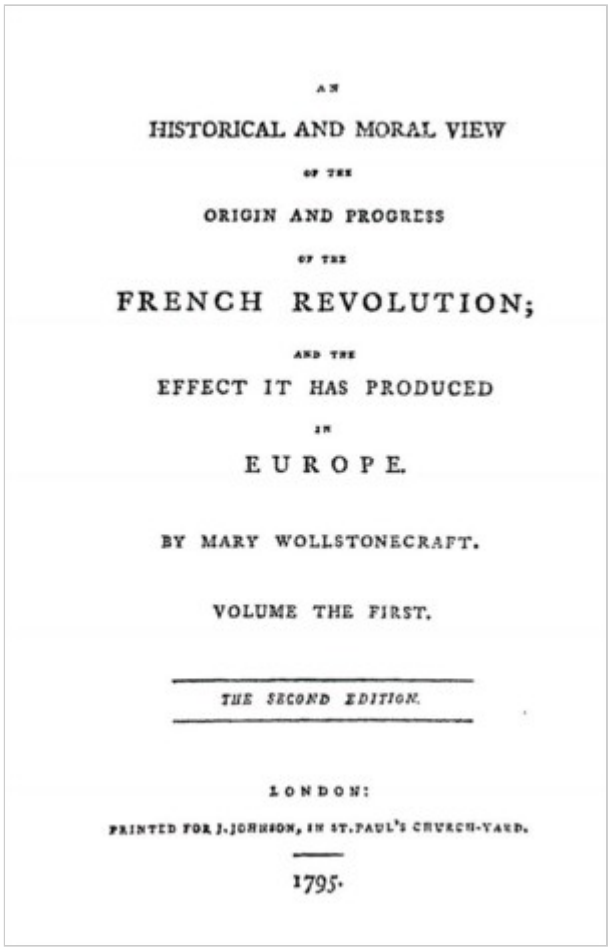
The Online Library of Liberty

A Project Of Liberty Fund, Inc.

Mary Wollstonecraft, ***An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe*** [1795]



AN

HISTORICAL AND MORAL VIEW

OF THE

ORIGIN AND PROGRESS

OF THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION;

AND THE

EFFECT IT HAS PRODUCED

IN

EUROPE.

BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1795.

Edition Used:

An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe (London: J. Johnson, 1795).

Author: Mary Wollstonecraft

About This Title:

An optimistic and rationalist account of the French Revolution based upon first-hand, eyewitness experiences. It was intended to defend the Revolution against critics like Burke. Wollstonecraft explained the violent excesses of the Revolution as an over-reaction caused by the degraded character of the French people which was in turn the result of the despotism of the old regime.

About Liberty Fund:

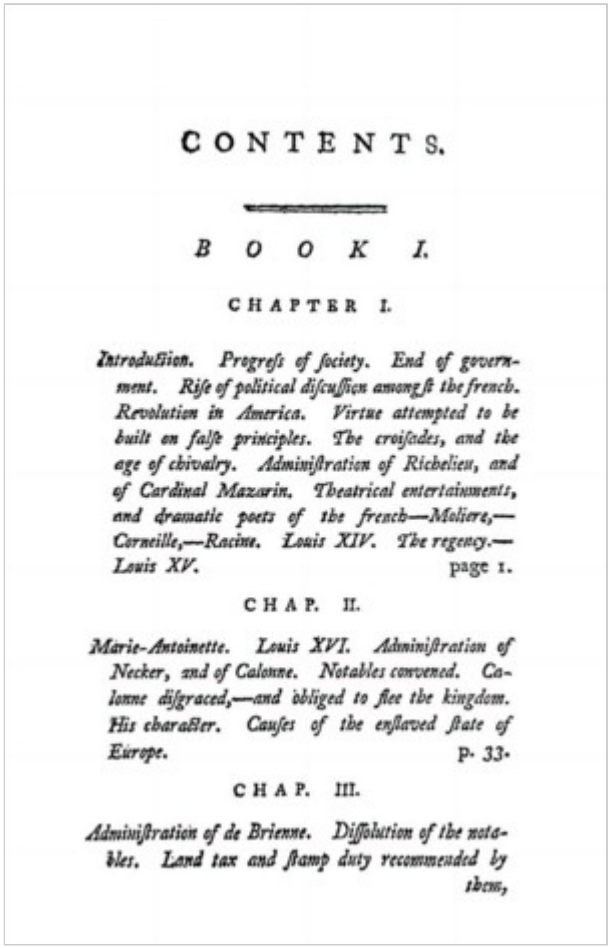
Liberty Fund, Inc. is a private, educational foundation established to encourage the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.

Copyright Information:

The text is in the public domain.

Fair Use Statement:

This material is put online to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. Unless otherwise stated in the Copyright Information section above, this material may be used freely for educational and academic purposes. It may not be used in any way for profit.



CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

Table Of Contents

[Back to Table of Contents]

ADVERTISEMENT.

This history, taking in such a variety of facts and opinions, has grown under my hand; especially as in writing I cannot avoid entering into some desultory disquisitions, and descriptions of manners and things which, though not strictly necessary to elucidate the events, are intimately connected with the main object; I have also been led into several theoretical investigations, whilst marking the political effects that naturally flow from the progress of knowledge. It is probable, therefore, that this work will be extended to two or three more volumes, a considerable part of which is already written.

[Back to Table of Contents]

PREFACE.

The revolution in France exhibits a scene, in the political world, not less novel and interesting than the contrast is striking between the narrow opinions of superstition, and the enlightened sentiments of masculine and improved philosophy.

To mark the prominent features of this revolution, requires a mind, not only unsophisticated by old prejudices, and the inveterate habits of degeneracy; but an amelioration of temper, produced by the exercise of the most enlarged principles of humanity.

The rapid changes, the violent, the base, and nefarious assassinations, which have clouded the vivid prospect that began to spread a ray of joy and gladness over the gloomy horizon of oppression, cannot fail to chill the sympathizing bosom, and palsy intellectual vigour. To sketch these vicissitudes is a task so arduous and melancholy, that, with a heart trembling to the touches of nature, it becomes necessary to guard against the erroneous inferences of sensibility; and reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion.

This important conclusion, involving the happiness and exaltation of the human character, demands serious and mature consideration; as it must ultimately sink the dignity of society into contempt, and its members into greater wretchedness; or elevate it to a degree of grandeur not hitherto anticipated, but by the most enlightened statesmen and philosophers.

Contemplating then these stupendous events with the cool eye of observation, the judgement, difficult to be preserved unwarped under the pressure of the calamitous horrours produced by desperate and enraged factions, will continually perceive that it is the uncontaminated mass of the french nation, whose minds begin to grasp the sentiments of freedom, that has secured the equilibrium of the state; often tottering on the brink of annihilation; in spite of the folly, selfishness, madness, treachery, and more fatal mock patriotism, the common result of depraved manners, the concomitant of that servility and voluptuousness which for so long a space of time has embruted the higher orders of this celebrated nation.

By thus attending to circumstances, we shall be able to discern clearly that the revolution was neither produced by the abilities or intrigues of a few individuals; nor was the effect of sudden and short-lived enthusiasm; but the natural consequence of intellectual improvement, gradually proceeding to perfection in the advancement of communities, from a state of barbarism to that of polished society, till now arrived at the point when sincerity of principles seems to be hastening the overthrow of the tremendous empire of superstition and hypocrisy, erected upon the ruins of gothic brutality and ignorance.

AN HISTORICAL AND MORAL VIEW OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

introduction. progress of society. end of government. rise of political discussion amongst the french. revolution in america. virtue attempted to be built on false principles. the croisades, and the age of chivalry. administration of richelieu, and of cardinal mazarin. theatrical entertainments, and dramatic poets of the french,—moliere,—corneille,—racine. louis xiv. the regency. louis xv.

When we contemplate the infancy of man, his gradual advance towards maturity, his miserable weakness as a solitary being, and the crudeness of his first notions respecting the nature of civil society, it will not appear extraordinary, that the acquirement of political knowledge has been so extremely slow; or that public happiness has not been more rapidly and generally diffused.

The perfection attained by the ancients, it is true, has ever afforded the imagination of the poetical historian a theme to deck with the choicest flowers of rhetoric; though the cool investigation of facts seems clearly to prove, that the civilization of the world, hitherto, has consisted rather in cultivating the taste, than in exercising the understanding. And were not these vaunted improvements also confined to a small corner of the globe, whilst, the political view of the wisest legislators seldom extending beyond the splendour and aggrandizement of their individual nation, they trampled with a ferocious affectation of patriotism on the most sacred rights of humanity? When the arts flourished in Greece, and literature began to shed it’s blandishments on society, the world was mostly inhabited by barbarians, who waged eternal war with their more polished neighbours, the imperfection of whose government sapping it’s foundation, the science of politics necessarily received a check in the bud—and when we find, likewise, the roman empire crumbling into atoms, from the germ of a deadly malady implanted in it’s vitals; whilst voluptuousness stopped the progress of civilization, which makes the perfection of the arts the dawn of science; we shall be convinced, that it demanded ages of improving reason and experience in moral philosophy, to clear away the rubbish, and exhibit the first principles of social order.

We have probably derived our great superiority over those nations from the discovery of the polar attraction of the needle, the perfection which astronomy and mathematics have attained, and the fortunate invention of printing. For, whilst the revival of letters has added the collected wisdom of antiquity to the improvements of modern research, the latter most useful art has rapidly multiplied copies of the productions of genius and compilations of learning, bringing them within the reach of all ranks of men: the scientific discoveries also have not only led us to new worlds; but, facilitating the communication between different nations, the friction of arts and commerce have given to society the transcendently pleasing polish of urbanity; and thus, by a gradual

softening of manners, the complexion of social life has been completely changed. But the remains of superstition, and the unnatural distinction of privileged classes, which had their origin in barbarous folly, still fettered the opinions of man, and sullied his native dignity; till several distinguished english writers discussed political subjects with the energy of men, who began to feel their strength; and, whilst only a rumour of these sentiments roused the attention and exercised the minds of some men of letters in France, a number of staunch disputants, who had more thoroughly digested them, fled from oppression, to put them to the test of experience in America.

Locke, following the track of these bold thinkers, recommended in a more methodical manner religious toleration, and analyzed the principles of civil liberty; for in his definition of liberty we find the elements of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man,* which, in spite of the fatal errours of ignorance, and the perverse obstinacy of selfishness, is now converting sublime theories into practical truths.

The revolution, it is true, soon introduced the corruption, that has ever since been corroding british freedom.—Still, when the rest of Europe groaned under the weight of the most unjust and cruel laws, the life and property of englishmen were comparatively safe; and, if an impress-warrant respected the distinction of ranks, when the glory of England was at stake, splendid victories hid this flaw in the best existing constitution; and all exultingly recollected, that the life or liberty of a man never depended on the will of an individual.

Englishmen were then, with reason, proud of their constitution; and, if this noble pride have degenerated into arrogance, when the cause became less conspicuous, it is only a venial lapse of human nature; to be lamented merely as it stops the progress of civilization, and leads the people to imagine, that their ancestors have done every thing possible to secure the happiness of society, and meliorate the condition of man, because they have done much.

When learning was confined to a small number of the citizens of a state, and the investigation of it's privileges was left to a number still smaller, governments seem to have acted, as if the people were formed only for them; and, ingeniously confounding their rights with metaphysical jargon, the luxurious grandeur of individuals has been supported by the misery of the bulk of their fellow creatures, and ambition gorged by the butchery of millions of innocent victims.

The most artful chain of despotism has ever been supported by false notions of duty, enforced by those who were to profit by the cheat. Thus has the liberty of man been restrained; and the spontaneous flow of his feelings, which would have fertilized his mind, being choked at the source, he is rendered in the same degree unhappy as he is made unnatural. Yet, certain opinions, planted by superstition and despotism, hand in hand, have taken such deep root in our habits of thinking, it may appear daringly licentious, as well as presumptuous, to observe, that what is often termed virtue, is only want of courage to throw off prejudices, and follow the inclinations which fear not the eye of heaven, though they shrink from censure not founded on the natural principles of morality. But at no period has the scanty diffusion of knowledge permitted the body of the people to participate in the discussion of political science;

and if philosophy at length have simplified the principles of social union, so as to render them easy to be comprehended by every sane and thinking being; it appears to me, that man may contemplate with benevolent complacency and becoming pride, the approaching reign of reason and peace.

Besides, if men have been rendered unqualified to judge with precision of their civil and political rights, from the involved state in which sophisticating ignorance has placed them, and thus reduced to surrender their reasoning powers to noble fools, and pedantic knaves, it is not surprizing, that superficial observers have formed opinions unfavourable to the degree of perfection, which our intellectual faculties are able to attain, or that despotism should attempt to check the spirit of inquiry, which, with colossian strides, seems to be hastening the overthrow of oppressive tyranny and contumelious ambition.

Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak. Instead of which, it has always leaned to the opposite side, wearing itself out by disregarding the first principle of it's organization.

It appears to be the grand province of government, though scarcely acknowledged, so to hold the balance, that the abilities or riches of individuals may not interfere with the equilibrium of the whole. For, as it is vain to expect, that men should master their passions during the heat of action, legislators should have this perfection of laws ever in view, when, calmly grasping the interest of humanity, reason assures them, that their own is best secured by the security of the commonweal. The first social systems were certainly founded by passion; individuals wishing to fence round their own wealth or power, and make slaves of their brothers to prevent encroachment. Their descendants have ever been at work to solder the chains they forged, and render the usurpations of strength secure, by the fraud of partial laws: laws that can be abrogated only by the exertions of reason, emancipating mankind, by making government a science, instead of a craft, and civilizing the grand mass, by exercising their understandings about the most important objects of inquiry.

After the revolution in 1688, however, political questions were no longer discussed in England on a broad scale; because that degree of liberty was enjoyed, which enabled thinking men to pursue without interruption their own business; or, if some men complained, they attached themselves to a party, and descanted on the unavoidable misery produced by contending passions.

But in France the bitterness of oppression was mingled in the daily cup, and the serious folly of superstition, pampered by the sweat of labour, stared every man of sense in the face. Against superstition then did the writers contending for civil liberty principally direct their force, though the tyranny of the court increased with it's viciousness.

Voltaire leading the way, and ridiculing with that happy mixture of satire and gaiety, calculated to delight the french, the inconsistent puerilities of a puppet-show religion, had the art to attach the bells to the fool's cap, which tinkled on every side, rousing

the attention and piquing the vanity of his readers. Rousseau also ranged himself on the same side; and, praising his fanciful state of nature, with that interesting eloquence, which embellishes reasoning with the charms of sentiment, forcibly depicted the evils of a priest-ridden society, and the sources of oppressive inequality, inducing the men who were charmed with his language to consider his opinions.

The talents of these two writers were particularly formed to effect a change in the sentiments of the french, who commonly read to collect a fund for conversation; and their biting retorts, and flowing periods, were retained in each head, and continually slipped off the tongue in numerous sprightly circles.

In France, indeed, new opinions fly from mouth to mouth, with an electrical velocity, unknown in England; so that there is not such a difference between the sentiments of the various ranks in one country, as is observable in the originality of character to he found in the other. At our theatres, the boxes, pit, and galleries, relish different scenes; and some are condescendingly born by the more polished part of the audience, to allow the rest to have their portion of amusement. In France, on the contrary, a highly wrought sentiment of morality, probably rather romantic than sublime, produces a burst of applause, when one heart seems to agitate every hand.

But men are not content merely to laugh at oppression, when they can scarcely catch from his gripe the necessaries of life; so that from writing epigrams on superstition, the galled french began to compose philippics against despotism. The enormous and iniquitous taxes, which the nobles, the clergy, and the monarch, levied on the people, turned the attention of benevolence to this main branch of government, and the profound treatise of the humane M. Quesnai produced the sect of the *economists,* the first champions for civil liberty.

On the eve of the american war, the enlightened administration of the comptroller general Turgot, a man formed in this school, afforded France a glimpse of freedom, which, streaking the horizon of despotism, only served to render the contrast more striking. Eager to correct abuses, equally impolitic and cruel, this most excellent man, suffering his clear judgment to be clouded by his zeal, rouzed the nest of wasps, that rioted on the honey of industry in the sunshine of court favour; and he was obliged to retire from the office, which he so worthily filled. Disappointed in his noble plan of freeing France from the fangs of despotism, in the course of ten years, without the miseries of anarchy, which make the present generation pay very dear for the emancipation of posterity, he has nevertheless greatly contributed to produce that revolution in opinion, which, perhaps, alone can overturn the empire of tyranny.

The idle caprices of an effeminate court had long given the tone to the awe-struck populace, who, stupidly admiring what they did not understand, lived on a *vive le roi,* whilst his blood-sucking minions drained every vein, that should have warmed their honest hearts.

But the irresistible energy of the moral and political sentiments of half a century, at last kindled into a blaze the illuminating rays of truth, which, throwing new light on

the mental powers of man, and giving a fresh spring to his reasoning faculties, completely undermined the strong holds of priestcraft and hypocrisy.

At this glorious era, the toleration of religious opinions in America, which the spirit of the times, when that continent was peopled with persecuted europeans, produced, aided, not a little, to diffuse these rational sentiments, and exhibited the phenomenon of a government established on the basis of reason and equality. The eyes of all Europe were watchfully fixed on the practical success of this experiment in political science; and whilst the crowns of the old world were drawing into their focus the hard-earned recompence of the toil and care of the simple citizens, who lived detached from courts, deprived of the comforts of life, the just reward of industry, or, palsied by oppression, pined in dirt and idleness; the anglo-americans appeared to be another race of beings, men formed to enjoy the advantages of society, and not merely to benefit those who governed; the use to which they had been appropriated in almost every state; considered only as the ballast which keeps the vessel steady, necessary, yet despised. So conspicuous in fact was the difference, that, when frenchmen became the auxiliaries of those brave people, during their noble struggle against the tyrannical and inhuman ambition of the british court, it imparted to them that stimulus, which alone was wanting to give wings to freedom, who, hovering over France, led her indignant votaries to wreak their vengeance on the tottering fabric of a government, the foundation of which had been laid by benighted ignorance, and it's walls cemented by the calamities of millions that mock calculation—and, in it's ruins a system was entombed, the most baneful to human happiness and virtue.

America fortunately found herself in a situation very different from all the rest of the world; for she had it in her power to lay the first stones of her government, when reason was venturing to canvass prejudice. Availing herself of the degree of civilization of the world, she has not retained those customs, which were only the expedients of barbarism; or thought that constitutions formed by chance, and continually patched up, were superiour to the plans of reason, at liberty to profit by experience.

When society was first regulated, the laws could not be adjusted so as to take in the future conduct of it's members, because the faculties of man are unfolded and perfected by the improvements made by society: consequently the regulations established as circumstances required were very imperfect. What then is to hinder man, at each epoch of civilization, from making a stand, and new modelling the materials, that have been hastily thrown into a rude mass, which time alone has consolidated and rendered venerable?

When society was first subjugated to laws, probably by the ambition of some, and the desire of safety in all, it was natural for men to be selfish, because they were ignorant how intimately their own comfort was connected with that of others; and it was also very natural, that humanity, rather the effect of feeling than of reason, should have a very limited range. But, when men once see, clear as the light of heaven,—and I hail the glorious day from afar!—that on the general happiness depends their own, reason will give strength to the fluttering wings of passion, and men will "*do unto others, what they wish they should do unto them.*"

What has hitherto been the political perfection of the world? In the two most celebrated nations it has only been a polish of manners, an extension of that family love, which is rather the effect of sympathy and selfish passions, than reasonable humanity. And in what has ended their so much extolled patriotism? In vain glory and barbarity—every page of history proclaims. And why has the enthusiasm for virtue thus passed away like the dew of the morning, dazzling the eyes of it's admirers? Why?—because it was factitious virtue.

During the period they had to combat against oppression, and rear an infant state, what instances of heroism do not the annals of Greece and Rome display! But it was merely the blaze of passion, "live smoke;" for after vanquishing their enemies, and making the most astonishing sacrifices to the glory of their country, they became civil tyrants, and preyed on the very society, for whose welfare it was easier to die, than to practise the sober duties of life, which insinuate through it the contentment that is rather felt than seen. Like the parents who forget all the dictates of justice and humanity, to aggrandize the very children whom they keep in a state of dependence, these heroes loved their country, because it was their country, ever showing by their conduct, that it was only a part of a narrow love of themselves.

It is time, that a more enlightened moral love of mankind should supplant, or rather support physical affections. It is time, that the youth approaching manhood should be led by principles, and not hurried along by sensations—and then we may expect, that the heroes of the present generation, still having their monsters to cope with, will labour to establish such rational laws throughout the world, that men will not rest in the dead letter, or become artificial beings as they become civilized.

We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora's box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil: we shall then leave room for the expansion of the human heart, and, I trust, find, that men will insensibly render each other happier as they grow wiser. It is indeed the necessity of stifling many of it's most spontaneous desires, to obtain the factitious virtues of society, that makes man vicious, by depriving him of that dignity of character, which rests only on truth. For it is not paradoxical to assert, that the social virtues are nipt in the bud by the very laws of society. One principal of action is sufficient—Respect thyself—whether it be termed fear of God—religion; love of justice—morality; or, self-love—the desire of happiness. Yet, how can a man respect himself; and if not, how believe in the existence of virtue; when he is practising the daily shifts, which do not come under the cognisance of the law, in order to obtain a respectable situation in life? It seems, in fact, to be the business of a civilized man, to harden his heart, that on it he may sharpen the wit; which, assuming the appellation of sagacity, or cunning, in different characters, is only a proof, that the head is clear, because the heart is cold.

Besides, one great cause of misery in the present imperfect state of society is, that the imagination, continually tantalized, becomes the inflated wen of the mind, draining off the nourishment from the vital parts. Nor would it, I think, be stretching the

inference too far, to insist, that men become vicious in the same proportion as they are obliged, by the defects of society, to submit to a kind of self-denial, which ignorance, not morals, prescribes.

But these evils are passing away; a new spirit has gone forth, to organise the body-politic; and where is the criterion to be found, to estimate the means, by which the influence of this spirit can be confined, now enthroned in the hearts of half the inhabitants of the globe? Reason has, at last, shown her captivating face, beaming with benevolence; and it will be impossible for the dark hand of despotism again to obscure it's radiance, or the lurking dagger of subordinate tyrants to reach her bosom. The image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding; and, as it opens, liberty with maternal wing seems to be soaring to regions far above vulgar annoyance, promising to shelter all mankind.

It is a vulgar errour, built on a superficial view of the subject, though it seems to have the sanction of experience, that civilization can only go as far as it has hitherto gone, and then must necessarily fall back into barbarism. Yet thus much appears certain, that a state will infallibly grow old and feeble, if hereditary riches support hereditary rank, under any description. But when courts and primogeniture are done away, and simple equal laws are established, what is to prevent each generation from retaining the vigour of youth?—What can weaken the body or mind, when the great majority of society must exercise both, to earn a subsistence, and acquire respectability?

The french revolution is a strong proof how far things will govern men, when simple principles begin to act with one powerful spring against the complicated wheels of ignorance; numerous in proportion to their weakness, and constantly wanting repair, because expedients of the moment are ever the spawn of cowardly folly, or the narrow calculations of selfishness. To elucidate this truth, it is not necessary to rake among the ashes of barbarous ambition; to show the ignorance and consequent folly of the monarchs, who ruled with a rod of iron, when the hordes of curopean savages began to form their governments; though the review of this portion of history would clearly prove, that narrowness of mind naturally produces ferociousness of temper.

We may boast of the poetry of those ages, and, of those charming flights of imagination, which, during the paroxysms of passion, flash out in those single acts of heroic virtue, that throw a lustre over a whole thoughtless life; but the cultivation of the understanding, in spite of these northern lights, appears to be the only way to tame men, whose restlessness of spirit creates the vicious passions, that lead to tyranny and cruelty. When the body is strong, and the blood warm, men do not like to think, or adopt any plan of conduct, unless broken-in by degrees: the force that has often spent itself in fatal activity becomes a rich source of energy of mind.

Men exclaim, only noticing the evil, against the luxury introduced with the arts and sciences; when it is obviously the cultivation of these alone, emphatically termed the arts of peace, that can turn the sword into a ploughshare. War is the adventure naturally pursued by the idle, and it requires something of this species, to excite the strong emotions necessary to rouse inactive minds. Ignorant people, when they appear to reflect, exercise their imagination more than their understanding; indulging

reveries, instead of pursuing a train of thinking; and thus grow romantic, like the croisaders; or like women, who are commonly idle and restless.

If we turn then with disgust from ensanguined regal pomp, and the childish rareeshows that amuse the enslaved multitude, we shall feel still more contempt for the order of men, who cultivated their faculties, only to enable them to consolidate their power, by leading the ignorant astray; making the learning they concentrated in their cells, a more polished instrument of oppression. Struggling with so many impediments, the progress of useful knowledge for several ages was scarcely perceptible; though respect for the public opinion, that great softner of manners, and only substitute for moral principles, was gaining ground.

The croisades, however, gave a shake to society, that changed it's face; and the spirit of chivalry, assuming a new character during the reign of the gallant Francis the first, began to meliorate the ferocity of the ancient gauls and franks. The *point d'honneur* being settled, the character of a *gentleman,* held ever since so dear in France, was gradually formed; and this kind of bastard morality, frequently the only substitute for all the ties that nature has rendered sacred, kept those men within bounds, who obeyed no other law.

The same spirit mixed with the sanguinary treachery of the Guises, and gave support to the manly dignity of Henry the fourth, on whom nature had bestowed that warmth of constitution, tenderness of heart, and rectitude of understanding, which naturally produce an energetic character—A supple force, that, exciting love, commands esteem.

During the ministry of Richelieu, when the dynasty of *favouritism* commenced, the arts were patronized, and the italian mode of governing by intrigue tended to weaken bodies, polished by the friction of continual sinesse. Dissimulation imperceptibly slides into falshood, and Mazarin, dissimulation personified, paved the way for the imposing pomp and false grandeur of the reign of the haughty and inflated Louis 14th; which, by introducing a taste for majestic frivolity, accelerated the perfection of that species of civilization, which consists in the refining of the senses at the expence of the heart; the source of all real dignity, honour, virtue, and every noble quality of the mind. Endeavouring to make bigotry tolerate voluptuousness, and honour and licentiousness shake hands, sight was lost of the line of distinction, or vice was hid under the mask of it's correlative virtue. The glory of France, a bubble raised by the heated breath of the king, was the pretext for undermining happiness; whilst politeness took place of humanity, and created that sort of dependance, which leads men to barter their corn and wine, for unwholesome mixtures of they know not what, that, flattering a depraved appetite, destroy the tone of the stomach.

The feudal taste for tournaments and martial feasts was now naturally succeeded by a fondness for theatrical entertainments; when feats of valour became too great an exertion of the weakened muscles to afford pleasure, and men found that resource in cultivation of mind, which renders activity of body less necessary to keep the stream of life from stagnating.

All the pieces written at this period, except Moliere's, reflected the manners of the court, and thus perverted the forming taste. That extraordinary man alone wrote on the grand scale of human passions, for mankind at large, leaving to inferiour authors the task of imitating the drapery of manners, which points out the *costume* of the age.

Corneille, like our Dryden, often tottering on the brink of absurdity and nonsense, full of noble ideas, which, crouding indistinctly on his fancy, he expresses obscurely, still delights his readers by sketching faint outlines of gigantic passions; and, whilst the charmed imagination is lured to follow him over enchanted ground, the heart is sometimes unexpectedly touched by a sublime or pathetic sentiment, true to nature.

Racine, soon after, in elegant harmonious language painted the manners of his time, and with great judgement gave a picturesque cast to many unnatural scenes and factitious sentiments: always endeavouring to make his characters amiable, he is unable to render them dignified; and the refined morality, scattered throughout, belongs to the code of politeness rather than to that of virtue* . Fearing to stray from courtly propriety of behaviour, and shock a fastidious audience, the gallantry of his heroes interests only the gallant, and literary people, whose minds are open to different species of amusement. He was, in fact, the father of the french stage. Nothing can equal the fondness which the french suck in with their milk for public places, particularly the theatre; and this taste, giving the tone to their conduct, has produced so many stage tricks on the grand theatre of the nation, where old principles vamped up with new scenes and decorations, are continually represented.

Their national character is, perhaps, more formed by their theatrical amusements, than is generally imagined: they are in reality the schools of vanity. And, after this kind of education, is it surprising, that almost every thing is said and done for stage effect? or that cold declamatory extasies blaze forth, only to mock the expectation with a show of warmth?

Thus sentiments spouted from the lips come oftner from the head than the heart. Indeed natural sentiments are only the characters given by the imagination to recollected sensations; but the french, by the continual gratification of their senses, stifle the reveries of their imagination, which always requires to be acted upon by outward objects; and seldom reflecting on their feelings, their sensations are ever lively and transitory; exhaled by every passing beam, and dissipated by the slightest storm.

If a relish for the broad mirth of *sun* characterize the lower class of english, the french of every denomination are equally delighted with a phosphorical, sentimental gilding. This is constantly observable at the theatres. The passions are deprived of all their radical strength, to give smoothness to the ranting sentiments, which, with mock dignity, like the party-coloured rags on the shrivelled branches of the tree of liberty, stuck up in every village, are displayed as something very grand and significant.

The wars of Louis were, likewise, theatrical exhibitions; and the business of his life was adjusting ceremonials, of which he himself became the dupe, when his grandeur was in the wane, and his animal spirits were spent* . But, towards the close even of

his reign, the writings of Fenelon, and the conversation of his pupil, the duke of Burgundy, gave rise to different political discussions, of which the theoretical basis was the happiness of the people—till death, spreading a huge pall over the family and glory of Louis, compassion draws his faults under the same awful canopy, and we sympathize with the man in adversity, whose prosperity was pestiferous.

Louis, by imposing on the senses of his people, gave a new turn to the chivalrous humour of the age: for, with the true spirit of quixotism, the french made a point of honour of adoring their king; and the glory of the *grand monarque* became the national pride, even when it cost them most dear.

As a proof of the perversion of mind at that period, and the false political opinions which prevailed, making the unhappy king the slave of his own despotism, it is sufficient to select one anecdote.

A courtier assures us,* that the most humiliating circumstance that ever happened to the king, and one of those which gave him most pain, was the publication of a memorial circulated with great diligence by his enemies throughout France. In this memorial the allies invited the french to demand the assembling of their ancient *states-general.* They tell them, "that the ambition and pride of the king were the only causes of the wars during his reign; and that, to secure themselves a lasting peace, it was incumbent on them not to lay down their arms till the states-general were convoked."

It almost surpasses belief to add, that, in spite of the imprisonment, exile, flight, or execution of two millions of french, this memorial produced little effect. But the king, who was severely hurt, took care to have a reply written* ; though he might have comforted himself with the recollection, that, when they were last assembled, Louis XIII dismissed them with empty promises, forgotten as soon as made.

The enthusiasm of the french, which, in general, hurries them from one extreme to another, at this time produced a total change of manners.

During the regency, vice was not only bare-faced, but audacious; and the tide completely turned: the hypocrites were now all ranged on the other side, the courtiers, labouring to show their abhorrence of religious hypocrisy, set decency at defiance, and did violence to the modesty of nature, when they wished to outrage the squeamish puerilities of superstition.

In the character of the regent we may trace all the vices and graces of false refinement; forming the taste by destroying the heart. Devoted to pleasure, he so soon exhausted the intoxicating cup of all it's sweets, that his life was spent in searching amongst the dregs, for the novelty that could give a gasp of life to enjoyment. The wit, which at first was the zest of his nocturnal orgies, soon gave place, as flat, to the grossest excesses, in which the principal variety was flagitious immorality. And what has he done to rescue his name from obloquy, but protect a few debauched artists and men of letters? His goodness of heart only appeared in sympathy. He pitied the

distresses of the people, when before his eyes; and as quickly forgot these yearnings of heart in his sensual stye.

He often related, with great pleasure, an anecdote of the prior de Vendôme, who chanced to please a mistress of Charles II, and the king could only get rid of his rival by requesting Louis XIV to recall him.

At those moments he would bestow the warmest praises on the english constitution; and seemed enamoured of liberty, though authorising at the time the most flagrant violations of property, and despotic arts of cruelty. The only good he did his country* arose from this frivolous circumstance; for introducing the fashion of admiring the english, he led men to read and translate some of their masculine writers, which greatly contributed to rouse the sleeping manhood of the french. His love of the fine arts, however, has led different authors to strew flowers over his unhallowed dust—sit emblem of the brilliant qualities, that ornamented only the soil on which they grew.

The latter part of the reign of Louis XV is notorious for the same atrocious debaucheries, unvarnished by wit, over which modesty would fain draw a veil, were it not necessary to give the last touches to the portrait of that vile despotism, under the lash of which twenty-five millions of people groaned; till, unable to endure the increasing weight of oppression, they rose like a vast elephant, terrible in his anger, treading down with blind fury friends as well as foes.

Impotence of body, and indolence of mind, rendered Louis XV the slave of his mistresses, who sought to forget his nauseous embraces in the arms of knaves, who found their account in caressing them. Every corner of the kingdom was ransacked to satiate these cormorants, who wrung the very bowels of industry, to give a new edge to sickly appetites; corrupting the morals whilst breaking the spirit of the nation.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER II.

marie-antoinette. louis xvi. administration of necker, and of calonne, notables convened. calonne disgraced,—and obliged to flee the kingdom. his character. causes of the enslaved state of europe.

During this general depravation of manners, the young and beautiful *dauphine* arrived; and was received with a kind of idolatrous adoration, only to be seen in France; for the inhabitants of the metropolis, literally speaking, could think and talk of nothing else; and in their eagerness to pay homage, or gratify affectionate curiosity, an immense number were killed.

In such a voluptuous atmosphere, how could she escape contagion? The prosligacy of Louis XIV, when love and war were his amusements, was soberness, compared with the capricious intemperance of the inebriated imagination at this period. Madame du Barry was then in the zenith of her power, which quickly excited the jealousy of this princess, whose strongest passion was that intolerable family pride, which heated the blood of the whole house of Austria. An inclination for court intrigue, under the mask of the most profound dissimulation, to preserve the favour of Louis XV, was instantly called into action; and it soon became the only business of her life, either to gratify resentment, or cheat the satiety, which the continual and unrestrained indulgence of pleasure produced.

Her character thus formed, when she became absolute mistress, the court of the passive Louis, not only the most dissolute and abandoned that ever displayed the folly of royalty, but audaciously negligent with respect to that attention to decency, which is necessary to delude the vulgar, was deserted by all persons, who had any regard for their moral character, or the decorum of appearances. Constrained by the *etiquette,* which made the principal part of the imposing grandeur of Louis XIV, the queen wished to throw aside the cumbersome brocade of ceremony, without having discernment enough to perceive, that it was necessary to lend mock dignity to a court, where there was not sufficient virtue, or native beauty, to give interest or respectability to simplicity. The harlot is seldom such a fool as to neglect her meretricious ornaments, unless she renounces her trade; and the pageantry of courts is the same thing on a larger scale. The lively predilection, likewise, of the queen for her native country, and love for her brother Joseph, to whom she repeatedly sent considerable sums, purloined from the public, tended greatly to inspire the most ineffable contempt for royalty, now stript of the frippery which had concealed it's deformity: and the sovereign disgust excited by her ruinous vices, completely destroying all reverence for that majesty, to which power alone lent dignity, contempt soon produced hatred.

The infamous transaction of the necklace, in which she was probably the dupe of the knaves she fostered, exasperated also both the nobility and the clergy; and, with her messalinian feasts at *Trianon,* made her the common mark of ridicule and satire.

The attention of the people once roused was not permitted to sleep; for fresh circumstances daily occurred, to give a new spring to discussions, that the most iniquitous and heavy taxes brought home to every bosom; till the extravagance of the royal family became the general subject of sharpening execrations.

The king, who had not sufficient resolution to support the administration of Turgot, whom his disposition for moderation had chosen, being at a loss what measures to take, called to the helm the plausible Necker. He, only half comprehending the plans of his able predecessor, was led by his vanity cautiously to adopt them; first publishing his *Comte-rendu,* to clear the way to popularity. This work was read with astonishing rapidity by all ranks of men; and alarming the courtiers, Necker was, in his turn, dismissed. He retired to write his observations on the administration of the finances, which kept alive the spirit of inquiry, that afterwards broke the talisman of courts, and showed the disenchanted multitude, that those, whom they had been taught to respect as supernatural beings, were not indeed men—but monsters; deprived by their station of humanity, and even sympathy.

Several abortive attempts were then made by two succeeding ministers, to keep alive public credit, and find resources to supply the expenditure of the state, and the dissipation of the court, when the king was persuaded to place the specious Calonne at the head of these embarrassed affairs.

During the prodigal administration of this man, who acted with an audacity peculiar to the arrogance common in men of superficial yet brilliant talents, every consideration was sacrificed to the court; the splendid folly and wanton prodigality of which eclipsing all that has been related in history, or told in romance, to amuse wondering fools, only served to accelerate the destruction of public credit, and hasten the revolution, by exciting the clamourous indignation of the people. Numberless destructive expedients of the moment brought money into the state coffers, only to be dissipated by the royal family, and it's train of parasites; till all failing, the wish of still supporting himself in a situation so desirable as that of comptroller general of the finances, determined him to convene an assembly of *notables:* whose very appellation points them out as men in the aristocratical interest.

Louis XVI, with a considerable portion of common sense, and a desire to promote useful reformation, though always governed by those around him, gave without hesitation the necessary orders for calling together the assembly, that afforded the wearied nation the most pleasing prospect, because it was a new one; but conveyed to their astonished minds at the same time the knowledge of the enormity of a *deficit,* which a series of vice and folly had augmented beyond all precedent.

The immoralities of Calonne, however, had created a general distrust of all his designs: but with an overweening presumption, the characteristic of the man, he still thought, that he could dexterously obtain the supplies wanted to keep the wheels of government in motion, and quiet the clamours of the nation, by proposing the equalization of taxes; which, humbling the nobility and dignified clergy, who were thus to be brought down from their privileged height, to the level of citizens, could not fail to be grateful to the rest of the nation. And the parliaments, he concluded,

would not dare to oppose his system, lest they should draw on themselves the distrust and hatred of the public.

Without canvassing Calonne's intentions, which the most enlarged charity, after his former extravagance, can scarcely suppose to have been the interest of the people, moderate men imagined this project might have been productive of much good; giving the french all the liberty they were able to digest; and, warding off the tumults that have since produced so many disastrous events, whilst coolly preparing them for the reception of more, the effervescence of vanity and ignorance would not have rendered their heads giddy, or their hearts savage. Yet some sensible observers, on the contrary, rather adopted the opinion, that as the people had discovered the magnitude of the *deficit,* they were now persuaded, that a specific remedy was wanting, *a new constitution;* to cure the evils, which were the excrescences of a gigantic tyranny, that appeared to be draining away the vital juices of labour, to fill the insatiable jaws of thousands of fawning slaves and idle sycophants. But though the people might, for the present, have been satisfied with this salutary reform, which would gradually have had an effect, reasoning from analogy, that the financier did not take into his account, the nobility were not sufficiently enlightened to listen to the dictates of justice or prudence. It had been, indeed, the system of ministers, ever since Richelieu, to humble the nobles, to increase the power of the court; and as the ministry, the generals, and the bishops, were always noble, they aided to support the favourite, who depressed the whole body, only for the chance of individual preferment. But this bare-faced attempt to abolish their privileges raised a nest of hornets about his ears, eager to secure the plunder on which they lived; for by what other name can we call the pensions, places and even estates of those who, taxing industry, rioted in idleness duty free* ?

An approaching national bankruptcy was the ostensible reason assigned for the convening of the *notables* in 1787; but the convocation, in truth, ought to be ascribed to the voice of reason, sounded through the organ of twenty-five millions of human beings, who, though under the fetters of a detestable tyranny, felt, that the crisis was at hand, when the rights of man, and his dignity ascertained were to be enthroned on the eternal basis of justice and humanity.

The *notables,* once assembled, being sensible that their conduct would be inspected by an awakened public, now on the watch, scrupulously examined into every national concern; and seriously investigated the causes, that had produced the *deficit,* with something like the independent spirit of freemen. To their inquiries, however, the minister gave only the evasive reply, 'that he had acted in obedience to the pleasure of the king:' when it was notorious to all Europe, that his majesty was merely a cypher at Versailles; and even the accusation brought against Calonne, by La Fayette, of exchanging the national domains, and appropriating millions of it's revenue to gratify the queen, the count d'Artois, and the rest of the cabal, who kept him in place, was generally believed. In fact, the state had been fleeced, to support the unremitting demands of the queen; who would have dismembered France, to aggrandize Austria, and pamper her favourites. Thus the court conniving at peculation, the minister played a sure game; whilst the honest labourer was groaning under a thousand abuses, and yielding the solace of his industry, or the hoards, which youthful strength had

reserved for times of scarcity or decrepit age, to irritate the inereasing wants of a thoughtless, treachcrous princess, and the avarice of her unprincipled agents.

This artful, though weak, machiavelian politician suffered no other person to approach the king; who, seduced into considence by his colloquial powers, could not avoid being dazzled by his plausible schemes. He had, nevertheless, a powerful enemy to contend with, in M. de Breteuil; who, having gratified some of the little passions of the dauphine, during her first struggles for dominion, was now protected by the absolute power of the queen. Endeavouring to measure his strength with her's, the minister was discomfited; and the whole swarm of flatterers, who had partaken of the spoil of rapine, were instantly alert to open the eyes of Louis, over which they had long been scattering poppies, and soon convinced him of the persidy of his favourite; whilst the two privileged orders joined their forces, to overwhelm their common enemy, attending to their vengeance at the very time they followed the dictates of prudence.

The accusations of La Fayette served, perhaps, as the ostensible reason with the public, and even with the king; yet it can hardly be supposed, that they had any effect on the cabal, who invented, or connived at the plans necessary to raise a continual supply for their pleasures. The fact is, that, most probably being found unequal to the task, or no longer choosing to be a docile instrument of mischief, he was thrown aside as unsit for use.

Disgraced, he quickly retired to his estate; but was not long permitted to struggle with the malady of exiled ministers, in the gloomy silence of inactivity; for, hearing that he had been denounced by the parliament, he fled in a transport of rage out of the kingdom, covered with the execrations of an injured people, in whose hatred, or admiration, the mellowed shades of reflection are seldom seen.

The extravagance of his administration exceeded that of any other scourge of France; yet it does not appear, that he was actuated by a plan, or even desire, of enriching himself. So far from it, with wild prodigality he seems to have squandered away the vast sums he extorted by force or fraud, merely to gratify or purchase friends and dependents; till, quite exhausted, he was obliged to have recourse to Necker's scheme of loans. But not possessing like him the confidence of the public, he could not with equal facility obtain a present supply, the weight of which would be thrown forward to become a stumblingblock to his successors. Necker, by the advantageous terms which he held out to moneyholders, had introduced a pernicious system of stock-jobbing, that was slowly detected, because those who could best have opened the eyes of the people were interested to keep them closed.—Still Calonne could not induce the same body of men to trust to his offers; which, not choosing to accept, they made a point of discrediting, to secure the interest and exorbitant premiums that were daily becoming due.

With an uncommon quickness of comprehension, and audacity in pursuing crude schemes, rendered plausible by a rhetorical flow of words, Calonne, a strong representative of the national character, seems rather to have wanted principles than feelings of humanity; and to have been led astray more by vanity and the love of

pleasure, which imperceptibly smooth away moral restraints, than by those deep plans of guilt, that force men to see the extent of the mischief they are hatching, whilst the crocodile is still in the egg. Yet, as mankind ever judge by events, the inconsiderate presumption, if not the turpitude of his conduct, brought on him universal censure: for, at a crisis when the general groans of an oppressed nation proclaimed the disease of the state, and even when the government was on the verge of dissolution, did he not waste the treasures of his country, forgetful not only of moral obligations, but the ties of honour, of that regard for the tacit confidence of it's citizens, which a statesman ought to hold sacred? since which he has been caressed at almost every court in Europe, and made one of the principal agents of despotism in the croisades against the infant liberty of France.

Reflecting on the conduct of the tools of courts, we are enabled in a great measure to account for the slavery of Europe; and to discover, that it's misery has not arisen more from the imperfectionof civilization, than from the fallacy of those political systems, which necessarily made the favourite of the day a knavish tyrant, eager to amass riches sufficient to save himself from oblivion, when the honours, so hardly wrestled for, should be torn from his brow. Besides, whilst ministers have found impunity in the omnipotence, which the seal of power gave them, and in the covert fear of those who hoped one day to enjoy the same emoluments, they have been led by the prevalence of depraved manners, to the commission of every atrocious folly. Kings have been the dupes of ministers, of mistresses, and secretaries, not to notice sly valets and cunning waiting-maids, who are seldom idle; and these are most venal, because they have least independence of character to support; till in the circle of corruption no one can point out the first mover. Hence proceeds the great tenacity of courts to support them; hence originates their great objection to republican forms of government, which oblige their ministers to be accountable for delinquency; and hence, likewise, might be traced their agonizing fears of the doctrine of civil equality.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER III.

administration of de brienne. dissolution of the notables. land tax and stamp duty recommended by them, but refused to be sanctioned by the parliament. bed of justice. the parliament banished to troyes,—but soon compromised for it's recall. struggles of the court party to prevent the convocation of the states-general. banishment of the duke of orleans, and two spirited members of the parliament. cour pleniere. remarks on the parliaments. imprisonment of the members. deputies of the province of britanny sent to the bastille. the soldiery let loose upon the people.

After the dismission of Calonne, M. de Brienne, a man whose talents Turgot had overrated, was now chosen by the queen, because he had formerly seconded her views, and was still the obsequious slave of that power, which he had long been courting, to obtain the so much envied place of minister. Having taken more pains to gain the post than to prepare himself to fulfil it's functions, his weak and timid mind was in a continual tumult; and he adopted with head-long confusion the taxes proposed by his predecessor; because money must be had, and he knew not where to turn to procure it by an unhacknied mode of extortion.

The *notables* were now dissolved; and it would have been a natural consequence of the dismission of the minister who assembled them, even if their spirited inquiries had not rendered their presence vexatious to the court. This, however, was an impolitic measure; for they returned highly disgusted to their respective abodes, to propagate the free opinions, to which resentment and argumentation had given birth.

Before the breaking up of the *notables,* they were nevertheless prevailed upon to recommend a land and stamp tax; and the edicts were sent to the parliament to be enregistered. But these magistrates, never forgetting that they enjoyed, in virtue of their office, the privileged exemption from taxes, to elude sanctioning the first, which was to have been an equal impost, took advantage of the public odiousness of the second; thus avoiding, with a show of patriotism, an avowed opposition to the interest of the people, that would clearly have proved, how much dearer they held their own.

The gaudy and meretricious pageantry of the court was now displayed, to intimidate the parliament, at what was termed a bed of justice, though in reality of all justice a solemn mockery; and, whilst pretending to consult them, the edicts were enregistered by a mandate of state. The parliament, in the mean time, making a merit of necessity, declared, that the right of sanctioning the impost belonged only to the states-general, the convocation of which they demanded. Provoked by their sturdy opposition, the court banished them to Troyes; and they compromised for their recall by enregistering the prolongation of the *deuxieme vingtieme,* a cowardly desertion of their former ground.

A century before (a proof of the progress of reason) the people, digesting their disappointment, would have submitted, with brutal acquiescence, to the majestic will of the king, without daring to scan it's import; but now, recognizing their own dignity,

they insisted, that all authority, which did not originate with them, was illegal and despotic, and loudly resounded the grand truth—That it was necessary to convoke the states-general. The government, however, like a dying wretch cut off by intemperance, whilst the lust of enjoyment still remaining prompts him to exhaust his strength by struggling with death, fought some time longer inauspiciously for existence, depending on the succour of the court empirics, who vainly flattered themselves, that they could prevent it's dissolution. From the moment, indeed, that Brienne succeeded Calonne, all the machinery, which the demon of despotism could invent, was put in motion, to divert the current of opinion, bearing on it's fair bosom the new sentiments of liberty with irresistible force, and overwhelming, as it swelled, the perishing monuments of venerable folly, and the fragile barriers of superstitious ignorance.

But supplies were still wanting; and the court, being fruitful in stratagems to procure a loan, which was the necessary lever of it's insidious designs, coalesced with some of the members of the parliament, and the agreement was to have been ratified in a *séance royale.* Yet, as the parliament had determined to be governed by a clear majority, the scheme of the keeper of the seals, who intended to have the business hurried over without telling the votes, was completely defeated.

The discovery of this unfair attempt made the indignant magistrates, glad to seize an occasion to recover their popularity, maintain with boldness their own character, and the interest of the people. The duke of Orleans, also, somewhat tauntingly suggesting to the king, that this was only another bed of justice, was exiled, with two other members, who had remonstrated with courage. These magistrates, now become the objects of public adoration, were considered by the grateful public as their only bulwark against the attacks of the ministry; which continued to harrass invention, to contrive means to counteract a concurrence of circumstances, that were driving before them all opposition.

The court, for I consider the government, at this period, completely at an end, continued to stumble out of one blunder into another, till at last they rested all their hopes on the popular reforms projected by Brienne, in conjunction with Lamoignon, a man with more strength of character, to cajole the people and crush the parliament. Several strokes, the feeble blows of angry men, who wished still to retain the stolen sweets of office, were aimed at this body, calculated to mislead the people, who were also promised a reformed code of penal laws. But the time when partial remedies would have been eagerly swallowed was past, and the people saw distinctly, that their will would soon be law, and their power omnipotent. But the minister, Brienne, not aware of this, to steer clear of further opposition, proposed the plan of a *cour pléniere:* an heterogeneous assembly of princes, nobles, magistrates, and soldiers. A happy substitute, as he imagined, for the parliament; and which, by restoring the ancient forms of the kings of France, would awe and amuse the people. He did not consider, that their minds were now full of other objects, and their enthusiasm turned into another channel.

This conduct proved more destructive to the court than any former folly it's advisers had committed. Imbecility now characterized every measure. The parliament however

fell into the snare, and forfeited the esteem and confidence of the people by opposing some popular edicts; particularly one in favour of the protestants, which they themselves had demanded ten years before, and to which they now objected, only because it came from another quarter. Yet the court, regardless of experience, endeavoured to restore it's credit by persecution; whilst, making all the clashing movements that fear could dictate to manifest it's power and overawe the nation, it united all parties, and drew the whole kingdom to one point of action.

The despotic and extravagant steps taken, to give efficiency to the *cour pléniere,* awakened the sensibility of the most torpid; and the vigilance of twenty-five millions of centinels was roused, to watch the movements of the court, and follow it's corrupt ministers, through all the labyrinths of sophistry and tergiversation, into the very dens of their nefarious machinations. To prevent the different parliaments from deliberating, and forming in consequence a plan of conduct together, the edict to sanction this packed cabinet was to be presented to them all on the same day; and a considerable force was assembled, to intimidate the members, who should dare to prove refractory. But, they were forewarned in time, to avoid being surprised into acquiescence: for, having received an intimation of the design, a copy of the edict had been purloined from the press, by means of the universal engine of corruption, money.

Warmed by the discovery of this surreptitious attempt to cheat them into blind obedience, they bound themselves by an oath, to act in concert; and not to enregister a decree, that had been obtained through a medium, which violated the privilege they had usurped of having a share in the legislation, by rendering their sanction of edicts necessary to give them force: a privilege that belonged only to the states-general. Still, as the government had often found it convenient to make the parliaments a substitute for a power they dreaded to see in action, these magistrates sometimes availed themselves of this weakness, to remonstrate against oppression; and thus, covering usurpation with a respectable veil, the twelve parliaments were considered by the people as the only barriers to resist the encroachments of despotism. Yet the sagacious chancellor L'Hôpital, not deceived by their accidental usefulness, guarded the french against their illegal ambition: for was it not a dangerous courtesy of the people, to allow an aristocracy of lawyers, who bought their places, to be as it were the only representatives of the nation? Still their resistance had frequently been an impediment in the way of tyranny, and now provoked a discussion, which led to the most important of all questions—namely, in whose hands ought the sovereignty to rest?—who ought to levy the impost, and make laws?—and the answer was the universal demand of a fair representation, to meet at stated periods, without depending on the caprice of the executive power. Unable to effect their purpose by art or force, the weak ministry, stung by the disappointment, determined at least to wreak their vengeance on two of the boldest of the members. But the united magistrates disputing the authority of the armed force, it was necessary to send to Versailles, to make the king sign an express order; and towards five o'clock the next morning the sanctuary of justice was profaned, and the two members dragged to prison, in contempt of the visible indignation of the people. Soon after, to fill up the measure of provocations, a deputation sent by the province of Brittany, to remonstrate against the establishment of the *cour pléniere,* were condemned to silence in the Bastille.

Without money, and afraid to demand it, excepting in a circumlocutory manner, the court, like mad men, spent themselves in idle exertions of strength: for, whilst the citizens of Paris were burning in effigy the two obnoxious ministers, who thus outraged them in the person of their magistrates, they were delivered up to the fury of the hired slaves of despotism, and trampled under foot by the cavalry; who were called in to quell a riot purposely excited.

Cries of horrour and indignation resounded throughout the kingdom; and the nation, with one voice, demanded justice—Alas! justice had never been known in France. Retaliation and vengeance had been it's fatal substitutes. And from this epoch we may date the commencement of those butcheries, which have brought on that devoted country so many dreadful calamities, by teaching the people to avenge themselves with blood!

The hopes of the nation, it is true, were still turned towards the promised convocation of the states-general; which every day became more necessary. But the infatuated ministers, though unable to devise any scheme to extricate themselves out of the crowd of difficulties, into which they had heedlessly plunged, could not think of convening a power, which they foresaw, without any great stretch of sagacity, would quickly annihilate their own.

The ferment, mean time, continued, and the blood that had been shed served only to increase it; nay, the citizens of Grenoble prepared with calmness to resist force by force, and the myrmidons of tyranny might have found it a serious contest, if the intelligence of the dismission of the ministers had not produced one of those moments of enthusiasm, which by the most rapid operation of sympathy unites all hearts. Touched by it, the men who lived on the wages of slaughter threw down their arms, and melting into tears in the embraces of the citizens whom they came to murder, remembered that they were countrymen, and groaned under the same oppression: and, their conduct, quickly applauded with that glow of sensibility which excites imitation, served as an example to the whole army, sorcing the soldiers to think of their situation, and might have proved a salutary lesson to any court less depraved and insensible than that of Versailles.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER IV.

necker recalled. his character. notables convened a second time. coalition of the nobility and clergy in defence of their privileges. provincial assemblies of the people. political publications in favour of the tiers-etat. general reflections on reform,—on the present state of europe,—and on the revolution in france.

Such were the measures pursued to exasperate a people beginning to open their eyes, and now clamourously demanding the restitution of their long-estranged rights; when the court, having in vain attempted to terrify or deceive them, found it expedient to still the storm by recalling Necker. This man had the confidence of France, which he in some degree merited for the light he had thrown on the state of the revenue, and for the system of economy, that he had endeavoured to adopt during his former administration: but unfortunately he did not possess talents or political sagacity sufficient to pilot the state in this perilous season. Bred up in a countinghouse, he acquired that knowledge of detail, and attention to little advantages, so necessary when a man desires to amass riches with what is termed a fair character: and, having accumulated a very large fortune by unremitting industry; or, to borrow the commercial phrase, *attention to the main chance,* his house became the resort of the men of letters of his day.

The foibles of a rich man are always fostered, sometimes perhaps insensibly, by his numerous dependents and visitants, who find his table amusing or convenient. It is not then suprizing, that, with the abilities of a tolerable financier, he was soon persuaded, that he was a great author, and consummate statesman. Besides, when the manners of a nation are very depraved, the men who wish to appear, and even to be, more moral than the multitude, in general become pedantically virtuous; and, continually contrasting their morals with the thoughtless vices around them, the artificial, narrow character of a sectary is formed; the manners are rendered stiff, and the heart cold. The dupes also of their flimsey virtue, many men are harshly called hypocrites, who are only weak; and popularity often turns the head giddy, that would have soberly fulfilled the common duties of a man in the shade of private life.

Having adopted with a timid hand many of the sagacious plans of his model, the clear headed, unaffected Turgot, Necker was considered by the greater part of the nation as a consummate politician: neither was it surprizing, that the people, snatched from despondency, should have mistaken the extent of his political knowledge, when they had estimated it by that of the greatest statesman, which France, or, perhaps, any other country, ever produced.

Having written on a subject, that naturally attracted the attention of the public, he had the vanity to believe, that he deserved the exaggerated applause he received, and the reputation of wise, when he was only shrewd. Not content with the fame he acquired by writing on a subject, which his turn of mind and profession enabled him to comprehend, he wished to obtain a higher degree of celebrity, by forming into a large book various metaphysical shreds of arguments, which he had collected from the

conversation of men, fond of ingenious subtilties; and the style, excepting some declamatory passages, was as inflated and confused as the thoughts were far fetched and unconnected* .

As it is from this period, that we must date the commencement of those great events, which, outrunning expectation, have almost rendered observation breathless, it becomes necessary to enter on the task with caution; as it ought not to be more the object of the historian to fill up the sketch, than to trace the hidden springs and secret mechanism, which have put in motion a revolution, the most important that has ever been recorded in the annals of man. This was a crisis that demanded boldness and precision; and no man in France, excepting Necker, had the reputation of possessing extensive political talents; because the old system of government scarcely afforded a field, in which the abilities of men could be unfolded, and their judgment matured by experience. Yet, whilst the kingdom was in the greatest fermentation, he seems to have thought of none but those timid half-way measures, which always prove disastrous in desperate cases, when the wound requires to be probed to the quick.

The old government was then only a vast ruin; and whilst it's pillars were trembling on their beseless foundations, the eyes of all France were directed towards their admired minister. In this situation, with all his former empiricism he began his second career, like another Sangrado. But the people could no longer bear bleeding—for their veins were already so lacerated, it was difficult to find room to make a fresh incision; and the emollient prescriptions, the practice of former times, were now insufficient to stop the progress of a deadly disease. In this situation, listening to the voice of the nation, because he was at a loss what step to take to maintain his popularity, he determined to hasten the convocation of the states-general: first recalling the exiled magistrates, and restoring the parliaments to the exercise of their functions. His next care was to dissipate all apprehension of a famine; a fear that had been artfully excited by the court agents, in order to have a pretext to form magazines of provision for an army, which they had previously resolved to assemble in the vicinity of Paris.

Thus far he seems to have acted with some degree of prudence, at least; but, inattentive to the robust strength which the public opinion had then acquired, he wavered as to the mode of constituting the states-general, whilst the parliament passed a decree to prevent their assembling in any other manner than they did in 1614. This obstinate pretention to legislate for the nation was no longer to be tolerated, when they opposed the wishes of the people: yet, with the common instinct of corporate bodies, they wrapped themselves up in the precedents that proved their winding-sheet, provoking universal contempt; for the herculean force of the whole empire was now clearing away every obstacle to freedom.

At this critical moment, the minister, enjoying great popularity, had it in his power, could he have governed the court, to have suggested a system, which might ultimately have proved acceptable to all parties; and thus have prevented that dreadful convulsion, which has shook the kingdom from one extremity to the other. Instead of that, he convened a second time the *notables,* to take their opinion on a subject, respecting which the public had already decided, not daring himself to sanction it's decision. The strongest proof he could give, that his mind was not sufficiently elastic

to expand with the opening views of the people; and that he did not possess the eye of genius, which, quickly distinguishing what is possible, enables a statesman to act with firm dignity, resting on his own centre.

Carried away by the general impulsion, with the inconsiderate fervour of men, whose hearts always grow hard as they cool, when they have been warmed by some sudden glow of enthusiasm or sympathy, the *notables* showed, by their subsequent conduct, that, though they had been led by eloquence to support some questions of a patriotic tendency, they had not the principles necessary to impel them to give up local advantages, or personal prerogatives, for the good of the whole community, in which they were only eventually to share. Indeed romantic virtue, or friendship, seldom goes further than professions; because it is merely the effect of that fondness for imitating great, rather than acquiring moderate qualities, common to vain people.

The *notables* had now two essential points to settle; namely, to regulate the election of the deputies, and how they were afterwards to vote. The population and wealth of several provinces, from commercial advantages and other causes, had given a new face to the country since the former election; so much so, that, if the ancient division were adhered to, the representation could not fail to be very unequal. Yet if the natural order of population were followed, the grand question of voting by orders or by voices seemed to be prejudged by the great increase of the members of the *tiers-etat.*

The nobles and the clergy immediately rallied round the standard of privileges, insisting, that France would be ruined, if their *rights* were touched: and so true were they now to their insulated interest, that all the committees into which the *notables* were divided, excepting that of which *monsieur* was president, determined against allowing the *tiers-etat* that increase of power necessary to enable them to be useful. Whilst, however, these disputes and cabals seemed to promise no speedy determination, the people, weary of procrastination, and disgusted with the obstacles continually thrown in the way of the meeting of the states-general, by a court that was ever secretly at work, to regain the trifling privileges, which it pretended to sacrifice to the general good, began to assemble, and even to decide the previous question, by deliberating together in several places. Dauphine set the example; and the three orders uniting sketched a plan for the organization of the whole kingdom, which served as a model for the other provincial states, and furnished grounds for the constituent assembly to work on when forming the constitution. Though the rumour was spread abroad, the court, still so stupidly secure as not to see, that the people, who at this period dared to think for themselves, would not now be noosed like beasts, when strength is brought into subjection by reason, beheld with wonder the arrival of deputations from different quarters, and heard with astonishment the bold tones of men speaking of their rights, tracing society to it's origin, and painting with the most forcible colours the horrid depredations of the old government. For after the minds of men had been fatigued by the stratagems of the court, the feeble measures of the minister, and the narrow, selfish views of the parliaments, they examined with avidity the productions of a number of able writers, who were daily pouring pamphlets from the press, to excite the *tiers-etat,* to assert it's rights on enlarged principles, and to oppose vigorously the exorbitant claims of the privileged orders, who stood up for ancient usurpations, as if they were the natural rights of a particular *genus* of man.

Those of the abbé Sieyes and the marquis de Condorcet were the most philosophical; whilst the unctuous eloquence of Mirabeau softened these dry researches, and fed the flame of patriotism.

In this posture of affairs, Necker, perceiving that the people were grown resolute, prevailed on the council to decree, that the number of the deputies of the *tiers-etat* should be equal to that of the two other orders taken together: but whether they were to vote by chambers, or in the same body, was still left undetermined.

The people, whose patience had been worn out by injuries and insults, now only thought of preparing instructions for their representatives.—But, instead of looking for gradual improvement, letting one reform calmly produce another, they seemed determined to strike at the root of all their misery at once: the united mischiefs of a monarchy unrestrained, a priesthood unnecessarily numerous, and an over grown nobility: and these hasty measures, become a subject worthy of philosophical investigation, naturally fall into two distinct subjects of inquiry.

1st. If, from the progress of reason, we be authorized to infer, that all governments will be meliorated, and the happiness of man placed on the solid basis, gradually prepared by the improvement of political science: if the degrading distinctions of rank born in barbarism, and nourished by chivalry, be really becoming in the estimation of all sensible people so contemptible, that a modest man, in the course of fifty years would probably blush at being thus distinguished: if the complexion of manners in Europe be completely changed from what it was half a century ago, and the liberty of it's citizens tolerably secured: if every day extending freedom be more firmly established in consequence of the general dissemination of truth and knowledge: it then seems injudicious for statesmen to force the adoption of any opinion, by aiming at the speedy destruction of obstinate prejudices; because these premature reforms, instead of promoting, destroy the comfort of those unfortunate beings, who are under their dominion, affording at the same time to despotism the strongest arguments to urge in opposition to the theory of reason. Besides, the objects intended to be forwarded are probably retarded, whilst the tumult of internal commotion and civil discord leads to the most dreadful consequence—the immolating of human victims.

But, 2dly, it is necessary to observe, that, if the degeneracy of the higher orders of society be such, that no remedy less fraught with horrour can effect a radical cure; and if enjoying the fruits of usurpation, they domineer over the weak, and check by all the means in their power every humane effort, to draw man out of the state of degradation, into which the inequality of fortune has sunk him; the people are justified in having recourse to coercion, to repel coercion. And, further, if it can be ascertained, that the silent sufferings of the citizens of the world under the iron feet of oppression are greater, though less obvious, than the calamities produced by such violent convulsions as have happened in France; which, like hurricanes whirling over the face of nature, strip off all it's blooming graces; it may be politically just, to pursue such measures as were taken by that regenerating country, and at once root out those deleterious plants, which poison the better half of human happiness. For civilization hitherto, by producing the inequality of conditions, which makes wealth more desirable than either talents or virtue, has so weakened all the organs of the body-

politic, and rendered man such a beast of prey, that the strong have always devoured the weak till the very signification of justice has been lost sight of, and charity, the most specious system of slavery, substituted in it's place. The rich have for ages tyrannized over the poor, teaching them how to act when possessed of power, and now must feel the consequence. People are rendered ferocious by misery; and misanthropy is ever the offspring of discontent. Let not then the happiness of one half of mankind be built on the misery of the other, and humanity will take place of charity, and all the ostentatious virtues of an universal aristocracy. How, in fact, can we expect to see men live together like brothers, when we only see master and servant in society? For till men learn mutually to assist without governing each other, little can be done by political associations towards perfecting the condition of mankind.

Europe will probably be, for some years to come, in a state of anarchy; till a change of sentiments, gradually undermining the strong-holds of custom, alters the manners, without rousing the little passions of men, a pack of yelping curs pampered by vanity and pride. It is in reality these minor passions, which during the summer of idleness mantle on the heart, and taint the atmosphere, because the understanding is still.

Several acts of ferocious folly have justly brought much obloquy on the grand revolution, which has taken place in France; yet, I feel confident of being able to prove, that the people are essentially good, and that knowledge is rapidly advancing to that degree of perfectibility, when the proud distinctions of sophisticating fools will be eclipsed by the mild rays of philosophy, and man be considered as man—acting with the dignity of an intelligent being.

From implicitly obeying their sovereigns, the french became suddenly all sovereigns; yet, because it is natural for men to run out of one extreme into another, we should guard against inferring, that the spirit of the moment will not evaporate, and leave the disturbed water more clear for the fermentation. Men without principle rise like foam during a storm sparkling on the top of the billow, in which it is soon absorbed when the commotion dies away. Anarchy is a fearful state, and all men of sense and benevolence have been anxiously attentive, to observe what use frenchmen would make of their liberty, when the confusion incident to the acquisition should subside: yet, whilst the heart sickens over a detail of crimes and follies, and the understanding is appalled by the labour of unravelling a black tissue of plots, which exhibits the human character in the most revolting point of view; it is perhaps, difficult to bring ourselves to believe, that out of this chaotic mass a fairer government is rising than has ever shed the sweets of social life on the world.—But things must have time to find their level.

[Back to Table of Contents]

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

retrospective view of grievances in france—the nobles—the military—the clergy—the farmers general. election of deputies to the states-general. arts of the courtiers. assembly of the states. riots excited at paris. opening of the states-general. the king's speech, answer to it by the keeper of the seals, speech of mr. necker. contest respecting the mode of assembling. tacit establishment of the liberty of the press. attempt of the court to restrain it. the deputies declare themselves a national assembly.

Before we enter on the grand business produced by the meeting of the states-general, it is necessary to take a retrospective glance over the oppressions of which frenchmen so loudly complained; and, whilst we trace their justness, the question will only be, why they did not sooner raise their shoulders to heave off the mighty load. To ascertain this truth, we need not enter into deep researches, though it may be difficult to collect all the parts of the feudal chain, which linked the despotism of sixty thousand nobles, who not only exercised all the tyranny that the system authorized, but countenanced the still more extensive depredations of their numerous dependents. What, indeed, could equal the slavery of the poor husbandman; not only pillaged by the tythe and game laws, but even obliged to let whole flocks of pigeons devour his grain, without daring to destroy them, because those pigeons belonged to the chateau; and afterwards forced to carry the scanty crop to be tolled at the mill of *monseigneur,* which, to follow a frenchman's staff of life through all it's stages of taxation, must then be baked at the privileged oven?

It would be captious, perhaps, to dwell on some of the abominable tenures of personal servitude, which, though grown obsolete, were not abrogated; especially as more specious, if not less grinding, not less debasing exactions were in force, to deprave every moral feeling of the two divisions of society; the governing, and governed.

When chased from the country, of which the chief charm is independence, by such worrying restraints, a man wished to pursue any occupation in a town, he must previously purchase a patent of some privileged person, to whom this tax had been sold by a farmer-general, or the parasite of a minister.

All lived by plunder; and it's universality gave it a sanction, that took off the odium, though nothing could varnish the injustice. Yet, such was the insensibility of the great, the pleasures these extortions procured were not less grateful to the senses, because paid by the sweat of industry.—No; like Vespasian's obnoxious tax, money was money; and who cared on what it was levied? Thus the rich necessarily became robbers, and the poor thieves. Talking of honour, honesty was overlooked; and, custom giving a soft name to different atrocities, few thought it a duty to investigate disregarded principles; or to relinquish their share of the plunder, to satisty a romantic singularity of opinion, which excited ridicule rather than imitation.

The military, a pest in every country, were here also all noble, and leagued with a hundred thousand privileged persons, of different descriptions, to support their prerogative of receiving a revenue, which was a dead weight on agriculture; whilst they were not obliged, in a direct way, to advance any thing towards defraying the public expenditure.

The gabelle, the corvée, the obligation to supply horses to transport the troops from one part of the kingdom to another, even when most necessary at the farm; clogs on husbandry, equally unjust and vexatious; were riveted only on the ankles of labour. Activity then being continually damped by such various restrictions, instead of being braced by encouragement, an invincible impediment was thrown in the way of agricultural improvements; for each individual, insulated by oppression, lived, strictly speaking, from hand to mouth; not caring to store up comforts, at the expence of extraordinary toil, when the enjoyment depended on so many casualties. Yet, never beginning to be sensible of the effect, the people were not, probably, aware of the cause; and only exclaimed against new impositions, because they did not think sufficiently deep to detect the old.

Beside which, France maintained two hundred thousand priests, united in the same spirit of licentiousness; who indulged themselves in all the depraved pleasures of cloaked immorality, at the same time they embruted the people by sanctifying the most diabolical prejudices; to whose empire every consideration of justice and political improvement was sacrificed.

Added to evils of this magnitude, there were the canker-worms that lurked behind monastic walls. For sixty thousand persons, who by renouncing the world cut the thread of nature, served as a prop to the priesthood that enjoyed more than a fourth of the produce of all France; independent of the estates it possessed, which were immense. And this body of men, the leeches of the kingdom, the idols of the ignorant, and the palladium of tyranny, contributed not a farthing to the support of the hydra, whom they were anxious to protect, as a guard to themselves. Ostentatiously boasting of their charity, whilst revelling on the spoil of fraud, by a sacrilege the most nefarious, their whole lives were a mockery of the doctrines, which they taught, and pretended to reverence. Beside these, and other vexations, almost innumerable, one entangled in another; each petty monopoly contributed to strengthen the massy fabric of despotism, which reared it’s head in defiance of time and reason. Much, indeed, depended on the caprice of the individuals of the privileged orders, whom the court could actuate at will, giving them occasionally a sop to silence any peevish growl.

There were also the farmers general, with their army of fifty thousand collectors, who, by their manner of levying and amassing the revenue, gave an additional gripe to an oppression, the most wringing that could be invented, because it’s very principles led to the exercise of the vilest peculation; and impunity was secured by a coalition of robbers, that multitude of men in office, whose families and flatterers all lived, and fattened on the spoil of their continual war with justice. And, whilst the interest of the people was continually sacrificed by the parliaments, the inferiour courts of law were still more venal, because composed of those litigious practitioners, who thicken like spawn on putrid bodies, when a state is become corrupt.

Such were the grievances!—Such the impositions, ‘that, taken together, levied a tax on the kingdom,’ says Rabaud, ‘which the imagination is afraid to calculate.’ This body of men we may consider as constituting France, till the great bulk of the people, who were slaves and dwarfs, bursting their shackles and rising in stature, suddenly appeared with the dignity and pretentions of human beings: Yes; with the same feelings; or perhaps stronger, because more natural; and claiming equal rights with those nobles, who, like the giants of old, were only great by the courtesy of the imagination. Who is so callous to the interest of humanity as to say it was not a noble regeneration? Who is so benumbed by selfish fears, as not to feel a glow of warmth, at seeing the inhabitants of a vast empire exalted from the lowest state of beastly degradation to a summit, where, contemplating the dawn of freedom, they may breathe the invigorating air of independence; which will give them a new constitution of mind? Who is so much under the influence of prejudice, as to insist, that frenchmen are a distinct race, formed by nature, or by habit, to be slaves; and incapable of ever attaining those noble sentiments, which characterize a free people? When the dawn of them appeared conspicuously at the elections for the states-general, which were the preparatory struggles to make a change of opinion produce an essential alteration in government.

Six millions of men were now in motion to choose the deputies, and prepare their instructions; and in these assemblies the commons commenced their political career; discussing, on new ground, subjects that quickly became the only interesting topics throughout the kingdom.

In some few places, the three orders meeting together seemed to decide the important question respecting the equality of the representatives; but, in general, the first two chambered themselves to guard tenaciously their trembling prerogatives; and the third, with a cautious jealousy, to demand the redress of grievances, which they could scarcely expect the others to denominate by so harsh a name.

Great decorum reigned in the chamber of the nobility, though split into various ranks; the lower of which had ill brooked, for a long time, the overbearing insolence of those princes and peers, who haughtily contested every step of honour. Still all agreed, to resign their pecuniary privileges, and joined in vague terms, with the public voice, to demand a constitution.

The same divisions produced more visible effects amongst the clergy: for considerable tumults were the consequence of the struggle of the parish-priests, the commons of this order, to have their due weight in the scale; and their success seemed a sure prognostic of the turn things were going to take in the nation. In fact, every diocess was become the centre of a petty despotism, more galling than the great, because at each man’s elbow; and the parish-priests, who were not in the high road to preferment, most oppressed, led the van in the new contest for equality; whilst disrespect for the mitre paved the way to a contempt for the crown.

Indivisible as had hitherto been the clerical body, the indecent pride of the dignitaries of the church, at this juncture, produced the schism, which induced the majority of the clergy to side with the people; whilst only a small minority of the nobility deserted the

common cause of the party. The parish-priests, in fact, appeared, from the time of their election, a corps in reserve for the third-estate; where they sought for the consequence they were denied in their own chamber, finding themselves more nearly allied by interest, as well as inclination, to this order than to the rich pastors, who, separating the sheep from the goats, bade them stand aloof, as possessing less riches—the holiness of that body, as of all others. The electing of so many of the inferiour clergy, in spite of the menaces and intrigues of their numerous superiours, was a striking proof, that the power of the church was in the wane; and that the people were beginning to feel their own strength. The disturbances at this time seemed the rumbling of the approaching tempest; and orators, formed in these provincial assemblies, to figure afterwards in national, were encouraged by applause to persevere.

Having the same mark in view, an uniformity of sentiment breathed throughout the instructions of the third-estate; principally levelled at the privileges of the two other orders: for on these abuses the most popular publications had hinged, rivetting conviction in the minds of the suffering people. A celebrated pamphlet, written by the abbé Sieyes, went through sixty editions; and the duke of Orleans, piqued at the royal family, took great pains to spread abroad opinions, which were far from being congenial with his own; thus, with purblind ambition, labouring to overturn a court, the ruins of which have rebounded on his own head.

But the temper of the nation, sore with suffering, and warmed by these discussions, so ran a-head of their judgment, as to lead the electors, with hasty zeal, to instruct their representatives, to demand the immediate suppression of a host of abuses, without guarding against the consequences.—Such, unfortunately, is always the conduct pursued by exasperated passions; for, during the rage to correct abuses, one is, too frequently, only exchanged for another. So difficult is it to impress the salutary lessons of experience on irritated minds!—And so apt are men, in the moment of action, to fly from one extreme to the other, without considering, that the strongest conviction of reason cannot quickly change a habit of body; much less the manners that have been gradually produced by certain modes of thinking and acting.

With one voice, however, the whole nation called for a constitution, to establish equal rights, as the foundation of freedom; and to guard against the depredations of favourites, whether they attacked person or property. So that the liberty of the press, and the abolition of *lettres de cachet,* were, in general, the articles that followed the positive injunction of confining the right of taxation to the representative body of the nation. The institution of juries was recommended, and the deputies were requested to take into consideration, whether the number of capital punishments could not be lessened, or totally abolished; remarks were made on the evil tendency of lotteries, and on the vexatious impediments thrown in the way of trade, by barriers and monopolies. In short, against the tyranny and injustice of the court, the nobility, and the clergy, all remonstrated; unmasking one species of oppression, and dilating on another; yet, among these numerous animadversions, prayers and praises alone were addressed to the king; and nothing like a glance at republicanism rendered their sincerity doubtful.

To divert the gathering storm from breaking over their heads, the cabal determined to rest all their hopes on the aid of the foreign troops; which they were collecting from different parts of the kingdom, not caring to trust to the french soldiery, who were assuming the character of citizens. Mean while, with the usual chicanery of courtiers, they continued to amuse the deputies, till they could crush them at once; and effectually blast the hopes of the people. The human heart is naturally good, though so often the dupe of passion,—For though it's feelings be sophisticated, or stifled; though the head contrives the blackest machinations; even in the silence of solitude, who will whisper to himself that he is a villain? Will he not rather try, like Milton's devil, to find out a damned plea of necessity, to cover his guilt?—paying homage, in spite of himself, to the eternal justice he violates under the pretext of self-preservation. But, it is not alone the virtues of man, those changing hues, of which the colour is undecided, that proclaim his native dignity. No; his vices have the same stamp of the divinity: and it is necessary to pervert the understanding, before the heart can be led astray. Men, likewise, indolently adopt the habits of thinking of their day, without weighing them. Thus these very courtiers, who could coolly contemplate the massacre, which must be the consequence of assembling the foreign troops, because it was a continuance of the established course of things, have since started, probably with real horrour, from the contemplation of the butcheries, which their very tenacity produced. Such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, and so necessary is it to render the head clear to make the principles of action pure.

The deputies, however, who were mostly collected from remote parts of the country, had become in their villages the hale sons of independence. And, though the french mania, of adoring their monarch, extended to every part of the kingdom, it only gave hilarity to the cheering glass at the homely tables of which they were masters; or activity to the dance, that was a real burst of animal spirits. Very different from the lascivious provocations to vice, exhibited at the opera, which, by destroying the social affections that attach men to each other, stifle all public spirit; for what is patriotism but the expansion of domestic sympathy, rendered permanent by principle? Besides, the writings that had awakened the spirit of these men had a little inebriated their brain. Such is, for the most part, the baneful effect of eloquence, that, persuading instead of convincing, the glory of the enthusiasm it inspires is sullied by that false magnanimity, which vanity and ignorance continually mistake for real elevation of soul; though, like the scorching rays of the sun after rain, it dries into sterility the heart, whose emotions are too quickly exhaled.

The courtiers, despising their rusticity, and still considering the people as ciphers, continued to discharge the usual routine of office, by adjusting the ceremonials of reception; all which tended to insult the third-estate, and show, that the deputies of the privileged orders were to be still treated as if they were a distinct class of beings. The insolence of such proceedings could not fail to provoke the honest indignation, and pique the vanity of those, who had been discussing on a broad scale the rights of man; whilst a little disconcerted by the ceremony that constrained them, they were obliged, every moment, to recollect, that they were the equals of these courtiers; and blushed even to own to themselves, that they could for an instant have been awed by such childish pomp. Nor were they more astonished at the pageantry of Versailles, than disgusted with the haughtiness of a court, whose magnificence was a proof how much

they had impoverished the people, who now demanded emancipation. Full, therefore, of the new notions of independence, which made them spurn at every idea of a distinction of men, they took advantage of the majority accorded them by the council, and began to rally their forces. Perceiving also, as they acted decidedly, that they possessed the confidence of the people, who, forgetting *vive le roi,* exclaimed only vive le tiers-etat!—they every day became more firm.

The courtiers immediately fixed on a house of rendezvous, where they were regularly to concert the best measures to crush the rising power of the commons; and these, not without a portion of the mistrust, which characterizes the nation, assembled in different places, till a mutual interest united them in that chosen by the deputies from Brittany. The disrespect, likewise, which the orders relative to their dress announced, prepared them for the contempt they were destined to receive, when separated like the indian casts, amongst whom a man fears to be polluted by the touch of an inferiour: for true to the inveterate prejudice in favour of precedents* , the nobility were gaudily caparisoned for the show, whilst the commons were stupidly commanded to wear the black mantle, that distinguishes the lawyers. But, the tide of opinion once turned, every thing contributes to accelerate it's course.

Before the meeting of the states-general, the question that was first to agitate the various interests, whether they were to vote by orders or poll, had been so thoroughly discussed, that it made, in many of the instructions, one of the foremost articles. For it was evident to the nation, were the different orders allowed to assemble in their separate chambers, each invested with the old privilege of putting a negative on the decisions of the other two, that they should be gulled with promises of reform, whilst the coffers of the court were replenished with a show of legality. It was, in fact, prudent in the court party to maintain this ground, because it appeared to be the only way to render abortive all the plans of reformation that struck at their authority. This then was the prefatory business, by which they were to measure their strength; and, would to God! the vigour manifested on this occasion had always been displayed by the representatives of those misled people.

We have seen the plots of this weak, headstrong cabinet every where defeated, and traced their bloody footsteps; but we shall find them still true to their scent, having recourse again to violence, when fraud was of no avail.

To furnish a pretext to introduce adroitly a considerable military force, at the time of the assembling of the states-general, two or three riots had been excited at Paris, in which many of the thoughtless populace were killed. One in particular, though still involved in the shades of mystery, occasioned great confusion and considerable slaughter, just at the eve of their meeting.

A respectable manufacturer in the suburbs of Paris, with the fairest character, employed a number of poor, whom he paid liberally; yet against this man some idle stories were industriously circulated, well contrived to mislead and exasperate the people, because they touched their vanity, and their most pressing want, the want of bread. The scarcity, real or factitious, of this article, has always been taken advantage of by those who wished to excite tumults in Paris; and at this juncture the duped

parisians rose, at the instigation of the court agents, to destroy themselves. The riot was permitted to get a-head before any serious attempts to quell it were taken, which rendered the interference of a little army, the point aimed at, necessary; and established an opinion, that the turbulent mob required to be awed by the presence of troops, whilst the states-general deliberated.

During this effervescence, or, at least, when it was subsiding, the states-general was opened, the 5th of may, 1789, by a speech from the throne, to which courtiers, in the usual phraseology, would naturally tack the epithet—*gracious.* The king commenced with a heartless declaration of his satisfaction at seeing himself surrounded by the representatives of the people; and then enumerating the heavy debts of the nation, a great part of which had been accumulated during his reign, he added one of those idle falsehoods, which swelled his declamation without throwing dust into any one's eyes, *that it was in an honourable cause;* when it was notorious, that the cause ought to have been reckoned most dishonourable, if power had not hitherto been the true philosopher's stone, that transmuted the basest actions into sterling honour. He afterwards alluded to the spirit of innovation, that had taken possession of the minds of the people, and the general discontent that agitated the nation: but, in the true cant of courts, dictating whilst complimenting, he assured them, that he depended on their wisdom and moderation; concluding with the words of course, *the humble servant of kings,* a declaration of his attachment to the public welfare.

The disregarded speech of the keeper of the seals was, like the reply usually made to the king's, in the house of commons in England, merely an echo of his majesty's, recommending moderation in the measures adopted to reform the abuses of government, with the necessary quantum of panegyric on the goodness of the king.

Attention and applause, however, awaited Necker, though followed by weariness and disgust. He spoke for three hours, introducing, with his customary pomp of words, a number of trivial observations; trying thus to escape, in a mist of rhetorical flourishes, from the subject he feared to bring forward, because he was equally apprehensive of ossending the court, and desirous of maintaining his reputation with the people. Not a word was uttered relative to the sole right of the states-general to levy taxes, the first demand of the nation. And men who sor some time had been talking of nothing but liberty and reform, were astonished, and dissatisfied, that he avoided all mention of a new constitution. Leaning to the side of the privileged orders, he asserted, that the mode of deliberating and voting in separate assemblies was the pillar of the nation—yet, cautiously adding a salvo, to have a pretext to use another language should it be necessary, he remarked, that *sometimes* it was better to poll. This ill-timed management naturally displeased both parties, as is always the case, when men of weak, compound characters, who have not the courage to act right, want effrontery to brave the censure, that would follow an open avowal of their undecided opinions; or rather, their determination to keep well with the strongest. Dwelling on the arrangement of the finances, he assured them, that a public bankruptcy might easily be avoided; and that even the *deficit,* which had been exaggerated by France, and Europe, was only fifty-six millions; and would appear of less consequence, when they recollected, that, since *his* administration, the revenue was augmented twenty-five millions. It is true, that, on entering into details, the greater part of this sum was found

to be still in perspective; and at the same time was to be raised by taxes, which all good citizens hoped would soon disappear. In short, the french, after applauding with rapture this brilliant bird's-eye view, observed, with the shrug of *sang froid,* 'that these hypothetical resources were merely faith and hope, on condition that they should be charitable.' With respect to the abolishing of privileges, that warred with humanity, he made use of some of the same species of jesuitical arguments, which are employed by the opposers of the abolition of the infamous traffic for slaves; that, as these privileges were a kind of property, it was necessary to find out a compensation, an indemnity, before they could be done away—with justice.

Thus has the spirit of justice—it is difficult to keep down indignation when attacking such sophisms—been always outraged by the mock respect of selfishness; for, without parrying off tergiversation, it is sufficient to prove, that certain laws are not just, because no government had a right to make them; and, though they may have received what is termed a legal sanction during the times of ignorance, "the duty lies in the breach and not in the observance." Besides, these pitiful arguments are an insult to the common sense, and to the distress of a people.—Where, indeed, could the french, or english, find a fund to indemnify the privileged orders or the planters? The abuses then, must continue to the end of time—out of sheer respect to the sacredness of public faith!

Thus spoke the king and Necker; but these addresses, instead of conciliating, only rendered both parties more obstinate; so that the smothering dispute respecting the manner of voting broke out immediately, when they met to constitute themselves a legal assembly. For the next day, even the deputies of the third-estate repaired to the common hall, and agreed, that the three orders should proceed to verify their powers together; clearly perceiving, that, were the orders once allowed to do business separately, an union would be impracticable, and all their efforts to obtain a constitution null, should they attempt to make equality of rights the basis. The nobility and clergy not joining the commons, they resolved to renew their meeting the following morning; only as an aggregate of individuals, who had no power to act, not having yet a political character. This very contest seemed to call upon them to support their claim to equality, because it emphatically warned them, that all their operations would be rendered perfectly nugatory, should they permit the orders to be a check on each other. The most sensible men of the commons being of opinion, that all expectations of a permanent reform were chimerical, unless the whole representation was formed into an indivisible assembly, encouraged the more undecided to persevere; though the nobles signified to them, the 13th, that they had ascertained the legality of their election.

The clergy, however, divided in their interest, proceeded with more caution; and the most discerning of them, perceiving that their order was becoming obnoxious to the people, who now deified the third estate, proposed a committee of conciliation, with a view, as they pretended, to promote a good understanding between all parties. The king also, in his turn, when the nobles rejected the mediation of the clergy, offered a plan of accommodation; a mighty nothing, that the court brought forth.—But this tub, thrown out to the whale, did not divert the attention of either party from the main object; though the nobles, many of whom were in the secret of the approach of the

army, should things be carried to extremes, pretended to acquiesce; yet guarding carefully at the same time all their ancient pretentions: and this insincerity drew on them the universal odium they merited, mixed with the contempt which ineffectual struggles always produce. Conciliatory measures, in fact, were only a solemn farce at this time; though the clergy, rather insidiously, to ingratiate themselves with the people, lamenting the high price of bread, requested, that deputies from the three orders should meet to deliberate how this grievance might be lessened. The deputies of the commons, with becoming dignity, tempered with prudence, adhered to their point; and dexterously parrying off the artful stroke levelled at their popularity, they represented to the clergy, that this was another powerful motive, to make them entreat all parties to rally round the same point, to remedy evils, which excited equal sympathy in their bosoms.

The inactivity occasioned by these disputes could not fail to inflame the public mind, especially as fresh publications were daily affording it fuel. For the liberty of the press was now tacitly established, and the freest sentiments uttered, with the heat of superficial knowledge, in defiance of court manifestoes. Still, as a proof that the court merely endured, for a season, what they could not prevent, the journal of the proceedings of the states-general was stopped, by an express order; to evade which it was continued in the form of letters from Mirabeau to his constituents.

This prohibition was probably dictated by a desire of keeping the provinces quiet in the stupor of ignorance, in which they had so long dozed; but it was injudicious to awaken attention by rigorous steps, that, quickly abandoned, had the very contrary effect, exciting, instead of intimidating, the spirit of opposition. In reality, the eyes of all France were at present directed towards the commons. The hopes of the nation rested on their magnanimity; and the future happiness of millions depended upon their perseverance. It was in this slate of things, that they afforded a convincing proof to the whole world, and to posterity, that vigour and precision alone are requisite in the representatives of a people, to give dignity to their proceedings, and to secure them against the machinations of all the combined powers of despotism.

Almost five weeks having elapsed, and the patience of the nation being quite exhausted by the delay, the commons resolved to present an address to the king, written by Mirabeau, explanatory of their motives, and then to proceed to business. But, previously, they sent a deputation to the other orders, for the last time, to invite them once more to repair to the common-hall, that their powers might be verified together; adding, that in default of their appearance, they should constitute themselves, and act accordingly. This determination was a deadly blow to the power of the two other chambers, and struck directly at the root of all distinction.

The nobles, whose inveterate pride and ignorance had prevented them from joining the third-estate at the first assembling of the deputies, now saw with dismay, that their power and influence, like the musty rolls of their pedigree, were mouldering into common dust. The clergy, however, more adroit, or rather a few of the parochial priests, by degrees, attended the summons, and repaired to the hall. There can be little doubt, but that the commons, at the first meeting, and for a long time after, would gladly have coalesced with the nobles; by which means the latter would have retained

many of their privileges, and preserved a weight in the nation, necessary to hinder that preponderance, on the side of the people, which it was easy to foresee would be productive of many excesses. This conclusion continual experience warranted; because it generally happens, that men, who are not directed by practical knowledge, in whatever business they engage, run precipitately from one extreme to the other. And certainly, from the state of servility in which the french nation was sunk, retaliation was to be expected; or, at least, dreaded, from unbridled liberty. Like boys dismissed from school, they might wish to ascertain their freedom by acts of mischief; and by showing a total disregard of the arbitrary commands, that kept down their spirits without exercising their understandings. However, the stupid arrogance of the nobles stript them, before the time reason would have determined, of those idle distinctions of opinion, the symbols of barbarism, which were not completely worn out of esteem.

The minister, still afraid to act independent of the court, blamed this spirited conduct of the commons, as an act of temerity, which the king ought not to sanction. Yet they, firm and resolute, though fearing that the court, like a dying savage, mortally wounded by his enemy, might, during the agonies of death, aim a desperate stroke at them, took the most prudent precautions, to avoid exasperating the falling soe. But these mild resolutions having been mistaken by the infatuated nobles, who confounded the true fortitude of moderation with cowardice, the die was cast, and the deputies declared themselves a national assembly.

Enthusiasm fired every heart, and extended itself like thought from one end of the kingdom to the other. The very novelty of this measure was sufficient to animate a people less volatile than the french; and, perhaps, it is impossible to form a just conception of the transports which this decision excited in every corner of the empire. Europe also heard with astonishment what resounding through France excited the most lively emotions; and posterity must read with wonder the recital of the follies and atrocities committed by the court and nobles at that important crisis.

The Social Contract of Roussean, and his admirable work on the origin of the inequalities amongst mankind, had been in the hands of all France, and admired by many, who could not enter into the depth of the reasoning. In short, they were learned by heart, by those whose heads could not comprehend the chain of argument, though they were sufficiently clear to seize the prominent ideas, and act up to their conviction. Perhaps, the great advantage of eloquence is, that, impressing the results of thinking on minds alive only to emotion, it gives wings to the slow foot of reason, and fire to the cold labours of investigation: Yet it is observable, that, in proportion as the understanding is cultivated, the mind grows attached to the exercise of investigation, and the combination of abstract ideas. The nobles of France had also read these writings for amusement; but they left not on their minds traces of conviction sufficiently strong to overcome those prejudices self-interest rendered so dear, that they easily persuaded themselves of their reasonableness. The nobility and clergy, with all their dependents under the influence of the same sentiments, formed a considerable proportion of the nation, on the rest of which they looked down with contempt, considering them as merely the grass of the land, necessary to clothe nature; yet only sit to be trodden under foot. But these despised people were

beginning to feel their real consequence, and repeated with emphasis the happy comparison of the abbé Seiyes, ‘that the nobility are like vegetable tumours, which cannot exist without the sap of the plants they exhaust.’ Nevertheless, in treating with the nobles, the angles of pride, which time alone could have smoothed silently away, were, perhaps, too rudely knocked off, for the folly of distinctions was rapidly wearing itself out, and would probably have melted gradually before the rational opinions, that were continually gaining ground, fructifying the soil as they dissolved; instead of which it was drifted by a hurricane, to spread destruction around as it fell.

Many of the officers, who had served in America during the late war, had beheld the inhabitants of a whole empire living in a state of perfect equality; and returned, charmed with their simplicity and integrity, the concomitants of a just government, erected on the solid foundation of equal liberty, to scan the rectitude, or policy of a different system. Convinced of their inutility as nobles, these, when fired with the love of freedom, seconded the views of the commons with heart and voice. But the sycophants of the court, and the greater part of the nobility, who were grossly ignorant of every thing that was not comprised in the art of living in a continual round of pleasure, insensible of the precipice on which they were standing, would not, at first, recede a single step to save themselves; and this obstinacy was the chief cause that led to the entire new organization of the constitution, framed by the national assembly. The french in reality were arrived, through the vices of their government, at that degree of false refinement, which makes every man, in his own eyes, the centre of the world; and when this gross selfishness, this complete depravity, prevails in a nation, an absolute change must take place; because the members of it have lost the cement of humanity, which kept them together. All other vices are, properly speaking, superfluous strength, powers running to waste; but this morbid spot shows, that there is death in the heart. Whatever, indeed, may be the wisdom or folly of a mixed government of king, lords, and commons, is of no consequence in the present history; because it appears sufficiently obvious, that the aristocracy of France destroyed itself, through the ignorant arrogance of it’s members; who, bewildered in a thick fog of prejudices, could discern neither the true dignity of man, nor the spirit of the times.

It also deserves to be noted, that the regeneration of the french government, at this crisis, depended on the fortitude of the national assembly at the outset of the contest; for, if the court party had prevailed, the commons would have rested in their usual state of insignificancy, and their whole proceedings proved only a solemn farce. They would have wrapped themselves up in their black mantles, like the herd of undertaker’s men at a funeral, merely to follow with servile steps the idle cavalcade to it’s resting place; and the people would only have seen their ancient tyranny revive, tricked out in new habiliments.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER II.

the national assembly proceed to business. opposition of the nobles, bishops, and court. a seance royale proclaimed, and the hall of the assembly surrounded by soldiers. the members adjourn to the tennis court, and vow never to separate till a constitution should be completed. the majority of the clergy and two of the nobles join the commons. seance royale. the king's speech. spirited behaviour of the assembly. speech of mirabeau. persons of the deputies declared inviolable. minority of the nobles join the commons. at the request of the king, the minority of the clergy do the same,—and are at length followed by the majority of the nobles. character of the queen of france,—of the king,—and of the nobles. lectures on liberty at the palais royal. paris surrounded by troops. spirit of liberty infused into the soldiers. eleven of the french guards imprisoned because they would not fire on the populace, and liberated by the people. remonstrance of the national assembly. the king proposes to remove the assembly to noyon, or soissons. necker dismissed. city militia proposed. the populace attacked in the garden of the thuilleries by the prince of lambesc. nocturnal orgies at versailles.

The third-estate, having constituted themselves a national assembly, now proceeded to business, with calm prudence, taking into consideration the urgent necessities of the state. Closely also attending to their instructions, they first pronounced, that all taxes not enacted by the consent of the representatives of the people were illegal; and afterwards gave a temporary sanction to the present levies, to avoid dissolving one government before they had framed another. They then turned their attention to the object next in importance, and declared, that, as soon as, in concert with his majesty, they should be able to fix the principles of national regeneration, they would employ themselves to examine and liquidate the national debt; mean time the creditors of the state were declared to be under the safe-guard of the honour of the french nation. These decrees concluded with a resolve, that the assembly, now become active, should dedicate it's first moments to inquire into the cause of the scarcity that afflicted the kingdom; and to search for a remedy the most prompt and effectual.

The nobles, bishops, and, in fact, the whole court, now seriously began to rally all their forces; convinced that it was become necessary, to oppose their united strength against the commons, to prevent their carrying every thing before them.

The chamber of the clergy had been engaged for several days, in discussing the question, where they should verify their powers. A number of them, during this discussion, appear to have advanced, feeling their way; for when they now came to divide, the majority decided to join the national assembly.

Alarmed by the prospect of this junction, one of the members of the chamber, which almost arrogated to itself the prerogative of legislation, that of the nobles, proposed an address to the king, beseeching him to dissolve the states-general; whilst the cause of the people was there vigorously supported by a minority, feeble as to numbers, but

powerful in argument, animated by the popularity, which their bold declaration could not fail to produce during the reign of enthusiasm.

This was a moment pregnant with great events. The court still trusted to subterfuge, and, holding the representatives of the people in superlative contempt, affected in some degree to yield to the prayer of the nation; though signifying, that the king was the only fountain of justice, and that he would grant every thing which his faithful subjects could reasonably demand. A trick as palpable as the design was flagrant; for at the instant they were pretending to see some reason in their requisitions, they were guarding against their obtaining the only thing that could secure their rights, an equal representation; holding for this purpose mischievous councils, composed of characters most obnoxious in the eyes of the people. In these meetings it was resolved, to amuse the commons, until the army could be assembled; and then, in case of obstinacy, they would draw on themselves the consequence. Accordingly the 20th of june, the day on which the majority of the clergy was to join the commons, the herald proclaimed a *séance royale;* and a detachment of guards surrounded the hall of the national assembly, to take care (such was the shallow pretext) that it should be properly prepared for the reception of the king. The deputies came to the door at the usual hour; but only the president (Baillie) and the secretaries were permitted to enter to take away their papers; and they saw, that the benches were already removed, and that all the entrances were guarded by a great number of soldiers.

Courage is seldom relaxed by persecution; and the firm and spirited proceedings of the assembly on this day, gave the decided blow to the stratagems of the court. During the first tumult of surprise, it is true, some of the deputies talked of going immediately to Marly, to invite the king to come among them, and in a truly paternal manner to unite his power with their's to promote the public good; and thus by an energetic appeal to his heart and understanding, to convince him that they spoke the language of truth and reason. But others, more experienced in ministerial wiles, calmly advised to adjourn the sittings to the neighbouring tennis-court. For they knew, that the hearts of courtiers are fortified with icy prejudices; and that, though a moment of sympathy, a flow of life-blood, may thaw them at the instant, it is only to render them more hard, when the glow of genial heat is passed.

Assembled at the tennis-court, they encouraged each other; and one mind actuating the whole body, in the presence of an applauding crowd, they joined hands solemnly, and took God to witness, that they would not separate, till a constitution should be completed. The benedictions that dropped from every tongue, and sparkled in tears of joy from every eye, giving fresh vigour to the heroism which excited them, produced an overflow of sensibility that kindled into a blaze of patriotism every social feeling. The dungeons of despotism and the bayonets sharpened for massacre, were then equally disregarded even by the most fearful; till, in one of those instants of disinterested forgetfulness of private pursuits, all devoted themselves to the promotion of public happiness, promising to resist, to the last extremity, all the efforts of such an inveterate tyranny. The absent deputies were sent for; and one, who happened to be sick, had himself carried to unite his feeble voice with the general cry. The very soldiers also, disobeying their officers, came to be willing centinels at the entrance of

the sanctuary of liberty, eagerly imbibing the sentiments, which they afterwards spread through their garrisons.

This indignity offered to the third-estate could not fail to excite new sensations of disgust at Paris; and give a fresh spring to the animation of the people at large. Yet, this spirited behaviour of the commons excited only supercilious contempt at court. For the gay circles there were so far sunk in fastidious delicacy, and squeamish respect for polished manners, that they could not even discover magnanimity in the conduct of a peasant, or a shopkeeper; much less grandeur in an assembly regardless of ceremonials. And not to be deficient themselves in these respects, the *séance royale* was put off another day, in order that the galleries, which had been erected for the accommodation of spectators by the national assembly, might be removed.

This was another injudicious step on the part of the cabinet; because it afforded time for the clergy to unite with the commons, who were in search of a place sufficiently capacious to contain such a body. At length, collected in a church, the clergy, with several bishops at their head, and two nobles of Dauphiné, joined them; and the place, seeming to reflect a sanctity on their union, tended to consolidate, under a nobler concave, the resolution taken in the tennis-court.

The following day, the *séance royale* really took place, with all the exterious splendour usually exhibited at these shows; which hitherto could scarcely be termed empty, because they produced the desired effect. But the public, having their attention turned to other things, now viewed with contempt, what had formerly inspired almost idolatrous respect. The deputies of the third estate were again ordered to enter by a separate door, and even left a considerable time standing exposed to a heavy shower. The people, who were totally excluded, formed themselves into groups, making indignant comments on the repeated affronts offered to their representatives, whose minds likewise recoiled at the idle attempt to impress them with an opinion of their insignificancy; when the very pains taken to do it proclaimed their growing importance in the state.

The object of the king's speech, on this occasion, was to annul the whole proceedings of the national assembly, and to hold out certain benefits, as lures to submission, which the king meant to grant to the people; as if, observes Mirabeau, 'the rights of the people, were the favours of the king.' A declaration of his sovereign will and pleasure was then read, in which, making an insidious attempt to withdraw from the assembly the confidence of the public, he declared, that, if they abandoned him, he would provide for the happiness of his people, without their assistance, knowing the purport of the instructious given to the deputies. The first article of the king's benevolent *intentions,* was to grant to the states-general the power of furnishing supplies; carefully specifying, however, that it was to consist of the three orders, who were to vote according to the ancient mode. Some other salutary plans of reform were also brought forward; but always with artful modifications, that would enable the old abuses to keep a sure footing. For example, the taxes were to be levied equally; yet a cautious respect for property sanctioned almost every other feudal privilege; and the absolute abolition of *lettres de cachet,** though his majesty wished to secure personal freedom, was hinted at as incompatible with public safety, and the preservation of the

honour of private families. The liberty of the press was allowed to be necessary; but the states general were requested to point out a mode of rendering it compatible with the respect due to religion, to morality, and to the honour of the citizens. The tenour of all the rest of the articles was the same; commencing with a plan of reform, and concluding with the *ifs* and *buts,* that were to render it void.—Then, winding round to the grand object of the meeting, the king terminated his discourse, with saying, forgetful that this was not the period to imagine himself reigning at Constantinople, 'I *command* you to separate immediately, and to attend, each of you, to-morrow, at the chamber appropriated for your order, there to resume your sittings; and I have commanded, in consequence, the grand master of the ceremonies to order the halls to be prepared.'

The majority of the nobles, and the minority of the clergy, obeyed this peremptory order, and obsequiously followed the king, like the trained horses of his court. The members of the national assembly, however, remained sitting, preserving a silence, more menacing and terrible, than the *I will,* or *I command,* of the cabinet; when the grand master of the ceremonies entered, and addressing himself to the president, reminded him, in the king's name, of the order given to separate immediately. The president answered, 'that the assembly was not constituted to receive orders from any person;' but Mirabeau, who thought this reply too tame, started up, and addressing the messenger, said: 'yes; we have heard the intentions which the king has been induced to utter; and you cannot be his organ in this assembly.—You, who have neither seat, nor right to speak, ought not to remind us of his discourse. However, to avoid all equivocation or delay, I declare to you, that if you are charged to make us go from hence, you should demand orders to employ force; for only the bayonet can oblige us to quit our places.' It is difficult to conceive the ardour inspired by this prompt eloquence. It's sire flew from breast to breast, whilst a whisper ran round, that what Mirabeau had just uttered, gave a finishing stroke to the revolution.

A warm debate ensued; and the assembly declaring their adherence to their former decrees, the abbé Siéyes said, in his dry, cogent manner: 'gentlemen, you are to day what you were yesterday.' A motion was then made, by Mirabeau, who suggested, as a prudent precaution against the measures of a desperate cabal, that the person of each deputy should be pronounced inviolable; and, after a slight discussion, it was carried unanimously.

From this moment we may consider the nation and court at open war. The court had at their command the whole military force of the empire, amounting, at least, to 200,000 men. The people, on the contrary, had only their bare arms, invigorated, it is true, by the new-born love of freedom, to oppose to the various weapons of tyranny. But the army, partaking of the common misery, were not deaf to the complaints or arguments of their fellow citizens: and they were particularly led to consider them with complacency, because a just apprehension, or prudent foresight, had induced many of the popular assemblies, to insert a clause in their instructions, recommending, that the pay of the soldiers should be augmented. Thus recognized as fellow citizens, this class of men, whom it had been the policy of the despots of Europe to keep at a distance from the other inhabitants, making them a distinct class, to oppress and corrupt the rest, began to feel an interest in the common cause. But the court, who either could

not, or would not, combine these important facts, rashly precipitated themselves into the very quicksand, into which they were vainly endeavouring to drive the commons.

As Necker had not attended in his place, at the *séance royale,* it gave colour to the rumour, which had for some time prevailed, that he purposed to retire from the ministry: so that, when the king returned, he was followed by an immense crowd, who could not conceal their discontent. Under the influence also of the same fear, a number of the deputies hastened to Necker, to entreat him not to resign. And the consternation increasing, the queen, who has ever been the first to desert her own plans, when there appeared a shadow of personal danger, sent for him; and, the better to cover the project of the cabinet, prevailed on him not to quit his post. The object of the cabinet he either had not the penetration to discover; or he had not sufficient magnanimity to resign a place, that gratified equally his pride and his avarice. This measure tended to tranquillize the minds of the people, though it was undermining their cause; for trusting to the integrity of this minister, who promised, ‘to live or die with them,’ they did not perceive, that he wanted the energy of soul necessary to enable him to act up to the principles he professed. However, the cause of liberty, as circumstances have proved, did not depend on the talents of one or two men.—It was the fiat of the nation; and the machinations of the tyrants of Europe have not yet been able to overturn it; though false patriots have led them, in their ardour for reform, to the commission of actions the most cruel and unjust. Every thing was effected by natural causes; and we shall find, if we take a cursory view of the progress of knowledge, that it’s advance towards simple principles is invariably in a ratio, which must speedily change the tangled system of european politics.

The *séance royale* produced so little effect, that the assembly, as if their sittings had never been interrupted, met the next day at the old hall; and the day after, the minority of the nobles. which consisted of forty-seven members, came to incorporate themselves with the commons. All of these, and particularly the duke of Orleans, who led them, acquired by this popular conduct, the love and confidence of the nation. How far they merited it, deceiving the public, or themselves, their future conduct will best explain.

The interesting events, in fact, which almost daily occurred, at the commencement of the revolution, fired the fancies of men of different descriptions; till, forgetting every selfish consideration, the rich and poor saw through the same focus. But, when the former had time to cool, and felt more forcibly than the latter the inconveniences of anarchy, they returned with fresh vigour to their old ground; embracing, with redoubled ardour, the prejudices which passion, not conviction, had chased from the field, during the heat of action. This was a strong reinforcement for the staunch aristocrats; because these were mostly good, but short-sighted people, who really wished, that justice might be established, as the foundation of the new government, though they flinched when their present ease was disturbed; and it was necessary to give more than good wishes.

This minority of nobles must certainly be allowed to have acted more prudently than their peers; and several of them, the most respectable men of that class, both in talents and morals, were probably actuated by half comprehended principles. The great body

of the nobles, nevertheless, and the minority of the clergy, continued to meet in different chambers, where their idle deliberations marked their decayed influence. For, shrinking into nothing, their present struggles to regain their power were as fruitless, as their former efforts had been presumptuous. Yet the jealousies and contumely of the nobility continued to agitate the commons; who, animated by a consciousness of the justice of their cause, and feeling, that they possessed the confidence of the public, determined to proceed with the objects of their meeting, without the concurrence of the first order; proving to them, when it was too late to preserve their factitious distinctions, that their power and authority were at an end. In vain were they told, that they were acting contrary to their true interest, and risking the salvation of their privileges. In vain did one of the most moderate of the deputies* remonstrate with them, on what, most probably, would be the consequence of their obstinacy. No argument could move them; and, blind to the danger with which they were threatened, they persisted to attend their councils, without any determinate rule of action. It is true, the duke of Luxembourg declared, in a private committee held by the king, the 26th of june, that ‘the division of the orders would controul the exorbitant claims of the people, and preserve those of the monarch; united,’ added he, ‘they know no master, divided, they are your subjects:’ and he concluded, with emphatically saying, that ‘it would save the independence of the crown, and stamp with nullity the proceedings of the national assembly.’ These were manly, though not patriotic sentiments; and if the court had rallied round them, and defended them to the last extremity, they would at any rate have prevented their disgrace, by avoiding the crooked path of treachery. But abandoning all dignity of conduct, they trusted to the art of manœuvring, which defeated by the people, they were left entirely at their mercy.

With respect to the improvement of society, since the destruction of the roman empire, England seems to have led the way, rendering certain obstinate prejudices almost null, by a gradual change of opinion. This observation, which facts will support, may be brought forward, to prove, that just sentiments gain footing only in proportion as the understanding is enlarged by cultivation, and freedom of thought, instead of being cramped by the dread of bastilles and inquisitions. In Italy and France, for example, where the mind dared to exercise itself only to form the taste, the nobility were, in the strictest sense of the word, a cast, keeping aloof from the people; whilst in England they intermingled with the commercial men, whose equal or superiour fortunes made the nobles overlook their inequality of birth: thus giving the first blow to the ignorant pride that retarded the formation of just opinions respecting true dignity of character. This monied interest, from which political improvement first emanates, was not yet formed in France; and the ridiculous pride of her nobles, which led them to believe, that the purity of their families would be sullied, if they agreed to act in the same sphere with the people, was a prevailing motive, that prevented their junction with the commons. But the more licentious part of the clergy, who followed with a truer scent their own interest, thought it expedient to espouse, in time, the cause of the power, from whence their influence derived its greatest force; and from which alone they could hope for support. This schism proved, as it promised, dangerous to the views of the court.

The desertion of the clergy rendered the nobility outrageous, and hastened the crisis when the important contest was to be brought to an issue.—Then it was that the king perceived how contemptible his undecided conduct had been, and exclaiming, it is said confidently, 'that he remained alone in the midst of the nation, occupied with the establishment of concord.' Vain words! and this affectation was particularly reprehensible, because he had already given orders for the assembling of the foreign troops: the object of which was to establish concord with the point of the bayonet.

This total want of character caused him to be flattered by all parties, and trusted by none. Insignificancy had distinguished his manners in his own court. Actions without energy, and professions without sincerity, exhibiting a conduct destitute of steadiness, made the cabinet concert all their measures regardless of his opinion, leaving to the queen the task of persuading him to adopt them. The evil did not rest even here; for the different parties following separate views, the flexibility of his temper led him to sanction things the most at variance, and most dangerous to his future honour and safety. For it appears obvious, that whatever party had prevailed, he could only be considered as an instrument; which, becoming useless when the object should be achieved, would be treated with disrespect. Periods of revolution drawing into action the worst as well as the best of men; and as audacity, in general, triumphs over modest merit, when the political horizon is russled by tempest; it amounted to a moral certainty, that the line of conduct pursued by the king would lead to his disgrace and ruin.

Seeing, however, that the people were unanimous in their approbation of the conduct of their representatives, and watchful to discover the designs of their enemies; it could not but occur to the cabinet, that the only way to lull attention to sleep, was to affect to submit to necessity. Besides, fearing, if they continued to resort to their different chambers, that their plot would take wind before all the agents were assembled, a fresh instance of dissimulation evinced, that their depravity equalled their stupidity. For the king was now prevailed on to write to the presidents of the nobility, and the minority of the clergy, requesting them, to represent to those two orders the necessity of uniting with the third, to proceed to the discussion of his proposals, made at the *séance royale.*

The clergy immediately acquiesced; but the nobility continued to oppose a junction so humiliating, till the court invented a pretext of honour to save the credit of their mock dignity, by declaring, that the life of the king would be in imminent danger, should the nobles continue to resist the desire of the nation. Pretending to believe this report, for the secret of the cabinet was buzzed amongst them, and appearing to wish to bury all rivalry in royalty, they attended at the common hall, the 27th. Yet even there, the first step they took was to enter a protest, in order to guard against this concession being made a precedent.

A general joy succeeded the terrour which had been engendered in the minds of the people by their contumelious perverseness; and the parisians, cherishing the most sanguine expectations, reckoned, that an unity of exertions would secure to them a redress of grievances.

It is perhaps unnecessary to dwell, for a moment, on the insensibility of the court, and the credulity of the people; as they seem the only clues, that will lead us to a precise discrimination of the causes, which completely annihilated all confidence in the ministers, who have succeeded the directors of those infamous measures, that swept away the whole party; measures which involved thousands of innocent people in the same ruin, and have produced a clamour against the proceedings of the nation, that has obscured the glory of her labours. It is painful to follow, through all their windings, the crimes and follies produced by want of sagacity, and just principles of action. For instance, the *séance royale* was held on the 23d, when the king, not deigning to advise, commanded the deputies to repair to their different chambers; and only four days after he implored the nobility and clergy to wave every consideration, and accede to the wish of the people. Acting in this contradictory manner, it is clear, that the cabal thought only of rendering sure the decided blow, which was to level with the dust the power, that extorted such humiliating concessions.

But the people, easy of belief, and glad to be light-hearted again, no sooner heard that an union of the orders had taken place, by the desire of the king, than they hurried from all quarters, with good-humoured confidence, called for the king and queen, and testified, in their presence, the grateful joy this acquiescence had inspired. How different was this frankness of the people, from the close hypocritical conduct of the cabal!

The courtly, dignified politeness of the queen, with all those complacent graces which dance round flattered beauty, whose every charm is drawn forth by the consciousness of pleasing, promised all that a sanguine fancy had pourtrayed of future happiness and peace. From her fascinating smiles, indeed, was caught the careless hope, that, expanding the heart, makes the animal spirits vibrate, in every nerve, with pleasure:—yet, she smiled but to deceive; or, if she felt some touches of sympathy, it was only the unison of the moment.

It is certain, that education, and the atmosphere of manners in which a character is formed, change the natural laws of humanity; otherwise it would be unaccountable, how the human heart can be so dead to the tender emotions of benevolence, which most forcibly teach us, that real or lasting felicity flows only from a love of virtue, and the practice of sincerity.

The unfortunate queen of France, beside the advantages of birth and station, possessed a very fine person; and her lovely face, sparkling with vivacity, hid the want of intelligence. Her complexion was dazzlingly clear; and, when she was pleased, her manners were bewitching; for she happily mingled the most insinuating voluptuous softness and affability, with an air of grandeur, bordering on pride, that rendered the contrast more striking. Independence also, of whatever kind, always gives a degree of dignity to the mien; so that monarchs and nobles, with most ignoble souls, from believing themselves superiour to others, have actually acquired a look of superiority.

But her opening faculties were poisoned in the bud; for before she came to Paris, she had already been prepared, by a corrupt, supple abbé, for the part she was to play; and, young as she was, became so firmly attached to the aggrandizement of her house,

that, though plunged deep in pleasure, she never omitted sending immense sums to her brother, on every occasion. The person of the king, in itself very disgusting, was rendered more so by gluttony, and a total disregard of delicacy, and even decency in his apartments: and, when jealous of the queen, for whom he had a kind of devouring passion, he treated her with great brutality, till she acquired sufficient finesse to subjugate him. Is it then surprizing, that a very desirable woman, with a sanguine constitution, should shrink abhorrent from his embraces; or that an empty mind should be employed only to vary the pleasures, which emasculated her circean court? And, added to this, the histories of the Julias and Messalinas of antiquity, convincingly prove, that there is no end to the vagaries of the imagination, when power is unlimited, and reputation set at defiance.

Lost then in the most luxurious pleasures, or managing court intrigues, the queen became a profound dissembler; and her heart hardened by sensual enjoyments to such a degree, that when her family and favourites stood on the brink of ruin, her little portion of mind was employed only to preserve herself from danger. As a proof of the justness of this assertion, it is only necessary to observe, that, in the general wreck, not a scrap of her writing has been found to criminate her; neither has she suffered a word to escape her to exasperate the people, even when burning with rage, and contempt. The effect that adversity may have on her choked understanding time will show* ; but during her prosperity, the moments of languor, that glide into the interstices of enjoyment, were passed in the most childish manner; without the appearance of any vigour of mind, to palliate the wanderings of the imagination.—Still she was a woman of uncommon address; and though her conversation was insipid, her compliments were so artfully adapted to flatter the person she wished to please or dupe, and so eloquent is the beauty of a queen, in the eyes even of superiour men, that she seldom failed to carry her point when she endeavoured to gain an ascendancy over the mind of an individual. Over that of the king she acquired unbounded sway, when, managing the disgust she had for his person, she made him pay a kingly price for her favours. A court is the best school in the world for actors; it was very natural then for her to become a complete actress, and an adept in all the arts of coquetry that debauch the mind, whilst they render the person alluring.

Had the hapless Louis possessed any decision of character, to support his glimmering sense of right, he would from this period have chosen a line of conduct, that might have saved his life by regulating his future politics. For this returning affection of the people alone was sufficient to prove to him, that it was not easy to eradicate their love for royalty; because, whilst they were contending for their rights with the nobility, they were happy to receive them as acts of beneficence from the king. But the education of the heir apparent of a crown must necessarily destroy the common sagacity and feelings of a man; and the education of this monarch, like that of Louis XV, only tended to make him a sensual bigot.

Priests have, in general, contrived to become the preceptors of kings; the more surely to support the church, by leaning it against the throne. Besides; kings, who without having their understandings enlarged, are set above attending to the forms of morality, which sometimes produce it’s spirit, are always particularly fond of those religious

systems, which, like a sponge, wipe out the crimes that haunt the terrified imagination of unsound minds.

It has been the policy of the court of France, to throw an odium on the understanding of the king, when it was lavishing praises on the goodness of his heart. Now it is certain, that he possessed a considerable portion of sense, and discernment; though he wanted that firmness of mind, which constitutes character; or, in more precise words, the power of acting according to the dictates of a man's own reason. He was a tolerable scholar; had sufficient patience to learn the english language; and was an ingenious mechanic. It is also well known, that in the council, when he followed only the light of his own reason, he often fixed on the most sage measures, which he was afterwards persuaded to abandon. But death seems to be the sport of kings, and, like the roman tyrant, whose solitary amusement was transfixing flies, this man, whose milkiness of heart has been perpetually contrasted with the pretended watriness of his head, was extremely fond of seeing those grimaces, made by tortured animals, which rouse to pleasure sluggish, gross sensations. The queen, however, prevailed on him not to attempt to amuse her, or raise a forced laugh, in a polite circle, by throwing a cat down the chimney, or shooting an harmless ass. Taught also to dissemble, from his cradle, he daily practised the despicable shifts of duplicity; though led by his indolence to take, rather than to give the tone to his domineering parasites.

The french nobility, perhaps, the most corrupt and ignorant set of men in the world, except in those objects of taste, which consist in giving variety to amusement, had never lived under the controul of any law, but the authority of the king; and having only to dread the Bastille for a little time, should they commit any enormity, could not patiently brook the restraints, the better government of the whole society required. Haughtily then disregarding the suggestions of humanity, and even prudence, they determined to subvert every thing, sooner than resign their privileges; and this tenacity will not appear astonishing, if we call to mind, that they considered the people as beasts of burden, and trod them under foot with the mud. This is not a figure of rhetoric; but a melancholy truth! For it is notorious, that, in the narrow streets of Paris, where there are no footways to secure the walkers from danger, they were frequently killed, without slackening, by the least emotion of fellow-feeling, the gallop of the thoughtless being, whose manhood was buried in a factitious character.

I shall not now recapitulate the feudal tyrannies, which the progress of civilization has rendered nugatory; it is sufficient to observe, that, as neither the life nor property of the citizens was secured by equal laws, both were often wantonly sported with by those who could do it with impunity. Arbitrary decrees have too often assumed the sacred majesty of law; and when men live in continual fear, and know not what they have to apprehend, they always become cunning and pusillanimous. Thus the abject manners, produced by despotism of any species, seem to justify them, in the eyes of those who only judge of things from their present appearance. This leads, likewise, to an observation, that partly accounts for the want of industry and cleanliness in France; for people are very apt to sport away their time, when they cannot look forward, with some degree of certainty, to the consolidation of a plan of future ease.

Every precaution was taken to divide the nation, and prevent any ties of affection, such as ought always to unite man with man, in all the relationships of life, from bringing the two ranks together with any thing like equality to consolidate them. If, for instance, the son of a nobleman happened so far to forget his rank, as to marry a woman of low birth; what misery have not those unfortunate creatures endured!—confined in prisons, or hunted out of the common nest, as contagious intruders. And if we remember also, that, while treated with contempt, only a twentieth part of the profit of his labour fell to the share of the husbandman, we shall cease to inquire, why the nobles opposed innovations, that must necessarily have overturned the fabric of despotism.

The inveterate pride of the nobles, the rapacity of the clergy, and the prodigality of the court, were, in short, the secret springs of the plot, now almost ripe, aimed at the embryo of freedom through the heart of the national assembly. But Paris, that city which contains so many different characters—that vortex, which draws every vice into it's centre—that repository of all the materials of voluptuous degeneracy—that den of spies and assassins—contained likewise a number of enlightened men, and was able to raise a very formidable force, to defend it's opinions.

The cabinet saw it's rising spirit with suspicion; and, resorting to their old wiles, produced a scarcity of bread, hoping that, when the people should be disheartened, the approaching army under Broglio would bring the whole affair to a speedy issue. But circumstances seemed favourable to the people; for the electors of Paris, after they had chosen their deputies, the election having been protracted very late, continued to meet at the *Hôtel-de-Ville,* to prepare the instructions, which they had not time to digest before the assembling of the states-general.

At this juncture also, a spacious square, equally devoted to business and pleasure, called the *Palais Royale,* became the rendezvous of the citizens. There the most spirited gave lectures, whilst more modest men read the popular papers and pamphlets, on the benefits of liberty, and the crying oppressions of absolute governments. This was the centre of information; and the whole city flocking thither, to talk or to listen, returned home warmed with the love of freedom, and determined to oppose, at the risk of life, the power that should still labour to enslave them—and when life is put on the cast, do not men generally gain that for which they strive with those, who, wanting their enthusiasm, set more value on the stake?

The turbulence of the metropolis, produced in great measure by the continual arrival of foreign troops, furnished, nevertheless, a plausible pretext for blockading it; and thirty-five thousand men, at least, mostly consisting of hussars and mercenary troops, were drawn from the frontiers, and collected round Versailles. Camps were traced out for still more; and the posts, that commanded the roads leading to Paris, were filled with soldiers. The courtiers, then unable to repress their joy, vaunted, that the national assembly would soon be dissolved, and the rebellious deputies silenced by imprisonment, or death. And should even the french soldiers abandon them, among whom there were some symptoms of revolt, the court depended on the foreign troops, to strike terrour into the very heart of Paris and Versailles. The gathering army was already a very formidable force; but the spirit of enthusiasm, and a keen sense of

injuries, rendered more sharp by insults, had such an effect on the people, that, instead of being intimidated, they coolly began to prepare for defence.

All had heard, or were now informed, of the efforts made by the americans to maintain their liberty.—All had heard of the glorious firmness of a handful of raw bostonian militia, who, on Bunker's-hill, resisted the british disciplined troops, crimsoning the plains of Charles-town with the blood of the flower of their enemy's army. This lesson for tyrants had resounded through the kingdom; and it ought to have taught them, that men determined to be free are always superiour to mercenary battalions even of veterans.

The popular leaders had also taken the surest means to ingratiate themselves with the soldiery, by mixing with them, and continually insinuating, that citizens ought not to allow the base ministers of power, to treat them like passive instruments of mischief. Besides, it was natural to expect, that the military, the most idle body of men in the kingdom, should attend to the topics of the day, and profit by the discussions, that disseminated new political principles. And such an influence had the arguments in favour of liberty on their minds, that, so early as the 23d of june, during a slight riot, two companies of the grenadiers refused to fire on the people, whom they were sent to disperse. But these symptoms of refractoriness roused the resentment of the court, instead of putting it on it's guard: consequently several were sent to prison, and the troops were confined to their barracks; yet, regardless of these orders, they came in crowds to the *Palais Royale,* a day or two after, eager to unite their voices with the general shout, *vive la nation,* which spoke the present sentiments of the people. The regiments of french, also, that now arrived, to be stationed with the foreign troops round Paris, were conducted to this hot-bed of patriotism; and, meeting with the most cordial reception, they listened with interest to the lively representations of the enormities committed by their old government, and of the meanness of those men, who could live on the bread earned by butchering their fellow citizens.

Whilst these opinions were taking root, the people heard, that eleven of the french guards, confined in the abbey, because they would not obey the order to fire on the populace, were to be transferred to the *Bicetre,* the most ignominious of all the prisons. The contest now commenced; for the people hastened to deliver them, and, forcing their way, emancipated their friends; and even the hussars, who were called out to quell the disturbance, laid down their arms. Yet, attentive to justice, they sent back to confinement a soldier, who had been previously committed by the police, for some other misdemeanour.

Exasperated as they were, the people, not yet become lawless, guarded the men they had rescued; whilst they sent a deputation to the national assembly, to intercede with the king in their behalf. This spirited, yet prudent, behaviour produced the desired effect; and the assembly named a certain number of the deputies, who with scrupulous decorum were to demand this grace of the king: and he accordingly granted their pardon, laying a cautious stress on it's being the first request made by the assembly. Put it was still questionable, whether this extorted act of lenity were not done, like the other actions of the court, only to blind the preparations that were making, to humble effectually the soldiery, the metropolis, and the assembly.

During this period of general suspicion, the presence of such a considerable sorce, as now was encamped on every side of the capital, particularly alarmed the electors, who held their deliberations very constantly to watch over the public peace; and, in order to avert the threatening storm, they proposed raising the city militia. Yet, before they determined, they sent to apprise the national assembly of their intention; wishing the king to be informed, that, if an armed force were necessary to secure the public tranquillity, the citizens themselves were the most proper persons to be entrusted with the commission.

The unsettled state of Paris, now suffering from a scarcity of bread, furnished, however, a plausible pretext for the augmentation of the troops, which increased the calamity. ‘When it is with the greatest difficulty,’ says one of the electors, ‘that we can procure provision for the inhabitants, was it necessary to increase the famine and our fears, by calling together a number of soldiers, who were dispersed through all the provinces? These troops,’ he adds, ‘were destined to guard the frontiers, whilst the representatives of the nation are deliberating on the formation of a constitution. But this constitution, desired by the king, and demanded by all the provinces of France, has to cope with dangerous interiour enemies.’

The national assembly, likewise, could not but perceive, that more soldiers were stationed near them, than would have been sufficient to repel a foreign invasion; and Mirabeau, with his usual fervour, animated them to action, by a lively picture of their situation. ‘Thirty-five thousand men,’ he observed, ‘are now distributed between Paris and Versailles; and twenty thousand more are expected. Trains of artillery follow them; and places are already marked out for batteries. They have made sure of all the communications.—All our entrances are intercepted; our roads, our bridges, and our public walks, are changed into military posts. The notorious events, the secret orders, and precipitate counter-orders—in short, preparations for war, strike every eye, and fill with indignation every heart. Gentlemen, if the question were only the insulted dignity of the assembly, it would demand the attention of the king himself; for should he not take care, that we be treated with decency, since we are deputies of the nation from which his glory emanates, which alone constitutes the splendour of the throne?—Yes; of that nation, who will render the person of the king honourable in proportion as he respects himself? Since his wish is to command free men, it is time to banish the old odious forms, those insulting proceedings, which too easily persuade the courtiers, who surround the prince, that royal majesty consists in the abasing relation of master and slave; that a legitimate and beloved king ought on all occasions to show himself with the aspect of an irritated tyrant; or, of those usurpers condemned by their melancholy fate, to mistake the tender and flattering sentiments of confidence.—And who will dare to say, that circumstances have rendered necessary these menacing measures? On the contrary, I am going to demonstrate, that they are equally useless and dangerous, considered either with respect to good order, the quieting of the public, or the safety of the throne: and, far from appearing the fruit of a sincere attachment to the person of the monarch, they can only gratify private passions, and cover perfidious designs. Undoubtedly I do not know every pretext, every artifice of the enemies of reformation, since I cannot divine with what plausible reason they have coloured the pretended want of troops, at a moment, when not only their inutility, but their danger strikes every mind.

‘With what eye will the people, harrassed by so many calamities, see this swarm of idle soldiers come to dispute with them their morsel of bread? The contrast of the plenty enjoyed by one, with the indigence of the other; of the security of the soldiers, to whom the manna falls, without it’s being necessary for them to think of to-morrow, with the anguish of the people, who obtain nothing but by hard labour and painful sweat; is sufficient to make every heart sink with despondency. Added to this, gentlemen, the presence of the troops heats the imagination of the populace; and, by continually presenting new fears, excites an universal effervescence, till the citizens are at their very fire-sides a prey to every kind of terrour. The people, roused and agitated, form tumultuous assemblies; and, giving way to their impetuosity, precipitate themselves into danger—for fear neither calculates nor reasons!’ He concluded with moving an address to the king, representing, that the people were extremely alarmed by the assembling of such a number of troops, and the preparations made to form camps during this season of scarcity; and to remonstrate respecting the conduct of those, who sought to destroy the confidence that ought to subsist between the king and the representatives of the people—a confidence, which alone can enable them to fulfil their functions, and establish the reform expected from their zeal by a suffering nation.

This speech produced the desired effect; and the motion being carried, Mirabeau was requested to prepare an address for their consideration.

The purport of the address was an abridgement of the above speech; respectful; nay, even affectionate; but spirited and noble.

Yet this remonstrance, so well calculated to preserve the dignity of the monarch, and appease the agitation of the public, produced no other effect than a supercilious answer, that only tended to increase the want of confidence, to which disgust gave a new edge. For, instead of attending to the prayer of the nation, the king asserted, that the tumultuous and scandalous scenes, which had passed at Paris, and at Versailles, under his own eyes, and those of the national assembly, were sufficient to induce him, one of whose principal duties it was to watch over the public safety, to station troops round Paris.—Still, he declared, that, far from intending to interrupt their freedom of debate, he only wished to preserve them even from all apprehension of tumult and violence. If, however, the necessary presence of the troops continue to give umbrage, he was willing, at the request of the assembly, to transfer the states-general to Noyon or Soissons; and to repair himself to Compiégne, in order to maintain the requisite intercourse with the assembly. This answer signified nothing; or, rather, it formally announced, that the king would not send away the troops. Obvious as was the meaning, and contemptible as was the dissimulation; yet, as it came from the sovereign, the fountain of fortune and honours, some of the supple hands of the deputies applauded.—But, Mirabeau was not to be cajoled by such shallow fallacy. ‘Gentlemen,’ said he, impatiently, ‘the goodness of the king’s heart is so well known, that we might tranquilly conside in his virtue, did he always act from himself.—But, the assurances of the king are no guarantee for the conduct of his ministers, who have not ceased to mislead his good disposition.—And have we yet to learn, that the habitual confidence of the french in their king is less a virtue than a vice, if it extend to all parts of the administration?

‘Who amongst us is ignorant, in fact, that it is our blind, giddy inconsideration, which has led us from century to century, from fault to fault, to the crisis that now afflicts us, and which ought at last to open our eyes, if we have not resolved to be headstrong children and slaves, till the end of time?

‘The reply of the king is a pointed refusal. The ministry would have it regarded only as a simple form of assurance and goodness; and they have affected to think, that we have made our demand, without attaching much interest to it’s success, and only to appear to have made it. It is necessary to undeceive the ministry—Certainly, my opinion is, not to fail in the confidence and respect which we owe to the virtues of the king; but I likewise advise, that we be no more inconsistent, timid, and wavering in our measures.—Certainly, there is no need to deliberate on the removal proposed; for, in short, notwithstanding the king’s answer, we will not go to Noyon, nor to Soissons—We have not demanded this permission; nor will we, because it is scarcely probable, that we should ever desire to place ourselves between two or three bodies of troops; those which invest Paris, and those which might fall upon us from Flanders and Alsace. We have demanded the removal of the troops—that was the object of our address!—We have not asked permission to flee before them; but only that they should be sent from the capital. And it is not for ourselves, that we have made this demand; for they know very well, that it was suggested by a concern for the general interest, not by any sentiment of fear. At this moment, the presence of the troops disturbs the public order, and may produce the most melancholy events.—Our removal, far from preventing, would, on the contrary, only aggravate the evil. It is necessary, then, to restore peace, in spite of the friends of disorder; it is necessary, to be consistent with ourselves; and to be so, we have only to adhere to one line of conduct, which is to insist, without relaxing, that the troops be sent away, as the only sure way to obtain it.’

This speech, delivered on the 11th of july, produced no further decision in the assembly, though it kept the attention of the members fixt to a point.

But things were now drawing rapidly to a crisis; for this very day Necker, who had been retained in place, only to hoodwink the people, was dismissed, with an injunction not to mention his dismission; and to leave the kingdom in twenty-four hours. These orders he servilely obeyed; and, with all the promptitude of personal fear, said, without the least emotion, to the nobleman, who brought the king’s commands, ‘we shall meet this evening at the council;’ and continued to converse, in his usual strain of smoothness, with the company at dinner. Miserable weakness! This man, who professed himself the friend of the people, and who had so lately promised ‘to live or die with them,’ had not, when brought to the test, sufficient magnanimity to warn them where danger threatened—For he must have known, that this dismission was the signal of hostilities: yet, fleeing like a felon, he departed in disguise, keeping the secret with all the caution of cowardice.*

The next day, the appointment of the new ministry, men particularly obnoxious to the public, made it known to the people; who viewed with melancholy horrour the awsul horizon, where had long been gathering the storm, now ready to burst on their devoted heads. The agitation of the public mind, indeed, resembled a troubled sea; which,

having been put in motion by a raging tornado, gradually swells, until the whole element, wave rolling on wave, exhibits one unbounded commotion. All eyes were now opened, all saw the approaching blast; the hollow murmurs of which had inspired a confused terrour for some time past.

It had been proposed on the 10th, at the *Hôtel-de-Ville,* as a regulation of the *Garde-Bourgeoise,* that twelve hundred men should be raised at a time, to be relieved every week; and the capital having been divided, at the election, into sixty districts, only twenty would be called out of each. And it was further resolved, that the districts should rest embodied until the entire evacuation of the troops, excepting those who formed the common compliment of the guards. The following day it was decreed; an address was voted to the national assembly, to request their mediation with the king, to sanction immediately the city militia; and the sittings of the committee were adjourned till monday, the 13th. But some of the electors, having heard on sunday, that the populace were all repairing to the *Hôtel-de-Ville,* hastened there about six o'clock in the evening, and found the hall indeed crowded with people of all conditions. A thousand confused voices demanded arms, and orders to found the *tocsin.*

At eight o'clock, the patrol guard was relieved, at the *Hôtel-de-Ville,* and the multitude pressed on the soldiers to disarm them; redoubling the cry for arms at the moment; and even threatened to set fire to the hall. But, still observing some respect for subordination, they demanded, a little imperiously, it is true, an order, in virtue of which, the citizens might arm themselves to repulse the danger that menaced the capital—and amidst these clamours, several precipitate reports painted, in the most lively colours, this danger.

One of the crowd said, that, no sooner had the news of the dismission of Necker reached Paris, than the people hastened to a sculptor's, and, seizing the busts of that minister, and of the duke of Orleans, they were now actually carrying them through the streets:—Another informed them, that the multitude had rushed into the different theatres, at the hour of opening them, and required, that they should be instantly shut;* and that in consequence all the spectators had been sent away:—A third announced four cannons, placed at the entrance of the *Champs Elysées,* with their cannoneers ready to light their matches, which were to begin the combat; and that these four cannons were supported by a regiment of cavalry, which, advancing under the command of the prince de Lambese to the place of Louis 15th, was stationed by the bridge that leads to the Thuilleries. He added also, that a *cavalier* of this regiment, passing by a soldier of the french guards, had fired his pistol at him; and, that the prince de Lambese himself had galloped into the garden, sabre in hand, followed by a detachment, who put to flight the old men, women, and children, that were peaceably taking their customary walk; nay, that he had actually killed, with his own hand, an old man, who was escaping from the tumult. The reporter, it is true, forgot to notice, that the populace had begun to pelt the prince with the stones, that were lying ready, near the buildings which were not finished. Startled, perhaps, by this resistance, and despising the mob, that he expected, only by his presence, to have intimidated, in a delirium, most probably, of terrour and astonishment, he wounded an unarmed man,

who fled before him. Be that as it may, this wanton outrage excited the indignation necessary to fire every spirit.

The electors being still pressed for arms, and unable to furnish them, at eleven o'clock decreed, that the districts should be immediately convoked; and that they would repair to all the posts of armed citizens, to beg them, in the name of their country, to avoid all species of riot.—But this was not the moment to talk of peace, when all were making ready for battle.—The tumult now became general. To arms! To arms! re-echoed from all quarters—and the whole city was instantly in motion, seeking for weapons of defence. Whilst the women and children rent the air with shrieks and lamentations, the cannons were fired; and the *tocsins* of the different parish churches joined by degrees, to excite, and continue, the universal alarm.

Still all their thoughts were turned on defensive measures. Many of the citizens, by ransacking the warehouses of arms, and catching up spits and pokers, appeared with weapons in their hands to second their determinate countenances; and being joined by some of the french guards, more completely accoutred, forced those foreign mercenaries, who had first awakened their fury, to retreat, fleeing like the beasts of the desert, before the bold and generous lion. Though victorious in this midnight fray, because determined to conquer, still they had scarcely any fire arms; and were as inexpert in the use of those they found, as the inhabitants of capitals commonly are—But indignation made each of them, so restless was their courage, seize something to defend himself with: hammers, axes, shovels, pikes, all were sought for, and clenched in hands nerved by heroism; yes, by true heroism, for personal safety was disregarded in the common danger. Wives assisted to beat out pikes for their husbands, and children ran about to pile up stones in readiness for tomorrow. To increase the apprehensions of the night, one of the barriers was set on fire; and a band of desperate robbers, taking advantage of the confusion, began to pillage some houses. To arms! was the cry of danger, and the watch-word of the city—for who could close their eyes? Whilst the tocsin drowning the murmurs of rage, and distress, made the confusion solemn.

Different sounds excited different emotions at Versailles; for there the heart, beating high with exultation, gave way to the most intemperate joy.—Already the courtiers imagined, that the whole mischief was crushed, and that they had the assembly at their mercy.

Intoxicated by success, a little too soon reckoned on, the queen, the count d'Artois, and their favourites, visited the haunt of the bribed ruffians, who were lurking in ambush, ready to fall upon their prey; encouraging them by an engaging affability of behaviour, and more substantial marks of favour, to forget every consideration, but their commands. And so flattered were they by the honied words, and coquetish smiles of the queen, that they promised, as they drained the cup in her honour, not to sheath their swords, till France was compelled to obedience, and the national assembly dispersed. With savage ferocity they danced to the sound of music attuned to slaughter, whilst plans of death and devastation gave the zest to the orgies, that worked up their animal spirits to the highest pitch. After this account, any reflections on the baneful effects of power, or on the unrestrained indulgence of pleasure, that

could thus banish tenderness from the female bosom, and harden the human heart, would be an insult to the reader's sensibility.

How silent is now Versailles!—The solitary foot, that mounts the sumptuous stair-case, rests on each landing-place, whilst the eye traverses the void, almost expecting to see the strong images of fancy burst into life.—The train of the Louises, like the posterity of the Banquoes, pass in solemn sadness, pointing at the nothingness of grandeur, fading away on the cold canvass, which covers the nakedness of the spacious walls—whilst the gloominess of the atmosphere gives a deeper shade to the gigantic figures, that seem to be sinking into the embraces of death.

Warily entering the endless apartments, half shut up, the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses, that vainly gleam in every direction, slacken the nerves, without appalling the heart; though lascivious pictures, in which grace varnishes voluptuousness, no longer seductive, strike continually home to the bosom the melancholy moral, that anticipates the frozen lesson of experience. The very air is chill, seeming to clog the breath; and the wasting dampness of destruction appears to be stealing into the vast pile, on every side.

The oppressed heart seeks for relief in the garden; but even there the same images glide along the wide neglected walks—all is fearfully still; and, if a little rill creeping through the gathering moss down the cascade, over which it used to rush, bring to mind the description of the grand water works, it is only to excite a languid smile at the futile attempt to equal nature.

Lo! this was the palace of the great king!—the abode of magnificence! Who has broken the charm?—Why does it now inspire only pity?—Why;—because nature, smiling around, presents to the imagination materials to build farms, and hospitable mansions, where, without raising idle admiration, that gladness will reign, which opens the heart to benevolence, and that industry, which renders innocent pleasure sweet.

Weeping—scarcely conscious that I weep, O France! over the vestiges of thy former oppression; which, separating man from man with a sence of iron, sophisticated all, and made many completely wretched; I tremble, lest I should meet some unfortunate being, fleeing from the despotism of licentious freedom, hearing the snap of the *guillotine* at his heels; merely because he was once noble, or has assorded an asylum to those, whose only crime is their name—and, if my pen almost bound with eagerness to record the day, that levelled the Bastille with the dust, making the towers of despair tremble to their base; the recollection, that still the abbey is appropriated to hold the victims of revenge and suspicion, palsies the hand that would fain do justice to the assault, which tumbled into heaps of ruins walls that seemed to mock the resistless force of time.—Down fell the temple of despotism; but—despotism has not been buried in it's ruins!—Unhappy country!—when will thy children cease to tear thy bosom?—When will a change of opinion, producing a change of morals, render thee truly free?—When will truth give life to real magnanimity, and justice place equality on a stable seat?—When will thy sons trust, because they deserve to be

trusted; and private virtue become the guarantee of patriotism? Ah!—when will thy government become the most perfect, because thy citizens are the most virtuous!

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER III.

preparations of the parisians for the defence of the city. the guards, and city watch, join the citizens. the armed citizens appoint a commander in chief. conduct of the national assembly during the disturbances at paris. they publish a declaration of rights,—and offer their mediation with the citizens,—which is haughtily refused by the king. proceedings at paris on the fourteenth of july. taking of the bastille. the mayor shot. proceedings of the national assembly at versailles. appearance of the king in the assembly. his speech.

Early in the morning of the 13th, the electors hastened to the centre of the general alarm, the *hôtel-de-ville,* and, urged by the necessity of the moment, passed the decrees, under deliberation, for the immediate embodying the *garde-bourgeoise,* without waiting for the requested sanction of the national assembly. The greater number then withdrew, to convoke their districts; whilst the few that remained endeavoured to calm the tumult, that was every moment augmenting, by informing the people of this decree; representing at the same time, to the citizens, the cogent motives which should induce them to separate, and each repair to his own district to be enrolled. But the crowd again called for arms, pretending, that there was a great number concealed in an arsenal, which nobody could point out. To quiet these clamours for a moment, the people were referred to the *prévot des marchands*[*] . He accordingly came, and requested, that the multitude would confirm his nomination to the function, which his majesty had confided to him. A general acclamation was the signal of their consent; and the assembled electors immediately turned their attention to the serious business before them.

They then established a *permanent committee,* to keep up a constant intercourse with the different districts, to which the citizens were again exhorted instantly to return, with all the arms they had collected; that those arms might be properly distributed amongst the parisian militia. But, it was impossible to pursue these important deliberations, with any degree of order, for a fresh multitude was continually rushing forward, to report fresh intelligence; often false or exaggerated, and always alarming. The barriers, they were told, were on fire; a religious house had been pillaged; and a hostile force was on the road, in full march, to fall upon the citizens. An immense number of coaches, waggons, and other carriages, were actually brought to the door of the hotel; and the demands of the concourse, who had been stopped going out of Paris, mingling with the cries of the multitude, eager to be led towards the troops, whose approach had been announced, were only drowned by the more lively instances of the deputies of the sixty districts, demanding arms and ammunition, to render them active. To appease them, and gain time, the mayor promised, if they would be tranquil till five o'clock in the evening, then to distribute a number of fusils; which were to be furnished by the director of a manufactory.

These assurances produced a degree of calm. Taking advantage of it, the committee determined, that the parisian militia, for the present, should consist of 48,000 citizens; and that the officers should be named by each district. Many subordinate decrees also

passed, all tending to prevent the disasters naturally produced by confusion; and to provide for the subsistence of the city. The french guards, who had during the night assisted the citizens, now came to testify their attachment to the common cause; and to beg to be enrolled with them. The commander of the city watch, a military body, likewise presented himself; to assure the committee, that the troops under his direction were disposed to obey their orders, and assist in defending the city.

Among the carriages stopped was one of the prince de Lambesc. The people imagined, that they had caught the prince himself; and, when they were convinced of their mistake, it was impossible to save the coach, though the horses were put into a neighbouring stable; and the portmanteau, carefully detached, was lodged in the hall. This trivial circumstance is worthy of notice, because it shows the respect then paid to property; and that the public mind was entirely fixed on those grand objects, which absorb private passions and interests. Stung also to the quick by the insulting disregard of their claims, the people forcibly felt an indignant sense of injustice, which rendered the struggle heroic.

Preparations of a warlike cast were made during the whole course of this day; and every thing was conducted with a degree of prudence scarcely to have been expected from such impetuosity. Trenches were thrown up, several of the streets unpaved, and barricadoes formed in the suburbs—Defence was the sole object of every person's thoughts, and deriding personal danger, all were preparing to sell their lives at a dear rate, furbishing up old weapons, or forging new. The old men, women, and children, were employed in making pikes; whilst the able bodied men paraded the streets, in an orderly manner, with most resolute looks, yet avoiding every kind of violence: there was, in fact, an inconceivable solemnity in the quick step of a torrent of men, all directing their exertions to one point, which distinguished this rising of the citizens from what is commonly termed a riot.—Equality, indeed, was then first established by an universal sympathy; and men of all ranks joining in the throng, those of the first could not be discriminated by any peculiar decency of demeanour, such public spirited dignity pervaded the whole mass.

A quantity of powder had been carried to the *hôtel-de-ville,* which the populace, for the most unruly always collected round this central spot, would probably have blown up in seizing, if a courageous elector* had not, at the continual risk of his life, insisted on distributing it regularly to the people. This engaged their attention a short time; but in the evening the demand for arms became more pressing than ever, mingled with a hoarse cry of persidy and treason, levelled against the mayor; which, for a while, was silenced by the arrival of a number of military chests, thought to contain arms, and these were supposed to be those promised by the mayor. Every possible precaution was immediately taken by the electors, to have them speedily conveyed into the cellar, that they might be given to those who knew best how to make use of them; instead of being caught up by the unskilful. The french guards had merited the confidence of the citizens; and four members of the committee, after some deliberation, were appointed to hasten to them, to request that they would come and take charge of the distribution. In short, great preparations were made, previous to the opening of the chests; but—when the chests were at last opened, in the presence of a concourse of people, and found to contain only pieces of old candlesticks, and such

like rubbish, the impatience of the multitude, whose courage and patriotism had been played with all day, instantly changed into indignation and fury; and the suspicion of treason on the part of the mayor was extended to the whole committee, whom they threatened to blow up in their hall.

One of the electors, the marquis de la Salle, now observed, 'that the greatest inconvenience in their present cruel situation was the want of order, and subordination; and that a correspondence of the different parts of the grand machine, so necessary to promote expedition and success, could not subsist without a commander, known and acknowledged by the public: for all the citizens, become soldiers, are perpetually,' he adds, 'exposed to spend their zeal and intrepidity in superfluous efforts; sometimes even counteracting their own designs. It is necessary then to name a general of the first abilities and experience; I am far from thinking myself worthy of your choice, though I offer all that I can offer, my fortune and my life; and shall willingly serve in any post.' This motion produced a new discussion; and the duke d'Aumont was appointed commander in chief. But, he half declining it, though he tried to procrastinate his refusal, the post devolved to the marquis de la Salle, who had been unanimously named second; and he entered immediately on the discharge of this important trust. And this nomination contributed to support the exertions of the committee; for in spite of the chaotic shock, which seemed to have thrown into confusion all the parts of this great city, the centre of union formed at the *hôtel-de-ville,* by the assembling of the electors, was in a great measure the salvation of the public. This municipal power, created by circumstances, and tacitly consented to by the citizens, established a great degree of order and obedience, even in the midst of terrour and anarchy. The *garde-bourgeoise* had been assembled in all the districts; and the patrols relieved with the greatest exactness. The streets were illuminated, to prevent confusion or dismay during the night; private property was respected, and all the posts carefully super-intended; but, at the barriers, every carriage and every person was stopped, and obliged to go to the *hôtel-de-ville* to give an account of themselves. The public particularly mistrusted the design of those who were going to Versailles, or coming from it. Deputations had been regularly sent, to inform the national assembly of the disturbances, which their danger and the dread of a siege had occasioned in Paris, and of the measures pursued to restrain the head-long fury of the people.

The national assembly, indeed, now appeared with the dignified aspect becoming the fathers of their country; seeing their own danger, without timidly shrinking from the line of conduct, which had provoked the violence of the court: and the president, an old man, not being thought equal to the present toils of office, a vice-president was appointed.

To fill this post, the marquis la Fayette was chosen: a deputy for several reasons popular. In America, where he voluntarily risked his life and fortune, before the french nation espoused their cause, he had acquired certain just principles of government; and these he digested to the extent of his understanding, which was somewhat confined. He possessed great integrity of heart, though he was not without his portion of the national vanity. He had already distinguished himself at the meeting of the notables, by detecting, and exposing the peculation of Calonne, and opposing

the arbitrary proceedings of the count d'Artois. Governed by the same motives, he had proposed, likewise, during their sittings, some bold plans of reform, calculated to reduce the public revenue, and lessen the grievances of the nation, at the same stroke.—Amongst these was a motion for the abolition of the Bastille, and other state prisons, throughout the kingdom; and the suppression of *lettres de cachet.* And still having the same objects in view, he, the very day the king's sneering reply was received (the 11th), laid before the assembly a proposal for a declaration of rights, similar to that of some of the american states. The marquis de Condorcet had published a declaration of this kind, to instruct the deputies, previous to their meeting. La Fayette had transmitted a copy of his declaration of rights to the assembled electors, to be read to the people; and nothing could be better adapted to keep them firm, telling them to what point they ought to adhere, than the short address with which it commenced.—'Call to mind the sentiments, that nature has engraven on the heart of every citizen; and which take a new force, when recognized by all.—For a nation to love liberty, it is sufficient that she knows it; and, to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it.* .'

Mirabeau, even whilst supporting tenaciously the dignity of the national assembly, felt a pang of envy, that another should bring forward such an important business, as the sketch of a new constitution; avowedly that the world might know how they had been employed, and what they were contesting for, should they become the victims of their magnanimity.

It was impossible now for the whole assembly not to see in the change of the ministry the danger at hand, the approach of which some had affected to treat as a chimera. Determined, however, to continue their labours, in the very face of such hostile preparations; yet taking every prudent precaution to secure their safety, they sent to inform the king of the disturbances at Paris; and to point out the evils which menaced the state, if the troops that invested the metropolis were not sent to more distant quarters:—offering, at the same time, to throw themselves between the army and the citizens, to endeavour to ward off the calamities that were likely to ensue. But the king, obstinately bent to support the present measures, or controlled by the cabal, replied, 'that he was the only judge of the necessity of withdrawing the troops;' and, treating the offered interposition of the deputies with the most ineffable contempt, told them, 'that they could be of no use at Paris, and were necessary at Versailles, to pursue those important labours, which he should continue to recommend.'

This answer was no sooner communicated, than La Fayette moved, that the present ministry should be declared responsible for the consequence of their obstinacy: and the assembly further decreed, that Necker and the rest of the ministry, who had just been sent away, carried with them their esteem and regret:—that, alarmed by the apprehensions of danger produced by the reply of the king, they would not cease to insist on the removal of the troops, and the establishment of a *garde-bourgeoise.*—They repeated their declaration, that no intermediate power can subsist between the king and the national assembly:—and that the public debt, having been placed under the safe-guard of french honour, the nation not refusing to pay the interest of it, no power had a right to utter the infamous word—bankruptcy.—In short, the assembly declared, that they persisted in their former decrees:—and that the

present resolves should be presented to the king, by the president, and printed for the information of the public.

Still the court, despising the courageous remonstrances of the assembly, and untouched by the apprehensions of the people, which seemed to be driving them to the desperation that always conquers, stimulated the king to persist in the prosecution of the measures, which they had prevailed on him to adopt. The assembly, thus rendered vigilant by the various tokens, that the crisis was arrived, which was to determine their personal and political fate, in which that of their country was involved, thought it prudent to make their sitting permanent. Animated and united by the common danger, they reminded each other, 'that, should they perish, their country still surviving would recover it's vigour; and that their plans for the good of the public again warming the hearts of frenchmen, a brave and generous people would erect on their tomb, as an immortal trophy, a constitution solid as reason, and durable as time:—whilst their martyrdom would serve as an example, to prove, that the progress of knowledge and civilization is not to be stopped by the massacre of a few individuals.'

Whatever might have been the object of the court, respecting the national assembly, which was probably the slaughter or imprisonment necessary to disperse them, and disconcert their theories of reform, it is certain, that their situation wore the most threatening aspect; and their escape was owing to the courage and resolution of the people; for the breast of the cabinet was too callous, to feel either respect or repugnance, when emoluments and prerogatives were in question.

It was a circumstance favourable to the people, and the cause of humanity, that the want of common foresight in the court prevented their guarding against resistance. For so negligent were they, that the citizens, who were early in the morning of the 14th every where scouring about in search of arms, requested of the committee an order to demand those they heard were stored up at the *hôtel des invalides;* and one of the electors was accordingly sent with them, to desire the governor to give up to the nation all the arms and ammunition committed to his care. He replied, that a body of citizens having already been with him, he had sent to Versailles for orders, and entreated them to wait till the return of the courier, whom he expected in the course of an hour or two. This answer at first satisfied the people, who were preparing to wait contentedly, till one of them observing, that this was not a day to lose time, they insisted on entering immediately; and instantly made themselves masters of all the arms they found, to the amount of 30,000 muskets, and six pieces of cannon. A considerable quantity of different sorts of arms were also carried away from the *garde meuble,* by a less orderly party; and fell into the hands of vagabonds, who always mix in a tumult, merely because it is a tumult. A hundred and fifty persons of this description had been disarmed the preceding night at the *hôtel-de-ville,* where they had dropped asleep on the stairs and benches, stupified by the brandy they had stolen: but, when they awoke, and requested work, not having any money or bread, they were sent to assist in the making of pikes, and the fabricating of other weapons, which required little skill. None of the citizens appeared, in fact, without some weapon, however uncouth, to brandish defiance, whilst sixty thousand men, enrolled and distributed in different companies, were armed in a more orderly, though not in a

more warlike manner. The army of liberty now, indeed, assumed a very formidable appearance; yet the cabinet, never doubting of success, neglected in the thoughtlessness of security, the only way left to oblige the roused people to accept of any terms.

Paris, that immense city, second, perhaps, to none in the world, had felt a scarcity of bread for some time, and now had not sufficient flour to support the inhabitants four days to come* .

If, therefore, the mareschal Broglio had cut off the supplies, the citizens would have been reduced to the alternative of starving, or marching in confusion to fight his army, before they could have been disciplined for a regular action. But directed only by the depraved sentiments of tyranny, they deemed assassination the most speedy method of bringing the contest to an end favourable to their designs. Unaccustomed to govern freemen, they dreamt not of the energy of a nation shaking off it's fetters; or, if their classical reveries had taught them a respect for man, whilst reading the account of that brave handful of spartans, who drove back, at the straits of Thermopylæ, millions of marshalled slaves; they had no conception, that the cause of liberty was still the same, and that men obeying her impulse will always be able to resist the attacks of all the enervated mercenaries of the globe.

The imaginations of the parisians, full of plots, created hourly many of the objects of terrour from which they started; though the troops being in motion around Paris naturally produced many false alarms, that their suspicious temper might have exaggerated sufficiently, without the help of invention. Various accounts of massacres and assassinations were consequently brought to the *hôtel-de-ville,* which inflamed the people, though afterwards they proved to be the idle rumours of fear. Thus much, however, appeared certain; a squadron of hussars had actually been seen hovering about the entrance of the *fauxbourg Saint-Antoine,* who disappeared when two companies of the french guards approached. The people of the same fauxbourg observed also, that the cannons of the Bastille were turned towards their street. On receiving this information, a message was sent from the committee to the governor of the Bastille, to expostulate with him; and one to each of the districts, desiring them to sound an alarm throughout, to break up the pavement of the streets, dig ditches, and oppose every obstacle, in their power, to the entrance of the troops. But, though the accounts of the hostile demeanour of some of the detachments in the skirts of Paris excited terrour, there was still reason to doubt the real disposition of the soldiery; for a considerable number, belonging to different regiments, had presented themselves at the barriers with arms and baggage, declaring their decided intention to enter into the service of the nation. They were received by the districts, and conducted to the *hôtel-de-ville:* and the committee distributed them amongst the national troops, with the precaution necessary to guard against the surprise of treason.

The deputation, sent to the Bastille, now returned, to give an account of their mission. They informed the committee, that the people, rendered furious by the menacing position of the cannon, had already surrounded the walls; but that they had entered without much difficulty, and were conducted to the governor, whom they had requested to change the disposition of his cannons; and that the reply he gave was not

as explicit as they could have wished. They then demanded to pass into the second court, and did not without great difficulty obtain permission. The little drawbridge, they continued, was let down; but the great one, which led to this court yard was raised, and they entered by an iron gate, opened at the call of the governor. In this court they had seen three cannons ready for action, with two cannoneers, thirty-six swiss, and a dozen of invalids, all under arms; and the staff officers were also assembled.—They immediately summoned them, in the name of the honour of the nation, and for the sake of their country, to change the direction of the cannons; and, at the instance even of the governor himself, all the officers and soldiers swore, that the cannons should not be fired, or would they make any use of their arms, unless they were attacked. In short, another deputation from one of the districts had likewise been received with great politeness by the governor; and while they were taking some refreshment, he had actually ordered the cannons to be drawn back; and a moment after they were informed, that the order was obeyed.

To calm the people, these very men descended the stair-case of the *hôtel-de-ville,* to proclaim the assurances they had received of the amicable intentions of the governor; but, whilst the trumpet was sounding to demand silence, the report of a cannon from the quarter of the Bastille was heard; and at the same moment, an immense crowd precipitated themselves into the square, fronting the hotel, with the cry of treason. And to support the charge, they brought with them a citizen, and a soldier of the french guards, both wounded. The rumour was, that fifteen or twenty more, wounded at the same time, were left to be taken care of, in different houses on the way; for that the governor, Delaunay, had let down the first draw-bridge to engage the people to approach, who were demanding arms; and that they, entering with confidence on this invitation, had immediately received a discharge of all the musketry of the fortress. This report, confirmed by the presence of the two wounded men, demonstrated to the committee the perfidy of the troops who guarded the Bastille, and the necessity of sending succour to those, who, without order or sufficient force, had commenced the attack. Mean time the fury of the people was directed against the mayor, who endeavoured by various subterfuges to appease the rage which had been excited by his vain promises of procuring arms. He had, it is true, several times dispersed the multitude by sending them to different places with orders for arms, where he knew they were not to be found; and now, to silence the suspicions that threatned to break out in some dreadful acts of violence, involving the whole committee in the same destruction, he offered to make one of the third deputation; the second appearing to be detained, to remonstrate with Delaunay, and try to prevent an effusion of blood. A drum and colours were ordered to attend them, because it was supposed, that the want of some signal had prevented the others from executing their commission.

Shortly after their departure, however, the second deputation returned, and informed the committee, that, in their way to the Bastille, they had met a wounded citizen, carried by his companions, who informed them, that he had received a shot from a fusil, fired from the Bastille into the street St. Antoine; and that immediately after they had been stopped by a crowd, who were guarding three invalids, taken firing on their fellow citizens. Judging by these events, added they, that the danger was increasing, we hastened our steps, animated by the hope of putting a stop to such an unequal combat. Arrived within a hundred paces of the fortress, we perceived the

soldiers on the towers firing upon the street St. Antoine, and we heard the report of the guns of the citizens in the court, discharged on the garrison. Drawing nearer, we made several signals to the governor, which were either unobserved, or disregarded. We then approached the gate, and saw the people, almost all without any thing to defend themselves, rushing forward exposed to the brisk fire of artillery, that hailed directly down upon them, making great havoc. We prevailed on those who had arms, to stop firing for a moment, whilst we reiterated our signal of peace; but the garrison, regardless of it, continued their discharges, and we had the grief to see fall, by our sides, several of the people, whose hands we had stopped. The courage of the rest, again inflamed by indignation, pushed them forward.—Our remonstrances, our prayers, had no longer any effect; and they declared, that it was not a deputation they now wished for.—It was the siege of the Bastille—the destruction of that horrible prison—the death of the governor, that they demanded, with loud cries. Repulsed by these brave citizens, we partook their momentary indignation, so fully justified by the abominable act of perfidy, with which they charged the governor.—They then repeated to us the information which has already reached you—that in the morning a crowd having approached the Bastille to demand arms, the governor had allowed a certain number to enter, and then had fired upon them. Thus the treason of the governor had been the first signal of a war, that he himself had begun with his fellow citizens, and seemed willing to continue obstinately, since he refused to attend to the deputation. Through all parts it was now resounded.—'Let us take the Bastille!'—And five pieces of cannon, conducted by this cry, were hastening to the action.

Some time after, the third deputation also came back, and recounted, that, at the sight of their white flag, one had been hoisted on the top of the Bastille, and the soldiers had grounded their arms;—that, under the auspices of these ensigns of peace, the deputies had engaged the people, in the name of the permanent committee, to retire to their districts, and take the measures the most proper to re-establish tranquillity—and, that this retreat was actually taking place; the people all naturally passing through the court where the deputation remained.—When, notwithstanding the white emblem of a pacific disposition, displayed on the tower, the deputies saw a piece of cannon planted directly at the court, and they received a sudden discharge of musketry, which killed three persons at their feet—that this atrocity, at the moment they were calming the people, had thrown them into a transport of rage; and many of them had even held their bayonets at the breasts of the deputies; saying, 'you are also traitors, and have brought us here that we might be more easily killed'—and it would have been difficult to calm them, if one of the deputies had not bid them observe, that they shared the same danger. The effervescence then abating, they hastened back and met 300 of the french guards, followed by the cannons taken at the invalids, all marching with a quick step, crying that they were going to take the Bastille. One of the deputies, who had been separated from the rest, further recited;—that having been obliged to scramble over the dead and dying to escape, the people, who recognized him as an elector, desired him to save himself—for that the treason was manifest. 'It is rather you, my friends, he replied, who ought to retire; you who hinder our soldiers and cannons from entering this encumbered court, where you are all going to perish, for no purpose.' But, that they interrupted him in a transport, exclaiming—'No!—No! our dead bodies will serve to fill up the trench.' He therefore retired with the balls hissing

about his ears. These recitals, and the rumour of the second act of treachery, spreading through the city, violently agitated minds already alive to suspicion.

Fresh crowds continually rushed into the *hôtel-de-ville,* and again they threatened to set fire to it, repeating how many times the mayor had deceived them. And, when he attempted to calm them by making plausible excuses, they stopped his mouth by saying, with one voice,—'he seeks to gain time by making us lose our's.' Two intercepted billets also having been read aloud, addressed to the principal officers of the Bastille, desiring them to stand out, and promising succour; increased the public fury, principally directed against the governor of the Bastille, the mayor, and even the permanent committee.—Outcry followed outcry, and naked arms were held up denouncing vengeance—when an old man exclaimed, my friends, what do we here with these traitors!—Let us march to the Bastille! at this cry, as at a signal of victory, all the people hastily left the hall, and the committee unexpectedly found themselves alone.

In this moment of solitude and terrour, a man entered with affright visible on every feature, saying, that the square trembled with the rage of the people; and that they had devoted all of them to death.—'Depart!' he exclaimed, running out, 'save yourselves while you can—or you are all lost!' But they remained still; and were not long permitted in silence to anticipate the approach of danger; for one party of people following another, brought in a number of their wounded companions:—and those who brought them, described with passion the carnage of the citizens sacrificed under the ramparts of the Bastille. This carnage, the military officers attributed to the disorder of the attack, and to the interpidity of the assailants still greater than the disorder.

The accounts of the slaughter, nevertheless, were certainly very much exaggerated; for the fortress appears to have been taken by the force of mind of the multitude, pressing forward regardless of danger. The ardour of the besiegers, rather than their numbers, threw the garrison into confusion; for the Bastille was justly reckoned the strongest and most terrific prison in Europe, or perhaps in the world. It was always guarded by a considerable number of troops, and the governor had been previously prepared for it's defence; but the unexpected impetuosity of the parisians was such as nothing could withstand. It is certain, that Delaunay, at first, despised the attempt of the people; and was more anxious to save from injury or pillage, a small elegant house he had built in the outer court, than to avoid slaughter. Afterwards, however, in the madness of despair, he is said to have rolled down large masses of stone from the platform on the heads of the people, to have endeavoured to blow up the fortress, and even to kill himself. The french guards, it is true, who mixed with the multitude, were of effential service in storming the Bastille, by advising them to bring the cannon, and take some other measures, that only military experience could have dictated; but the enthusiasm of the moment rendered a knowledge of the art of war needless; and resolution, more powerful than all the engines and batteries in the world, made the draw-bridges fall, and the walls give way.

Whilst then the people were carrying every thing before them, the committee only thought of preventing the further effusion of blood. Another deputation was therefore

nominated, more numerous than had hitherto been sent; and they were just setting out on this errand of peace, when some voices announced, that the Bastille was taken. Little attention, however, was paid them; and the news was so improbable, that the impression made by the rumour was not sufficiently strong to stop the outrages of the mob, who still were menacing the mayor and the committee.—When a fresh uproar, heard at first at such a distance that it could not be distinguished, whether it were a cry of victory or of alarm, advancing with the crash and rapidity of a tempest, came to confirm the unlooked for intelligence.—For the Bastille was taken!

At the instant even the great hall was inundated by a crowd of all ranks, carrying arms of every kind.—The tumult was inexpressible—and to increase it, some one called out, that the hotel was giving way, under the mingled shout of victory and treason! vengeance and liberty!—About thirty invalids and swiss soldiers were then dragged into the hall, whose death the multitude imperiously demanded.—Hang them! Hang them! was the universal roar.

An officer of the queen's regiment of guards (M. Elie) was brought in on the shoulders of the conquerors of the Bastille, and proclaimed by them, as the first of the citizens, who had just made themselves masters of it. The efforts he used to repress the testimonies of honour, which were lavished on him, were of no avail; and he was placed, in spite of his modesty, on a table opposite the committee, and surrounded by the prisoners, who seemed to be standing in fearful expectation of their doom. In this situation he was crowned, and trophies of arms awkwardly placed around, to which sentiment and circumstances gave dignity. All the plate taken at the Bastille was brought to him, and his comrades pressed him, in the most earnest manner, to accept it, as the richest spoil of the vanquished enemy. But he refused with sirmness, explaining the motives of his refusal so eloquently, he persuaded all who heard him, that the spoil did not belong to them; and that patriotism, jealous only of glory and honour, would blush at receiving a pecuniary recompense.—And, making a noble use of the ascendency which he had over the people, he began to recommend moderation and clemency.—But he was soon interrupted by the account of the death of Delaunay; seized in the court of the Bastille, and dragged by the furious populace almost to the *hôtel-de-ville,* before he was massacred.—And soon after the death of three other officers was reported.

The prisoners listened to these tales with the countenances of victims ready to be sacrificed, whilst the exasperated crowd demanded their instant execution. One of the electors spoke in their favour, but was scarcely permitted to go on. The people, indeed, were principally enraged against three of the invalids, whom they accused of being the cannoneers, that had sired so briskly on the citizens. One of them was wounded, and consequently inspired more compassion. The marquis de la Salle placed himself before this poor wretch, and forcing, in some degree, the people to hear him, he insisted on the authority which he ought to have as commander in chief; adding, that he only wished to secure the culprits, that they might be judged with all the rigour of martial law. The people seemed to approve of his reasoning; and taking advantage of this favourable turn, he made the wounded invalid pass into another apartment.—But, whilst he was preserving the life of this unfortunate man, the mob hurried the other two out of the hall, and immediately hung them on the adjacent

lamp-post* . The effervescence, nevertheless, in spite of this overflowing of fury, still continued, and was not even damped by these cruel acts of retaliation. Two sentiments agitated the public mind—the joy of having conquered, and the desire of vengeance. Confused denunciations of treason resounded on all sides, and each individual was eager to show his sagacity in discovering a plot, or substituted suspicion instead of conviction with equal obstinacy. The mayor, however, had given sufficient proofs of his disposition to support the court, to justify the rage which was breaking out against him; and a general cry having been raised around him, that it was necessary for him to go to the *palais royal,* to be tried by his fellow citizens, he agreed to accompany the people.

Mean time the clamour against the rest of the invalids redoubled. But the french guards, who entered in groups, requested as a recompense for the service which they had rendered to their country the pardon of their old comrades; and M. Elie joined in the request; adding, that this favour would be more grateful to his heart, than all the gifts and honours which they wished to lavish on him. Touched by his eloquence, some cried out—Pardon! and the same emotion spreading throughout the circle—Pardon! Pardon! succeeded the ferocious demand of vengeance, which had hitherto stifled sympathy. And to assure their safety, M. Elie proposed making the prisoners take an oath of fidelity to the nation and the city of Paris: and this proposition was received with testimonies of general satisfaction. The oath being administered, the french guards surrounded the prisoners and carried them away, in the midst of them, without meeting with any resistance.

The committee now endeavoured to reestablish something like order, for in the tumult the table had been broken down, and destruction menaced on every side—when a man entered to inform them, that an unknown, but, indeed, a merciful hand had shot the mayor, and thus by the only possible mean snatched him from the popular fury. The whole tenour of his conduct, in fact, justified the charge brought against him, and rendered at least this effect of public indignation excusable.—So excusable, that had not the passions of the people, exasperated by designing men, afterwards been directed to the commission of the most barbarous atrocities, the vengeance of this day could hardly be cited as acts of injustice or inhumanity.

The Bastille was taken about four o'clock in the afternoon; and after the struggle to save the prisoners, some necessary regulations were proposed, to secure the public safety. The conduct of the men in office had so irritated the people, that the cry against aristocrats was now raised; and a number of persons of distinction were brought to the *hôtel-de-ville* this evening, by the restless populace, who, roving about the streets, seemed to create some of the adventures, which were necessary to employ their awakened spirit. Breathless with victory, they, for the moment, gave a loose to joy; but the sounds of exultation dying away with the day, night brought back all their former apprehensions; and they listened with fresh affright to the report, that a detachment of troops was preparing to enter one of the barriers. Not, therefore, allowing themselves to sleep on their conquering arms, this was, likewise, a watchful night; for the taking of the Bastille, though it was a proof of the courage and resolution of the parisians, by no means secured them against the insidious schemes of the court. They had shown their determination to resist oppression very forcibly; but

the troops that excited their resistance were still apparently waiting for an opportunity to destroy them. Every citizen then hurried to his post, for their very success made them the more alive to fear. The *tocsin* was again rung, and the cannon that had forced the Bastille to surrender dragged hastily to the place of alarm. The pavement of the adjacent streets was torn up, with astonishing quickness, and carried to the tops of the houses; where the women, who were equally animated, stood prepared to hurl them down on the soldiers.—All Paris, in short, was awake; and this vigilance either frustrated the designs of the cabal, or intimidated the hostile force, which never appeared to have entered with earnestness into it's measures. For it is probable, that some decisive stroke had been concerted; but that the officers, who expected by their presence only to have terrified into obedience the citizens, whose courage, on the contrary, they roused, were rendered irresolute by the disaffection of the soldiers. Thus was the nation saved by the almost incredible exertion of an indignant people; who felt, for the first time, that they were sovereign, and that their power was commensurate to their will. This was certainly a splendid example, to prove, that nothing can resist a people determined to live free; and then it appeared clear, that the freedom of France did not depend on a few men, whatever might be their virtues or abilities, but alone on the will of the nation.

During this day, while the parisians were so active for it's safety, the national assembly was employed in forming a committee, to be charged with digesting the plan of a constitution, for the deliberation of the whole body: to secure the rights of the people on the eternal principles of reason and justice; and thereby to guarantee the national dignity and respectability. Towards the evening, the uncertainty of what was passing at Paris, the mysterious conduct of the cabinet, the presence of the troops at Versailles, the substantiated facts, and the suspected proscriptions, gave to this sitting the involuntary emotions, that must naturally be produced by the approach of a catastrophe, which was to decide the salvation or destruction of a state. Mirabeau, firm to his point, showed the necessity of insisting on the sending away the troops without delay; and soon after the viscount de Noailles, arriving from Paris, informed them, that the arms had been taken from the *hótel-des-invalides;* and that the Bastille was actually besieged. The first impulse was for them to go altogether, and endeavour to open the king's eyes; but, after some reflection, a numerous deputation was nominated;—to insist on the removal of the troops; and to speak to his majesty with that energetic frankness, so much more necessary as he was deceived by every person by whom he was surrounded. Whilst they were absent, two persons, sent by the electors of Paris, informed the assembly of the taking of the Bastille, and the other events of the day; which were repeated to them, when they returned with the king's vague answer.

A second deputation was then immediately sent, to inform him of these circumstances:—To which he replied—'You more and more distress my heart, by the recitals you bring me of the miseries of Paris. But I cannot believe, that the orders which I have given to the troops, is the cause of them: I have, therefore, nothing to add to the answer that you have already received from me.'

This reply tended to increase the general alarm; and they determined again to prolong the sitting all night; either to be ready to receive the enemy in their sacred function, or

to make a last effort near the throne to succour the metropolis. Nothing could surpass the anxious suspense of this situation; for the most resolute of the deputies were uneasy respecting their fate, because their personal safety was connected with the salvation of France. Their nocturnal conversation naturally turned on the late events that had taken place at Paris; the commotions in the provinces; and the horrours of famine, ready to consume those whom a civil war spared. The old men sought for an hour of repose upon the tables and carpets; the sick rested on the benches.—All saw the sword suspended over them, and over their country—and all feared a morrow still more dreadful.

Impressed by their situation, and the danger of the state, one of the deputies (the duke de Liancourt) left his post, and sought a private audience with the king, with whom he warmly expostulated, pointing out the critical situation of the kingdom; and even of the royal family, should his majesty persist to support the present measures. Monsieur, the king's eldest brother, and not only the most honest, but the most sensible of the blood royal, immediately coincided with the duke, silencing the rest of the cabal. They had at first treated with contempt the intelligence received of the Bastille's being taken; and now were so stunned by the confirmation, that, at a loss how to direct the king, they left him to follow the counsel of whoever dared to advise him.—And he, either convinced, or persuaded, determined to extricate himself out of the present difficulties, by yielding to necessity.

On the morning of the 15th, the national assembly, not informed of this circumstance, resolved to send another remonstrance to the king;—and Mirabeau, giving a sketch of the address, drew a rapid and lively picture of the exigencies of the moment. 'Tell him,' said he, 'that the hordes of foreigners, by whom we are besieged, have yesterday been visited by the princes and princesses, their favourites, and their minions, who, lavishing on them caresses and presents, exhorted them to perseverance—tell him, that the whole night these foreign satellites, gorged with gold and wine, have, in their impious camp, predicted the subjugation of France, and, that they invoked, with brutal vehemence, the destruction of the national assembly—tell him, that, even in his own palace, the courtiers have mingled in the dance to the sound of this barbarous music—and, tell him, that such was the scene, which announced St. Bartholomew.

'Tell him, that the Henry, whose memory the world blesses, the ancestor, whom he ought to wish to take for a model, allowed provision to pass into Paris in a state of revolt, when he was in person besieging it; whilst his ferocious counsellors are turning back the flour, that the course of commerce was bringing to his faithful and famished city.'

The deputation left the hall; but was stopped by the duke de Liancourt; who informed them, that the king was then coming to restore them to tranquillity and peace. Every heart was relieved by this intelligence; and a cynic, probably, would have found less dignity in the joy, than the grief of the assembly. A deputy, however, moderated these first emotions, by observing, that those transports formed a shocking contrast with the distress which the people had already endured.—He added, 'that a respectful silence

was the proper reception of a monarch during a moment of public sorrow: for the silence of the people is the only lesson of kings.'

Shortly after, the king appearedin the assembly, standing uncovered; and without any attention to ceremony. He addressed the representatives of the people with artful affection: for as it is impossible to avoid comparing his present affectionate style, with the cold contempt with which he answered their repeated remonstrances the preceding evening, it is not judging harshly to despise the affectation, and to suggest, that it was dictated rather by selfish prudence than by a sense of justice, or a feeling of humanity. He lamented the disorder that reigned in the capital, and requested them to think of some method to bring back order and tranquillity. He alluded to the report, that the personal safety of the deputies had been menaced; and, with contemptible duplicity asked, if his well-known character did not give the lie to such a rumour.—Reckoning then, he concluded, on the love and fidelity of his subjects, he had given orders to the troops to repair to more distant quarters—and he authorized, nay, invited them, to make known his intentions to the metropolis.

This speech was interrupted and followed by the most lively expression of applause; though the sagacity of a number of the deputies could not possibly have been clouded by their sympathy: and the king returning to the palace on foot, great part of the assembly escorted him, joined by a concourse of people, who rent the air with their benedictions. The declaration of Louis, that, trusting to the representatives of the people, he had ordered the troops to withdraw from Versailles, being spread abroad, every person, feeling relieved from the oppression of fear, and unshackled from the fetters of despotism, threw off care; and the national assembly immediately appointed eighty-four of it's most respectable members, to convey to Paris the glad intelligence; that the harrassed parisians might participate in the joy they had procured the assembly, by the most noble exertions.

Arrived at Paris, they were received with enthusiasm, as the saviours of their country; and saw there more than a hundred thousand men in arms, formed into companies; showing the superiority of a nation rising in it's own defence, compared with the mercenary machines of tyranny. The transports of the people, and the sympathy of the deputies, must have formed a highly interesting scene: success elevating the heart for the moment, and hope gilding the future prospect.—But the imagination would languidly pourtray this dazzling sunshine, depressed by the recollection of the sinister events, that have since clouded the bright beams. Precluded then by melancholy reflections from rejoicing with the happy throng, it is necessary to turn our attention to the circumstances, from which mankind may draw instruction:—and the first that present themselves to our notice are those which disconcerted the flagitious plan of the ministry;—the regulations that preserved order in the metropolis;—the astonishing reduction of the Bastille;—the union of the french guards with the citizens;—the prompt establishment of a city militia;—and, in short, the behaviour of the people, who showed neither a thirst for pillage, nor a fondness for tumult.

The court by their criminal enterprises had entirely disorded the political machines, that sustained the old worn out government* ; which, worm-eaten in all it's pillars, and rotten in all it's joints, fell at the first shock—never to rise again. The destruction

of the Bastille—that fortress of tyranny! which for two centuries had been the shame and terrour of the metropolis* , was the sentence of death of the old constitution.

The junction of the three orders in fact securing the power of the national assembly, and making the court appear a cypher, could not fail to prove sorely mortifying to it's old minions; and the success of the people on the 14th of july proclaiming their supremacy, the courtiers, resorting to their old arts, suggested to the king a line of conduct the most plausible and flattering to the inconsiderate partizans of a revolution; whilst it betrayed to the more discerning a dissimulation as palpable as the motives of the advisers were flagrantly interested. For their views being narrowed by the depravity of their character, they imagined, that his apparent acquiescence, exciting the admiration and affection of the nation, would be the surest mode of procuring him that consequence in the government, which ultimately might tend to overthrow what they termed an upstart legislature; and, by the appropriation of chances, reinstate the tyranny of unlimited monarchy.

This serious farce commenced previous to that memorable epocha; and in marking the prominent features of the events that led to the disasters, which have fullied the glory of the revolution, it is impossible to keep too near in view the arts of the acting parties; and the credulity and enthusiasm of the people, who, invariably directing their attention to the same point, have always been governed in their sentiments of men by the most popular anarchists. For this is the only way to form a just opinion of the various changes of men, who, supplanting each other, with such astonishing rapidity, have produced the most fatal calamities.

The cabinet, indeed, the better to disguise their secret machinations, made the king declare, the 23d of june, that 'he annulled and dissolved all powers and restrictions, which by cramping the liberty of the deputies would hinder them either from adopting the form of deliberation by orders separately, or in common, by the distinct voice of the three orders,' absolutely gave his sanction for constituting the national assembly one and indivisible.—And in the same declaration, article the 6th, he says, 'that he will not suffer the *cahiers,* or mandates, to be regarded as dictatorial; for they were only to be considered as simple instructions, intrusted to the conscience and free opinion of the deputies, who have been chosen.' This was giving them unbounded latitude for their actions.—This was not only a tacit consent to their proceedings; but it was granting them all his authority to frame a constitution.—It was legalizing their actions, even according to the arbitrary rules of the old despotism; and abrogating in a formal manner that imaginary authority, the sanction of which, at a former period, would have been necessary to their existence as representatives of the people.—But happily that period had passed away; and those men, who had known no rule of action paramount to the commands of their sovereign, were now sufficiently enlightened, to demand a restitution of their long-estranged rights;—and a constitution, upon which they could consolidate their liberty and national fraternity.

This imperious demand was irresistible; and the cabinet, unable to check the current of opinion, had recourse to those stratagems, which, leading to their ruin, has buried in the wreck all that vain grandeur elevated on the spoil of industry, whilst it's gilding obscured the sad objects of misery that pined under it's shade. Lively sanguine minds,

disgusted with the vices and artificial manners produced by the great inequality of conditions in France, naturally hailed the dawn of a new day, when the Bastille was destroyed; and freedom, like a lion roused from his lair, rose with dignity, and calmly shook herself.—With delight they marked her noble pace, without ever supposing that the tiger, who thirsts for blood, and the whole brutal herd, must necessarily unite against her.—Yet this has been the case; the dogs of war have been let loose, and corruption has swarmed with noxious life.—But let not the coldly wise exult, that their heads were not led astray by their hearts; or imagine, that the improvement of the times does not betoken a change of government, gradually taking place to meliorate the fate of man; for, in spite of the perverse conduct of beings spoilt by the old system, the preponderancy of truth has rendered principles in some respects triumphant over men; and instruments of mischief have wondered at the good which they have unwittingly produced.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER IV.

reflections on the conduct of the court and king. injurious consequences of the complication of laws. general diffusion of knowledge. state of civilization amongst the ancients. it's progress. the croisades, and the reformation. early freedom of britain. the british constitution. fate of liberty in europe. russia. decline of the aristotelian philosophy. descartes. newton. education improved. germany. frederic ii. of prussia.

The effect produced by the duplicity of courts must be very great, when the vicissitudes, which had happened at Versailles, could not teach every person of common sense, that the moment was arrived, when subterfuge and treachery could no longer escape detection and punishment; and that the only possibility of obtaining the durable confidence of the people was by that strict attention to justice, which produces a dignified sincerity of action. For after the unravelling of the plot, contrived to cheat the expectation of the people, it was natural to suppose, that they would entertain the most wakeful suspicion of every person who had been privy to it.

It would have been fortunate for France, and the unhappy Louis, if his counsellors could have profited by experience. But, still pursuing the old track, bounding over the mine, the bursting of which had for a moment disconcerted them, we shall find, that the continual dissimulation of the king, and the stratagems of his advisers, were the principal, though perhaps not the sole cause of his ruin. He appears to have sometimes mistrusted the cabal; yet, with that mixture of facility and obstinacy in his character, the concomitants of indolence of mind, he allowed himself to be governed without attempting to form any principle of action to regulate his conduct. For if he had ever really desired to be useful to his people, and to lighten their accumulated burdens, as has been continually insisted, he was astonishingly defective in judgment not to see, that he was surrounded with sycophants, who fattened on their hearts blood, using his own hand to brand his name with infamy. It may possibly be urged in reply, that this yielding temper was a proof of the king's benign desire to promote the felicity of his subjects, and prevent the horrours of anarchy. To confute such remarks, it is only necessary to state, that the preparations which had been made to dissolve the national assembly, and to reduce the people to entire subjection, if they were not his immediate contrivance, must have had his sanction, to give them efficiency; and that the tergiversation, which he employed on this occasion, was sufficient to make every other transaction of his reign suspected. And this will be found to be the case in all the steps he afterwards took to conciliate the people, which were little regarded after the evaporation of the lively emotions they excited; whilst the want of morals in the court, and even in the assembly, made a prevailing mistrust produce a capriciousness of conduct throughout the empire. Perhaps, it is vain to expect, that a depraved nation, whatever examples of heroism, and noble instances of disinterested conduct, it may exhibit on sudden emergencies, or at the first statement of an useful reform, will ever pursue with steadiness the great objects of public good, in the direct path of virtuous ambition.

If the calamities, however, which have followed in France the taking of the Bastille, a noble effort, be attributed partly to ignorance, or only to want of morals, the evils are in no degree lessened; neither does it justify the conduct of the virulent opposers of those manly exertions inspired by the voice of reason. The removal of a thousand grinding oppressions had been demanded;—and promised, to delude the public; who finding, at last, that the hopes, which had softened their misery, were likely to be blasted by the intrigues of courtiers, can we wonder, that the worm these courtiers were trying to crush, turned on the foot prepared to stamp it to nothing.

The complication of laws in every country has tended to bewilder the understanding of man in the science of government; and whilst artful politicians have taken advantage of the ignorance or credulity of their fellow citizens, it was impossible to prevent a degeneracy of morals, because impunity will always be a stimulus to the passions. This has been the cause of the insincerity, which has so long disgraced the courts of Europe, and pervading every class of men in their offices or employ, has extended it's poison throughout the higher orders of society; and it will require a simplification of laws, an establishment of equal rights, and the responsibility of ministers, to secure a just and enlightened policy. But till this be effected, it ought not to surprize us, should we hear the mock patriots of the day declaiming about public reform, merely to answer sinister purposes; or should we chance to discover, that the most extolled characters have ben actuated by a miserable selfishness, or prompted by corroding resentment, to exertions for the public good; whilst historians have ignorantly attributed the political advantages, which have been attained by a gradual improvement of manners, to their resolution, and the virtuous exercise of their talents.

And we ought not to be discouraged from attempting this simplification, because no country has yet been able to do it; since it seems clear, that manners and government have been in a continual and progressive state of improvement, and that the extension of knowledge, a truth capable of demonstration, was never at any period so general as at present.

If at one epocha of civilization we know, that all the improvements which were made in arts and sciences were suddenly overturned, both in Greece and Rome, we need not inquire, why superficial reasoners have been induced to think, that there is only a certain degree of civilization to which men are capable of attaining, without receding back to a state of barbarism, by the horrid consequences of anarchy; though it may be necessary to observe, that the causes which produced that event can never have the same effect again:—because a degree of knowledge has been diffused through society by the invention of printing, which no inundation of barbarians can eradicate. Besides, the improvement of governments do not now depend on the genius of particular men; but on the impetus given to the whole society by the discovery of useful truths. The opposers then of popular governments may tell us, if they please, that Themistocles had no motive in saving his country, but to gratify his ambition; that Cicero was vain, and Brutus only envious of the growing greatness of Cæsar.—Or, to approach our own times;—that, if the supercilious Wedderburne had not offered an indignity to Franklin, he never would have become an advocate for american independence; and that, if Mirabeau had not suffered in prison, he never would have written against the *lettresde cachet,* or espoused the cause of the people.—All of which assertions I am

willing to admit, because they exactly prove what I wish to enforce; namely, that—though bad morals, and worse laws, have helped to deprave the passions of men to such a degree, as to make the benefits which society have derived from the talents or exertions of individuals to arise from selfish considerations, still it has been in a state of gradual improvement, and has arrived at such a pitch of comparative perfection, that the most arbitrary governments in Europe, Russia excepted, begin to treat their subjects as human beings, feeling like men, and with some powers of thinking.

The most high degree of civilization amongst the ancients, on the contrary, seems to have consisted in the perfection the arts, including language, attained; whilst the people, only domesticated brutes, were governed and amused by religious shows, that stand on record as the most egregious insult ever offered to the human understanding. Women were in a state of bondage; though the men, who gave way to the most unbridled excesses, even to the outraging of nature, expected that they should be chaste; and took the only method to render them so in such a depraved state of society, by ruling them with a rod of iron; making them, excepting the courtezans, merely household, breeding animals.

The state of slavery, likewise, of a large proportion of men, tended probably, more than any other circumstance, to degrade the whole circle of society. For whilst it gave that air of arrogance, which has falsely been called dignity, to one class, the other acquired the servile mien that fear always impresses on the relaxed countenance. It may be delivered, I should imagine, as an aphorism, that when one leading principle of action is founded on injustice, it sophisticates the whole character.

In the systems of government of the ancients, in the perfection of the arts, and in the ingenious conjectures which supplied the place of science, we see, however, all that the human passions can do to give grandeur to the human character; but we only see the heroism that was the effect of passion, if we except Aristides. For during this youth of the world, the imagination alone was cultivated, and the subordinate understanding merely exercised to regulate the taste, without extending to it’s grand employ, the forming of principles.

The laws, made by ambition rather than reason, treated with contempt the sacred equality of man, anxious only to aggrandize, first the state and afterwards individuals: consequently, the civilization never extended beyond polishing the manners, often at the expence of the heart, or morals; for the two modes of expression have, I conceive, precisely the same signification, though the latter may have more extent. To what purpose then do semi-philosophers exultingly show, that the vices of one country are not the vices of another; as if this would prove, that morality has no solid foundation; when all their examples are taken from nations just emerging out of barbarism, regulating society on the narrow scale of opinions suggested by their passions, and the necessity of the moment? What, indeed, do these examples prove? Unless they be allowed to substantiate my observation, that civilization has hitherto been only a perfection of the arts; and a partial melioration of manners, tending more to embellish the superiour rank of society, than to improve the situation of all mankind. Sentiments were often noble, sympathies just—yet the life of most men of the first class was

made up of a series of unjust acts, because the regulations thought expedient to cement society, did violence to natural justice. Venerable as age has rendered many of these regulations, cold substitutes for moral principles, it would be a kind of sacrilege not to strip them of their gothic vests. And where then will be found the man who will simply fay—that a king can do no wrong; and that, committing the vilest crimes to fully his mind, his person still remains sacred?—Who will dare to assert, that the priest, who takes advantage of the dying fears of a vicious man, to cheat his heirs, is not more despicable than a highwayman?—or that obedience to parents should go one jot beyond the deference due to reason, enforced by affection?—And who will coolly maintain, that it is just to deprive a woman, not to insist on her being treated as an outcast of society, of all the rights of a citizen, because her revolting heart turns from the man, whom, a husband only in name, and by the tyrannical power he has over her person and property, she can neither love nor respect, to find comfort in a more congenial or humane bosom? These are a few of the leading prejudices, in the present constitution of society, that blast the blossoms of hope, and render life wretched and useless—And, when such were tolerated, nay, reckoned sacred, who can find more than doubtful traces of the perfection of man in a system of association pervaded with such abuses? Voluptuousness alone softened the character down to tenderness of heart; and as taste was cultivated, peace was sought, rather because it was convenient, than because it was just. But, when war could not be avoided, men were hired by the rich to secure to them the quiet enjoyment of their luxuries; so that war, become a trade, did not render ferocious all those who directly, or indirectly waged it.

When, therefore, the improvements of civil life consisted almost entirely in polishing the manners, and exercising the transient sympathies of the heart, it is clear, that this partial civilization must have worn itself out by destroying all energy of mind. And the weakened character would then naturally fall back into barbarism, because the highest degree of sensual refinement violates all the genuine feelings of the soul, making the understanding the abject slave of the imagination. But, when the advances of knowledge shall make morality the real basis of social union, and not it's shadow the mask of selfishness, men cannot again lose the ground so surely taken, or forget principles, though they may accomplishments.

And that a civilization founded on reason and morality is, in fact, taking place in the world, will appear clear to all those, who have considered the atrocious vices and gigantic crimes, that sullied the polish of ancient manners. What nobleman, even in the states where they have the power of life and death, after giving an elegant entertainment, would now attract the detestation of his company, by ordering a domestic to be thrown into a pond to fatten the fish.* —What tyrant would dare, at this time, to poison his brother at his own table; or stab his enemy's mother, not to mention his own, without colouring over the deed? and do not the exclamations against boxing matches, in England, also prove, that the amphitheatre would not now be tolerated, much less enjoyed? If the punishment of death be not yet abolished, tortures worse than twenty deaths are exploded, merely by the melioration of manners. A human being is not now forced to feed the lamp that consumes him; or allowed vainly to call for death, whilst the flesh is pinched off his quivering limbs. Are not, likewise, many of the vices, that formerly braved the face of day, now obliged to lurk, like beasts of prey, in concealment, till night allows them to roam at

large. And the odium which now forces several vices, that then passed as merely the play of the imagination, to hide their heads, may chase them out of society, when justice is common to all, and riches no longer stand in the place of sense and virtue. Granting then to the ancients that savage grandeur of imagination, which, clashing with humanity, does not exclude tenderness of heart, we should guard against paying that homage to sentiment, only due to principles formed by reason.

Their tragedies, this is still but a cultivation of the passions and the taste, have been celebrated and imitated servilely; yet, touching the heart, they corrupted it; for many of the fictions, that produced the most striking stage effect, were absolutely immoral. The sublime terrour, with which they fill the mind, may amuse, nay, delight; but whence comes the improvement? Besides, uncultivated minds are the most subject to feel astonishment, which is often only another name for sublime sensations. What moral lesson, for example, can be drawn from the story of Oedipus, the favourite subject of such a number of tragedies?—The gods impel him on, and, led imperiously by blind fate, though perfectly innocent, he is fearfully punished, with all his hapless race, for a crime in which his will had no part.

Formerly kings and great men openly despised the justice they violated; but, at present, when a degree of reason, at least, regulates governments, men find it necessary to put a gloss of morality on their actions, though it may not be their spring. And even the jargon of crude sentiments, now introduced into conversation, shows to what side leans vanity, the true thermometer of the times.—An affectation of humanity is the affectation of the day; and men almost always affect to possess the virtue, or quality, that is rising into estimation.

Formerly a man was safe only in one civilized patch of the globe, and even there his life hung by a thread. Such were the sudden vicissitudes, which, keeping the apprehension on the stretch, warmed the imagination, that clouded the intellect. At present a man may reasonably expect to be allowed tranquilly to follow any scientific pursuit; and when the understanding is calmly employed, the heart imperceptibly becomes indulgent. It is not the same with the cultivation of the arts. Artists have commonly irritable tempers; and, inflaming their passions as they warm their fancy, they are, generally speaking, licentious; acquiring the manners their productions tend to spread abroad, when taste, only the refinement of weakened sensations, stifles manly ardour.

Taste and refined manners, however, were swept away by hordes of uncivilized adventurers; and in Europe, where some of the seeds remained, the state of society slowly meliorating itself till the seventeenth century, nature seemed as much despised in the arts, as reason in the sciences. The different professions were much more knavish than at present, under the veil of solemn stupidity. Every kind of learning, as in the savage state, consisted chiefly in the art of tricking the vulgar, by impressing them with an opinion of powers, that did not exist in nature—The priest was to save their souls without morality; the physician to heal their bodies without medicine; and justice was to be administered by the immediate interposition of heaven:—all was to be done by a charm. Nothing, in short, was founded on philosophical principles; and the amusements being barbarous, the manners became formal and ferocious. The

cultivation of the mind, indeed, consisted rather in acquiring languages, and loading the memory with facts, than in exercising the judgment; consequently, reason governed neither law, nor legislation; and literature was equally devoid of taste. The people were, strictly speaking, slaves; bound by feudal tenures, and still more oppressive ecclesiastical restraints; the lord of the domain leading them to slaughter, like flocks of sheep; and the ghostly father drawing the bread out of their mouths by the idlest impositions. The croisades, however, freed many of the vassals; and the reformation, forcing the clergy to take a new stand, and become more moral, and even wiser, produced a change of opinion, that soon appeared in humanizing the manners, though not in improving the different governments.

But whilst all Europe was enslaved, suffering under the caprice or tyranny of despots, whose pride and restless ambition continually disturbed the tranquillity of their neighbours; the britons, in a great degree, preserved the liberty that they first recovered. This singular felicity was not more owing to the insular situation of their country, than to their spirited efforts; and national prosperity was the reward of their exertions. Whilst, therefore, englishmen were the only free people in existence, they appear to have been not only content, but charmed with their constitution; though perpetually complaining of the abuses of their government. It was then very natural, in such an elevated situation, for them to contemplate with graceful pride their comparative happiness; and taking for granted, that it was the model of perfection, they never seem to have formed an idea of a system more simple, or better calculated to promote and maintain the freedom of mankind.

That system, so ingenious in theory, they thought the most perfect the human mind was capable of conceiving; and their contentions for it's support contributed more to persuade them, that they actually possessed an extensive liberty, and the best of all possible governments, than to secure the real possession. However, if it had no specific basis beside magna charta, till the habeas corpus act passed; or before the revolution of 1688, but the temper of men; it is a sufficient demonstration, that it was a government resting on principles emanating from the consent, if not from the sense of the nation.

Whilst liberty had been consumed by the lascivious pleasures of the citizens of Venice and Genoa;—corroded in Switzerland by a mercenary aristocracy;—entombed in the dykes of the covetous Hollanders;—driven out of Sweden by an association of the nobles;—and hunted down in Corsica by the ambition of her neighbours;—France was insensible to her value;—Italy, Spain, and Portugal, cowering under a contemptible bigotry, which sapped the remains of the rude liberty they had enjoyed, formed no political plans;—and all Germany was not only enslaved, and groaning beneath the weight of the most insulting civil tyranny, but it's shackles were riveted by a redoubtable military phalanx.—Despotism, in fact, had existed in that vast empire for a greater length of time than in any other country;—whilst Russia stretched out her arms with mighty grasp, embracing Europe and Asia. Sullen as the amphibious bear of the north; and so chilled by her icy regions, as to be insensible to the charms of social life, she threatened alternate destruction to every state in her vicinity. Huge in her projects of ambition, as her empire is extensive, the despotism of her court seems as insatiable, as the manners of her boors are barbarous.—Arrived at

that stage of civilization, when the grandeur and parade of a palace are mistaken for the improvement of manners, and the false glory of desolating provinces for wisdom and magnanimity, the tzarina would sooner have abandoned her favourite plan of imitating the conduct of Peter the great, in labouring to civilize her kingdom, than have allowed freedom to find a firm seat in her dominions to assist her. She has vainly endeavoured, indeed, to make the sweet flowers of liberty grow under the poisonous shade of despotism; giving the russians a false taste for the luxuries of life before the attainment of it's conveniences. And this hasty attempt to alter the manners of a people has produced the worst effect on their morals: mixing the barbarism of one state of society, deprived of it's sincerity and simplicity, with the voluptuousness of the other, void of elegance and urbanity, the two extremes have prematurely met.

Thus pursued and mistaken, liberty, though still existing in the small island of England, yet continually wounded by the arbitrary proceedings of the british ministry, began to flap her wings, as if preparing for a flight to more auspicious regions—And the anglo-americans having carried with them to their place of refuge the principles of their ancestors, she appeared in the new world with renovated charms, and sober matron graces.

Freedom is, indeed, the natural and imprescriptible right of man; without the enjoyment of which, it is impossible for him to become either a reasonable or dignified being. Freedom he enjoys in a natural state, in it's full extent: but formed by nature for a more intimate society, to unfold his intellectual powers, it becomes necessary, for carrying into execution the main objects, which induces men to establish communities, that they should surrender a part of their natural privileges, more effectually to guard the most important. But from the ignorance of men, during the infancy of society, it was easy for their leaders, by frequent usurpations, to create a despotism, which choking up the springs that would have invigorated their minds, they seem to have been insensible to the deprivations under which they lived; and existing like mere animals, the tyrants of the world have continued to treat them only as machines to promote their purposes.

In the progress of knowledge, which however was very tardy in Europe, because the men who studied were content to see nature through the medium of books, without making any actual experiments themselves, the benefits of civil liberty began to be better understood: and in the same proportion we find the chains of despotism becoming lighter. Still the systematizing of pedants, the ingenious fallacy of priests, and the supercilious meanness of the literary sycophants of courts, who were the distinguished authors of the day, continued to perplex and confound the understandings of unlettered men. And no sooner had the republics of Italy risen from the ashes of the roman jurisprudence, than their principles were attacked by the apostles of Machiavel, and the efforts made for the revival of freedom were undermined by the insidious tenets which he gave to his prince.

The arts, it is true, were now recovering themselves, patronized by the family of the Medicis; but the sciences, that is, whatever claimed the appellation, had still to struggle with aristotelean prejudices; till Descartes ventured to think for himself; and Newton, following his example, explained the laws of motion and gravity, displaying

the mechanism of the universe with wonderful perspicacity; for the analysis of ideas, which has since diffused such light through every branch of knowledge, was not before this period applied even to mathematics. The extension of analytical truths, including political, which at first were only viewed as splendid theories, now began to pervade every part of Europe; stealing into the very seminaries of learning in Germany, where formerly scholastic, dry theology, laborious compilations of the wanderings of the human understanding, and minute collations of the works of the ancients, had consumed the fervour of youth, and wasted the patience of age. The college and the court are always connected:—and literature beginning to attract the attention of several of the petty sovereigns of the empire, they were induced to patronize those daring men who were persecuted by the public for attacking religious or political prejudices; and allowing them an asylum at their courts, they acquired a relish for their conversation. The amusements of the chace then yielding to the pleasures of colloquial disquisition on subjects of taste and morals, the ferocity of northern despotism began imperceptible to wear away, and the condition of it's slaves to become more tolerable.

Education, in particular, has been studied; and the rational modes of instruction in useful knowledge, which are taking place of the exclusive attention formerly paid to the dead languages, promise to render the germans, in the course of half a century, the most enlightened people in Europe. Whilst their simplicity of manners, and honesty of heart are in a great degree preserved, even as they grow more resined, by the situation of their country; which prevents that inundation of riches by commercial sources, that destroys the morals of a nation before it's reason arrives at maturity.

Frederic the Ild of Prussia, with the most ardent ambition, was nevertheless as anxious to acquire celebrity as an author, as he was fame as a soldier. By writing an examination of Machiavel's Prince, and the encouragement he gave to literary talents and abilities, he contributed very much to promote the acquirement of knowledge in his dominions; whilst, by granting his confidence to the philosophical Hertzberg, the administration of his government grew considerably milder.

His splendid reputation as a soldier continued to awe the restless ambition of the princes of the neighbouring states, which afforded an opportunity to the inhabitants of the empire to follow, during the reign of tranquillity, those literary pursuits, which became fashionable even at the half civilized court of Petersbourg. It now, indeed, appeared certain, that Germany would gain in future important political advantages; for men were beginning to presume to think, and scanned the conduct of the supercilious Joseph with freedom, treating his vanity with contempt.

It is by thus teaching men from their youth to think, that they will be enabled to recover their liberty; and useful learning is already so far advanced, that nothing can stop it's progress:—I say peremptorily nothing; for this is not the era hesitatingly to add, short of supernatural events. And though the unjustifiable proceeding of the english courts of justice, or rather of the arbitrary chief judge Mansfield, who established it as a law precedent, that the greater the truth the greater the libel, tended materially to prevent the authors of the american war from being attacked for those tyrannical steps, that ultimately tended to stop the progress of knowledge and the

dissemination of political truth; yet the clamour which was raised against that unpopular war is a proof, that, if justice slept, liberty of thought had not forsaken the island.

The overweening presumption, however, of men ignorant of true political science; who beheld a nation prosperous beyond example, whilst all the neighbouring states were languishing, and knew not how to account for it; foolishly endeavouring to preserve this prosperity, by mad attempts to throw impediments in the way of those very principles, which had raised Great Britain to the elevated rank she has attained in Europe, served only to accelerate their diffusion. And France being the first among the nations on the continent, that had arrived at a civilization of manners, which they have termed the only art of living, we find was the first to throw off the yoke of her old prejudices.

It was at this crisis of things, that the despotism of France was completely overturned, and twenty-five millions of human beings unloosed from the odious bands, which had for centuries benumbed their faculties, and made them crouch under the most ignominious servitude—And it now remains to observe the effect of this important revolution, which may fairly be dated from the taking of the Bastille.

[Back to Table of Contents]

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

a deputation of the national assembly arrives at paris. baillie chosen mayor, and la fayette commander in chief of the national guards. resignation of the ministry. necklr recalled. the king visits paris. character of the parisians. the revolution urged on prematurely. emigrations of several of the nobility and others. calonne advises the french princes to stir up foreign powers against france. foulon killed.

The presence of the deputies had diffused throughout the capital the most intoxicating joy—for where is joy expressed with such infantile playfulness, such entire forgetfulness of to-morrow, as at Paris? and the citizens, with their usual burst of gratitude, which always resembles adoration, made choice of Baillie, the first acting president of the national assembly, for mayor, and of La Fayette for commander in chief of the national guards: the name now given to the *garde-bourgeoise,* and the other soldiers incorporated with them. But the rapture of the parisians, as transient as lively, dwindled, as their spirits were exhausted, into the murmurs of suspicion.—The ministry, said they, who were chosen to depress us, are not yet dismissed; and the troops, that were to have been their instruments of mischief, still hover round Paris, and are even augmented by the arrival of two fresh regiments at St. Denis. A rumour was spread, that a convoy of flour had been intercepted by the order of the ministers, in it's way to Paris; and some disturbances at the Bastille had given colour to a report, that they had attempted to make themselves once more masters of this important fortress. The night of the 15th was then another devoted to watchfulness and anxiety; and in the morning a deputation was sent to the national assembly, praying them to demand the dismission of the present ministry, and the recall of Necker.

The assembly took the subject into deliberation; but still attentive to *etiquette,* they debated about the decorum of interfering with the appointment of the executive power. This roused the genius of Mirabeau; and the bubbles of fear, and the straw-like objections of timidity, were carried away by the torrent of his eloquence. The discussion grew warm; yet for the present occasion soon became of little importance, because the ministry, finding that they could not stand the brunt of the storm, resigned; Necker also, in whom the public had still the most implicit confidence, was invited to return;—and the king, appearing to be anxious to give every proof of his desire to establish general tranquillity, signified, that he wished to visit Paris. A short time after they were officially informed that the troops were promptly removing to more distant quarters. The national assembly accordingly sent some of their members to communicate to the parisians this welcome intelligence, to prepare for the reception of the king by calming the fears of the people.

And he, adhering to his purpose, left Versailles the next day (the 17th), though his family ridiculously endeavoured to dissuade him; insinuating, that he ought not to trust his sacred person to the mercy of an enraged multitude; whilst rumours of projected assassinations were repeated before him, with exaggerated comments. But,

being a man of considerable animal courage, and now almost perceiving, that all the evils with which he was struggling had been produced by his headstrong advisers, he seemed determined, at least for the present, not to be governed by their dangerous councils. And he had even the sagacity to foresee, that, convulsed as the kingdom was, they would occasion a civil war, and his life might then be still more exposed. In this instance, as we shall find in many others, Louis appears to have been directed by a kind of glimmering instinct of propriety; for at the present juncture it was particularly discreet, considering the little effect the pageantry of the court had produced at the *séance royale,* to meet the people without the parade of robes or guards. And, in fact, the hundred deputies who followed him, were now the only retinue that would have appeared respectable in the eyes of the people. What too must have been his surprise, in spite of all he had heard, to pass through an immense avenue of armed parisians with such a new aspect.—Till now he had always seen a timid multitude flying before the watch, giving vent to their vengeance in vain songs, and to their grief in feeble murmurs:—to-day he saw them triumphant, moving orderly along, calling out on every side, during the procession, for a constitution and laws! marching in unison with their reflections, they advanced, but slowly; for, almost afraid to hope, they proceeded with the measured step of thought, or rather sadness; and the people, whose mind was still agitated, as the swell of the sea continues after the storm has subsided, uttered not the shout of gladness—*vive le roi;*—but the menacing memento—*vive la nation.*

This was as ominous a sound, as the woe! woe! resounding through the silent streets of a besieged city—for it was equally the voice of fate, proclaiming the will of the people, disgusted with courts, and suspicious even of the king. Louis seems to have been forcibly struck by the energy every where displayed; and not more by the eloquent discourses addressed to him at the hôtel-de-ville, than by the countenance of each citizen: for the fire of liberty had already lighted up in every face the serene lustre of manly firmness.—So impressed, indeed, was his mind by the whole scene, that, when the animated speakers were silent, he exclaimed in reply—'My people! my people, may always rely on my love.'—And taking the national cockade from the hands of the mayor, he appeared at the window with his heart in his eyes, as if eager to convince the multitude of his sincerity: and perhaps conscious, that, first submitting to necessity, he now yielded to feeling. At these words, the repetition of which flew like lightning from rank to rank, the whole concourse of people caught the electrical sympathy.—*Vive-le-roi* was shouted from every quarter; and revived affection glowed with the fresh fervour, that effaces the remembrance of doubts, and makes the fear of having been unjust, the most powerful spring of tenderness. And persuading themselves, for the moment, that the disposition of the king was not so much at variance with their happiness as his conduct, they poured blessings on him, bestowing all their execrations on his counsellors.

Pleasure, now almost mounting to a feverish height, set all Paris quickly in motion; and the found of the thundering artillery was the swift harbinger of the tidings of reconciliation to Versailles, where the royal family must have been anxiously alive to the events of the day.

These sudden transitions from one extreme to another, without leaving any settled conviction behind, to confirm or eradicate the corroding distrust, could not be seen in such a strong light any where as at Paris, because there a variety of causes have so effeminated reason, that the french may be considered as a nation of women; and made feeble, probably, by the same combination of circumstances, as has rendered these insignificant. More ingenious than profound in their researches; more tender than impassioned in their affections; prompt to act, yet soon weary; they seem to work only to escape from work, and to reflect merely how they shall avoid reflection. Indolently restless, they make the elegant furniture of their rooms, like their houses, voluptuously handy. Every thing, in short, shows the dexterity of the people, and their attention to present enjoyment.

And so passive appears to be their imagination, it requires to be roused by novelty; and then, more lively than strong, the evanescent emotions scarcely leave any traces behind them. From being devoted to pleasure in their youth, old age is commonly passed in such merely animal gratifications, that a respectable looking aged man or woman is very rarely to be seen. Independent, likewise, of the vanity which makes them wish to appear polite, at the very moment they are ridiculing a person, their great susceptibility of disposition leads them to take an interest in all the sensations of others, which are forgotten almost as soon as felt. And these transient gusts of feeling prevent their forming those firm resolves of reason, that, bracing the nerves, when the heart is moved, make sympathy yield to principles, and the mind triumph over the senses.

Besides, the climate of France is so genial, and the blood mounted so cheerily in the veins, even of the oppressed common people, that, living for the day, they continually basked in the sunshine, which broke from behind the heavy clouds that hung over them.

It is impossible, after tracing the horrid conspiracy formed by the court against the lives and liberty of the people, not to feel the most ineffable contempt for that kind of government, which leaves the happiness of a nation at the mercy of a capricious minister of state. The awful and interesting lesson, which the developement of this treachery afforded, was such as ought to have made an indelible impression on their minds.—It was a lesson, the very thought of which stops for a moment the genial current of the heart.—It was a lesson, that should be repeated to mankind, to bring home to their very senses a conviction of the lengths to which a depraved and absolute government will go, for the sake of holding fast it's power.—It was, in short, a deduction of experience, which will teach posterity that life, and every thing dear to man, can be secured only by the preservation of liberty.

The want of decision in the character of Louis seems to have been the foundation of all his faults, as well as of all his misfortunes; and every moment fresh occasions to make the observation arise as we trace his misconduct, or compassionate his situation.

To give a striking instance, it is only necessary to turn our attention to the fatal effects that flowed from his consenting to assemble an army of foreigners, to intimidate the states-general. He could not resist the court, who counselled this measure; or silence

the misgivings of his heart, which made him averse to the troops taking any decisive step, that might lead to slaughter. And still governed by these undisciplined seelings, when he dismissed the army, he pursued the advice of the very cabal, that had led him into this errour; giving way to the wishes of the people, yet dissembling with them even in the act of reconciliation. Thus, for ever wavering, it is difficult to mark any fixt purpose in his actions; excepting that which does him honour—the desire to prevent the shedding of blood. This principle has, in general, directed his conduct; though the short-sighted measures of timid humanity, devoid of strength of mind, turned all his efforts to a very contrary effect.

From the presence of these troops, and their abortive attempt to crush liberty in the egg, the shell was prematurely broken, and the enthusiasm of frenchmen excited before their judgment was in any considerable degree formed. Intoxicated by conquest, each began to descant on the existing abuses, to show his own cleverness in pointing out the remedy; and arms being once in the hands of the people, it was difficult to persuade them to give them up for the occupations of peace. It is true, had the national assembly been allowed quietly to have made some reforms, paving the way for more, the Bastille, though tottering on it's dungeons, might yet have stood erect.—And, if it had, the sum of human misery could scarcely have been increased. For the *guillotine* not finding it's way to the splendid square it has polluted, streams of innocent blood would not have flowed, to obliterate the remembrance of false imprisonment, and drown the groans of solitary grief in the loud cry of agony—when, the thread of life quickly cut in twain, the quivering light of hope is instantly dashed out—and the billows suddenly closing, the silence of death is felt!—This tale is soon told.—We hear not of years languished away in misery, whilst dissolution by inches palsies the frame, or disturbs the reason: yet, who can estimate the sum of comfort blasted; or tell how many survivors pine the prey of an imagination distracted by sorrow?

The character of the french, indeed, had been so depraved by the inveterate despotism of ages, that even amidst the heroism which distinguished the taking of the Bastille, we are forced to see that suspicious temper, and that vain ambition of dazzling, which have generated all the succeeding follies and crimes. For, even in the most public-spirited actions, celebrity seems to have been the spur, and the glory, rather than the happiness of frenchmen, the end.—This observation inforces the grand truth on mankind, that without morality there can be no great strength of understanding, or real dignity of conduct. The morals of the whole nation were destroyed by the manners formed by the government.—Pleasure had been pursued, to fill up the void of rational employment; and fraud combined with servility to debase the character;—so that, when they changed their system, liberty, as it was called, was only the acme of tyranny—merely with this difference, that, all the force of nature being roused, the magnitude of the evil promised, by some mighty concussion, to effect it's own cure.

The reunion of the king and people not only routed, but terrified, the cabal; and as cowardly in adversity, as presumptuous in prosperity, they immediately took to flight different ways, and even disguised. One man, who had long been obnoxious to the people on account of inordinate covetousness, and vulgar tyranny, not softened by the graceful condescension of the nobility, caused it to be reported, that he was dead. The

renowned mareschal Broglio sought an asylum at Luxemburgh, whilst madame Polignac fled to Basle. Thus went into exile an amiable woman, who had been the instrument of the ambition of a family, that rapaciously availed themselves of her great favour with the queen, whose strange predilection for handsome women blighted the reputation of every one, whom she distinguished.

The count d'Artois, with several others of the blood royal and principal nobility, likewise thought it prudent to leave the kingdom for the present; either to provide for their safety, or to seek vengeance. At Brussels they met the unquiet Calonne, who, having heard of the dismission of Necker, was lured back by the first glimpse of hope. For wishing to wipe away the indignity, which he had so impatiently brooked; and fondly believing, that the army had had sufficient time to quash the verbal disputes of the nation; he was hastening towards France, to be ready to come in for his share of the triumph.

To his country this meeting has proved a source of evil, that could only have been hatched in such an unprincipled brain, fertile in plans of mischief, and prone to puzzle the cause which he wanted force to subvert. His last effort for power had been to obtain a seat in the states-general. And, had not the remembrance of his former administration stood in his way, it is probable he would have succeeded, and there have become a flaming patriot, could he have been the leader of a party; for he possessed the showy talents necessary to procure instantaneous applause in a popular assembly—a deceiving, rather than a commanding eloquence. Mirabeau, on the contrary, seems to have had from nature a strong perception of a dignified propriety of conduct; and truth appearing to give earnestness to his arguments, his hearers were compelled to agree with him out of respect to themselves. Leaving then plausibility far behind, he always stood forth as the sturdy champion of reason; even when, laying down his club, he loitered to dally with the imagination. Whilst therefore Mirabeau was teaching the national assembly dignity* , the resentment of the vain-glorious Calonne, sharpened to the keenest edge by disappointment, made him suggest to those crest-fallen princes, the necessity of engaging foreign aid, to reinstate the king in his former plenitude of power, and to heal their wounded pride. Unfortunately, the plausibility of his manners, and the ingenuity of his arguments, awakened their fears, and nourished their prejudices; and quickly persuaded to assert what they wished to believe, they protested against the conduct of the national assembly; insinuating, that the body of the people did not support their pretensions. The delusion, however, did not rest here; for he even convinced them, that, if the appeal made to the national honour of the french did not recall crowds to their chivalrous allegiance, it would not be a difficult task to engage all the powers of Europe in behalf of his most christian majesty, by showing them, that, if freedom were once established in France, it would soon extend beyond it's confines, bounding over the Alps and Pyrenees.

Such are the opposite sentiments, or rather conduct of court parasites, and men struggling to be free, that it is sufficient to contrast them. The deputies, whose lives had been threatened, and their persons grossly insulted, not only excused the ill advised monarch for the countenance which he had given to the violation of the most sacred principles; but expressed a conciliatory disposition to all parties. The mob, it is true, in the heat of rage, inhumanly butchered two of the vile instruments of

despotism. But this violence offered to justice ought not to be attributed to the temper of the people, much less to the connivance of the national assembly, who acted with a degree of magnanimity, at this time, of which it can never be enough lamented that they have since lost sight. The behaviour however of the hardened children of oppression in all countries is the same; whether in the amphitheatre at Rome, or around the lantern-post in Paris.

The king's eldest brother alone remained with the court, a man with more resources of understanding in himself, than the rest of his family; yet, making it a point of honour to be treated like his younger brother the count d'Artois, he contributed by his rapacity to drain the royal treasure, though such an expensive variety of amusements was not necessary to give a zest to his pleasures.

The noble depredators had now escaped; yet Foulon, the minister, the most desperate and pusillanimous of the gang, was taken, in spite of his mock funeral.—I purposely use the word gang; for a squeamish delicacy with respect to terms makes us sometimes confound characters to such a degree, that the great villain is not stigmatized with the epithet associated with the idea of a gallows; because, by the grossest subversion of reason, the aggravation of guilt has so palliated the punishment, that the head, which would have disgraced a halter, has been respectfully severed on a block.

Once seized, no authority could prevent the murder of this miserable wretch; and the same evening the intendant of Paris, his son-in-law, met a death still more shocking, being prolonged by the humane interposition of the respectable mayor, and La Fayette, in his favour.

Strange, that a people, who often leave the theatre before the catastrophe, should have bred up such monsters! Still we ought to recollect, that the sex, called the tender, commit the most flagrant acts of barbarity when irritated.—So weak is the tenderness produced merely by sympathy, or polished manners, compared with the humanity of a cultivated understanding. Alas!—It is morals, not feelings, which distinguish men from the beasts of prey! These were transactions, over which, for the honour of human nature, it were to be wished oblivion could draw the winding-sheet, that has often enwrapped a heart, whose benevolence has been felt, but not known. But, if it be impossible to erase from the memory these foul deeds, which, like the stains of deepest dye revived by remorse in the conscience, can never be rubbed out—why dwell circumstantially on the excesses that revolt humanity, and dim the lustre of the picture, on which the eye has gazed with rapture, often obliged to look up to heaven to forget the misery endured on earth? Since, however, we cannot 'out the damned spot,' it becomes necessary to observe, that, whilst despotism and superstition exist, the convulsions, which the regeneration of man occasions, will always bring forward the vices they have engendered, to devour their parents.

Servility, destroying the natural energy of man, stifles the noblest sentiments of the soul.—Thus debased, heroic actions are merely directed by the head, and the heart drops not into them it's balm, more precious than the trees of Arabia ever distilled! Ought we then to wonder, that this dry substitute for humanity is often burnt up by the

scorching flame of revenge? This has now actually been the case; for there has been seen amongst the french a spurious race of men, a set of cannibals, who have gloried in their crimes; and tearing out the hearts that did not feel for them, have proved, that they themselves had iron bowels. ‘But, if the anger of the people be terrible,’ exclaims Mirabeau, ‘it is the sang froid of despotism, that is atrocious; those systematic cruelties, which have made more wretches in a day than the popular insurrections have immolated in a course of years!* We often fear,’ adds he, ‘the people, because we have injured them; and thus are forced to fetter those we oppress.’

The example of the capital was followed by the provinces; and all the citizens flew to arms, whilst the soldiers grounded their’s, swearing not to stain their hands with the blood of their fellow citizens. Added to the account of the conspiracy to dissolve the states-general, and massacre their representatives, a number of idle rumours of present danger tended to make the country people not only eager to guard against they scarcely knew what, but also desirous to enter into the adventures, and share the honours of the parisians.

In all civil wars, personal vengeance mixing with public, or taking advantage of it, has directed the dagger of the assassin: and in France it ought particularly to have been dreaded; because, when fear induces a man to smother his just resentment, the festering wound is only to be cured by revenge. It is then highly probable, that most of the barbarities in the towns were the effervescence of private anger, or the sport of depraved, uncultivated minds, who found the same pleasure in tormenting men, as mischievous boys in dismembering insects; for public indignation, directed against aristocratical tyranny, was elsewhere, in general, displayed only in burning the country castles, and the archives of nobility. But, in the country, indeed, men rarely commit such crimes, as lift up their reptile heads in the capital, where the rank atmosphere affords the noxious particles necessary to give virulence to the poison. The vices of villagers are, in fact, rather the rich exuberance of the passions, than the vile dregs of exhausted nature.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER II.

the duke of liancourt chosen president. the people arm for the defence of the country. the municipal officers appointed under the old government superseded by committees. some people treacherously destroyed by springing a mine at a civic feast. the genevese resident taken up by the patrol. the french suspicious of the designs of britain. necker returns. general amnesty resolved by the electors of paris. debate on a declaration of rights. declaration of rights separate from the constitution determined on. sacrifices made by the nobles, clergy, &c.

The duke of Liancourt, whose warning voice had made the king look around him, when danger was at his heels, was now chosen president. At this moment the obstacles, which at first clogged the exertions of the assembly, seemed to have been overcome: still fresh ones starting up threw a damp on their exultation; and the apprehensions of a famine, real or factitious, were not the least alarming, though the most frequent.

New conspiracies were already formed on the borders of France, by the princes, and those who had subsisted by the corruptions of the old system. But this only proved a stimulus; because the nation, being determined to secure the rights it had so suddenly regained, raised new regiments in every part of the country, and was soon in a situation to repel any attack, which it was possible for all Germany to have made; the only quarter from which the fugitive princes, at that period, could expect assistance. So rapid was the spirit, so general the momentum, that in the course of a week upwards of three millions of men in arms were formed into companies by a common interest resembling an electrical sympathy. Such was the quick succession of events—Such the unanimous sense of the nation; and such the formidable force which instantly opposed itself to the impotent threats of departing despotism. History will record this memorable era, when the disciplined forces of the most puissant tyranny vanished before the force of truth, though still but half unveiled; obliging the haughty sycophants to search for shelter in the recesses of a forest, whither they stole under cover of the night from the presence of an injured people.

The conduct of the *garde bourgeoise,* during the progress of the revolution, without varnishing over the excesses produced by ebullitions of zeal, is of itself sufficient to prove, that a national militia should every where take place of standing armies, did not experience invariably attest, that the laws were never respected by men, whose business is war, unless they are reduced to mere machines by despotism.

The old municipal officers, mostly suspected, because nominated by the friends of the court, were now obliged to give place to committees elected by the common voice. These taking the administration of public business into their hands, a new order of things began every where to prevail. Still, however, the disturbed imagination of the people was filled with plots, to which some mysterious and fatal incidents gave life.

The municipality of Soissons informed the national assembly, that troops of banditti had cut down the corn before it was ripe, and obliged the villagers to take refuge in the towns. But on further inquiry, it appeared, that this report arose from a simple quarrel of the peasants amongst themselves, which had alarmed some labourers, who flew to the neighbouring town, imagining that they had thousands of banditti at their heels.

Paris was also disturbed by an idle rumour of a riot at St. Denis; so seriously affirmed by those, who declared that they had been eyewitnesses of the violence, that troops and cannon were sent, but they could find no traces of the disturbance.

Another, more serious, had exasperated the people against the nobility, and roused the indignation of the national assembly. A nobleman and counsellor of the parliament gave a civic feast in his castle to the inhabitants of his village; from which, on some pretext, he was absent. All was joy and festivity; but in the midst of the dance of gladness, the sudden explosion of a mine spread around affright and death.—Hearing of this treachery, the people, catching up their rustic weapons, firebrands, hastened to the neighbouring castles; some of which they burnt, others they demolished by pulling them down.

The recital of this atrocity produced a great effect in the national assembly; and, says Mirabeau, ‘though great assemblies are often much too susceptible of theatrical emotions; and this narration was accompanied with circumstances, of which the invention is seldom presumed; and though it was also attested by a public officer; yet the atrocity of the crime gave it an air of improbability.’ This wanton act of barbarity, which the historian also would fain believe a monstrous chimera of heated brains, was, nevertheless, as well substantiated, as such a fact could be; which nothing, but the confession of the guilty party, can render absolutely certain, because it seems equally foolish and barbarous.

These disorders, warmly represented by Lally-Tolendal, determined the assembly, on the 23d of july, to publish a proclamation, inviting all good citizens to the maintenance of order; and declaring, that to try and punish for all crimes of *leze-notion* was the sole prerogative of the national assembly, till, by the constitution which it was about to establish, a regular tribunal should be instituted, for the trial of such offences. After endeavouring to excuse the violence, or, more properly speaking, to account for it, Mirabeau observed to the assembly, ‘that they ought to be thoroughly convinced, that the continuation of this formidable dictator would expose liberty to as much risk as the stratagems of her enemies. Society,’ he continues, ‘would soon be dissolved, if the multitude, accustomed to blood and disorder, placed themselves above the magistrates, and braved the authority of the law. Instead of running to meet freedom, the people would soon throw themselves into the abyss of servitude; for danger too often rallies men round the standard of absolute power; and in the bosom of anarchy, a despot even appears a saviour. For Carthage is not yet destroyed; there remains a mass of instruments to impede our operations, and to excite divisions in an assembly, that has only been united by danger.’

Some trifling incidents, swelled into importance by supposition, kept alive the inventive mistrust of the nation, to which some innocent victims were sacrificed, without allaying it's brooding propensity to produce, like jealousy, the evil it feared. Suspecting every body, and a little vain of authority, the patroles of parisian citizens sometimes officiously arrested whomever they thought fit, without assigning a sufficient cause; and among the rest, they stopped the resident in France from Geneva. Three letters were found on him; and one of them being addressed to the count d'Artois, rendered suspicious the circumstance of his tearing a fourth.

The letters were sent by the mayor of Paris to the assembly; and the facts laid before them afforded Mirabeau an opportunity, to display his eloquence on a subject, that recalled to his mind abuses, which had formerly touched himself—the violation of private correspondence.—Though this did not appear to be exactly the present question; for they were not intercepted letters, but letters to which chance had annexed some suspicious characters, to point them out for inspection. The despotism of opening indiscriminately all letters, to enable the government to judge of the character and sentiments of each individual, is too obvious to need animadversion—And who, indeed, will not exclaim against the tyranny, be it even parental, that dares to steal into the secrets of the heart; or the impertinent curiosity, that seeks for information only to diversify an idle life? The latter may be termed petty larceny; yet often the peace of whole families is invaded by these cowardly thefts, and quarrels are rendered irreconcilable, by giving air to angry expressions, the utterance solely of the passion of the moment. The allowing letters, also, surreptitiously obtained, to appear as evidence, in courts of justice, is a gross violation of the first principle of law; because no letters can lawfully be opened, but as other suspected things are sought for—after information given to a magistrate. But, when seals are broken at the discretion of an individual, and brought forward to criminate a person, it is to the full as unjust, as to make a man plead against himself—And for justice to be awarded in consequence of an act of injustice, is an abuse that demands investigation. But the present was not a case in point. It was not a clandestine ransacking of all letters, to search for the clue of some suspected plot; or like the reading of the correspondence of a babbling conspirator, after the danger was over, whose letters might contain a list of timid accomplices, who would be driven to desperation by publicity. However, the decided turn was given to the question by the bishop of Langres observing, that all ages had applauded the generosity of Pompey, who committed to the flames the letters, which the senators had addressed to Sertorius. The mania of imitating the romans on this began to appear, producing one of those instances of false magnanimity, that always arise from imitation: yet so trifling, indeed, in it's present consequence, that it would scarcely deserve to be ridiculed, much less censured, had not the same affectation afterwards brought forth more serious and even fatal follies.

The temper also of the parisians, who mix in the world very early in life, leads them to imagine, that they have acquired the profound knowledge of the springs of human passions, which enables a sagacious man almost to foresee future events, only because they have often detected the weaknesses of the human heart. This made them now suppose, that the court of Great Britain was about to prosit by their intestine troubles. The phraseology had long been in both countries, that they were the natural enemies

of each other; and the mistrustful french quickly imagined, that the english meant immediately to take vengeance for their interference in favour of the americans, by seizing some of their West-India islands. The duke of Dorset, in his justification of England, only changed the object of mistrust, by giving rise to some vague conjectures respecting a conspiracy for delivering Brest into the hands of the english; and, as there was no clue to lead to the discovery of the traitors, several nobles of Brittany, probably innocent, were arrested.

These were, nevertheless, but flight impediments; for the invigorating voice of the awakened nation gave energy to the assembly, who now named committees to expedite the present business, preparatory to their grand task of framing a constitution. The authority and respectability of the assembly being acknowledged, they attentively considered the state of the kingdom; and, mindful of the present distress of the people, issued orders for the free circulation of provision, which had been obstructed by the ancient forms, so opposite to the true principles of political economy.

At this juncture, Necker, still esteemed by the nation, unfortunately returned. Intoxicated by popularity, this minister had not sufficent prudence to decline the honours, which he could not support by that dignity of conduct the present crisis required. In his way to Paris, having heard, that the life of the baron de Benzenval, commandant of the swiss guards, who had been with Broglio, was in danger, he humanely interposed to stop the hand of violence; and so far he deserves praise. But when, arrived at Paris, he was received, by the lively inhabitants, as the tutelar genius of France, this apotheosis had it's usual effect; and assuming the demi-god, at the *Hótel-de-Ville,* he was not content to preserve this victim from the public fury, withont recommending a general amnesty; a measure which was as inconsiderately adopted, as proposed. For the electors pretending to issue laws for the whole nation, gave great umbrage to the parisians, who had winked at the stretch of their power, which the pressing exigency of circumstances required, during the moment danger menaced the capital. The wild current thus turned, the men, who in the morning had declared, 'that liberty was safe, since Necker was allowed to watch over her,' now accused him of ambition, and a desire to keep well with the court, by facilitating the return, or escape, of it's minions. Such in fact was the inconstancy of a people, always running after theatrical scenes, that the tocsin was rung to denounce Necker as a courtier in one quarter of the city, at the very time the *PalaisRoyal* was illuminated to celebrate his return as a patriot.

The business, however, being referred to the national assembly, with a modifying explanation, they decided it mildly, paying the respect due to the good intentions from which it proceeded, though they did not pretend to sanction the hasty resolve of the electors.

After this tumult had subsided the narrow capacity of the minister did not allow him to take a determined part in the grand work, in which the deputies were engaged. His mind had not sufficient strength to burst the shackles of it's old opinions; and, acting with his usual commercial calculations, he seems to have been one cause of the divisions, which began to agitate an assembly, united rather by circumstances than by

sentiments. Besides, the sudden emancipation of the people occasioned a delirium of joy, which required to be managed with the greatest delicacy. A vigorous ministry was certainly necessary to check the licentious spirit manifesting itself continually by acts of violence, in so many parts of the kingdom, where tumults and assassinations were the effects of the giddiness of unexpected success. Whilst complaining of the old government, every man in his sphere seemed to be eager to try how he himself could govern, and make up for the time he had delegated his authority. Besides, the procrastination of the relief looked for as the immediate consequence of the Revolution, however unavoidable, made the people not only murmur, but, disregarding all reason, attempt to gain more by force than could, for a long time, be granted by justice—even had justice been unbiased by self-interest.

The nation called for a constitution; and the assembly debated about the declaration of rights inherent to man, and those he gives up when he becomes a citizen, on which they designed to rest it, as an explanatory support.

Several members argued, that the declaration ought to conclude, and not precede the constitution; insisting, that it was dangerous to awaken a *somnambulist* on the brink of a precipice; or to take a man to the top of a mountain, to show him a vast country that belonged to him, but of which he could not immediately claim the possession. ‘It is a veil,’ said they, ‘that it would be imprudent to raise suddenly.—It is a secret, that it is necessary to conceal, till the effect of a good constitution puts them into a situation to hear it with safety* .’

But Barnave terminated the sitting, though the question was still in debate, by observing, ‘that the declaration of rights was in two respects practically useful;—first, as it fixed the spirit of the legislation, in order that it might not vary in future;—and, secondly, as it would direct the representatives of the nation in the formation of laws, in all the details of legislation, the completion of which could only be the work of time. As to the apprehension expressed of the people abusing these rights, when they acquire a knowledge of them, it is,’ said he, ‘futile,—and we need only turn over the page of history, to lose these vain fears; for we shall constantly find the people tranquil in the same proportion as they are enlightened.’

Poizing thus the pillars of equal liberty, the discussion was the next day interrupted by the report made by the committee appointed for the purpose of digesting the information sent to the assembly, of the melancholy intelligence which they daily received from the provinces.—‘The taxes, the rents were no longer paid, the revenue was exhausted, the laws were without force; and the social ties almost broken.’ To remedy so many evils, the committee proposed to the assembly to publish, as soon as possible, a solemn declaration to testify their deep sense of the misery of the provinces, and their disapprobation of the non-payment of taxes and rents; and to declare, that, till the assembly had time to consider the decrees necessary to be passed to regulate these objects, there did not exist any cause to justify similar refusals. This proposition occasioned a warm debate.

Some of the deputies represented, that the seudal laws were too iniquitous,—the taxes too unequally assessed—the wretchedness too general, to hope for any happy effect

from such a declaration—it would soon fall into oblivion, as had done the proclamation for peace:—it would aggravate the misery of the state, by manifesting the impotence of the national assembly:—it would irritate even the people, who had need of comfort; and of whom they could not, without a kind of derision, in their present circumstances, require the payment of taxes, of which they knew well that each of them felt the injustice.

Others did not fail to insist on the danger of letting the disorder increase; on the sacredness of property; and on the immense *deficit* with which the nation was menaced; adding, that the national assembly would become contemptible, if it did not take the most vigorous measures.—They further dilated on the necessity of re-establishing the authority of the courts of justice;—and other arguments of the same tendency, which would have been more conclusive, more useful, if the supporters of the declaration had brought forward the shadow of a mode to assure it's execution. The debate from being warm became bitter, till it was at length resolved, that a declaration should be issued for the security of property, and that the remaining proposals of the committee should be discussed the next evening, the 4th of august.

But, before they separated, the assembly was informed, that Broglio had ordered all the arms, deposited at the town-house of Thionville, to be carried away.—This step appeared to them the height of imprudence, at a moment when the community was obliged to arm itself to watch over the public safety.

The following morning it was decided by a great majority, that there should be a declaration of rights separate from the constitution. The sitting of the evening was impatiently expected, and the opposers of a new proclamation flattered themselves, that they should secure the general suffrage, by making it appear, that patriotism demanded great sacrifices; and that instead of the vain formality of an exhortation, soon despised by the people, it was necessary to carry real offerings to the altar of peace.—This was the purport of a speech made by one of the nobles, the viscount de Noailles; who showed, in a very forcible manner, 'that the kingdom, at this moment, fluctuated between the alternative of the destruction of society, or of a government which would be admired and imitated by all Europe. How is this government to be obtained?' said he, 'how are the relaxed ties of society to be strengthened? By calming the people,' he continues, by letting them see, that we are really employed for their good; and that we resist them only where it is manifestly conducive to their interest, that they should be resisted.—To attain then this tranquillity, so necessary, I propose:

'1st. That it be declared, before the proclamation digested by the committee, that the representatives of the nation have decided to levy the impost, henceforward, in proportion to the income of each individual.

'2dly. That all the public charges shall, in future, be equally supported by the whole community.

'3dly, That all the feudal claims shall be redeemable, on a fair valuation.

‘4thly, That all the manorial claims, the *mains-mortes,* and other personal services, shall be done away, without any ransom.

‘5thly. That the manorial rents in poultry, and other kinds of provision, shall be redeemable by the proprietor or contractor, at a just valuation.’

The duke d‘Aiguillon seconded this motion, which had been warmly applauded; or rather made another tending to the same end. For dreading the suppression of his pension, when the *Livre Rouge* should be reviewed, he suddenly, from being a minion of the old court, became a loud patriot. And further to evince his zeal in the cause of liberty, he declared, ‘that the insurrection found it’s excuse in the vexations to which the people were subject. The lords of manors,’ he observes, ‘seldom commit the excesses of which their vassals complain; but their agents are often devoid of humanity, and the wretched husbandmen, subject to the barbarous feudal laws still in force, groan under the restriction to which they become the victims. At this happy era, when united for the public good, and disengaged from all personal interest, we are going to labour for the regeneration of the state, it seems to me, gentlemen, that it is necessary, before establishing this constitution, so desired by the nation, to prove to all the citizens, that our intention is to establish, as soon as possible, that equality of rights which alone can assure their liberty.’

It too frequently happens, that men run from one extreme to another, and that despair adopts the most violent measures. The french people had long been groaning under the lash of a thousand oppressions; they were the hewers of wood, and drawers of water, for the chosen few. It was, therefore, to be apprehended, after they had once thrown off the yoke, which had imprinted on their character the hateful scars of servitude, that they would expect the most unbridled freedom, detesting all wholesome restraints, as reins they were not now bound to obey. From observing, perhaps, that this was the disposition of the times, the political empiries have continually inflamed the soibles of the multitude, by flattering them. Thus the nobility, whose order would probably lose most by the revolution, made the most popular motions, to gain favour with the people; tickling the spirit they could not tame. Thus also we have seen the desperate leaders of factions selecting ingeniously the terms *sans-culottes, citoyen,* and *egalité,* in order to cajole the minds of the vulgar; and hence it has happened, that, in proportion as this cajolery was more highly seasoned, the power of ruling has descended to the most desperate and impudent of the smatterers in politics; whilst public anarchy, and private discord, have been productive of the dreadful catastrophes, and wanton outrages, which have given such home thrusts to the dignity of freedom.

The feudal claims that insult humanity, and show how near man is to the brute creation when laws are first made, were afterwards attempted to be enumerated; but a general cry of indignation and horrour prevented the deputy from finishing the frightful picture of human debasement and brutality. The vestiges of these direful oppressions, however, were still held dear by these very men, who, not having the compass of morality to direct their politics, were humane rather through weakness of nerves than foundness of understanding.

Be this as it may, the motion of the viscount de Noailles excited a sudden enthusiasm, mixed with anger. The members of the privileged orders, like children, seemed to say, by their actions, if you force me to give up this toy, it is fair that you should resign your sugar-plumb.—One gave a blow in the face; and the retort courteous was a back-handed stroke. For a member, that the duke d'Aiguillon should not be generous at the expence of others, proposed the *immediate* suppression of all places and emoluments granted so profusely by the court, as the heaviest burthen of the people—because obliged to support with their necessaries the luxuries of the great; who, detained as a kind of guards at court, were not only prevented from enlivening the provinces by their presence, but distressed them by drawing away their produce. Distinguishing, however, between the pensions obtained by intrigue, and those that were the reward of actual services,—he moved, that the former should be suppressed, and the latter reduced.

A motion was then made, that not only feudal rights, but all the jurisdiction of the lords of manors, established on the same arbitrary ground, should be abolished.

The president now, according to rule, perceiving that no one attempted to speak against the motion, was proceeding to put it to the vote—but he paused, reproaching himself for attempting to put an end to such an interesting discussion before such among the clergy, as wished to speak, had had an opportunity of declaring their sentiments.

This artful compliment roused the bishop of Nancy to declare, 'that, the continual and sympathizing witnesses of the misery of the people, the clergy undoubtedly sighed after an opportunity to contribute to their relief; and that the motion anticipated their desire: yet, to show their entire approbation of it, he must be permitted to propose in addition, that the price of the ransom of ecclesiastical feudalities should not be converted to the profit of the actual incumbent; but thrown into a fund for the relief of the poorer part of the body.'

The bishop of Chartres, after approving of the sacrifices already made, demanded, that the suppression of the game laws should be joined to them. This worthy prelate painted the injustice of those laws, not less absurd than oppressive, which force the farmer to be the tranquil spectator of the ravages of his harvest; condemning him to endure cruel punishments, if he follow the first impulse of nature, which would lead him to kill the animals that injure him. A number of the nobility concurred in these sentiments; for who would be out-done in heroism? and demanded the renunciations of these unnatural privileges.

The president de Saint-Fargeau now rose, to demand an explanation relative to the taxes of which the clergy and nobility offered to divide the weight. 'We have given,' said he, 'hopes to the people; but we ought to give them something more substantial; we have decreed, that, provisionally, the taxes should continue to be paid as they have been hitherto; that is to say, we have reserved to the clergy and the nobility the benefit of their exemptions, till they are expressly revoked.—Why do we delay to pronounce this revocation, so strictly imposed in almost all our instructions?—I propose, therefore, that not only for the last six months, but from the very commencement of

the year, all privileged persons, without exception, support their proportional part of the public impost.'

As the discussion of the propositions of the viscount de Noailles advanced, the necessity of effacing all the traces of servitude became more and more obvious; and all the members seemed eager to point out to their colleagues the new sacrifices, that ought to be made to the good of their country. One demanded the suppression of the exclusive right to warrens;—another that of fisheries; a third the sale of offices, and that justice should be administered gratuitously.

The parish priest of Soupes, in the name of his brethren, joined the oblations of the poor to the hecatombs, of which the most part cost nothing to those who proposed them; 'he declared, that, animated by a desire to contribute to the relief of the people, they would relinquish, from the present time, all their casual (or surplice) fees.' This offer, made with great simplicity of heart, affected the assembly; nor could a very different proposal, made by the duke du Châtelet, respecting the buying up of the tithes, efface it entirely.

The transition to gaiety, when a member asked permission to offer also his sparrow, was very natural in a people, who always mix a degree of sarcastic pleasantry, the good-humoured face of which first appears, with the most serious things. However, after the laughter ceased,—he continued to make his demand more seriously, by observing, that an object, trifling in appearance, was a real grievance to the husbandmen; he moved, therefore, for the total demolition of all the *dove-cotes* throughout the kingdom.

The respectable duke de la Rochefoucault, after having applauded all these propositions, remarked, that the king had given the example of freeing the serfs in his demesnes; and that the moment was come, to extend this benefit to all the kingdom. This benevolent citizen did not stop here; but added a wish, that, before the close of the sessions, the assembly would take into consideration the sate of the unhappy victims of covetousness, retained in slavery under another hemisphere.

A member now made a motion, that excited testimonies of the most sincere satisfaction from the assembly; it was to augment the stipends of the parish priests, the most respectable part of the clergy.

Several dignitaries of the church, possessing two or more benefices, unwilling to be left behind in generosity, followed with a declaration, that, conformable to the canons, they were resolved to limit themselves to a single one.

The deputies of the provinces enjoying peculiar privileges receiving a hint, that the appellation of french citizens, all partaking the same rights, was the most glorious they could bear, immediately came forward to renounce them. A number of propositions, more or less important, brought up the rear. The suppression of the first fruits; the rights of wardenship; and the abrogation of those barbarous vows, which fetter unfortunate beings for life.—In short, full and entire liberty for the non-catholics.—Admission of all the citizens into all offices, ecclesiastical, civil, and

military.—Abolition of the plurality of ecclesiastical pensions.—And then, not forgetting their national character, it was proposed, that a medal should be struck in commemoration of this night* ; and a decree also passed, conferring gratuitously on the king the august title, it might favour of a style that scarcely befits the dignity of history, to say *nick-name,* of restorer of french liberty. A deputation was accordingly appointed to carry this new mark of homage to the king, and to request his presence at a solemn *Te Deum,* to be celebrated throughout the kingdom.—And behold night closed on the renowned 4th of august!

It is not possible, says a journalist of the day, to give a distinct description of the scenes which were continually shifting during this sitting.—The vivacity of the sentiments, the quick transition from a generous emotion to an epigrammatical sensation, the disorder which made sensibility predominate over legislative dignity—the reciprocal mistrust, and the combat of generosity—all diversified by the amiable and seducing enthusiasm, so characteristic of the nation, made this an epocha in the history of the revolution, on which the contemplative mind, accustomed to consider the varied character of man, will ponder.

Another observation, also, naturally occurs; for it is just to remark, as a proof of the crudeness of the political notions, not to mention principles, of these legislators, that all talked of *sacrifices,* and boasted of generosity, when they were only doing common justice, and making the obvious practical comment on the declaration of rights, which they had passed in the morning.—If such were the rights of man—they were more or less than men, who with-held them; and the resignation, rather a resumption of their reason than a sacrifice of their property, was called for, the moment they acknowledged the sovereignty of the people by becoming their representatives.

It is very possible, that the next morning the different parties could scarcely believe, that they had more than the imperfect recollection of a dream in their heads. So quick, indeed, had been the determinations of the meeting, which encroached on the midnight hour, that they had not the sober cast of thought to give them dignity. They seem in reality to have been mostly the effect of passion, of ambition, or a vain desire of vengeance; for those who were led only by enthusiasm, and the vanity of the moment, esteemed their conduct as highly extravagant, when they had time to cool. But the commons, who had the deepest views, knew to what they had urged them, and would not let them recede.

It is true, the abolition of these privileges and powers had been strictly enjoined, in the instructions given to the deputies by their constituents; but, it is doubtful, whether they would have been attended to, had not the most sagacious foreseen, that the neglect might occasion a civil war. Knowing, that then property would not be cautiously respected, they began by attacking that of their presumptuous adversaries; and actually surprised the assembly into the unanimous renunciation of all revenues arising from feudal dues, and even into the abolition of tithes. The nobility, also, who saw, that they should gain more by the suppression of tithes, than they should lose by the sacrifice of the obnoxious manorial fees, came into the same system. The steps likewise taken to increase the salaries of the indigent clergy, the most numerous part

of the body in the assembly, secured their influence. And by destroying the monopoly of municipal and judicial employments, the support of the cities was obtained.—Thus the national assembly, without a struggle, found itself omnipotent. Their only enemies were individuals, seemingly of importance, it is true, as they had been accustomed to lead the great corporate bodies; but what was their empire, when all their former subjects were withdrawn from their control? of these enemies, the church dignitaries were of the most consequence; but, after the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, it would have been impossible for the court, even supposing a counter-revolution, to provide for them; as they would have been a dead weight on the royalists.

Unfortunately, almost every thing human, however beautiful or splendid the superstructure, has, hitherto, been built on the vile foundation of selfishness; virtue has been the watch-word, patriotism the trumpet, and glory the banner of enterprize; but pay and plunder have been the real motives. I do not mean to assert, that there were not any real patriots in the assembly.—I know there were many. By real patriots, I mean men who have studied politics, and whose ideas and opinions on the subject are reduced to principles; men who make that science so much their principal object, as to be willing to give up time, personal safety, and whatever society comprehends in the phrase, *personal interest,* to secure the adoption of their plans of reform, and the diffusion of knowledge.

But most of the leaders of the national assembly were guided by the vulgar import of the word, a vain desire of applause, or deep schemes of emolument. The Lameths, for instance, who had been the obsequious slaves of the queen, were among the hottest advocates for popular power; and throughout the assembly there were traces of a similar spirit.

During the first struggle, the national assembly and the people were divided into republicans and royalists; but we shall find, from the moment all danger of disturbance appeared to be over, the higher class were receding from the patriots, and recruiting from the royalists, to form for themselves, under the appellation of the *impartiaux,* the elements of a growing aristocracy.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER III.

reflections on the members of the national assembly. secession of several pseudo-patriots. society ripe for improvement throughout europe. war natural to men in a savage state. remarks on the origin and progress of society. the arts—property—inequality of conditions—war. picture of manners in modern france.

The despotism of the former government of France having formed the most voluptuous, artificial characters, in the higher orders of society, makes it less extraordinary to find the leading patriots men without principles or political knowledge, excepting what they had casually gleaned from books, only read to while away an idle hour not employed in pleasure. So superficial indeed was their acquaintance with any subject that demanded thought—and so great the degeneracy of their manners, it was natural for every man of reflection to infer, that a considerable length of time must elapse before the new order of things, which they were about to create, could attain stability. But this was not a discouraging consideration, when it was obvious, that important advantages had already been gained by the people; and by the improvement of morals, which would necessarily follow, it was to be presumed, that the evils, the old system produced, would vanish before gradual amendments; whilst, by a practical knowledge of political and civil liberty, the great objects of the revolution would be ascertained; namely, just laws, and equal liberty.

The depravity of the higher class, and the ignorance of the lower respecting practical political science, rendered them equally incapable of thinking for themselves; so that the measures which flattered the foibles, or gratified the weakness of either, were sure to have great influence in producing a schism in the public mind; which gave an opportunity to the enemies of the revolution to impede it’s course. And the number of the lower class having it’s due weight, when they became free, the most daring innovators became the greatest favourites with the public, to whose will every prudential consideration was obliged to yield.

Much had been gained on the 4th of august by the nation: the old forms of feudal vassalage were completely overturned—and France then stood at the point the most advantageous in which a government was ever constructed.—She stood fair as the dawn of her liberty, having shaken off the prejudices of ages; and reason was tracing out the road, which leads to virtue, glory, and happiness—Still ambitious selfishness, melancholy drawback! governed too great a proportion of the assembly; and the nobles and clergy who had been averse to the junction of the orders now intriguing, every debate became a bitter or violent contest, in which the popular advocates continued to gain an ascendency.

This disposition to intrigue, and want of sincerity, so generally remarked in the French character, laid the foundation of universal distrust; and the coalesced parties, who had not been actuated by a love of liberty, or regard for the prosperity of the kingdom, but dexterously fell in with the spirit of the day, were not aware, that a

watchful, suspicious multitude, would be as likely to mistrust them in their turn, as the court, which had thriven on the ruin of their happiness. This was a blindness so gross, that it appears not a little wonderful, after considering the different characters, who succeeded each other in the ministry, or directed the helm of the state, that men should not acquire sufficient judgment to adopt the integrity of conduct, with which alone people in their senses, awake to their interest and rights, will ever be satisfied.

For a vain glorious ambition, mixing with the abortions of giddy patriotism, acts as the most fatal poison to political disquisitions, during seasons of public ferment. The solid views of deep thinkers are adapted to the spirit of the times, and the state of reason of their compeers. And if they find, that the current of opinion, in overturning inveterate prejudices, and the decayed walls of laws, that no longer suit the manners, threatens the destruction of principles the most sacred; they ought firmly to wait at their post, until, the fervour abating, they could, by diverting the stream, gradually restrain it within proper bounds.—But such patriotism is of slow growth; requiring both a luxuriant public soil, and to be fostered by virtuous emulation. Yet this emulation will never flourish in a country where intriguing finesse, supplying the place of exalted merit, is the surest ladder to distinction. It was by debasing artifices, under the old government, that men obtained favour and consequence; and whilst such men, men who were educated and ossified by the ancient *regimen,* act on the political stage of France, mankind will be continually distressed and amused by their tragic and comic exhibitions.

Art applied to art, and stratagem against stratagem, may produce, for a time, alternate defeats; but ultimately the most cunning will triumph.

Vanity had made every frenchman a theorist, though political aphorisms were never ascertained under the reign of tyranny or caprice. The sagacious part of the nation, it is true, clearly perceived, that the period was arrived, when a revolution was inevitable; but selfishness being incompatible with noble, comprehensive, or laudable views, it is not wonderful, keeping in sight the national foible, that at the meeting of the states-general every deputy had his particular plan to suggest. Few of the leaders embraced the same; and acting, without coalescing, the most violent measures were sure to be the most applauded. We shall find also, that some of the most strenuous advocates for reforming abuses, and establishing a constitution, when their favourite systems were exploded, peevishly retired in disgust: and by afterwards venting it, have hurried into action a race of monsters, the most flagitious that ever alarmed the world by the murder of innocents, and the mockery of justice; and whilst the profanation of her temple, besprinkled with blood, has branded with an indelible stigma the sanguinary brutes, the deserters cannot escape without a share of the odium.

Contemplating the progress of the revolution, a melancholy reflection is produced by observing, that almost every precipitate event has been the consequence of a tenacity and littleness of mind in the political actors, whilst they were affecting a roman magnanimity of conduct—to which they appear to have been as great strangers, as they were destitute of legitimate patriotism, and political science.

We have first seen Calonne, in order to secure his popularity and place, proposing an equalization of taxes; and, when he found that his consequence and power were lost, abandoning his country in disgust, and employing the most unwarrantable means to involve his fellow citizens in all the horrours of a civil war. We shall find, likewise, several other declaimers, for their subsequent conduct obliges me to consider them in no better light, when their plans were disregarded, if not acting the same shameful part, yet leaving their posts; their patriotism expiring with their popularity.—And it will be only necessary to keep in mind the conduct of all the leading men, who have been active in the revolution, to perceive, that the disasters of the nation have arisen from the same miserable source of vanity, and the wretched struggles of selfishness; when the crisis required, that all enlightened patriots should have united and formed a band, to have consolidated the great work; the commencement of which they had accelerated. In proportion as these desertions have taken place, the best abilities which the country contained have disappeared. And thus it has happened, that ignorance and audacity have triumphed, merely because there were not found those brilliant talents, which, pursuing the straight forward line of political economy, arrest, as it were, the suffrage of every well disposed citizen.—Such talents existed in France: and had they combined, and directed their views by a pure love of their country, to one point; all the disafters, which in overwhelming the empire have destroyed the repose of Europe, would not have occurred to disgrace the cause of freedom.

Every great reform requires systematic management; and however lightly weak daring heads may treat the gravity of such a remark, the pacific progress of every revolution will depend, in a very material degree, on the moderation and reciprocity of concessions made by the acting parties. It is true, that in a nation chiefly celebrated for wit so much prudence could scarcely be expected—yet that is not a sufficient reason for condemning all the principles, that produced the revolution: for liberty cannot be considered as belonging exclusively to any particular climate, or temper of mind, as a physical effect. It was peculiarly urgent, indeed, to form such a coalition, to counteract the dangerous consequences of old prejudices. The stubborn habits of men, whom personal interest kept firm to their ground, it was morally certain would interrupt the tranquil march of the revolution: it would have been prudent then for men, who agreed in the main objects, to have overlooked trifling differences of opinion, till they were secured: and of this several members seem to have been aware.*

Had the conduct of men been sincere, and had they really pursued that fraternity, about which they so continually declaimed; they might, in consolidating the rights of french citizens, have established every political advantage, which the then state of reason was capable of adopting for the immediate benefit of society. But resentment bursting forth, which had long lain concealed (the effect of servitude and contumely), joined with the vanity of excelling all other nations in the science of government, to produce an insolent audacity of conduct, which, aiming at overturning every thing, discouraged the wavering, and frightened the timid. Designing knaves then conceived the plan of rising to eminence by the accumulating foibles of the multitude, who, loosened from all restraint, were easily caught by the insidious arts of the most contemptible anarchists.

The object of those monsters, who were meditating the violation of the sacred ties of honour and humanity, was early perceived by the more penetrating; but instead of opposing themselves to their designs, they for the most part became initiated into their clubs; whilst others, more haughty, though perhaps less under the direction of principles,—if there were any among them,—emigrated, leaving their country verging towards the whirlpool of civil discord, and all it's concomitant wretchedness.

It is necessary for us to attend closely to these considerations, in order to be enabled to form a just opinion of the various revolutions which have succeeded each other:—because, from a superficial view of things of this nature, we frequently attribute to the passions, or innate turpitude of man, what was merely the effect of moral depravity. Hence it has happened, that so many of the admirers of the revolution, in its infancy, now talk of extravagant innovations, tending to overturn all the barriers of justice,—to trample on the feelings of humanity, and to destroy every thing splendid and beautiful,—the production of ages, industry, taste, and learning.

But this revolution did not interest frenchmen alone; for it's influence extending throughout the continent, all the passions and prejudices of Europe were instantly set afloat. That most favoured part of the globe had risen to an astonishing pre-eminence, though every where it's inhabitants have had to contend with distinctions the most unnatural, and prejudices the most veteran. But, having overcome those formidable obstacles to the happiness of her citizens, society seems to have arrived at that point of civilization, when it becomes necessary for governments to meliorate it's condition, or a dissolution of their power and authority will be the consequence of a wilful disregard of the intimations of the times. This is a truth, which the people have perceived; but which the parasites of courts, and the advocates for despotism have not been willing to believe. And besides, their support, it might be said existence, being attached to the continuation of those savage abuses, they have fought with unusual intrepidity in their defence. Thus wars have been the business of courts, in which they have artfully interested the passions of the people.

Men in a savage state, without intellectual amusements, or even fields or vineyards to employ them, depending for subsistance on the casual supply of the chace, seem continually to have made war, one with another, or nation with nation; and the booty taken from their enemies formed the principal object of contest, because war was not, like industry, a kind of abridgement of their liberty. But the social feelings of man, after having been exercised by a perilous life, flow over in long stories, when he reaches garrulous old age. Whilst his listening progeny wondering at his seats, their hearts are fired with the ambition of equaling their fire. His soul also warmed by sympathy, feeling for the distresses of his fellow creatures, and particularly for the helpless state of decrepit age; he begins to contemplate, as desirable, associations of men, to prevent the inconveniencies arising from loneliness and solitude. Hence little communities living together in the bonds of friendship, securing to them the accumulated powers of man, mark the origin of society: and tribes growing into nations, spreading themselves over the globe, form different languages, which producing different interests, and misunderstandings, excite distrust.

The invention of the arts now affords him employment; and it is in proportion to their extension that he becomes domestic, and attached to his home. For whilst they were in their infancy his restless temper, and savage manners, still kept alive his passion for war and plunder; and we shall find, if we look back to the first improvement of man, that as his ferocity wore away, the right of property grew sacred. The prowess or abilities of the leaders of barbarians gave them likewise an ascendency in their respective dynasties; which gaining strength in proportion to the ignorance of the age, produced the distinctions of men, from which the great inequality of conditions has originated; and they have been preserved long since the necessity has ceased to exist.

During the reign of ignorance, the disagreements of states could be settled only by combats; and the art of dexterously murdering seems to have decided differences, where reason should have been the arbitrator. The custom then of settling disputes at the point of the bayonet, in modern Europe, has been justified by the example of barbarians; and whilst fools continually argue from the practice of inhuman savages, that wars are necessary evils, courts have found them convenient to perpetuate their power: thus slaughter has furnished a plausible pretext for peculation.

Fortunately, in spite of the various impediments that have thwarted the advancement of knowledge, the blessings of society have been sufficiently experienced to convince us, that the only solid good to be expected from a government must result from the security of our persons and property. And domestic felicity has given a mild lustre to human happiness superiour to the false glory of sanguinary devastation, or magnificent robberies. Our fields and vineyards have thus gradually become the principal objects of our care—and it is from this general sentiment governing the opinion of the civilized part of the world, that we are enabled to contemplate, with some degree of certainty, the approaching age of peace.

All that could be done by a body of manners, without a soul of morals, to improve mankind, had been tried in France—The result was polished slavery; and such an inordinate love of pleasure, as led the majority to search only for enjoyment, till the tone of nature was destroyed. Yet some few really learned the true art of living; giving that degree of elegance to domestic intercourse, which, prohibiting gross familiarity, alone can render permanent the family affections, whence all the social virtues spring.

It is a mistake to suppose that there was no such thing as domestic happiness in France, or even in Paris. For many french families, on the contrary, exhibited an affectionate urbanity of behaviour to each other, seldom to be met with where a certain easy gaiety does not soften the difference of age and condition. The husband and wife, if not lovers, were the civilest friends and the tenderest parents in the world—the only parents, perhaps, who really treated their children like friends; and the most affable masters and mistresses. Mothers were also to be found, who, after suckling their children, paid a degree of attention to their education, not thought compatible with the levity of character attributed to them; whilst they acquired a portion of taste and knowledge rarely to be found in the women of other countries. Their hospitable boards were constantly open to relations and acquaintance, who, without the formality of an invitation, enjoyed there cheerfulness free from restraint; whilst more select circles closed the evening, by discussing literary subjects. In the

summer, when they retired to their mansion houses, they spread gladness around, and partook of the amusements of the peasantry, whom they visited with paternal solicitude. These were, it is true, the rational few, not numerous in any country—and where is led a more useful or rational life?

In the provinces, likewise, more simplicity of manners prevailing, their morals were more pure: though family pride, as in England, made the most noble house the royal family of each village, who visited the grand court only to import it's follies. Besides, in France, the women have not those factitious, supercilious manners, common to the english; and acting more freely, they have more decision of character, and even more generosity. Rousseau has taught them also a scrupulous attention to personal cleanliness, not generally to be seen elsewhere: their coquetry is not only more agreeable, but more natural: and not left a prey to unsatisfied sensations, they were less romantic indeed than the english; yet many of them possessed delicacy of sentiment.

It is, perhaps, in a state of comparative idleness—pursuing employments not absolutely necessary to support life, that the finest polish is given to the mind, and those personal graces, which are instantly felt, but cannot be described: and it is natural to hope, that the labour of acquiring the substantial virtues, necessary to maintain freedom, will not render the french less pleasing, when they become more respectable.

[Back to Table of Contents]

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

opinions on the transactions of the fourth of august. disorders occasioned by those transactions. necker demands the assembly's sanction to a loan. a loan decreed. tithes abolished. debate on the declaration of rights. the formation of a constitution. debate on the executive power. the suspensive vlto adopted. pretended and real views of the combination of despots against france. debate on the constitution of a senate. means of peaceably effecting a reform should make a part of every constitution.

The numerous offerings made to their country by the deputies, on the 4th of august, excited loud applause; but not without a mixture of sarcastic censure, and murmurs of disapprobation.

Some blamed the decrees, which, said they, have sacrificed the property of several thousand families to the vain desire of popularity.—Others complained of the neglect of those forms, by which every assembly, that aspires at putting some maturity into it's decrees, ought to direct it's debates;—they disapproved of an afternoon sitting;—of the rapid succession of subjects, not allowing time for any to be weighed;—of the multiplicity of them;—and of the continual acclamations, which rendered a calm discussion physically impossible.—'What!' they continued, 'shall the most important business always be treated with the levity, which characterized us before we deserved to be termed a nation? Eternally the sport of our vivacity, a happy turn decides with us the most serious point; and gay fallies are ever our substitutes for arguments.—We do madly the wisest things; and even our reason is always connected by some filament or other to inconsistency.—The national assembly had been a long time reproached for dwelling on trifling objects; and not attending sufficiently to the promotion of general good.—When suddenly—in a single night, more than twenty important laws are decided by an uproar. So much done, in such a short time, is so astonishing, that it appears like a dream.'

In reply it was said—'Why deliberate, when all are agreed?—Does not a general good always appear self-evident?—Was it not sufficient to declare these patriotic propositions to prove their justness?—The first person, who pointed out a new tribute to the public interest, only gave utterance to what we all before felt—there was no need then of discussion or eloquence, to make that be adopted, which had already been resolved by the greater number of the deputies, and commanded by the awful authority of the nation, in their mandates.—The assembly might have proceeded more methodically; but the result could not have been more advantageous. It seemed as if all the old effects, all the mouldering titles of feudal oppressions were then put up to auction; and the kind of mistrust of the different orders, which provoked reciprocal concessions, was still for the public good.'

The nobles and clergy of the provinces, who had not been carried away by the enthusiasm of the 4th of august, felt themselves particularly aggrieved. Those who

were recently noble did not like to mix again on equal terms in towns where they had received the homage paid to princes; and the people, eager to exercise their liberty, began to hunt down the game, regardless of the mischief they did to the standing corn. The very concessions of the nobility seemed to rouse the vengeance it ought to have allayed; and the populace vented their rage by burning the castles, which had been, as it were, legally dismantled of their feudal fortifications.

The clergy, in particular, complained, that their deputies had exceeded all bounds in voting away the private property of the body; for they would not allow, that tithes came within the description of feudal tenures. The want of provision, likewise, tended to make the people clamour about present grievances, without suffering the prospect of future comfort and respectability to have it's due force towards calming their minds. All, therefore, flew to arms, and three millions of men wearing the military garb, showed the natural disposition of the nation; and their present resolve, no longer to couch supinely under oppression. Many excesses were the consequence of this sudden change; and it is notorious, that the people, in some instances, became the instruments of the routed party; who continued to use every stratagem to render the nation dissatisfied with the revolution.

It is the nature of man, either in a savage state or living in society, to protect his property; and it is wise in a government to encourage this spirit. For the example now displayed by France is a notable proof of the inexpediency of standing armies, so long as the people have an interest in supporting the political system under which they live. The national assembly, aware of this, invited the militia and the municipalities, to endeavour to quell the disorders which did violence to persons and property; and they were particularly requested to take the most watchful care, that the convoys of wheat and flour were not stopped by the idle and lawless. For several of the most fatal tumults had originated from this cause.

The decrees of the 4th of august, were then brought forward to be examined and explained; and some attempts were made to argue away the essence of many of the vaunted sacrifices.—But the discussion was interrupted, to attend to business of a more pressing nature. The present state of the nation was most alarming; and the ministers, not knowing how to act under the new trammels of responsibility, came to represent to the assembly;—that the laws were without force;—the courts of justice without activity;—and they requested them, immediately to point out the coercive measures necessary to give to the executive authority the influence it had lost.—'For,' observed they, 'whether the irritated sense of the abuses, which the king wishes to reform, and you desire to proscribe for ever, have led the people astray; or, the declaration of an universal regeneration have shaken the various powers upon which the social order reposed—or whatever, in fact, be the cause, gentlemen, the truth is, that public order and tranquillity are disturbed in almost every part of the kingdom.'

Necker, afterwards, having explained the deplorable state of the finances, the extraordinary expences, and the diminution in the produce of the revenue, demanded, in the name of the king, that the assembly would sanction a loan of thirty millions of livres, to fulfil the engagements, and discharge the inevitable expenditure of the two approaching months; by which time, he presumed, the constitution would be nearly

established. Thinking also, that the patriotism of moneylenders was not to be reckoned upon, he proposed to add to the five per cent. he mentioned some allurements of speculation, to quicken the determination of the lenders—and he further inferred, that private interest would then tend to quiet the kingdom, whilst they were advancing in the formation of the constitution, which was to secure it's future tranquillity, and provide a permanent revenue.

This proposal produced the most warm and loud applause.—One member proposed, that the loan should instantly be voted in the presence of the minister, as a mark of their entire satisfaction — another offered six hundred thousand livres as a security, that he would raise the loan in his own province. This effervescence, so contagious, which is after all only physical sensibility, excited by a commotion of the animal spirits, proves, that a considerable length of time is necessary to accustom men to exercise their rights with deliberation; that they may be able to defend themselves from a kind of instinctive confidence in men; and to make them substitute respect for principles, to a blind faith in persons, even of the most distinguished abilities.—But to elevate a numerous assembly to this calm grandeur; to that permanent dignity, which represses the emotions of the moment, demands, it is probable, a more advanced state of reason.

Lally Tolendal supported the necessity of adopting the measures proposed for the obtaining a loan to supply the exigencies of government, which were become very urgent; and he refuted the objection, made by several deputies, who were against the grant, that in their instructions they had been strictly enjoined not to sanction any tax or loan before the constitution was formed. On this side Mirabeau ranged himself; for with all his great talents and superiority of genius, he could not avoid envying inferiour abilities, when they attracted the least popularity. He therefore, with plausible rhetoric, but shallow arguments, opposed the loan; and with great parade moved, that the deputies should offer their individual credit, instead of departing from the very letter of their instructions. This was one of those instances of pretended disinterestedness, or false patriotism, calculated to dazzle the people, whilst it involved the nation in fresh embarrassments.

The plan was referred to the consideration of the committee, appointed to make financial reports: and they accordingly acknowledged the necessity of a prompt supply; but thought, that the loan might now be obtained without the additional advantages, which Necker mentioned as a necessary bait. The discussion was then renewed with great heat, and even personality; till at last the interest of the loan was sixed at four and an half per cent.; and to slip through the knot they were afraid to cut, it was to be sanctioned under the wing of the decrees of the 4th of august.

It did not, however, prove productive; for in the course of three weeks, only two millions, six hundred thousand livres were subscribed. And this delay of business induced the assembly to adopt, with less scruple, another proposal for a fresh loan, instead of the one that did not promise to answer, at a rate less advantageous to the nation: or rather they yielded to the necessity, into which they had plunged themselves; and left the mode of obtaining it to the executive power, in spite of their former objection. But it was not an easy task to inspire the bankers and money-

holders with sufficient faith in the new government, to induce them to come forward to support it; besides, the previous discussion had converted caution into timidity; and the more desperate the state of the finances appeared, the stronger grew the suspicion, that threw insurmountable obstacles in the way of a temporary relief.

Settling the precise terms of the decrees, which were to abolish feudal vassalage, the question respecting the including of tithes was agitated with most earnestness; and the objections urged against the abolition were not only ingenious, but reasonable* . The abbé Sieyes spoke with great good sense, asserting, 'that the tithes were not a tax levied on the nation; but a rent-charge, for which a proper allowance had been made to the present possessors of the estates, to not one of whom they actually belonged. He, therefore, insisted, that, if the sacrifice were necessary, it ought to be made to the public, to relieve the people, and not to enrich the proprietors; who were, generally speaking, of the most opulent part of the community.' He advised the assembly to be on their guard, lest avarice, under the mask of zeal, should deceive them, leading the nation to reward rather than indemnify the nobility. The fact was, that the landed interest were only resigning obsolete privileges, which they scarcely dared exercise, to secure a solid advantage. Society has hitherto been constructed in such a vicious manner, that to relieve the poor you must benefit the rich. The present subject was a delicate one; the abolition of tithes would remove a very heavy vexatious clog, that had long hung on the neck of industry; yet it were to be wished, that it could have been settled in such a way as not to have secured a great pecuniary advantage to the nobility. For though it was physically impossible, to make this sacrifice to society at large immediately; because the proprictors, and more particularly the lease-holders of the estates, could not have redeemed the tithes, without distressing themselves to a degree, that would nearly have stopped the course of husbandry; not to mention agricultural improvements, so necessary in France, and to be looked for as the fruit of liberty:—yet a gradual tax on the original landlord would have prevented the nobility from being the great gainers by their so much extolled disinterestedness, in their fallacious sacrifice of privileges. Because, for all real property they were to be reimbursed; and for the obnoxious feudal tenures, such as personal servitude, with others they were ashamed to enumerate as being due from man to man, the tithes were an ample indemnity; or more properly speaking clear profit, except to those who parted with the plumes which raised them above their fellows with great regret. It was, indeed, very difficult to separate the evil from the good, that would redound to the nation by the doing away of this tax.—The clergy, however, cut the debate short, by resigning their right, offering to trust to the justice of the public for the stipend in return necessary to enable them to support the dignity of their function.

On the 13th, therefore, the whole discussion closed; for the other articles did not admit of much disputation. The president accordingly waited on the king, who received his new title with the decrees, to which he afterwards made some objections, though the assembly considered them as virtually sanctioned* .

A committee of five had been employed to digest a declaration of rights, to precede the constitution. The opinion of those, who thought that this declaration ought to have been kept back, has already been alluded to; yet the subject seems to require a little further consideration. And, perhaps, it will appear just to separate the character of the

philosopher, who dedicates his exertions to promote the welfare, and perfection of mankind, carrying his views byond any time he chooses to mark; from that of the politician, whose duty it is to attend to the improvement and interest of the time in which he lives, and not sacrifice any present comfort to a prospect of future perfection or happiness. If this definition be just, the philosopher naturally becomes a passive, the politician an active character. For though the desire of loudly proclaiming the grand principles of liberty to extend them quickly, be one of the most powerful a benevolent man, of every description of mind, feels; he no sooner wishes to obey this impulse, than he finds himself placed between two rocks.—Truth commands him to say all; wisdom whispers to him to temporize.—A love of justice would lead him to bound over these cautious restraints of prudence; did not humanity, enlightened by a knowledge of human nature, make him dread to purchase the good of posterity too dearly, by the misery of the present generation.

The debates respecting the adoption of the declaration of rights became very spirited; and much heterogeneous matter was introduced, to lengthen the discussion, and heat the disputants, as the different articles were reviewed. The article respecting religion particularly arrested the attention of the assembly, and produced one of those tumultuous scenes, which have so often disgraced their deliberations. The intolerant sentiments uttered; and even the insertion of some amendments, which could not, without a contradiction in terms, find a place in a declaration of rights; proved, that the assembly contained a majority, who were still governed by prejudices inimical to the full extent of that liberty, which is the unalienable right of each citizen, when it does not infringe on the equal enjoyment of the same portion by his neighbour* . The most sensible part of the assembly asserted, that religion ought not to be mentioned, unless to declare, that the free exercise of it was a right in common with the free utterance of all opinions; which came under civil cognizance only when they assumed a form, namely, when they produced effects, that clashed with the laws; and even then it was the criminal action, not the passive opinion, which was proscribed by the penalty of punishment.

In this declaration are found the principles of political and civil liberty, introduced by a very solemn exordium:—Declaring ‘that, as ignorance, forgetfulness, and contempt of the rights of men, are the sole causes of public grievances, and of the corruption of governments, the assembly had resolved to re-establish, in a solemn declaration, the natural, imprescriptible, and sacred rights of man; in order that this declaration, constantly present to all the members of the social body, may continually remind them of their rights, and of their duties; that, having it in their power every moment to compare the acts of the legislative and executive authorities with the purpose of all political institutions, they may the more respect them; and that the remonstrances of the citizens, founded, in future, on simple and incontestible principles, may always tend to support the constitution, and to promote the happiness of the whole community.’

Some temporary business, towards restoring public tranquillity, and to give force to the laws, insulted by the licentious conduct of men inebriated merely by the expectation of freedom, scented from a-far, being dispatched, the formation of a constitution became the standing labour of the assembly.

The first question naturally fell under this head—what share of power ought the king to be allowed to possess in the legislature? This was an important consideration for men, who were all politicians in theory; and many of whom, having suffered under the absolute sway of the king's ministers, still felt the smart of their oppression, and a contempt for the power that authorized their dominion: whilst the blind zealots for the indefeasible rights of kings, though they were ashamed of the phrase, heated the imagination of their party, by the most inflated encomiums on the benefits arising from extensive kingly prerogatives, and vapid remarks on the british constitution, and other forms of government, obviously to display their erudition. The most noisy indecorus debates ensued, and the assembly seemed to meet rather to quarrel than deliberate. A division the most decided consequently took place; which, under different appellations, and professing different principles, has ever since continued to convulse the senate; if the legislative assembly, or the convention, deserve a name so dignified.

In discussing whether the royal sanction should be necessary to the validity of the acts of the legislative body, a variety of extraneous subjects, and others prematurely brought forward, so entangled the main question, as to render it difficult to give a clear and brief account of the debates; without lending a degree of reasonableness to them, that the manner of arguing, rudely personal, and loudly uncivil, seemed to destroy. For good lungs soon became more necessary in the assembly than sound arguments, to enable a speaker to silence the confusion of tongues; and make known his opinion to men, who were eager only to announce their own. Thus modest men had no chance to be heard, though persuasion dwelt on their lips: and even Mirabeau, with his commanding eloquence, and justness of thought, procured attention as much by the thundering emphasis, which he gave to his periods, as by his striking and forcible association of ideas.

As a nation, the french are certainly the most eloquent people in the world; their lively feelings giving the warmth of passion to every argument they attempt to support. And speaking fluently, vanity leads them continually to endeavour to utter their sentiments, without considering whether they have any thing to recommend them to notice, beside a happy choice of expressions. Only thinking then of speaking, they are the most impatient of hearers, coughing, hemming, and scraping with their feet, most audibly, to beguile the time. Laying aside also, in the assembly, not only their national politeness, but the common restraints of civility; good manners seldom supply the place of reason, when they are angry. And as the slightest contradiction sets them on sire, three parts out of four of the time, which ought to have been employed in serious investigation, was consumed in idle vehemence. Whilst the applauses and hisses of the galleries increased the tumult; making the vain still more eager to mount the stage. Thus every thing contributing to excite the emotions, which lead men only to court admiration, the good of the people was too often sacrificed to the desire of pleasing them. And so completely was the tide of their affection for the king turned, that they seemed averse to his having any portion of legislative authority in the new constitution.

The duke de Liancourt divided the question respecting the share of power he was to enjoy as a part of the government. 1*st. Is the royal sanction indispensably necessary,*

to give the actual force of law to the decrees of the national assembly? 2*dly. Ought the king to bean integrant portion of the legislature?* In England the phrase *royal assent* has been adopted, as expressive of a positive act; but the french, rather choosing to distinguish the same act of power by a negative, fixed on the latin word *veto, I forbid.* And then it became a question, how far this *veto* ought to extend, supposing the prince to be invested with it.—Was it decisively to obstruct the enaction of a law passed by the legislative body? or only to suspend it, till an appeal could be made to the people by a new election?

The assembly in this instance seem to have acted with strange confusion of mind, or a total ignorance of the nature of a mixed government: for either the question was nugatory, or a king useless. Lally-Tolendal, Mounier, and Mirabeau, argued for the absolute *veto.*—'Two powers,' says Mirabeau, 'are necessary to the existence of the body-politic, in the orderly discharge of it's functions:—To will—and to act. By the first, society establishes the regulations which ought all to conspire to one end—the good of all:—By the second, these regulations are carried into execution; and public authority is exerted, to make society triumph over the obstacles, which might arise from the opposite wills of individuals. In a great nation, these two powers cannot be exercised by the people: whence comes the necessity of representatives, to exercise the faculty of willing, or the legislative power; and also of another species of representation, to exercise the faculty of acting; or, the executive power.'

He further insists, that 'the possession of this power is the only way to render a king useful, and to enable him to act as a check on the legislative body: the majority of which might tyrannize in the most despotic manner, even in the senate, to the very expulsion of the members, who dared to thwart the measures they could not approve. For under a weak prince, a little time and address alone would be necessary, to establish legally the dominion of an army of aristocrats; who, making the royal authority only the passive instrument of their will, might replunge the people into their old state of debasement.

'The prince, therefore, being the perpetual representative of the people, as the deputies are their representatives elected at certain periods, is equally their safe-guard.

'No person exclaims against the *veto* of the national assembly; which is, in reality, only a right the people have confided in their representatives, to oppose every proposition, that would tend to re-establish ministerial despotism. Why then object to the *veto* of the prince, which is but another right, especially confided in him by the people, because he and they are equally interested to prevent the establishment of an aristocracy?'

He proceeds to prove, 'that, whilst the legislative body is respectable, the *veto* of the king cannot do harm, though it is a salutary check on their deliberations; and granting, that the influence of the crown has a tendency to increase, a permanent assembly would be a sufficient counterpoise for the royal negative. Let us,' he concludes, 'have an annual national assembly, let ministers be made responsible; and the royal sanction, without any specified restrictions, but, in fact, perfectly limited, will be the

palladium of national liberty, and the most precious exercise of the liberty of the people.'

Having suffered by the abuse of absolute power, many of the deputies, afraid to entrust their constitutional monarchs with any, opposed the *veto;* lest it should palsy the operations of the national assembly, and bring back the old despotism of the cabinet. The discussion likewise extending beyond it's walls, was as superficially and as warmly treated by those, who thought only of the old government, when they talked of framing a new one. And as the people were now led by hot-headed men, who found it the shortest way to popularity, to deliver exaggerated elogiums on liberty, they began to look for a degree of freedom in their government, incompatible with the present state of their manners; and of which they had no perfect idea. It is not then surprising, that it should become a mark of patriotism, to oppose the *veto;* though Mirabeau never gave a stronger proof of his, than in supporting it; convinced that it was the interest of the people he was espousing, whilst he risked their favour.

The will of the public was, in reality, so decided, that they would scarcely allow the *veto* to be mentioned; and the assembly, to steer a middle course, adopted the *suspensive veto;* after considering some other important elements of the constitution, which seemed to them to be intimately connected with the royal prerogative.

Certainly a few of the most judicious deputies must have perceived the impolicy of the *suspensive veto;* and they could only have agreed to fall into the measure, under an idea that the minds of the people not being completely ripe for a total change of government—from absolute despotism to complete republicanism, it was politically necessary still to maintain the shadow of monarchy. 'To assign,' says one of the deputies, 'a term to the *veto,* is at last to force the king to execute a law of which he disapproves: and making him thus a blind and passive instrument, a secret war is fomented between him and the national assembly. It is, in short, to refuse him the *veto;* though those who refuse it have not the courage openly to say, that France has no longer any need of a king.'

But, from the commencement of the revolution, the misery of France has originated from the folly or art of men, who have spurred the people on too fast; tearing up prejudices by the root, which they should have permitted to die gradually away. Had they, for example, allowed the king to have enjoyed the share in the government promised by the *absolute veto,* they would have let him gently down from the altitude of unlimited sway, without making him feel the ground he lost in the descent. And this semblance of his former authority would have gratified him; or rather, breaking his fall, have induced him to submit patiently to other restraints, less humiliating to him, though more beneficial to the people. For it is evident from experience, and might have been foreseen, that the determination on this question was one grand source of the continual bickerings of the assembly with the court and ministry; who took care to make the king see, that he was set up as an idol, merely to receive the mock respect of the legislative body, till they were quite sure of the people.

Could it, indeed, have been ascertained, that Louis, or rather the queen, would have tamely born with such a diminution of power, this measure might have been deemed

prudent; because it was then morally certain, that the monarchy would have expired naturally with the dissolution of the king. But, when the pride and restless spirit of the queen were well known; and that it was probable, from the whole tenour of her former life, she would contrive to have the ministry composed of the most dissolute and headstrong men; it must appear the height of folly only to have lest the king the power of perplexing their proceedings, after they had piqued his pride. And when, to give, as it were, efficiency to the conspiracies, which would naturally be formed by the courtiers, to recover the authority rest from them, we find they afterwards voted such an enormous sum to defray the civil list, as was sufficient to move like puppets hundreds of the corrupt french; it must be confessed, that their absurdity and want of discernment appear not less reprehensible, than the subsequent conduct of the court flagitious.

The constitutional committee had given it as their opinion, that the contested *veto* did not concern the national assembly then existing; which, being a constituting body, it was their duty to see that the constitution was accepted, not sanctioned. This report carries with it an air of imbecility, which renders it almost incredible: for, if the assembly were determined to oblige the king to accept their decrees, they had better have told him so with becoming dignity, and made provision for his retiring from a post in which he was useless. Instead of this, he was in a manner shuffled off the throne; and treated with cruelty as well as contempt. It would have been at least ingenuous, and might be deemed magnanimous, had they allowed him to retire with a third of the stipend, which they afterwards voted him, when he continued to appear like a theatrical king, only to excite the pity of the vulgar, and to serve as a pretext for the despots of Europe to urge in justification of their interference. The liberating an imprisoned monarch was a plausible motive, though the real one was obviously to stop the progress of principles, which, once permitted to extend themselves, would ultimately sap the foundation of their tyranny, and overturn all the courts in Europe. Pretending then only to have in view the restoration of order in France, and to free an injured king, they aimed at crushing the infant brood of liberty.

Similar sentiments must have occurred to every thinking person, who ever seriously reflected on the conduct of the germanic courts, which has actually destroyed the tranquillity of Europe for centuries past. War is the natural consequence of their wretched systems of government.—They are supported by military legions; and without wars they could not have veteran soldiers. Their aggrandisement then, and half-lived pleasures, cast in a mould of ceremony, spring out of the miseries, and are fostered by the blood of human beings; whom they have sacrificed with as much *sang froid,* sending them in herds to slaughter, as the hard-hearted savage romans viewed the horrid spectacle of their prize-fighters; from the bare idea of which the mind turns, disgusted with the whole empire, and particularly with the government that dared to boast of it's heroism and respect for justice, when not only tolerating, but encouraging such enormities.

To the sympathizing princes of the continent, therefore, the king should have been given up: or, if it were necessary to humour the prejudice of the nation, and still suffer frenchmen to have a most christian king, or *grand monarque,* to amuse them by devouring capons or partridges before them; it would have been but just, both in

reason and policy, to have allowed him such a portion of liberty and power, as would have formed a consistent government. This would have prevented those clamours, which were sure to draw together an host of enemies, to impede the settlement of rational laws; flowing from a constitution, that would peaceably have undermined despotism, had it been allowed gradually to change the manners of the people. Though had this power been granted, it might have been productive perhaps of great inconveniences; as it is not likely, that a court accustomed to exercise unbridled sway would contentedly have co-operated with the legislature, when possessing only reasonable prerogatives.

Some apprehensions of this kind may have occurred to the assembly: though it rather appears, that they were either influenced by a ridiculous pride, not being willing to take the british constitution, so far as it respected the prerogative, for their model; or intimidated by the people, who, during the long debate, had outrageously expressed their will, and even handed about a list of proscriptions, in which the *vetoists* were denounced as traitors worthy of death. Be this as it may, they determined on a half-way measure, that irritated the court without appeasing the people. Having previously decreed, that the national assembly should be permanent, that is always existing, instead of being dissolved at the close of every session, they resolved, that the *veto* of the king should suspend the enaction of a law only during two legislatures. ‘The wisdom of this law,’ says Rabaud, ‘was universally acknowledged:’ though the folly of it rather merited universal reprobation.

From the manner indeed, in which the assembly was constituted, it was to be dreaded, that it’s members would not long sustain the dignity, with which they commenced the career of their business: because the party, that opposed with such bitterness the junction of the three orders, still opposing with rancorous heat, and wily stratagems, every measure proposed by the really patriotic members, were indirectly seconded by the insincere and wavering; who, having no motive to govern their conduct, but the most detestable selfishness, the offspring of vanity or avarice, always took the side best calculated to gratify the crude wishes of the multitude. And this unyoked multitude, now suddenly initiated into the science of civil and natural rights, all become consummate politicians, began to control the decisions of a divided assembly, rendered timid by intestine broils.

There were besides many circumstances, which tended to make any attempt to counteract this influence very difficult. At the meeting of the states-general, the whole court-party, with the greater proportion of both the nobility and clergy, were in opposition to the third estate: and though the number of the latter was equal to that of the other two orders, they had also to contend with the inveterate prejudices of ages. The court had thought only of devising means to crush them; and had the soldiery acted with the blind zeal common to men of this profession, it would of itself have been sufficient to have completely disconcerted their views. This conduct of the cabinet, and the discovery of the atrocious conspiracy, which had been formed against the people and their idolized representatives, provoking the resentment and vengeance of the nation, palsied all authority, and rendered the laws that had emanated from it contemptible. To oppose this torrent of opinions, like an impetuous current, that after

heavy rains, defying all resistance, bears away on it's raging bosom every obstacle, required the most enlightened prudence and determined resolution.

So much wisdom and firmness seldom fall to the lot of any country: and it could scarcely have been expected from the depraved and volatile french; who proudly, or ignorantly, determining to follow no political track, seem to have fixed on a system proper only for a people in the highest stage of civilization:—a system of itself calculated to disorganize the government, and throw embarrassments into all it's operations. This was an errour so gross, as to demand the severest animadversions. For this political plan, ever considered as utopian by all men who had not traced the progress of reason, or calculated the degree of perfectibility the human faculties are capable of attaining, was, it might be presumed, the most improper for the degenerate society of France. The exertions of the very admirers of the revolution were, likewise, far from being permanent; and they could hardly have been expected to possess sufficient virtue to support a government, the duration of which they at least feared would be short. The men termed experienced believed it physically impossible; and no arguments were cogent enough to convince them of the contrary: so that, they leaving the task to mock patriots and enthusiasts, a fresh odium has been thrown on principles, which, notwithstanding are gaining ground. Things must be left to their natural course; and the accelerating progress of truth promises to demonstrate, what no arguments have hitherto been able to prove.

The foundation of liberty was laid in the declaration of rights; the first three articles of which contain the great principles of natural, political, and civil liberty.—First, that men are born, and always continue, free, and equal in respect to their rights:—civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility. Secondly, the end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man: which rights are—liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression. Thirdly, the nation is the source of all sovereignty: no body of men, no individual, can then be entitled to any authority, which is not derived from it. The first article, establishing the equality of man, strikes at the root of all useless distinctions:—the second, securing his rights against oppression, maintains his dignity:—and the third, acknowledging the sovereignty of the nation, confirms the authority of the people.—These are the essential points of a good government: and it is only necessary, when these points are ascertained by a nation, and solemnly ratified in the hearts of it's citizens, to take care, in the formation of a political system, to provide against the abuse of the executive part; whilst equal caution should be observed, not to destroy it's efficiency, as on that depend it's justice, vigour, and promptitude. The other articles are explanatory of the nature and intent of these rights, and ought to have had more attention paid to them, when the structure was raised, to which they served as a basis.

Whilst defining the authority of the king, or rather determining, that he should have no authority, unless the option of disturbing the legislation deserve that name, they debated the question of two chambers with equal inconsideration, and all the puerile self-sufficiency of ignorance. The opposers of two chambers, without allowing, that there was any political wisdom in appointing one house of representatives to reconsider the resolves of the other, ridiculed the idea of a balance of power, and

instanced the abuses of the english government to give force to their objections. At the same time fearing, that the nobles of the court would contend for an hereditary senate, similar to the british house of peers; or, at least, for a seat during life, paramount to the representatives who they determined should be elected every two years; they sought to bring the business to a speedy issue. The very division of the nobility served to hasten it, and strengthened the arguments of the popular members; who finding that they could rely on the concurrence of the parish priests, whose wishes in favour of the unity of the assembly were quickly betrayed by the opinions of their leading orators, demanded the decision of a question, that had been agitated in the most tumultuous manner.

Mirabeau wished to prove, that the decision of the question respecting the permanency of the assembly had prejudged that of the two chambers; and the plan of a senate, proposed by the constitutional committee, only excited fresh apprehensions, that the ancient hydra would again rear it's head. They represented this senate as the cradle of a new aristocracy; as a dangerous counterpoize to popular violence, because it would still foster the prejudices, which produced inequalities amongst men, and give continual play to the overbearing passions, that had hitherto degraded mankind. And to show previously their entire disinterestedness, as well as fear of allowing the exercise of power to become familiar, much less necessary to any members of the community, they unanimously voted, that for each legislature, the name given to the meeting of the representatives, a total change of the deputies should take place.

The very nobility, in fact, were far from being united in support of two chambers. The order was a numerous one: and to establish an equality of privileges, it was necessary, that they should all concur to elect the upper chamber, as the representatives of the whole body; whilst the nobles of the court, and of the ancient houses, secretly indulged the hope of establishing a peerage; which would not only raise them above the commons, but keep at a proper distance the upstart nobility, with whom they had heretofore impatiently jostled. There was even another cause of jealousy: for it was presumed, that the forty-seven nobles, who first joined the assembly, would now be rewarded. In short, the idle fears and more contemptible vanity of the different parties now operated so much in favour of an indivisible senate, that the question was decided by a great majority, to the intire satisfaction of the public, who were almost as eager for one chamber, as averse to the *veto.*

The deputies, who opposed the upper chamber to promote the good of society, did it from a belief, that it would be the asylum of a new aristocracy; and from a total ignorance, or obscurity of ideas, respecting it's utility. Whilst the oppressions of the feudal system being still present to the minds of the people, they considered a division of the legislative body as inconsistent with the freedom and equality they were taught to expect as the prime blessings of a new constitution. The very mention of *two chambers* carried them back to the old dispute, respecting the negative of the different orders; and seemed to subvert the revolution. Such fears, degenerating into weakness, can only be accounted for by recollecting the many cruel thraldoms, from which they had so recently escaped. Besides, the remembrance of their former servitude, and the resentment excited by the late struggle to prove they were men, created in their enthusiastic imaginations such a multitude of horrours, and fantastic images of new

dangers, as did not allow them to exercise the full powers of their reason. So that to convince them of the propriety of a new institution, and heat the supporters of it, nothing more was necessary, than to show, that it was the very reverse of those maintained by the partizans of the old government.

The wisdom of giving to the executive part of a government an absolute *veto* might very justly have been questioned; as it seems to be giving a power to one man to counteract the will of a whole people—an absurdity too gross to merit refutation. Still, whilst crowns are a necessary bauble to please the multitude, it is also necessary, that their dignity should be supported, in order to prevent an overweening aristocracy from concentrating all authority in themselves. This seems to have been expedient, likewise, as long as the manners of barbarians remained: as savages are naturally pleased with glass and beads, in proportion as they afford a striking contrast to the rude materials of their own fabrication.

In the progressive influence of knowledge on manners, both dress and governments appear to be acquiring simplicity; it may therefore be inferred, that, as the people attain dignity of character, their amusements will flow from a more rational source than the pageantry of kings, or the view of the fopperies exhibited at courts. If these have been supported hitherto by childish ignorance, they seem to be losing their influence, as the understanding of the world approaches to manhood: for, as they grow wiser, the people will look for the solid advantages of society; and watching with sufficient vigilance their own interest, the *veto* of the executive branch of the government would become perfectly useless; though in the hands of an unprincipled, bold chief magistrate, it might prove a dangerous instrument. In forming a representative plan of government it appears necessary then to take care only, that it be so constructed, as to prevent hasty decisions; or the carrying into laws dangerous, impolitic measures, which have been urged by popular declaimers, who are too apt to gain an ascendancy in a numerous assembly. Until the principles of governments become simplified, and a knowledge of them be disseminated, it is to be feared, that popular assemblies will often be influenced by the fascinating charms of eloquence: and as it is possible for a man to be eloquent without being either wise or virtuous, it is but a common precaution of prudence in the framers of a constitution, to provide some check to the evil.

Besides, it is very probable, in the same state of reason, that a faction may arise, which will control the assembly; and, acting contrary to the dictates of wisdom, throw the state into the most dangerous convulsions of anarchy: consequently, it ought to form a primary object with a constituting assembly, to prevent, by some salutary contrivance, the mischief flowing from such sources. The obvious preventative is a second chamber, or senate, which would not, it is most likely, be under the influence of the same faction; and it is at least certain, that it's decisions would not be directed by the same orators. The advantage would be more certain if business were not conducted in the two chambers in a similar manner. Thus by making the most numerous assembly the most active, the other would have more time to weigh the probable consequence of any act or decree, which would prevent those inconveniences; or, at least, many of them, the consequence of haste or faction.

This system in an old government is susceptible of improvement. The minds of young men generally having more fire, activity, and invention, it would be politically wise to restrict the age of the senators to thirty-five, or forty years; at which period of life they most likely would have gone through a certain routine of business; and become more sage, and steady, they would be better calculated to decide respecting the policy, or wisdom of the acts of the chamber of representatives.

It is true France was in such a state at the time of the revolution, that a like improvement could not have been instantly carried into execution, because the aristocratical influence was justly to be dreaded. The constituting assembly then should have remained indivisible; and as the members became in some measure acquainted with legislative business, they would have prepared senators for the upper chamber. All the future legislatures being divided into two chambers, a house of representatives, and a senate, the members of the national assembly might have been permitted to be elected for the senate, though they should not have attained the age prescribed; for the restriction needed not to have taken place until the government found it's level, and even then, the members of the preceding house of representatives might have been allowed to be returned for the senate.

It has been a common remark of moralists, that we are the least acquainted with our own characters. This has been literally the case with the french: for certainly no people stand in such great need of a check; and, totally destitute of experience in political science, it must have been clear to all men of sound understanding, that some such plan alone would have enabled them to avoid many fatal errours.

The first efforts of the national assembly were truly magnanimous; but the character of the men was too light, to maintain the same heroism, when not warmed by passion—too giddy, to support with grave dignity the splendour of sudden glory. Their vanity was also unbounded; and their false estimate of disinterestedness of conduct, whilst they betrayed puerility of sentiment, was not among the least of the misfortunes, which have befallen that unhappy country. Their hearts had been too long sophisticated, to suggest the best mode of communicating freedom to millions; and their heads were still less calculated to lay down a practicable plan of government, adapted to the state of knowledge of the age. So much so, that they seem to have selected from books only the regulations proper for a period of perfect civilization.

The revolutions of states ought to be gradual; for during violent or material changes it is not so much the wisdom of measures, as the popularity they acquire by being adapted to the foibles of the great body of the community, which gives them success.—Men are most easily led away by the ingenious arguments, that dwell on the equality of man, and these are always employed by the different leaders of popular governments.

Whilst the most ingenious theorists, or desperate partizans of the people, take advantage of this infirmity of our nature, the consequences must sometimes prove destructive to society, if they do not end in the most dreadful anarchy. For when the members of a state are not directed by practical knowledge, every one produces a plan

of polity, till the confusion becomes general, and the nation plunges into wretchedness, pursuing the schemes of those philosophers of genius who, advancing before their age, have sketched the model of a perfect system of government. Thus it happened in France, that Hume's idea of a perfect commonwealth, the adoption of which would be eligible only when civilization has arrived at a much greater degree of perfection, and knowledge is more generally diffused than at the present period, was nevertheless chosen as the model of their new government, with a few exceptions, by the constituent assembly: which choice doubtless proceeded from the members not having had an opportunity to acquire a knowledge of practical liberty. Some of the members, it is true, alluded to the improvements made by the americans on the plan of the english constitution; but the great majority, despising experience, were for forming, at once, a system much more perfect. And this self-sufficiency has produced those dreadful outrages, and attacks, made by the anarchists of that country, on personal liberty, property, and whatever else society holds sacred.

These melancholy considerations seem to me to afford irrefragable arguments, to prove that it is necessary for all governments, which have for their object the happiness of the people, to make the power of altering peaceably a fundamental principle of their constitution.

Still, if the attempt to carry prematurely into execution the sublime theory, which has occupied some of the best heads to form, have afforded an opportunity to superficial politicians, to condemn it as absurd and chimerical, because it has not been attended with immediate success, the advocates for the extension of truth and reason ought not to despair. For when we contemplate the slow improvement, that has been made in the science of government; and, that even the system of the british constitution was considered, by some of the most enlightened ancients, as the sublimest theory the human mind was able to conceive, though not reducible to practice, they should not relax in their endeavours to bring to maturity a polity more simple—which promises more equal freedom, and general happiness to mankind.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER II.

observations on the veto. the women offer up their ornaments to the public. debate whether the spanish branch of the boursons could reign in france. conduct of the king respecting the decrees of the fourth of august. vanity of the french. debates on quartering a thousand regulars at versailles. individuals offer their jewels and plate to make up the deficiency of the loan. the king sends his rich service of plate to the mint. necker's proposal for every citizen to give up a fourth of his income. speech of mirabeau on it. his address to the nation.

AFTER the national assembly had determined, that the legislative body should consist of one house, to be renewed every two years, they appear to have had some suspicion of the impolicy of the decree; but not allowing themselves time to comprehend the use of a senate taken from the body of the people, they attempted to silence the fears, some moderate men entertained, of the bad consequences which might arise from the decisions of an impetuous assembly without a check, by assuring them, that the delay, the *veto* would occasion, was a sufficient counterpoise. They represented the king's *veto* as the negative archetype of the national will; adding, that it would be the duty of the sovereign to examine with vigilance the justice or wisdom of their decrees; and by the exertion of his power prevent the hasty establishment of any laws inimical to the public good. So easy is it for men to frame arguments, to cover the homely features of their own folly—so dangerous is it to follow a refined theory, however feasible it may appear, when the happiness of an empire depends on it's success; and so inconsiderately did the national assembly act in this great business, that they did not wait even to determine the precise meaning of the word *sanction.*

If the king then represented the negative will of the nation, which the assembly pretended to say he did; and if he possessed the supreme wisdom and moderation necessary to guaranty that will, which supposing he did not, it was a folly too gross to require any comment; in the name of common sense—why was his *veto suspensive?*

The truth is obvious,—the assembly had not sufficient courage to take a decided part.—They knew, that the king and court could not be depended upon; yet they had not the magnanimity to give them up altogether. They justly dreaded the depravity and influence of the nobles; but they had not the sagacity to model the government in such a manner, as would have defeated their future conspiracies, and rendered their power nugatory; though they had the example of the Thirteen States of America before them, from which they had drawn what little practical knowledge of liberty they possessed.—But, no; the regeneration of France must lead to the regeneration of the whole globe. The political system of frenchmen must serve as a model for all the free states in the universe!—*Vive la liberté* was the only cry—and *la bagatelle* entered into every debate—whilst the whole nation, wild with joy, was hailing the commencement of the golden age.

The women too, not to be outdone by the roman dames, came forward, during this discussion, to sacrifice their ornaments for the good of their country. And this fresh

example of public spirit was also given by the third estate; for they were the wives and daughters of artizans, who first renounced their female pride—or rather made one kind of vanity take place of another. However, the offering was made with theatrical grace; and the lively applauses of the assembly were reiterated with great gallantry.

Another interruption had likewise occurred, of a more serious nature.—For after they had decreed, with an unanimous voice—That *the person of the king is sacred and inviolable,* that *the throne is indivisible;* that *the crown is hereditary, in the males of the reigning family, according to the order of primogeniture, to the perpetual exclusion of females,* a deputy proposed, that, before going any further, they should decide 'whether the branch reigning in Spain could reign in France, though it had renounced the crown of the latter kingdom by the most authentic treaties.'

Several of the most respectable members represented, that this was a delicate business, with which it was impolitic to meddle at present, and as unnecessary as imprudent. Mirabeau was of this opinion; but when he found, that much time was likely to be consumed in idle debates, and contemptible vehemence, he endeavoured to cut the matter short by moving a new question—namely, 'that no one could reign in France, who was not born in the kingdom.'

But nothing could prevent the agitation of the same subject for three days; prolonged either by the fears of one party, or the desire of another to embroil the assembly, and retard the formation of a constitution. Mirabeau made several severe, but just remarks, on the character of Louis XIV, whose ambition had produced the dispute; and reprobated with dignity, their manner of treating a people, as if they were the property of a chief. Should any difficulty arise, in future, he maintained, that the nation would then be competent to judge of it; and had an equal right to determine the succession, as to choose a new system of government.

The assembly, though generally so inattentive to the suggestions of sound policy, despising moderation, became now beyond measure scrupulous. Some deputies represented the danger of alienating to the english the commerce of Spain, by disgusting it's court; and others anticipated the intestine troubles, which a doubt respecting the unchangeable descent of the crown might produce. At last they resolved to add to the declaration, respecting the monarchy, that they did not mean to make the decree, *by any means prejudge the effect of renunciations.*

Whilst they were settling these things in the assembly, the refractory nobles and clergy were intriguing to prevent the king from giving his assent to the promulgation of the decrees of the 4th of august. The royal *sanction* had been demanded before the import of the word was scanned; and the court taking advantage of this ambiguity, made the king pretend he misunderstood the demand; and imagined that they merely asked for his opinion, and not to know his will. Instead then of a simple monosyllable, he replied by a memoire. He approved, in general, of the spirit of these determinations; but entered into an investigation, more or less copious, of every article. He weighed the advantages and inconveniences; and pointed out precautions and modifications, which appeared to him necessary to realize the former and prevent the latter. He objected particularly to the abolition of some rents; which, though

substitutes for personal service, were now actual property; he suggested some difficulty that might attend the abolition of tithes; and hinted, that the german princes, who had possessions in Alsace, secured to them by treaty, might resent the infringement. In answer to the last objection, a member observed, that the inhabitants of this province, who had long been sinking under the weight of these privileges, daily augmented by the connivance of ministers, had inserted an article in their instructions expressly demanding the abolition of this destructive system; which reduced them to despair, and forced them continually to emigrate. Several of the deputies wished to have the king's reply referred to the examination of a committee; yet, a great majority insisting, that the decrees of the 4th of august were not new laws, to be carried into force by the executive power, but abuses which it was absolutely necessary to clear away before the formation of the constitution, demanded their immediate promulgation. Accordingly they resolved, that the president should wait on the king and request him immediately to order the promulgation of the decrees; assuring him at the same time, that the national assembly, when considering each article separately, would pay the most scrupulous attention to the observations communicated by his majesty.

This imperative petition had the desired effect, and the king acceded, the 20th of september, to their will, sanctioning decrees he did not approve.

This was the first glaring instance of the constituting assembly acting contrary to it's pretensions; and the king, long in the habit of dissembling, always yielding to the pressure of remonstrances, no matter from what quarter they came, with criminal insincerity acknowledging himself a cipher, laid the foundation of his own insignificancy, by ordering the promulgation of decrees, which he believed were incompatible with justice, and might involve the french monarchy in disagreeable disputes with foreign princes, when peace was particularly necessary to calm it's internal convulsions.

If a chief magistrate be of any consequence to a state, his wisdom ought to appear in the dignity and firmness of his actions.—But, if he be considered as the fountain of justice and honour, and do not possess the abilities and magnanimity of a common man, in what a wretched light must he be viewed by the eyes of discernment and common sense?—And, if the framers of a constitution create a power that must continually act at variance with itself, they not only undermine the pillars of their own fabric, but they insert the scion of a disease the most destructive to truth and morals.

After complying with this compulsatory request, Louis, who, finding that he was left without any share of power, seems to have thought very little of his *suspensive veto,* determined to play a part that would give an air of sincerity to his present conduct, whilst his object was secretly to favour the efforts of the counter-revolutionists; and if possible effect his own escape.—But, in the mean time, he endeavoured to make such use of it as might prevent the total derangement of the old system, without unveiling his secret views, and intentions. It is difficult to determine which was the most reprehensible, the folly of the assembly, or the duplicity of the king. If Louis were without character, and controlled by a court without virtue, it amounted to a demonstration, that every insidious mean would be employed by the courtiers to

reinstate the old government; and recover, if possible, their former splendour and voluptuous ease. For, though they were dispersed, it was notorious to all France, nay, to all Europe, that a constant correspondence was kept up between the different parties, and their projects concerted by one of the most intriguing of disappointed men* . It was obvious, therefore, to Mirabeau, that the king ought to be gained over to the side of the people; and made to consider himself as their benefactor, in order to detach him from the cabal. But in this respect he was unfortunately over-ruled. This mixture of magnanimity, and timidity, of wisdom and headstrong folly, displayed by the assembly, appears, at the first view, to involve such a contradiction, that every person unacquainted with the french character would be ready to call in question the truth of those undeniable facts, which crowd on the heels of each other during the progress of the great events, that formed the revolution. A superficial glance over the circumstances, will not enable us to account for an inconsistency, which borders on improbability.—We must, on the contrary, ever keep in our thoughts, that, whilst they were directed in their political plans, by a wild, half comprehended theory, their sentiments were still governed by the old chivalrous sense of honour, which diffusing a degree of romantic heroism into all their actions, a false magnanimity would not permit them to question the veracity of a man, on whom they believed they were conferring favours; and for whom they certainly made great allowance, if they did not forgive him for countenancing plots, which tended to undermine their favourite system.

It is, perhaps, the characteristic of vanity, to become enamoured with ideas, in proportion as they were remote from it's conception, until brought to the mind by causes so natural, as to induce it to believe, that they are the happy and spontaneous flow of it's own prolific brain. Their splendour then eclipsing his judgment, the man is hurried on by enthusiasm and self-sufficiency, like a ship at sea, without ballast or helm, by every breath of wind: and, to carry the comparison still further, should a tempest chance to rise in the state, he is swallowed up in the whirlpools of confusion, into the very midst of which his conceit has plunged him; as the vessel, that was not prepared to stem the violence of a hurricane, is buried in the raging surge.

The occasions of remarking, that frenchmen are the vainest men living, often occur, and here it must be insisted on; for no sooner had they taken possession of certain philosophical truths, persuading themselves, that the world was indebted to them for the discovery, than they seem to have overlooked every other consideration, but their adoption. Much evil has been the consequence; yet France is certainly highly indebted to the national assembly for establishing many constitutional principles of liberty, which must greatly accelerate the improvement of the public mind, and ultimately produce the perfect government, that they vainly endeavoured to construct immediately with such fatal precipitation.

The consideration of several other articles of the constitution was continually interrupted, and not more by the variety of business, which came under the cognizance of the assembly, than by the want of a proper arrangement of them. Much time was lost in disputing about the choice of subjects of deliberation; and the order in which they ought to proceed. The business of the day was perpetually obliged to give place to episodical scenes; and men, who came prepared to discuss one question,

being obliged to turn to another, lost in some measure the benefit of reflection, and the energy, so different from the enthusiasm of the moment, with which a man supports a well digested opinion.

Two or three slight debates had arisen on the subject of quartering a thousand men, of the regular troops, at Versailles. The commandant of the guards had requested permission of the municipality; pointing out the necessity for the security of the town, the national assembly, and the person of the king. The necessity did not appear so obvious to the public, and, in fact, the demand seemed calculated to provoke the tumults, against which they were so officiously guarding. Mirabeau also observed, 'that the executive power had undoubtedly a right to augment the military force, in any particular place, when private information, or urgent circumstances, appeared to require it; and that the municipality had, likewise, a right to demand the troops they judged necessary; yet he could not help thinking it singular, that the ministers should have entrusted the municipality with a secret, which they did not communicate to the assembly, who might be supposed at least as anxious to take every precaution for the safety of the town and the king's person.' To these pertinent remarks no attention was paid; and a letter from the mayor of Paris, informing the assembly, that a great number of the districts of the metropolis had remonstrated against the introduction of regular troops into Versailles, to awe the national guards, was equally neglected; whilst a letter to the president, in the name of the king, informing him, that he had taken the different measures necessary to prevent any disturbances in the place where the national assembly were sitting, was thrown aside without any comment.

The loan still failing, several individuals made magnificent presents; sacrificing their jewels and plate, to relieve the wants of their country. And the king sent his rich service to the mint, in spite of the remonstrances of the assembly.—The disinterestedness of this action, it is absurd to talk of benevolence, may fairly be doubted; because, had he escaped, and the escape was then in contemplation, it would have been confiscated; whilst the voluntary offer was a popular step, which might serve for a little time to cover this design, and turn the attention of the public from the subject of the reinforcement of the guards to the patriotism of the king.

These donations, which scarcely afforded a temporary supply, rather amused than relieved the nation; though they suggested a new plan to the minister. Necker, therefore, incapable of forming any great design for the good of the nation, yet calculating on the general enthusiasm, which pervaded all descriptions and ranks of people, laid before the assembly the ruinous state of the finances, proposing at the same time, as the only mode of remedying the evil, to require of the citizens a contribution of one-fourth of their income. The assembly was startled by this proposal, but Mirabeau, believing that the people would now grant whatever their representatives required, prevailed on the assembly, by a lively representation of the perilous state of the kingdom, to adopt the only plan of salvation which had yet been suggested—insisting, that this was the only expedient to avoid an infamous national bankruptcy. 'Two centuries of depredations and pillage,' he exclaimed, 'have hollowed out an immense gulph, in which the kingdom will soon be swallowed. It is necessary to fill up this frightful abyss. Agreed!—Choose out the rich, that the sacrifice may fall on the fewer citizens; but, determine quickly! There are two

thousand notables, who have sufficient property to restore order to your finances, and peace and prosperity to the kingdom. Strike; immolate without pity these victims!—precipitate them into the abyss—it is going to close on them—ye draw back, with horrour—ye men! pusillanimous and inconsistent!—and see ye not in decreeing a bankruptcy, or, which is still more contemptible, rendering it inevitable, ye are sullied by an act a thousand times more criminal?'

But it is impossible to do justice to this burst of eloquence, in a translation; besides, the most energetic appeals to the passions always lose half their dignity, or, perhaps, appear to want the support of reason, when they are cooly perused.—Nothing produces conviction like passion—it seems the ray from heaven, that enlightens as it warms.—Yet the effect once over, something like a fear of having been betrayed into folly clings to the mind it has most strongly influenced; and an obscure sense of shame lowers the spirits that were wound up too high.

From the whole tenour of this speech it is clear, that Mirabeau was in earnest; and that he had fired his imagination, by considering this plan as an act of heroism, that would ennoble the revolution, and reflect lasting honour on the national assembly. In this extemporary flow of eloquence, probably the most simple and noble of modern times, mixed none of the rhetoric which frequently entered into his studied compositions; for his periods were often artfully formed;—but it was the art of a man of genius. He proposed to the assembly to address their constituents on this occasion; and he was accordingly requested to prepare an address for their consideration.

His address to the nation is, indeed, a master-piece; yet, being written to persuade, and not spoken to carry a point immediately, and overwhelm opposition, there is more reasoning in it; and more artful, though less forcible, appeals to the passions. And, though this expedient appears to be the most wild that folly could have blundered upon, the arguments ought to be preserved with which it was glossed over.

To expect a man to give the fourth of what he lived on; and that in the course of fifteen months, leaving it to him to make the estimate, was expecting that from virtue, which could only have been produced by enthusiasm. All the ancient acts of heroism were excited by the spur of present danger; and of this kind of virtue the french were equally capable; yet, though the plan afforded them an opportunity to give a splendid proof of their patriotism, it by no means answered; because, it being the effect rather of temper than of principle, selfishness had time to find a plausible pretext to elude it; and vanity is seldom willing to hide it's good works in the common measure.

As the removing the national assembly to Paris forms an epocha in the history of the revolution, it seems proper to close this chapter with Mirabeau's address.

'The deputies of the national assembly suspend a while their labours to lay before their constituents the wants of the state, and to call upon their patriotism to second the measures, which a country in danger demands.

‘It were betraying you to dissemble. Two ways are open—the nation may stride forward to the most glorious pre-eminence, or fall head-long into a gulph of misfortune.

‘A great revolution, the very plan of which some months ago would have appeared chimerical, has taken place amongst us, Accelerated by unforeseen circumstances, the momentum has suddenly overthrown our ancient institutions. Without allowing us time to prop what must be preserved, or to replace what ought to be destroyed, it has at once surrounded us with ruins.

‘Our efforts to support the government are fruitless, a fatal numbness cramps all it’s powers. The public revenue is no more; and credit cannot gain strength at a moment, when our fears equal our hopes.—This spring of social power unbent, has weakened the whole machine; men and things, resolution, courage, and even virtue itself, have lost their tension. If your concurrence do not speedily restore life and motion to the body-politic, the grandest revolutions, perishing with the hopes it generated, will mingle again in the chaos, whence noble exertions have drawn it; and they, who shall still preserve an unconquerable love of liberty, will refuse to unworthy citizens the disgraceful consolation of resuming their fetters.

‘Since your deputies have buried all their rivalry, all their contending interests, in a just and necessary union, the national assembly has laboured to establish equal laws for the common safety. It has repaired great errours, and broken the links of countless thraldoms, which degraded human nature: it has kindled the flame of joy and hope in the bosoms of the people, the creditors of earth and nature, whose dignity has been so long tarnished, whose hearts have been so long discouraged: it has restored the long-obscured equality of frenchmen, established their common right to serve the state, to enjoy it’s protection, to merit it’s rewards: in short, conformably to your instructions, it is gradually erecting, on the immutable basis of the imprescriptible rights of man, a constitution mild as nature, lasting as justice, and the imperfections of which, the consequence of the inexperience of it’s authors, will easily be repaired. We have had to contend with the inveterate prejudices of ages, whilst harassed by the thousand uncertainties which accompany great changes. Our successors will have the beaten track of experience before them; we have had only the compass of theory to guide us through the pathless desert. They may labour peaceably; though we have had to bear up against storms. They will know their rights, and the limits of their power: we have had to recover the one, and to fix the other. They will consolidate our work—they will surpass us—What a recompence! Who shall dare, mean while, to assign limits to the grandeur of France? Who is not elevated by hope? Who does not felicitate himself on being a citizen of it’s empire?

‘Such, however, is the crisis of the finances, that the state is threatened with dissolution before this grand order of things can find it’s centre. The cessation of the revenue has banished specie. A thousand circumstances hasten it’s exportation. The sources of credit are exhausted; and the wheels of government are almost at a stand. If patriotism then step not forward to the succour of government, our armies, our fleets, our subsistence, our arts, our trade, our agriculture, our national debt, our country itself, will be hurried towards that catastrophe, when she will receive laws only from

disorder and anarchy—Liberty would have glanced on our sight, only to disappear for ever, only to leave behind the bitter consciousness, that we did not merit the possession. And to our shame, in the eyes of the universe, the evil could be attributed solely to ourselves. With a soil so fertile, industry so productive, a commerce so flourishing, and such means of prosperity—what is this embarrassment of our finances? Our wants amount not to the expence of a summer's campaign—and our liberty, is it not worth more than those senseless struggles, when even victory has proved ruinous?

'The present difficulty overcome, far from burdening the people, it will be easy to meliorate their condition. Reductions, which need not annihilate luxury; reforms, which will reduce none to indigence; a commutation of the oppressive taxes, an equal assessment of the impost, together with the equilibrium which must be restored between our revenue and our expenditure; an order that must be rendered permanent by our vigilant superintendency.—These are the scattered objects of your consolatory perspective.—They are not the unsubstantial coinage of fancy; but real, palpable forms—hopes capable of proof, things subordinate to calculation.

'But our actual wants—the paralysis of our public strength, the hundred and sixty extra millions necessary for this year, and the next—What can be done? The prime minister has proposed as the great lever of the effort, which is to decide the kingdom's fate, a contribution proportional to the income of each citizen.

'Between the necessity of providing instantly for the exigencies of the public, and the impossibility of investigating so speedily the plan before us; fearing to enter into a labyrinth of calculations, and seeing nothing contrary to our duty in the minister's proposal, we have obeyed the dictates of our consciences, presuming they would be yours. The attachment of the nation to the author of the plan, appeared to us a pledge of it's success; and we confided in his long experience, rather than trust to the guidance of our speculative opinions.

'To the conscience of every citizen is left the valuation of his income: thus the effect of the measure depends on your own patriotism. When the nation is bursting from the nothingness of servitude to the creation of liberty—when policy is about to concur with nature in unfolding the inconceivable grandeur of her future destiny—shall vile passions oppose her greatness? interest stay her flight? and the salvation of the state weigh less than a personal contribution?

'No; such madness is not in nature; the passions even do not listen to such treacherous reckonings. If the revolution, which has given us a country, cannot rouse some frenchmen out of the torpor of indifference, at least the tranquillity of the kingdom, the only pledge of their individual security, will influence them. No; it is not in the whirl of universal overthrow, in the degradation of tutelary authority, when a crowd of indigent citizens, shut out from the work-shops, will be clamouring for impotent pity; when the soldiery disbanded will be forming itself into hungry gangs of armed plunderers, when property will be violated with impunity, and the very existence of individuals menaced—terrour and grief waiting at the door of every family—it is not amidst such complicated wretchedness, that these cruel and selfish men will enjoy in

peace the hoards which they denied their country. The only distinction that awaits them, in the general wreck, will be the universal opprobrium they deserve, or the useless remorse that will corrode the inmost recesses of their hearts.

‘Ah! how many recent proofs have we of the public spiritedness, which renders all success so easy! With what rapidity was formed the national militia, those legions of citizens armed for the defence of the country, the preservation of tranquillity, and the maintenance of the laws! A generous emulation has beamed on all sides. Villages, towns, provinces, have considered their privileges as odious distinctions, and solicited the honour of depriving themselves of peculiar advantages, to enrich their country. You know it: time was not allowed to draw up the mutual concessions, dictated by a purely patriotic sentiment, into decrees; so impatient was every class of citizens to restore to the great family whatever endowed some of it’s members to the prejudice of others.

‘Above all, since the embarrassment of our finances, the patriotic contributions have increased. From the throne, the majesty of which a beneficent prince exalts by his virtues, has emanated the most striking example.—O thou, so justly the dearly beloved of thypeople—king—citizen—man of worth! it was thine to cast a glance over the magnificence that surrounded thee, and to convert it into national resources. The objects of luxury which thou hast sacrificed, have added new lustre to thy dignity; and whilst the love of the french for thy sacred person makes them murmur at the privation, their sensibility applauds thy magnanimity; and their generosity will repay thy beneficence by the return it covets, by an imitation of thy virtues, by pursuing thy course in the career of public utility.

‘How much wealth, congealed by ostentation into useless heaps, shall melt into flowing streams of prosperity! How much the prudent economy of individuals might contribute to the restoration of the kingdom! How many treasures, which the piety of our forefathers accumulated on the altars of our temples, will forsake their obscure cells without changing their sacred destination! “This I set apart, in times of prosperity;” says religion; “it is fitting that I dispense it in the day of adversity. It was not for myself—a borrowed lustre adds nothing to my greatness—it was for you, and the state, that I levied this honourable tribute on the virtues of your forefathers.”

‘Who can avoid being affected by such examples? What a moment to display our resources, to invoke the aid of every corner of the empire!—O prevent the shame, with which the violation of our engagements, our most sacred engagements, would stain the birth of freedom! Prevent those dreadful shocks, which, in overturning the most solid institutions, and shattering the most established fortunes, would leave France covered with the sad ruins of a shameful hurricane. How mistaken are those, who at a certain distance from the capital contemplate not the links, which connect public faith with national prosperity, and with the social contract! They who pronounce the infamous term bankruptcy, are they not rather a herd of ferocious beasts, than a society of men just and free? Where is the frenchman who will dare to look his fellow citizens in the face, when his conscience shall upbraid him with having contributed to empoison the existence of millions of his fellow creatures? Are we the nation to whose honour it’s enemies bear witness, who are about to fully the

proud distinction by a bankruptcy?—Shall we give them cause to say, we have only recovered our liberty and strength to commit, without shuddering, crimes which paled even the cheek of despotism?

‘Would it be any excuse to protest, that this execrable mischief was not premeditated? Ah! no: the cries of the victims, whom we shall scatter over Europe, will drown our voice. Act then!—Be your measures swift, strong, sure. Dispel the cloud, that lowers over our heads, the gloom of which sheds terrour into the hearts of the creditors of France.—If it burst, the devastation of our national resources will be more tremendous than the terrible plague, which has lately ravaged our provinces.

‘How will our courage in the exercise of the functions, you have confided to us, be renewed! With what vigour shall we labour in forming the constitution, when secured from interruption! We have sworn to save our country—judge of our anguish, whilst it trembles on the verge of destruction. A momentary sacrifice is sufficient; a sacrifice offered to the public good, and not to the encroachments of covetousness. And is this easy expiation of the faults and blunders of a period, stigmatized by political servitude, above our strength? Think of the price which has been paid for liberty by other nations, who have shown themselves worthy of it:—for this, rivers of blood have streamed—long years of woe, and horrid civil wars, have every where preceded the glorious birth!—Of us nothing is required, but a pecuniary sacrifice—and even this vulgar offering is not an impoverishing gift:—it will return into our bosom, to enrich our cities, our fields; augmenting our national glory and prosperity.’

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER III.

reflections on the new mode of raising supplies. no just system of taxation yet established. paper money. necessity of gradual reform.

THE task certainly was very difficult, at this crisis, for a minister to give satisfaction to the people, and yet supply the wants of the state; for it was not very likely that the public, who had been exclaiming against the incessant demands of the old government, would have been pleased with new burdens, or patiently endured them. Still it is always the height of folly in a financier, to attempt to supply the exigencies of government by any but specific and certain means: for such vague measures will ever produce a *deficit,* the consequences of which are most pernicious to public credit and private comfort.

A man, who has a precise sum to live upon, generally takes into his estimate of expences a certain part of his income as due to the government, for the protection and social advantages it secures him. This proportion of his income being commonly the same from period to period, he lays it by for that particular purpose, and contentedly enjoys the remainder. But, should a weak minister, or a capricious government, call on him for an additional sum, because the taxes have proved unproductive, either through the inability of some of the members of the state, or that they were laid on articles of consumption, and the consumption has not been equal to the calculation; it not only deranges his schemes of domestic economy, but may be the cause of the most serious inconvenience.

A man who has a limited income, and a large family, is not only obliged to be very industrious to support them, but he is likewise necessitated to make all his arrangements with the greatest circumspection and exactness; because a trifling loss, by involving him in debt, might lead to his ruin, including that of his family. The rich man, indeed, seldom thinks of these most cruel misfortunes; for a few pounds, more or less, are of no real importance to him. Yet the poor man, nay even the man of moderate fortune, is liable to have his whole scheme of life broken by a circumstance of this kind, and all his future days embittered by a perpetual struggle with pecuniary vexations.

Governments, which ought to protect, and not oppress mankind, cannot be too regular in their demands; for the manner of levying taxes is of the highest importance to political economy, and the happiness of individuals. No government has yet established a just system of taxation* : for in every country the expences of government have fallen unequally on the citizens; and, perhaps, it is not possible to render them perfectly equal, but by laying all the taxes on land, the mother of every production.

In this posture of affairs, the enthusiasm of the french in the cause of liberty might have been turned to the advantage of a new and permanent system of finance. An able, bold minister, who possessed the confidence of the nation, might have

recommended with success the taking of the national property under the direct management of the assembly; and then endeavouring to raise a loan on that property, he would have given respectability to the new government, by immediately procuring the supplies indispensably necessary not only to keep it, but to put it in motion.

In times of civil commotion, or during a general convulsion, men who have money, and they are commonly most timid and cautious, are very apt to take care of it, even at the expence of their interest; and, therefore, it was to be presumed, that the monied men of France would not have been very ready to subscribe to the different loans proposed by the minister, unless the security had been obvious, or the speculative advantages exorbitant. But if Necker, whom the prudent usurer adored as his tutelar god, had said to the nation 'there is a property worth 4,700,000,000 *l.* independent of the property of the emigrants, take it into your immediate possession; and, whilst the sales are going on, give it as a guarantee for the loan you want. This just and dignisied measure will not only relieve your present necessities, but it will be sufficient to enable you to fulfil great part of your former engagements.' There would have been then no need of the eloquence of Mirabeau; reason would have done the business; and men, attending to their own interest, would have promoted the public good, without having their heads turned giddy by romantic flights of heroism.

The immediate and incessant wants of a state must always be supplied; prudence therefore, requires, that the directors of the finances should rather provide by anticipation for it's wants than suffer a *deficit.* The government being once in arrears, additional taxes become indispensable to bring forward the balance, or the nation must have recourse to paper notes; an expedient, as experience has shown, always to be dreaded, because by increasing the debt it only extends the evil. And this increasing debt, like a ball of snow, gathering as it rolls, soon attains a wonderful magnitude. Every state, which has unavoidably accumulated it's debt, ought, provided those at the helm wish to preserve the government, and extend the security and comforts of it's citizens, to take every just measure to render the interest secure, and to fund the principal; for as it augments, like the petrifying mass, it stands in the way of all improvement, spreading the chilling miseries of poverty around—till the evil baffling all expedients, a mighty crash produces a new order of things, overwhelming, with the ruins of the old, thousands of innocent victims.

The precious metals have been considered as the best of all possible signs of value, to facilitate the exchange of commodities, to supply our reciprocal wants: and they will ever be necessary to our comfort, whilst by the common consent of mankind they are the standards of exchange. Gold and silver have a specific value, because it is not easy to accumulate them beyond a certain quantity. Paper, on the contrary, is a dangerous expedient, except under a well established government: and even then the business ought to be conducted with great moderation and sagacity.—Perhaps it would be wise, that it's extent should be consistent with the commerce of the country, and the quantity of species actually in it—But it is the spirit of commerce to stretch credit too far. The notes, also, which are issued by a state before it's government is well established, will certainly be depreciated; and in proportion as they grow precarious, the gold and silver, which was formerly in circulation will vanish, and every article of trade, and all the comforts of life, will bear a higher price.

These are considerations, which ought to have occurred to the french minister, and have led him to take decided measures. The interest of the national debt was 255,395,141 *l.* by a report for the year 1792.—Necker, by his account dated the 1st of may, 1789, states the income at 475,294,000 *l.,* and the expences at 531,533,000 *l.:* consequently there was a deficiency of 56,239,000 *l.;* and it was not probable, it could not even be expected, that during the convulsions of a revolution, the taxes would be regularly paid: the debt, then, and the demands of the state, must increase.

The credit of every government greatly depends on the regulation of it's finances; and the most certain way to have given stability to the new system, would have been by making such arrangements as would have insured promptitude of payment. No minister ever had it so much in his power to have taken measures glorious for France, beneficial to Europe, happy for the people of the day, and advantageous to posterity. No epocha, since the inflated system of paper (the full blown bladders of public credit, which may be destroyed by the prick of a pin) was invented, ever appeared so favourable as that juncture in France, to have overturned it completely: and by overlooking these circumstances, the nation has probably lost most of the advantages, which her finances might have gained by the revolution.

Such mistakes, whilst they involve in them a thousand difficulties, prove the necessity of gradual reform; lest the light, suddenly breaking-in on a benighted people, should overpower the understanding it ought to direct. The line in which Necker had been accustomed to move, by restraining what little energy his mind was capable of exerting, precluded the possibility of his seeing the faint lines marked on an expansive scale, which afforded the data for calculations; and the nation, confiding to him the direction of a business for which he had not sufficient talents, seems to have contemplated in imagination a prospect, which has not yet been realized; and whilst expectation hovered on it's margin, the dazzling scenery was obscured by clouds the most threatening and tremendous.

These are evils that from the beginning of time have attended precipitate and great changes. The improvements in philosophy and morals have been extremely tardy. All sudden revolutions have been as suddenly overturned, and things thrown back below their former state. The improvements in the science of politics have been still more slow in their advancement than those of philosophy and morals; but the revolution in France has been progressive. It was a revolution in the minds of men; and only demanded a new system of government to be adapted to that change. This was not generally perceived; and the politicians of the day ran wildly from one extreme to the other, without recollecting, that even Moses sojourning forty years in the wilderness could but conduct the jews to the borders of the promised land, after the first generation had perished in their prejudices; the most inveterate sins of men.

This is not a discouraging consideration. Our ancestors have laboured for us; and we, in our turn, must labour for posterity. It is by tracing the mistakes, and profiting from the discoveries of one generation, that the next is able to take a more elevated stand. The first inventor of any instrument has scarcely ever been able to bring it to a tolerable degree of perfection; and the discoveries of every man of genius, the optics of Newton excepted, have been improved, if not extended, by their followers.—Can it

then be expected, that the science of politics and finance, the most important, and most difficult of all human improvements; a science which involves the passions, tempers, and manners of men and nations, estimates their wants, maladies, comforts, happiness, and misery, and computes the sum of good or evil flowing from social institutions; will not require the same gradations, and advance by steps equally slow to that state of perfection necessary to secure the sacred rights of every human creature?

The vanity and weakness of men have continually tended to retard this progress of things: still it is going forward; and though the fatal presumption of the headstrong french, and the more destructive ambition of their foreign enemies, have given it a check, we may contemplate with complacent serenity the approximation of the glorious era, when the appellations of fool and tyrant will be synonymous.

[Back to Table of Contents]

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

errour of the national assembly in neglecting to secure the freedom of france. it's conduct compared with that of the american states. necessity of forming a new constitution as soon as an old government is destroyed. the declaring the king inviolable a wrong measure. security of the french against a counter-revolution. the flight of the king meditated.

The conduct of the assembly in losing so much time—the most precious time to secure the happiness of their country, and enable the present generation to participate in the blessings they were preparing for posterity, instead of having to encounter all the miseries of anarchy, can never be sufficiently lamented. France had already gained her freedom; the nation had already ascertained certain, and the most important, political truths: it ought, therefore, to have been the next consideration, how these were to be preserved, and the liberty of the empire consolidated on a basis that time would only render more firm.

Moderate men, or real patriots, would have been satisfied with what had been gained, for the present, allowing the rest to follow progressively. It was the most political and the most reasonable way to secure the acquisition. In this situation France had to contend with the prejudices of half Europe, at least, and to counteract the influence of the insidious intriguers, who were opposing themselves to her regeneration; to facilitate which the assembly ought to have made it one of their main objects to render the king contented with the change; and then the machinations of all the underminers of the revolution, would not have loosened one fundamental stone, to endanger the rising edifice.

Such is the difference between men acting from a practical knowledge, and men who are governed entirely by theory, or no principle whatever. Most of the United States of America formed their separate constitutions within a month, and none took more than three, after the declaration of their independence by congress. There certainly was a vast distinction between those States, then the colonies of Great Britain, and France after the 14th of july; but both countries were without a government. America with an enemy in the heart of their empire, and France threatened with an attack. The leading men of America, however, knew, that there was a necessity of having some kind of government, and seem to have perceived the ease, with which any subsequent alterations could be effected. The members of the national assembly, on the contrary, found themselves surrounded with ruins; and aiming at a state of perfection for which the minds of the people were not sufficiently mature; affecting likewise to be directed by a magnanimous disinterestedness, they not only planted the germ of the most dangerous and licentious spirit, but they continued to irritate the desperate courtiers, who, having determined to oppose stratagem to force, and not succeeding, rested all their future hopes on the king's escape.

The liberty of the press, which had been virtually established, at this period, was a successful engine employed against the assembly. And to a nation celebrated for epigrammatic fancy, and whose taste had been so refined by art, that they had lost the zest of nature, the simplicity of some of the members, their awkward figures, and rustic gait, compared with the courtly mien, and easy assurance of the chevaliers of Versailles, afforded an excellent subject. Some of these satires were written with considerable wit, and such a happy turn of caricature, that it is impossible not to laugh with the author, though indirectly ridiculing the principles you hold sacred. The most respectable decrees, the most important, and serious discussions, were twisted into jests; which divided the people without doors into two distinct parties; one, speaking of the assembly with sovereign contempt, as a set of upstarts and babbling knaves; and the other, setting up new thrones for their favourites, and viewing them with blind admiration, as if they were a synod of demi-gods. The contenancing of this abuse of freedom was ill-judged. The different parties were already sufficiently heated; yet it would have been impossible, perhaps, to have restrained the temper of the times, so strong is the intoxication of a new folly, though it would have been easy for the assembly to have passed a decree respecting libels. But so ardent was become their passion for liberty, that they were unable to discriminate between a licentious use of that important invention, and it's real utility. Treating then with an untimely disdain the many abusive publications, which were sold within the very walls where they were sitting, they were not aware of the effect which they produced on the minds of mock heroes, who, having no principle but honour, were ready to risk their lives to sooth distressed beauty, no matter what produced it; or to alleviate the sufferings of a king, though the consequence of his turpitude or tergiversation.

After the wreck of a government the plan of a new constitution ought to be immediately formed, that is, as soon as circumstances will possibly admit, and presented to the citizens for their acceptance; or rather the people should depute men for that purpose, and give them a limited time for framing one. A constitution is a standard for the people to rally round. It is the pillar of a government, the bond of all social unity and order. The investigation of it's principles makes it a fountain of light; from which issue the rays of reason, that gradually bring forward the mental powers of the whole community. And whenever the wheels of government, like the wheels of any other machine, are found clogged, or do not move in a regular manner, they equally require alteration and improvement: and these improvements will be proportionably perfect as the people become enlightened.

The authority of the national assembly had been acknowledged nearly three months previous to this epocha, without their having taken any decided steps to secure these important ends. Indeed it does not appear to have been their first object. They seem not to have known, or at least not to have been apprehensive, that, in proportion to the length of time that the people are without an established government, anarchists gain an ascendency over their minds; and it then becomes no easy task to form a constitution adapted to their wayward tempers.

When a few fundamental principles are ascertained, and the state has determined that they shall form the basis of it's polity, it seems to be no difficult matter to give motion to the new springs of government. It is true, that many of the prejudices of frenchmen

were still inveterate, and in some measure influenced them; and it is also certain, that their total ignorance of the operations of any rational system of government was an impediment to this motion; but it is nevertheless to be presumed, that, the liberty of frenchmen having been previously secured by the establishment of the declaration of rights, if the assembly had formed some kind of a constitution, and proposed it to the nation, and to the king, if he were considered as forming a part of it, for their acceptation, the dispute between the people and court would have been brought to a speedy issue; and the public attention directed to a point would have given dignity and respectability to their proceedings. If such measures had been followed, and it appears a little strange they were not, most probably the king and court, perceiving that their future consequence wholly depended on their acquiescence with the state of reason, and temper of the times, would have relinquished all those absurd and dangerous projects for overturning the rising political fabric of the nation, which anarchy fostered.

It is the pillars of a building, which indicate it's durability, and not the minor beams that are inserted through them, in order to rear the structure. The natural, civil, and political rights of man are the main pillars of all social happiness; and by the firm establishment of them, the freedom of men will be eternally secured. The moment, therefore, a state has gained those important and sacred privileges, it is clear, that it ought to form some kind of government, grounded upon this firm and broad basis, that being the only possible way to give them permanency. But the constituent assembly, unmindful of the dreadful effects beginning to flow from an unbounded licentiousness, continued to pursue a romantic sublimity of character, dangerous to all sublunary laws; whilst most interestedly attentive to things that should have been subordinate to their first object, they were led into a procrastination, which in it's consequence has been fatal in the extreme.

The decree which made the king inviolable, passed on the 15th of september, at the time the crown was declared hereditary, and the empire indivisible, was the most idle, if not the most dangerous measure, both for him and France, which could have been devised. The former life of Louis had exhibited a series of follies, and displayed an insincerity not to be tolerated, much less encouraged; and it was likely, if this doctrine, a relict of the abasement of ignorance, that kings can do no wrong, should be carried into a law, forming part of the constitution, that he would avail himself of the decree of the assembly to cover his contempt of the national sovereignty. When kings are considered by the government of a country merely as ciphers, it is very just and proper, that their ministers should be responsible for their political conduct: but at the moment when a state is about to establish a constitution on the basis of reason, to undermine that foundation by a master-piece of absurdity, appears a solecism as glaring as the doctrine itself is laughable, when applied to an enlightened policy. In fact, whilst Mirabeau contended for the infallibility of the king, he seems to have had no right from reason to deride those who respected that of the church: for, if the government must necessarily be supported by a pious fraud, one was as respectable as the other.

The bigotry of Louis was well known; nay, it was notorious, that he employed his confessor to erase from his tender conscience the remembrance of the vices he

resolved to indulge, and to reconcile the meanest dissimulation with a servile fear of the Being whose first attribute is truth.—This man, whose bestiality had been carefully pampered by the queen and count d'Artois, because in those moments of revelry, prolonged to the most disgusting excess of gluttony and intoxication, he would sanction all their demands, was made in his person and conduct sacred and unimpeachable. This was the extreme folly of weakness. But, when it is also kept in view, that, at the very period when he was declared inviolable, he was suspected, in concert with the court, to be actually meditating his flight, there seems to be a pusillanimity in it as contemptible as the pretended dignity of the assembly was ridiculous.

True firmness consists in doing whatever is just and reasonable, uninfluenced by any other consideration. The defining the power of the crown in the assembly to be subordinate to the authority of the people must have appeared to the kings of Europe a dangerous encroachment on their indefeasible rights:—a heresy tending to undermine their privileges, should such audacity pass unchastized, and to destroy the splendour of royalty by presuming to control it's omnipotence. It was then scarcely to be expected, that their resentment would be appeased by shielding the person of Louis against the danger of intrigue and violence. It was not, indeed, the preservation of the life of this unfortunate man, that interested them so sensibly as to appall the sycophants of Europe.—No; it was the attack made on despotism; and the attempt to draw aside the splendid curtain which concealed it's folly, that threw them into a general ferment and agitation. This agitation could not fail to inspire the court of Versailles with hope, and they stood prepared to take advantage of the gathering storm, as eagerly as a distressed mariner, who has long laid becalmed, perceiving at length a gentle heaving of the sea, and feeling the undulating motion of his bark, foresees the approaching breeze, and spreads his sails to catch the first breath of wind. The effect of the feigned or real pity of many of the admirers of the old system, who were deeply wounded by the wrong done, as they insisted, to their king, was to be dreaded; for it was not to be supposed, that the chivalrous spirit of France would be destroyed in an instant, though *swords had ceased to leap out of their scabbards* when beauty was not deified. It was then undoubtedly to be feared, that they would risk their lives and fortunes to support the glory of their master, and their own notions of honour: and the assembly, by making Louis not accountable for any of his actions, however insincere, unjust, or atrocious, was affording all his abettors a shelter, encouraging at the same time his hypocrisy, and relaxing the little energy of character, which his misfortune seemed to be calling into play.

Mistaken lenity in politics is not more dangerous than a false magnanimity is palpable littleness in the eyes of a man of simple integrity. Besides, had the representatives of the people considered Louis merely as a man, it is probable he would have acted more like one. Instead of palliating the matter, they should, on the contrary, have proclaimed to all Europe, with a tone of dignified firmness, that the french nation, willing for themselves, regardless of the rights and privileges of others, though respecting their prejudices, finding that no compromise could be formed between the court and people, whose interest neither justice nor policy ever required should be distinct, do not consider themselves accountable to any power or congress on earth, for any measure they may choose to adopt in framing a constitution to regulate their

own internal polity. That treating their monarch like a man, and not as a mere idol for state pageantry, they would wish, by establishing the dignity of truth and justice, to give stability to the freedom of frenchmen, and leave a monument in their institutions to immortalize a sincere and acquiescing king. But that, though their ideas might differ greatly from those of their neighbours, with whom they desired to live on the most amicable terms, they would pursue the path of eternal reason in consolidating the rights of man; and by a striking example lay the foundation of the liberty of the whole globe, of that liberty which had hitherto been confined to the small island of England, and enjoyed imperfectly even there.

The house of Austria was at this period engaged in a war with the turks, which obliged it to withdraw most of it's troops from Flanders; and the intelligence, that the flemings, highly discontented with the innovations, which the vain weathercock Joseph the Second had made in their form of worship, were on the eve of an insurrection, more against the folly of the man than the despotism of his court, calmed the fears of the french, as to the danger of being immediately attacked by Germany. This security, for they had no dread of Sardinia, made them consider the possibility of a counter-revolution being effected by foreign enemies as far from alarming. It is true, there was not any just cause of apprehension, unless they took into the calculation, that the policy of Europe for ages past had been subject to sudden changes; a state of profound tranquillity giving place to sanguinary scenes of confusion, and inhuman butcheries—often about such trifling insults and idle pretentions, as individuals would be ashamed to make a pretext for quarrelling; and having reason to expect these changes as long as the systems of courts preserve their existence, France could not reckon, with any degree of certainty, on the continuation of peace.—Neither did the national assembly appear to have calculated upon it; for they undoubtedly betrayed symptoms of pusillanimity, when they suffered their conduct to be in the smallest degree influenced by the apprehension of a combination of the crowned heads of Europe to replace the royal diadem of France, should the most brilliant of it's jewels be touched by profane hands.

These fears, perhaps, were the secret cause, combined with the old habit of adoring the king, as a point of honour, and loving the court, as an affair of taste, that induced them to preserve the shadow of monarchy in the new order of things. It's preservation might have been politically necessary; because, before abolishing any ancient form, it is necessary to secure whatever political good may have flowed from it, and guard against being exhausted by cutting off an excrescence.—But, if the continuance of a king in the new system were expedient to avert present evil, they should have allowed him the power necessary to give energy to the government; and making him responsible for the rectitude of his actions, the man would have had a fair trial, and posterity, judging of his conduct, would have been enabled to form a just estimate of a kingly government.

Machiavelian cunning, however, still directed the movements of all the courts of Europe; and these political moles, too well perceiving the timidity that was mixed with the blustering courage of the assembly, only waited for a favourable season to overturn the rising edifice. Their agents had private instructions to promote the escape of Louis, as the surest mode of making a decided schism in the national politics; and

they firmly believed, that the affection still subsisting for his christian majesty would facilitate the execution of their plan. The court also presuming on the divisions and lenity of the assembly, took the most indefatigable pains to foster in the mind of the public, nay, in that of all Europe, pity for the degraded person of the king, and detestation of the sacrilege, which had been committed on the dignity of royalty. Their continual theme was the ignominious state to which the most mild of the Bourbons was reduced, by men, who usurped the reins of government, and trampled on the honours of that august and ancient family. Restraining the authority of a throne, which supported the most abominable tyranny, they were shaking the despotism, which held in bondage nine-tenths of the inhabitants of the world. These were alarming signals to a certain class of men, to the drones and myrmidons who live on the spoil and blood of industry and innocence. The intrusion of knowledge, which was sure to render them an useless set of beings in society, was to be prevented by ingenious clamours, whilst a great number of weak, well-meaning people, and still more knaves, enlisted under their banner.

The universal damp, which the revolution had given to the courts of Europe, producing among them a lively sympathy for the sombre atmosphere of Versailles, a general sorrow was consequently expressed by all their minions, and expressed with unfeigned concern; for the want of the usual routine of amusements tended to make it real. Hope, indeed, began again to animate them, when the king was prevailed on to concert his escape; yet their eagerness to accelerate his departure for the frontiers, where they purposed to erect the royal standard, to avail themselves of the proximity of german connections, was in a great degree the cause of defeating that illcontrived design.

A design formed very early, and systematically pursued, was probably rendered entirely abortive by the obstinacy of the court; who still persisted to cherish the belief, that the public opinion was changed only for the moment, and that their deeply rooted love of royalty would bring them back to what they termed their duty, when the effervescence excited by novelty had subsided. And thinking, that the cordial reception given by the parisians to the soldiery had contributed to estrange them, and effect the revolution, they determined to regain their lost ground, and dazzle them by feasts, instead of stealing on their affections by hospitality.—Still, bearing impatiently their humiliating situation, the courtiers could not help vauntingly exposing their project; and the babbling of joy showed the weakness of the heads, that could so soon be intoxicated by hope.

A preparatory step was thought necessary to awaken a sense of allegiance in the breasts of the people, and to promote a division amongst them, if not their entire concurrence, after the cabinet should have securely in their possession the person of the king; and this division would then enable them to calculate their strength, and act accordingly. For this purpose, in spite of the comments that had been made on the festivity at Versailles, which seemed before to insult the misery of the people, and greatly tended to provoke the exertions that overturned the Bastille and changed the whole face of things, they projected another entertainment to seduce the military, encouraged to throng round the court, whilst famine was at the very gates of Paris. But previously the old french guards, who had been incorporated with the *garde*

bourgeoise, began to manifest some symptoms of discontent at not being allowed to guard the person of the king. Whether they considered their honour as wounded, or were spirited up to aspire at regaining this privilege, is not decided; but it is clear, that the court, either to facilitate the entrance of fresh troops, or from a real dislike to men, who had taken such an active part in disconcerting their first plot, opposed their wish; and even the municipality, as has been already noticed, was induced to request, that a regiment of fresh troops might be called in to guard the person of the king, and keep the peace, which this trifling dispute, swelled into an insurrection in the report, threatened to disturb.

The king's body-guards, whose time of service expired the first of october, were still retained with those who came to replace them; and an immense crowd of supernumeraries continued daily to increase this corps, which had not yet sworn allegiance to the nation. The officers, in particular, flocked to Versailles, amounting to between eleven or twelve hundred, constantly parading together. The universal topic was commiseration of the king's fate, and insinuations respecting the ambition of the assembly. Yet, oven there the court party seemed to be prevailing: a president attached to loyalty was elected; and Mirabeau's remonstrances, respecting the augmentation of the troops, were disregarded.

Mean time, not only the officers of the new regiment, but those of the national guards, were caressed by the court, whilst the citizens, with more sagacity, were lavish of their attention to the soldiers. The cabinet had not sufficient discernment to perceive, that the people were now to be led, not driven; and the popular promoters of anarchy, to serve their private interest, availed themselves, unfortunately, but too well of this want of judgment.—Thus whilst one party, declaiming on the necessity of order, seemed to be endeavouring to rivet on them the chains of servitude, the other lifted them above the law with vain glorious notions of their sovereignty.—And this sovereignty of the people, the perfection of the science of government, only to be attained when a nation is truly enlightened, consisted in making them tyrants; nay the worst of tyrants, because the instruments of mischief of the men, who pretended to be subordinate to their will, though acting the very part of the ministers whom they execrated.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER II.

entertainment at versailles. the national cockade trampled under foot. a mob of women proceed to the hotel-de-ville—and thence to versailles. the king's reply to the national assembly's request, that he would sanction the declaration of rights and the first articles of the constitution. debates on it. arrival of the mob at versailles. the king receives a deputation from the women, and sanctions the decree for the free circulation of grain. the assembly summoned. la fayette arrives with the parisian militia. the palace attacked by the mob—who are dispersed by the national guards. reflections on the conduct of the duke of orleans.

ON the first of october, in consequence of these fresh machinations, a magnificent entertainment was given in the name of the king's body-guards; but really by some of their principal officers, at the opera-house of the castle. The affectation of excluding the dragoons, distinguished for their attachment to liberty, seemed to show, but too plainly, the end in view, rendered still more conspicuous by the unusual familiarity of persons of the first rank with the lowest soldiers.

When their heads were heated by a sumptuous banquet, by the tumult of an immense crowd, and the great profusion of delicious wines and *liqueurs,* the conversation, purposely turned into one channel, became unrestrained, and a chivalrous scene completed the folly. The queen, to testify her satisfaction for the homage paid to her, and the wishes expressed in her favour, exhibited herself to this half-drunken multitude; carrying the dauphin in her arms, whom she regarded with a mixture of sorrow and tenderness, and seeming to implore in his favour the affection and zeal of the soldiers.

This acting, for it is clear that the whole was a preconcerted business, was still more intoxicating than the wine.—The exclamation *vive le roi, vive la reine,* resounded from all sides, and the royal healths were drunk over drawn swords, whilst that of the nation was rejected with contempt by the body-guards. The music, the choice could not have been the effect of chance, played the well known air—O Richard! O my king! the universe abandons thee* ! and during this moment of fascination some voices, perhaps bribed for the occasion, mingled execrations against the assembly. A grenadier even darted from the midst of his comrades, and accusing himself of having been unfaithful to his prince, endeavoured, several times, to plunge his sword into his bosom. His held arm was not indeed allowed to search for the disloyal heart; but some blood was permitted to flow—and this theatrical display of sensibility, carried to the highest pitch, produced emotions almost convulsive in the whole circle, of which an english reader can scarcely form an idea. The king, who is always represented as innocent, though always giving proofs that he more than connived at the attempts to recover his power, was likewise prevailed on to show himself at this entertainment. And some of the same soldiery, who had refused to second the former project of the cabal, were now induced to utter insults and menaces against the very authority, they then supported. 'The national cockade,' exclaimed Mirabeau, 'that emblem of the defenders of liberty, has been torn in pieces, and stamped under foot; and another

ensign put in it's place.—Yes; even under the eye of the monarch, who allowed himself to be styled—*Restorer of the rights of his people,* they have dared to hoist a signal of faction.'

The same scene was renewed two days after, though with less parade; and invitations for a similar treat were given for the following week.

The rumour respecting them, which reached Paris, contained many exaggerated circumstances; and was regarded as the commencement of fresh hostilities, on the part of the court. The cry now was, that the stunned aristocracy had again reared it's head; and that a number of old officers, chevaliers of St. Louis, had signed a promise to join the body-guards in a new attempt. This list was said to contain thirty thousand signatures; and idle as the tale was, it seemed to be confirmed by the appearance of white and black cockades, which inconsiderate individuals displayed at the risk of their lives. These, said the parisians, are the first indications of a projected civil war—the court wish only to have the king safe to head them before they speak out:—he ought, therefore, to be removed to Paris, inferred the politicians of the palais royal. The exasperating of the people in this manner was certainly the most absurd blundering folly that could have ruined a party, who apparently saw the necessity of dividing the people in order to conquer them. It was, in fact, a species of madness, and can be accounted for only by recollecting the ineffable contempt really felt by the court for the *canaille,* which made them still imagine the revolution to be only a temporary convulsion, not believing it possible, in spite of the daily events, that they could be crushed by the mass they despised. Their presumption proceeded from their ignorance, and was incurable.

The queen was supposed to be at the head of this weak conspiracy, to withdraw the soldiery from siding with the people. She had presented colours to the national guards of Versailles, and when they waited on her to express their thanks, she replied, with the most winning affability, 'the nation and the army ought to be as well affected to the king as we ourselves are. I was quite charmed with what passed on thursday.' This was the day of the feast.

A scarcity of bread, the common grievance of the revolution, aggravated the vague fears of the parisians, and made the people so desperate, that it was not difficult to persuade them to undertake any enterprize; and the torrent of resentment and enthusiasm required only to be directed to a point to carry every thing before it. Liberty was the constant watch word; though few knew in what it consisted.—It seems, indeed, to be necessary, that every species of enthusiasm should be fermented by ignorance to carry it to any height. Mystery alone gives full play to the imagination, men pursuing with ardour objects indistinctly seen or understood, because each man shapes them to his taste, and looks for something beyond even his own conception, when he is unable to form a just idea.

The parisians were now continually brooding over the wrongs they had heretofore only enumerated in a song; and changing ridicule into invective, all called for redress, looking for a degree of public happiness immediately, which could not be attained,

and ought not to have been expected, before an alteration in the national character seconded the new system of government.

From the enjoyment of more freedom than the women of other parts of the world, those of France have acquired more independence of spirit than any others; it has, therefore, been the scheme of designing men very often since the revolution, to lurk behind them as a kind of safeguard, working them up to some desperate act, and then terming it a folly, because merely the rage of women, who were supposed to be actuated only by the emotions of the moment. Early then on the fifth of october a multitude of women by some impulse were collected together; and hastening to the *hôtel-de-ville* obliged every female they met to accompany them, even entering many houses to force others to follow in their train.

The concourse, at first, consisted mostly of market women, and the lowest refuse of the streets, women who had thrown off the virtues of one sex without having power to assume more than the vices of the other. A number of men also followed them, armed with pikes, bludgeons, and hatchets; but they were strictly speaking a mob, affixing all the odium to the appellation it can possibly import; and not to be confounded with the honest multitude, who took the Bastille.—In fact, such a rabble has seldom been gathered together; and they quickly showed, that their movement was not the effect of public spirit.

They first talked of addressing the committee appointed by the municipality to superintend the operations necessary to obtain provision for the city, and to remonstrate respecting their inattention or indifference to the public calamity. Mean time a new cord was fixed to the notorious lamp-iron, where the amusement of death was first tolerated. The national guards, forming a hedge of bayonets to prevent the women from entering the hotel, kept them in suspense a few moments.—When, uttering a loud and general cry, they hurled a volley of stones at the soldiers, who, unwilling, or ashamed, to fire on women, though with the appearance of furies, retreated into the hall, and left the passage free. They then fought for arms; and breaking open the doors of the magazines, soon procured fusils, cannons, and ammunition; and even took advantage of the confusion to carry off money and notes belonging to the public. In the interim some went to search for the volunteers of the Bastille, and chose a commander from among them to conduct the party to Versailles; whilst others tied cords to the carriages of the cannons to drag them along.—But these, being mostly marine artillery, did not follow with the alacrity necessary to accord with their wishes; they, therefore, stopped several coaches, forcing the men to get out and the ladies to join them; fastening the cannons behind, on which a number of the most furious mounted, brandishing whatever weapon they had found, or the matches of the cannons. Some drove the horses, and others charged themselves with the care of the powder and ball, falling into ranks to facilitate their march. They took the road by the *Champs Elisées* about noon, to the number of four thousand, escorted by four or five hundred men, armed with every thing on which they could lay their hands.

Mean time the *tocsin* sounded from all parts; the french guards, still urged on by wounded pride, loudly declared, that the king ought to be brought to Paris; and many

of the citizens, not on duty, concurred with the rest of the national guards in the same opinion, particularly those accustomed to attend the harangues at the Palais Royal. La Fayette, refusing to accompany, endeavoured to calm them. But finding, that the tumult increased, and that prayers were giving place to menaces, he offered to make known to the king, at their head, the wishes of the capital, if the municipality gave him orders to this effect. Their council was now assembled; yet prolonging the deliberation till between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, the people became so very impatient, that it was thought prudent to allow them to set out: and the exclamations of the populace proved how easy it was to govern, or lead them astray, by every fresh hope.

Few events have happened at Paris, that have not been attributed by the different parties to the machinations of the leaders on the other side; to blacken whose characters, when they had the upper hand, the most audacious falsehoods have been industriously circulated; the detection of which has induced many calm observers to believe, that all the accounts of plots and conspiracies were fabricated in the same manner; not considering, that even the universality of these suspicions was a proof of the intriguing character of the people, who from a knowledge of themselves became thus mistrustful of others. It was currently reported, that very considerable sums had been distributed amongst the mob, before it marched to Versailles; and, though many fabulous stories of showers of gold have since been retailed by the credulous, this seems, from their subsequent conduct, to have had some foundation: for nothing like the heroism, the disinterestedness, appeared, which, in most other risings of the parisians, has formed a striking contrast with their barbarity; sometimes sufficient to oblige us, lamenting the delusions of ignorance, to give the soft name of enthusiasm to cruelty; respecting the intention, though detesting the effects. Now, on the contrary, acting like a gang of thieves, they gave colour to the report—that the first instigators of the riot were hired assassins.—And hired by whom?—The public voice repeats, on every side, the despicable duke of Orleans, whose immense estate had given him an undue influence in the bailliages, and who still exercised all the means that cunning could devise, and wealth produce, to revenge himself on the royal family. He was particularly incensed against the queen, who having treated him with the contempt which he doubtless merited, and even influenced the king to banish him to one of his country seats, when he uttered some popular sentiments, he continued to nourish the most implacable hatred to her person, whilst the changing sentiments of the nation respecting the present branch of his family excited in him hopes, that would at once have gratified both his revenge and his ambition.

There is no calculating the mischief which may be produced by a revengeful cunning knave, possessing the forcible engine of gold to move his projects, and acting by agency, which, like a subterraneous fire, that for a long time has been putting the combustible matter into a state of fusion, bursts out unexpectedly, and the sudden eruption spreads around terrour and destruction.

The agents of despotism, and of vengeful ambition, employed the same means to agitate the minds of the parisians; and covered as they now are with foul stains, it is an acknowledgement due to their original good disposition, to note, that at this period they were so orderly it required considerable management to lead them into any gross

irregularity of conduct. It was, therefore, necessary for the duke's instruments to put in motion a body of the most desperate women; some of whom were half famished for want of bread, which had purposely been rendered scarce to facilitate the atrocious design of murdering both the king and queen in a broil, that would appear to be produced solely by the rage of famine.

The shameless manner in which the entertainment of the officers of the body-guards had been conducted; the indiscreet visit of the queen to interest the army in the cause of royalty, coming in artfully after the rabble of soldiers had been allowed to enter; together with the imprudent expressions of which she afterwards made use; served as pretexts, nay, may have been some of the causes of these women suspecting, that the dearth of bread in the capital was owing to the contrivance of the court, who had so often produced the same effect to promote their sinister purposes. They believed then, that the only sure way to remedy such a grievous calamity, in future, would be to implore the king to reside at Paris: and the national militia, composed of more orderly citizens, who thought the report of a premeditated escape was not without foundation, imagined, that they should nip a civil war in the bud, by preventing the king's departure, and separate him effectually from the cabal, to whom they attributed all his misconduct.

Whilst the multitude were advancing, the assembly were considering the king's reply to their request to sanction the declaration of rights, and the first articles of the constitution, before the supplies were granted. The reply was couched in terms somewhat vague, yet it's meaning could not be misunderstood.—He observed, that the articles of the constitution could be judged of only in their connection with the whole; nevertheless he thought it natural, that at the moment the nation was called upon to assist the government by a signal act of confidence and patriotism, they should expect to be re-assured respecting their principal interest.—'Accordingly,' he continues, 'taking it for granted, that the first articles of the constitution, which you have presented to me, united to the completion of your labours, will satisfy the wishes of my people, and secure the happiness and prosperity of the kingdom, conformably to your desire I accept them; but with one positive condition, from which I will never depart; namely, that from the general result of your deliberations the executive power shall have it's entire effect in the hands of the monarch. Still it remains for me to assure you with frankness, that, if I give my sanction of acceptance to the several articles, which you have laid before me, it is not because they indiscriminately give me an idea of perfection; but I believe it laudable in me to pay this respect to the wishes of the deputies of the nation, and to the alarming circumstances, which so earnestly press us to desire above all things the prompt re-establishment of peace, order, and confidence.

'I shall not deliver my sentiments respecting your declaration of the rights of man and of citizens. It contains excellent maxims proper to direct your deliberations; but principles susceptible of application, and even of different interpretations, cannot be justly appreciated, and have only need of being so when their true sense is determined by the laws, to which they ought to be the basis.'

In the subterfuge employed in this answer, the profound dissimulation of the king appears; and that 'pitiful respect for false honour,' which makes a man boggle at a naked untruth, even when uttering a number of contemptible prevarications. Thus did he at first struggle against every concession, against granting any real freedom to the people; yet afterwards unable to maintain his ground, he impotently gave way before the storm he had raised, every time losing a part of the authority which depended on opinion.

The assembly manifested an universal discontent. One of the members remarked, that the king withheld his acceptance of the declaration of rights; and only yielded to circumstances in accepting the constitutional articles: he, therefore, moved, that no taxes should be levied, before the declaration of rights and the constitution should be accepted, without any reservation.—Another asserted, that the king's reply ought to have been counter-signed by one of the ministers. What an absurdity! yet the inviolability of the king standing in their way, it seemed to be necessary to secure ministerial responsibility, to render it null; not only to prevent the ministers from finding shelter behind it, but to make it utterly useless to the king, who was thus, literally speaking, reduced to a cipher. Mirabeau, however, after alluding with energy to the entertainment, which, out of derision, had been termed patriotic, made three or four motions. One was, 'that no act emanating from the king should be declared without the signature of a secretary of state.'—So inconsistent was the man, who argued with such eloquence for the absolute *veto*:—Another was, 'that his majesty would please to be explicit; and not by a conditional consent, extorted by circumstances, leave any doubt of his sincere concurrence in the mind of the people.' It was also noticed, to corroborate the inference, that the king was only yielding, for the moment, to opinions which he hoped to see exploded, that the decree for the circulation of grain had been altered before the publication, and the usual preamble, *for such is our pleasure,* formed a strange contrast with an acknowledgement of the legislative rights of the nation. Robespierre, particularly, maintained, that the nation had not any need of the assistance of the monarch to constitute itself—that the king's reply was not an acceptance, but a censure; and, consequently, an attack on the rights of the people.

This seemed virtually the opinion of the assembly, though Mirabeau's soft style of expressing their will was adopted. It was particularly in this decision, that the deputies displayed a great degree of the weakness, which mistakes temerity for courage, and the shadow of justice for verity.—And affecting to say, to reconcile a contradiction, that the authority of kings is suspended as often as the sovereign is occupied in framing the elements of the constitution, or altering fundamental laws, they demonstrated the inconsistency of their own system, and acknowledged it's absurdity; which is still more flagrantly shown in Mirabeau's irrational declaration, that, 'by a pious fiction of the law, the king cannot himself deceive; but the grievances of the people demanding victims, these victims are the ministers.'

At this juncture of the debate the tumultuous concourse of women arrived at Versailles: but it must not be unnoticed, that there was a number of men with them, disguised in women's clothes; which proves, that this was not, as has been asserted, a sudden impulse of necessity. There were besides men in their own garb armed like

ruffians, with countenances answerable, who, swearing vengeance against the queen and the body-guards, seemed to be preparing to put their threats in execution. Some barbarians, volunteers in guilt, might perhaps have joined, spurred on solely by the hope of plunder, and a love of tumult; but it is clear, that the principal movers played a surer game.

The women had taken two routes; and one party, without arms, presented themselves at the gate of the assembly, whilst the other clustered round the palace waiting for them. The avenues were already filled with bodyguards, the flanders regiment was drawn up in ranks; in short, the soldiers were gathered together quickly in one quarter, though the people of Versailles were exceedingly alarmed, and particularly by the appearance of the vagabonds, who followed the female mob.

With some difficulty the women were prevailed on to allow a few to enter orderly into the assembly, with a spokesman to make known their demand; whilst crowds, taking refuge in the galleries from the rain, presented there the strange sight of pikes, fusils, and tremendous sticks bound with iron. Their orator represented the grievances of the people, and the necessity of continually providing for their subsistence: he expressed the concern of the parisians on account of the slow formation of the constitution, and attributed this delay to the opposition of the clergy. A bishop then presided in the absence of Mounier, the president, who had been dispatched by the assembly with their expostulatory petition to the king. A deputy, to spare him the embarrassment of a reply to the insinuation against his order, reprimanded the petitioner for calumniating that respectable body. He accordingly made an apology, yet justified himself by declaring, that he only reported the purport of the discontentment of Paris. They were informed, in reply, by the vice-president, that a deputation was already sent to the king, requesting his sanction of a decree to facilitate the interiour circulation of grain and flour: and finding, that it was impossible to attend to the business of the day, he adjourned the assembly, without waiting for the return of the president.

The women about the palace entered into conversation with the soldiers, some of whom said, ‘that were the king to recover all his authority, the people would never want bread!’ This indiscreet insinuation exasperated them; and they replied in the language, that is proverbial for being the most abusive. A fray also ensuing, brought on by a dispute relative to the affair of the cockades, one of the body guards drew his sword, which provoked a national guard of Versailles to give him a blow with his musket, that broke his arm.

The national troops were eager to convince the mob, that they were equally offended at the disrespect paid to the emblem of liberty; and the flemish regiment, though they were in battle array, made the women let their rings drop into their guns, to be convinced that they were not charged: saying, ‘It was true, they had drunk the wine of the body guards; but what did that engage them to do? They had also cried, *vive le roi,* as the people themselves did every day; and it was their intention to serve him faithfully, but not against the nation!’—with other speeches to the same effect;—adding, that one of their officers had ordered a thousand cockades; and they knew not why they were not distributed!’ Enraged by the tenour of this discourse, a body-guard’s man struck one of the soldiers talking thus, who, in return, fired on him,

and fractured his arm. All was now confusion; and every thing tended to render the body guards more odious to the populace.

The king arrived in the midst of it from hunting, and admitted at the same time the deputation from the national assembly, and an address from the women. He received the latter with great affability, testified his sorrow on account of the scarcity of bread at Paris, and immediately sanctioned the decree, relative to the free circulation of grain, which he had just received from the assembly. The woman who spoke, attempting to kiss his hand, he embraced her with politeness, and dismissed them in the most gentleman-like manner. They immediately rejoined their companions, charmed by the reception they had met with; and the king sent orders to the guards not to make use of their arms. The count d'Estaing, the commander in chief, announced likewise to the militia of Versailles, that the body-guards would the next day take the oath of allegiance to the nation, and put on the patriotic cockade. 'They are not worthy,' was the indignant growl of the multitude.

Some women now returning to Paris, to report the gracious behaviour of the king, were unfortunately maltreated by a detachment of body-guards, commanded by a nobleman; and the volunteers of the Bastille coming to their assistance, two men, and three horses, were killed on the spot. These same irritated women meeting, likewise, the parisian militia, on their way to Versailles, gave them an exaggerated description of the conduct of the guards.

The court now taking the alarm, fearing that their plan would be defeated, by the king's being obliged to go to Paris, urged him immediately to set out for Metz, and the carriages were actually prepared. It is scarcely credible that they would have gone so far without his concurrence.

One loaded coach had been permitted to go out of the gate; but the national troops beginning to suspect what was going forward, obliged it to re-enter. The king then, with his usual address, finding his escape at that time impracticable, and not wishing to shed blood in forcing his way, made a merit of necessity, and declared he would rather perish than see the blood of frenchmen streaming in his quarrel! So easy is it for a man, versed in the language of duplicity, to impose on the credulous; and to impress on candid minds a belief of an opinion that they would gladly receive without any doubting allay, did not other circumstances more strongly contradict the persuasion. This declaration, however, which was re-echoed with great eagerness, was considered as a manifest proof of the purity of his intentions, and a mark of his fixed adherence to the cause which he affected to espouse. Yet, to prove the contrary, it is only necessary to observe, that he put off the acceptance of the declaration of rights, and the first articles of the constitution, till after the attempt to escape was frustrated: for it was near eleven o'clock when he sent for the president, to put into his hands a simple acceptation, and to request him to convoke the assembly immediately, that he might avail himself of their counsel at this crisis; alarmed by the mob without, who, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather, it being a very wet and stormy night, were uttering the most horrid imprecations against the queen and the body-guards.

A drum instantly summoned the assembly; and La Fayette arriving with his army in less than an hour after, the president was again called for, who returned to the assembly with the king's assurance, that he had not even thought of leaving them, nor would he ever separate himself from the representatives of the people.

La Fayette had previously assured the king of the fidelity of the metropolis, and that he had been expressly sent by the municipality of Paris to guard his august person. A rumour had prevailed, ever since the arrival of the women, that the parisian militia were coming to second them; but as the *commune* of Paris had not determined till late in the afternoon, the messenger from La Fayette to the palace could not have reached Versailles long before him: but the court supposing that they would come, and having heard of the wish of the parisians to bring the king to Paris, where they had always spies to give them the earliest notice of what was going forward, pressed him to set out without loss of time; still they were actuated solely by the desire of getting him away, and not from any apprehension that his life was in danger.

After tranquilizing the king, La Fayette joined the parisian militia in the avenue, to inform them, that the king had sanctioned the decree of the assembly for expediting the more speedy circulation of provisions; that he accepted, without any reservation, of the declaration of rights, with the first articles of the constitution, declaring at the same time his unshaken resolution to remain among his people; and that he consented also to have a detachment of the national troops of Paris to contribute to guard his person.

Joy now took place of dread at Versailles; and the citizens distributed their addresses amongst the soldiers, offering them lodgings; they having been previously requested, by the beating of a drum, to receive as many of the parisian militia as they possibly could. The rest, after passing several hours in arms round the palace, sought for shelter, as the morning began to dawn, in the churches. Every thing appearing quiet, the harassed king and queen were prevailed on to seek the repose they needed; and La Fayette, about five in the morning, retired to his chamber, to write to the municipality an account of his proceedings, before he likewise endeavoured to snatch a little rest.

Scarcely an hour after, the restless mob, great part of which had taken refuge in the hall and galleries of the assembly, began to prowl about. The most decent of the women, who had been pressed into the service, stole away during the night. The rest, with the whole gang of ruffians, rushed towards the palace, and finding its avenues unguarded, entered like a torrent; and some among them, most probably, conceived, that this was the moment to perpetrate the crime for which they had been drawn from their lurking-holes in Paris.

Insulting one of the body-guards who opposed their entrance, he fired, and killed a man. This was a fresh pretext for entering to search for the murderer, as he was termed by these rioters; and driving the guards before them up the grand stair-case, they began to break into the different apartments, vowing vengeance against the body-guards, in which were mingled the bitterest curses, all levelled at the queen.

Catching one unfortunate guard by himself, he was dragged down the stairs; and his head, instantly severed from his body, was mounted on a pike, which rather served to irritate than glut the fury of the monsters, who were still hunting after blood or plunder.

The most desperate found their way to the queen's chamber, and left for dead the man who courageously disputed their entrance. But she had been alarmed by the tumult, though the miscreants were not long in making their way good, and, throwing a wrapping-gown around her, ran, by a private passage, to the king's apartment, where she found the dauphin; but the king was gone in quest of her: he, however, quickly returning, they waited together in a horrid state of suspence. Several of the guards, who endeavoured to keep back the mob, were wounded; yet all this happened in a very short space of time.

The promptitude and rapidity of this movement, taking every circumstance into consideration, affords additional arguments in support of the opinion, that there had been a premeditated design to murder the royal family. The king had granted all they asked the evening before; sending away great part of the multitude delighted with his condescension; and they had received no fresh provocation to excite this outrage. The audacity of the most desperate mob has never led them, in the presence of a superiour force, to attempt to chastise their governors; and it is not even probable that banditti, who had been moved by the common causes of such insurrections, should have thought of murdering their sovereign, who, in the eyes of the greater number of frenchmen, was still shrouded by that divinity, tacitly allowed to hover round kings, much less have dared to attempt it.

La Fayette was quickly roused; and, sending his *aides-de-camp* to assemble the national guards, he followed the ruffians with equal celerity. They had actually forced the king's apartment at the moment he arrived; and the royal family were listening to the increasing tumult as the harbinger of death,—when all was hushed,—and the door opening a moment after, the national guards entered respectfully, saying they came to save the king;—'and we will save you too, gentlemen,' added they, addressing the bodyguards, who were in the chamber.

The vagabonds were now pursued in their turn, and driven from room to room, in the midst of their pillage, for they had already begun to ransack that sumptuously furnished palace. From the palace they repaired to the stables, still intent on plunder, and carried away some horses, which were as quickly retaken. Every where they pursued the body-guards, and every where the generous parisian troops, forgetting their piqued pride and personal animosity, hazarded their lives to save them.—Till, at length, order was perfectly established.

Such was the termination of this most mysterious affair; one of the blackest of the machinations that have since the revolution disgraced the dignity of man, and sullied the annals of humanity. Disappointed in their main object, these wretches beheaded two of the guards, who fell into their hands; and hurried away towards the metropolis, with the *insignia* of their atrocity on the points of the barbarous instruments of

vengeance—showing in every instance, by the difference of their conduct, that they were a set of monsters, distinct from the people.

Whilst nature shudders at imputing to any one a plan so inhuman, the general character and life of the duke of Orleans warrant the belief, that he was the author of this tumult. And when we compare the singularly ferocious appearance of the mob, with the brutal violation of the apartment of the queen, there remains little doubt, but that a design was on foot against the lives of both her and the king.—Yet in this, and most other instances, the man has wanted courage to consummate his villany, when the plot he had been following up was ripe.

It is, perhaps, not the least noble faculty of the mind, to question the motives of action, which are repugnant to the feelings of nature, outraging the most sacred feelings of the human soul. But it is the developement of a character, that enables us to estimate it's depravity; and had the conduct of that wretch ever varied, the veil of mystery might still have remained unrent, and posterity, hearing of the judgment of the châtelet, would have believed *Egalité* innocent. The court had become highly obnoxious to the nation, and with it the king was implicated, in spite of the efforts of Mirabeau, and some other favourites of the people, to render him respectable; so that there wanted not a plausible reason for suspecting, that the duke might aspire at obtaining the regency, though Louis was neither massacred, nor allowed to escape. But the present scheme being disconcerted, fear, for a while, damped his ambition: and La Fayette, finding that these suspicions still formed a pretext to excite commotions, with a view to quiet the minds of the parisians, seconded the importunities of the duke, who wished to visit England, till the affair blew over. The king, therefore, was prevailed on to give him a nominal commission, to be made use of as a plea to obtain liberty of absence from the assembly, of which he was a member.

He was certainly very apprehensive of an investigation of the business; and revenge and ambition equally giving way to personal fear, he left his colleagues to finish the constitution, and his agents to recover his fame, by representing the story as a calumny of the royalists, against whom the public were sufficiently enraged to credit any aspersion.

The bold tone he assumed the july following was far from being a proof of his innocence; because it was not very probable, that a cunning man should take his measures in such a critical affair without due precaution.—On the contrary, he would labour to sink so entirely into the back-ground of the plot, as to render it difficult, if not impossible, for him to be perceived. And this was practicable to a man, who was willing, in the promotion of his purpose, to dissipate the most splendid fortune.

To a disposition for low intrigue was added also a decided preference of the grossest libertinism, seasoned with vulgarity, highly congenial with the manners of the heroines, who composed the singular army of the females.

Having taken up his abode in the centre of the palais royal, a very superb square, yet the last in which a person of any delicacy, not to mention decorum, or morality, would

choose to reside; because, excepting the people in trade, who found it convenient, it was entirely occupied by the most shameless girls of the town, their hectoring protectors, gamesters, and sharpers of every denomination. In short, by the vilest of women; by wretches, who lived in houses from which the stript bodies, often found in the Seine, were supposed to be thrown* —and he was considered as the grand sultan of this den of iniquity. Living thus in the lap of crime, his heart was as tainted as the foul atmosphere he breathed.—Incapable of affection, his amours were the jaundiced caprices of satiety; and having proved in the affair of Keppel and d'Orvilliers, that he wanted the courage of a man, he appears to have been as fit for dark under-hand assassinations as he was unequal to any attempt flowing from virtuous ambition.

That a body of women should put themselves in motion to demand relief of the king, or to remonstrate with the assembly respecting their tardy manner of forming the constitution, is scarcely probable; and that they should have undertaken the business, without being instigated by designing persons, when all Paris was dissatisfied with the conduct and the procrastination of the assembly, is a belief which the most credulous will hardly swallow,' unless they take into their view, that the want of bread was the bye word used by those, who in a great measure produced it; for perceiving the turn the public mind was taking, they drove the mob on to perpetrate the mischief long designed, under the sanction of national indignation.

It is evident, that the court was not concerned, however desirous the eabinet might have been to render the people discontented with the new order of things; for they seem to have been entirely occupied with the scheme, on which they built the most sanguine expectation, of prevailing on the king to retire to Metz. Besides, the course the project took is a circumstantial evidence, that, designed against Versailles, it was not meditated there.

That the Châtelet should not have been able to substantiate any proof of his guilt, is not in the least extraordinary.—It is only necessary to be acquainted with the general propensity of the french to intrigue, to know, that there is no service, however dangerous, or purpose, however black, for which gold will not find a man. There were wretches, who would have considered exile as an escape from the continual dread of menaced detection, could they carry with them a sum to commence anew their fraudulent practices in another country; and money the duke did not spare to gratify his passions, though sordidly mean when they were out of the question.

His remaining also in England for such a length of time, merely to avoid disturbing the tranquillity of the state, when it was possible, that by it's disorder and agitation he might gain a sceptre, cannot be credited; because it is well known, that he never sacrificed any selfish consideration to the general good. Such examples of self-denial and true patriotism are uncommon, even from the most virtuous men; and it is idle to imagine, that a man, whom all the world allowed to be vicious, should risk the popularity, which he had been at such pains to acquire, unless it were to guard his life.

On his return, nevertheless, finding that all was safe, he appeared in the assembly, provoking the inquiry from which he had before skulked; and braving detection, when the danger was passed, he had the address to persuade the public of his innocence.

Nay, the mock patriots of the day, pretending to despise princes, were glad to have a prince on their side.

The report, that Mirabeau, always an avowed advocate for a limited monarchy, was concerned in the plot, was certainly a calumny; because it is notorious, that he had an habitual contempt for the duke, which had even produced a decided coolness some time before. And, if any collateral proof of his innocence were necessary, it would be sufficient to add, that the abbé Maury, his competitor in eloquence, and opponent in opinion, declared there was no ground for his impeachment.

It is unfortunate, indeed, that some of the villains employed were not immediately interrogated. The soldiery, in chasing them from one quarter to another, gave proofs not only of their intrepidity, but attachment to the new government; and the only reprehensible part of their conduct was suffering the murderers to escape, instead of apprehending as many as they could, and bringing them to condign punishment. Such an omission, it was to be feared, would produce the most fatal consequences, because impunity never fails to stimulate the wretches, who have arrived at such a pitch of wickedness, to commit fresh, and, if possible, still more atrocious crimes; and it is by suspending the decrees of justice, that hardened miscreants, made so by oppression, give full scope to all the brutality of their sanguinary dispositions.

This neglect, in their turn, was not the least reprehensible or fatal errour, produced by the factions of the assembly. The crisis demanded vigour and boldness.—The laws had been trampled on by a gang of banditti the most desperate—The altar of humanity had been profaned—The dignity of freedom had been tarnished—The sanctuary of repose, the asylum of care and fatigue, the chaste temple of a woman, I consider the queen only as one, the apartment where she consigns her senses to the bosom of sleep, folded in it's arms forgetful of the world, was violated with murderous fury—The life of the king was assailed, when he had acceded to all their demands—And, when their plunder was snatched from them, they massacred the guards, who were doing their duty.—Yet these brutes were permitted triumphantly to escape—and dignified with the appellation of the people, their outrage was in a great measure attempted to be excused by those deputies, who sometimes endeavoured to gain an undue influence through the interposition of the mob.

At this moment the assembly ought to have known, that the future respectability of their laws must greatly depend on the conduct they pursued on the present occasion; and it was time to show the parisians, that, giving freedom to the nation, they meant to guard it by a strict adherence to the laws, that naturally issue from the simple principles of equal justice they were adopting; punishing with just severity all such as should offer to violate, or treat them with contempt. Wisdom, precision, and courage, are the permanent supports of authority—the durable pillars of every just government, and they only require to be, as it were, the porticos of the structure, to obtain for it, at once, both the admiration and obedience of the people. To maintain subordination in a state by any other means is not merely difficult, but, for any length of time, impossible.

They ought to have stood up as one man in support of insulted justice; and by directing the arm of the law, have smothered in embryo that spirit of rebellion and licentiousness, which, beginning to appear in the metropolis, it was to be feared would attain herculean strength by impunity, and ultimately overturn, with wanton thoughtlessness, or headstrong zeal, all their labours. Yet, so contrary was their conduct to the dictates of common sense, and the common firmness of rectitude of intention, that they not only permitted that gang of assassins to regain their dens; but instantly submitted to the demand of the soldiery, and the peremptory wish of the parisians—that the king should reside within the walls of Paris.

The firmness of conduct, which the representatives of a people should always maintain, had been wanting in the assembly from the moment their power had been acknowledged; for instead of being directed by any regular plan of proceeding, a line equally marked out by integrity and political prudence, they were hurried along by a giddy zeal, and by a burlesque affectation of magnanimity; as puerile as the greater part of their debates were frivolous. Whilst their vanity was gratified by the lively applauses lavished on their inflated and popular declamation, they set fire to the foibles of the multitude, teaching their desperate demagogues to become their rivals in this species of eloquence, till the plans of the leaders of clubs, and popular societies, were generally admired and pursued.

The will of the people being supreme, it is not only the duty of their representatives to respect it, but their political existence ought to depend on their acting conformably to the will of their constituents. Their voice, in enlightened countries, is always the voice of reason. But in the infancy of society, and during the advancement of the science of political liberty, it is highly necessary for the governing authority to be guided by the progress of that science; and to prevent, by judicious measures, any check being given to it's advancement, whilst equal care is taken not to produce the miseries of anarchy by encouraging licentious freedom. The national assembly, however, delighted with their blooming honours, suffered themselves to be hurried forward by a multitude, on whom political light had too suddenly flashed, and seemed to have no apprehension of the danger, which has so fatally resulted from their tame acquiescence.

The people of Paris, who have more than their portion of the national vanity, believed that they had produced the revolution; and thinking themselves both the father and mother of all the great events, which had happened since it's commencement, and that the national assembly, whose conduct indeed betrayed symptoms of an understanding not adult, ought to be directed by their leading-strings, frequently declared, that liberty would not be secured, until the court and the assembly were brought within the walls of the capital. This was the subject of club debates, decided with legislative pomposity, on the rumour of the intended evasion of the king; and the insult offered to the national cockade, the first of october, brought them to the determination—that it was proper he should be there.—Such was their will, the capital of the nation—now sovereign. Foreseeing also, as they had already dreaded, that the only security for infant freedom would be to guard the court, and place in the centre of information their infant representatives; whom they alternately idolized and suspected.

The decorum of manners in a people, long subordinate to the authority of their magistrates, had on several occasions, and even on the fifth of october, controlled the impetuous populace, who had undertaken, or joined in the enterprize; and considering the manner in which they were pushed on, it is extraordinary, that they did not commit greater depredations. For with all their brutality, and eagerness to plunder the palace, they did not attempt to pillage Versailles, though half famished.

The army of La Fayette indeed, principally composed of citizens, behaved not only in an irreproachable manner; but the celerity of their movements, their obedience to the discipline which they had so promptly acquired, joined to the clemency and moderation they displayed, excited the gratitude and respect of all parties.—Still, trembling for the rights that had been so gloriously snatched out of the clinched hand of despotism—it was the wish of all the leaders to have the king at Paris. It was in fact the general sentiment at Paris, and of the greater part of the nation.

That city, which had contributed so essentially in effecting the revolution, viewed with anxiety the influence of a party spirit in the assembly, though themselves split into several political sects, who almost execrated each other. And finding, that the indecision of the members had given fresh hopes to the court, which at last might render their emancipation merely a dazzling meteor, they were restlessly bent on having the king and assembly more immediately in their power. The report, likewise, of Louis's intended escape; which had he effected, it was probable, that he would have been in the next place prevailed on to join the discontented princes and nobles, thus producing a schism in the kingdom, that must infallibly have brought on not only a cruel civil war, but have embroiled them with all the different powers of Europe; was a still more urgent motive: for whilst they were constantly affecting to believe in the goodness of his heart, they never showed by their conduct, that they had any confidence in his sincerity.—Their opinion of the assembly was equally unfixed.—One day a deputy was extolled as the hero of liberty, and the next denounced as a traitorous pensioner of despotism.

These sentiments were dangerous to the authority of the new government; but they were sentiments which never would have been promulged, even had they existed, had the assembly acted with integrity and magnanimity. Because, though the people do not always reason in the most logical or rhetorical style, yet they generally perceive in what consists the defects of their legislators. And in every free government, when the deputies of the state, convened to form laws, do not act with precision and judgment, they will be sure to lose their respectability; and the consequence will be a dissolution of all authority.

It appears to amount to a certainty, that the assembly did not at that time possess the implicit confidence of the people, by their demanding, that the king should be obliged to reside within the barriers of the capital.—It was surely as possible to guard him at Versailles as at Paris; and if it were necessary, that he should be kept as a prisoner of state, or hostage, the government was the proper authority to determine how, and where:—and in giving up this necessary privilege of authority, they surrendered their power to the multitude of Paris.

Or rather a minority of the assembly, who wished to be removed to the capital, by exciting and humouring the people, directed the majority; and in the same manner has the dignity of the representative body ever since been trampled under foot by selfishness, or the blind zeal of vanity.—It is in reality from this epocha, not forgetting such a leading circumstance, that the commencement of the reign of anarchy may be fairly dated. For, though a tolerable degree of order was preserved a considerable time after, because a multitude long accustomed to servitude do not immediately feel their own strength; yet they soon began to tyrannize over one part of their representatives, stimulated by the other. They, however, continued to respect the decrees of the national assembly especially as there were rarely any passed on which the public opinion had not been previously consulted, directed as it was by the popular members, who gained their constant suffrage by the stale trick of crying out for more freedom. It was the indispensable duty of the deputies to respect the dignity of their body—Instead of which, for sinister purposes, many of them instructed the people how to tyrannize over the assembly; thus deserting the main principle of representation, the respect due to the majority. This first grand desertion of the principles, which they affected to adopt in all their purity, led to public misery; involving these short-sighted men in the very ruin they had themselves produced by their mean intrigues.

The authoritative demand of the parisians was striking so directly at the freedom of the assembly, that they must either have been conscious of wanting power, or they had no conception of dignity of action, otherwise they would not have suffered the requisition of the people to have been complied with. Yet they seem to have considered it, if it be not paradoxical to assert it, as an advancement of their independence; or, perhaps, as giving security to their authority, childishly proud of regulating the business of the nation, though under the influence of the parisian despotism.

It is true, such things are the natural consequence of weakness, the effects of inexperience, and the more fatal errours of cowardice. And such will always be the effects of timid, injudicious measures. Men who have violated the sacred feelings of eternal justice, except they are hardened in vice, are never afterwards able to look honest men in the face; and a legislature, watched by an intelligent public, a public that claims the right of thinking for itself, will never after go beyond it, or pass one decree which is not likely to be popular.

To consult the public mind in a perfect state of civilization, will not only be necessary, but it will be productive of the happiest consequences, generating a government emanating from the sense of the nation, for which alone it can legally exist. The progress of reason being gradual, it is the wisdom of the legislature to advance the simplification of it’s political system, in a manner best adapted to the state of improvement of the understanding of the nation. The sudden change which had happened in France, from the most fettering tyranny to an unbridled liberty, made it scarcely to be expected, that any thing should be managed with the wisdom of experience: it was morally impossible. But it is nevertheless a deplorable reflection, that such evils must follow every revolution, when a change of politics equally

material is required.—Thus it becomes more peculiarly the duty of the historian to record truth; and comment with freedom.

Every nation, deprived by the progress of it's civilization of strength of character, in changing it's government from absolute despotism to enlightened freedom, will, most probably, be plunged into anarchy, and have to struggle with various species of tyranny before it is able to consolidate it's liberty; and that, perhaps, cannot be done, until the manners and amusements of the people are completely changed.

The refinement of the senses, by producing a susceptibility of temper, which from it's capriciousness leaves no time for reflection, interdicts the exercise of the judgment. The lively effusions of mind, characteristically peculiar to the french, are as violent as the impressions are transitory: and their benevolence evaporating in sudden gusts of sympathy, they become cold in the same proportion as their emotions are quick, and the combinations of their fancy brilliant. People who are carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, are most frequently betrayed by their imagination, and commit some errour, the conviction of which not only damps their heroism, but relaxes the nerve of common exertions. Freedom is a solid good, that requires to be treated with reverence and respect.—But, whilst an effeminate race of heroes are contending for her smiles, with all the blandishments of gallantry, it is to their more vigorous and natural posterity, that she will consign herself with all the mild effulgence of artless charms.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER III.

the moe demand the king's removal to paris. this city described. the king repairs to the capital, escorted by a deputation of the national assembly and the parisian militia. the king's title changed. proceedings of the national assembly. reflections on the declaration of rights.

AFTER the wild tumult, on the morning of the 6th of october, abated, the king showed himself to the people, in the balcony, and the queen followed with the dauphin in her arms. At first, he vainly attempted to speak; but La Fayette informed the people, that his majesty came forward to assure them, that it should be the business of his life to contribute to the happiness of his people. *The king at Paris,* exclaimed a voice, which was quickly re-echoed by the crowd. 'My children,' replied the king, 'you wish me to be at Paris, and I will go; but it is on the condition, that my wife and family accompany me.' A loud shout of *vive le roi* restified the extacy of the moment. The king made a sign to demand silence; and then, with tears in his eyes addressed them again.—'Ah! my children, run to the relief of my guards.' Immediately two or three appeared in the balcony with the national cockade in their hats, or the cap of liberty on their heads. The king threw his arms round one of them, and the people following his example embraced those whom they had taken prisoners in the court. One sentiment of gladness seemed to animate the whole concourse of people; and their sensibility produced as mad demonstrations of joy as lately had been displayed of ferocity. The soldiery all mingled together, exchanging swords, hats, or shoulder belts—exhibiting in the most striking manner the prominent features of the french character.

Meanwhile the assembly, instead of instantly examining into the particulars of that alarming convulsion, and exerting themselves to cause a proper respect to be paid to the sovereignty of the law, childishly gave way to the universal transport: instead of considering the peremptory wish of the people to remove the king to Paris as a distrust of their wisdom, as well as of the veracity of the court, which was in some measure the case, they unanimously agreed to the motion of Mirabeau, seconded by Barnave, 'that the king and assembly should not be separated during the present sessions.' Mirabeau, and other popular members, were probably glad to have the person of the king secured, without being obliged to appear, in an ostensible manner, in the affair; because they always endeavoured to keep a little hold on the court, whilst they led the people. Such are the pitiful shifts of men, who are not guided by the compass of moral principles, which alone render the character dignified or consistent. Readily then acquiescing in a measure the most fatal and contemptible, they decreed, that the assembly was inseparable from the person of the king, and sent a deputation to inform him of this resolve, previous to his departure.

That Louis, finding all his projects for the present defeated, and after such a narrow escape for his life, should readily have acceded to the demand of the multitude, is not in the least extraordinary.—But, that the representatives of the nation should, without resistance or remonstrance, have surrendered their authority, and thrown themselves

headlong into the heart of a city, which could be suddenly agitated, and put into the most disorderly and dangerous commotion, by the intrigues or folly of any desperate or factious leader of the multitude—suffering themselves to be environed by it's wall, shut in by it's barriers—in a word—choosing to live in a capacious prison; for men forced, or drawn into any such situation, are in reality slaves or prisoners,—almost surpasses belief. This absurd conduct, in fact, can be accounted for only by considering the national character, and the different though equally interested views, of the court and popular parties, in the assembly.

Independent of the additional incense of praise, with which Mirabeau wished to be continually regaled, in the metropolis, he had a decided preference for it, frequently asserting, that it was the only place where society was truly desirable; the people and place, in spite of their vices and follies, equally attaching the taste they cultivated.

Exclaiming against capitals, the impartial observer must acknowledge, that much has been done to render this a superb monument of human ingenuity.

The entrance into Paris, by the Thuilleries, is certainly very magnificent. The roads have an expansion that agrees with the idea of a large luxurious city, and with the beauty of the buildings in the noble square, that first attracts the travellers eye. The lofty trees on each side of the road, forming charming alleys, in which the people walk and lounge with an easy gaiety peculiar to the nation, seem calculated equally to secure their health and promote their pleasure. The barriers, likewise, are stately edifices, that tower with grandeur, rendering the view, as the city is approached, truly picturesque.

But—these very barriers, built by Calonne, who liked to have Paris compared with Athens, excite the most melancholy reflections.—They were first erected by despotism to secure the payment of an oppressive tax, and since have fatally assisted to render anarchy more violent by concentration, cutting off the possibility of innocent victims escaping from the fury, or the mistake, of the moment.—Thus miscreants have had sufficient influence to guard these barriers, and caging the objects of their fear or vengeance, have slaughtered them; or, violating the purity of justice, have coolly wrested laws hastily formed to serve sinister designs—changing it's sacred sword into a dagger, and terming the assassin's stab the stroke of justice, because given with the mock ceremonials of equity, which only rendered the crime more atrocious. The tyrant, who, bounding over all restraint, braves the eternal law he tramples on, is not half so detestable as the reptile who crawls under the shelter of the principles he violates. Such has been the effect of the enclosure of Paris: and the reflections of wounded humanity disenchanting the senses, the elegant structures, which served as gates to this great prison, no longer appear magnificent porticoes.

Still the eye of taste rests with pleasure on its buildings and decorations: proportion and harmony gratify the sight, whilst airy ornaments seem to toss a simple, playful elegance around. The heavens too smile, diffusing fragrance: and as the inhabitants trip along the charming boulevard, the genial atmosphere seems instantaneously to inspire the animal spirits, which give birth to the varied graces that glide around. Clustering flowers, with luxuriant pomp, lend their sweets, giving a freshness to the

fairy scene—nature and art combining with great felicity to charm the senses, and touch the heart, alive to the social feelings, and to the beauties most dear to fancy.

Why starts the tear of anguish to mingle with recollections that sentiment fosters—even in obedience to reason?—For it is wise to be happy!—and nature and virtue will always open inlets of joy to the heart. But how quickly vanishes this prospect of delights! of delights such as man ought to taste!—The cavalcade of death moves along, shedding mildew over all the beauties of the scene, and blasting every joy! The elegance of the palaces and buildings is revolting, when they are viewed as prisons, and the sprightliness of the people disgusting, when they are hastening to view the operations of the guillotine, or carelessly passing over the earth stained with blood. Exasperated humanity then, with bitterness of soul, devotes the city to destruction; whilst turning from such a nest of crimes, it seeks for consolation only in the conviction, that, as the world is growing wiser, it must become happier; and that, as the cultivation of the soil meliorates a climate, the improvement of the understanding will prevent those banesul excesses of passion which poison the heart.

A deputation of the national assembly accompanied the royal family to Paris, as well as the parisian militia. A number of the women preceded them, mounted on the carriages which they had taken in their way to Versailles, and on the cannons, covered with national cockades, and dragging in the dirt those that were considered as symbols of aristocracy. Soon after they set out, either by chance, or, which is more probable, pursuant to a plan contrived by some person in power, forty or fifty loads of wheat and flour fell into the procession, just before the king, giving weight to the exclamation of the populace, that they had brought the baker and his family to town.

The assembly continued to sit at Versailles till the nineteenth; and several interesting debates were entered upon, particularly one brought forward by the bishop of Autun, respecting the appropriation of the estates of the clergy to supply the exigences of the government. The abolition of *lettres de cachet* was considered, and a fresh organization of the municipalities proposed; but as none of these motions were carried before they were more fully discussed at Paris, it seems best to bring the different arguments on those important subjects under one point of view.

Settling the articles of the constitution, however, which previously occupied them, several frivolous discussions, respecting the style of expression to be adopted to signify the king's acceptance of their decrees, were lengthened out with warmth, and puerile objections made to ancient forms—that were merely forms. After some disputation, the title of the monarch was changed from king of France, with the rest of the formule, for that of king of the French; because Rousseau had remarked, perhaps fastidiously, that the title ought to express rather the chief of the people, than the master of the soil.

The intended removal of the assembly to Paris also produced several warm debates. This resolution, indeed, excited, not without reason, apprehensions in the breasts of some of the deputies, relative to their personal safety, should they, in future, venture to oppose any of the motions of the popular party, which that party instructed the mob of Paris to support.

The president, Mounier, pleading his bad state of health, begged to be dismissed; and Lally-Tolendal, thinking that he could not stem the torrent, retired from public business at the same time. A great many of the members hinting their fears, that the assembly would not be free at Paris, on various pretexts demanded such a number of passports, as to make the president express some apprehension lest the assembly should thus indirectly dissolve itself; whilst other deputies uttered a profusion of indecent sarcasms on a conduct, which the behaviour of the populace, and even of these very orators, seemed to justify. Mirabeau, who so earnestly desired to be at Paris, ridiculed with unbecoming bitterness every opposition made to the removal of the assembly; yet, listening to the representation, that the allowing so many malecontents to retire into the provinces might produce dangerous fermentations, he proposed that no passport should be granted, till the deputy who demanded it had made known his reason for so doing to the assembly. A letter from the king, notifying his intention of residing most part of his time at Paris, and expressing his assurance, that they did not mean to separate themselves from him, now requested them to send commissioners to Paris, to search for a proper place, where they might in future hold their sessions. They accordingly determined to go thither, conformably to the decree of the sixth of october, when a convenient situation should be found.

After this determination, several members gave an account of the gross insults they had received at Paris. One in particular, who was not obnoxious to the public, narrowly escaped with life, only because he was mistaken for a deputy against whom the mob had vowed vengeance. Another, who had also been insulted, with proper spirit moved, that a decree respecting libels should instantly be passed. ‘Are we,’ he asked, ‘to be led to liberty only by licentiousness? No; the people, deceived and intoxicated, are rendered furious. How many times (he added) have I lamented the impetuosity of this assembly, who have accustomed the public, seated in our galleries, to praise, to blame, to deride our opinions, without understanding them.—And who has inspired them with this audacity?’ — He was interrupted by signs of disapprobation; and personalities now disgraced the debate, in which Mirabeau mingled satirical observations and retorts, that did more credit to his abilities than to his heart. But, a day or two after, recollecting himself, he presented the plan of a decree to prevent riots, which he introduced, by saying, that it was an imitation, though not a copy, of the English riot act.

The evening before the departure of the assembly for Paris, passports being still demanded with earnestness, a decree was made, ‘that passports should be granted only for a short and determinate time, on account of urgent business; and that unlimited passports, in cases of ill health, should not be granted before the deputies were replaced by their substitutes;’ and further, cutting a knot that might have revived old claims and animosities, had it been brought forward alone, they decreed, ‘that in future the substitutes should be nominated by the citizens at large; and that, eight days after the first session at Paris, there should be a call of the house; suspending till then the consideration of the propriety of printing and sending to the provinces the list of the absent deputies.’

The constraining so many members to remain at their posts, and condemning a man to a state of ignominious servitude, whilst they were talking of nothing but liberty, was

as contemptibly little, as the policy was injudicious. For if the king pretended to acquiesce in their measures the better to disguise his real intention, which doubtless was to fly as soon as he could find an opportunity, or was at liberty, what did they gain? For as they must have known, that his emancipation would be the consequence of his acceptance of the constitution, his imprisonment could only tend to retard their operations: yet they had neither the magnanimity to allow him to depart with an handsome stipend, if such were his wish; nor to grant him such a portion of power, in the new constitution, as would, by rendering him respectable in his own eyes, have reconciled him to the deprivation of the rest. But, as things were settled, it was morally certain, that, whenever his friends were ready, a blow would be directed against them, which they were then as well prepared to meet as they could be at a subsequent period.

Under the influence of fixed systems, certain moral effects are as infallible as physical.—That every insidious attempt would be made by the courts of Europe, to overturn the new government of France, was therefore certain; and, unless they had all been overturned at the same time, was as much to be expected as any effect from a natural cause. The most likely mean then to have parried the evil would have been a decided firmness of conduct, which, flowing from a real love of justice, produces true magnanimity; and not a parading affectation of the virtues of romans, with the degenerate minds of their posterity.

Precision, wisdom, and courage, never fail to secure the admiration and respect of all descriptions of people; and every government thus directed will keep in awe it's licentious neighbours. But fear and timidity betray symptoms of weakness, that, creating contempt and disrespect, encourage the attempts of ambitious despots; so that the noblest causes are sometimes ruined or vilified by the folly or indiscretion of their directors. All Europe saw, and all good men saw with dread, that the french had undertaken to support a cause, which they had neither sufficient purity of heart, nor maturity of judgment, to conduct with moderation and prudence; whilst malevolence has been gratified by the errours they have committed, attributing that imperfection to the theory they adopted, which was applicable only to the folly of their practice.

However, frenchmen have reason to rejoice, and posterity will be grateful, for what was done by the assembly.

The economy of government had been so ably treated by the writers of the present age, that it was impossible for them, acting on the great scale of public good, not to lay the foundations of many useful plans, as they reformed many grievous and grinding abuses.—Accordingly we find, though they had not sufficient penetration to foresee the dreadful consequences of years of anarchy, the probable result of their manner of proceeding, still by following, in some degree, the instructions of their constituents, who had digested, from the bright lines of philosophical truths, the prominent rules of political science, they, in laying the main pillars of the constitution, established beyond a possibility of obliteration, the great principles of liberty and equality.

It is allowed by all parties, that civilization is a blessing, so far as it gives security to person and property, and the milder graces of taste to society and manners. If, therefore, the polishing of man, and the improvement of his intellect, become necessary to secure these advantages, it follows, of course, that the more general such improvement grows, the greater the extension of human happiness.

In a savage state man is distinguished only by superiority of genius, prowess, and eloquence. I say eloquence, for I believe, that in this stage of society he is most eloquent, because most natural. For it is only in the progress of governments, that hereditary distinctions, cruelly abridging rational liberty, have prevented man from rising to his just point of elevation, by the exercise of his improveable faculties.

That there is a superiority of natural genius among men does not admit of dispute; and that in countries the most free there will always be distinctions proceeding from superiority of judgment, and the power of acquiring more delicacy of taste, which may be the effect of the peculiar organization, or whatever cause produces it, is an incontestible truth. But it is a palpable errour to suppose, that men of every class are not equally susceptible of common improvement: if therefore it be the contrivance of any government, to preclude from a chance of improvement the greater part of the citizens of the state, it can be considered in no other light than as a monstrous tyranny, a barbarous oppression, equally injurious to the two parties, though in different ways. For all the advantages of civilization cannot be felt, unless it pervades the whole mass, humanizing every description of men—and then it is the first of blessings, the true perfection of man.

The melioration of the old government of France arose entirely from a degree of urbanity acquired by the higher class, which insensibly produced, by a kind of natural courtesy, a small portion of civil liberty. But, as for political liberty, there was not the shadow of it; or could it ever have been generated under such a system: because, whilst men were prevented not only from arriving at public offices, or voting for the nomination of others to fill them, but even from attaining any distinct idea of what was meant by liberty in a practical sense, the great bulk of the people were worse than savages; retaining much of the ignorance of barbarians, after having poisoned the noble qualities of nature by imbibing some of the habits of degenerate refinement. To the national assembly it is, that France is indebted for having prepared a simple code of instruction, containing all the truths necessary to give a comprehensive perception of political science; which will enable the ignorant to climb the mount of knowledge, whence they may view the ruins of the ingenious fabric of despotism, that had so long disgraced the dignity of man by it's odious and debasing claims.

The declaration of rights contains an aggregate of principles the most beneficial; yet so simple, that the most ordinary capacity cannot fail to comprehend their import. It begins by asserting, that the rights of men are equal, and that no distinctions can exist in a wholesome government, but what are founded on public utility. Then showing, that political associations are intended only for the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man, which are his liberty, security of property, and resistance against oppression; and asserting also, that the nation is the source of all fovereignty; it delineates, in a plain and perspicuous manner, in what these rights, and

this sovereignty, consist. In this delineation men may learn, that, in the exercise of their natural rights, they have the power of doing whatever does not injure another; and that this power has no limits, which are not determined by law—the laws being at the same time an expression of the will of the community, because all the citizens of the state, either personally, or by their representatives, have a right to concur in the formation.

Thus, having taught the citizens the fundamental principles of a legitimate government, it proceeds to show how the opinion of each may be ascertained; which he has a right to give personally, or by his representatives, to determine the necessity of public contributions, their appropriation, mode of assessment, and duration.

The simplicity of these principles, promulged by the men of genius of the last and present ages, and their justness, acknowledged by every description of unprejudiced men, had not been recognised by any senate or government in Europe; and it was an honour worthy to be reserved for the representatives of twenty-five millions of men, rising to the sense and feeling of rational beings, to be the first to dare to ratify such sacred and beneficial truths—truths, the existence of which had been eternal; and which required only to be made known, to be generally acknowledged—truths, which have been fostered by the genius of philosophy, whilst hereditary wealth and the bayonet of despotism have continually been opposed to their establishment.

The publicity of a government acting conformably to the principles of reason, in contradistinction to the maxims of oppression, affords the people an opportunity, or at least a chance, of judging of the wisdom and moderation of their ministers; and the eye of discernment, when permitted to make known it's observations, will always prove a check on the profligacy or dangerous ambition of aspiring men.—So that in contemplating the extension of representative systems of polity, we have solid ground on which to rest the expectation—that wars and their calamitous effects will become less frequent, in proportion as the people, who are obliged to support them with their sweat and blood, are consulted respecting their necessity and consequences.

Such consultations can take place under representative systems of government only—under systems which demand the responsibility of their ministers, and secure the publicity of their political conduct. The mysteries of courts, and the intrigues of their parasites, have continually deluged Europe with the blood of it's most worthy and heroic citizens, and there is no specific cure for such evils, but by enabling the people to form an opinion respecting the subject of dispute.

The court of Versailles, with powers the most ample, was the most busy and insidious of any in Europe; and the horrours which she has occasioned, at different periods, were as incalculable, as her ambition was unbounded, and her councils base, unprincipled, and dishonourable. If, then, it were only for abolishing her sway, Europe ought to be thankful for a change, that, by altering the political systems of the most improved quarter of the globe, must ultimately lead to universal freedom, virtue, and happiness.

But it is to be presumed, when the effervescence, which now agitates the prejudices of the whole continent, subsides, the justness of the principles brought forward in the declaration of the rights of men and citizens will be generally granted; and that governments, in future, acquiring reason and dignity, feeling for the sufferings of the people, whilst reprobating the sacrilege of tyranny, will make it their principal object, to counteract it's baneful tendency, by restraining within just bounds the ambition of individuals.

[Back to Table of Contents]

CHAPTER IV.

progress of reform. the encyclopedie. liberty of the press. capitals. the french not properly qualified for the revolution. savage compared with civilized man. effects of extravagance—of commerce—and of manufactures. excuse for the ferocity of the parisians.

PEOPLE thinking for themselves have more energy in their voice, than any government, which it is possible for human wisdom to invent; and every government not aware of this sacred truth will, at some period, be suddenly overturned. Whilst men in a savage state preserve their independence, they adopt no regular system of policy, nor ever attempt to digest their rude code of laws into a constitution, to ensure political liberty. Consequently we find in every country, after it's civilization has arrived at a certain height, that the people, the moment they are displeased with their rulers, begin to clamour against them; and, finally rejecting all authority but their own will, in breaking the shackles of folly or tyranny, they glut their resentment by the mischievous destruction of the works of ages, only considering them as the moments of their servitude.

From the social disposition of man, in proportion as he becomes civilized, he will mingle more and more with society. The first interest he takes in the business of his fellow-men is in that of his neighbour; next he contemplates the comfort, misery, and happiness of the nation to which he belongs, investigates the degree of wisdom and justice in the political system, under which he lives, and, striding into the regions of science, his researches embrace all human kind. Thus he is enabled to estimate the portion of evil or good which the government of his country produces, compared with that of others; and the comparison, granting him superiour powers of mind, leads him to conceive a model of a more perfect form.

This spirit of inquiry first manifests itself in hamlets; when his views of improvement are confined to local advantages: but the approximation of different districts leading to further intercourse, roads of communication are opened, until a central or favourite spot becomes the vortex of men and things. Then the rising spires, pompous domes, and majestic monuments, point out the capital; the focus of information, the reservoir of genius; the school of arts, the seat of voluptuous gratification, and the hot-bed of vice and immorality.

The centrifugal rays of knowledge and science now stealing through the empire, the whole intellectual faculties of man partake of their influence, and one general sentiment governs the civil and political body. In the progress of these improvements the state undergoing a variety of changes, the happiness or misery produced occasions a diversity of opinions; and to prevent confusion, absolute governments have been tolerated by the most enlightened part of the people. But, probably, this toleration was merely the effect of the strong social feelings of men; who preferred tranquillity, and the prosperity of their country, to a resistance, which, judging from the ignorance of their fellow citizens, they believed would bring more harm than good in it's train. In

short, however long a combination of tyranny has retarded the progress, it has been one of the advantages of the large cities of Europe, to light up the sparks of reason, and to extend the principles of truth.

Such is the good and evil flowing from the capitals of states, that during the infancy of governments, though they tend to corrupt and enervate the mind, they accelerate the introduction of science, and give the tone to the national sentiments and taste.

But this influence is extremely gradual; and it requires a great length of time, for the remote corners of the empire to experience either the one, or the other of these effects. Hence we have seen the inhabitants of a metropolis feeble and vitiated, and those of the provinces robust and virtuous. Hence we have seen oppositions in a city (riots as they are called) to illegal governments instantly defeated, and their leaders hanged or tortured; because the judgment of the state was not sufficiently matured to support the struggle of the unhappy victims in a righteous cause. And hence it has happened, that the despots of the world have found it necessary to maintain large standing armies, in order to counteract the effects of truth and reason.

The continuation of the feudal system, however, for a great length of time, by giving an overgrown influence to the nobility of France, had contributed, in no small degree, to counteract the despotism of her kings. Thus it was not until after the arbitrary administration of Richelieu, who had terrified the whole order by a tyranny peculiar to himself, that the insidious Mazarine broke the independent spirit of the nation by introducing the sale of honours; and that Louis XIV, by the magnificence of his follies, and the meretricious decorations of stars, crosses, and other marks of distinction, or badges of slavery, drew the nobles from their castles; and, by concentrating the pleasures and wealth of the kingdom in Paris, the luxury of the court became commensurate to the product of the nation. Besides, the encouragement given to enervating pleasures, and the venality of titles, purchased either with money, or ignoble services, soon rendered the nobility as notorious for effeminacy as they had been illustrious for heroism in the days of the gallant Henry.

The arts had already formed a school, and men of science and literature were hurrying from every part of the kingdom to the metropolis, in search of employment and of honour; and whilst it was giving it’s tone to the empire, the parisian taste was pervading Europe.

The vanity of leading the fashions, in the higher orders of society, is not the smallest weakness produced by the sluggishness into which people of quality naturally fall. The depravity of manners, and the sameness of pleasure, which compose a life of idleness, are sure to produce an insupportable *ennui;* and, in proportion to the stupidity of the man, or as his sensibility becomes deadened, he has recourse to variety, finding a zest only from a new creation of charms; and commonly the most unnatural are necessary to rouse sickly, fastidious senses. Still in the same degree as the refinement of sentiment, and the improvement of taste advance, the company of celebrated literary characters is sought after with avidity; and from the prevalence of fashion, the empire of wit succeeds the reign of formal insipidity, after the squeamish palate has been rendered delicate even by the nauseous banquets of voluptuousness.

This is the natural consequence of the improvement of manners, the harbinger of reason; and from the ratio of it's advancement throughout society, we are enabled to estimate the progress of political science. For no sooner had the disquisition of philosophical subjects become general in the select parties of amusement, extending by degrees to every class of society, than the rigour of the ancient government of France began to soften; till it's mildness became so considerable, that superficial observers have attributed the exercise of lenity in the administration to the wisdom and excellence of the system itself.

A confederacy of philosophers, whose opinions furnished the food of colloquial entertainment, gave a turn for instructive and useful reading to the leaders of circles, and drew the attention of the nation to the principles of political and civil government. Whilst by the compilation of the Encyclopedia, the repository of their thoughts, as an abstract work, they eluded the dangerous vigilance of absolute ministers; thus in a body disseminating those truths in the economy of finance, which, perhaps, they would not have had sufficient courage separately to have produced in individual publications; or, if they had, they would most probably have been suppressed.

This is one of the few instances of an association of men becoming useful, instead of being cramped by joint exertions. And the cause is clear:—the work did not require a little party spirit; but each had a distinct subject of investigation to pursue with solitary energy. His destination was traced upon a calm sea, which could not expose him to the Scylla or Charybdis of vanity or interest.

The economists, carrying away the palm from their opponents, showed that the prosperity of a state depends on the freedom of industry; that talents should be permitted to find their level; that the unshackling of commerce is the only secret to render it flourishing, and answer more effectually the ends for which it is politically necessary; and that the imposts should be laid upon the surplus remaining, after the husbandman has been reimbursed for his labour and expences.

Ideas so new, and yet so just and simple, could not fail to produce a great effect on the minds of frenchmen; who, constitutionally attached to novelty and ingenious speculations, were sure to be enamoured with a prospect of consolidating the great advantages of such a novel and enlightened system; and without calculating the danger of attacking old prejudices; nay, without ever considering, that it was a much easier task to pull down than to build up, they gave themselves little trouble to examine the gradual steps by which other countries have attained their degree of political improvement.

The many vexatious taxes, which under the french government not only enervated the exertions of unprivileged persons, stagnating the live stream of trade, but were extremely teasing inconveniences to every private man, who could not travel from one place to another without being stopped at barriers, and searched by officers of different descriptions, were almost insuperable impediments in the way of the improvements of industry: and the abridgment of liberty was not more grievous in it's pecuniary consequences, than in the personal mortification of being compelled to observe regulations as troublesome as they were at variance with sound policy.

Irritations of the temper produce more poignant sensations of disgust than serious injuries. Frenchmen, indeed, had been so long accustomed to these vexatious forms, that, like the ox who is daily yoked, they were no longer galled in spirit, or exhaled their angry ebullitions in a song. Still it might have been supposed, that after reflecting little, and talking much, about the sublimity and superiour excellence of the plans of *french* writers above those of other nations, they would become as passionate for liberty, as a man restrained by some idle religious vow is to possess a mistress, to whose charms the imagination has lent all it's own world of graces.

Besides, the very manner of living in France gives a lively turn to the character of the people; for by the destruction of the animal juices, in dressing their food, they are subject to none of that dulness, the effect of more nutritive diet in other countries; and this gaiety is increased by the moderate quantity of weak wine, which they drink at their meals, bidding defiance to phlegm. The people also living entirely in villages and towns are more social; so that the tone of the capital, the instant it had a note distinct from that of the court, became the key of the nation; though the inhabitants of the provinces polished their manners with less danger to their morals, or natural simplicity of character. But this mode of peopling the country tended more to civilize the inhabitants, than to change the face of the soil, or lead to agricultural improvements. For it is by residing in the midst of their land, that farmers make the most of it, in every sense of the word—so that the rude state of husbandry, and the awkwardness of the implements used by these ingenious people, may be imputed solely to this cause.

The situation of France was likewise very favourable for collecting the information, acquired in other parts of the world. Paris, having been made a thoroughfare to all the kingdoms on the continent, received in it's bosom strangers from every quarter; and itself resembling a full hive, the very drones buzzed into every corner all the sentiments of liberty, which it is possible for a people to possess, who have never been enlightened by the broad sunshine of freedom; yet more romantically enthusiastic, probably, for that very reason. Paris, therefore, having not only disseminated information, but presented herself as a bulwark to oppose the despotism of the court, standing the brunt of the fray, seems with some reason, to pride herself on being the author of the revolution.

Though the liberty of the press had not existed in any part of the world, England and America excepted, still the disquisition of political questions had long occupied the intelligent parts of Europe; and in France, more than in any other country, books written with licentious freedom were handed from house to house, with the circumspection that irritates curiosity. Not to lay great stress on the universality of the language, which made one general opinion on the benefits arising from the advancement of science and reason pervade the neighbouring states, particularly Germany; where original compositions began to take place of that laborious erudition, which being employed only in the elucidation of ancient writers, the judgment lies dormant, or is merely called into action to weigh the import of words rather than to estimate the value of things. In Paris, likewise, a knot of ingenious, if not profound writers, twinkled their light into every circle; for being caressed by the great, they did not inhabit the homely recesses of indigence, rusticating their manners as they

cultivated their understandings; on the contrary, the finesse required to convey their free sentiments in their books, broken into the small shot of innuendoes, gave an oiliness to their conversation, and enabled them to take the lead at tables, the voluptuousness of which was grateful to philosophers, rather of the epicurean than the stoic sect.

It had long been the fashion to talk of liberty, and to dispute on hypothetical and logical points of political economy; and these disputations disseminated gleams of truth, and generated more demagogues than had ever appeared in any modern city.—The number exceeded, perhaps, any comparison with that of Athens itself.

The habit also of passing a part of most of their evenings at some theatre gave them an ear for harmony of language, and a fastidious taste for sheer declamation, in which a sentimental jargon extinguishes all the simplicity and fire of passion: the great number of play-houses* , and the moderate prices of the pit and different ranges of boxes, bringing it within the compass of every citizen to frequent the amusement so much beloved by the french.

The arrangement of sounds, and the adjustment of masculine and feminine rhymes, being the secrets of their poetry, the pomp of diction gives a semblance of grandeur to common observations and hackneyed sentiments; because the french language, though copious in the phrases that give each shade of sentiment, has not, like the italian, the english, the german, a phraseology peculiar to poetry; yet it's happy turns, equivocal, nay even concise expressions, and numerous epithets, which, when ingeniously applied, convey a sentence, or afford matter for half a dozen, make it better adapted to oratorical flourishes than that of any other nation. The french therefore are all rhetoricians, and they have a singular fund of superficial knowledge, caught in the tumult of pleasure from the shallow stream of conversation; so that if they have not the depth of thought which is obtained only by contemplation, they have all the shrewdness of sharpened wit; and their acquirements are so near their tongue's end, that they never miss an opportunity of saying a pertinent thing, or tripping up, by a smart retort, the arguments with which they have not strength fairly to wrestle.

Every political good carried to the extreme must be productive of evil; yet every poison has it's antidote; and there is a pitch of luxury and refinement, which, when reached, will overturn all the absolute governments in the world. The ascertainment of these antidotes is a task the most difficult; and whilst it remains imperfect, a number of men will continue to be the victims of mistaken applications. Like the empirics, who bled a patient to death to prevent a mortification from becoming fatal, the tyrants of the earth have had recourse to cutting off the heads, or torturing the bodies, of those persons who have attempted to check their sway, or doubt their omnipotence. But, though thousands have perished the victims of empirics, and of despots, yet the improvements made both in medicine and moral philosophy have kept a sure, though gradual pace.—And, if men have not clearly discovered a specific remedy for every evil, physical, moral, and political, it is to be presumed, that the accumulation of experimental facts will greatly tend to lessen them in future.

Whilst, therefore, the sumptuous galas of the court of France were the grand source of the refinement of the arts, taste became the antidote to *ennui;* and when sentiment had taken place of chivalrous and gothic tournaments, the reign of philosophy succeeded that of the imagination. And though the government, enveloped in precedents, adjusted still the idle ceremonials, which were no longer imposing, blind to the imperceptible change of things and opinions, as if their faculties were bound by an eternal frost, the progress was invariable; till, reaching a certain point, Paris, which from the particular formation of the empire had been such an useful head to it, began to be the cause of dreadful calamities, extending from individuals to the nation, and from the nation to Europe. Thus it is, that we are led to blame those, who insist, that, because a state of things has been productive of good, it is always respectable; when, on the contrary, the endeavouring to keep alive any hoary establishment, beyond it's natural date, is often pernicious and always useless.

In the infancy of governments, or rather of civilization, courts seem to be necessary to accelerate the improvement of arts and manners, to lead to that of science and morals. Large capitals are the obvious consequences of the riches and luxury of courts; but as, after they have arrived at a certain magnitude and degree of refinement, they become dangerous to the freedom of the people, and incompatible with the safety of a republican government, it may be questioned whether Paris will not occasion more disturbance in settling the new order of things, than is equivalent to the good she produced by accelerating the epocha of the revolution.

However, it appears very certain, that should a republican government be consolidated, Paris must rapidly crumble into decay. It's rise and splendour were owing chiefly, if not entirely, to the old system of government; and since the foundation of it's luxury has been shaken, and it is not likely that the disparting structure will ever again rest securely on it's basis, we may fairly infer, that, in proportion as the charms of solitary reflection and agricultural recreations are felt, the people, by leaving the villages and cities, will give a new complexion to the face of the country—and we may then look for a turn of mind more solid, principles more fixed, and a conduct more consistent and virtuous.

The occupations and habits of life have a wonderful influence on the forming mind; so great, that the superinductions of art stop the growth of the spontaneous shoots of nature, till it is difficult to distinguish natural from factitious morals and feelings; and as the energy of thinking will always proceed, in a great measure, either from our education or manner of living, the frivolity of the french character may be accounted for, without taking refuge in the old hiding place of ignorance—occult causes.

When it is the object of education to prepare the pupil to please every body, and of course to deceive, accomplishments are the one thing needful; and the desire to be admired ever being uppermost, the passions are subjugated, or all drawn into the whirlpool of egotism* . This gives to each person, however different the temper, a tincture of vanity, and that weak vacillation of opinion, which is incompatible with what we term character.

Thus a frenchman, like most women, may be said to have no character distinguishable from that of the nation; unless little shades, and casual lights, be allowed to constitute an essential characteristic. What then could have been expected, when their ambition was mostly confined to dancing gracefully, entering a room with easy assurance, and smiling on and complimenting the very persons whom they meant to ridicule at the next fashionable assembly? The learning to fence with skill, it is true, was useful to a people, whose false notions of honour required that at least a drop of blood should atone for the shadow of an affront. The knack also of uttering sprightly repartees became a necessary art, to supply the place of that real interest only to be nourished in the affectionate intercourse of domestic intimacy, where confidence enlarges the heart it opens. Besides, the desire of eating of every dish at table, no matter if there were fifty, and the custom of separating immediately after the repast, destroy the social affections, reminding a stranger of the vulgar saying—'every man for himself, and God for us all.' After these cursory observations, it is not going too far to advance, that the french were in some respects the most unqualified of any people in Europe to undertake the important work in which they are embarked.

Whilst pleasure was the sole object of living among the higher orders of society, it was the business of the lower to give life to their joys, and convenience to their luxury. This cast-like division, by destroying all strength of character in the former, and debasing the latter to machines, taught frenchmen to be more ingenious in their contrivances for pleasure and show, than the men of any other country; whilst, with respect to the abridgment of labour in the mechanic arts, or to promote the comfort of common life, they were far behind. They had never, in fact, acquired an idea of that independent, comfortable situation, in which contentment is fought rather than happiness; because the slaves of pleasure or power can be roused only by lively emotions and extravagant hopes. Indeed they have no word in their vocabulary to express *comfort*—that state of existence, in which reason renders serene and useful the days, which passion would only cheat with flying dreams of happiness.

A change of character cannot be so sudden as some sanguine calculators expect: yet by the destruction of the rights of primogeniture, a greater degree of equality of property is sure to follow; and as Paris cannot maintain it's splendour, but by the trade of luxury, which can never be carried to the same height it was formerly, the opulent having strong motives to induce them to live more in the country, they must acquire new inclinations and opinions.—As a change also of the system of education and domestic manners will be a natural consequence of the revolution, the french will insensibly rise to a dignity of character far above that of the present race; and then the fruit of their liberty, ripening gradually, will have a relish not to be expected during it's crude and forced state.

The late arrangement of things seems to have been the common effect of an absolute government, a domineering priesthood, and a great inequality of fortune; and whilst it completely destroyed the most important end of society, the comfort and independence of the people, it generated the most shameful depravity and weakness of intellect; so that we have seen the french engaged in a business the most sacred to mankind, giving, by their enthusiasm, splendid examples of their fortitude at one moment, and at another, by their want of firmness and deficiency of judgment,

affording the most glaring and fatal proofs of the just estimate, which all nations have formed of their character.

Men so thoroughly sophisticated, it was to be supposed, would never conduct any business with steadiness and moderation: but it required a knowledge of the nation and their manners, to form a distinct idea of their disgusting conceit and wretched egotism; so far surpassing all the calculations of reason, that, perhaps, should not a faithful picture be now sketched, posterity would be at loss to account for their folly; and attribute to madness, what arose from imbecility.

The natural feelings of man seldom become so contaminated and debased as not sometimes to let escape a gleam of the generous fire, an ethereal spark of the soul; and it is these glowing emotions, in the inmost recesses of the heart, which have continued to feed feelings, that on sudden occasions manifest themselves with all their pristine purity and vigour. But, by the habitual slothfulness of rusty intellects, or the depravity of the heart, lulled into hardness on the lascivious couch of pleasure, those heavenly beams are obscured, and man appears either an hideous monster, a devouring beast; or a spiritless reptile, without dignity or humanity.

Those miserable wretches who crawl under the feet of others are seldom to be found among savages, where men accustomed to exercise and temperance are, in general, brave, hospitable, and magnanimous; and it is only as they surrender their rights, that they lose those noble qualities of the heart. The ferocity of the savage is of a distinct nature from that of the degenerate slaves of tyrants. One murders from mistaken notions of courage; yet he respects his enemy in proportion to his fortitude, and contempt of death: the other assassinates without remorse, whilst his trembling nerves betray the weakness of his affrighted soul at every appearance of danger. Among the former, men are respected according to their abilities; consequently idle drones are driven out of this society; but among the latter, men are raised to honours and employments in proportion as a talent for intrigue, the sure proof of littleness of mind, has rendered them servile. The most melancholy reflections are produced by a retrospective glance over the rise and progress of the governments of different countries, when we are compelled to remark, that flagrant follies and atrocious crimes have been more common under the governments of modern Europe, than in any of the ancient nations, if we except the jews. Sanguinary tortures, insidious poisonings, and dark assassinations, have alternately exhibited a race of monsters in human shape, the contemplation of whose ferocity chills the blood, and darkens every enlivening expectation of humanity: but we ought to observe, to reanimate the hopes of benevolence, that the perpetration of these horid deeds has arisen from a despotism in the government, which reason is teaching us to remedy. Sometimes, it is true, restrained by an iron police, the people appear peaceable, when they are only stunned; so that we find, whenever the mob has broken loose, the fury of the populace has been shocking and calamitous. These considerations account for the contradictions in the french character, which must strike a stranger: for robberies are very rare in France, where daily frauds and fly pilfering prove, that the lower class have as little honesty as sincerity. Besides, murder and cruelty almost always show the dastardly ferocity of fear in France; whilst in England, where the spirit of liberty has prevailed, it is usual

for an highwayman, demanding your money, not only to avoid barbarity, but to behave with humanity, and even complaisance.

Degeneracy of morals, with polished manners, produces the worst of passions, which floating through the social body, the genial current of natural feelings has been poisoned; and, committing crimes with trembling inquietude, the culprits have not only drawn on themselves the vengeance of the law, but thrown an odium on their nature, that has blackened the face of humanity. And whilst it's temple has been sacrilegiously profaned by the drops of blood, which have issued from the very hearts of the sad victims of their folly; a hardness of temper, under the veil of sentiment, calling it vice, has prevented our sympathy from leading us to examine into the sources of the atrocity of our species, and obscured the true cause of disgraceful and vicious habits.

Since the existence of courts, whose aggrandisement has been conspicuous in the same degree as the miseries of the debased people have accumulated, the convenience and comfort of men have been sacrificed to the ostentatious display of pomp and ridiculous pageantry. For every order of men, from the beggar to the king, has tended to introduce that extravagance into society, which equally blasts domestic virtue and happiness. The prevailing custom of living beyond their income has had the most baneful effect on the independence of individuals of every class in England, as well as in France; so that whilst they have lived in habits of idleness, they have been drawn into excesses, which, proving ruinous, produced consequences equally pernicious to the community, and degrading to the private character. Extravagance forces the peer to prostitute his talents and influence for a place, to repair his broken fortune; and the country gentleman becomes venal in the senate, to enable himself to live on a par with him, or reimburse himself for the expences of electioneering, into which he was led by sheer vanity. The professions, on the same account, become equally unprincipled. The one, whose characteristic ought to be integrity, descends to chicanery; whilst another trifles with the health, of which it knows all the importance. The merchant likewise enters into speculations so closely bordering on fraudulency, that common straight forward minds can scarcely distinguish the devious art of selling any thing for a price far beyond that necessary to ensure a just profit, from sheer dishonesty, aggravated by hard-heartedness, when it is to take advantage of the necessities of the indigent.

The destructive influence of commerce, it is true, carried on by men who are eager by overgrown riches to partake of the respect paid to nobility, is felt in a variety of ways. The most pernicious, perhaps, is it's producing an aristocracy of wealth, which degrades mankind, by making them only exchange savageness for tame servility, instead of acquiring the urbanity of improved reason. Commerce also, overstocking a country with people, obliges the majority to become manufacturers rather than husbandmen; and then the division of labour, solely to enrich the proprietor, renders the mind entirely inactive. The time which, a celebrated writer says, is sauntered away, in going from one part of an employment to another, is the very time that preserves the man from degenerating into a brute; for every one must have observed how much more intelligent are the blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons in the country, than the journeymen in great towns; and, respecting morals, there is no

making a comparison. The very gait of the man, who is his own master, is so much more steady than the slouching step of the servant of a servant, that it is unnecessary to ask which proves by his actions he has the most independence of character.

The acquiring of a fortune is likewise the least arduous road to pre-eminence, and the most sure: thus are whole knots of men turned into machines, to enable a keen speculator to become wealthy; and every noble principle of nature is eradicated by making a man pass his life in stretching wire, pointing a pin, heading a nail, or spreading a sheet of paper on a plain surface. Besides, it is allowed, that all associations of men render them sensual, and consequently selfish; and whilst lazy friars are driven out of their cells as stagnate bodies that corrupt society, it may admit of a doubt whether large work-shops do not contain men equally, tending to impede that gradual progress of improvement, which leads to the perfection of reason, and the establishment of rational equality.

The deprivation of natural, equal, civil and political rights, reduced the most cunning of the lower orders to practise fraud, and the rest to habits of stealing, audacious robberies, and murders. And why? because the rich and poor were separated into bands of tyrants and slaves, and the retaliation of slaves is always terrible. In short, every sacred feeling, moral and divine, has been obliterated, and the dignity of man sullied, by a system of policy and jurisprudence as repugnant to reason, as at variance with humanity.

The only excuse that can be made for the ferocity of the parisians is then simply to observe, that they had not any confidence in the laws, which they had always found to be merely cobwebs to catch small flies. Accustomed to be punished themselves for every trifle, and often for only being in the way of the rich, or their parasites; when, in fact, had the parisians seen the execution of a noble, or priest, though convicted of crimes beyond the daring of vulgar minds?—When justice, or the law, is so partial, the day of retribution will come with the red sky of vengeance, to confound the innocent with the guilty. The mob were barbarous beyond the tiger’s cruelty: for how could they trust a court that had so often deceived them, or expect to see it’s agents punished, when the same measures were pursuing?

Let us cast our eyes over the history of man, and we shall scarcely find a page that is not tarnished by some foul deed, or bloody transaction. Let us examine the catalogue of the vices of men in a savage state, and contrast them with those of men civilized; we shall find, that a barbarian, considered as a moral being, is an angel, compared with the refined villain of artificial life. Let us investigate the causes which have produced this degeneracy, and we shall discover, that they are those unjust plans of government, which have been formed by peculiar circumstances in every part of the globe.—Then let us coolly and impartially contemplate the improvements, which are gaining ground in the formation of principles of policy; and I flatter myself it will be allowed by every humane and considerate being, that a political system more simple than has hitherto existed would effectually check those aspiring follies, which, by imitation, leading to vice, have banished from governments the very shadow of justice and magnanimity.

Thus had France grown up, and sickened on the corruption of a state diseased. But, as in medicine there is a species of complaint in the bowels which works it's own cure, and, leaving the body healthy, gives an invigorated tone to the system, so there is in politics: and whilst the agitation of it's regeneration continues, the excrementitious humours exuding from the contaminated body will excite a general dislike and contempt for the nation; and it is only the philosophical eye, which looks into the nature and weighs the consequences of human actions, that will be able to discern the cause, which has produced so many dreadful effects.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

[*]What else could be expected from the courtier, who could write in these terms to madame de Maintenon: *God has been so gracious to me, madam, that, in whatever company I find myself, I never have occasion to blush for the gospel or the king.*

[*]For example, the reception of a portuguese adventurer, under the character of a persian ambassador. A farce made by the court to rouze the blunted senses of the king.

[*]Memoires du marechal de Richelieu.

[*]In this reply will be found many of the reasons, that have been lately repeated; and some (a proof of the progress of reason), which no one had the audacity to repeat, when standing up in defence of privileges.

[*]It is well known, that for a long time he wished to convoke the states-general; and it was not without difficulty, that Dubois made him abandon this design. During the year 1789, a curious memorial has been reprinted, which he wrote on this occasion; and it is, like the author, a model of impudence.

[*]Since the constituent assembly equalized the impost, Calonne has boasted, that he proposed a mode of levying equal taxes; but that the nobility would not listen to any such motion, tenaciously maintaining their privileges. This blind obstinacy of opposing all reform, that touched their exemptions, may be reckoned among the foremost causes, which, in hurrying the removal of old abuses, tended to introduce violence and disorder.—And if it be kept in remembrance, that a conduct equally illiberal and disingenuous warped all their political sentiments, it must be clear, that the people, from whom they considered themselves as separated by immutable laws, had cogent grounds to conclude, that it would be next to impossible to effect a reform of the greater part of those perplexing exemptions and arbitrary customs, the weight of which made the peculiar urgency, and called with the most forcible energy for the revolution, Surely all the folly of the people taken together was less reprehensible, than this total want of discernment, this adherence to a prejudice, the jaundiced perception of contumelious ignorance, in a class of men, who from the opportunity they had of acquiring knowledge, ought to have acted with more judgment. For they were goaded into action by inhuman provocations, by acts of the most flagrant injustice, when they had neither rule nor experience to direct them, and after their temperance had been destroyed by years of sufferings, and an endless catalogue of reiterated and contemptuous privations.

[*]Importance of religious opinions.

[*]‘The code of étiquette’, says Mirabeau, ‘has been hitherto the sacred fire of the court and privileged orders.’

[*]Under the reign of Louis XV two hundred and thirty thousand *lettres de cachet* had been issued; and after this, who will assert, that this was not an inveterate evil, which ought to be eradicated; for it is an insult to human reason, to talk of the modification of such abuses, as seem to be experiments to try how far human patience can be stretched.

[*]Count Lally Tolendal.

[*]This was written some months before the death of the queen,

[*]Such is ever the conduct of *soi-disant* patriots.

[*]This is an event much more important at Paris, than it would be in London.

[*]The mayor.

[*]This man, the abbé Lefebure, remained all night, and the greater part of the next day, standing over a barrel of gun-powder, persisting to keep off the people, with undaunted courage, though several of them, to torment him, brought pipes to smoke near it; and one actually fired a pistol close by, that set fire to his hair.

[*]Lally Tolendal said of La Fayette, at this time, that 'he spoke of liberty as he had defended it.'

[*]The supplying of Paris with provision always depended on a nice arrangement of circumstances, capable of being controlled by the government of the state. It is not like London, and other great cities, the local position of which was previously pointed out by nature, and of which the welfare depends on the great and perpetual movements of commerce, which they themselves regulate. To cut off the provision from London, you must block up the port, and interdict in an open manner an intercourse, on which the wealth of the nation in a great measure depends. Paris, on the contrary, might be famished in a few days by a secret order of the court. All the people of the place would feel the effect, and no person be able to ascertain the cause. These considerations render it easy to account for the continued scarcity of provision in Paris during the summer of 1789. No person can doubt, but the court viewed the revolution with horrour; and that, among the measures which they took to prevent it, they would not overlook so obvious an expedient, as that of cutting off the supplies from the capital; as they supposed the people would lay the blame on the new order of things, and thus be disgusted with the revolution.

[*]The lamp-posts, which are only to be sound in squares, and places where there are not two rows of houses, are much more substantial than in England.

[*]'In August 1778,' says Lally-Tolendal, 'the laws were overturned; and twenty-five millions of men without justice or judges;—the public treasury without funds, and without resource;—the sovereign authority was usurped by the ministers;—and the people without any other hope than the states-general;—yet without confidence in the promise of the king.'

And, Mounier also gives a similar sketch. 'We have not a fixed or complete form of government—we have not a constitution, because all the powers are confounded—because no boundary is traced out.—The judicial power is not even separated from the legislative.—Authority is dispersed; it's various parts are always in opposition; and amidst their perpetual shocks the rights of the lower class of citizens are betrayed.—The laws are openly despised, or rather we are not agreed what ought to be called laws.'

[*]In the Bastille, it is true, were found but seven prisoners.—Yet, it ought to be remarked, that three of them had lost their reason—that, when the secrets of the prison-house were laid open, men started with horrour from the inspection of instruments of torture, that appeared to be almost worn out by the exercise of tyranny—and that citizens were afraid even for a moment to enter the noisome dungcons, in which their fellow-creatures had been confined for years.

[*]The cruelties of the half civilized romans, combined with their unnatural vices, even when literature and the arts were most cultivated, prove, that humanity is the offspring of the understanding, and that the progress of the sciences alone can make men wiser and happier.

[*]Mirabeau appears to have been continually hurt by the want of dignity in the assembly.—By the inconsistency, which made them stalk as heroes one moment, with a true theatrical stride, and the next cringe with the flexible backs of habitual slaves.

[*]'Let us compare,' he further adds, 'the number of innocents sacrificed by mistake, by the sanguinary maxims of the courts of criminal judicature, and the ministerial vengeance exercised secretly in the dungeons of Vincennes, and in the cells of the Bastille, with the sudden and impetuous vengeance of the multitude, and then decide on which side barbarity appears. At the moment when the hell created by tyranny for the torment of it's victims opens itself to the public eye; at the moment when all the citizens have been permitted to descend into those gloomy caves, to poize the chains of their friends, of their defenders; at the moment when the registers of those iniquitous archives are fallen into all hands; it is necessary, that the people should be essentially good, or this manifestation of the atrocities of ministers would have rendered them as cruel as themselves!'

[*]These members seem to have formed a just estimate of the french character.

[*]Some french wags have laid a great stress on these decrees passing after dinner.

[*]Lally-Tolendal, in particular; for giving his opinion on the subject of two chambers, he said:—'It is not doubtful at present, and for this first assembly, that a single chamber is preferable, and perhaps necessary—There are so many difficulties to be surmounted, so many prejudices to be conquered, so many sacrifices to be made, such old habits to root out, so great a power to control; in a word so much to destroy, and almost all to create anew. This moment, gentlemen, which we are so happy as to have seen, of which it is impossible a description can be given—when private characters, orders of men, and provinces, are vying with each other, who will make the greatest sacrifices to the public good—when all press together at the tribune, to renounce voluntarily, not only odious privileges, but even those just rights, which appear to you an obstacle to the fraternity and equality of all the citizens. This moment, gentlemen, this noble and rich enthusiasm which hurries you along, this new order of things which you have begun—all this—most assuredly, could never have been produced but from the union of all persons, of all opinions, and of all hearts.'—

[*]'It is worthy of remark, that the *divine right* of tithes was never insisted on,' says a french writer, 'even by the clergy, during this debate. Yet the year before, when the same question was brought forward in the irish house of parliament, great stress was laid on this gothic idea of their origin.'

[*]It is observable, that the satisfaction of the people was by no means equal to the discontent manifested by the privileged orders.

[*]See the article 10. ‘No man ought to be molested on account of his opinions, not even on account of his religious opinions, provided his avowal of them does not disturb the public order established by law.’

[*]Calonne.

[*]In Holland almost all the taxes are collected in the shape of excise.

In France, formerly, the taxes were generally internal; but, since the mode established of making a revenue of 300,000,000 *l.* by the land and house tax part of the 580,000,000 *l.* estimated to be the peace establishment, it appears, that this was too great a proportion to be obtained in that way. Hence the revenne of France has lately failed in a great degree.

In America the taxes of the federal government have been lately established solely on the customs, that is to say, on goods imported. These operate two ways; encouraging home manufactures, and discouraging the manufactures of other countries.

Great Britain has levied her revenue on customs both inwards and outwards; on excise, principally internal; on stamps, which operate both internally and externally; and on fixed objects, as well as internal consumption, (as salt).

[*]

> ‘O Richard, O mon roi,
> L’univers t’abandonne!’

[*]They used to lie to be owned in a conspicuous part of the city.

[*]There are upwards of thirty scattered throughout the city.

[*]I use this word according to the french acceptation, because we have not one to express so forcibly the same signification.