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ROBESPIERRE

*The Incorruptible*

FRIEDRICH SIEBURG

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ROBESPIERRE





*Artist unknown; Musée Carnavalet Archives photographiques*  
MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE



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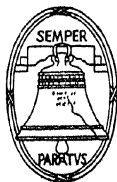
# ROBESPIERRE

## *The Incorruptible*

*By*

FRIEDRICH SIEBURG

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NEW YORK

ROBERT M. McBRIDE AND COMPANY

ROBESPIERRE, THE INCORRUPTIBLE

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY JOHN DILKE

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## FOREWORD

The details of place, time and circumstance are taken without exception from contemporary sources. No events, no details, and no oral expressions are invented. Reference to the works and documents consulted would have necessitated footnotes on nearly every page. Out of consideration for the reader, therefore, all the sources are omitted. To my collaborator and friend, Paul Bourdin, for his valuable co-operation in revising the text and procuring the illustrations my deepest thanks are due.





## CHAPTER I

### THE LAST NIGHT

At two o'clock in the morning he was carried on a wooden board into the Tuileries. Carried up fifteen steps—in his shattered skull the wounded man felt each step taken by his bearers like the stroke of a hammer—then left into the ante-room of the Committee of Public Safety.

It was a large room, with two windows overlooking the gloomy gardens. Formerly it had been one of the Queen's apartments. The ceiling, painted by Mignard of Avignon, portrayed a smiling Apollo in a landscape of pillars and pink clouds welcoming the goddess Minerva and her retinue, the Four Quarters of the World. The dirty white of the walls, relieved only by thin gold beading, looked warm and yellow in the dim light of the candles. There were no curtains in the windows; anyone pressing his face against the panes would see a few dripping trees and fleeting clouds, between which the restless summer stars were once more visible. The garden paths were dry again and steaming.

The night was hot. The storm that had broken over Paris towards midnight and flooded the streets with warm rain had brought but little coolness. That baking midsummer, which dried up fountains, withered flowers, destroyed food in the cupboards, and warped furniture and doors, did not allow people to rest at night. Those few, who naked and bathed in sweat had fallen asleep on their bare beds, had been awakened again by

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the ringing of the tocsin, by gunfire, by horses trotting on the cobbles and the march of armed men.

Many a citizen had obeyed the call of the tocsin, silently put on his National Guard's uniform, seized his musket and gone to the rallying-point for his section. Two hours later, drenched with rain, he had as silently returned home, answering his wife's anxious inquiry merely with: 'Nothing special. We marched to the Hôtel de Ville, but when the storm came on we were ordered to dismiss.' Then he had undressed, and standing for a little at the window had listened to the confused tumult of the gloomy, feverish city and watched the pale light that seemed to come from the river; then he had stretched himself on his bed. His wife, hearing him breathe regularly, had asked timidly in the darkness: 'Are you asleep already?' He had not answered. Did he realize that the Revolution had just ended? That during the two hours he stood to arms the 'Reign of Terror and Virtue' had come to an end?

In the ante-room of the Committee of Public Safety the bearers set down their burden. Was the man on the plank dead or still breathing? His wound was fearful: the left cheek was pierced by a pistol bullet, with the lower jaw completely shattered and held together by a white cloth round his head. The staunch blood had dried into a dark brown crust, protruding from beneath the scanty bandage. The man's face, so far as it could be seen at all through the dirt and blood, was pale as wax. The bluish eyelids were tight-shut, and on the nobly curved forehead stood a few beads of sweat, like specks of ice.

This man lying between life and death was Maximilien Robespierre, thirty-six years of age, a native of Arras in the county of Artois, formerly a lawyer, a member of the National Convention and of the Committee of Public Safety. Outlawed

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a few hours earlier by unanimous decision of the people's representatives, and therefore doomed to death, he had just tried to inflict death upon himself at the Hôtel de Ville.

They cleared the large table of papers and writing-material, lifted the wounded man carefully on to it, and pushed under his head the small box in which the guard kept their daily bread ration. He was still motionless. His clothes had the uncanny rigidity of the clothes of the dead. The creases of his blue frock-coat, the same one that he had worn a few days before at the Festival of the Supreme Being, appeared frozen, as though they could never again be smoothed out. His shirt was ripped open, his neckerchief was gone, and the fine lace ruffles round his wrists were torn. The pale yellow knee-breeches and white satin stockings were spotted with blood.

His condition demanded quiet. There were crowds outside who wanted to see the dying man: many who could not believe that this man was lying there defenceless, and many who, with the sense that life had been suddenly given back to them, now felt a strange kind of thankfulness towards him. They pressed against the door, but the armed men who had brought him allowed only the officials of the Committee of Public Safety and a few privileged members of the Convention to enter. Instinctively the steps of the curious were deadened and voices were lowered. Quiet reigned in the room; nothing was audible but the breathing of those standing round him, and the silence of the prostrate man became increasingly noticeable.

From the next room came the clatter of forks, plates and glasses and the sound of eager voices, where members of the Convention and the two committees were taking a hurried meal. Most of them had not taken off their clothes for two nights. The sitting had lasted from morning till midnight; no

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one had been able to take refreshment, throats were hoarse with shouting and with the dust of the council hall, and hands and knees were still quivering from the overwhelming excitement. No wonder a raging hunger had suddenly set in. An usher produced twenty-three bottles of wine, some loaves, a ham, eight cutlets, and a basket of peaches, apricots and pears, and eating and drinking began. They were like shipwrecked sailors who had been drifting, without hope and nearly out of their wits, on a flimsy raft, and were now by a divine miracle brought to a land flowing with water and abounding with fruit. Individual voices could be distinguished, stifled every now and then by a mouthful of meat or a gulp of wine: Collot's studied, metallic, actor's voice; Barère's warm accents; those blustering sounds must belong to Lecointre, that breathless cheerfulness to Fréron; and who but Fouché could speak at such a time in those quiet, even tones?

The bleeding man on the table had been lying there for an hour without moving. It was still night, and he was still alive. Next day before sundown he would be dead. Like a murmur the words 'Robespierre is dead' would spread through Paris, slowly swell, penetrate prisons and hiding-places like the sound of bells, rush along the streets and call men from their houses, fly over the countryside, turning weathercocks on church steeples, cross the coast and fill the sails of English frigates, reach the King at Potsdam and the Emperor in Vienna. They would circle the earth like a huge tidal wave, convulsing many hearts, evoking from the frivolous a cheerful oath, causing grief and apprehension to the thoughtful—though only for a brief second, as a breath touches a mirror.

And you, swaggering, wanton, and yet magnanimous Paris? You people of the suburbs and slums—*sansculottes*, market

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women, navvies, boatmen, munition workers, builders, wool-carders, bakers, soapmakers, tanners, masons—all you who loved to read Hébert's denunciations and listen to Jacques Roux's inflammatory speeches—what have you to say? Will you weep on hearing of the death of the man who sacrificed innumerable lives to obtain for you a more just division of earthly goods? No, you will fail him next day as you failed him that night when you were called to arms. At most a few of you will stand on the pavement as the tumbrils roll by to the place of execution, and shout after the men of the Commune who are to accompany him to death: 'Down with the maximum wage!'

It is all over with Robespierre. He will take his secret with him to the grave; and France will be for ever unable to decide whether he enjoyed spilling the blood of his fellow-men, or was overthrown just as he was about to put an end, out of pity, to the terror of the guillotine; whether he loved his neighbour or only himself; whether he sullied the French Revolution or exalted it; whether he benefited France or wronged her; whether he was the greatest and noblest man of his age or a morbid shedder of blood.

Throughout Europe, from Spain to St. Petersburg and from Ireland to Constantinople, there was no inn, no social gathering, no chimney-corner, no doorstep, where two opinions were not being violently disputed. Old friends avoided each other, girls stopped exchanging letters, card-parties were broken up, families were divided, young men raged, women dreamed, old men were sad, cynics were uneasy, lovers became enemies; because one side said: 'He is purely destructive,' and the other: 'He is changing the face of humanity.' In Germany aged priests were oppressed with misgivings because their consciences could

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not fathom the mystery of this Frenchman, who let priests die in plague-stricken galleys, but raised God once more to the altars. In England young poets broke their pens in despair because the combination of freedom and tyranny in Paris crippled their soaring genius. Everywhere the deeds and words of this man pervaded souls like yeast, raising problems that weighed more heavily than a curse, and sowing perplexity in the hearts of princes on their thrones, priests in their sanctuaries, and teachers at their desks.

What was tormenting Europe? Deeply horrified by the cruelty and wickedness of the French Revolution, she feared for her comfort and decency; but at the same time she was irresistibly fascinated by the boldness of the new ideas, and did not want to mistake the path into the future. God, King, and Custom filled one side of the scale, but the other quivered under the pressure of those splendid and inspiring words, Freedom and Equality. The world was divided into those who were afraid of the future and those who wished to mould it. France had already flung a king's head in defiance at the feet of Europe; and Valmy, Jemappes, Mainz, Nice, Savoy, Wattignies, the Geisberg, Weissenburg and Fleurus had shown an inwardly lacerated France outwardly united by a new belief—a belief which, symbolized by the tricolor, had fired the imagination of youth—belief in the French nation.

To most foreigners, however, the conduct of France during the past five years was aptly symbolized by the red cap, which had originally been worn by galley-slaves, but had become the emblem of freedom. Not much more was known than was depicted in cheap engravings and painted on coffee-cups: a small bloodstained scaffold with a shining guillotine; a monkey-faced man in a nightcap—Marat; a good-natured-looking, fat

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man with a double chin and strongly curved nose, with his hands bound behind his back—the King; or a coarse workman with earrings, shirt-sleeves rolled up, a large pipe, and two pistols showing at his belt, who wore long trousers instead of the usual knee-breeches (*culottes*) and was nicknamed ‘*Sansculotte*’. But the commonest was the bust of a man neither young nor old, neither good-looking nor ugly, neither sympathetic nor repellent, with a receding forehead and a tightly compressed mouth, with his hair dressed and powdered in the old-fashioned way, and the thick, snow-white folds of his neckerchief standing out coquettishly above his frock-coat—Robespierre.

It was that same Robespierre who now lay bleeding and vanquished on the fine leather-covered table ornamented with bronze in the ante-room of the Committee of Public Safety. Here he was spending the last night of his life, for on the next day, if he had not by then died of his terrible self-inflicted wound, he had to meet his death under the guillotine. There were to be no judicial proceedings against ‘Robespierre and confederates, accused of conspiracy against the Convention, the Republic and Freedom’. For the Convention during its night sitting had unanimously outlawed him and his followers. The public prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville, had only to prove his identity in order to send him to the guillotine—a procedure instituted by Robespierre himself.

The news of his fall and of the end of the Robespierriest Commune was at that hour of night hardly yet known in Paris. But next day the semaphore would carry the tidings to the armies on the frontiers of the Republic, whence they would rapidly penetrate abroad by the evening. The Army indeed was likely to be mainly indifferent to the news. It was true that the Committee of Public Safety had ordered the staff to be purged of all

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those loyal to the King. But a soldier is a soldier, and as the choice of recruits was made, on the proposal of the clubs and supervision committees, by the sections, the more loud-voiced patriots took care to send others first into the field. It mattered little to the man at the front whether a Robespierre or a Barras lorded it in Paris, so long as France's standards remained victorious, and so long as Carnot, Lindet and Prieur kept up a proper supply of munitions, guns, waggons and above all bread and boots. But unfortunately that was just the trouble. Even at home there was no bread to spare and bread rationing in Paris had not made the loaves either bigger or better. The soldiers had to sit down at the tables of the poor Rhinelanders, Dutch or Italians, and repay them for their food with revolutionary wisdom. None of that would be changed by the disappearance of this sinister Robespierre, who anyway never showed himself at the front.

For some of the generals the event might naturally mean much more. The good-looking young Hoche, that spoilt child of victory, was this moment locked up in the vault of the Carmelite monastery in Rue Vaugirard, from which he would certainly be set free in the morning. Custine, Houchard and Beauharnais, who had had to pay for their defeats with death, could not, it was true, be brought back to life. Their bodies were lying in some overcrowded cemetery, at Sainte Marguerite or in the Parc Monceau, and it was even doubtful whether their heads were there too. It would be bad for young Bonaparte, the little Corsican general who promised well but who had seriously compromised himself with both the Robespierres, especially the younger. At the moment he was at Genoa discussing with the Council the immediate construction of a military road from Ceva to Savona. In a few days he would be in



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gaol at Antibes pondering over the vagaries of fortune, but not for long. As for Pichegru, he despised all these Paris politicians, though Robespierre perhaps the least of them. 'Remember, people,' he said meaningly, 'the columns of the allied tyrants have never been able to withstand our armies, and a handful of rascals will not withstand them either.'

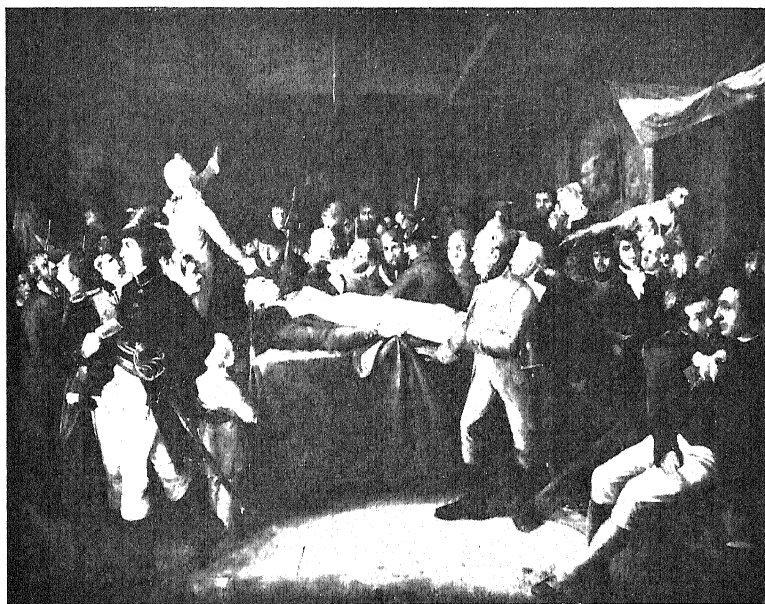
In the next room a clock slowly struck three, drowning the voices of the diners. Robespierre suddenly opened his eyes, and without moving his head let them wander round the room. Did he know where he was or recognize the voices next door? He felt life weak within him. The left side of his face was paralysed as though frozen. He tried to feel about with his tongue, but it did not belong to him; it also seemed to be injured. Dimly he realized that his jaw was shattered. He seemed to feel bone splinters, broken teeth and dried blood, giving his saliva a bitter taste. The wound began to bleed again, the blood flowing in a thin trickle down his neck and slowly soaking through his shirt. The buckles of his breeches felt tight; he made an effort to loosen them, but his hand could not reach them. An official standing near guessed the meaning of that helpless movement, undid the buckle, and loosened the stocking. Robespierre made a tremendous effort to thank him, and painfully brought out the words: '*Merci, Monsieur.*'

*Monsieur?* Had not everyone during those five Republican years used the word 'Citizen'? That patriotic salutation had become part and parcel of men's lives. What was the meaning of this relapse into the speech of a world that would never return? Was it merely a sign, intensified by pain, of Robespierre's studied efforts to maintain good manners and remain polite and even courteous? Or was it rather a bitter suspicion that the great time of the Revolution would end with him? Perhaps the

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bleeding man saw deeper and farther in the fever of his agony than other dying men, and felt an irrevocable epoch running out with his life blood. He tried to stop the flow with a little white leather pouch, which had been used as a pistol-holder and bore the stamp of the gunsmith. How difficult the movement was! Slowly and repeatedly he raised his hand to his face, dabbing the warm liquid with the white leather. But for that laborious action one would have thought him dead, so pallid was his face and so motionless his body. Always slender, he now appeared even thinner and more insignificant looking, and the thin legs looked so lifeless that they hardly seemed to belong to him.

The crowd in the room was growing ever larger. The people wanted to see; they wanted to see the wound, the blood. The soldiers were continually pressing back the inquisitive. Was it true, they wanted to know, that he had spoken? What had he said? Was it true that he had tried to get up and leave the room? Was it absolutely true that he was outlawed—that he was powerless, finished, done for, and could do no one any more harm? Thousands of whispered questions filled the air, and in the increasing warmth the candles burned fitfully. But the people did not long keep silent in the presence of his agony. How could they hold out against the temptation to open their hearts at last? Those who in the last few weeks had had to hide, no longer daring to sleep in their houses at night for fear of arrest; those who had been terror-stricken when his piercing glance rested on them in the Convention; perhaps also he who, on such occasions, had tried to hide himself behind the broad back of the man in front of him and in doing so had stuttered, horrified: 'He will think I'm thinking something'; those whom he had described, without mentioning names, as cowardly



*Artist unknown; Musée Carnavalet*

*Photo: Bulloz*

### ROBESPIERRE LYING WOUNDED

This painting by an unknown artist, perhaps not a Frenchman, shows Robespierre lying wounded after his arrest. The room, inaccurately represented as the antechamber of the Committee of Public Safety, in which Robespierre spent his last night, was a sumptuously furnished room of the Tuileries Palace.



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rogues; those whose embarrassed intrusion he had contemptuously rejected; those who had felt that he recognized and saw through them; those whose guilty and frightened smile he had left unanswered; all those who had known themselves to be suspected, despised, envied, watched or threatened;—all these wanted to breathe freely again and, like Doubting Thomas, to plunge their hands in his wound.

Robespierre could no longer move his head, but he could follow his tormentors with his glance. His bright eyes, which had not even then lost their innocent and at the same time frightened expression, followed each face as it approached and receded. It was as though he wanted to recognize them and impress them on his memory, in order to enter the names that evening in his notebook and give them next day to the chief of police, Citizen Herman. But what he was really seeing no one knew. Did he hear the insults, the derision of the cowards, their useless threats, their liberated, almost cheerful, mockery? The pain of his wound suddenly became so great that his body seemed to him an unearthly structure of burning coldness. He felt a trickling dampness on his forehead; someone had spat at him, and as the spittle slipped slowly down his forehead it was exquisitely refreshing.

Perhaps there were also a few friends among all these inquisitive cowards—friends who no longer dared show their real feelings. For although yesterday it had been the highest recommendation in the State to have personal relations with this man, now it might cost you your life. Had not orders already been issued for the arrest of the cabinetmaker Duplay and his wife, with whom he had lived for the last few years? No, it was better not to stand up for the man lying there, but leave him to his fate. Would mortal man ever be able to explain such a sud-

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den revulsion in ten short hours? By the fear of death of all those who were not yet in prison, said some. But that was not all. How could this insignificant man—fonder of words than of actions, who constantly faced the world unarmed and empty-handed, who lived alone in a small lodging, who never tolerated an armed bodyguard, but loved to lose himself on unaccompanied walks in the woods round Paris, who asked no man a favour, who summoned principles, never men, to his help—how could he inspire such paralysing fear? Even yet it was not perfectly certain. All this might not be true after all. Supposing he suddenly got up. Supposing that, casting a cold glance over the crowd, he strode to the door and disappeared into the council chamber of the Committee of Public Safety. Those who pursued the idea any further felt their hands moving involuntarily to their necks.

Someone had brought caricatures from a London newspaper showing Robespierre sitting on Louis XVI's throne eating roasted hearts of aristocrats with the cabinetmaker Duplay's daughter. The drawings were passed round and caused a good deal of merriment. Someone else remembered that in the Convention recently Barère had read out extracts from foreign newspapers which referred constantly to 'Robespierre's troops', 'Robespierre's fleet', 'Robespierre's festivals'. Was it any wonder that so much was thought abroad of his power and position in the Republic? The Convention had elected him President; in the Committee of Public Safety he was unquestioned ruler; he had robbed the Security Committee of its independence and substituted a police force under Saint-Just. The Commune belonged to him, as both its nominated State Commissioner and the Mayor had been chosen by him; the Revolutionary Tribunal was in his hand, for since the 23rd Prairial the jurymen

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had been chosen from his supporters and given official status. But above all he was the leader of the Jacobin Club, the most important and powerful body in the Republic. He was? He had been. Something had gone for good. As he had been the embodiment of its principle, perhaps the whole Revolution was now at an end.

The talk and chatter, whispering and rustling, shoving and pushing of the crowd filled the room, which became increasingly close and hot. But Robespierre heard this only half-consciously, for his mind was already filled with the sweet, heart-rending music of death and resurrection. The people of France still had their fears and triumphs, but he wished to think only of the Elysian Fields. Not those Champs Elysées under whose chestnut trees he used to walk with the cabinetmaker's daughter, discussing the consoling power of the Supreme Being or one's duty to one's country, or drinking a glass of lemonade and watching the little Savoyards dance;—no, the Elysian Fields he wished to think of were not a road, but a goal.

What a night was that—the night of the 9th-10th Thermidor—that July night which no rain nor wind could refresh! Though soon grey dawn would appear, Paris was still grilling with heat. Someone had opened the windows wide, but what was the use? The air that entered slowly was steamingly heavy and full of dust; it seemed to have lost for ever the breath of the hurrying river and the lawns, and carried with it only the stifling smell of eating-houses, stables, and privies. Unreal and yet tremendous in the ears of the sufferer seemed the noise of the night. The creaking of furniture and the soft gnawing of a mouse resounded in his head as loudly as the memory of the pistol shot he had aimed at himself. There was a sound of roaring, swelling, speaking, whispering, made up of the rustle of

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withered trees, the clatter of feet, the whispers of many people and the restless breathing of those in search of sleep who dozed on their couches in the stifling heat.

It was now nearly four o'clock in the morning. The little leather purse, stiff with dried blood, could soak up no more. Robespierre searched over his body with weak hands for something with which to staunch the flow of blood. Somebody understood his movements and put a few sheets of writing-paper into his hand. It was white paper with the heading: 'Committee of Public Safety of the Republic, One and Indivisible: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death.' He laid a sheet carefully and gently against his torn cheek. The paper was cool. He had always loved paper; he had never tired of covering it closely with his small writing. He had taken refuge in paper as children hide their faces in the folds of their mother's skirt. Especially did he like making lists, neatly and vertically on a large sheet,—lists of measures, principles, wanted persons, suspects. To be sure he had scribbled the order for Danton's arrest on the back of a used envelope, but he had been in rather a hurry then. Actions, written cleanly on paper, were not actions in the sense of good or evil deeds, but merely applied principles. What was written on paper was not real; it did not bleed. He had never been present at an execution, but had only arranged them on paper. Paper was white, but now on this July night for the first time it was red with blood.

Robespierre opened his eyes; he had felt someone leaning over him, scrutinizing him. It was true; a man stood there observing him dispassionately and indifferently, obviously concerned only with the state of the wound. His uniform showed him to be an army surgeon. 'How seldom has a head bent over me,' thought the sufferer, forced to close his eyes again by a



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fresh stab of pain. 'To be happy, to grow old and die quietly, one must have memories of faces that have bent over one.

'I was not five years old when my mother died. I was six when my father suddenly left Arras and disappeared. I slept in a room used for storing sacks of grain, for my grandfather was a brewer. I was a pretty little boy; I could knit—think of that! I should have liked to sit on my grandmother's knee, but she was a stern woman; I didn't even dare tell her that I was afraid of the many mice that used to come quietly into my room at night to nibble the barley. I worked industriously at school, for my grandmother would tell me every day that I must work harder and better than the other children, so as not to be a burden on my relations for too long and to be able to support my little brothers and sisters as soon as possible. I was nearly always alone. I missed my mother. I used to feed the pigeons that also came after the barley. I kept a few song-birds; my enemies later spread the story that I made a little guillotine to execute them with. I used to sit sadly at the window. In Paris I didn't get on well. I was a scholar at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. I was the poorest pupil there; my coat was often torn and my shoes were full of holes, but I worked harder than the others. If by any chance I received a few *sous* I took them at once to the hair-dresser, for well-kept and powdered hair was more important to me than food and drink. I had no Sunday clothes. Once when the young King Louis paid a visit to the school I was chosen to make the speech of welcome. The headmaster, a good man, presented me with an old frock-coat for the occasion. The King, who was stout and amiable, did not listen properly. Later I advocated his condemnation, not because of his weaknesses and mistakes, but because of his position: Louis had to die that the country might live. I possessed one or two books, two shoe-

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brushes, a small oilcloth bag with powder and puff, and a small supply of sewing thread, wool, and needles, for I mended the worst holes myself. Things went badly for me. Although I was well grown I often seemed to myself a cripple. That was because I never had any happiness.

'My success as a young lawyer was not exactly brilliant. There was that ridiculous case when I defended the first man in France to put a lightning-conductor on his house, when his anxious neighbours had taken action against him; even on appeal I lost. However, I made my way in the National Assembly, although even my colleagues of the Third Estate often jeered at me. At first they always mis-spelt my name in the reports of meetings and even replaced it with asterisks, because nobody could remember it. But mockery and interruption did not prevent me from giving my opinion. When the aged Archbishop of Aix, to illustrate the miserable condition of the people, held up a piece of black bread in his elegant, snow-white hand, it was I who advised him and his kind to surrender the Church property and give up their shameful luxury. But what was the good, for one was never a match for those lords. I would tremble inwardly whenever a court lady stared curiously at me. I was even afraid of the good Duc de Liancourt, who was a decent man; and the King's Master of Ceremonies, who acted as liaison between his Majesty and the delegates, irritated me so much that he even haunted my dreams. He was twenty-three years old; he wore a cloak sparkling with gold embroidery and jewels, his hands were covered with diamond rings, and in his hat were at least seven white ostrich feathers. He was really the most insolent fellow imaginable; he made the Third Estate fall in like a troop of soldiers, called us 'You good people', and examined our dress through a golden monocle. But time soon did

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for all those people. Soon nobody dared interrupt me. Not two years later, when visiting Arras, I was welcomed at Bapaume by two hundred horsemen who escorted me the rest of the way, and my birthplace was illuminated in my honour. That was grand! Otherwise I haven't had much joy in my life. However, I am still young.

'I lived in two tiny rooms in a courtyard overlooking a cabinetmaker's workshop. I should have liked to have riding lessons like Saint-Just, but I was afraid of horses. However, I had as many oranges as I liked and my hair was always in the best condition. To-morrow I am invited to lunch with the Lavieron brothers at Creteil. They are good people, who are always glad to give me pleasure. They will wait in vain. Probably a gendarme will come instead of me, to throw them into prison because they are acquaintances of mine. Most of my school companions have disappeared. Those who witnessed my humiliation are no more. Camille Desmoulins was the last. I quite liked him. He remembered how difficult my boyhood was and never spoke of it. Eventually he stumbled and fell. What a life! What a host of shades! Perhaps the black bread of that time had better been coal. . . . It must be painful to work in a coalmine. . . . An eyeglass has no terrors for me now; I use one myself. Now, of course, I have lost it; it must be lying in the Salle d'Égalité at the Hôtel de Ville. If only they don't step on it, glasses are so dear; to-morrow, perhaps, they can look for it. . . . Of course, the bread was very black then, only he shouldn't have held it up, as the Host is elevated at Mass. . . . No, Fouché; no, Chaumette; death is not an eternal sleep. Death is the beginning of immortality, but first I must pass through the purgatory of shame and fever . . . fever. . . .'

The army surgeon had opened his case of instruments. An


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older man, also a doctor, came up, bringing with him writing-material, as the Convention desired to have a report on the state of the wounded man. Could a dressing do much good, as the patient would anyhow lose his ill-treated head next day? The surgeon suggested merely putting on a bandage and leaving the man to his fate. It did not matter to him who it was that lay there. He was a soldier and had always been alone with his sword and his instrument case. He was just off to Belgium or to the Rhine, and he did not care if the rulers of the Convention killed one another. To-morrow Paris would be behind him; he was going with his regiment—all decent fellows from Orléans or Tours—riding his fat little dappled horse; what did it matter to him whether Robespierre lived or died? He was a human being, however, and should not be left to suffer unnecessarily.

The other doctor was not of this opinion; he was employed by the health authorities and had to make a report; the wounded man must be capable of receiving his punishment. So the wound was probed, and bone-splinters, shreds of flesh, and teeth were removed. The operation must have been very painful, but Robespierre uttered no sound. He followed the movements of both doctors closely with his eyes, as though he wanted to supervise them or learn something from them. Thick layers of bandage were put on to absorb the fresh blood. Then the head was once more wrapped round with a napkin, for the different parts of the cheek and jaw still hung loose. Robespierre would never again utter a word in this world.

Then the report for the Convention. Here the older doctor was in his element. He wrote: 'The condition of this justifiably outlawed man . . .' The other shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. 'The monster . . .', the pen continued. The army surgeon muttered an oath, urged him to come to the point, signed,

Carnot a payé  
 le 22 Thermidor an 2  
 le montant de ce qui suit  
 par mandat

Dépenses faites pour les représentants  
 du Peuple, Bourdon, Bourdon de  
 Seine, Leonard Bourdon et autres  
 dans la nuit du 9 au 10  
 Thermidor, par M<sup>o</sup> Mothey Garçon  
 de Bureau de la Section de la  
 Guerre du Comité de Salut Public  
 23 bouteilles de vin de 13 m. 50 ✓  
 et 10 m. 50 ✓  51" ✓  
 quatre primes de quatre livres B  
 jambon . . . . . 18  
 8 Cotelettes . . . . . 6" ✓  
 pichon, a brisets et primes 6 15 ✓  
 total . . . . . 84 + 15c P

Certifié Le Mémoire Cidessus  
 véritable Paris le vingt  
 -deux Thermidor 2<sup>e</sup> année  
 Republicaine Mothey  
 garçon de bureau

Archives Nationales

STATEMENT OF EXPENSES OF THE COMMITTEE OF  
PUBLIC SAFETY

This is the statement of expenses for refreshments supplied to the Committee during the night of the 9th-10th Thermidor. In the left-hand margin is Carnot's order for payment of the amount.



## THE LAST NIGHT

and left the room without a word. The Convention was still sitting. Not till six o'clock did the President, Charlier, adjourn the meeting till nine the same morning.

Outside the day was beginning, a clear day that promised to be as hot as the previous one. The first pale light was falling on the trees in the Tuileries Gardens. The grey morning was completely silent, everything looked numbed, not even casting a shadow. The grey light laid a deathly pallor on a world turned to stone. Was all life extinguished for ever? Had the planet on which we live cooled at this moment to colourless ash? It was the hour when the wandering spirits of the dead hurry back to their graves, shuddering at such stillness. Gradually the leaves and bushes took on a pale colour; the first bird-sound, still drowsy with sleep, rang out; another answered, and soon the birds in the gardens broke into a thousand-voiced choir. The first carts rumbled in the streets, a dog barked, a human voice was heard. The day had begun. Robespierre's last night was over.

## CHAPTER II

### A BAD FRENCHMAN

**R**obespierre—mighty, unloved shade, demanding a draught of the sacrificial blood of life! He does not thirst for the blood he spilled, but I see him hovering on the shore that divides the kingdom of Death from the land of the living. What drives him back? Is it the happiness he could never enjoy, and which is perhaps somewhere waiting for him? Is it his work, which began to crumble on the day of his death, but which he still believes capable of fulfilment? Or, if he cannot hope for the respect, still less the love, of posterity, does he hope to obtain at least some measure of justification? He must know that the public buildings of his country are still adorned with the words 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', and even if it annoys him that the Spirit of the Republic, whose bust is to be found in all public halls, still wears the Phrygian cap he so much disliked, he feels homesick for life. The Republic for whose sake he lived and died still exists and has emerged victorious from every catastrophe. The anniversary of the storming of the Bastille is still the national holiday; the tricolor, still young, waves in the wind; and on solemn occasions the great men of the Republic proudly style themselves successors of the Jacobins. Small wonder that he roams restlessly on the shores of the spirit world, and would give all his dearly won insensibility to return to life even for one day and tread once more the soil of the French Republic.



## A BAD FRENCHMAN

Do not wish for it, Maximilien; be faithful to your death. They would have nothing to do with you, for you were only a burden to them. They would only arrest you again, outlaw you, and if possible execute you once more. It is not your Republic, but a different one. You are alone, sad ghost. You are not forgotten; worse, you are rejected. The eagerness of the pale dead, who crowd round the sacrificial altar to snatch a drop of life-giving blood, is not worthy of you. You were courageous to the very end. You knew that to go on living a people must from time to time be subjected to the inexorable working out of an idea to its logical conclusion. In you, strange Frenchman, there was greatness. Your policy was so idealistic that its application resulted in death as a principle—not only the death of those opposed to your ideas, but your own death as well. Had you continued to live, had you attained fifty years of age and conquered half the world with your generals—Bonaparte, Masséna, Pichegru, Lannes, Bernadotte—your destiny would have been an adventure. But you fell young, cut off by your own ideal.

Some will say: 'Robespierre stands for the Terror, the guillotine.' That is true; but should it not be added that in his programme terror was linked with virtue, and that his tyranny was an attempt to force freedom on France? Never has a political career shown such rigid consistency, not even that of Cromwell, who died in office, full of honours, and was not executed till after his death. What was Robespierre's paradise? 'We want an order of things', he said, 'where all vulgar, cruel passions will be subdued, where all beneficent, generous passions will be encouraged by the laws, where the only ambition will be the desire to win fame and serve the country, where distinctions will arise only out of equality itself; where the citizen will be subject

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to the guardian of the law, the guardian of the law to the people, and the people to justice; where the country will ensure the well-being of every individual, and every individual will be proud to enjoy his country's prosperity and fame; where every soul will grow greater in the constant interchange of Republican sentiments and through the necessity of earning the respect of a great people; where the arts will be the adornment of freedom, which will in turn ennoble them; where commerce will be the source of public wealth and not merely the intemperate avarice of a few great houses. In our country we wish to substitute morality for egoism, honesty for honour, principles for customs, duty for charity, the reign of reason for the tyranny of fashion, hatred of vice for contempt for misfortune, pride for insolence, magnanimity for vanity, love of fame for love of money, good people for good company, wisdom for wit, truth for splendour, the magic of happiness for the torments of debauchery, a generous, powerful and happy people for an amiable, frivolous, and decadent people'! . . .

What the Incorruptible sketched in these categorical terms is at first sight a true idyll, a peaceful community of virtue built up on equality. He never altered this picture, much less surrendered it, but the effort to realize it led him directly to terrorism. How the sparks flew when he said that 'principles must be substituted for customs'! There is a binding force in these apparently harmless maxims which is terrifying. Away with customs, so that the Republic may assert its principles! The conduct of private life here received its first blow. Nor did he conceive of the principle of virtue, which he had inherited from Rousseau, as limited to the individual. For him, 'virtue meant public virtue. It can be considered, he said expressively, 'only in relation to the people and to the Government'. One step

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further, and 'what is corrupt is anti-revolutionary'. And finally, as the logical conclusion: 'The mainspring of the People's Government in the Revolution is at the same time Virtue and Terror.'

How short in this man's mind was the distance between the pursuit of happiness and the shedding of blood! At the entrance to Paradise stood the guillotine. Why? Because the Incorruptible was unable to realize that politics consists in endless striving after happiness, but never in fulfilment. What to a good politician would have seemed useful Robespierre would have called vain. The politician respects persons, and therefore every 'human' policy remains an imperfect work. The prophet, the saint and the founder of a religion transcend the bounds of humanity, sacrificing themselves and others. Similarly Robespierre, who started as a humanist, became in the course of his short term as a ruler the symbol of inhumanity. In order to further the triumph of morality he annulled the moral laws. In order to realize a human ideal he abolished human values for France.

What was Rousseau, the author of the *Contrat Social*, but a believer without a Church; and what was Robespierre but the only man who tried to put the *Contrat Social* into practice? Just as the eccentric Genevan could only understand the 'general will' when in a spiritual state so much resembling heavenly grace as to be mistaken for it, so the Incorruptible achieved the contemplation of his god, 'the people', not through the laborious but precious experiences of one who lives amongst the people, but by means of a kind of revelation. He never liked the masses and was never closely connected with them. But he idealized 'the people' as his fixed principle, and acted strictly according to that principle during the whole ~~five years~~ of his

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political career. What he wanted in reality was a theocracy, with the place of God taken by 'the people'—as he understood that image. That his doctrine should—indeed must—combine illegalities, and even crimes, with great acts of martyrdom, was the result of this democratic mysticism, which consisted in the deification of 'the people's will'—a will he believed that he alone understood. He did not therefore fight for the living community of the people, but proceeded from an abstraction which, far from being based on the elements of goodness and strength in the people, found these springs of life a positive hindrance. His shame is at the same time his glory: he did not act from earthly desires or selfish inclinations, but, as high priest of his new god, he shrank from nothing.

Though the word 'State' is seldom found in Robespierre's utterances, nevertheless all his actions can be attributed to 'reasons of State'. The complete abdication of all individual claims to happiness, which he demanded for the assertion and fulfilment of that 'general will' postulated by Rousseau as basis for the ideal regulation of society, soon converted the Republic into a dark prison filled with the sighs of good citizens and the scornful laughter of rogues. The French Revolution was successful in so far as it was concerned with humanity, but failed where the conception of 'the people' was at stake. It was human in every way until Robespierre took over the leadership and made it inhuman and 'virtuous'. Those influential liberal ideas which originated in it and have permeated modern civilization through and through were none of his work. The Girondins, Danton, even the plebeian atheist Hébert, who were all executed by Robespierre, have nevertheless in spirit easily outlived him. The ghosts of those executed men so thoroughly took possession of the place vacated on the 10th Thermidor that even

## A BAD FRENCHMAN

Napoleon dared not expel them. What to-day is proudly or unwillingly called the heritage of the great Revolution does not originate with Robespierre, nor even with his one disciple, Saint-Just, but has only come into existence through the careful removal of his own political and philosophical contribution. For his predecessors the Terror was an element of national defence; for him it was the counterpart of public virtue and inseparably bound up with it. For them the guillotine was a weapon of self-defence; for him it was a political instrument. What was great in Robespierre belongs just as little to the classic legacy of the still popular Revolution as that for which he was blamed.

France's choice is made. The Third Republic has decided against Robespierre. In no public place has he a memorial, whereas Danton's memory is honoured with statues. The rooms at 398 Rue St. Honoré, where the Incorruptible lived, are still preserved, but there is no memorial tablet to remind posterity that here for three years beat the heart of the Republic. On the other hand Clémenceau, the famous Prime Minister, unveiled an inscription at a house in Choisy where Danton lived for a few months only. Robespierre is wondered at, studied, but not honoured. He violated a fundamental law of modern France: although he was a democrat, he was not a liberal. Above all, he was inhuman. France does not forgive him for having set the law above men, not only in principle but also in application, thereby doing them a lasting wrong. The ceaseless compromise between reasons of State and human comfort, which is the essence of modern French politics, is compatible with the Terror of 1793, but not with the systematic bloodshed of 1794.

The Frenchmen who to-day on platforms proudly proclaim

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themselves, with their hands on their hearts, descendants of the Jacobins and the heirs of the Revolution, are not thinking of Robespierre's democratic mysticism, but of Danton's compromising but warm humanity. The latter was a full-blooded lover of life, only too glad to wink at irregularities, whose leonine voice called the people to arms; the former was an ascetic, hating enjoyment and convenient compromises, who coldly demanded, in sermons above the heads of the masses, a virtue that excluded happiness. Danton stood for happiness; Robespierre stood for the law. He who does not love life cannot rule a sophisticated and free people; he who does not believe in the goodness of life, and who does not base all his public measures on his optimism, cannot keep the necessary balance between the individual and the State. To this French principle Robespierre's memory is sacrificed.

In the opinion of France he was not a politician at all, but a priest *manqué* who used France as a field for the practice of Rousseau's religion, and who would have cut off any number of heads to prove his doctrine, if he had not been prevented by 'the will of the people'. That will the modern French politician takes pains to discover, establish and continually divert; he never loses personal touch with the individual elector, whose hand he shakes and whose shoulder he pats. The Incorruptible, on the other hand, proclaimed this will, published it, and imposed it. 'The People always want the Good, but they cannot always perceive it,' he said; he was convinced he could perceive this good and so understand the people's will better than the people themselves. He never mixed with the crowd or spoke to it. The few hundred listeners of the Jacobin Club, before whom he appeared indefatigably, were always the same; the tribunes of the Convention also had their habitual audiences, in which,

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moreover, the members of the Club predominated. He disliked physical familiarity and avoided shaking hands. He knew only two places of contact with the public: his desk, and the tribune; and at both he was carefully separated from the crowd and from reality.

'Principles instead of customs'—so runs his demand. What can that mean to a Present in which public life is founded on customs? Is not the whole existence of man a custom—a sweet and precious custom? His demand reveals a cutting contempt for the joys of life, which consist precisely in the affirmation of customs and in complete freedom for them. What could a man mean to the Frenchman of that day who loved nothing—not even women or money—except his philosophy, who despised possessions, stood aside from wealth, and never set his heart on earthly goods? If France to-day is still equalitarian, it is from aversion to offensive ostentation and antipathy to exaggeration of all kinds. With Robespierre, however, it was a matter of principle. He did not shrink from becoming separate from the crowd, but condemned attempts to establish uniformity in outward life. He never gave up his elegant dress, his powdered hair, his old-fashioned pigtail. He always fought against the red cap, and people who wore exaggerated revolutionary costume only earned his mistrust, which he did not keep to himself.

If France renounces him to-day it is perhaps with the feeling that there ran through his whole being something un-French, and therefore that he represented something negative rather than positive. The Revolution created a new conception of the nation, and thereby gave France the precious opportunity of being at the same time nationalist and humanitarian, but Rousseau's pupil contributed nothing essential to that conception; perhaps he even curtailed it. The war that the Girondins forced

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on the King was, as it were, the ideal form, as well as the prototype, of the modern offensive war. 'A crusade of individual freedom,' it was called by Brissot, its most passionate advocate. A thoroughly French sentiment, expressing satisfaction at the opportunity of undertaking something at the same time idealistic and politically realistic—something that brings an increase of power, while furthering a humanitarian ideal. Brissot identified French foreign policy with the service of mankind—or possibly the other way round. France's political impetus and standing in the world still rest even now on the conviction with which Brissot uttered the call to arms and Danton preached the *levée en masse*. Robespierre was against war, and even against soldiers, and from the beginning strongly denounced the idea of France having a mission in the world that could be used to further political ends.

The modern French conception of life, with its sparing and reluctant acknowledgment of the needs of a community to which it does not consider itself indebted, is the opposite to that of this implacable mystic, who never tired of demanding the surrender of individual rights for the benefit of society. Whereas for the man of to-day freedom is a blessing which allows him to pursue his own personal happiness, so long as he does his neighbour no harm, the zealot of 1797 knew only the 'despotism of freedom', and declared any striving for individual well-being to be anti-social so long as the perfect society remained unrealized. Confidence in the natural inertia of things and the slow but sure play of forces was incompatible with the usurpation of a Dictator who considered himself alone in the knowledge of the 'general will' and was determined to force people to a happiness modelled, not on their simple weaknesses, but on the principle of 'public virtue'.



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Although France could perfectly distinguish between the blood of the guillotined and the blood of those who fell on the battlefields of the Moskowa—for Napoleon made use of the word 'honour', which Robespierre expressly renounced—she condemned in both phenomena the same idea—namely dictatorship. It was not so much a rooted aversion to personal power as such, as to the use of that power to compel the individual to make the greatest of all sacrifices—a change in his state of mind, and therefore a changed pattern of his life. Napoleon, although he began as a pupil of Rousseau's and a disciple of Robespierre's, took care to occupy the minds of his countrymen—who although social and gregarious were by our standards hostile to the idea of the State—by trying to force them to a heroism which they considered extravagant, and still more by trying to legalize the Executive as an assertion of the 'people's will' while keeping the legislative power for himself.

The Frenchman, however, wants just the opposite. He will bestow on the ruling powers only so much authority—which in this case can only come from the people, as God is excluded—as is necessary to enable them to administer the country properly; but not so much that they can exact from the individual in peace time any sacrifice or even self-denial. So long as the ruling powers are kept weak, therefore, by being authorized to act only from hand to mouth, they can never lift France above herself nor expect from the individual citizen any attitude or actions that interfere with his personal activities. The French fear of dictatorship, moreover, arises not only from love of comfort, but also from fear of losing French characteristics. That fidelity to tradition which reasserted itself in spite of the prophets of 1794, and even in spite of the heroes of 1812, cannot be dismissed as mere indolence or egoism, for it was a recogni-

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tion of the most valuable traits in the national character. The inner sureness with which France rejects the great but disturbing phenomena of her history, in order to enjoy undisturbed her own peculiar pattern of life, is made all the more impressive by the equanimity with which she puts up with the vexatious and shameful incidents forming the reverse side of that pattern.

Considered in this light Robespierre appears to have been nothing but a bad Frenchman. He contributed nothing essential to the patriotism which the Revolution enhanced, or rather produced. The real development of his power began with the beheading of the King in January 1793, and lasted nineteen months. During that time the magic meaning of the word Nation underwent no further intensification. On the contrary, whereas up to the fall of Danton every Republican-minded Frenchman could pass as a 'patriot', that designation became in the mouth of the Incorruptible the watchword of a sect into which he only could admit his countrymen. Patriotism, which rose like a brilliant, bloodshot star over Europe, had in France itself almost passed its zenith by the beginning of the last year of the Reign of Terror. After the Dictator's fall it lived on only in the Army, where the young Bonaparte was quick to seize on it. In Robespierre's time the patriot was no longer the man of the *Marseillaise* who, inspired by the Revolutionary standards, showed the rest of Europe what a true Frenchman could do. Instead, the only patriots were the elect of the 'Church of Rousseau', the humble and strict ministers of the 'people's will' as exclusively revealed to the 'Pope' of that 'Church'—Robespierre himself. In his enemies' eyes, however, the patriot was merely a disorderly fellow in long trousers, with his tricolor belt full of pistols, leaning against the guillotine with a red cap on his head and stolen goods in his pocket. The more the Re-

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volution became the exclusive concern of the sect concentrated in the Jacobin Club, the more patriotism lost its national ring and acquired a Jacobin exclusiveness; and this exclusiveness was interpreted as the dictatorship of democratic mysticism or of the mob.

With the King's blood the nation had sealed its covenant, and had read the world a lesson the value of which even to-day is not exhausted. The union of the nation ensued as an act of despair, and as a people never rescues itself from an emergency without thereby taking a step forward, France emerged stronger and greater from her panic. The struggle had begun without any programme. The people, who had been hurried blindly, almost unconsciously, into the gigantic adventure of the Revolution, had but one idea—to lay about them and be rid of the curse of the old régime. Then came success, astonishment at their own strength and the need to create something new. The people stood as it were in a void; once the intoxication of freedom had been tasted the necessity to make use of it arose. What a prospect! The individual searched vainly in his inner self for what Cromwell had called 'freedom of conscience'. It was, however, not a religious, but a philosophical struggle that had to be fought out, and here the voice of conscience could be of little use.

The absence of moral issues made the glorious meaning of the newly found national consciousness doubly strong, and it was on this issue that France instructed and enlightened the whole world. But Robespierre did not stop at that point. For him it was not enough that the French nation had become conscious of itself, and that for the first time a people took its place as an active, sovereign unit. What he was seeking was 'the people in itself'. That he was on the way to establishing true

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popular sovereignty was the unshakable conviction of his closely sealed heart. If his philosophy had turned out to be politically applicable—which he never doubted—it would have been in his eyes the most conclusive proof of the existence of God. It was this conception of ‘the people’ that he served—a people that need not necessarily be French. His idol did not derive its holiness from its being French; its power and effectiveness did not lie in the secret peculiarity of the French character, but derived from that absolute philosophical knowledge which prevails beyond time and space.

Being a ‘bad Frenchman’, Robespierre may be said to have been also a ‘bad European’, for so far there has been only one way of conceiving Europe and giving effect to its peculiar qualities—namely, the French way. If modern European civilization, morality and social principles bear the impress of the great Revolution, the prophet of the ‘people in itself’ is indeed a bad European. The selfish weakness of that Continent was as foreign to him as its capacity for enjoyment and its noble passions; for all these qualities proceeded from a cosmopolitanism, already half-eradicated, which he resisted with the guillotine. Is not the present paralysis of a Europe that bases itself on 1789 due to this very liberalism? How necessary it is, even to-day, to be vigilantly on guard against the French Revolution, or at least to put its principles again to the test, so as not to be left defenceless against it? In a certain sense it is not yet over, for its development is not completed and its legacy of ideas has not yet passed into history. Man is free, certainly; but to what end? He is good, without doubt; but does he know it? All power comes from the people, to be sure; but what is the people?

The French Revolution freed us from injustice, but it also gave us greater power to do wrong. It gave us, with freedom,

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opportunities of misusing it. For this result Robespierre cannot be held responsible, as his doctrine of equality was quenched in blood and has never been revived by the successors of the Revolution. The spirit of the French Revolution that reigns in the world to-day is perhaps that of Condorcet, of Brissot, or of Danton, but nowhere that of Robespierre, Saint-Just or Babeuf. In so far as the gifts of the Revolution are of doubtful quality, but of practical value, they come from its French nationalist aspect; in so far as they are great, but impracticable, they come from its Utopian, Socialist phase. That phase ended with Robespierre and was thenceforth regarded as an aberration, an interruption of development, whereas in reality it was the abrupt end of the Revolution itself.

Can it be said that modern France in her supreme crisis, which at the same time produced a European crisis, decided in favour of Voltaire against Rousseau? It can at least be said that she decided in favour of Danton against Robespierre. France *is* Danton. She is sceptical and humanitarian, amorous and witty, harmonious and undisciplined, patriotic and comfortable;—in short, human to the point of suicide. And she is bewildered when confronted with a dogmatism like Robespierre's, carried to such inhuman lengths.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MAN OF ACTION AND HIS REFLECTION

Is it possible to describe a man's character without feeling some partiality, some slight sympathy for him? Nothing about Maximilien Robespierre was attractive. Respect is the strongest feeling produced by this man who lives in every school-book as 'the Incorruptible'. What is there in him that can either attract or move us, when he never failed to suspect what was attractive in others nor to counteract by a strict, almost aggressive reserve what was moving in himself or his destiny? In any case, do we really know enough about him? Does not all the evidence about his life spring from a conflict of opinion, and every scrap of information about him bear traces either of adoration or of blind hatred, but never of impartiality? Since the Revolution has never ceased to be a living factor in everyday French politics, its ideas, characters, and events have always been subjects of political controversy. This is just as true of the writing of history as of the contemporary evidence. The latter is derived largely from the time following the 9th Thermidor, from persons who, being in greater or lesser degree responsible for that tragic event, wished either to extol or to justify their part in bringing about the tyrant's fall.

For their satisfaction was not entirely unmixed. The nobler among them guessed that with Robespierre they had struck down the true Revolution, and the baser sort—by far the majority—knew perfectly well that the dirty work of the Re-

## THE MAN OF ACTION AND HIS REFLECTION

volution had been their doing, not that of the man whom they made to suffer for it. Tallien, Fouché, Fréron and Barras, who had assiduously murdered and robbed without any pretext of doctrinaire fanaticism, had just as bad consciences as Sieyès, Boissy d'Anglas and Cambacérès, who would have joyfully welcomed the end of the Reign of Terror if it had not been brought about by those very scoundrels. They all, however, seized their pens to comment on the occasion in letters, descriptions, pamphlets and memoranda, and with shaking hands to portray the hero of the bloody drama, hitherto the Incorruptible, as the Monster. It was only too easy to ascribe to him inhuman traits. In the portrait of that enigmatic man were no weaknesses which could be sympathetically winked at, no anecdotes about a warm heart beneath a cold exterior. Nothing about him seemed to claim any sympathy or even understanding from his survivors. All that was visible of him stood out hard, cold and clear, while whatever was within remained obstinately, almost contemptuously, hidden. And it is still the same to-day.

The man's whole life was enveloped in sadness. Sadness oppressed his father's house at Arras. The Flemish mists fill that uninspiring country-town with northern shadows. Life there seems to pulsate more slowly than elsewhere in France, hiding behind securely locked doors and brightly polished windows carefully veiled with snow-white curtains. The noisy cheerfulness of markets, the pleasant interchange of talk across the streets, the Sundays on the sunlit river-banks, the scents of wine and flowers and the whole chattering gaiety of the usual French town are lacking in this place, which seems to come into its element only in autumn, when the air is damp and the wind sways the poplars. The footsteps of the inhabitants seem to be always hurrying as they clatter on the rounded cobbles of the

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winding streets; on the Loire or the Garonne one thinks of a glass of wine and a sunny corner, but here one wants a good fire and a tankard of warm ale.

No Latin atmosphere enlivens the town, and Robespierre himself had nothing of the Latin about him. Sociable pleasure in wordy public argument, that gift of the Mediterranean, was just as lacking in him as the capacity to relent and become a 'good fellow' when irreconcilable opinions threatened to disturb the peace. An indefinable northern atmosphere enveloped him even in the happiest moments of his life, separating him from the Latin open-heartedness, nimbleness, and boastfulness which surrounded him on all sides. It was not that he avoided people, but that he would not open himself to them and would never sacrifice one jot or tittle of his opinions to make himself pleasant.

The experiences of his childhood did not predispose him to take life lightly. His mother died in childbirth when he was five years old. His father, a respected lawyer, was soon afterwards stricken with a disorderly melancholy, left Arras for an unknown destination without taking so much as a spare shirt with him, returned home only once more, and then disappeared for ever, probably to settle down in Germany. The children were distributed among their relations, and Maximilien and his little brother, P nbon, came under the care of their grandfather, in whose family they ate the bitter bread of orphans. Later the bishop arranged for the eldest boy to receive a scholarship at the famous Paris school of Louis-le-Grand.

Robespierre was thus the first of the long line of scholars who have played such a large part in French politics, and who have always maintained, with the sensitiveness of the poor dependant, the sense of equality and the right to rise from the lowest to



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the highest positions. Of the 600 pupils at the Lycée he was one of the poorest, and the only extravagance he allowed himself was well-kept hair, for which at that time a hairdresser was indispensable. He was from beginning to end of his schooldays a model pupil, nearly always taking first place. This is one of the most important facts of his life. All the dislike he incurred in the course of his short earthly pilgrimage was the counterpart of that instinctive aversion which healthy schoolboys feel for the perpetual top boy, who instead of joining in their games and pranks employs the time in working and thus outstrips them. He shone in all subjects, but especially in the study of the classical authors, whose austere figures so attracted him that his teacher, the Abbé Hérivaux, nicknamed him 'the Roman'. This typical school education with its arbitrary conception of antiquity determined his later intellectual equipment, which always remained modest in the sphere of pure science. His tireless study of Rousseau, which also began at school, never became a critical penetration of that perplexed philosopher's contradictory ideas, but remained always a rudimentary experience, and this developed in him a disposition resembling that of his hero.

Hardly anything is known about the four years of his life as a student in Paris. Certain it is that he kept his scholarship, so that up to the final examination he could live and board in the establishment, while he attended lectures at the Faculty of Law in the Place du Panthéon and in his spare time did practical work with a Public Prosecutor in the Temple. How did he live? Did he enjoy the autumn colouring of the dying century or did it sharpen the bitterness of his lonely, wounded soul? Whom did he talk to? With whom did he wander in those Paris streets, filled with the feverish life of a bankrupt State? Was there any human being to share his evening rest or his Sunday leisure? We know

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nothing; we find in his taciturn character no sign of that curious emancipating effect which Paris with her imperishable artlessness exerts on all men. Perhaps the future member of the Commune sat in the smoky taverns and dirty eating-houses of the suburbs of St. Antoine and St. Marceau, listening to a rough echo of the current talk then still melodiously and elegantly practised in those Society *salons* which were closed to him. He may have done so, but it is not very likely. This man had listened only to the message inside himself and had always diligently shut his ears to voices from outside, in order to debate with himself 'in the silence of his passions', as Jean-Jacques had advised, 'what man can demand of his neighbour, and what his neighbour can demand of him.'

These silent student days do not seem to have held any of the intoxication of freedom which usually characterizes the first independent steps of a young man. The years went by in work and lonely reading, and could probably have been passed just as well in a remote convent cell as in a Paris study. Rousseau's works were, now as ever, his favourite occupation. The author of the *Contrat Social* and the *Confessions* lived at that time in the attic of a house in the Rue Plâtrière, where with self-tormenting candour and obstinacy he laid bare his disorder and poverty to his elegant visitors. Perhaps the young student sometimes crept up to the house of the master whom he revered from afar, and with black envy in his heart watched the fine gentlemen and beautiful ladies, carefully balancing their gigantic coiffures, ascend the steps leading to the fashionable philosopher. Secretly he felt a kinship of feeling with the work of that great disturber which went far beyond mere objective agreement and promised the young man the liberation of all his unused powers. He was no longer content merely to know: he wanted to see

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and feel. He wanted to hear from the mouth of the prophet the magic word which he had not yet the courage to find in himself.

One day Maximilien, plucking up his courage, resolved to seek out the sage and ask him: 'Master, what shall I do?' But meanwhile Rousseau had moved to Ermenonville, where a hospitable marquis had offered him a retreat. The student took a post-chaise and towards evening arrived at the object of his pilgrimage. Through the ancient trees in the park he perceived a lighted window, behind which Rousseau sat at a little table. Tied round his head he wore a brightly coloured kerchief, with his untidy white hair escaping beneath it. A strange kind of dressing-gown with a shabby fur collar was half open, revealing the old man's neglected linen. Everything pointed to abandonment and solitude. Nobody seemed to poke that fire or snuff those candles. Where was Thérèse Levasseur? Had she left him alone, to pursue her uncouth pleasures? Was there nobody to smoothe out the furrows of that sad brow and take away the lost look from those eyes?

Maximilien contemplated his idol through the window-pane as though he were studying himself in a mirror; and indeed it was his own reflection he saw. Two destinies were meeting which apart would have had no significance. What one had thought, the other was to carry out; and the actions of one were to find their justification in the written word of the other. No, it was not a mirror that Robespierre was gazing at; it was the Styx in which he found his own image, the stagnant waters of death, into which the icy current of his own short life was fated to flow. Thus he stood on the bank, stooping to catch the shimmering reflection of his own features which seemed to shine back at him from the other side. Just as he was about to touch

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his reflection, Rousseau noticed his presence and beckoned him in.

Did the thinker recognize the future man of action? Did he greet with emotion his only real disciple, or did he have a horrified premonition of the sea of blood that would flow from a mere two or three chapters of his *Contrat Social*? There stood on the threshold in flesh and blood the terrible responsibility of the creator of ideas and formulae. That young man almost speechless with shyness, whose lean face was colouring with confusion and whose tightly compressed lips, with nothing youthful about them, quivered with excitement, was ready to take seriously and carry out to the letter every word that the old man in the turban had ever set down on paper. Did Rousseau see rising behind his visitor the Angel of Death—naked, with the head of a bird? Did he feel the icy darkness of annihilation into which the other was prepared to lead mankind in order to make it a perfect society? Did he know into what cold metal this stranger would reforge the idea of virtue—that virtue which had hitherto moved to tears only clever ladies and their attentive escorts? On that spring evening, on the threshold of that house in the Ile-de-France, the Word and the Deed stood face to face and gazed into each other's eyes. Did they recognize one another? Were they aware of the unbreakable bonds that were fated to unite them for all eternity? The Word said: 'I see you for the first time, my sombre brother; do not leave me, lest I fall into error.' The Deed replied: 'I cannot help you, pale shade; it is too late.'

At the age of twenty-three Robespierre became a lawyer and, provided with a special scholarship of 600 *livres*, departed for his native city to lay the foundation of his career. As one of his sisters had meanwhile died, he set up house with his remaining

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brother and sister. In the courts he pleaded neither well nor badly, and without making himself either disliked or remarked. He made his entry into intellectual society, wrote occasional poems, made the acquaintance of a professor called Fouché at the Oratory School, met now and again an engineer officer named Carnot, and for the rest acquired a detailed knowledge of the administration and conditions of his small world. Nothing in his life or his activities foreshadowed the passion with which, on the convocation of the States-General in the autumn of 1788, he suddenly threw himself into public life. No doubt he aired his opinions when there was talk of the desperate financial situation of the State, the bad harvest, the misery of the peasants, or the dissatisfaction of the bourgeoisie. Such topics were current in every family, by every hearth, and at every whist-table in France. It was customary to talk about the distresses of the kingdom and explain them in terms of the learned theories of the fashionable philosophers. Robespierre's sudden new activity, however, went deeper. He came forward with detailed criticisms of the taxes, public expenditure, and all the burdens that lay on his native province. Three pamphlets appeared from his pen in quick succession: *To the Artesian nation, on the need of reforming the States of Artois*; *Communication to the agricultural population*; and a third, the title of which already had the Robespierist touch: *The enemies of the nation unmasked*. He was evidently aiming at inclusion in the delegation to Versailles. These writings already strike the keynote that was to determine his whole political activity—the social keynote, seeking to make the 'have-nots' conscious of their wants and rouse them up against the 'haves'.

With ten *louis* lent to him by a friend of his sister's, a trunk containing 'three pairs of well-worn black breeches, a recently

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dyed velvet coat, six shirts in good condition, three pairs of silk stockings (one almost new), a small black cloak, a lawyer's gown, and a hat carried under his arm', he left for Versailles in the spring of 1789 to take his place in the Assembly of the States-General as a Deputy of the Third Estate, which soon afterwards under Mirabeau's leadership became the Constituent Assembly. The little provincial lawyer felt overwhelmed as he sat in the resplendent hall of the château among the dukes, bishops and other great ones of the land, listening to those sure and supple orators, the brothers Lameth, Rœderer, Mirabeau. For him speaking in public was at once a pleasure and a torment. When he mounted the tribune he had to summon all his strength to avoid trembling; and he had the greatest difficulty in making himself heard in that perpetual tumult with his weak, ungracious voice, which improved but slowly.

Nor were things made easy for him. His motions went unnoticed, his interventions in debate were stifled in laughter, his speeches were drowned by the noise and not listened to. What could that pale little man with the hard eyes be up to? Did he not realize that he was sitting among magnificent, educated, comfortable people? Very few of them were aware that their deliberations and endless wrangling with the Crown were the beginning of the Revolution. The young man from Arras, however, did know. They took him for a crank, a grumbler, or a harmless fool; they laughed at him, they shouted him down. But he clung obstinately to the tribune and shouted against the uproar. He knew that one day they would listen to him whether they wanted to or not. In a few years Condorcet, who then dissuaded those of his friends who were alarmed by Robespierre from 'lifting the club of Hercules against a flea that would vanish with the winter', would be wandering about in

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rags, vainly trying to escape the myrmidons of the Incorruptible. Woe to those who called him 'a poor scholar' in their scurrilous pamphlets! They would have done well to beware of that elegant lawyer and obstinate orator. Only Mirabeau felt this, observing: 'He will go far, for he believes what he says.'

The great fever of the world had begun; the virus of the Rights of Man had entered the blood of the nations. France, amid universal rejoicing, was smashing her ancient armour with powerful hammer-strokes and seeking to forge herself something new. From all quarters came back the echo: 'Man is created free, even though he is born in chains.' People were determined to be judged on their merits. The educated man, the bourgeois, pushed his way with vigorous blows to the surface of public life. To the economic freedom of movement which the more capable among that class had long enjoyed was now to be added equality of political and social rights with other members of the possessing classes. The bourgeois Revolution had begun. Of the peasant, the workman and the mass of small artisans there was not much mention. Although numerically they formed the largest part of the population, the philosophic writers and leaders of society had not yet been able to perceive them, nor even to consider them as the backbone of society. Revolutionary France looked upward, not downward.

Did Robespierre know better? He must at least have had an inkling that the idea of the people, for him a purely philosophical conception, contained a terrible reality of which political thought, at that turning-point of history, had scarcely taken account. At any rate, in his heart he understood by equality not only equality of rights, but also of possessions. No wonder that the bourgeois Revolution feared him from first to last as a trouble-maker. Thereby, however, he won to himself the

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*petite bourgeoisie*, the vanguard, as it were, of a proletariat as yet unformed. His unexampled success with those masses was nevertheless based on a misunderstanding from the very beginning. When he went on his knees before 'the people', meaning by that the idea of the people, he attracted to him the propertyless; and when he preached equality as an element of natural law the mass of the *petite bourgeoisie* believed that it was a question of redistributing property in their favour.

It was not surprising that he found his natural place at the Jacobin Club which was then being founded. The Constituent Assembly had dispersed, its last resolution, on a motion of Robespierre's, having been that none of its members should be eligible for the new National Assembly. After the Assembly had adjourned he devoted himself entirely to the Jacobins, refusing or giving up every office, and appeared night after night in the former refectory of the Jacobin monks, where he expounded the laws to those present. Whereas in the Assembly he had spoken on every conceivable subject—Corsica, vagabondage, the colonies, the Jews, episcopal jurisdiction, the lottery, the game laws, nuns' pensions, foreign politics, education, the postal system—at the Jacobin Club he soon began to simplify his proposals. He aimed to establish the principle that any action taken outside those precincts could be nothing but a betrayal of 'the people' and the Revolution, and therewith placed his foot on the ladder that led to power: for whoever had the Jacobins had the *faubourgs*, whoever had the *faubourgs* had the Paris Commune, and whoever had Paris was master of the Revolution.

At the *Salon* in the autumn of 1791, together with the *Horaces* and the sketch of the *Serment du Jeu de Paume*, by David, and the *Paesiello*, by Mme. Vigée-Lebrun, there was shown a series of



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portraits of members of the National Assembly, by Mme. Labille-Guyard. There was Bishop Talleyrand, holding in his hand some papers with the inscription: 'Religious toleration, national education'; there were the handsome Barnave, Beauharnais and the two Lameths. Above all there was Maximilien Robespierre, wearing a small cloak and a jabot of snow-white organdie. Instead of his name beneath the portrait was the title: 'The Incorruptible'. That word was the synopsis of all that carried the man to the top; by itself it was already half the battle. On 21st September, 1792, Robespierre entered the Convention as Deputy for Paris amid tumultuous applause from the tribunes. In the following January, by the King's death-sentence, he welded that body for better or for worse to the destinies of the Revolution. On 2nd June, 1793, the Girondins were struck down. On 27th July Maximilien became a member of the Committee of Public Safety. In August he prevented the introduction of the Constitution, and then, while Europe was reeling from the desperate blows of the French armies, the Convention made the Terror—together with Virtue—the order of the day. The Incorruptible was moving toward the dizzy heights of dictatorship. With the year 1794 Robespierre's destiny began to unroll with terrifying rapidity. It seemed only yesterday that he had arrived from Arras with his small trunk and a few pamphlets in his cloak to take his place in the hall of Versailles, yet the last year of his life was already beginning. With a roar the black wings of Fate rushed across the ever-shadowed sundial of his life. Autumn was at hand before ever summer had come. Six months more remained to him. In March he sent Hébert and his companions to the scaffold, in April Danton and Camille, and then began the period leading to the Festival of the Supreme Being and the Ninth Thermidor.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIFE OF A SAD MAN

These few short years did not go by without bringing into Robespierre's life a faint gleam of human warmth. It was as if a kindly glow had come into the pallid face of the Grand Inquisitor from having gazed one evening into the peaceful flame of a family hearth. For the last three years of his life Robespierre lived with the cabinetmaker Maurice Duplay and his family, and whatever comfort, domestic intimacy and warmth his nervously sealed heart was capable of absorbing he found there.

The 17th July, 1791, was a most turbulent Sunday. In the Champ-de-Mars there were bloody encounters between the citizens and Lafayette's troops. The Sunday crowds were attacked and fired on, and many were killed and wounded. The tocsin sounded, drums were beaten, and there was incessant shooting. Towards evening martial law was proclaimed. The soldiers streamed into the centre of the city, swearing to make an end of the whole Republican nuisance. In front of the Jacobin Club, which had just ended its evening sitting, there surged an angry crowd. Would the 'patriots', who were preparing to leave the hall, be arrested? Robespierre appeared on the flight of steps; the cheers of the citizens were answered by the soldiers with oaths and blows of their clubs. Robespierre turned into the Rue Honoré, pale but calm. The crowd began to follow him and hindered his progress, and he was looking

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helplessly round when a stranger took him kindly by the arm and drew him into the doorway of a house. It was the cabinet-maker Duplay, whose dwelling was just at that part of the Rue Honoré. Being himself an enthusiastic Jacobin he had noticed the predicament of the famous orator, and begged him to remain in his house until the danger was over. Robespierre took some belated refreshment in the artisan's family circle; and there, under the admiring glances of the two daughters and the motherly care of Mme. Duplay, he had, for the first time since his far-off childhood, the feeling of being at home. In a small empty room next the son's bedroom a bed was prepared for him for the night. The housewife brought him a candle and an orange and withdrew on tiptoe. Then, while the house slowly sank into the silence of night, Robespierre, dreamily stroking the fresh-smelling white pillow, felt himself safe.

With that polite young man, who so modestly, almost blushing, accepted his hostess's services, death entered the house. Before three years were over the comfortable circumstances of that *petit bourgeois* family were destroyed: the mother had hanged herself in prison, the second daughter had lost her young husband, the father had with great difficulty escaped being sentenced to death, and all that remained of the family was scattered, persecuted, outlawed and given no peace. However, luckily for themselves, men cannot see the future. The cabinetmaker's family were pleased to be able to give shelter to the Incorruptible, and he, for his part, could not have wanted anything better. The street was one of the best in Paris; it was only a few steps to the Convention and the Jacobin Club was next door. He liked the family, and when the master of the house proposed that he should take up his permanent residence there he at once agreed. The narrow room in which he had

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spent the first night became the place where he slept and worked. He took his meals in the family circle and received his friends in the living-room. We do not know how much he paid for this arrangement, but Duplay did not become rich on it.

The cabinetmaker's dwelling was extremely spacious. A large porch led into the long courtyard, which in fine weather served as a workshop for Duplay and his associates. To right and left there were small sheds against the walls, filled with benches, tools and pots of glue. All day long the courtyard rang with the cheerful noises of sawing, hammering and the sharpening of planes. Although everything was covered with sawdust and wood-shavings the girls had found room to cultivate a little flower-bed. Above the walls towered the trees in the neighbouring monastery garden. In spite of the narrow space everything had a look of the country, the murmur of the great city sounded distant, and under the eaves there was a martin's nest. On fine days Mother Duplay used to sit in the courtyard and do her household work, a habit which soon became a duty, for thus she could more easily keep an eye on people's comings and goings and inspect visitors who tried to intrude on the Incorruptible. The more powerful the latter became the more important became her vigilance. Soon she was not alone in performing her duty, but always had some of the Jacobins at her side, such as the soapboiler Calandini, who became a general, the locksmith Didier, the distiller Gravier, or the printer Nicolas. All these eventually received some kind of office or at least became salaried jurymen of the Revolutionary Tribunal, where one could draw 6,500 f. a year for declaring oneself 'sufficiently convinced'.

Duplay himself fulfilled this function. Besides that he soon

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had his hands full with official orders for platforms, seating accommodation, tribunes, and other objects required for the Convention or for public occasions. Nicolas, a specially trustworthy man, received numerous printing orders, doing all the printing for the Committee of General Security. There was plenty of that; the thousands of forms and warrants for arrests, lists of suspects, convictions by the Tribunal, questionnaires for grain and food merchants, bread cards;—these alone would have kept any printer busy. Camille Desmoulins wittily observed in his newspaper: ‘Last January I saw M. Nicolas consume a roast potato for dinner. Will it be believed that this *sansculotte*, who lived so frugally, is owed over 150,000 f. by the Tribunal for the month of Nivôse for printing? . . . While I am an aristocrat who live under the shadow of the guillotine, Nicolas is a *sansculotte* who lives under the shadow of a fortune.’ Poor Camille! He was soon to pay for his impudence and weep tears of despair in the tumbrel; but neither was the industrious Nicolas to enjoy his good fortune much longer.

The house had two storeys. The dining-room and drawing-room were on the ground floor. On the first floor were the bedrooms of the family, and in the left wing, next to the staircase, the two little rooms occupied by Maximilien. The nearest to the door was a tiny ante-room, crossed in one stride, which led to the living-room proper. The latter contained a walnut bed, with a blue damask curtain that had been cut out of an old dress of Mme. Duplay’s, a simple table that served as a desk, and four cane-bottomed chairs. On the walls were two bookshelves of planed pine-wood from Duplay’s workshop. In them Robespierre stacked the innumerable manuscripts, written in his small, neat hand, of his speeches, Committee reports and projects. There also lay the reports of his secret agents and of

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his confidants in the police, the Administration, the Convention and the Hôtel de Ville, as well as the letters that poured in on him in daily-increasing numbers. There, too, stood the box which after his death proved to have such rich contents that Courtois, who was charged with the examination of his belongings, caused a good part of his discoveries to disappear.

There certainly were some curious documents in that narrow room. Under the leaden inkstand was a neatly drawn-up list of 'patriots having some sort of talent'—a list which included precisely that small circle whom the great man trusted. Inside a blue blotter, written on special sheets of paper, were the most urgent tasks to be done, extracted by him in the evenings from the hurried notes which filled his notebook. 'Hesse at Orléans to be dismissed' no doubt refers to the German Prince Karl of Hesse, who had become a rabid revolutionary and held a military command at Orléans under the nickname 'General Marat'. This man had two characteristics which Robespierre hated: he was a foreigner and a renegade aristocrat, and for both these reasons had behaved in a doubly savage manner. He soon disappeared and joined his former compeers in the 'Paradise of the headless'.

'Indefinite postponement of the decree about the calendar.' In fact he thought the ten-day-week calendar, with its lyrical veneration of peasants, quite absurd, like all the outward symbols of the Revolution. The able Fabre d'Eglantine and his like had more need, he thought, to change their opinions than the calendar. Robespierre, however, well knew that such slavish worship of the Revolution was only indulged in with anxious side-glances at himself, as he would have cruelly reproached any lack of such zeal, even to the length of uttering veiled threats; and this only increased his contempt for the 'Byzan-

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tines' of the Republic. Eventually, however, the new calendar was introduced, and July became Thermidor.

'Dissolution of the Union of Republican Revolutionary Women.' The Convention, he thought, ought on principle to have forbidden all organizations of women. These ladies must be either former nuns and *marquises* who wanted secretly to hear Mass and weep before the crape-veiled picture of Louis Capet; or else Communists who, led by the ex-priest Jacques Roux, got up demonstrations in favour of maximum prices and a capital levy, and went to watch the executions, which in his opinion even men should not have done.

'Circulation of good writings':—easier said than done, but nevertheless extremely necessary. It was not a question of making the Republic palatable, but of continually showing that it was based on justice and strove for complete equality. It was extraordinary that people would not understand that. But the writers themselves were worst of all; 'they should be outlawed as the worst enemies of the country', because they stirred up unrest in the name of the Rights of Man.

On another shelf lay addresses of allegiance from the clubs in provincial towns, acclaiming him as the shining light of freedom, the infallible scribe and sage. Addresses of devotion, across whose ornamental texts he sometimes wrote the word 'flatterer' as the only marginal note. Also love-letters from unknown feminine adorers. Thus wrote a young widow from Nantes:

'Ever since the beginning of the Revolution I have been in love with you: you are my idol, and I have no other in the world but you. As dowry I offer you the qualities of a true Republican, an income of 40,000 f. and my 22 years.'

Then this litany from a patriot at Calais: 'Robespierre, pillar of the Republic, protector of patriots, incorruptible genius,

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enlightened Montagnard, who sees all, foresees all, unravels all, who cannot be deceived or seduced.'

There were letters from parents who wanted to call their sons after him: 'I have ventured to burden him with the weight of your name.' Or the request of Mirabeau's sister, which concludes: 'Unchangeable and strong, you are an eagle soaring in the heavens.' It was remarkable how many of those letters were not signed, thus being evidence of a genuine cult. There were also police reports describing the feeling among the people during Robespierre's illness:

'Near the Jardin des Plantes a large crowd was discussing Robespierre's illness. The people appear to be so moved by it that they say all is lost if Robespierre dies. "He alone", said one woman, "detects the plots of evildoers. Only God can preserve the life of this incorruptible patriot" (they all sighed heavily). I noticed that while the *sansculottes* were discussing Robespierre's indisposition the better-dressed people said nothing, but on their faces could be seen a look of satisfaction.'

Many would have given a fortune—in *assignats*—to have been able to peruse these interesting documents to their heart's content, in order to prove that the Incorruptible was aiming at dictatorship. But the house was well guarded; and nothing was lost through untidiness, for the great man carefully cleared up the table every night before going to bed; at the most a volume of Rousseau or Racine might be left lying on it. Throughout the night his faithful dog Brount slept under the table.

While he worked his shortsighted eyes, tired by the eternal spectacles, would wander through the window and away over the neighbouring trees into the blue sky, following the flights of the martins. From the narrow courtyard below came the cheerful voice of the elder Duplay daughter and the noise of the



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workshop; and when he opened the window—which often happened, as he was fond of nature—the fragrance of the gardens poured into his room and mixed with the bitter smell of the fresh pine planks which Duplay's companions were sawing. Few visitors were allowed into his small room. Most of them were received in a little apartment adjoining the family living-room, a kind of *salon*, which the family had converted into a small Robespierre gallery. The walls were decorated with his portraits, on the mantelpiece stood his busts, and on the table were a dozen Robespierres in bronze.

One day Barras and Fréron, Deputies of the Convention, just returned from an official mission to the south of France, where they had taken the opportunity to carry out various shady transactions and inflict many unnecessary cruelties, hurried to Robespierre in the hope of warding off the storm which they felt gathering over their heads. In the courtyard they met Elisabeth in the act of hanging out washing. 'In her hand she held a pair of striped cotton stockings in the fashion of the day—no doubt the same that we saw daily on Robespierre's legs when he appeared at the Convention. Opposite sat Mme. Duplay between a bucket and a salad-bowl, shelling peas. Two men in uniform were dutifully helping to shell the peas, presumably so as to be able to take advantage of this familiarity to gossip more freely.'

Fréron, who knew his way about, made for the steps leading upstairs, but the women, declaring that the Incorruptible was not at home, at first blocked the visitors' way. Finally, however, Mme. Duplay gave way and called upstairs: 'Fréron and a friend of his are here.' They then went up. Robespierre had just had his hair dressed, as was his habit every morning, and was standing in a dressing-gown. His hair and face were covered

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with a thick layer of white powder. The visitors wished him good-morning, but he made no answer. They then explained the reason of their visit, but he answered not a word, as though he were completely unaware of their presence. He turned to the small mirror hanging on the cross-bar of the window, scraped away the powder, shaved, washed in a small basin held in his left hand, cleaned his teeth, and spat hard several times on the exact spot where the two embarrassed visitors were standing. They began to report on their mission, defending themselves against the accusations current against them, but slowly relapsed into dismayed stammering as Robespierre, instead of answering, looked through them as though they were made of glass and took not the faintest notice of their presence. Not a muscle moved in his face, there was no emotion reflected in it. 'Never', wrote Barras later, 'have I seen anything so motionless, even in the cold marble of statues or in the face of a dead man already entombed.' . . . Eventually the two heroes had to withdraw without having gained their object, but they were soon to pay him back.

The peaceful Duplay household was unrecognizable, so many were the visitors—and new guests as well. Robespierre's younger brother Augustin, also called Bonbon, a member of the Convention, where by reason of his frank, soldierly nature he played an honourable but—as was proper—secondary rôle, at once came to live with the Duplays, and together with his sister Charlotte took the two rooms in front above the entrance. But things did not go well. Although Bonbon was very good-natured his sister, who was no longer young, wanted to have the elder brother entirely to herself, and Mother Duplay, who had begun to cherish hopes of marrying her daughter Eléonore to Maximilien, had her own views of this development. There

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was bound to be trouble, and soon it came to violent scenes between the two women;—‘the war between the housekeeper and the *curé’s* sister.’ The sister had to withdraw and her younger brother set up a small establishment for her nearby in the Rue Florentin. With her Fouché disappeared from the small number of friends of the house. It is not known whether he really had any serious intention of marrying Robespierre’s sister, or whether he seized this opportunity to leave the man who could never forgive him his crimes, in order to prepare from a safe distance a deadly plot against him.

There was also the elderly Marquise de Chalabre, a gushing political female; Camille Desmoulins and his young wife, the beautiful Lucile; the sombre infant prodigy Saint-Just; the gallant Lebas, who was soon to take away the younger Duplay daughter, Elisabeth, to a brief conjugal felicity; the painter David; the gentle but severe Couthon, lame in both legs, who was always carried in by a gendarme and deposited in an arm-chair; and the faithful Buonarroti, a descendant of the great Michelangelo. They often sat peacefully in Mme. Duplay’s pleasant room at the close of a long, busy day. The women took out their sewing; the mother served refreshments, Elisabeth sat close to Lebas, and Eléonore could not take her eyes off Robespierre, who gave her an occasional friendly, *sedate nod*. The men talked peacefully and quietly. The day was over—a day like any other. Each had done his work, performed his duty, and now rested in that intimate atmosphere. One in the course of the afternoon had as a juryman voted twelve death sentences, honestly taking the trouble to judge each case on its merits; another had sent off a guillotine to Nantes, or examined a list of denunciations, or sequestered the property of an executed man, or drawn up a list of suspects. All had worked in the

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terrible workshop of death called the Terror. They had felt fixed on themselves the horrified, discountenanced looks of the beings who had to die. They had heard the lamentations of the weak and the cries of the desperate, and seen the silence of the strong. Before leaving the building they might have taken a fleeting glance into that dark room, for ever filled with tears, where the executioner's assistants cut off the hair of the condemned women. They had also made laws, provided for State payment of teachers, harangued the troops leaving for the front, approved credits for a simplified process of making saltpetre, or decided to levy money from the rich to reduce the price of bread. They had returned from the Belgian front or the Rhine and immediately written their reports; they had instituted a museum at the Louvre; they had distributed land to settlers. In a word—they had worked, and the quiet of a meditative evening was doubly welcome,

When the conversation flagged, Buonarroti opened the clavichord and began to play, cleanly and delicately, a piece by Méhul: then Lebas, who had a fine voice, sang the romance 'Tandis que tout sommeille', while Elisabeth watched with enraptured eyes, parted lips and flushed cheeks. Mme. Duplay let fall her work, and the faithful dog Brout lay in the corner growling gently in his sleep. Time passed softly, almost audibly, as they sat there lost in their thoughts. Later on Robespierre stepped forward, leaned against the mantelpiece, and read out a piece of Montesquieu's *Dialogue between Sulla and Eucrates*. He knew the words by heart and hardly needed the book, which he really only used to hide his shyness; his spectacles were pushed up on his forehead, his eyes were half-shut, and his broad but delicate face was bent in an attitude of profound absorption. He stood there with his elegant legs in their yellow silk breeches

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lightly crossed and his green frock-coat carefully buttoned across his red-and-white-striped waistcoat. The lamp behind him on the mantelpiece threw silvery streaks of light on his snow-white powdered hair. His voice sounded hesitant, almost supplicating:

'My lord, your actions upset all my previous conceptions. I thought you had ambition, but not the love of fame. I could see that your soul was out of the ordinary, but I did not suspect that it was great. Everything in your life seemed to me to indicate a man consumed with the desire to command, full of the most sinister passions, gladly taking upon himself the shame, the remorse, and even the baseness inseparable from tyranny. For, after all, you have sacrificed everything to your own power. You have taken care to make all Romans fear you. Mercilessly you have exercised the most terrible magistrature ever known. The Senate trembles at the sight of its pitiless defender. When someone asked you "Sulla, how much longer will you shed the blood of the Romans?" your answer was to publish the lists that decided the life and death of every citizen.'

Then Sulla's answer:

'It was exactly the shedding of all this blood that enabled me to carry out the greatest of all my achievements. If I had ruled the Romans mercifully, I might well have been induced to abdicate my office by vexation, disgust, or caprice. But I laid down my dictatorship at a time when there was no one in the world who did not believe that dictatorship was my only safety. I appeared before the Romans, a citizen among fellow-citizens, and dared to say to them: "I am ready to answer for all the blood I have shed for the Republic. I will render account to all those who come to plead for a father, a son, or a brother." All the Romans were silent before me.'

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For a while after Robespierre had finished nobody spoke. Lebas's hand lay in Elisabeth's; Eléonore, whose face had a saintly pallor, gazed into the light of the candles; Saint-Just bowed his profile, pure as an angel's; a fair curl had fallen across his brow, and in his eye a tear quivered. What stillness! Not a movement; scarcely a breath. From far away the muffled roar of the city penetrated the room. A voice calling in the street approached, gradually becoming audible. It was a boy announcing the names of those executed that day. The voice quickly died away again, but there soon followed another, that of a newsvendor shouting as though drunk. He was selling Hébert's paper *Père Duchesne*, and his words could be distinctly heard in the still room:

'*Père Duchesne* is damned angry this evening!'

The Incorruptible thereupon returned to his sombre thoughts.

Sadness never left him; one would have said that it followed him like a shadow, had he not been himself its shadow. It was the sadness of one who never lived for the sake of living, who though devoid of any warm feeling for his country could never forget that he was in the world to fulfil a definite task, and who felt he had no right to allow himself to be diverted for a single moment. Life, he thought, while it could be beautiful, was also sinister and terrifying; it was always an eternal darkness, out of which rose up disquieting dangers. As a child one saw these dangers as slinking rats that crept into the bedroom, or as a black giant with arms outstretched, or as the meaningless tumult of a great city, in which one wandered helplessly, having lost mother's hand. But, grown-up, it was no longer enough to pull the bed-clothes over one's head and cry softly. There were real dangers; there was the fearful, oppressive burden of what

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had to be done whether one wanted to or not; there was the torment of everyday decisions and behaviour in public. One wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it over, an action that might have terrible consequences, causing soldiers to march, carriages to travel, ships to sail, people to die, the face of the earth to be changed. Therefore it was better not to look at life too closely. From the Rue Honoré to the Convention, almost opposite, and to the Jacobin Club nearby was a big enough world, more than an anxious heart could contain; it was more than could be circumscribed with a pen or noted down on a sheet of foolscap. Perhaps it would have been better to drink or amuse oneself with cheerful women, or even just smoke a pipe; but who knew whether these vices were not new doors through which dangers might press in upon a fearful heart. One had to hang on with both hands to the daily order of things, otherwise one was engulfed by the sinister wave of life and swept into unknown abysses. It was incomprehensible that men could rest in the arms of a woman; incomprehensible that they could look on at an execution; incomprehensible that they could, as soldiers, sleep in an open field and then mount a horse to ride in amongst the whistling bullets. But perhaps it was not so bad after all; perhaps they got drunk beforehand; perhaps it was all only boasting. That might have been expected of Danton, who was always speaking of the delights of woman; or of Dubois-Crancé, who loved going to the front and riding with soldiers. It was sad that there were so many people who never, when they were alone and for once not working, felt that icy darkness rise up in their hearts. Who looked after grown-ups, and why was one grown-up at all? The workshops resounded, dishes clattered, carts rattled by, smells of cooking rose up; all men knew their place, knew

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where they belonged, knew the neighbours for whom they worked. Indeed, those who worked had to keep before them the faces of those for whom they toiled, or had to be able to imagine the hand they would have liked to take hold of when they were tired. But when nothing of the kind existed; when instead of consolation there lurked only a tremendous fatigue; when one was always the only man alone in the streets while everyone else was hurrying home to a friendly hearth and friendly faces; when life was spent among papers and with rough, noisy men who were strong and hostile, who hated and mocked, who would have tortured and even killed one had they discovered one's youth and helplessness and fear; when in the morning, instead of going to the Committee of Public Safety, one would much rather have stayed in bed, saying: 'Mother, I have toothache', and never have got up again;—then the only safety was in silence, compressed lips, clenched fists, a stiff back, and an unswerving gaze. But the sadness still persisted, falling everywhere like invisible ash.



## CHAPTER V

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This man's sadness was like a dark pool through which his soul never rose to the surface. All that was visible of him was stiffness, mistrust, an almost boundless timidity. He would tremble all over when a fellow-citizen, in the artificially hearty fashion of the time, clapped him amicably on the back—a gesture, incidentally, which needed a good deal of courage. The custom of exchanging fraternal embraces—a tribute to ideals of simplicity, whether literary, philosophical or political—was a torment to him. At the Jacobins sessions it sometimes happened that the assembly obliged him to go through a form of reconciliation with an opponent, which was then sealed by an embrace. With a disgusted face—‘the face’, as Danton said, ‘of a cat that has tasted vinegar’—and blushing deeply, he would offer his cheek to his adversary, and for the rest of the evening was like a bear with a sore head. The patriotic *tu*, which entered even into official phraseology, never came easily to him, and he generally managed to use the neutral *vous* to a group of people.

His punctilious politeness caused a woman to liken his behaviour to that of a dancing-master of the *ancien régime*. Any spontaneous, informal behaviour seemed to fill him with such fear that one is tempted to attribute all his studied stiffness to a need to hold fast to rules and fixed habits, for fear of being swept away in a sea of surprises and violent experiences. In a word, he was so shy that he never dared to be unconstrained.

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Much of his revolutionary behaviour, especially what has been called his inhumanity, is explained by his lack of inner and outer assurance. He was incapable of an unaffected attitude towards life, which therefore seemed to him full of dangers and hostile menaces. He lost this fear for the first time when he settled in the Duplay family. In that atmosphere of timid respect and unobtrusive care life lost some of its terrors for him. All the humiliation and disturbance inflicted on him by contact with reality were there removed from him before they could reach him. He lived as it were in an institution: all knives and pieces of glass on which his ideas might get cut were kept out of harm's way, all nails and hooks on which they might hang themselves were carefully removed, and there was no opening left through which stern reality might penetrate.

His elegance was world-famous. He loved bold colour-schemes and his innumerable waistcoats were especially daring. His cravats were always snow-white and were changed as soon as they showed the slightest crumple. Although lace cuffs were getting more and more old-fashioned he wore them almost daily, and the movement with which he shook back the lace falling over his hands was often the only interruption of his immobility while speaking. He preferred to carry his hat in the old-fashioned manner, under his arm, so as not to disturb his hair, which every morning was curled into two side-rolls and powdered snow-white, while the short pigtail was tied with a black satin ribbon. He seemed to cling to his spectacles; sometimes he wore two pairs, one of green glass to shade his eyes, the other to read by. When he took his eyes off a manuscript he would push back his spectacles on to his forehead, almost up to his hair. Often he would conceal his glance behind the green glasses. Did he do this through shyness, or in order to leave

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those around him uncertain of his expression? It was true that he had sensitive eyes, which easily became inflamed and sometimes even bloodshot. But it was also a fact that his glance inspired fear, whether it was hidden behind the impenetrable glasses or rested, rigid and hard, on those about him. Especially in the Convention did people try to avoid his glance; from which, incidentally, it may be deduced that most of the Deputies had bad consciences.

The studied shabbiness of many revolutionaries, who dressed as real *sansculottes*, was not only suspicious to him but also instinctively disagreeable. Many people, although they had a carriage and horses and beautiful silver at home in well-filled cupboards, went about looking like vagabonds; they wore handkerchiefs round their heads and long trousers striped with red, white and blue, and brandished huge knotted sticks, in the hope of being taken for loyal disciples of Equality. Others blew their noses on their hands or profaned the church doors, so that it should be forgotten that formerly they had made fortunes by supplying the Court or had been confessors to dukes. All these habits filled Robespierre with repugnance, not only because they were false, but at least as much because he hated dirt and disorder and vulgarity. It was no good; he simply could not get used to slovenly clothing, coarse customs and bad odours.

That abstraction, the People, before whom he knelt in spirit, had no more taste or smell than the Host, and lived only in the tabernacle of his faith. The regular members of the Jacobin Club were well-behaved people; anyone who got drunk, or was uncivil, or otherwise gave offence, was expelled. The rabble drifted round the suburbs and howled at the executions in the Place de la Révolution—both of them places Robespierre never went to. His connexions with the underworld of Paris were

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maintained through roundabout channels carefully organized by Herman's police, who were directed by himself and Saint-Just, and through the Commune, which was administered by his friends. Nor could he ever reconcile himself to the red cap. Its origin disturbed him; it had been adopted as a national emblem when the mutineers of Nancy, freed from the galleys at Brest, appeared before the Convention to receive its congratulations wearing their convict's dress, of which the red cap was then a part. Robespierre never ceased openly to fight against the cap. When Pétion, as Mayor of Paris, called upon the Jacobin Club not to support the use of outward tokens as these gave the revolutionary cause the character of party politics, Robespierre leapt to his support, spoke against the wearing of the red cap, and said: 'It is degrading to the people to believe that they can be influenced by outward emblems, which are calculated to divert them from their true allegiance to freedom.'

The Incorruptible was very difficult to satisfy. To be ostentatiously revolutionary was to be a disguised aristocrat; to continue as before was to be indifferent and therefore a secret enemy of the great cause. To demand blood was to be secretly conspiring with Lafayette to make the Convention and its organs unpopular by incitement to excesses; to counsel mildness was to have some private reason to fear the severity of the Tribunal. To propose a reward to the soldiers was to divert attention from internal troubles; to oppose the presumptuous petition of a contingent of troops was to be paid by the English to make the army discontented. To say 'yesterday' was to be a Royalist; to say 'to-morrow' was to be a seducer. To praise Robespierre was to be a flatterer; to blame him was to be a conspirator against the nation. There was no possible way of

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satisfying him and disarming his ever-watchful suspicion—except by getting oneself executed.

Robespierre's political doctrine was in exact accordance with his highly unpolitical character. It was a policy of principles, and the principles of others were his chief care. In this ceaseless supervision and investigation of principles alien to him he exhausted his best powers. Everything in his politics was accurate, complete and irrefutable; there was but one difficulty—human nature. Men, with their passions, impulses and habits—in short, their whole way of life—upset his doctrine. He therefore became an enemy of life. He had calculated exactly the results of his doctrine when translated into politics. Nothing could go wrong: the problem had to work itself out, and if the threads were entangled it could only be the fault of man's evil will. Hence his favourite words were 'conspiracy', 'cloak', 'disguise', 'unmasking', 'treason' and 'rascality'. He made such extravagant use of these terms that the police and the tribunals were hardly able to use any others, and the word 'conspiracy' written on an official document meant simply that the person concerned was to be removed from the world. Pétion said of him that he 'saw everywhere conspiracies, treason and plots; he never forgave an insult to his self-esteem; he was a prey to the most fleeting suspicions and always believed that he was being watched and persecuted'. The veiled threat was his favourite weapon: 'He who trembles is guilty.' A hint from his lips had so sharp an edge that eventually he himself was struck down by it. He would mention no names, but would continue his allusions until the person obviously meant began in desperation to defend himself; then Robespierre would fling at him: 'I did not name Bourdon; woe to him who names himself!'

To use the language of the Church, it may be said that pride

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and envy were his worst sins, and indeed they often became in his enigmatical character one and the same thing. Perhaps in this combination of the two lay the key to the secret of his life: he despised sin because of its shame, but envied it because of its pleasures. No one in the Tribunal was more self-righteous where human weaknesses were concerned, but he would perhaps have been less harsh had he not been aware of the pleasures to be obtained from those weaknesses. Envious of the happiness of others, he fiercely crushed all that was human in himself. Incapable of letting himself go, he judged those who were able to. Both fleeing from vice and fearing it, he tried to raise himself above those who not only had reprehensible inclinations but also the courage to enjoy them.

The cold contempt in which he held the *bons viveurs* of the Convention—Danton, Fabre, Héroult or the Girondins—was made up equally of pride and envy. How the hearty assurance of Danton annoyed him, even when he was still his friend! And Danton saw through him; he saw the reason for his continence and voluntary poverty: ‘Robespierre simply can’t . . .; and he’s terrified of money!’ It was the cruel, carelessly triumphant cry of an athlete who knew himself to be a Hercules with women and had no scruples about systematically and regularly filling his pockets. Then there was Fabre, who was so ready with his tongue and as quick at repartee as a fencer, whereas Robespierre could not speak extempore at all. And then Héroult de Sechelles, whom the ladies called handsome, who dressed so wonderfully and yet so naturally, and moved with such elegant unconstraint; whereas he, Robespierre, never dared undo a single button, thought much too much about his clothes and would not have known what to do with his hands if he had not had his spectacles or an eyeglass. All these people were con-

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temptible dandies and libertines, but what would he not have given to possess their assurance and audacity!

It was the same with the Girondins. They were the survivors of the *salons*, a company of brilliant young men who represented in the Convention the enlightened and sceptical bourgeoisie; and theirs was the spirit that had lightheartedly and suicidally prepared the Revolution by which they were now devoured. Brissot, Vergniaud, Buzot, Barbaroux, Louvet—they were all drawing-room revolutionaries who set more store by witty remarks than strength of character. These elegant, cultivated gentlemen naturally found a gloomy ascetic from the provinces like Robespierre rather comic, and let him feel that he could have no place in their chosen circle. Freedom and the rights of man did not, in their opinion, mean that the world should be turned into a monastery and life into a penance. How Robespierre hated them! Because they made him feel his sadness and helplessness, he grudged them their own happiness.

Another form of unconstraint that inspired Robespierre with divided feelings was the soldier's life. Weapons filled him with an almost physical fear and the nature of fighting men was completely foreign to him. He despised their thoughtlessness and primitiveness, but at the same time envied their physical mastery of all difficulties, their courage, and their manliness. He never tired, whether in the Committee, the Convention or the Jacobin Club, of preaching distrust of war, still more distrust of the officer: 'The spirit of oppression and ambition for power are common to the military of all countries.' Or, referring to the honour of an officer: 'I am proud not to know such honour.' He was always begging Barère, whose duty it was to read out to the Convention the news of victories, not to make too much

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of them. 'The prosperity of a State is judged less by its successes abroad than by its happy internal condition.' Against the young military leaders, who appeared to the outside world—and to posterity—as the finest products of the Revolution, he could never give enough warning. 'It is certain that wherever an important military chief exercises undisputed power the people are not free.' When Carnot delightedly showed him an application from an unknown young man named Lazare Hoche, in whom he divined a future leader of armies, Robespierre observed: 'He seems to be a very dangerous man.'

And Carnot himself! With what mistrust Robespierre watched that great worker, that silent, imperturbable organizer! It was difficult to provoke violent opposition from that serious man. Once, however, he did succeed in forcing tears of rage from him. He had accused him of a secret understanding with the enemy, in the hope that the man would at last lose his contemptible calm; but Carnot said nothing: he only hid his face with both hands, while the angry tears ran down between his fingers. Precious tears for Robespierre, but nevertheless the tears of a soldier who refused to be humbled. Another time he called out to him: 'We will speak to each other again on the next defeat!' But instead came Wattignies. Once he so far forgot himself with Carnot as to reveal the true reason for his resentment: 'You're a lucky one! What wouldn't I give to be a soldier!' What a cry of longing for a carefree life! But the two worlds are irreconcilable.

Robespierre's life was like his little room at the Duplays'. His habits were strict; his needs—apart from clothes and other personal items—were scanty. In answer to an invitation of Camille's to a dinner-party he wrote: 'I shall stay at home. Champagne is poison to freedom.' He was satisfied with every-



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thing given to him. To sweets alone he was not indifferent, and his one weakness was for oranges, which he could peel with one hand; he ate so many that his plate could always be recognized by its heap of orange-peel. He went to bed late and got up early; he never lay down to rest during the day; he never took refreshment at any of the numerous coffee-houses that were so fashionable at the time. He did not take snuff, which even the Quakers were allowed. His existence was work, and nothing but work; he spent the day in the Convention or the Committee of Public Safety; in the evenings he was with the Jacobins—in two and a half years he made over 150 speeches—and at nights he wrote, neatly and fluently, his innumerable reports and the manuscripts for his speeches, for he never improvised. Often in the pale early dawn, when the cabinetmaker's comrades came to work, a light still showed at the Incorruptible's small window. When Barras, Jullien, Hérault or Tallien drove home at night through the empty streets from theatres, restaurants and brothels, between their yawns they would make fun of their colleague who at that hour could find nothing better to do than 'watch over freedom'. Robespierre knew this and repaid them with contempt. The vices of these greedy and noisy individuals embittered him. He set the police on the gambling-clubs, he raged against drunkenness, and the poor prostitutes—as well as the brilliant courtesans—had only one persecutor fiercer than Robespierre—Couthon, the paralytic.

Thus, reflected in the mirror of this soul, the whole world seemed to be divided into Dantons and Robespierres, mutually exclusive and fighting each other. On one hand was the broad-shouldered man, with robust stomach, ample movements and deep voice; and on the other the narrow-chested, lean man, whose voice was sharp and who moved precisely, without

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taking up much room. The first—wine-drinker, cheerful *gourmet*, lover—shook his hair into untidy curls, wore his shirt open at the neck, and let his waistcoat become spotted; whereas the temperate, ascetic man was well groomed and took care to have no button undone. The former incurred debts and took money wherever he could get it; the latter kept an account-book and saved up to pay off the debts of his youth. While the one had no friends and was not loved even by those whom he benefited, the other was surrounded by well-wishers who laughingly turned a blind eye to his misdeeds. The latter, moreover, was full of pity for all living creatures and tolerant of human failings, whereas the former rejected the sinner without even hearing him.

Poor Robespierres, doing everything for the sake of a doctrine, allowing themselves no pleasures and not daring to sigh even when alone! In refusing the pity they did not want they lost the esteem their virtuous efforts deserved. Lucky Dantons, who worked for the pleasure it gave them and embraced even an idea with sensuous passion; tears and wild embraces were at their disposal and the least victory they won over themselves justified in the eyes of the world all their weaknesses!

The Revolution needed the two kinds of men: the Dantons made it vibrant, elementary, comprehensible, and atoned for its extravagance by their human passions; and without the Robespierres it would have been pure spoliation, a blind reversal of the existing order and the unchaining of brutality and greed. The call for audacity was matched by the call for virtue, and the fiery pursuit of life became great only through the austere pursuit of ideas.

If it is true that there is no more glorious way of honouring life than by loving—if woman is indeed a God-given element,

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in whom the most secret riches of life become visible and tangible—then Robespierre's melancholy and strict renunciation were not to be wondered at. It is a bitter thing to have to say of him that he never loved and never could have loved. No one can really pity him for not knowing what to make of the lower pleasures of life and never trying to enjoy himself. We can only understand the sadness in which he was constantly enveloped when we realize that the sweet pain, the consuming passion and the deep, satisfied peace which only woman can give to man were denied him. All his relations with women were marked either by timidity or, more often, by a ceremonious precision which gave the effect of an elderly man, if not that of an 'old bachelor'. His letters to women were formal and extremely gallant; such politeness, however, far from being attractive, kept people at a distance. When he spoke to women he might have been an *abbé* of the *ancien régime*; his manners completely lacked one thing—reverence. The atmosphere between man and woman, normally vibrating with dangers and possibilities, was with him absolutely cold and without tension.

With only two women was he really intimate, and they were past their best, were indeed motherly. One was Mme. Duplay, who, watchfully jealous, wanted Robespierre entirely for herself and even drove his sister from the field. The other was the grey-haired Marquise de Chalabre, who was included among his rare guests. She was one of the numerous ladies of the aristocracy who had welcomed the new principles with open arms and adopted the cause of liberty as the latest fashion. There was no doubt that the Incorruptible attracted these enthusiastic ladies who gave themselves up to politics because it was too late for love. If it was impossible to lure him into a *salon*—the peak of social ambition for every woman of the time—they could at

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least adore him from afar and greet the inexorable logic of his conclusions with passionate applause. At the Jacobin Club the ladies always sat in the front row and with rapt expressions fixed him with their lorgnettes. The elderly Marquise de Chalabre—she was not really as old as she looked—was luckier; she could visit him; she could even mop his brow, damp after the exertion of a long speech, with her tiny handkerchief. It was said that he sometimes allowed her to hold a mirror in front of him while he tied his tie. At a time when she only knew him by correspondence she had offered him her fortune, the better to spread his ideas and serve the new cause. It is questionable whether all the rich old ladies who revered him as they do a fashionable doctor or famous preacher would have gone so far. The majority were content to sit at his feet, applauding the severity which he displayed towards all pleasure, as this was also denied to them.

What of Eléonore, the cabinetmaker's elder daughter; was she not betrothed to the Incorruptible? It is true that she passed for his *fiancée* and that the friends of the house so regarded her. In the Convention, where the same view was held, it was given expression in cautious, but malicious, jests. They would have given out that she was his mistress, but, as that would have been in Parisian eyes almost a recommendation, the joke was that she was not. Poor Eléonore, pale apparition, taciturn Ophelia of this Hamlet for ever clothed in the darkness of his thoughts! There is really not much to be said about her. The parents, of course, were proud to think that their daughters were going to have such influential husbands. Elisabeth, the younger of the two, had just married the young Deputy Lebas and was about to have a son, who would one day be tutor to the future Emperor Napoleon III. 'Madame Robespierre'—how strange it

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sounds! There was something incongruous in the idea of the Incorruptible as a tender husband and idyllic father of a family—he who never had the impulse nor the courage to take the hot little hand of a child in a crowd and stroke it. The Duplays themselves were not quite reassured at the prospect, and, although their lodger agreed that Eléonore should be regarded as his future wife, theirs was not the usual family happiness that is joyfully imparted to the neighbours and displayed with proper parental satisfaction. Mother Duplay was tempted more than once to open her heart and make the great news as public as possible, but she still hesitated.

The future son-in-law was certainly not encouraging. No one would have dared, with him, to make the sort of jokes with which it is customary to allude to the secret intimacy between an engaged couple; his reserved manner and serious looks did not invite such good-humoured jests. Perhaps the mother had a vague feeling that it was premature to connect any expectations of earthly happiness with such a guest, who even after a long sojourn with them remained so enigmatic and who seemed to stand in the shadow of a great but still unknown destiny. He was not the sort of son-in-law with whom one could chat about arrangements for the future home. For him the future held either the fulfilment of a dream of mankind or else a void—even the cabinetmaker's household knew it. A man before whom Europe trembled, and on whom life seemed to weigh like a mountain no doubt conferred honour on the mean house in the Rue Honoré, but at the same time he exposed it to the cold light of Judgment, in which dreams of simple family joys do not thrive.

Nevertheless, no doubt was felt that the great man would one day marry Eléonore. One day—when would that be?

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Human wickedness seemed to be increasing rather than diminishing. Everywhere conspirators and traitors were getting the upper hand. The vicious and the sensual had the laugh on their side, and the perfect society seemed to be further off than ever; death itself was corrupt and did not disdain to serve the criminals who plunged the Republic in blood in order to sate the hell-fire of their cruelty and plunder the corpses. How long, O Lord, how long? The finer the meshes of the law became, the more adroit grew the scoundrels at slipping through them. Though the mere thought of it was almost treasonable, people often found themselves repeating the saying of Charlotte Corday: 'What a sad people to found a Republic!' But one must not become discouraged: the people were good, but they were still ignorant. To affirm the impossibility of doing good was to die. Death stood behind him who took it on himself to look over the heads of men and see only Man.

'I belong entirely to the common weal,' he was always saying; or else: 'All my love is for the Republic and the People.' And it was the literal truth, applicable even to his daily life. Free evenings were rare and short; meals were taken hastily. Only one pleasure this much-occupied man allowed himself, and that was to go for long walks in the Bois de Boulogne or the Bois de Montmorency. Nature was to him not merely an object of philosophical speculation, but had an immediate effect on his anxious Ego. Nature was kindly; she did not shame the timid nor scorn the weak; she was reserved and patient. The stream in whose reflection he relaxed his features would not betray him; the meadow where he threw himself down unrestrainedly would not give him away; the tree against whose trunk he pressed his cheek, seeking protection, would not give him up. Even under the conciliatory protection of Nature,

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however, he rarely experienced true relaxation. For the most part this disciple of Jean-Jacques covered the ground on his walks at a rapid pace, almost at a run. Sometimes he was seen rushing along a lonely forest path, his head bowed and a bunch of flowers in his hand, while his good dog trotted behind him, finding little time to stop and engage in pursuits of its own.

Now and then he asked Eléonore to accompany him on a walk, but this seldom happened; when he wanted company he preferred to take the whole family with him. It almost looked as if he avoided being alone with the cabinetmaker's daughter. She herself put up with his reserve patiently; she did not press him, did not ask anything, did not expect anything. She confided to her sister the rare conversations she had alone with him. No, she had nothing to hide, unfortunately. Maximilien walked with her up and down the Champs Elysées, talking about the 'blessings of liberty' or the 'meaning of the Supreme Being'; poor nourishment, this, for a loving heart. We do not know, however, and never shall know, whether this young girl really loved the taciturn man at her side. She did not wear her heart on her sleeve either. Silently she bore the burdensome fame of being Robespierre's *fiancée*; silently her modest personality grew into the potent destiny to which it had been blindly chained. She was to survive him, but without ever giving herself to another man and without ever quitting the gloomy world of her memories. She was to die an old maid, bearing her sterility as a sacrifice to the shade of a man who was continually plunged in sterile melancholy. All the women Robespierre attracted seem to have been Eléonores grown up. Her character was still that of a young girl full of hope, but would she not one day be like those women, who, denied love, took refuge in the world of miracles? The Incorruptible seemed to them a pro-

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phet, a worker of miracles, who would soon set up on earth the paradise of Rousseau's dreams. These enthusiasts took up the best seats at the Jacobins' when he was at the tribune and raved with adoration when he had finished speaking, causing a Deputy to observe: 'What a man this Robespierre is with all his women! He is a priest who wants to become a god!'

Perhaps it was his sense of order that led him to envisage a marriage with Eléonore as a possibility 'as soon as Liberty has triumphed over her murderers'. Although he knew that his loneliness and simplicity were most important factors in his reputation and inseparable from the legend that surrounded him, he believed that one day the time would come when he must normalize his life in order to continue to inspire confidence in the Republic. The struggle was not over yet, but would France, once the Revolution was completely victorious, put up with a saint at the head of her public life? Eléonore was to become as it were the presiding genius of a France reconciled with herself, but perhaps it was unprofitable to look so far ahead while the way to the immediate future led through such dark shadows. Love? It was no doubt one of the domestic virtues, but was it not far more often the disguise of vice? Was it real love that the cowardly and corrupt Tallien felt for the smooth shoulders and mature lips of Citizeness Cabarrus? Was it love that the crazy Méricourt, who liked to lace up her slender figure in a bright-coloured uniform, inspired in the too-numerous circle of her admirers, not to say clients? If only love always led into the well-marked paths of virtue! But was it not also an adventure, and were not the pleasures that lurked behind the bushes of the isle of Cythera as terrifying as the laughter of Pan?

No, Robespierre did not love. His outward appearance, well-



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ordered and well cared for as it was, produced no effect either of strength or of weakness; it combined the immature grace of youth with the faded elegance of old age. Was he born old, or had he never matured? His face was not without good features: his nose was delicately *retroussé*, his retreating forehead was hollowed at the temples, and at the corners of his tightly shut, narrow mouth, which seemed to indicate refusal of earthly goods, there lurked an inexplicable, almost obstinate smile, which might mean: 'I know best', or 'I see further'. His eyes were placed unusually far apart in a small face which broadened markedly towards the forehead, a feature which always made unfavourable observers speak of his cat's face, or his tiger's head. (Certain it is that though there was in his appearance nothing brutal or coarse it had a disquieting effect.) The face had nothing masculine about it, and this absence of masculinity gave his features an expression at once charming and terrifying, that put one in mind sometimes of an angel and sometimes of an animal. The unmasculine bordered on the inhuman. It was the glacial blissfulness of a face bathed in the polar atmosphere of the Absolute and having only one true relation to life—namely, death.

Such was the appearance of the man who, as Rœderer said, 'seemed to carry the burden of the missions of both National Assemblies.' Let us see how he looked to the masses of his faithful followers and how he spoke to them. His gestures were rare; occasionally his forefinger pointed upwards, like an elegant but formidable weapon. His measured demeanour was at first reminiscent of a schoolmaster, but one soon perceived in his arguments the steel spring of a logic carried to the point of annihilation. His words, however cold and artificial, almost amounted to acts, and this close relation between statement and action

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gave him as an orator almost paralysing authority. At such moments his inscrutable, sexless face became like the mask of the Judge of the dead. The rigid sadness of his features was enlivened only by a nervous twitching, which flickered sometimes in the corners of his eyes, sometimes round his lips, and was repeated in his fingers, forever drumming on the chair. He spoke slowly, in a voice sometimes penetrating but never pleasant. What he had to say was carefully written down and put together with industrious tenacity. His speeches often resembled sermons burdened with cultured similes and classical flourishes, causing Duport to remark that Robespierre took the tribune for a professorial chair of natural law. His rhetoric had nothing in common with the outbursts of Danton and Vergniaud, the prototypes of the long line of Republican orators, whose style, a century later, they still determine. These love to 'lay bare their hearts' and let themselves be borne gently on the joyful welcome of the people as on a wave. Their enthusiasm grows with that of their audience; the virile, almost erotic resonance of their own voices so affects them that they give themselves up to it as though to a guide and hurl themselves into the next sentence as if it were an adventure. Theirs is the impetuous behaviour that demands perpetuation in bronze—the hand pointing to the future, the cloak forming a pair of wings, the hair streaming in the wind like a banner.

This was not Robespierre's style. He doubted the value of such eloquence and even despised it a little. He thought that whoever made use of it must be vicious or at least shameless. The long nights he passed bent over his manuscripts brought him magnificent formulae and expressions. His speech against the war on 11th January, 1792, and his speeches during the trial of Louis XVI were great performances of unparalleled force of

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expression. But even they are not enough to explain the extraordinary influence he had on his contemporaries. How could this stern, relentless orator—who never stirred a finger to please or charm, who read for hours on end from manuscripts in a matter-of-fact and often monotonous voice, who quoted in detail the Greeks and Romans or contemporary philosophers, who was fond of long, intricate sentences—produce such an extraordinary effect?

Fiévée, who heartily detested the Incorruptible, described his impression of an evening at the Jacobins as follows: 'Slowly he stepped forward. He was at this time almost the only man who still kept to the costume and style of hairdressing of pre-Revolutionary days; small and thin, he rather resembled a tailor of the *ancien régime*. He wore glasses, perhaps because he really needed them, but perhaps because they served to hide the movements of his face, which was rigid and without dignity. His delivery was slow. His sentences were so long that each time he paused to push up his spectacles one thought he had finished, but after he had let his eyes wander all over the hall he would lower his spectacles once more on to his nose and add a few more phrases to his already overweighted sentence. . . . My ears were buzzing. There was no applause, as there was for Père Duchesne, but sobs of emotion, cries and convulsions fit to shake the hall.'

This picture painted by an opponent is corroborated by thousands of other witnesses. Although he wished only to convince, never to please, he possessed, in spite of the academic formality of his speech, the secret of producing an immediate effect. The men who on the 9th Thermidor brought about the end of his *de facto* dictatorship had no difficulty in explaining how he was able to win such supremacy over his fellows. This

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is what Billaud-Varenne, one of the victors of that day, said about him: 'It should not be forgotten that in the Convention Robespierre soon became the only man who drew all eyes to himself, and that the confidence he won made him pre-eminent in that assembly; thus, by the time he joined the Committee of Public Safety, he was already the most important person in France. Were I asked how he managed to achieve such influence on public opinion, I would answer: by professing the most austere virtues, the most unlimited devotion, and the purest principles.' This judgment on a fallen enemy hits on the truth: Robespierre carried conviction by his purity. France felt that he asked nothing for himself, that his fanaticism was completely disinterested—in short, that he was 'The Incorruptible'. Such a man can lead France in the brief hour of need, but she denies him her love, which can only arise as a reciprocal feeling between him and the masses.

Robespierre enjoyed, it is true, a kind of affection, especially among that part of the population whose political consciousness was in process of formation. His call for equality released in the petty bourgeois the urge to rise in the social scale, even though the demand for equality of rights implied a demand for equality of possessions. Robespierre's social claims were still uncertain, but behind the hitherto indeterminate Third Estate, to whom he gave consciousness of its existence and its dimensions, rose, formless and menacing, the mass of those without property, driving the prophets of equality along the road to Communism. 'I regard you, citizen,' wrote an old soldier a few weeks before his fall, 'as the Messiah promised to us by the Supreme Being to reform all things.' In fact his burning faith powerfully roused the masses, who had hitherto been overlooked by a Revolution made in the interests of the bourgeoisie.

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The two conceptions of Virtue and Equality were a lever to overturn the edifice of earthly possessions. Did Robespierre wish to overturn it? Surely not. He acknowledged the inviolability of property as an institution; but by demanding its more just distribution he laid a pick-axe at the foundations of contemporary society. With his call for equality he unchained the demon of envy in the propertyless classes, who were rapidly becoming conscious of their strength: no one, they declared, should rule; no one should be on top. The Jacobins who demanded that the church towers be pulled down because by standing up above all other buildings they violated the principle of equality were also obeying this call, though even they did not understand it. To the envy aroused by the possession of a supple mind, a noble bearing, superior manners, or an inscrutable inner life there succeeded envy of fine clothing, of comfortable ways of living, and finally of greater possessions. Robespierre believed that his programme of virtue was being acclaimed by the people; he did not realize that the applause was for the possibilities it opened up of plundering the rich, enslaving the eminent and humiliating the nobly born.

On the other hand the good elements among the people also responded to his call. His fanatical veneration for what he called 'the people' aroused in the masses many forces hitherto dormant. But he indicated no objective; in paying homage to 'the people' as an idea he did not realize that in politics every idea seeks concrete expression. While he believed he was worshipping a divinity he was really paying homage to a class. How could his conviction that 'the people' could do no wrong have escaped being seized on by the masses for their own ends? One has only to read his speech of 11th August, 1791 (on 'the need to repeal the decree concerning the silver mark'), to understand

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how the masses took this idolization of 'the people' to refer to themselves. This is the secret of Robespierre's influence. He was the scribe who appeared before the masses with Rousseau's gospel and said to them in effect: 'You are masters.' In truth the man was unfathomable, for all his rectitude. There was in him a secret thirst for revenge on those who were happy and enjoyed themselves. It was this that gave his democratic mysticism its sombre glow, at the sight of which the people cried: 'Hosanna!'

Had God plumbed the darkness of Robespierre's soul? We shall see what a fateful part religion played in the drama of his fall. His idea of the State arose painfully from the recesses of a mystical ardour—an ardour devoted, not to the Creator, but to the deified People. He was a saint without religious faith, but none the less a pious man. He felt in the depths of his being the urge to worship the divine, but since the gift of prayer was denied him the divine remained hidden from him, and in its stead there was revealed to him an idol, the 'general will', to which he devoted all the fervour of his longing to believe. But still his immortal soul remained thirsty, and so, when he was already in the shadow of his decline, he announced the Supreme Being, an almost touching invention which shows him too weak for the true faith and too profound for political idolatry. He was constantly preventing excesses against priests and churches, and the iconoclasm of Hébert, Chaumette and Fouché had no more determined foe. Never was his eloquence so pure and genuine as when it was a question of defending respect for the divine. The discussion at the Jacobins on 26th March, 1792, showed Robespierre in all his humanity. Every word was a poignant attempt to free his soul from the intricacies of his political Utopia and lift it to God. One feels that he could not live

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without God. But one also feels the terrible plight of a man who could not pray, whose lips were sealed in the presence of the Creator. He stood at the door, but found no words. His perplexity was worse than death. A martyr without God, he felt that he had only to raise a finger to be free and win happiness, that the tombstone could in an instant be removed from his soul, if he could only manage to fall on his knees and say: 'Lord, I am alone, quite alone, help me! I am weak, very weak; I am blind, quite blind; I am tired, very tired; help me and give me Thy law!'

Nevertheless He whom he could not recognize as the supreme lawgiver was to be a modest light to him in his many hours of darkness. The power which he denied Him in the community of men was given to him freely when he needed consolation. Heaven should not speak, but only comfort; the Creator should not counsel, but only soothe; God should not reign, but only serve. 'How could I have borne labours beyond human strength if I had not been able to lift up my soul? This divine perception has recompensed me for all the advantages to be gained by those who betray the people.' And to young Elisabeth Duplay, who does not seem to have believed in God with the same ardour, he said with the earnestness of a priest: 'You are wrong, and you will be unhappy. . . . You are still very young, Elisabeth; remember that it is the only consolation on earth.' How slight must the consolation have been, seeing that this perplexed and anxious soul lived continuously in such impenetrable sadness; that, though indefatigably seeking the good, he spread only evil; and that finally he went with wide-open eyes to the death that is the only way out of the narrow path of so grave an error.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIVE SHORT YEARS

The year 1794, which saw the fall of Robespierre, was the fifth year of the Revolution. By then the events of the first year of that tremendous upheaval were already half-forgotten. Who still remembered how a gathering of bourgeois world-reformers, supported by patriarchal nobles and enlightened priests, had ceased to be the representatives of the Third Estate and soared to the height of a National Assembly? Half-forgotten were the struggles with the obstinate possessors of privileges and the no less tiresome quarrels with the slow-witted and easily influenced King, faded were the jubilations over the Oath of the Tennis Court, and the cries of rage of starving peasants and poor people had died away. Overgrown, too, were the ruins of burnt castles; forgotten, the tears of joy shed on the day of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the heroines of the women's procession to Versailles; forgotten, for ever forgotten, the moving speeches of welcome to the King, led by Lafayette through the crowd of women when, still half-idol and already half-hostage, he was brought back to Paris. Only the glorious day of the Bastille could still be accurately remembered, for it had become the National Holiday of the Republic.

It was four years since the clergy, whose property had been confiscated to provide cover for the new *assignats*, had been enrolled in the Civil Service and required to take the oath to the Constitution. Three years had passed since the death of Mirabeau,



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and since the King, with Queen Marie Antoinette and the little Dauphin, had tried to flee to his troops in Lorraine. Then came Lafayette's violent attempt in the Champ de Mars to strike down the Republicans, at that time only one among several parties. Next, the Legislative Assembly elected by the taxpayers, which fought about the royal veto—for the King was still the head of the Executive. By then France's new form was already beginning to take shape, not only in the hearts of the people, but also on the map. The old Provinces disappeared and were replaced by eighty-three Departments. Before the end of 1791 there were signs of the approaching storm. The severity of the laws against the *émigrés* and the priests who hesitated to accept the Constitution heralded the coming Terror.

It was two years since the Republicans had seized the helm of the State. While Robespierre appeared, day in, day out, before the Jacobins, forging the revolutionary will of the people, the Girondins in the Legislative Assembly preached war against the kings of Europe. King Louis was thrust aside, and the threads he had woven with foreign Courts were roughly broken by France's declaration of war on the Emperor in Vienna. The first coalition of crowned heads was formed and an invasion of foreign armies threatened. Paris was in a fever, impatiently watching the conflict between the King and the people's representatives. Louis, aroused at last from his good-natured indolence, would not yield an inch. Although on 20th June, 1792, he allowed the red cap to be placed on his head by the crowds who pressed into the palace, and even drank to their health, he would not forgo his right of veto. The enemy appeared on the frontiers and the country was declared to be in danger. The Duke of Brunswick issued his haughty manifesto, in which the Revolution was treated as a schoolboy prank. The Clubs

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demanded the deposition of the King. The tocsin rang every night. The forty-eight Sections into which Paris had been divided—originally for electoral purposes, but later for the organization of the National Guard—became intensely active, inspired the Commune with the spirit of insurrection, occupied the Hôtel de Ville, and finally, on 10th August, stormed the Tuileries. It was the end of the monarchy.

Louis and his family were imprisoned in the Temple. Lafayette escaped across the frontier. The executive power fell into the hands of the people's representatives, who transmitted it to a Government chosen by them. Danton became Minister of Justice, and decreed on 25th September that 'the French Republic is One and Indivisible'. The real ruler of the new State, however, was not the Assembly but the Commune of Paris, in which the sinister, formless powers of the people were condensing. Marat, the 'friend of the people', exhorted them to violence, and while the enemy pushed forward to Verdun the mob massacred the political prisoners in the dungeons of Paris. Blood flowed like water; but perhaps the real France was away at the front, for on 20th September, to cries of '*Vive la Nation*', the army of young volunteers held up the Prussians at Valmy. Goethe, who was in the camp of the vanquished, observed: 'From this place and from to-day there starts a new epoch of the world's history, and you will be able to say that you were present.' In Paris on the same day the Convention met, this time elected by universal suffrage. Robespierre stood now in the full limelight of the Revolution. At the head of a radical minority, called the 'Mountain' because they sat on the upper benches of the Convention, he led the struggle against the Girondins towards its crisis.

It seemed almost unbelievable that the trial of the King had

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been only a year before. Only one year; but that year 1793, which began with the execution of Louis XVI, was no ordinary year; it was the classic year of the Revolution. It dragged the spirit of France through the darkest depths and raised it to the highest peaks. It was the best and worst year of the Revolution. The peasants of Vendée rose up against the godless regicides; Dumouriez, the victor of Jemappes, betrayed his country and went over to the Austrians; Mainz was lost again and even Valenciennes was occupied by the enemy; bread began to get scarce, while boots and gunpowder for the soldiers ran out. Like Saturn, the Revolution devoured its own children. The Revolutionary Tribunal was set up. On 2nd June the Commune attacked the Convention and forced it to give up the Girondins. Revolts broke out at Toulon, Marseilles, Lyons and in Normandy; Marat was stabbed by the girl Charlotte Corday; the heads of the Girondins fell; the Queen was executed. The Committee of Public Safety became the real Government and Robespierre, who had been a member of the Committee since July, the real leader. The Jacobins, Robespierre's people, poured into all Government posts. The high cost of living and the proximity of the enemy demanded a superhuman effort. In September the Terror became the order of the day.

Robespierre prevented the entry into the force of the Constitution: the Government was to remain a Revolutionary one until peace was re-established. Carnot instituted universal military service and created a new Army. Education was made compulsory and teachers became officials. The whole nation was requisitioned by the State. But the misery in the towns spread to the country, from which it reacted with redoubled force on the towns. In Paris Jacques Roux began his Communistic preaching, and the journalist Hébert, who with Chaumette led

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the atheist movement and worshipped the goddess Reason, followed him because he followed the masses. The Revolution was sliding down the steep slope of misery and economic demagoguery. Robespierre's call for equality found an echo in the cry of the masses for expropriation. In May a maximum price for corn was fixed, on 26th June the Bourse was closed, and on 27th June the death penalty was decreed for profiteering and hoarding. Everywhere increasing swarms of unemployed emerged and added to the general insecurity.

By August the pressure of the masses on the Convention for authoritarian control of trade by the State was so great that a few street demonstrations sufficed to abolish the last remnants of Liberalism in the Committees and the Convention. Cambon refunded the National Debt; on 28th August joint-stock companies were abolished, and on 8th September the banks and the offices of exchange brokers were closed. At the same time the compulsory surrender of gold ornaments and jewellery was decreed, and all private claims to gold from abroad were taken over by the State at their nominal value in *assignats*. On 29th September came the famous 'Maximum'—the fixing of a maximum price for all necessities at one-third above the prices ruling in 1790. Similarly maximum wages were fixed at fifty per cent. higher than in 1790. Le Chapelier's law against strikes remained in force. Furthermore, it was made obligatory to declare the amount of the harvest. The peasants were letting more and more fields lie fallow and agricultural production was decreasing. In October bread-rationing was introduced in Paris. In November gold and valuables were confiscated against their nominal value in *assignats*, and in December the value of *assignats* was only fifty per cent. of the official rate of exchange. All this legislation provoked furious opposition. Articles of daily

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use disappeared from the market and were only to be had by illicit trading. The Commissars and the men who, under Ron-sin, were detailed to enforce the economic decrees sent thousands of peasants and merchants to prison or to the scaffold. Nevertheless distress increased and business declined still further. Building ceased in the towns; starving farm-hands appeared in swarms in the streets and markets and threateningly displayed the evidence of their want. At Lyons, Marseilles and Nantes the Fouchés, Barrases, and Carriers carried out bloody reprisals against the Federalists, shooting, executing and drowning wholesale. The introduction of the new Calendar, with the months poetically named in honour of Nature, signalized the advent of a new world with new laws.

At the beginning of the year 1794 one man alone knew that France had advanced a good stage nearer Paradise on earth—Robespierre. Perhaps Saint-Just also, that 27-year-old Spartan, who was then at work on a law to enable the Senate to take possession of all young children and give them a State education; and the painter David, who, in the middle of doing cartoons of scenes from the Roman Republic, sketched a uniform for the French citizen. No clemency, no indulgence: Danton heard the cry and knew himself lost. On 26th February, which was now called the 8th Ventôse, Saint-Just demanded the expropriation of all 'enemies of the Republic' and the distribution of their possessions among approved *sansculottes*. The Sections and Supervision Committees were directed to draw up lists of those to be expropriated. The Revolution bordered here on a class war, anticipating the dictatorship of the proletariat; only now it was the Committee of Public Safety that decided policy not street-orators and agitators like Roux, Chaumette and Hébert.

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As the authority of the real rulers increased, so their responsibility grew. Robespierre struck down all his adversaries: on 24th March Hébert and his companions met their end under the guillotine; on 5th April Danton, Camille, Fabre, Hérault. The *assignat* had in the meantime fallen to thirty-three per cent. of its nominal value, and the economic decrees had to be gradually modified. The atheist movement was crushed. Legal protection was abolished, and the Revolutionary Tribunal was reorganized. Robespierre now had the whole machinery of police, justice and public security in his hands. He was Dictator. He decreed the existence of God. Meanwhile the Emperor was soundly beaten by the Republic at Fleurus.

Summer came. The guillotine was removed to the south-eastern edge of the city, for people would no longer tolerate the continual spectacle of death in their midst. The miniature-painters did well; everyone gladly let themselves be painted, so as not to be too quickly forgotten should fate overtake them. Children hid their heads under the bed-clothes when they heard the step of a patrol in the street; the grown-ups, sitting at table, held their spoons in mid-air as though transfixed: whose turn was it now? They did not go on eating until the knocking was heard on a neighbour's door. Nevertheless life had to be lived: there was the salad to be picked in the garden, shoes for the warm weather to be ordered, a pretty dress to get, Sunday—though officially it had been abolished—to be enjoyed. Men gazed inexhaustibly into the eyes of a child, the heart of a loved wife, the infinity of a starry summer night. Inexhaustible was the peace of evening, the gift of sleep. The poppy flowered by the roadside, the corn waved in the warm breath of noon, brimstone butterflies danced in the sun. Thus Thermidor arrived.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HEAVENS CLOSE

Robespierre had but a single idea; and this simplicity of his conception of the world, the exclusiveness of his will, and the absence in his nature of disturbing passions gave him that irresistible impetus which made him the foremost figure of the French Revolution. For the sake of this idea he slew his fellow-citizens, and for its sake he himself was slain. In attempting to translate a philosophy into practical politics he made it deadly. His uniqueness lies in the fact that neither before nor after him has anyone tried so logically to apply a Utopian and religious conception to practical politics. His public activities consisted in the almost automatic substitution, of political ideas for religious conceptions. He wished to found a perfect society with the people as sovereign—in other words, to set up on earth the Kingdom of Heaven, with the people as God. This enterprise he undertook without considering the difference between the true character of God and the nature of the people as he imagined it. Reality became in his eyes a criminal factor, since it stood in the way of his undertaking. Without realizing it, he was fighting against everything living—against life itself.

If his existence had run its course in a scholar's study it would have led to a venerable old age illumined by wisdom. Robespierre might have been a great moral philosopher and political theorist. Solitude and the silence of night brought him counsel

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and enlightenment. Bent over his manuscript he was almost happy. Why did Fate call him instead to rule a country, to shed blood, to die young? No one knows whether he was actuated by love of power. In no way did he strive for power as such—power at any price. If he had not minded with whom, by what means, or with what forms he governed, his life would not have come to an end at the age of thirty-six; he would have had Saint-Just beheaded, allied himself with Pichegru and Bonaparte and died full of years as Emperor of the French, or at least as President of the Republic, after opening a Universal Exhibition in Paris. No, he did not need power for itself; he needed it to realize his idea. He seems to have been a completely unpolitical man, seeing France, not as common property to be administered, but as raw material for the incarnation of his Truth. His influence came to an end just when the Revolution ceased and politics—which, whether good or bad, are necessary to carry on daily life—returned. Seldom has anyone intervened in politics with such desire for construction, and seldom has anyone caused such destruction. The destruction Rousseau took in hand in the theoretical sphere was undertaken by Robespierre at the cost of human lives.

Robespierre always called himself a disciple of Jean-Jacques and constantly invoked his memory in justification of his own political action. 'Why', he cried, 'is he no longer living, that sensitive and eloquent philosopher, whose writings have developed among us those principles of public morality that have made us worthy to conceive the project of reforming our country!' And in fact Rousseau's contribution to the development that led to the Reign of Terror was immense, even exceeding what eighteenth-century society did to bring about its own destruction. That society was the last to be held together by



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its own law, disposing as it did of a complete and spontaneous form that produced a self-evident style extending to all ideas, customs and habits, to artistic effort as well as the domain of thought and morals, to architecture and the handicrafts. Within it there still existed a formal assurance that could tolerate disorder only by an effort of will, while its perfection and harmony were not dependent on the individual but grew of themselves. This was as true of architecture as of social customs. The longer its worldly conventions held sway, however, the looser became their living connection with their creative law, and the desire arose in men to break from them completely and cast themselves adrift upon the sea of the Ego.

The more pious teachers still had a hazy knowledge of the creative mysteries that had once been taught as divine precepts in schools, studios and workshops; but an immeasurable humility was necessary to remain faithful to the sacred law, and only a few felt so inclined. In the language of believers, it could perhaps be said that although the bond between Heaven and Earth still existed it was so slender that only those who needed it were aware of it. A thin pillar of smoke was all that was left of the innumerable sacrificial fires that had once been offered to Heaven. The initiated died out or else tried to sell their knowledge, which thereby became worthless. Number, Measure and Law were still valid, but their origin was no longer understood. Order was still maintained, but was no longer sacred. The King still wore the crown, but could not remember from whom he had received it. God began to close his heaven above the world; henceforth only genuine prayer could reach Him: daily intercourse with Him ceased.

Moreover, men rejoiced that this was so; they were proud of it. They had become conscious of their own powers and were

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convinced that each one of them was not merely a world in himself, but a whole universe, no longer needing heavenly law but in a position to govern itself. The study of the natural science of man led to a great revolution of thought—the first and most tremendous explosion of an individualism become conscious and general. This volcanic eruption of talent, audacity, wealth of ideas, crime, stupidity and vulgarity was all the more powerful in that it was the first attempt of Christian humanity to replace a universal order of measures and values by an order of its own, created overnight, as it were, out of the depths of human nature.

The men of the eighteenth century had laid careful plans for this upheaval that was to engulf themselves. The temptation to put their own powers to the test, to feel themselves as gods, and to experiment with the materials of annihilation proved too strong for them. No one could resist it, least of all those who in default of the constituted authorities had undertaken the direction of opinion—the Philosophers. These were not a class of men devoted to science but were a part of the ruling class, whose self-consciousness they heightened at the expense of the general interest. They belonged to society, and it was only through society that they were enabled to put their ideal into circulation and reach the general public. What is to-day called Fashion had in those times greater binding force. Revolutionary doctrines were not merely fashionable: it was obligatory to profess them. To believe in the Revolution was not only a sign of good form, but also a necessity. The new truth, spread everywhere in talk and in the *salons*, existed only through the medium of general conversation; and as it was known by experience that general conversation never had practical consequences, but always stopped before the point where opposition would have crys-

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tallized into preparation for the actual destruction of society, no one had the feeling that the foundations of his own existence were being endangered.

Human freedom cannot be carried beyond the point where it destroys itself; yet society drank in, as if it had been the precious triumph of its own free intelligence, the poison that was to destroy it. It became a sign of magnanimity to pursue thought to all lengths, not stopping even where it implied the end of the thinker and his class. Had not Fénelon applied this kind of thinking to the Throne itself? Had not this tutor of the Dauphin ceaselessly exhorted his pupil to have doubts of the genuineness of his future estate and consider himself an 'ordinary man'—a condition which would 'render the attainment of virtue less difficult'? So it was with eagerness that aristocratic France welcomed the first demonstrations of the young North American democracy. When Benjamin Franklin came to Paris he could not escape from his admirers. The *beaux esprits* swarmed round him to receive advice for reforming the world. Smart society gave him riotous hospitality and listened with shivers of gratitude when he castigated its immorality and extravagance. Cardinal Rohan, especially, paid court to him, never suspecting that certain individuals of the Third Estate shared his partiality, nor that a young provincial lawyer named Robespierre had dedicated his first brief to the inventor of the lightning-conductor.

The first performance of the *Marriage of Figaro*, produced with the assistance of the Court, was the chief entertainment of the Season, which had never been more brilliant, more lively, nor more conscious of its own splendour. There was a rush for the poisoned cup, every hit was applauded as long as it struck home to the applauder, who was able to enjoy the singular

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pleasure of looking on from a box at his own death on the stage. There was no greater social triumph than to show off Voltaire or Rousseau in one's *salon*, however contemptuous and bad-tempered was the reception by these great men of the homage of a class to which they denied all *raison d'être*. With feverish industry and hysterical laughter eighteenth-century society heaped up the faggots against its own house. Contact with evil became almost a sign of good form, whereby Nature and the natural were given the rôle of evil. The State and the Clergy soon abandoned all resistance, changed sides, and likewise favoured Philosophy. After Malesherbes became Director of the Library all censorship of the printed word ceased, and instead there began the systematic advancement of enlightened literature attacking the authority of the Throne and the Church. The weapons used against the monarchy were forged in the royal apartments at Versailles. Later on, at the trial of Marie Antoinette, the Public Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal contented himself with reviving the calumnies against the Queen spread by Court society ten years before. In a word, the 'freedom of mankind', now emerging into the limelight, served the purposes of evil and collective suicide.

The fascinating spiritual richness of this century, its colourful charm and incomparable audacity of thought, was a moral rather than a philosophical phenomenon. The epoch would have been less splendid if its will to live had been stronger. Its elegance would have been less piquant if it had not been a systematic preparation for its decline. If we forget for a moment our knowledge of the consequence of this festival of charm and wit, we are surprised by the naïveté of its rationalistic self-satisfaction. Many articles of the famous Encyclopedia seem to us transient and superficial. The universality of those minds fre-

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quently did not go beyond a just pride in the progress of natural science. The democracy they were preparing manifested itself in the greater accessibility of scientific knowledge and in joyful satisfaction with 'the machine'. In point of fact the scientific knowledge of a Diderot, a Voltaire, or even a Montesquieu was extremely modest. One need only compare the scientific activities of these men with those of Pascal to perceive at once that genuine universality, possessing the key to religious knowledge as well as to science, had made way for that pride in culture which forms the prelude of every advance towards civil emancipation.

It is notable that it was particularly the methods of the most abstract sciences—astronomy and higher mathematics—that were regarded as the introduction to 'philosophy' and were translated into terms of public life. In this manner the revolutionary doctrine, as applied later on with vigorous realism, was able in spite of all the distress and social disintegration to develop in an airless void, thus increasing still further its original incompatibility with practical life. The pseudo-science of the Encyclopedists was worked out into definite social demands by those learned and literary circles that were gradually uniting intellectual France in a true *république des lettres*; and the more compact, logical and complete these demands appeared in discussion, the more they were regarded as 'scientific'. Naturally this was possible only at the expense of reality.

Robespierre's mistake—making a doctrine, not men, the object of politics—was thus anticipated by these circles. The more logical the solution of a problem the further removed it is from reality, and Robespierre's solutions eventually became so logical that they would cut through the toughest obstacles. The last decades before the Revolution witnessed the worst misuse man has ever made of his freedom and the divine power of his mind.

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Voltaire indulged in this misuse with an almost royal self-conceit, while Rousseau practised it with a bad conscience. A sublime egoist, the sage of Ferney felt strong enough to stand on his own feet and was therefore but moderately interested in the reorganization of human society. The philosopher from Geneva, on the other hand, suffered from having no roots—a condition he had produced for himself. His work of destruction brought him no happiness, and in his weakness he sought to recreate on a new plane the order of things he had destroyed, if only to be a support for himself. This ideological contrast runs all through the Revolution. Robespierre's most faithful admirer, Buonarroti, looking back long after the great upheaval on the men of this stormy epoch, divided them into two groups. The first sought to occupy the places of the fallen holders of privileges, and instead of abolishing class distinctions attempted to modify them for the enhancement of their own enjoyment. These adherents of a régime of egoism—the Girondists and Dantonists—were almost all disciples of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists. The other group sought to do away with class distinctions through a régime of equality and found a virtuous and fraternal society as Rousseau had wished. This rather rough-and-ready division contains a good deal of truth and is valid even to-day. Modern France is Dantonist and Voltairean. The Third Republic is sceptical and tolerant, like Voltaire; Robespierre was devout and intolerant, like Rousseau.

Voltaire felt no need to commune with God. For him everything was harmonious—with the harmony of cold crystal. Rousseau on the other hand was bewildered and could not stand on his own feet. A profound fear of life wrung cries of anguish from his troubled soul. Dumbly he yearned for enlightenment. He was devout, without having the strength to

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believe. He would have loved God if he had been in a state of grace and had been able to form a conception of Him. His state of despair on the fringe of religion, which appeared to him as a fearful precipice, and his stifled attempts to attain to prayer without allowing himself to address God, offer a heartrending spectacle and contain the explanation of all his social doctrine. The society he strove for was not an elementary community grown together through necessity, race, common gods, or tradition, but proceeded from an act of will on the part of individuals, who were supposed to have consciously concluded a treaty—the *Contrat Social*—in order to guarantee to one another the exercise of their ‘natural rights’. ‘Natural’ meant everything that had not yet been destroyed by civilization or egoism or had been purified through their corruption. Man was good in himself, but frequently forgot it or no longer remembered it, because he had turned away from Nature and fallen under the degenerating influences of civilization. Rousseau thus took over the doctrine of original sin, of which man is purified through baptism, except that for him participation in the ‘social contract’—that is to say, adherence to the community postulated by him—was necessary for purification. This adherence, however, was linked to certain conditions—namely, the complete equality of all the members, the renunciation by each member of his rights and liberties in favour of society, and the subjection of all to the ‘general will’ (*volonté générale*).

It will be seen that although this political theory did contain democratic elements—its basic feeling was democratic—it was so strongly anti-liberal that the French Revolution, in order to remain liberal, had to reject both the gospel of Rousseau and his disciple, Robespierre. The renunciation demanded of man become conscious of his ‘natural freedom’ led to an identifica-

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tion of the individual with the State which practically amounted to a totalitarian system—all the more so as the theory did not find room for a representative assembly or any other means of mediation between the individual and the State. Man—or, strictly speaking, the People—was the incarnation of sovereignty; and as the People was not a tangible, computable institution capable of expressing itself, the trustee of this sovereignty—the State—must remain sole master and sole judge of human freedom. Thus Rousseau's society emerged as the most absolute and illiberal democracy.

The decisive element in this doctrine and in the political use to which it was put by Robespierre was Rousseau's conception of the 'general will'. This was the corner-stone of the whole massive edifice of the Reign of Terror and the Jacobin dictatorship. From this Revolutionary France received strength to overcome her foes abroad and at home and for a few months to set up on the national soil a bloody Utopia which, though it led to the annihilation of life, nevertheless represented a cosmic act of human creation. The 'general will' was not the will of the majority but the will of those who were virtuous and had the truth in them. It was the will that all men would have had if they had not been led astray by 'custom and despotism'—that is to say, by civilization. Furthermore, it was the *a priori* will of man, which was always good and disinterested as long as it was not corrupted by a *posteriori* experience.

Politically speaking, then, the individual was not socially admissible until he had professed this dogma; the mere observance of the laws was not enough; true belief was required in order to be tolerated as a good citizen. Robespierre had only one idea, and this idea of the 'general will', derived from Rousseau's *Contrat Social*, guided each one of his actions, laws,



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measures—and excesses. On it he built up the democracy which he described in the following words:

‘A democracy is not a State where the people conduct their public affairs in continual session, nor one where a hundred thousand sections of the people, through isolated, precipitate and contradictory measures, decide the fate of the whole community; such a Government has never existed, and could only exist to lead the people back to despotism. A democracy is a State where the sovereign people, guided by laws of its own making, itself does everything that it can do well and does through deputies what it cannot do itself.’

Jean-Jacques—that tormented and bewildered mortal—did not produce this system out of the naïve pleasure in knowledge that actuated his learned and cultured contemporaries. He did not share their self-satisfaction and complacency at the insight which they believed they had obtained into the mechanism of Creation. He evolved his social theory because he was too weak for simple devotion to the Catholic faith. Everything that he imagined, however, for his ideal community was no more than a profane reflection of the true community of believers. He was like a fallen angel, seeking in his darkened abyss to do God’s work over again. In a word, Rousseau’s political dogma was a repetition, an imitation, of the Catholic dogma. In his system civilization took the rôle of original sin and the People the place of God. Politics became religion. ‘No one can dispute that the general will is a pure act of perception on the part of the individual, who considers in the silence of his passions what he can demand of his neighbour and what his neighbour can rightly demand of him.’

‘In the silence of his passions!’ As if it were the strivings of a devout soul to attain to contemplation of the divine will! It is a

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demand, almost in the manner of Pascal, for that state of grace unperturbed by earthly excitements without which no religious knowledge is possible. The General Will—Robespierre wrote it with capital letters, like the name of God—rose from the depths of the human conscience—purified by contemplation and devotion—to the surface of daily life, and he alone could know it who with the aid of the true faith was in possession of grace. The revelation of the General Will—or the perception of the true ‘people’—was thus a religious experience, an idea borrowed from the doctrine of the Catholic faith but leading to the deification of ‘the people’. The consequences that Robespierre drew from this doctrine showed conclusively how the application of a purely mystical process to earthly institutions leads to the annihilation of human life; or, in other words, that a policy founded on a religious dogma results in death.

In this way the social theory of Jean-Jacques, which was perhaps only the outburst of despair of an unbelieving soul thirsting after God, became the programme of the Reign of Terror. Robespierre—and to a certain extent Saint-Just—believed that he understood the General Will; he was convinced that he had discovered by mystical experience what ‘the people’ was. Around this sanctuary he built his Church, the Society of the Jacobins. He was himself the head of this Church, the Pope of Rousseau’s community of believers; he had power to exclude and reject unbelievers, and therefore to judge all those who did not bow the knee before the one true God. Every man was brought into existence in order that he might know the Revolutionary truth; if he could not attain to it he was ‘plucked out and cast into the fire’. Every being and every institution had to be examined to see whether they were compatible with the *Volonté Générale*. From this arose the necessity, not only to

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inquire into the right of every man to exist, but also to do away with all institutions that might come between the 'natural' man and the ideal society—the theocracy of the people. Castes and classes, estates and corporations, Churches and authorities, even family and property, were suspect as being capable of hindering direct reciprocal action between man and State. Robespierre's State—the Republic—engulfed first of all life, then man himself. With the religious origin of this dream society was bound up a new political notion of tremendous significance: the transference of religious intolerance into the political sphere—with this difference: that whereas religion includes repentance and can therefore be patient, Robespierre's theory allowed only submission or death.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TERROR AND VIRTUE

Under Robespierre's rule the State was not content with the fulfilment of civic duties and the observance of the laws, but demanded from all men the conviction that the laws were the expression of the will of the new God. This implied an encroachment on the moral life of the individual, who, instead of ordering his conduct by the recognized moral values common to all humanity, was required to practise that particular virtue which Robespierre made the keystone of his policy. This explains why virtue almost always appeared on his lips as the twin sister of terror, and why the famous decree of the Convention made both together the order of the day. His policy was just as much bound up with terror as it was with death: "The mainspring of the Revolutionary Government is Virtue, together with Terror!"—so runs his report of the 18th Pluviôse, Year II. The conceptions of good and evil were to suffer this essential qualification: that the administrator of the 'general will' was to decide what was good and what was evil.

In the same report Robespierre goes on to express himself as follows: 'Not only is virtue the soul of democracy, but only under that form of government can it exist. In a monarchy, I know of only one person who can really love his country, and who therefore does not need virtue—the monarch. The reason for this is that of all the inhabitants of his State the monarch is the only one who has a country. Is he not—for practical pur-

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poses at least—the sovereign? Is he not in the place of the people?’ Only in a community in which the people was at the same time sovereign and idol could true principles—that is to say, virtue—exist. ‘In the French Revolutionary system’, said Robespierre, ‘that which is immoral is bad policy. That which is corrupt is counter-revolutionary.’ And again: ‘Republican virtue must be considered in relation to the people and the Government; it is as necessary for the one as for the other.’

The police ceased to be an institution peculiar to the State, since the latter daily absorbed more and more of social life and rapidly extended itself to cover all aspects of everyday and private existence. In so far as the individual and the State came to be identified with one another, the control of opinion ceased to be an intrusion in the private life of the citizens. For according to the conception of virtue proclaimed by Robespierre every action of each single man in all circumstances was a political matter, whether it concerned politics or purely personal affairs. In consequence the natural tension that usually exists between the citizen and the executor of State power disappeared. The famous Law of Suspects of 17th September, 1793, was directed not only against those who had attacked or hindered the Revolution, but also against those who had not actively favoured it.

At the height of the Reign of Terror there were in France about 21,000 Supervision Committees, composed in each Commune and Section of citizens who had distinguished themselves by their zeal and devotion to the Revolutionary cause. In order to facilitate the activity of these committees all householders, porters, hotel-keepers, farmers and other owners of dwelling-places were obliged to keep at the entrance-door or in some

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other visible place a list—in legible writing—of all inhabitants of the house, with particulars of their age and occupation. Moreover, every citizen had to carry on his person at all times the so-called ‘certificate of citizenship’, attesting the Republican sentiments of the bearer, which could only be issued by authorization of the local Jacobin Society after examination before the General Council of the Commune. Not only the police and other representatives of authority, but also every citizen, had the right to ask a suspicious-looking person for this certificate and to have him arrested if he could not produce it. Former aristocrats, on principle, never received it, and other persons only if they could give evidence of Republican activities or produce an influential recommendation. At first the certificate was merely a protection against the distrust of fellow-citizens and the curiosity of the police, but later it became indispensable to obtain numerous necessities of daily life, and occasionally had to be produced when buying bread and other food rationed or controlled by the State. Finally it became the only means of assuring personal safety, for the famous Law of Suspects empowered the authorities to arrest and send before the Public Prosecutor all persons not in possession of a certificate. In a word, whoever did not have a certificate of citizenship was completely without rights and, in order to possess it, it was necessary to be recommended by the Jacobins and to stand well with the members of the Supervision Committees.

Never in the history of the world has delation been practised so systematically, on such a scale, and with such deadly effect as during the Reign of Terror in 1794. Whereas normally the policeman is concerned only with the seamy side of public life, here he was occupied with its finest and purest aspect—ideas. His task was no longer to confiscate burglars’ implements or

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convict *souteneurs*, but to look into men's hearts to see if the sacred flame burned there in sufficient strength and purity. His duty was the general duty of all citizens, in accordance with Rousseau's fundamental principle—that there should be no difference between people and State, but rather that the people themselves should be the only authority, provided they have attained full consciousness of themselves. Thus the informer, like the policeman, came nearest to the ideal citizen, instead of being, as in non-revolutionary States, a necessary evil in the service of the forces of order.

However much the Convention might complain of the misuse of delation it unreservedly acknowledged the convenience of the system. Rewards for informers were always being paid and honours were constantly rendered to them; often they were mentioned in the *National Gazette* or accorded the honour of taking part in a sitting of the Convention. And, the Convention being enthusiastic about Roman virtue, applause for an informer was doubly loud when it could be made out that his patriotic act had been at the cost of his personal feelings, as when the person denounced was a friend, relation or benefactor. Moreover, delation lost its arbitrariness, since various laws—especially those of 17th September, 1793, and the 22nd Prairial—made it the duty of every individual. Did this duty raise a moral conflict? Perhaps in the breasts of those who, in the old tradition of Monarchical times, strove to obey authority while remaining true to the Commandments of God; but not for genuine Revolutionaries, who did not recognize any moral law superior to the State and binding on all mortals, since they saw in the Republic the sole moral order. Had not the Incorruptible declared that outside the Republic no virtue was possible? And though in principle the informer served the community, that

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did not prevent him from misusing his patriotic duty for the satisfaction of personal desires and interests.

All this weighed heavily on the communicative and sociable French, who love gossip above everything. It extended even to family life, for whenever a father sought to use his authority to raise objections to the new-fangled opinions of his son or his daughter's habit of watching executions there ensued tension and quarrels, which often raised an acute conflict in the breast of the member of the family devoted to the Revolution, and more than once led him to denounce a father, a sister, or a brother to the Supervision Committee. 'I recognize as a patriot', said the Deputy Javogues, 'only him who would if necessary denounce his father, mother or sister, and drink a glass of their blood on the scaffold.' That former employees or servants of a family were often in the same position goes without saying. Who does not know the story of the negro Zamor, who had served Mme. Dubarry for many a year and been loaded with favours, and pitilessly delivered her to the Revolutionary Tribunal? Then there was old Père Queudeville, who kept himself hidden for years and finally applied for advice to his former favourite pupil, the Deputy Levasseur, who promised him help, got him to name his hiding-place, and had him arrested in the night. The famous master-butcher Legendre, the friend of Danton, did the same thing. The wife of the writer Marcandier came to ask him for help, confiding to him the desperate situation of her husband and also, in the course of a cordial conversation, the place of his refuge. Next day both were arrested and immediately sent to die under the guillotine.

Each day brought a similar event, without the utter ignominy of the informer ever being made plain. It must be recognized, however, that the latter could never feel quite sure of his



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own skin: his visitor might be an *agent provocateur* trying to make him the accomplice of some illegal act, or the suppliant might be arrested and blurt out the hopes he had reposed in him, and in any case delation had expressly been raised to the level of a patriotic duty. Robespierre was the first to elaborate the institution and incorporate it into his system of virtue, but it had been used since the first days of the Revolution and was justified as a sign of zeal. Mirabeau himself announced that 'delation is the most important of our new virtues!' That he meant this in good earnest appears from the enthusiastic assent of the younger Desmoulins, who wrote in his newspaper: 'He who said that delation had become one of our most important political virtues spoke words of gold. It has been left long enough to the Public Prosecutor to call down the public vengeance on criminals: may they now go in fear of as many accusers as there are good citizens! It will be impossible to escape the vengeance of authority when there is no longer only one person exercising it, but the nation itself, which never sleeps. Citizens, when you have anything to denounce, come to me.' That bilious friend of the people, Marat, demanded that 'every justified denunciation shall give the informer the right to public esteem. Every unfounded denunciation, made from patriotic motives, shall not expose the informer to punishment.' The Girondins had the same conception; they extolled delation as 'the palladium of freedom and the salvation of the people', and repeatedly—as on 14th February and 4th May, 1793—decreed rewards for it. They it was, too, who took the first steps towards organizing denunciation on a large scale as a branch of Governmental activity. It was left to Robespierre to classify it as part of the moral law of the Revolution.

The elevation of supervision and denunciation into public

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virtues accords with the idea of the Terror, in so far as the latter implied the 'dictatorship of the central power and the suppression of liberty'. Any appeal to the Rights of Man thenceforth became impossible for those who did not understand that the liberal phase of the Revolution, with its bourgeois and cosmopolitan complexion, was over, and that there now reigned an austere spirit of equality, which Robespierre named 'the despotism of liberty'. Under the influence of this idea the moral law enacted by the Republic was made so binding that no one thenceforth could call himself an honest man. Every reproach took on a political character: a person might be called extravagant if he was thought to be a disguised aristocrat, and anyone whose vices caused offence would be judged, not for his manner of life, but for the strength of his Republican convictions. The place of 'sin' was taken by 'treason', and a wicked man was pronounced a 'conspirator' out of hand.

The most comprehensive epithet was naturally 'aristocrat'. It was aimed not only at the former privileged class—now almost extinct—of *ci-devant seigneurs*, but also at all persons who did not belong to 'the people'. This accusation, which at first sight appears clear and obvious enough, was in reality complex. 'The people' was not only a certain class distinguished by rough manners and small incomes, but was also a dogma, an object of belief implying its own code of morals. Accordingly whoever continued to be virtuous or wicked in the old sense, with only his conscience as guide, was an aristocrat, since he not only demanded a private moral life of his own, but also withdrew from the community of patriots in order to devote himself to a personal form of existence. Under the régime of virtue as understood by Robespierre there was no longer any room for the individualism that had animated the beginning of the Revolu-

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tion. From this antipathy to fine manners, personal taste, haughty eccentricity and taciturn seclusion there quickly appeared a new mental attitude—namely, hostility to propriety, in its pre-Revolutionary sense. To be an aristocrat it was not necessary to be nobly born; it was enough to remain an honourable man in the traditional sense of the word.

The transference of religious thought into the political sphere, which was the peculiarity of the Robespierriest epoch, resulted in what was politically expedient becoming not only philosophically true, but also morally just. Robespierre's eloquence was based on this juxtaposition of things in different categories; and the resulting confusion of ideas was the immediate cause of abuses, producing also in weaker natures the intolerably hypocritical language of the Reign of Terror. Such was the fear of being regarded as politically suspect that men took pains to merge themselves, both by their language and by their appearance, in the mass of 'patriots'. In Paris conversation was particularly uncouth, being modelled chiefly on the language of the most popular newspaper, *Père Duchesne*. If one made frequent enough use of 'b——' and 'the devil', and addressed everyone—even in official business—as '*tu*', there was some hope of not offending. If it was necessary to refer to the time of the Monarchy, one spoke of Louis Capet, or the tyrant, or the age of slavery. The tricolor cockade worn by every zealous or prudent citizen as a matter of course could not be large enough; best of all was to wear a tricolor waistcoat embroidered with the lictor's *fasces*, and a red cap.

Robespierre naturally could not stand all these outward signs, and winced when addressed as *tu*. But it was easy for him to talk, as he had no need of these things. He could even get away with an old-fashioned pigtail at a time when most people let

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their hair grow over their foreheads, with long tufts, called dog's ears, across their cheeks. The future Count Thibaudeau, a respectable Deputy by no means given to self-dramatization, so far violated his sense of propriety as to go about in a carefully studied *sansculotte's* costume, with loose trousers and open shirt. The rich Granet, who was soon to know better times, dressed in dirty rags and wore a piece of torn sackcloth round his dishevelled head, to show that he belonged to the people. A cockade in one's hat was not enough; it was advisable to wear a tricolor rosette on the lapel of one's coat. This might well be the size of a plate and form the starting-point for a ribbon as much as eight inches wide, hanging down modestly or fluttering proudly in the wind. Especially favoured was a bright-coloured poster on one's door, showing, framed between a sapper and a *sansculotte* armed with a pike, and crowned with a Phrygian cap, the inscription: 'Unity, Indivisibility of the Republic; Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—or Death.'

The laws threatened with death those who had not 'constantly given proof of their adherence to the régime'. This implied for the individual citizen a well-nigh impossible task; he might take the utmost pains to 'give proof' of his Republican sentiments, but who was to say whether his proof was sufficient? He went about dressed as a *sansculotte*; he used the coarse speech of a true friend of the people; he changed his son's name from Louis to Brutus; he used the new playing-cards figuring the spirits of Freedom and Equality instead of Kings and Knaves; he drank his coffee from a cup painted with the execution of the King; he applauded each execution and called the victims villains and traitors; he declared to anyone who would listen that there was no finer colour than the red of the tyrant's blood; he led the mob that stoned the old marquis who had

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lived in the *château* above the town for fifty years and had taken care of the parish; he wrote to the Convention demanding stricter measures against the peasants; he had the church turned into a prison; he organized every tenth-day holiday a 'fraternal communal feast of patriots' in the open air; he made the first subscription towards the setting-up of a guillotine for the Department;—in a word, he did all that a man could do to show the fervour of his Republican heart; but he could never be sure that he had done enough and would not be denounced by someone even more active, who might declare himself ready to 'drink the warm blood of conspirators'.

The great importance attached by the Republicans to such symbols is explained by the impossibility of finding a really reliable indication of Republican convictions. The statues of the Kings and their Ministers were pulled down, the crown and lilies disappeared from signs, gates, utensils and book-bindings, to be replaced by the *fascès* surmounted by the cap of freedom. From the names of streets and places every memory of the time of the Monarchy was banished. The innumerable streets named after saints were altered—the Rue St. Honoré becoming the Rue Honoré—or else lost their names entirely, like the Rue St. Roch, which was re-christened Rue de la Montagne after the 'Mountain' Party to which Robespierre belonged. In honour of Roman virtue the Rue Notre Dame des Champs was called the 'Street of Lucrecia Avenged'—presenting a difficult problem for fathers to explain to their children on Sunday walks. Composite street-names containing the words 'Notre Dame' were altered, these words generally being changed to 'Reason' or 'Nation'. Thus Rue Notre Dame des Victoires became Rue des Victoires Nationales. The memory of St. Louis, who had served Paris so well, completely disappeared; the Place de la Sorbonne

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was renamed Place Châlier after the Jacobin who had been killed at Lyons; and Marat's name was naturally found everywhere—Montmartre was even called Montmarat.

The former royal town of Versailles narrowly escaped being renamed 'Cradle of Freedom'. The Convention decreed in October 1792 that all references to pre-Revolutionary times must be removed from place-names. Innumerable places took the opportunity to re-baptize themselves patriotically and added *Liberté* or *Egalité* to their names. 'Mountain' joined to a name was especially frequent, in the hope of pleasing the Deputies enthroned on the 'Mountain' in the Convention. Château-Thierry was called *Egalité-sur-Marne*; Villejuif tactfully called itself *Commune-Équitable*; Saint-Esprit became simply *Jean-Jacques-Rousseau*; the small sea-coast town of St. Maximin named itself *Marathon*, on account of some vague idea of a councillor's; the little town of St. Pierre-le-Moulin, not to be behind the times, decided to be *Brutus-le-Magnanime*; even the name *Dunquerque* offended and was altered to *Dune-Libre*. The more patriotic the new name, the more certain the approval of the Paris authorities. Perhaps even Robespierre would condescend to approve, or at least a Deputy on an official tour might let fall a word of recognition. Towns were also sometimes punished with the loss of their original names. Toulon, which had opened the gates to the English, was after its recapture at first called *Ville-Plate*, because Fréron would have liked to raze it to the ground, but later became *Port-la-Montagne*. Rebellious Lyons, after its chastisement, was called *Ville-Affranchie*, and Marseilles was named *Ville-sans-Nom* by its tyrant Barras. In official correspondence the designations 'town', 'village', 'place' or 'hamlet', were abolished, because they violated the conception of equality, and instead the uni-

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versal designation Commune was applied to all places irrespective of the number of their inhabitants.

Since a *fleur-de-lys* carved on a chimney-piece, a tea-cup with a picture of the *Autrichienne*, a pipe-bowl in the form of a crown, or the portrait of an ancestor wearing the insignia of the order of the Saint-Esprit were enough to send the owner to prison and before the Tribunal, every vestige of the old times was carefully removed. Insignificance, silence and dissimulation were the most important conditions of survival. Condorcet would never have been recognized in his rags if he had not had with him a small leather-bound Horace. A toss of the head, a delicate wrist, the indefinable atmosphere of good education and independent mode of life, could all betray a man as an enemy of the Revolution. The *sansculottes* could infallibly distinguish those who would have stood out from the crowd, had they not artificially made themselves mean and ordinary.

Every hour, every movement, every word, every breath was impregnated with politics, for Robespierre's doctrine demanded incessant Revolutionary behaviour, even when a man was alone. Whoever opposed the Revolution was lost—but whoever was not actively for it was also guilty. There was therefore no secret refuge of private life into which the law did not follow the individual. In these circumstances it was not surprising that political leadership was occupied less and less with actual administration and more and more with control. The rôle of the Committee of General Security is sufficiently described by its title. But the Committee of Public Safety, although in practice it exercised the real power, had theoretically only the right of control. Robespierre was no law-giver, apart from his function of controlling, discovering and exterminating 'false opinions'. It was significant that the Committee distinguished between

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the 'workers'—Carnot, Lindet, Prieur, the two Cambons and Jean-bon Saint-André—pure technicians who organized the army, the fleet, the reserves, nutrition and finance; and the 'politicians'—Robespierre, Couthon, Saint-Just, Collot, Billaud and Barère—who kept alight the 'spark of the Revolution'.

In April 1794 the Ministries were abolished and replaced by administrative Departments under simple Commissars, who had no powers of expenditure but had to refer every item to the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety also had no budget beyond a fund of 50,000,000 f., and although it proposed most of the laws and finally enforced them on its own account it still maintained the fiction that it was not the Government, and that the executive power was held by the Convention itself. This did not indicate fear of responsibility—cowardice was the last thing Robespierre or Saint-Just could be accused of; it was due rather to a conviction that the Republic should not merely govern, but that its main concern should be for 'virtue'.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL

Since the new political system was founded on a dogma, the 'general will', the first thing to be done was to furnish that dogma with full power to assert itself. Robespierre was its high-priest, and the Jacobin Society its Church, uniting the believers who understood and represented the general will. To the Jacobins, therefore, fell the rôle of supreme court of supervision, a function expressly recognized by the Government. 'The spirit of freedom', declared the Committee of Public Safety in a Circular Note of 4th February, 1794, 'was born among the Popular Societies, where it grew and attained its present height. They are the vigilant sentinels who hold the outposts of opinion and have sounded the alarm in all dangers and treasons. In their sanctuaries patriots have found victorious weapons and sharpened them. The Republic expects fresh services from the Popular Societies. The Revolutionary Government, organized in its various sections, will develop its full force and will proceed in spite of every resistance against all enemies of the people. The Convention calls you to shoulder the common cares and joint efforts necessary to set this edifice on a firm foundation. You will be our most powerful supporters.'

This appreciation was not exaggerated. The Jacobin Club, with its well-nigh 2,000 daughter-societies spread through the country, was the real basis of the French Revolution during the

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Reign of Terror. It worked both from below and from above; it controlled the Supervision Committees of each Commune and Section, as well as every other Revolutionary body—the Municipality of Paris as well as the National Guard. It handled the petitions that were continually reaching the Convention and largely decided the latter's activities. Every important decision of the Committees and of the Convention was previously laid before the Club, which then held a kind of rehearsal of the actual session and debate. Every Deputy, on returning from an official journey to the front or the provinces, first reported to the Club, justified himself before it, or sought exoneration from it. Every great speech was repeated before the members of the Club, if they had not already heard it. In short, the Jacobin Society was the real 'people' in Rousseau's sense, exercising sovereign control.

Control of what? For, as the Popular Societies were by degrees occupying all official positions, the supervisor and the supervised were becoming one and the same person. The Jacobins, for instance, decided who was to be conscripted and thus rendered innocuous—for they saw no glory in the military profession; they it was who decided—indirectly through the Supervision Committees—who could hold a certificate of citizenship, who should be included in the list of suspected aristocrats, whose life did not conform to Republican standards, who was a trustworthy citizen, with whom a good Republican might do business, and to whom an approved *sansculotte* might refuse to pay his debts. Often the various authorities on whom a citizen's safety depended were combined in the same Jacobin. Michelet cites the example of the man who had a grudge against the journalist Prudhomme. He denounced Prudhomme to the General Assembly of his Sec-

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tion. As he himself was president of this Assembly, he declared the denunciation accepted and transmitted it to the Supervision Committee. Being also president of that committee he decided, 'on receipt of the denunciation', to arrest the journalist, a duty which, as leader of the local Section of the National Guard, he undertook himself.

The Convention saw that this autocracy of the Jacobins, which automatically involved claims to the occupation of most official positions, could easily lead to corruption, although they had tried to avoid it by giving those positions a political character. Dubois-Crancé wrote to the Paris Club from Rennes, where he was on a mission, that in his opinion the Jacobins would finally have to choose between supervising the officials or becoming officials themselves, but that these two functions could not be combined. The Club took this suggestion very badly, and Robespierre, who disliked Dubois-Crancé on account of his soldierly character, had the greatest pleasure in taking proceedings against him. It also seemed quite natural to the authorities for sums of money to be constantly remitted to the Popular Societies from the confiscated fortunes of the condemned or from the fines imposed on disobedient towns.

This supremacy, leading to arbitrariness and corruption, was by no means the chance result of the interplay of political and social forces, but the logical consequence of the translation into practical politics of the *Contrat Social*. And if Robespierre relied more on the Jacobin Club than on the Convention, the psychological explanation—advanced by Condorcet—that he was a sectarian and only felt at his ease among sectarians, is not enough; the explanation was rather that a Pope cannot live without a Church, and that the Society of the Jacobins was that 'Church' without which the deity called 'the people' could not manifest

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itself. Only there could the 'general will' become known. This emergence of a 'Church' was inevitable if the principle of the direct sovereignty of the people was to underlie practical politics. The people was so exclusively the holder and repository of all political will that People and State became one and the same thing, needing no representative body to act as go-between. And this theory did not erroneously confuse two separate things—the rights of civil liberty and the sovereign rights of the State—but consciously identified them. The National Convention, elected by universal suffrage, was therefore not comparable to a representative body in the sense of a Parliament, but was rather a kind of substitute for a not clearly defined executive power. The individual citizen, by voting for the Convention, did not express his own will, for that was not what mattered. The law of political behaviour was drawn rather from the 'general will', which could not be ascertained by Parliamentary methods but could only be discovered by a man's inner experience.

Thus we have on the one hand the individual men, the bourgeois, peasants, workmen, intellectuals—in short, the entire collectivity of the French people; and on the other hand 'the people' as an absolute, legal conception, consisting of the class that had become conscious of the national will. This latter creation at first existed only in the pure thought of the Philosophers, but received human—all-too-human—form when the fiction which it represented had to be, not unmasked, but upheld. Robespierre was always shouting into the void: 'You are the People!' and inevitably a group of men established themselves in this void, answering him—aping the voice of the People—and usurping the sovereignty belonging to the People. The growth of the power of this group led to the political

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abdication of the populace. Since not the Convention only, that pale shadow of the Executive, but also almost all public offices were elective, the populace was continually voting. Nevertheless it was gradually renouncing almost entirely the exercise of its rights. In Paris as early as August 1790, out of a total of 81,200 voters more than 67,000 did not record their votes, and this abstention increased still further during the Reign of Terror, so that finally it was left almost exclusively to the Jacobins to see to the appointment of 83 bishops, 400 criminal judges, 3,700 civil judges, 8,000 justices of the peace with 20,000 assessors, 42,000 local tax-collectors, 46,000 priests and unnumbered secretaries, controllers, officers of gendarmerie, and police officials. To exclude all possibility of error the mother-society in Paris was continually sending out black-lists—an invention of Marat's—containing the names of persons who from the 'patriotic' standpoint were unsuitable for public office.

The 'eyes of the people', as the Popular Societies were called by the Convention, described their own rôle in the following terms: 'Since their institution the Popular Societies have been the supervisors of the constituted authorities and of the Government itself; and this supervision is the essence of liberty; for, as the people cannot be always gathered together in the original assembly, it has delegated its authority to the local societies in order to keep an eye on those in power. Such is the legitimate character of the Popular Societies.' The Jacobins of Lyons declared in so many words that 'sovereignty resides immediately in the Popular Societies'. Robespierre, as the first of the Jacobins, claimed to possess the most complete conception of this principle of sovereignty, on which he founded the organic connexion between virtue and terror. He abrogated the general moral laws that apply to every person irrespective of nationality,

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class and origin, and set up in their place the 'Revolutionary' moral laws, which could be comprised in the one word—'virtue'.

That this virtue was not a simple moral attitude, accessible to everyone who strove after it, Robespierre never ceased to declare. There was no virtue apart from the Revolution: or, as a Deputy expressed it in the Convention: 'Those who are not Jacobins are not truly virtuous.' And as one of the most essential tasks of the Republic consisted in making virtue the order of the day—which meant punishing bad Republicans for lack of virtue and vicious persons for lack of Republicanism—entirely new fields of activity for death were opened up by the establishment of the Jacobin morality. The Revolutionary State, in the Robespierrist sense of the term, no longer permitted the individual a private code of morality; it even proceeded against such morality for not having relation to the State and so being 'counter-revolutionary' or 'aristocratic'. Thus it constantly happened during 1794—the year of the Terror—that a handful of depraved scoundrels and immoral fanatics sent to the scaffold for 'lack of virtue' the most honourable men and women, without Robespierre's good faith ever being seriously in question. He was pursuing a policy that led to the annihilation of human life, and the connexion between virtue and terror revealed most clearly that fearful mechanism which could spread only death—whether for those who pursued it or those who had to suffer it.

It is hardly necessary to see in the comprehensive details of the Revolutionary apparatus in general, and of the Jacobin Club in particular, a masterpiece of conscious organization. It is enough to realize the consequences of Robespierre's idea—his only idea. He was in no sense the creator of this Revolutionary

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mechanism, which arose rather from the application of Rousseau's philosophy, or—in other words—from political principles. The Revolutionary did not act arbitrarily: his office was prescribed by destiny. The life of the French people consists in unsuccessful Revolutions and unsuccessful attempts to avoid them or repair the damage they do. The mighty power of the human spirit, whose sympathetic spectator God is, leads only to death if it is not combined with an almost disdainful love of and respect for life. At the end of a century whose only justification of the Creator and Divine Judge was to prevent men from robbing their masters, this man, who was all character, all moral tension, all lucidity, but whose personality was without love or beauty, came before the French people and subjected them to the inexorable logic of his one idea. Was this the mad excess of an individual? By no means; it was the austere fulfilment of a decree of fate, which demanded that this vain and soulless deification of the people should be made an inhuman example in the eyes of the universe.

It would be quite a mistake to imagine Robespierre as an overworked lawgiver of immense activity. He did not lead a people: he merely watched over a dogma. The somewhat stiff and taciturn impression made by his personality can be explained by the sphinx-like activity of watchfulness which consumed the Dictator. His instrument was justice, his field of action the Jacobin Club. He did not need to organize this society nor to take care that it controlled every movement of public life. That happened by itself, impelled by the gravitational force of the Idea. The unprecedented drama of the Revolution, with its tremendous and terrible outbreak of passions, personalities and human activities in general, sometimes seems to have been nothing but the play of will against will, in which

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each man suffered from mechanical forces against which he reacted furiously. If it was the greatest manifestation of modern individualism, it was also a breathless pursuit along the narrow crest between politics and death.

It was quite spontaneously that the Popular Societies came to extend their unbroken net over France: there was no need for anyone to guide them. Was not the same thing true of the intellectual societies and philosophical circles, their precursors, who had really created the Revolutionary doctrine? In view of the undoubted connexion between the two, can they be regarded as a kind of Masonic conspiracy? Augustin Cochin, the young sociologist who was killed in the Battle of the Somme, pointed out with great lucidity the spiritual connexion between the 'idea societies' of the eighteenth century and of the Revolution, thus touching on the secret of the nature of the Revolution. His examples of the remarkable unanimity—extending even to spelling mistakes—of the *cahiers* that led to the meeting of the States-General, in which the populace of the different and apparently disconnected parts of France concentrated their demands and grievances, is indeed startling. But does there follow from this the existence of a consciously active force, a unified leadership of the discontented; and is it proper to regard this historic avalanche as the result of an understanding between the philosophical societies and other free-thinking circles?

Is it not truer to say that this tacit, fundamental agreement was the symptom of an epoch intoxicated with the power of reason and the force of opinion? The first act of the Revolution was primarily nothing more than a loosening of tongues. The atmosphere was filled with voices, opinions, judgments and rumours, pouring over the country in great waves. The summer of 1789 began with an attack of cosmic fear. Men lay



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sleepless in their homes, a great red star was seen over the house, the will-o'-the-wisp danced in the marsh, shadows glided across the brook, the thatch rustled, church-bells sounded without being touched, in church the organ suddenly began playing by itself at night, doors flew open and banged again although there was no draught. A horseman galloped up the village street at midnight, knocked up the mayor and called on him to rouse and arm all the peasants, as 3,000 brigands were on the march along the high-road. In Brittany, in the valley of the Dordogne, in the Alps, on the Mediterranean—everywhere bands of brigands were reported. They were said to be armed, to murder everyone, to set fire to all the villages, to burn the crops in the fields and kill the cattle in the pastures. Who were these bloodthirsty ruffians? Where did they come from? Who had seen them? The tocsins sounded and the peasants seized scythes, cudgels and hunting-knives and advanced under some resolute leader against the foes—only to return home next morning without having found the slightest trace of them. In Artois everyone was preparing for flight, because fugitives from the coast brought news of English troops having been landed. Elsewhere frightened men arrived in carriages with all their worldly goods, imagining that the horsemen of the Imperial Army were behind them. Mostly, however, it was bands of brigands whom no one had seen, but whom everyone knew to be about. 'Such a panic', records a chronicler, 'seized hold of men's minds that they left their homes to set off at random, without knowing whither. A priest of Ruillé, from 4 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. to-day, was confessing people who were out of their wits at the idea of imminent death.' On all the roads wandered troops of peasants—half-courageous, half-timid—with pikes, axes and other weapons, awaiting the enemy. Would he come

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from the south or from the north? In one village in Périgord an unknown horseman gave the carpenter an order for 200 spear-staves at once, which he executed, but no one came to claim them. In other places the people were exhorted by unknown messengers to go to the police stations and barracks and provide themselves with arms, as the neighbouring village had been plundered by bandits. In a few days the whole country was more or less under arms.

Does it follow that this 'Great Fear' was the work of a leading group who wished—perhaps with the aid of the famous twenty-five millions that Pitt had obtained from the London Parliament—to carry out a test mobilization of the Revolution? Is it permissible to attribute the volcanic eruption of 1789 to the artificial machinations of agitators? If the Revolution was not made, one can at least say that it was favoured, by 'liberal' France, with an alacrity and joy in self-destruction never seen before nor since. They were all of them—the Parliament, the Notables, the Court, the sceptical clergy, the Duke of Orleans, Chamfort, Condorcet, Marion Roland and the Girondists—social suicides of one sort or another. Pity for the fate of Mme. Roland will always be coupled with the thought that never did a woman play with dangerous ideas with such levity. One could not condemn oneself more harshly than she did herself in the following well-known passage in her memoirs: 'O Brutus, who with bold hand in vain liberated the corrupt citizens, we have erred like you. These pure men whose glowing hearts aspired to freedom, for which they had prepared themselves in calm study and austere seclusion, flattered themselves, as you did, that the overthrow of tyranny would inaugurate the reign of justice and peace; but in fact it was only the signal for the outbreak of the most hateful passions and the most hideous vices.'

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The revolts of the peasants, who really wished to burn only the feudal title-deeds of their lords, but ended by burning the owners of the castles as well, produced grim legends about the cruelty of the former ruling class. It was spread abroad, and believed, that a marquis had cut open the body of a peasant in order to bathe in the blood his foot that had been wounded while hunting; that noble book-lovers had had their Lucretius bound in human skin; and on the other hand that *sansculottes* had asked the headsman for the hearts of executed aristocrats in order to eat them roasted at their fraternal banquets. It was believed that the Queen had had a mine driven under the chamber where the Constituent Assembly had its sessions, and that the nobles had had crops thrown into the sea in order to starve out the people. All non-Jacobins firmly believed that Robespierre intended to marry the daughter of Louis XVI, who was imprisoned in the Temple. Saint-Just, in a speech on the 8th Ventôse of the Year II, could calmly declare that an Imperial general had had children roasted in Belgium, and could even say: 'In 1788 Louis XVI had 8,000 people of all ages massacred in Paris in the Rue Mêlée and on the Pont-Neuf. The Court repeated these scenes in the Champ-de-Mars; the Court hanged prisoners in the prisons; the 'drunks' fished out of the Seine were their victims; every year 15,000 smugglers were hanged; 3,000 persons were broken on the wheel; there were more prisoners in Paris then than now.' Nobody dreamed of doubting the accuracy of these 'facts'. How did the 'massacre' in the Champ-de-Mars arise, when Lafayette made a last attempt to curb the Revolution he had once so zealously favoured? Two workmen had hidden themselves under a wooden stand and conceived the coarse idea of boring through the planks on which the spectators—particularly the female spectators—were

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standing, in order to gain an unauthorized view of the proceedings. The auger went through the sole of a shoe into a foot; the rogues, on being discovered, were taken for myrmidons of the Court trying to blow up the people; and then there was panic.

While public opinion showed itself sensitive to every disturbance of the atmosphere and greedily absorbed the most senseless tales, it remained in profound ignorance of what was really happening. People's minds during these years willingly took refuge in the unreal and avoided on principle the actuality over which they were constantly stumbling. Eventually they no longer wished to see or hear the truth, because they could not alter it yet had to go on living. By the summer of 1794 nobody looked on any more at executions, and the terrorists finally had to order the clubs to turn out into the streets or else hire people to accompany the tumbrils with insults and greet the fall of the guillotine with cries of '*Vive la République!*' The fall of Robespierre, which made an end of the Terror and opened the prisons, brought a regular deluge of revelations; the freed prisoners began to speak and people in general dared once more to open their mouths. A clerk of the Revolutionary Tribunal during the trial of Fouquier-Tinville, when the latter observed that the 9th Thermidor had made him insolent to his superiors, retorted. 'I was not insolent; I was merely no longer afraid of being killed!'

Not till the subsequent trials—those of the Public Prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville; the bailiff of Nantes, Carrier; the butcher of Arras and Cambrai, Lebon; and the member of the Committee of Public Safety, Billaud—when hundreds of witnesses poured out their hearts, were the mass-executions, the drownings, and the whole cruelty really known by the public. Knowledge of

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the political events and their relation to one another was scanty. When Hébert was arrested it was believed in Paris that 'all' had been arrested—Robespierre as well—and that the Revolution was over. The same belief was held every time a man who until yesterday had belonged to the mighty fell a victim to the guillotine; and most Frenchmen followed very imperfectly the process by which the radical Revolutionaries were continually annihilated by their more radical colleagues. It was otherwise, of course, in the small circle of the Jacobins, where the fever of the crisis was measured day by day.

A contemporary popular tract gives a picture of the ideal Jacobin. In his right hand he holds a bell, to show that he is always ready to sound the alarm, his left hand holds a sheet of paper on which are written the two great dates of the Revolution—the storming of the Bastille and the capture of the Tuileries, and on his head is the red cap, furnished with a singular ornament—an open, shining eye, with the word 'Supervision'. The poet André Chénier, who enthusiastically welcomed the Revolution at the fall of the Bastille and died on the scaffold on the 8th Thermidor as one of its last victims, published in the *Journal de Paris*, before the Terror had really begun, an article which later became world-famous on 'the causes of the troubles by which France is torn and which are preventing the establishment of liberty'. The most important of these, in André Chénier's judgment, was the misuse by the Popular Societies of the idea of popular sovereignty.

'A few hundred idlers', he wrote, 'assembled in a garden or at a play, or a few gangs of bandits looting shops, are with brazen effrontery called 'the people'; and the most insolent despots have never received from their greediest courtiers such vile and disgusting incense as the cringing flattery with which

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these two or three thousand usurpers of the national sovereignty are daily intoxicated by the writers and orators of this club, who are plunging France into confusion. As the appearance of patriotism is the only virtue demanded by them, a few men sullied by shameful lives make haste to testify to their patriotism by the extravagance of their speech, hoping to gain oblivion of the past and opportunities for the future by their declamations and by exciting the passions of the masses, and seeking by their impudence to redeem themselves from shame. There are revealed daily sentiments and principles which threaten every fortune and every property. Under the names of 'usury' and 'monopoly', industry and trade are represented as crimes. Every rich man is counted as an enemy of the State. Ambition and avarice spare neither honour nor reputation. The most hateful suspicions and the most unbridled calumnies are called 'freedom of opinion'. Whoever demands the proof of an accusation is a suspect, an enemy of the people. In these societies every stupidity is admired so long as it is bloodthirsty and every lie believed so long as it is murderous. Women go there to applaud the explosions of bloodthirsty madness. They presume to confer 'certificates of right thinking'. All the members and friends of this fraternity are good citizens, everyone else is a hypocrite. Mere admission to this league, like the baptism of Constantine, washes away all crimes and erases all blood and murder. The Popular Societies, joined hand in hand, form an electric chain round France. At one and the same moment they agitate in every corner of the nation, utter the same cries, execute the same movements. Their incessant turbulence has reduced the Government to a state of terrified inertia. In the assemblies of primary voters and electors their intrigues, cunning machinations and scandalous tumults have driven out

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many respectable men, whose weakness before them is reprehensible, and have besmirched hundreds of popular officials with calumnies. Everywhere judges, administrators and public officials who are not their creatures and agents are their enemies and the objects of their persecution. Usurping the authority of the State itself, they break into Courts of Justice and interrupt the proceedings, and compel the Communal authorities to appear before them and receive their orders. In more than one place they have dared to enter citizens' houses by force, search them, judge them and condemn or acquit them. Every revolt against the lawful authorities receives from them protection and support. Anyone, calling himself a patriot, who has defied the law and its organs comes to them to boast of his deed. Every dismissed subordinate who takes refuge in calumny is a victim of his patriotism; every mutinous and rebellious soldier can demand from them the crown of citizenship; every leader who has been insulted or murdered was in the wrong.'

This picture, though full of hatred, describes, as have other contemporaries, the anarchic abuses to which the activities of the Paris club and its daughter-societies was bound to lead under the unsympathetic guidance of Robespierre. In the fury of his anger the poet forgot that these activities were not directed against authority, but actually gave it legality and were expressions of the general right of supervision. The Club was composed of the great initiated, who alone in the Republic decided what was good and what was bad. The instinct of good and evil implanted by God in the heart of man was not even invoked as an auxiliary. Robespierre said over and over again that 'private virtues' did not, under the Republic, prove the worth of a citizen. The people who defended the victims of the Terror testified to the morally irreproachable life of those victims, but

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'did not find out whether they were also friends of justice and of the people'. In a word, Robespierre simply abrogated the general moral standard and replaced it by a Jacobin standard.

In this 'nationalization' of morality lay the real significance of the Jacobin Terror, which was thereby armed with an inhuman—almost superhuman—logic, breaking through all the barriers inherent in human nature. Thus a Revolution that was begun under the banner of humanity, and was to bequeath a heritage of humanity to posterity, became at its culmination and in its most authentic phase the sharpest refutation of that very ideal. Was not this the great misunderstanding, as it were, of the Revolution? For only Robespierre and Saint-Just really thought out the Revolutionary idea to its conclusion, while men like Danton stuck half-way along the road, recoiled before the consequences and finally succumbed to them.

France—the country of humanity? In point of fact this ideal has only once been completely and deliberately set aside: in France, by Robespierre. It must be remembered that Robespierre thought he had discovered virtue in Rousseau's sense of the word and applied this discovery to practical politics. The necessity of governing the country was sacrificed to the need of making consciences conform with a philosophical conception of politics. Robespierre was thus confusing two different spheres—mixing up religious experience with the organization of public life—and only the intrinsic strength of the raw material of France prevented him from fashioning a form of society similar to that of the Anabaptists at Münster. That the administration was able to carry on—and even to win the war—was only made possible by surreptitious measures. The tremendous exploits of 1793 were accomplished behind the Dictator's back by methods and principles that are always used in a



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time of national danger. For Robespierre wanted more: he wanted to win no victory over the enemies of France, but over human consciences. The cheerful improvisations of a Carnot did not impress him in the least, for he felt—rightly—that Carnot was a man who would win victories wherever and however he could, even if things were not always done in an orthodox manner.

In the Committee of Public Safety Robespierre was occupied with what we should call general politics—that is to say, he gave the régime its outward physiognomy; and as it was a pure Rousseauist régime the least of his actions bore a doctrinal character. The rigour of his political principles gave the Committees power to rule France with a degree of centralization and absolutism that even Richelieu had not known. The technicians of the Committee of Public Safety—Carnot, Cambon, Jean-Bon Saint-André—each pursued a purely non-political activity, while the strictness of Robespierre, the fanaticism of Couthon, and the fierce energy of Saint-Just saved them from acting in a void and succumbing to the thousand and one difficulties with which the resistance of unbridled egoism strewed their path.

## CHAPTER X

### POLITICS AND DEATH

The society conceived by Robespierre was founded on a mystical conviction—knowledge of the people's will—which could not form the basis of a State. Robespierre cannot be considered a statesman any more than St. Joan, who received her mission from a voice in the clouds. He did not think in political, but only in sectarian, or at the most theological, terms. The nature of the statesman is derived from the essence of the nation with which he has to deal, from ceaseless contact with the human element—in a word, from respect for human nature as the ultimate object and final arbiter in any community. This demands the capacity to see his own country in relation to the world and therefore to permit no irreconcilable contradiction between the national and the universal. Thus the statesman always approximates more to the administrator than to the army leader; for a campaign, even though it embodies the most sublime movement, can never in any circumstances be a settled condition of things. And it is under settled conditions that mankind wishes to live.

What a tragic misunderstanding this Dictatorship was! The Dictator was convinced that he was introducing happiness on earth, since he held that men were happy when they were living in accordance with 'principles', whereas in reality they wished to live in accordance with their own natures. 'Happiness is a new idea in Europe,' cried Saint-Just to the Conven-

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tion. Rightly said, and wonderfully said—but it was in spite of him and his friend Robespierre, not because of them. For the idea of human welfare as a national task began its triumphant career with the Revolution—with that Revolution of which Robespierre's rule was merely an episode. The liberal age aimed at happiness and was justified by the happiness of the individual. But liberalism rose with new strength from the bloodshed of the 10th Thermidor. The shade of Danton received new life from that bloodshed, surviving the short, anti-liberal epoch which France and the West were later on to reject as a momentary excess of the great Revolution. Thus the title of statesman, which is refused to Robespierre, was fully deserved by an unbelieving libertine like Talleyrand on account of his true perception of the world.

Born under a different star Robespierre would have become a saint. Like his master, Rousseau, he was a devout man, but without the love of God. In the religious background of his sombre soul lay the germ of political capacity. Out of Rousseau's spiritual instability there developed in a roundabout way through Robespierre a régime which cost thousands of lives and temporarily darkened the earth with blood. Supposing St. Theresa had undertaken to rule an empire on the strength of her visions! Supposing a statesman presumed to live in the contemplation of God and derive his policy from visions, like Jules de Polignac, who advised Charles X to hold fast on account of an interview he had had with the Blessed Virgin! Every mysticism concerned not merely with the Creator, but also with creation, leads to destruction and is a policy of death. The fall of the Maid of Orleans was inevitable. She continually felt an impulse to return home to her rustic peace, knowing in her crystal-clear soul that each step further in her career led deeper into politics and therefore nearer to death.

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Robespierre was the saint of a Church with no other God but the 'legitimate people'—an idea that could not achieve reality in flesh and blood. For the people did not consist of the sum of all individuals; its numbers were nothing more than an 'empirical means'. For him the people was not man himself, with his weaknesses and eternally unfulfilled striving for truth and happiness, but a doctrine distinct from man and therefore more closely approximating to the State. The natural limit to political action—respect for human life—silently collapsed. Politics became synonymous with death.

Death, which started as a punishment, soon became a political method. At first it chastised those who broke the law, but soon it was used to exterminate all those who did not belong to 'the people'. Death is the most complete method of exclusion from society, and here it was the only one, for France and the Republic were identical and society was totalitarian. Hence the incessant demand that the soil of the nation should be cleansed of traitors. It was not enough to reduce to silence and impotence the holders of wrong opinions; so long as they even existed society was not complete. People died for their errors as well as for their vices or their indifference; the latter were of no more account, and were replaced by the single question: '“People”, or not “people”?' Whoever did not belong to 'the people', as it was conceived in the Jacobin Society, was an aristocrat. Robespierre did not fight with facts, but with articles of faith. He did not say: 'That is false!' but: 'That is treason!' and when Camille protested to him that to burn was not to refute, it only proved that he had not thought out to their conclusions the ideas of Rousseau which he was so fond of quoting. Burning was much more than refuting, as it not only suppressed the error, but also the erring person. And, conversely,

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whoever thought wrongly had no virtue, a quality that had in Robespierre's eyes far more than a purely moral value. True virtue can be exercised by a man for himself alone, far from society, in the stillness of his heart. But Revolutionary virtue was a public quality, his possession of which a man had to prove, not to his conscience, but to the Supervision Committee.

The Terror was the practical application of this theory of virtue, and the whole terrorist legislation, though immoral in the counter-Revolutionary sense, was virtuous and even legal in the Revolutionary sense. This political morality stood and fell with the Dictator, Robespierre. We shall see how the Public Prosecutor, at his trial after the 9th Thermidor, gazed horrified at the razor-sharp border-line between his moral guilt and his political guiltlessness. At his condemnation a judge spoke for the first time of 'evil intent' instead of 'true Revolutionary conviction', and therewith the Revolution was over. 'The Terror', Robespierre said, 'is not so much a particular principle as a consequence of the application of the principle of democracy to the most pressing needs of the nation.' It was a question of purging the physical structure of France so that it could become a true Republican community. For this reason Robespierre called the war for liberty 'indivisible', as it was to annihilate the enemy at home as well as abroad. With these terrible words Saint-Just incited the flagging zeal of the terrorists: 'The impetus of the Revolutionary Government which set up the dictatorship of justice has disappeared. One would think that the hearts of the accused and of the judges had come to an understanding to freeze up the springs of justice and to deny it. One would think that each man had been terrified by his conscience and by the inflexibility of the laws, saying to himself: "I am not virtuous enough to be so terrible; philosopher-lawgivers, make allow-

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ance for my weakness; I dare not tell you that I am vicious; I would rather say that you are cruel.”’

Bloodshed was thus a political argument: to cause it was almost a proof of right thinking. Those who shrank from it were not cowardly so much as wrong-headed; above all they were not virtuous and therefore not good Republicans. ‘Virtue’, said Rousseau, ‘is nothing more than the concentration of the general will’; and his disciple, Maximilien, defined the Republic as ‘a Government guided by the general will, which is law’. The Revolutionary community of the faithful was so carefully closed that entry into it was impossible even by means of some sacrament like baptism. One simply had to belong to it, and just as only the Pope can canonize, so only Robespierre could authoritatively determine who thought rightly and who wrongly. His power thus consisted in the first place of the control of opinion: he was in possession of the ruling standard of values. His dislike for the renegades, the tardy converts and the over-zealous was implacable. He had an unerring instinct for true affinities. To try to deceive him was a vain endeavour; he knew exactly the limits of the Jacobin sect and who could be included in them.

The work of extermination of the Revolutionary Tribunal solved the question of what was to happen to those who were not Republicans. For it was inadmissible that they should remain outside the community—that there should be any life outside the community. Finally, therefore, all those were punished with death who had ‘complained of the Revolution’ or had ‘not favoured the Revolution’. In these circumstances no semblance of justice could any longer be maintained. Equality before the law, which had at first appeared to be one of the most important achievements of the Revolution, disappeared.

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There no longer remained for the individual any possibility of gaining the longed-for security by blameless conduct. For people were born aristocrats, and when Robespierre simply called all those who did not conform to the 'general will' aristocrats, he did so not because he thought they had a handle to their names, but because he regarded their opinions as inborn.

Was he not right? Was not these men's incapacity to renounce their morality in favour of a new political morality inborn in them? Is there not a kind of spiritual and moral inflexibility that cannot be acquired? It was not always pride that divided the world of these doomed men from that of their executioners, but often an inner harmony, a capacity to live alone with oneself, which could not be annihilated by the deepest humiliation or the coarsest violence. This was no doubt what Couthon meant when he said: 'It is less a question of punishing than of exterminating.'

The condemnation of the King was the rehearsal for the Terror. It was passed by a majority of one. That was still in the time of the Girondins, when poor Vergniaud presided. It was the first time that the conception of justice was lifted off its pivot, and Robespierre supplied the lever. Hardly ever again did he describe the Revolutionary conception of justice with such precision as in the famous speech of 3rd December, 1792.

'This is', he said, 'no legal prosecution. Louis is no accused man. You are no judges. You are statesmen and representatives of the people and can be nothing else. You are not here to give judgment for or against this man, but to take action on behalf of the common weal—to carry out an act of national providence.' And he proceeded to point out the error of making it a purely judicial case: 'But if Louis were acquitted—assumed to

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be innocent—what of the Revolution? If Louis is innocent, then all defenders of liberty are calumniators, and the friends of truth and defenders of oppressed innocence are rebels.' Robespierre pointed out with marvellous clarity that it was a question of handling the case according to a procedure not defined by conscience nor by law, but simply and solely by Revolutionary logic. And so he came to that conclusion which was flashed round the whole world: 'Louis must die, that the nation may live'.

Saint-Just had given his opinion on 13th November, in opposition to the Legislative Committee, which wanted to see the King judged as a simple citizen. The twenty-five-year-old Saint-Just saw with complete certainty that this would be a foolish mistake. Juridically it was not possible to judge Louis, for up to the suspension of the Monarchy his person was inviolable, and since 10th August, 1792—that is to say, since the time when, as a simple citizen, he was punishable in accordance with the Constitution—he had been a State prisoner in the Temple. Saint-Just cut the knot:

'The sole object of the Committee was to convince you that the King should be judged as an ordinary citizen, but I tell you that he must be judged as an enemy; we have not to judge him so much as to fight him.'

His standpoint was that the case against the King should not be on account of any crime, but on account of his being King, and he invented the phrase: 'One cannot reign without guilt!' Thus the trial of this unfortunate King—a good, but lethargic and entirely unstatesmanlike prince, who kept a petty-cash book, was devoted to lock-making, and only in the moment of his death took on the character of an invincible Christian—became the touchstone of the new morality, which consisted in



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the holding of political convictions and the extermination of those who did not share them. Danton, who was no great doctrinaire, said quite bluntly: 'We don't want to judge the King, we want to kill him!' Robespierre and Saint-Just did not view the matter so simply; they wanted nothing better than to do away with Louis, but wished to give the act its proper place in the general picture of their politico-moral thought and thus consolidate the new conception of justice.

The brilliant young Girondins struggled in the net; this was not what they wanted. They had made the Revolution in order to humanize law. They wanted to make the King a cipher, but they did not want to murder him; they wanted to act more or less on the principle that a king is a man like any other. Robespierre and Saint-Just were much more sublime, more honest, and cleverer; for them the Revolution was the end of the old suffering, negligence and arbitrariness. A king was by no means just a man, and even if he were . . . ! This was a tremendous reversal of the notion of truth. Truth took on a national sense and morality a political sense. It was not a question of seeking justice, but of acting politically. With the condemnation of the King the 'policy of principles' celebrated its first great triumph. From that moment Robespierre held the Convention by an unbreakable noose which daily grew tighter. Whoever had voted for death was a true Republican; whoever had voted against it had been bribed by the enemy. There was no going back; from then on the majority in the Assembly was bound together by an act which would lay blood-guiltiness on every individual member, should a single one of them weaken in applying the Terror. Louis's condemnation prepared the way for the Terror, which in the course of the same year became the order of the day.

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The voting in the Convention was by name and went on all day. Each Deputy mounted the Tribune, gave his judgment and disappeared. Night came on, then day, then another night. While below the Deputies slept on their benches and the clerks could hardly hold their pens, the tribunes were constantly filled with fresh crowds of spectators—zealous patriots who hissed representatives voting for clemency, and ladies just come from the opera, who refreshed themselves with sweets and ices—for it was oppressively hot in the Chamber—and fixed inquisitive eye-glasses on the handsome Barbaroux and the graceful Saint-Just. Some kept count of the votes in order to estimate the King's chances, and at every 'Death' stuck a pin in a piece of cardboard, so that they could easily reckon up the state of the voting at any moment.

The spectacle dragged on, dust and smoke darkened the lamps, midnight went by. The shadow of each voter as he passed by under the President's seat was thrown distorted and gigantic on walls and ceiling by the lamps on the shorthand-writers' desk. Those phantoms, in the murky twilight of the Chamber full of shadows and murmuring voices, continued to slip past the tribune—anxiously, like judges of death themselves fearing death—until at three in the morning the president, Vergniaud, in a toneless voice announced the result. Louis was lost. But so was the Convention, for the few men who had really thought out the consequences of the Revolution knew that a new morality—that of public virtue—had been created. The Revolution now had to win; if it succumbed this new morality would become a crime and all who had practised it would be bloodstained criminals. Cambon expressed this when he said: 'At last we have landed on the island of Liberty, and we have burned the boats that brought us.'

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Thus it came to pass that the principles of justice hitherto understood, which in spite of their intricacies embodied the age-old difference between good and evil, were abrogated. What had now become of objective truth? What remedy was there against a sage who claimed that his knowledge was independent of the principles of freedom and equality? Did the Robespierriest State allow any neutral domain in which the human spirit could live without being asked for its political opinions? The legislation of the Convention, which was directed against those 'who had done nothing for the Republic', was at a loss when faced with a knowledge that entrenched itself behind absolute truth. Robespierre had no use for knowledge; he respected it from vague memories of his enlightened youth, but did not need it. Nevertheless, though indifferent to it, he disapproved of any campaign against it, especially when actuated by plebeian destructiveness. Hanriot's proposal to burn the National Library; the demand of the Commune of Clermont-Ferrand for the destruction of the Cathedral because it was a 'hiding-place of fanaticism'; the project of the Commune of Marseilles to burn the learned libraries, because 'theology was fanaticism, history lies, philosophy dreams and science unnecessary'—all these excesses, for which the Abbé Grégoire had invented the word 'vandalism', instinctively annoyed him. It was otherwise with the more politically inspired attacks on cultural treasures. When Grégoire proposed in the Committee of Public Safety to save the treasures of French literature it was objected that under the Republic only one book was necessary—the 'Book of Nature'. This answer was in the spirit of Rousseau, referring as it did to the overgrowth and corruption of the 'general will' by civilization. Similarly Barrère's declaration: 'We will burn all the libraries; we need only the history of

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the Revolution and the laws!' was no mere 'vandalism', since it designated the only reliable source of truth.

The great Lavoisier, who as chemist discovered oxygen and as physicist examined the behaviour of bodies in a gaseous state, who was the first to announce that 'nothing is lost, nothing is created', appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal. In order to procure money for his experiments he had applied to the King for a post as farmer of taxes and—to his undoing—had obtained it. The Revolution sent all tax-farmers to the scaffold. Lavoisier contemplated his fate with equanimity, unafraid of death although he knew that he was more than a gaseous body; what worried him was the breaking-off of an important experiment, which was on the point of success when he was arrested in the midst of his pistons and retorts. He begged the president of the Tribunal, Coffinhal, for a few days' grace to complete his work. But Coffinhal answered him curtly:

'The Republic has no need of *savants* or chemists.'

A terrible saying this, which reveals in a blinding flash the conception of the State envisaged by Robespierre in his endless speeches. The Republic needed Republicans, and nothing else. Lavoisier appealed to entirely unpolitical and neutral values; he wanted to cross the threshold of a new truth before he died. More devoted service to knowledge there could not be, for he well knew that impatient death stood at his shoulder and worked the bellows while he bent over the glowing flame to watch the mysterious marriages of matter. Immeasurable, divine heart of man! Heaven and earth vanish before thy greatness! These two men stood face to face, one saying: 'Let the truth live!' the other: 'Let the Republic live!' And both were to pay with their lives, for the president of the Court, who had the *savant* beheaded on the 19th Floréal as the fourth of twenty-

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eight tax-farmers, soon followed him into that kingdom where everything is lost and created anew and where both science and politics give way to a higher truth.

'The Republic needs no chemists!' For more than 100 years France has done penance for that saying; having chemists for Foreign Ministers and mathematicians for War Ministers, continually bending the knee to knowledge, and affirming that 'progress consists in always leading the people away from myths and bringing them nearer to knowledge' (Herriot). At all Republican celebrations the delight in knowledge heralded by the First Republic has been revived. Its indomitable joy of living and its almost blind optimism have always been saturated with a childlike pleasure in what can be taught and learned. 'The Republic by definition sets out to be an optimistic Government'—these and similar phrases were to be written by the disciples of Danton, not by those of Robespierre.

Even Robespierre's Republic, however, needed chemists. Not, of course, to learn the truth from them, nor to build up the general welfare on their knowledge, but to make gunpowder. The enemy was in the land, and though the soldiers of the Republic might lack bread they must not lack powder. While the tumbrils rattled to the place of execution and the Tribunal gave judgment to the sound of firing, the plaster was scraped from the walls and ceilings of cellars in order to make saltpetre. Never had chemists been so fanatical in the service of the State as at the moment when the Court declared that the Republic had no need of them. Monge organized the search for saltpetre, Chaptal discovered a new and quicker process of refining; Berthollet, Fourcroy, Carny—all worked day and night to provide the Republic with the thunderbolts it needed. But they only served it, and it was not their business to claim

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for themselves any absolute, independent truth so long as Robespierre administered the only valid truth.

The scientist ceased to be the protector of a human ideal and became an expert, to be summoned when required and afterwards neglected. There were prophecies that the Republic would founder for lack of skilled technicians. There was no more Diplomacy, the wonderful administrative machinery of the Kings was shattered, the financial experts had been beheaded, the personnel of the tremendous machinery of justice was scattered to the winds, one general after another was executed. Beauharnais, Luckner, Custine and Houchard paid for their military failures with their heads. All Europe was agreed that this disorder could last only a few months, as the Revolution must collapse if only for lack of competent officials and officers. People who could not even draw up a Diplomatic Note surely could not govern a province or lead an army. Whoever so wantonly sacrificed technical skill and suspected all experts must come to a bad end.

In the Committee of Public Safety there was a conflict of opinion. Carnot was old-fashioned enough to show practical good sense; he had cooperated in the purging of the Army, but now that that was accomplished he thought some attention should be paid to military capacity. Differences of opinion constantly arose between Robespierre and the experts of the Committee. There were frequent disputes over persons whose energy and competence were unquestioned, but who otherwise left something to be desired. Little by little all administrative and judicial officials and military commanders who found no favour in the eyes of the Jacobin Club were eliminated. But still the machine worked. The hopes of its adversaries that the Republic would come to grief for lack of experts vanished

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from day to day. On the contrary, the Revolution turned out to possess a magician's wand for military talent. From the nameless mass of unknown soldiers and lieutenants stand out names like Hoche, Bonaparte, Marceau, Desaix, Kléber, Murat, Augereau, Soult. Out of the 2,000 Confederates who on 17th July, 1792, declared their readiness to leave for the camp at Soissons, more than forty-five became generals of division and some even marshals. A few names only will suffice: Brune, Jourdan, Lannes, Masséna, Moreau, Mortier, Oudinot, Delmas, Championnet, Gouvion Saint-Cyr! The Revolution sowed death, but reaped talent—a harvest of creative youth abounding in audacity.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ANGEL OF DEATH

From what unknown abyss rose this genius? From what maternal depths did this creature strive towards the light? Robespierre was timeless, sterile, neither young nor old. But beside him was that mysterious being who was at once light and darkness, the soldier and lawgiver Saint-Just, who at the age of twenty-seven, still at his side, was to mount the scaffold. Never will the world's astonishment at this youth grow dim; and never will it be able to decide between timid admiration of his greatness and horror of his inhumanity. Saint-Just was not of this world; but no one could say whether he had risen from the Realms of Death to warn mankind of the frailty of its pleasures and hopes, or whether he was a messenger from that Empire of Light where bodies have no substance, tears are unknown and the Book of Wisdom lies eternally open in the brilliance of infinite day.

His was an unearthly beauty. His large deep-blue eyes reflected the firmament of an unknown universe. His fair curly hair fell over his rounded forehead, almost touching his eyebrows, whose delicate arches continued the curve of his nose. His mouth was finely moulded and almost unnaturally pure, as if formed by the spatula of an artist. Whence came the almost delirious charm of this physiognomy? Perhaps from the ability to inspire both tenderness and icy fear. If one felt inclined to lay one's hand on those golden locks thickly covering the childlike



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head, one also wished to flee to the end of the world from the enigmatic hardness of that look. Had another mouth ever touched those perfect lips? What did that face look like asleep: were the cheeks flushed, the mouth open? Did he ever sleep? Was he alive? Was he dead? His bearing was almost stiff, with measured steps he mounted the tribune, his hands folded behind his back, making no gestures. His chin rested motionless on his massive cravat, which was carefully starched. Only his golden earrings dangled gently above the high collar of his frock-coat.

As a boy he had been fond, in drawing-lessons, of sketching the head of Antinöus. He had been a spoilt youngster, causing his mother much trouble, and finally had run away to the capital with the family silver. His anxious mother had him hunted out by the police and shut up in a mental home, where he wrote *Organt*, an epic poem in twenty cantos—fantastic and at the same time flippant, in the style of Voltaire—which he prefaced with the following phrase:

*'J'ai vingt ans, j'ai mal fait, je pourrai faire mieux.'*

His first letter to Robespierre, dated August 1790, began: 'You who uphold the reeling nation against the torrent of despotism and intrigue, you whom I know only as I know God—through your miracles. . . .' The letter, which was written on behalf of the economic interests of his native locality, ended thus: 'I do not know you, but you are a great man. You are the representative, not merely of the province, but of humanity and of the Republic.'

It was some time, however, before these two men met. Saint-Just was not admitted to the Legislative Assembly because he had not attained the statutory age. His whole nature was immersed in the current of the time, and his disappointment over the inactivity enforced by his youth was so consum-

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ing that life became almost unbearable for him. Later there was found among his papers a letter to a friend, which he had perhaps never sent off. But he wrote it, and it was the first and last time he showed any sign of convulsion, any disturbance of his equilibrium.

'Since I have been here', he wrote, 'I have been shaken by a Republican fever which devours and consumes me. By the same post I send your brother a second letter. Procure it as soon as it is available. Also tell MM. de Lameth and Barnave about it; I have mentioned them in it. You will find me great in some parts of it. It is unfortunate that I cannot stay in Paris. I feel I could ride the crest of this century. Companions of glory and liberty, preach them in your Sections; may danger encompass you! Seek out Desmoulins, embrace him from me, and tell him that he will never see me again; that I admire his patriotism, but despise him, because I have seen into his heart and know that he is afraid I might betray him. Tell him not to abandon the good cause, and impress this upon him, for he has by no means the audacity of magnanimous virtue. Adieu! I stand above misfortune. I will bear everything, but I will tell the truth. You are all cowards for not having appreciated me. My fame nevertheless will grow and perhaps overshadow you. Infamous fellows that you are, I am a rascal, a criminal, because I have no money to give you. Snatch out my heart and devour it; you will then become what you are not: great.

'I have given Clé a note for you, asking you not to let him have a copy of my letter. I most particularly make this request of you, and if you do so I shall regard it as a sign of enmity. The Administration is afraid of me; I am envied, and until fate places me beyond the reach of danger from the people of my district I must take all precautions here. Enough: I hope that

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Clé will come back empty-handed, otherwise I shall never forgive you.

'O God! Why must Brutus languish in oblivion far from Rome? But my decision is taken: if Brutus cannot kill another, he will kill himself.

'Adieu! Come!

SAINT-JUST.'

This letter is the only sign of emotional disturbance Saint-Just ever gave. For the rest of his short life he remained impassive, in a marble harmony, like the statues of the gods. 'Power belongs to the phlegmatic!' he called to his friend Robespierre, when the latter's face became contorted with rage. His calm was terrifying, for it radiated a coldness that seemed to destroy all life. Born under another star he might have been one of those great murderers of whom history speaks in whispers, such as Gilles de Rais, who loved the slow and scientific pleasure of death. His cruelty was never that of a brute, but of a superhuman judge. Almost all the great death sentences of the Convention were his work. He demanded the head of the King, the death of the Girondins, the death of his friend Hébert and his party; the death of his friend Desmoulins, the death of Danton, the death of Hérault. Inflexible and graceful he looked as he stood on the tribune, the light shining on his golden curls, his earrings gently dangling, while no expression nor movement broke the paradisaical calm of that face—the face of the Angel of Death.

His glacial presence could be borne by nobody—except Robespierre. For the latter saw in him the completion of his own character. Everything that he carried out as a humble disciple of Rousseau this youngster did almost out of his own head; he was not only a philosopher, but also a lawgiver. He

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had not been entrusted by Rousseau with the secret of the General Will; it had come to him from Heaven, like the reflection of a star on the cool waters of a fountain. He had, indeed, Robespierre's steely logic, but not the daily torment Robespierre had in maintaining it and defending it against the assaults of a darkened emotional life. For Saint-Just political and moral power were inseparably bound up with one another and no one seemed to him better fitted to wield such a dictatorship than Robespierre. Nobody can say whether he loved him, but in any case he bore him steadfast loyalty and never left his side. It was not only the loyalty of a friend, but also the loyalty of an evil genius to the one possessed, or of the guardian angel to the soul in danger. He whispered to this afflicted soul the magic word of the superhuman faith, and urged on the hand that sometimes faltered in so many accusations, warrants for arrest, and death sentences. When he was present all actions seemed just and all decisions easy, for in the shadow of every action and decision at which Robespierre dared not look for fear of the sight of Death stood Saint-Just, wrapped in the unearthly light of his harmoniousness.

This youngster knew himself; no trait in his own character was strange to him; nothing in him was unconscious. It was clear to him that he shared with Robespierre the responsibility for the suspension of moral laws and judicial security, but he was proud of it. 'There is', he said, 'something terrible in the sacred love of country; it is exclusive to such a degree that it sacrifices everything, without pity, without fear and without respect, to the public interest.' And again: 'A Republic is not made with clemency, but with fierce, inflexible rigour against all those who have betrayed it.' What he understood by treason we know well. Treason was the act of being different. Everyone

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was a traitor so long as he had not shed blood for the Republic. Saint-Just's whole policy with regard to the defence and consolidation of the Republican idea was fundamentally nothing less than the extermination of all those who did not cherish that idea. His aim was to create an empty space round the small circle of right-thinking men, and he proceeded to do this by means far more tyrannical than Robespierre's. For he was solitary, standing quite by himself; he did not want to be Pope of the Jacobin Church. Although he did not despise that community he did not constantly need it to justify to himself his own acts. He was much less systematic than Robespierre, who could not live at all without the community of the 'faithful'. Saint-Just produced everything out of the unknown abyss of his character, and where Robespierre consulted the orthodox Jacobins he held speech with the dead.

For he understood the language of the dead. It was said that as a boy he had fixed up a room with a black cloth on which white death's-heads appeared, and that in this room, by the light of two weak candles, he loved to meditate. Certain it is that he had intimate and mysterious relations with death—not only with the death who had the features of a handsome youth and held an inverted torch, but also with the death which he was preparing for others. The white hands of this annihilator were not spotted with a single drop of blood, for the contamination did not reach him. The headless and decomposing corpses of his victims taught him a wisdom which culminated in absolute contempt for life. 'Let those who are ambitious go and walk for an hour in the cemetery, where the tyrant and the conspirator sleep together!' ran his famous report on the 'general police'. Death indeed spoke to him and taught him that the fight was over, that life was nothing, and that the pleasure of

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returning to the soil lasted for ever. 'I despise the dust of which I am made!'

Perhaps he was himself the genius of death, in whose eyes the whole kingdom of insensibility was reflected; perhaps he was himself the torch-bearer whose cool beauty inspires calm in the poor hearts of men and whose aspect impresses by its very inability to suffer. Never was there such a pure reflection in such dark waters and never was a mortal man so immersed in the invisible stream of oblivion. Silently the stars journey through time, while the human race strives impotently with unrecognized longing towards immortality. Tears fall and become spinning worlds, sighs escape and swell into the harmony of the spheres. The smile of a God fills the globe with fertility and again the sweet source of human suffering begins to flow. But he needed neither food nor drink, sought neither the poppy nor the grape, neither grew cold nor hot; nothing hurt him, nothing made him glad: he was there—beautiful, precise, naked—Death itself.

In his *Institutions* he spoke for the first and last time with himself. Had he a soul? One would like to believe so. 'Obliged to isolate himself from the world and from himself, man drops his anchor in the future and presses to his heart the posterity which bears no blame for the evils of the present. . . . I have left all weaknesses behind me; I have seen only the truth in the universe and have expressed it. . . . Circumstances are difficult only for those who recoil from the grave.' And then this cry from those marble lips:

'I long for the tomb as a blessing of Providence, in order no longer to witness the impunity with which misdeeds are committed against my country and against humanity.'

And yet he continually thought out new reasons for punish-



*Collection of Dr. Duruy*

*Photo: Bulloz*

SAINT-JUST. PAINTING BY DAVID





## THE ANGEL OF DEATH

ment, not because he wanted to persecute mankind, but because he felt himself a doctor cutting away diseased limbs. He conceived his acts of extermination in an entirely political sense. He had no taste for blood. 'The human spirit', he said, 'is sick, and its weakness produces misfortune, for it tolerates oppression. Believe me, everything that exists round us must change and come to an end, because everything round us is unjust.'

If there had been any means of extermination other than death he would have been content with it. In the deliberations of the Committee of Public Safety which led up to the Decree of the 26th Germinal he proposed that 'the old world should be exterminated'. But more deadly than death was deprivation of rights. He wanted to deprive the aristocrats of civil rights and fasten a cannon-ball to their legs. At the feet of free Republicans there should be a mass of Helots—former nobles, priests, rich men and *bon viveurs*, wearing penal costume and bearing the visible marks of shame. In a word, since the world could not stand blood the bloodless Terror was invented, to kill men's souls and destroy their dignity and freedom. Was not death—even death suffered under the guillotine—almost ennobling; and was not the return to the shadows the beginning of a reconciliation, even where there could be no reconciliation? The Committee of Public Safety did not adopt his views. Even Robespierre rejected the notion, as it did not accord with the apotheosis of the Supreme Being which was already germinating in his mind. Nevertheless, what still remained was terrible enough. The decree was nothing but the machinery of annihilation, although a few measures in favour of industry and trade were incorporated in it, doubtless at the instance of Lindet or Prieur. Apart from them:

'All citizens are obliged to inform their local authorities and

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the Committee of Public Safety of thefts, disloyal speeches and acts of oppression of which they have been the victims or witnesses.' And finally: 'Anyone who is in future convicted of complaining of the Revolution, who lives without an occupation, and is neither over sixty nor ill, will be deported to Guiana.'

If Robespierre carried Rousseau's philosophy to its conclusion, Saint-Just did the same for Robespierre. He had dropped his anchor in the future and now stood on the brink of the abyss of social revolution. Robespierre was so busy with the political and moral preparation of the community he dreamed of that the constantly repeated warning signals of the slowly rising proletarian movement did not enter his consciousness. Although he proclaimed social justice and wished to see it extended to the fruits of labour the principle of private property remained sacred to him. The mass of *assignats* in circulation was increasing, the cost of living and the dearth of necessities were rapidly rising, unemployment was driving ever fresh hordes on to the streets, and the Convention was driven deeper and deeper into economic control. The senseless attacks on production and trade increased so much that by the summer of 1793 the principles of political economy that had inspired the beginning of the Revolution had been entirely abandoned. And yet in all the welter of decrees necessitated by the price-snowball and the increasing scarcity of commodities there was no sign of any conscious tendency towards Communism. The maximum prices, the special taxes on the possessing classes, the requisitioning of corn, the 'equality bread', the laws on the distribution of the national wealth, public assistance and the hoarding of provisions, the speculation, the control of crops and exports, and finally the State requisitioning of 'arms and

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talents'—that is, manual and brain workers—all this was no planned, still less Communistic, policy, but the precipitate makeshift of an over-centralized Government faced with the clenched fists of masses desperate with hunger and the cries of distress of its ragged armies.

Robespierre and his associates were unprepared for the onset of these problems. Robespierre's was a single-track mind, and therefore he naturally perceived deep rifts in the social structure of the people for whose triumph he was working. Did not the Jacobin Club mainly consist of well-to-do citizens, and did not those who wielded the pen play the chief part in the Supervision Committees? The nobility and clergy—the true social classes—could easily be recognized and were held together by unambiguous signs. But was not what used to be called the Third Estate also, from the standpoint of popular sovereignty, extremely unambiguous? The classes that had been annihilated were recognizable by their privileges and their beliefs, but where was the border-line between bourgeoisie and people? The pursuit of gain grew immeasurably; in spite of prison and the guillotine trade in the national wealth and the provisioning of the armies had become sources of corruption. What if mere political conviction were not sufficient as a dividing line; what if virtue, in the last resort, were not only a political, but also a social institution? In a word, Robespierre felt that the bourgeois forces and classes had profited by the Revolution and that they were just as much enemies of the people as the conspirators and traitors who drank their coffee out of cups painted with the image of Louis XVI or heard Mass said by a non-juring priest. Struggling with this suspicion of a class-question he wrote in his note-book: 'Who are our enemies? The vicious and the rich'; and still more plainly: 'The internal dangers come from

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the bourgeois; to overcome the bourgeois the people must be rallied'.

The Paris Commune, the Sections and the *faubourgs* were interspersed with elements thirsting for a social mission. Men like Jacques Roux, Varlet and Leclercq, who preached a purely Communist doctrine, were in continual opposition to the police of the central power. 'It is cowardly', Roux cried to the Government, 'to tolerate those who appropriate the products of the land and of industry, who in the granaries of avarice heap up goods of the most elementary necessity, and who make usurious calculation with the tears and impoverishment of the people.' Robespierre saw in this agitation, which found a powerful echo in the proletariat of the working quarters, especially among the women, primarily a disturbance of the State's authority. The speech in which he accused Jacques Roux before the Jacobins in June 1793 was feeble and did not go anywhere near the root of the agitation. That Roux was a 'rascal and false patriot' sufficed at first, though a few weeks later he added 'agent of Pitt and Coblenz'. But Roux's ideas nevertheless affected all the other Revolutionary elements, for all the social and economic measures of the Convention and the Committees were in competition with a propaganda aimed at the idea of property. Hébert, the Paris newspaper king, whose *Père Duchesne* had a circulation of over 500,000 and who knew how to manipulate the votes of the masses, steered slowly into the Communist stream, disputing with Roux and his associates the succession to Marat. Robespierre felt distinctly that in the Commune and the assemblies of the Sections there lurked social aspirations which he could not define and whose exact nature escaped him. He had paid homage to these underfed workmen and artisans cooped up in their pitiful dens with the cry: 'You

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are the People!' often enough to feel that he had awakened something more than mere pride in belonging to the chosen mass of good patriots. He had constantly contrived to procure for them material and social advantages, which they had regarded rather as booty than as a legitimate inheritance.

Ceaselessly his thoughts were busy with the idea of redistributing property, and in his speech of 24th April, 1793, on 'Human and citizen rights' he outlined for the first time the limits of the right of property. He declared that all men had an equal right to the products of the land and of industry, but this did not quieten the unrest of the masses. Not until the Revolution was over was the social question really elaborated, and then by the genial Babeuf, leader of the 'Conspiracy of Equals', who was the father of modern Socialism and considered himself a disciple of Robespierre.

The claims of the proletariat soon began to take the form of hunger-revolts and excesses. The authorities allowed themselves to be driven to numerous assaults on the national economy, above all the so-called 'maximum', but eventually they resisted the conspirators. Roux was arrested on Robespierre's proposal and took his own life, and Hébert and his associates found their way to the scaffold. Nevertheless the Convention, in taking these measures, was not consciously combating the Communist danger; and in fact the original accusation against the Hébertists—responsibility for the dearth of foodstuffs—was completely overshadowed by the conspiracy against the Convention laid to their charge—a conspiracy alleged to have aimed at the dictatorship of a 'Grand Judge'. The Reign of Terror had no clear consciousness of its social possibilities and its only really Communistic measure, undertaken by Saint-Just a few weeks before the fall of Hébert, was understood neither by the latter nor by the Convention.

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While Robespierre was linking Virtue with the Terror, Saint-Just joined to it a form of social upheaval strongly resembling the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The great speech of the 8th Ventôse, which bore the apparently innocent title 'Report on incarcerated persons', annihilated all hopes of an end of the Terror. He took up the theme which he had formulated in the preceding autumn: 'You have to punish not only the traitors but also those who are indifferent. You have to punish everyone who is passive in the Revolution and does nothing for it'. This time even terser and deadlier words fell from the beautiful lips: 'The way to found a Republic is to destroy that which is opposed to it'. Then at one step, without any transition, he reached almost innocently the theme of expropriation.

'The force of circumstances is leading us to results we had not contemplated. Profits are in the hands of numerous enemies of the Republic. Necessity is making the working people dependent on their enemies. Do you imagine that a State can exist if its social relations are opposed to its form of government? Those who make a Revolution with half-measures only dig their own graves. The Revolution is leading us to recognize the principle that he who shows himself to be an enemy of his country can have no possessions in it. Do not allow a single unhappy or poor man to exist; this is the only price at which a true Revolution and Republic can be had.'

The decree, which was immediately approved, ran as follows: 'The property of patriots is inviolable and sacred. The goods of persons recognized as enemies of the Revolution will be confiscated in favour of the Republic. Such persons will be held under arrest until the conclusion of peace and then exiled for life.'

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The Assembly was almost paralysed by the cruelty and foolhardiness of this decree; it was pure Saint-Just, for here again he was asking for something more and better than death. Before, he had wanted to punish with shame, but now with misery. Moreover, he linked this annihilation with the enrichment of the Jacobins, and that this was a practical measure, to be executed at once, is proved by the order he read out on the 13th Ventôse, requesting the Communes to furnish lists of needy patriots. The Committee of Public Safety was to 'draw up a report on the methods of indemnifying all unfortunates with the goods of enemies of the Republic'. Finally, the Supervision Committees were charged with the preparation of a report on 'the behaviour of all those under arrest'—that is to say, the designation of those persons who were to be expropriated. Saint-Just thus summed up the meaning of this measure which permitted the expropriation of all non-Jacobins: 'The way to confirm the Revolution is to apply it for the benefit of those who support it and the ruin of those who oppose it'.

Neither Jacques Roux nor Hébert had ever dared to propose such a usurpation. Was this not everything that the masses had dully coveted—'the poor are the mighty ones of the earth'? Was not the Revolution by this completed—sublime and brutal at the same time—promising its children not only justice but also enrichment? In the prisons of the Republic nearly 300,000 persons were immured and the Supervision Committees—entirely in the hands of the Jacobin Club—could be trusted not to let a single one escape. A transference of property on a grand scale was intended; a whole élite was to be expropriated and annihilated for ever and the immense army of the disinherited was to succeed it—in the name of the law. Thus Saint-Just, taking the Revolution by its bloodstained hand, led

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it to the brink of its true destiny. He knew that this law, for those who carried it to a logical end, meant the completion—nay, the exaggeration—of the Revolution. The Reign of Terror ceased to be a weapon and became a social system. Saint-Just, foreseeing Europe's cry of horror, declared proudly:

'The peoples of Europe are being deceived about what is happening among us. Our discussions are misrepresented, but they cannot so easily misrepresent strong laws: the latter will illumine foreign countries like an inextinguishable torch.'



## CHAPTER XII

### THE STEELY BLAST

WE cannot say whether Robespierre wished to follow this young Revolutionary along the path he had opened up, for the length of life that remained to the two men was too short. Although we might like to see them before us speaking to one another—the ageless man and the youth, both serious, both hard, made of steel, not flesh and blood—however much we stir our imagination we cannot see Saint-Just anything but alone, even with the Army, to which he was generally sent on missions with the gallant Lebas. He liked being with the Army; the incessant movement, the tension, and the hard life suited him. The political post was also to his taste; the popular representative on mission was a mobile part of the central authority; his powers were unlimited, he could put into force any measure he liked, and he disposed of the property, life and death of men. Here is how he himself described the duties of the Convention's representatives with the Army:

“They must be fathers and friends to the soldiers; they must sleep under canvas; they must be present at all military exercises. With the generals they must not be too familiar, so that the soldiers shall have the more confidence in their justice and impartiality. The soldiers must find them ready to listen to them by day or night; their meals should be solitary; they must remember that they are answerable for the public safety and that the final overthrow of Kings is more important than tran-

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sitory comfort.' And to these directions he added a dark thrust: 'Those who make Revolutions, and want to make them properly, must not sleep till they are in their graves!'

Here speaks not merely the metallic voice of the soldier. A soldier is unthinkable without a certain good humour and *joie de vivre*, but this young man was too systematic, too strict with himself, too cool, to be nothing more than the companion in arms of those ardent soldiers of the Revolution. What drove him on was more than ardour; it was a conscious and purely moral exaltation, which he himself described in a speech as follows: 'Exaltation comes from obstinate determination to defend the rights of the people and of the Convention. It comes from contempt for riches and from courageously simple habits. Exaltation is virtue, not fury.' In the late autumn of 1793 he was with the Army of the Rhine, in the following January with the Army of the North—only for a week, at the end of April he returned to the North, and finally was again sent to the front on 6th June. Carnot's instructions ran thus:

'The members of the Committee of Public Safety resolve that their colleague Saint-Just shall proceed forthwith to the Northern and Eastern frontiers, to supervise the Armies of the Republic from the coast to the Rhine and see that the decrees of the Convention and the orders of the Committee are carried out.'

Every time Saint-Just arrived at the front it was as if a steely blast had come to blow out the tattered standards, tear up the officers' tents, sweep away the intendants' files, and shake the walls of the fortresses. The generals trembled before him. He arrived, shot out questions like arrows, made rapid notes, summoned the soldiers, asked if there were any complaints, fished the bread out of their haversacks to taste it, inspected their

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shelters, noted, ordered, degraded, promoted, and had people shot. Never did he sit down at table with the staff; sitting on a milestone, he dipped his piece of bread in a mug of wine and sprang up whenever he saw a column passing by with ill-cared-for horses or when a drunken man appeared. He ransacked the staff offices and chased off clerks to the front, straightened out the transport, expelled the prostitutes, and seized butter from the generals' kitchens to grease the breeches of the cannon. The whole Army, from the smallest bugler to the Commander-in-Chief, feared him, but each man knew that he was upright and demanded nothing for himself. If it was impossible to love him, they were forced to admire him. In his dark-blue frock-coat with the Tricolor sash round his waist, carrying his broad-brimmed hat with its triple plume on the point of his sword, his fair hair streaming in the wind and his earrings gently dangling, he marched with firm steps at the head of the troops advancing under Prussian gunfire against the lines of Wissembourg. The Committee of Public Safety, assailed by the complaints of the hungry, threatened by the whispers of conspirators, and almost stifled by the daily flow of blood, commanded him: 'Conquer!' and he conquered.

He went everywhere: in camp, with the horses, at the depôts, in infirmaries, smithies, gunpowder-works, at the map-tables of the staff, in the communication-trenches of the heavy artillery, on parade-grounds and shooting ranges; he estimated the requirements of faggots, sandbags, mortars and firearms; he counted the horses with mange and those that needed shoeing; he inspected the building materials of the engineers; he studied promotion lists and unearthed injustices; he interrogated prisoners and instructed messengers; he rode out to the advanced posts and the ammunition trains. Above all, he spoke to

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the soldiers: interrogating them about their officers, their treatment, their moral, their opinions on the military situation and on internal politics. He aroused their consciousness of themselves and their powers of determination and inspired them with the feeling of having astonished mankind, spectators of their exploits. In the towns in the war zone he purged the Communal administrations, the Clubs, and the Supervision Committees, investigated the opinion of the townspeople, surrounded himself with the patriots, and burdened the half-hearted with requisitions and supplies.

He was everywhere, swift as lightning and always acting immediately. Now he was in Flanders, now in the Palatinate, now in Belgium, now on the Rhine. He was to be seen at night rushing along in a light half-open carriage, the splash-leather over his knees, the coachman by his side whipping the horses. The vehicle, with his small trunk tied on behind, jolted through the mud of the dilapidated roads. The rain lashed their faces and the sky was red with the reflection of burning farms. A detachment of galloping hussars slowly overtook the carriage. As the horsemen rushed along bent over the necks of their horses, the plumes of their shakoes dripping with water, they looked inquisitively at the occupants of the carriage, recognized under the broad-brimmed hat the angel's profile of Saint-Just, and spurred on their horses. The carriage continued on its swaying journey, while from the distance came faintly the sound of desultory firing, and the poplars bent in the wind. Saint-Just dreamed away, his eyes in front of him: 'The world has been empty since the Romans'.

The generals of the time had the enemy before them and the guillotine behind them: Saint-Just saw to that. But how different he was from the usual political chatterboxes of the Clubs

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who were sent to supervise the patriotic virtue of the commanders! He knew the plans of campaign and intervened in the smallest details, exerting his influence on strategy: from the first moment he concentrated on the relief of Landau as the chief objective, as is shown by the letter he wrote to the young Hoche after the latter's reverse at Kaiserslautern. There was an unheard-of eruption of Republican fury when he and Lebas joined the Army of the Rhine. The following letter to the soldiers was written from Strasbourg:

'We come here and we swear in the name of the Army that the enemy will be conquered. If there are here any traitors—or even anybody indifferent—to the cause of the people, we bring for them the sword of execution. Soldiers! We have come to avenge you and give you leaders to lead you to victory. We are resolved to seek out merit, reward it, and promote it, and to punish all crimes, whoever has committed them. Courage, valiant Army of the Rhine! Henceforth you will be fortunate and will triumph with liberty. All commanders, officers and Government agents of all kinds are hereby ordered to redress, within three days, the justifiable grievances of the soldiers. At the end of that time we will listen to those grievances ourselves and will make examples of such justice and severity as the Army has not yet seen.

SAINT-JUST. LEBAS.'

The next step concerned the High Command: 'This Army lacks above all a leader who is truly Republican and believes in victory. We hope to get Pichegru. He is at Huningue; we have despatched a special messenger to him and we await him.'

Meanwhile the Strasbourg Municipality was purged. The Revolutionary Committee carried out 10,000 arrests, made nocturnal house-to-house searches at the homes of 'rich egoists',

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and furnished a list of persons on whom Saint-Just imposed a compulsory loan of 9,000,000 f., to be delivered in twenty-four hours. Then the following communication was sent to the Strasbourg Municipal Council:

‘Ten thousand men in the Army are barefooted. You will to-day take off the shoes of all the aristocrats in Strasbourg and by 10 a.m. to-morrow 10,000 pairs of shoes are to be on the way to headquarters.’

Again on the same day: ‘All the overcoats of the citizens of Strasbourg are hereby commandeered. To-morrow evening they must be delivered to the stores of the Republic.’

In the interval the two representatives sent a message to the women of Strasbourg: ‘The citizenesses of Strasbourg are urged to give up wearing German clothes, as their hearts are French.’ A German translation was prudently added.

It fared ill with a certain Eulogius Schneider, ‘Public Prosecutor to the Revolutionary Tribunal, former priest, and born a subject of the Emperor,’ who had ‘shown himself at Strasbourg in shameless luxury, drawn by six horses and escorted by guards with drawn swords.’ The learned tyrant was sentenced for this presumption to be pilloried for four hours in public on the scaffold. He could think himself lucky to have saved his life, for in the moat of Hanheim dozens of condemned generals fell under the bullets of firing-squads. Here is another who doubtless fared no better:

‘The commanding officer of the 15th Battalion of Doubs, who has shown himself indifferent to the principles of the Revolution and neglected his men, is to be arrested.’

As for the man who had asked leave to go to Poitiers in order to save his property:

‘Considering that Jacques Mérigues is a coward who places

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his private interests before those of his threatened country, we order the said Jacques Mérigues to be degraded in a public place at Strasbourg and sent to Mirecourt under arrest until the conclusion of peace.'

All officers, including generals, were without exception from now on to share the privations of their soldiers:

'General, you will order all officers of the rank of general to sleep and eat at the head of their divisions and brigades in their tents.'

So it went on, day in, day out. The army bowed like a field of corn under this storm, but emerged strengthened and invincible. Saint-Just's inexorable hammer-blows had not only restored the striking-power and moral of the troops, but had reinforced Carnot's work of genius with the moral qualities necessary to the creation of a Popular Army. It was no longer possible to carry on the war from a purely professional standpoint; to be able to endure, to fight and to conquer, the Army had to be the standard-bearer of a principle comprehensible and enlightening to every soldier; and this it was that Saint-Just understood and translated into acts.

He was twenty-five years old when he made the first notes for his *Republican Institutions*. This work, however, was not to be completed. The manuscript of his last speech, which he was not able to finish, on the 9th Thermidor, ended with a decree demanding the immediate realization of the 'Institutions'. These he based on an idea completely foreign to the French character. A community, he said, is held together not so much by its laws as by the institutions created by authority. The law, however much it goes into details, can never embrace the whole of human life and all the intricacies of its relations with the Universe. The State should not content itself with taking cog-

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nizance of men's activities only in so far as they impinge on the Republic, but must embrace the whole man from his birth and in his entirety. The task of authority in the ideal Republic was of a pedagogical rather than a juridical nature. 'In a Monarchy', he said, 'there is nothing but a Government. In a Republic there are also Institutions—whether to comprise the sphere of morals or to arrest the corruption of morals or of men. A State that lacks Institutions is only an illusory Republic. Since everyone understands by liberty the independence of his own passions and avarice, the citizens become predatory and egoistic; and thus the individual conception that each man, according to his interests, has of his freedom leads to the enslavement of all. We have a Government; we have this in common with Europe, in so far as we have authorities and a public administration. But Institutions, which are the soul of the Republic, we lack.'

It can be seen how far his spirit was from the Liberalism under whose sign the upheaval had begun. Laws regulate the relations between man and the State, as between two equal powers; the most essential aspects of his existence are at a man's own disposal. Institutions, on the other hand, implied State organization of men's lives carried into the most secret recesses of their private existence. 'Institutions have as their object the practical establishment of social and individual guarantees for the avoidance of dissension and violence; they are to substitute the power of morals for the power of men.' There were still too many laws and too few Institutions. The latter suppressed liberty in the liberal sense; the individual was not merely to obey the laws, but his whole character was to be made obedient, so that the maintenance of social order by specific laws would become superfluous. In a word, the citizens of the State were to cease ordering their own lives, watching over their own



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consciences, and forming their own ideas; all that, by means of the Institutions, was to be taken over by the State.

In order to free men from the modern snares of despotism, civilization, and vice—Rousseau's three categories—the restoration of France to the condition of a purely agrarian State was to be attempted. The people, squandering themselves in 'manufacture and sickness', had to be forcibly led back to their original peasant condition. Man had not been created to live in workshops and factories, nor in hospital; his hands had been fashioned simply and solely for the use of weapons or the plough. All men must work; wealth was a 'vileness'; destitution was to be remedied by the distribution of the national goods among the poor. Restrictions on the circulation of money and hoarding were to be punished; all taxes throughout the country were to be levied on the same day. 'Every Frenchman should be enabled to pay for the most elementary necessities without becoming dependent on anyone but the law and without reciprocal dependence in civil relations.' Finally, the public authorities were to be limited in number and if possible replaced by individual persons, so that as far as possible the place of an authoritative body would be taken by a single official or judge.

These were the conditions that had to be fulfilled before the actual Institutions could be established and start working. Saint-Just had only roughly sketched the vast plan of organization that was to embrace every phase of life and regulate everything down to the smallest detail, but its broad outlines stood out clearly.

'Children up to five years old belong to their mothers, and afterwards, till their death, to the Republic.

'The education of children between ten and sixteen is military and agricultural. . . . They are divided into companies of sixty. Six companies form a battalion. Every month the teachers

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appoint a leader from amongst those who have behaved themselves best. . . . They are distributed amongst the workers during harvest time. They learn all military exercises and annually on the day of the Festival of Youth assemble in camps, where in specially prepared arenas they undergo infantry training. . . . All children wear the same clothing until their sixteenth year. From their sixteenth to their twenty-first year they wear working-clothes, then uniform until their twenty-fifth year.

‘Every man aged twenty-one is obliged to declare in the temple who are his friends. If a man gives up a friend, he is obliged to state the reasons before the people in the temple.’

‘A man and a woman who love one another are married. Married people are obliged to give three months’ notice of their divorce in the temple.’

There then follow numerous provisions on guardianship, adoption, inheritance, contracts. The last chapter concludes with the sentence: ‘The law does not make right, right makes the law’.

In the Criminal Institutions: ‘Drunkenness shall be punished. Whoever in a state of insobriety does or says anything illegal shall be banished.

‘Murderers shall wear black for the rest of their lives. If they leave off these clothes they shall be put to death.’

Saint-Just also gives much prominence to public festivals, rewards, competitions and insignia:

‘Men who have always lived blamelessly shall wear a white scarf from their sixtieth year.

‘The citizens assemble in the temples to inquire into the private life of officials and of young people under twenty-one.

‘Every citizen shall once a year render account in the temple of the manner in which he has employed his possessions.

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‘Every landowner who practises no profession and does not act as a judge is obliged to till the soil from his twenty-fifth to his fiftieth year.

‘A soldier must never return to his birthplace if he has quitted his post in battle, or lost his weapon, or deserted, or committed a breach of discipline, or complained of hardships. A father who embraces a son who has shown cowardice forfeits his scarf of old age.

‘Camps are forbidden to women on pain of death.

‘The merits of generals shall not be praised till the end of the war.’

In this Revolutionary thought the Government had a peculiar position. It was by no means the apex of the State, but rather an administrative organ. Supreme power was in the hands of the people; not the masses, but ‘the people’ as a political conception. Robespierre saw it incarnated in the Jacobin Society, but Saint-Just looked forward to a future when there would be a court of appeal representing the people’s will and controlling the Government—the Roman institution of Censors. These Censors were not to intervene in the exercise of State power or the administration; they were to have no other office but supervision. This is further evidence that the foundation of the State dreamed of by the terrorists was not law, but opinion.

‘In every Revolution a Dictator is necessary, to save the State by force, or else Censors, to save it by virtue.

‘One must frighten those who govern; one should never frighten the people.

‘The Censors are forbidden to speak in public. Modesty and strict austerity are their virtues. They are inflexible. They summon the officials to give account of their conduct. They de-

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nounce all abuses and all injustice on the part of the Government. They must not extenuate or pardon anything.'

And then this memory of the Constitution of 1793, which never came into force: 'Insurrection is the exclusive right of the people and the citizen.' But Saint-Just added, hesitant and groping, as if he doubted: 'Insurrections that break out in a free State are often dangerous to freedom itself. . . .'

Enough; this immense, presumptuous work remained unfinished. Like the arch of an unfinished bridge it jutted dangerously and dizzily over the broad stream of the future. Saint-Just had jotted it down piecemeal—in the pauses in sittings of the Convention, on the edge of a writing-table in the Committee of Public Safety, on short walks, at the camp-fires of the Army. When he took out his little book to write, the others—members of the Convention, generals or officials—thought he was taking note of those whom he wished to send to the scaffold. But instead it was these metallic dreams, these Spartan visions, belonging entirely to the future and designed to call forth a new mankind. He was a lawgiver, but not of this world. On the smooth, rocky walls of his soul there was no place for doubt or uncertainty, and no stone broke loose to roll into the abyss.

Did he dream of happiness? At any rate not of happiness for himself. He was always speaking of Lycurgus, the ancient lawgiver, 'who with inexorable severity forged the well-being of his people and then exiled himself'. So also he wished one day to quit, without a look behind, the steely paradise created by his own pitiless hand.

'Calmly to stride along through blood and tears'—who could it be but he? Not even Robespierre was always free from doubt. The latter experienced outbreaks of rage at the stupidity of his associates and knew hours of discouragement or conflict.

## THE STEELY BLAST

Saint-Just was not the man to go to Ermenonville and contemplate, under the trees that shade Rousseau's last refuge, that sadness the autumnal breath of which rests on all life. He was the angel of death, standing silently at the gates of the Revolution and looking into the future. Not a future made up of the many small hopes and fears of mortal man, but a future in which all reckonings would be paid, all enigmas find an answer, all fruits ripen, and all passions be consumed in the colourless flame of perfection. The torn battlefield of history seemed in this young man's imagination a gigantic drawing-board awaiting compass and ruler. And if asked why his hand did not tremble, how he did not fear the reaction of his own blood, whence came his god-like assurance, he would answer without raising his voice: 'I despise the dust of which I am made'.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A PARISIAN SUMMER

Paris lay under the burning breath of the summer of 1794. Five years of Revolution had left their mark on the countenance of the city, which was blackened with smoke and deeply furrowed. Neither the Municipality nor the citizens could afford to arrest the decay. The roofs were carelessly patched, the paving was loose, the gardens were overgrown, many trees had been felled for firewood, the plaster and paint of the house-fronts was dilapidated, and the pale yellow that gives their tone to the lodging-houses was as unrecognizable under the dirt as the delicate silver-grey stone of the public buildings and palaces. There were many ruins; the Bastille had long ago been demolished, but the façade of the Tuileries still showed some good big holes and was in many places blackened with powder and fire. People were not sparing of musket-balls in those years and visitors liked to leave their mark on the walls of houses. Many monuments had disappeared, tyrants on foot or on horseback had been thrown from their pedestals, innumerable street-names had been daubed over, crucifixes and sacred pictures had been removed, many stained-glass windows had been shattered and not replaced, railings had been taken away to be melted down. From earlier festivals there remained dilapidated erections or symbolic statues made of bad materials—goddesses with enormous breasts, who were gradually dissolving and at the next heavy rain would soften and collapse altogether.

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Nevertheless Paris—the old Paris—clung to life, which was still so precarious and so precious. There was hardly any bread; people stood patiently in long queues from earliest dawn at the strongly bolted doors of the bakeries in order to get the small amount available when the shops opened. A few National Guards were usually on duty to prevent quarrels. In their threadbare uniforms, the red trimmings of which were nearly as black with dirt as the white shoulder-belts, and their shapeless cocked hats they looked almost as wretched as everyone else. The wait was long; and during those weeks it grew hot soon after sunrise. When the shops were opened a feverish rush began, and the fear of not getting any bread was an almost physical phenomenon, like the sweat and dust of the crowd.

Many of the waiting people complained—prudently not of the Convention, whose interference had driven goods from the markets, but of the English or the traitors. Some read as they stood, others joked or paid court to their neighbours. A man absent-mindedly moving his lips must be a former priest in spite of his workman's clothes, and an old woman who seemed neither to see nor hear what was going on about her, but clasped her shawl anxiously round her breast with her all-too-white hand, was surely a *ci-devant*—a countess or *marquise*—who had survived. Things did not always happen so quietly; often rough fellows brusquely pushed aside the waiting people, forced themselves to the front and hammered on the shops with their thick knotted sticks until the shop-fronts fell in. Sometimes the crowd flung itself with such greed on a wine-ship lying alongside the quay that it sank before a single cask could be unloaded. All depôts, granaries, slaughterhouses, and markets were strictly guarded by troops, otherwise they would long since have been sacked.

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There was no bread, no meat, no soap, no milk, no fat, and there were no shoes, but still life went on. People lived feverishly, either too much or too little. There were people who could not stay even half-an-hour at home, but went out early in the morning, first to wait for their bread, then to take a glimpse at the court-room of the Revolutionary Tribunal, perhaps even listening to the proceedings for a quarter of an hour, gnawing their bread and staring at the hastily condemned prisoners. Then they would walk on the muddy bank of the Seine, because the river brought a fresh breeze and soothed secret fears with its incessant movement. Entering a café on the Quai Voltaire or the Odéon they would not let themselves be drawn into conversation, as the other customers might be spies; then, continuing along the right bank, they would go in to listen to the speeches at the Convention and fall asleep from fatigue, until some patriot shook them up when Robespierre mounted the tribune. Coming out, they would go to the courtyard of the Palais de Justice, where the tumbrils for the day's executions were being loaded, and perhaps follow the first tumbril a little until it turned off into the Rue Honoré, when they would enter another café to read the latest number of the *Révolution de Paris* or the *Thermomètre du Jour*. Then they would hurriedly eat a bad meal at a cook-shop on the *boulevard*, and finish up at the meeting-place of the Jacobins to see the famous men arrive for the evening session.

There were others who had not left their rooms for months, who paced up and down between their four walls in shabby dressing-gowns, fed the cats from the gutters, and had their scanty nourishment brought them by an old servant-woman, refusing to listen to her reports of the latest events. The noise of the streets reached them muffled from below. When they heard



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shots or cries or the hoof-beats of galloping horses they did not lean out to look. Church-bells were heard no more, but the tocsin or the alarm-gun was all the more frequent. They had sworn to take little notice of all that; they read in their prayer-books or their Livy, wrote no letters, received no one, and knew day and night only as a mirage above the roofs of Paris. Both classes, the restless and the buried, unwilling to face reality, were continually fighting against deep despair.

Most people, however, lived or at least tried to live as they had always done. The essential thing was not to offend: not to make oneself remarked either by too much zeal or by too much indifference, to be neither too well nor too badly clothed, and never to express an opinion of one's own—in a word, to try to get oneself overlooked, or even forgotten. A man who did not live right in the centre of the city could pursue his avocations for weeks on end without noticing the Revolution much—except for the lack of bread; and of course it was necessary to have a valid certificate of citizenship in one's pocket. Paris did nothing, worried about nothing, and tried to live as if everything were the same.

Paris believed every day that the Revolution was over and at the same time believed that it never would be over. Life must be continued at any price. If there was not enough bread or beef to be bought, there were superfluous vanities—the beautifully striped silks that were then so much the fashion, ornaments and perfumes. Musical instruments, too, and books found a good market, and painters would have had plenty to do if they had not been eternally painting noble Roman senators, virtuous Lucretias and sombre Brutuses. The children did not have enough butter and milk, but got plenty of toys—mannikins with a caricature of Pitt's face or tin soldiers modelled on the heroes

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of Jemappes and Wattignies. It was incredible how many business people took advantage of the political situation and did not even scruple to offer for sale to children little wooden guillotines. The latter were ingenious toys—you pulled the string, the knife fell and the doll lost its head; it was not much of a success, however, and the inventor did not grow rich.

No one understood how the proprietors of the good restaurants still kept themselves provisioned. At Méot's, Véry's and Naudet's the old menu was still to be found, several pages long. For a small bundle of *assignats*—hardly bigger than a brick—one could get a sturgeon *au vin blanc*, chicken and rice, three fried sheep's kidneys, *haricots verts* and *purée* of peas, cheese, ice, a bottle of Clos-Vougeot and liqueurs. At Deharme's in Rue des Grands-Augustins the fire under the stockpot had never gone out: for many decades the broth had been bubbling incessantly in the immense receptacle, while it was continually being filled up with fresh chickens and capons to increase the strength of the brew. Night or day one could go in and order a chicken steeped in that divine broth. At Leblanc's in Rue de la Harpe there were still the famous Bayonne hams, the smallest of which weighed 20 lb. At Beauvilliers' under the arcades of the Palais-Royal one could choose from 168 different soups, meat dishes, vegetables and sweets. No wonder people poured in. Nevertheless the restaurant keepers did not have an easy time of it; they had to have trade connexions who turned night into day and knew all the ramifications of an illicit trade. The famous Véry himself was at the moment in prison again, but he was so indispensable that his clients hoped to see him back soon, to watch him carve game, or fillet a pike, or devoutly pour out Chambertin. The noble art of cooking was becoming democratized, for the great chefs of the noble families had been

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obliged to abandon their age-old vaults under the palaces of the Faubourg St. Germain and practise their exclusive art for the benefit of the crowd that could pay.

As the summer grew daily hotter and more glaring Paris lived in the streets. The restaurant-keepers moved out their tables into the open air, so far as was possible on the uneven *pavé* sloping towards the middle of the streets, and served passers-by with ices, apple *beignets*, or glasses of sparkling Saumur. Unfortunately many people still could not get rid of the habit of throwing their refuse into the street, where dogs continually searched the gutters; and the smell during the heat of the day was stifling. A man peacefully consuming his mid-day meal at a table in the open would often suddenly draw his sword to transfix a rat that was after the refuse between his feet, while frightened women climbed on to chairs or clung to their companions.

Lemonade-sellers went by ringing their bells and flower-women offered loving couples their quickly fading wares. Young officers in narrow clinging trousers and brass helmets adorned with leopard skin sauntered arm-in-arm through the crowd and stared insolently from under their hats at the young girls. A pale, austere woman, surely a former noble, offered fine Dutch lace for sale; and a delicate old man, cooking pancakes on his portable oven, looked as if the house in whose capacious porch he had taken up his stand had once belonged to him. A group of prisoners passed by guarded by mounted gendarmes; and the curiosity with which the crowd gazed at them was directed, not at their probable fate, but at their clothing. Some wore sleeveless jackets of goatskin, others were naked under a black vest of hairy wool with two rows of silver buttons; some went barefoot, others in wooden shoes lined

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with straw. Their greasy hair, filled with chaff and dust, fell on their shoulders. Dully and indifferently they stared before them, taking no notice of the crowds that filled the streets. Apparently they were peasants from Vendée or Poitou who had fought for their priests and their King, and having for some reason escaped summary justice on the spot had been brought to Paris for a final decision.

The Palais-Royal remained as before the centre of amusements. Hotels, fashionable shops, gaming-clubs, lodging-houses, reading-rooms, dance halls and, last but not least, the waxworks of M. Curtius filled the overflowing passages of the huge building. The gardens and arcades were the headquarters of prostitutes, tricksters and pickpockets, of philosophers and political tub-thumpers. Street orators climbed on to chairs and quickly collected groups of listeners, among whom there were always one or two police agents. Pamphlets were hawked round and the latest books lay about everywhere to be looked through. A ceaseless uproar of voices and laughter filled the alleys and gardens.

The pretty women seductively displayed their teeth as they smiled and languorously moved their long limbs clothed in flowing peplums made of transparent *tulle*. Their naked feet were encased in red leather sandals, their hair fell on to their necks in innumerable stiff little curls, and beautifully woven shawls adorned with golden bees or flowers slid from their bare shoulders and trailed on the ground. Broad-brimmed hats with ribbons and feathers were still to be seen, but small bonnets, narrow turbans, or flat caps were already coming in, and even the Phrygian cap appeared in decorative variations. Fashion was perplexed and continually searching for something, borrowing from the Greeks and Romans, or its own idea of them,

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from the Turks, the Spaniards and from soldiers' or huntsmen's dress. There was one dominant motive, however: to expose the feminine form, showing up the movement of the limbs, revealing the turn of the hips and the alternation of the thighs, and allowing the wind to press the light envelope of muslin and organdie against the naked body. The *modiste* Lisfrand and her colleagues grew daily more daring; underclothes disappeared bit by bit, and it was as if a feverish desire had seized all these luscious beauties, who seemed to whisper: 'Take me, before it is too late'.

Before it is too late! Death was always round the corner, ready to acquit these poor mortals of the reproach of debauchery and immodesty. Blood-red sashes were worn *à la victime*; there were enamelled brooches in the form of a bundle of rods with the lictor's axe, and earrings representing a tiny golden guillotine. Those long necks with their immaculate whiteness seemed made to be adorned with a small red ribbon 'no broader than the back of a knife'. By arousing their desire the women seemed to be urging the citizens to drown themselves in the waters of oblivion. The men, who carried a pistol in each pocket and hid their faces in the high collars of their broad coats, offered the women only a pair of gleaming eyes, with their long hair drawn forward over their temples as if by the wind, and enormous gold earrings dangling from their ears. Officers in disintegrated uniforms; commissars in immense feathered hats with their chins sunk in neckerchiefs as big as horse collars and their broadswords trailing on the ground; pale youngsters with daggers hidden under their shirts—all drank in with feverish looks the beauty of the naked flesh, for they were the guillotined or the fallen of to-morrow. The knife was sharpened and the bullets were cast for them; life was no

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longer anything—life was everything. The urge to mere survival was very strong, for there weighed on Paris the terrible leaden weight of ever-present death. In the largest and finest square of the city the guillotine had stood for many months past and the blood of the condemned flowed daily. Every day fresh batches were brought from the prisons, though these never grew any emptier. ‘The cemeteries, not the prisons,’ Saint-Just had declared, ‘must be filled.’ And although haste was made to obey this instruction there still remained hundreds of thousands of prisoners. In the lists kept at the prisons, after the names of the arrested persons the reasons for their arrest were always given: ‘Has in his house cups with the Queen’s picture’; ‘Has a prayer-book printed with the crown and lilies’; ‘Does not believe in the good deeds of the Revolution’; ‘Does not go about with decent people’; or simply: ‘Is an egoist’.

Whoever, on going down the steps in front of his dwelling, saw a gendarme coming up, grew pale; his heart stood still as he leaned against the railing with cold sweat on his brow—and then was filled with savage joy if the gendarme knocked at the floor below his. Every official communication was opened with mortal fear, every unknown visitor made the heart beat faster, every sight of a condemned man raised the question: ‘Who will be the next?’ or: ‘When will my turn come?’ A man on going to sleep in his bed had the feeling of having gained a day of life, though fear pursued him even into his sleep; he would suddenly start up, wide awake, his heart thumping in terror, while outside the dawn—pale stone-grey dawn—was breaking.

Every afternoon the tumbrils rolled along the Rue Honoré with the condemned. The owners of the shops, cafés and businesses in that fine, well-to-do street complained vigorously that the daily repeated spectacle only attracted the rabble, frightened

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away the good public, and was ruining trade in the most important business district of Paris. People were already saying that the guillotine must shortly be removed to the south-eastern side of the city, by the turnpike *du Trône*, now called *du Trône renversé*. Meanwhile the sad procession went every day from the Conciergerie over the river, then along the Rue Honoré as far as the Rue Nationale, formerly the Rue Royale, which joined the Place de la Révolution. There, between the pedestal of the equestrian statue of Louis XV—on which a goddess of liberty, half washed away by rain, now sat—and the terrace of the Tuileries Gardens, facing the Rue Fromentin, rose the scaffold of execution. Beneath the wooden scaffold there was always a great pool of blood, which was never quite soaked up by the sand liberally strewn there and which attracted all the wandering dogs. When it rained everything was washed away and the reddened water poured into the gutters, where the dogs did themselves well, leaving their bloodstained footprints everywhere. Chaumette had complained to the town clerk about this and had obtained a ruling that dogs in that neighbourhood must be kept on a lead. When his own blood was added to the pool, therefore, things had been improved. Nevertheless on hot days the west wind carried a horrible stench of recent death to the inner city.

A person condemned by the Revolutionary Tribunal in the morning was taken to his death the same afternoon; he had not long to wait. It was worse for those who were condemned after the midday interval, for they could not die until the next day. The tumbrils were generally ordered at the beginning of the day, for acquittals were as good as impossible. The Public Prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville, was an industrious man; he worked sixteen hours a day, slept for a few hours on a mattress

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in his office, and was the first to be back at his desk. Before the beginning of the session there generally appeared an older man, heavily built and with a stern, almost spiritual air, in the passages of the law-courts, to inquire the prospective programme of the day. It was Sanson, the executioner of Paris; a busy man, for he had to order the right amount of tumbrils, horses, baskets, ropes, sand and assistants. This was not always easy; the suppliers charged him usurious prices, and in spite of the prevailing patriotic zeal substitutes could only be had for high wages. But Sanson was always punctually in his place; everything went like clockwork and no one had ever had the slightest occasion to complain of the manner in which he discharged his task. Fouquier-Tinville, a true bureaucrat, could appreciate such reliability.

After the sentence the persons condemned to death were taken into a special room at the Conciergerie, where they were prepared for execution and where those who were to die the following day spent their last night. For the men a room in the chancery of the prison had been partitioned for this purpose; the newly arrived prisoners, while their particulars were being taken down, could see through the wooden barrier those who were leaving the prison for ever. Count Beugnot has described this in his *Memoirs*. 'On the day I arrived two men were awaiting the arrival of the executioner. They had been relieved of their coats, their hair was dishevelled, and their necks were arranged. Their features were not at all distorted. Whether consciously or not, they held their hands in the position in which they were going to be bound and attempted proud and disdainful attitudes. Some mattresses spread on the floor showed that they had spent the night there and thus had already undergone a long torment. Nearby were the remains of their last



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meal. Their coats lay about, and two candles that had not yet been extinguished fought against the daylight, so that the scene was lit only by the light of death.' A few steps along the vaulted passage blackened with the flames of faggots was the small, windowless room containing the women condemned to death. Here their hair was cut off and their hands were bound, and here they spent their last hours.

Life was over. Above in the court-room there had still been hope; questions were asked and it was worth while holding one's head up and giving a firm answer. But there in that dark room, scantily lit with oil-lamps, with the baskets for cut-off hair and the fetters lying ready with the blood of the previous day hardly washed off, where the cold scissors of the executioner touched the bent necks, it was different! Who knew what death was? Not the death that would one day come to one in bed, a release from fatigue, but the death that was like a machine, that was an institution, having its instruments and its personnel; death dealt out *en masse*; death that was swift, orderly and impersonal—no going to sleep, no release, but an official arrangement in which all had been carefully thought out except one thing: that life was splendid.

Terribly pale, with wide-open eyes, a woman lay on the wooden bench and thought. She could not think much, but her brain for ever repeated: 'Never more, never more!' Further than this she could not get; she was in no condition to imagine what was to be never more, though yesterday she knew that she would have loved once more to see her little child sleeping—once more to have pressed her face against the shoulder of her beloved, her eyes fast closed in crimson darkness, her arm round his neck—and to have remained thus for all eternity. Happy was he who could weep—who could moan, sob and

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gulp until his throat ached and his head throbbed. One's own weeping deflected one's thoughts; could it be true that everything was over, though one was only twenty-eight years old? Surely something would happen, something would rise up out of the complete darkness, and life would be sweet once more! Then one would never again do evil, never again be foolish and cruel, never cause another to suffer. All this could not be true! The gendarme sitting there smoking his pipe was a man after all; the other women there could not all have to die; the man who came along with the scissors and as he passed threw a couple of blonde plaits into a basket could not mean it seriously. God, one should have prayed more! All one's life one should have prayed more! It was summer in Paris, and in the Rue de Tournon that evening there was to be a community dinner in the open air. The lanterns would flicker in the gentle breeze, glasses would be clinked and healths drunk to the Republic. It would be a warm summer's night. How was it possible that people could go on living outside without thinking of those in prison! How could they go to sleep, how could they be happy, leaving them there to die—they who were quite innocent. How slowly time passed!

The carts halted outside before the iron gates of the Cour de Mai. Sanson was there in person, going through the list drawn up by the Court and giving the gaoler a receipt. It was swarming with people: friends and relations who wished to bid a dumb farewell to the victims; gendarmes and clerks; and finally the inquisitive, who came there every day to see how 'to-day's lot' behaved. For during those months in Paris there was a crowd of people who never missed these spectacles, who either waited there in the courtyard or on the route taken by the carts, or else swarmed round the scaffold in the Place de la Révolu-

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tion to get a good view. Who were these people? Were they diseased with love of blood and pain? Were they a brutalized mob out to pass the time? Were they fanatics who wanted to see the blood of the 'conspirators' flow? Or were they a rabble, paid twenty *sous* apiece to conceal with shouts of '*Vive la République!*' and 'Down with the traitors!' the rapidly rising disgust at the never-ending atrocities? In fact there were some of each kind, but they were almost always the same people; they formed a crowd of *habitués* of executions and the smallness of their number acquits Paris of the shame of having loved the spectacle of the pains of death.

Paris tried to look the other way and not think about it, but this could not always be done. It was impossible to avoid the most important business quarter of the city. Every now and then a mother, coming with her little boy out of a confectioner's, was unable to cross the Rue de la Route because a cart was just passing on its way to the place of execution; or else an old couple leaving the Church of St. Roch had to remain at the top of the steps because the latter were blocked with spectators. There were good people who followed the procession as if paralysed and under a magic spell, and could not tear themselves away until the last head had fallen under the triangular knife. There were people who went there to 'become strong', and others who had no idea why they were there. On 'big days' the whole of Paris was naturally afoot, and curiosity to see Danton or the Queen for the last time—in many cases for the first time too—overcame all delicacy or horror. What did these people see? A cart full of bound people, usually quiet, almost proud, and resigned to their fate. How seldom it happened that one of the condemned revolted against his fate! And if those who had to die took it so calmly, why should the survivors get excited?

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If all the condemned had cried out, struggled, and appealed to the sympathy of the spectators as shrilly as Mme. Dubarry did—poor old thing—the authorities would have had to provide a larger force of men to escort the tumbrils.

A police spy whose duty it was to observe the effect of the executions on the populace was in favour of having the carts go the same way every day, as then 'the weak could keep away'. One day a woman fell unconscious at the mere sight and the crowd indignantly gathered round. Next day the spy referred to the circumstance, 'because the aristocrats, who cleverly make use of everything, take advantage of incidents like the one reported yesterday to draw the attention of the people cunningly to the great number of executions, and if possible to arouse their pity for the fate of their enemies and bring hatred upon those who are preparing their own triumph. "One can no longer go out", they say, "without running into the guillotine or those who are being taken to it. Children are becoming cruel and it is to be feared that pregnant women may give birth to infants marked on the neck or lifeless as statues, from having witnessed these sad things." The people usually receive these speeches, in which they see only good faith and humanity, with a deeply thoughtful demeanour; and this may lead to their having ideas and feelings opposed to those which they should have.'

The only way into and out of the Conciergerie led through a small dark courtyard, which was lower than the large Cour de Mai. A flight of ten steps led to the iron grill separating the two courts. The carts halted at the grill while Sanson, standing in the smaller courtyard, summoned the condemned persons to mount the steps. As soon as the last cart was loaded he folded up the warrant of execution signed by Fouquier-Tinville, put

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it in his pocket, and gave the order to start. The mounted escort drew their swords, the rabble crowding the steps of the Palais de Justice yelled: '*Vive la République!*' and the carts crossed the great courtyard, rolled through the massive iron gates, and turned left down towards the river. One day a man with shaved neck and bound wrists, named Gossin, ran after the carts, calling out: 'Take me too! I have been condemned!' The carts halted, while silence paralysed the crowd. The condemned men seemed to have forgotten their own misfortune and gazed curiously at the man who with wild cries was demanding his own death. 'What is your name?' asked the executioner, pulling out his list. 'François Gossin.' The executioner sought in vain and then pushed the man back: 'Go to the devil, you block-head, you're not here!' But the bound man would not be put off, moaning, with wild eyes: 'Yes, yes, I was condemned, take me too!' 'Get away, blast you!' said the executioner impatiently and was going to give the order to move on, when a judge came up and explained that the list was not complete and that Gossin had in fact been condemned. The latter then clambered eagerly on to the last cart; but hardly had the procession started moving again when the unfortunate man came to his senses and understood what he had done. 'Oh! my wife and children!' he cried out in horror as the carts rattled pitilessly across the bridge to the right bank.

Slowly they went towards their death. The condemned were nearly always calm. Many shrugged their shoulders when the populace shouted abuse at them and some even answered back; others looked with interest at the streets, the houses and the spectators on the steps and in the windows, like Charlotte Corday, who had never seen Paris and looked with a certain curiosity at the fine shops and swarming life. Most of them, however,

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stared silently in front of them, their eyes shining in terribly pale faces, or wept softly to themselves. Hardly ever did one of these unfortunates try to struggle against his fate, even at the last moment. This curious paralysis testified to their consciousness, not only of the immense power of the State, but also of the elemental force of the Revolution, to which men succumbed as if to a force of Nature. 'The condition of paralysis', said a contemporary, 'was so strong that if one had said to a condemned person: "Go home now and wait for the cart, which will come round to-morrow morning to fetch you", he would have gone home, and next morning at the appointed time would have climbed on to the cart.' Most of the condemned looked disfigured by the rough haircutting of the executioner, and with their collars torn open and thrust back; many wore slippers or were barefoot, and some wore nothing under their waistcoats; only the women paid some attention to their appearance and hid their shorn hair under a cap. There were some who murmured prayers half-aloud and in great haste, without opening their eyes; while others sought among the crowd for the faithful priest in civilian clothing who followed the procession and, by a sign of the hand or the eyes, gave absolution.

The heavy springless carts jolted over the irregular cobbles. The way was long. They passed the Church of the Oratorians, the fine façade of which was blackened with age; the church doors were open, ready to receive the last prayers of the dying. Here, on 16th October, when the Queen was being taken to her death, stood a mother who held up her little fair-haired baby so that it could kiss its hand to the Queen. In front of the Palais-Egalité, the former Palais Royal, there was always more of a crowd—mostly pitiless people inclined to shout sarcastic

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abuse. The best place was on the steps of the church of St. Roch; there stood the really hardened shouters—the women who on seeing the Queen spat into their hands and tried to throw the spittle at the unfortunate woman. The executioner was more humane; he would advise the victims to support themselves against the rails, instead of letting themselves be rocked to and fro by the jolting of the cart. Or, when he noticed that someone could hardly breathe for fear or was trying to prevent himself from trembling, he would attempt a polite smile and say apologetically: ‘A long way, isn’t it?’ Charlotte Corday smiled at this question and shrugged her shoulders indifferently—though Sanson meant it well.

At last the cart turned into the Rue Nationale, bringing the Place de la Révolution in sight. Against the broad horizon, the summer clearness of which was slightly obscured by a silver mist, there stood out sharp and slender the shape of the guillotine. That was the moment when the condemned felt anew the full horror of their interminable agony. Their eyes suddenly filled with fear; all at once the blood left their heads, and the world seemed to have become dumb and dead. They no longer heard the jolting of the cart, nor the murmur of the distant crowd, but were aware only of the gentle summer breeze, the voice of a bird, and the pale-blue expanse of a sky that made them homesick, divided though it was by the towering instrument.

The great square was humming with life. A cordon of gendarmes formed a ring round the scaffold, so that one had to be very close to distinguish the proceedings clearly. The *habitués* were there in force, including the work-shy rabble of the suburbs and some women, regular termagants, who had brought camp stools so as not to have to stand, and passed the time by

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knitting. But there were also well-dressed people—elegant fellows accompanied by made-up women. A police report thus described them: ‘Nearly all had eye-glasses and they were always changing their places so as to be where they could see best. Some had climbed up steps and others on to carriages, at five *sous* a place. A fine company!’ On the terrace of the Tuileries Gardens, from which there was a good view, there was even a restaurant called ‘The Guillotine’, where the names of those who were to be executed that day appeared on the back of the menu.

The guillotine rose up—slender, almost elegant, and high in the air between the two planks hung the triangular knife. The wood, which was painted red, was good wood, and the nails and fastenings were of copper, so as not to rust. The whole apparatus was an instrument of precision, carefully designed and executed. It had been made by an Alsatian called Tobias Schmidt, who was by profession a piano-maker, but now had his hands full with his new speciality. He was expert in fine woodwork designed neither to warp with moisture nor come loose with usage. He earned a small fortune in this way, which he squandered in a few years with a pretty dancer. The executioner’s assistants were hefty fellows, with their sleeves rolled up above their muscular arms and Phrygian caps on their heads. One of them generally held a rose between his teeth. Sanson looked after them well and was always demanding an increase in their salary, as they had a hard life and got their clothes and shoes spoilt by the blood. Admittedly they did their work cleverly and with great speed. Never did they make a false step; never was the mechanical exactness of their *tempo* relaxed. Each execution took just under a minute.

The Abbé Carrichon, who accompanied to the scaffold the



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ladies of the Noailles family in order to give them absolution from a distance, could not, after fulfilling his pious duty, tear himself away from the further progress of the horrible spectacle. 'In scarlet red streams', he said, 'the blood poured out of the necks.' As if spellbound he stared at the slaughter, though he was a pious and a good man. He describes what followed: 'I was just going away when the appearance, expression and height of the next victim made me stop a moment. He was a man of 5 ft. 8 in. or 9 in., strongly built, with a very imposing face. He stood to one side while the others were being executed in order to see what happened. His demeanour aroused curiosity. He walked firmly up and looked fearlessly at the executioner, the board on which he was to lie, and the instrument of death—perhaps even with too proud a look.' Then came an old man's turn. 'The chief executioner took him by the left arm, the first assistant by the right arm, the second seized him by the legs; he was laid on his belly, the head fell, and the body was thrown into a great cart where everything was running in blood.' And so it went on.

Sanson called up the victims one by one. The first mounted the steps to the scaffold, his silhouette appearing above the heads of the crowd. Silence fell: the newsvendors grew quiet; the Republican community-songs, which had been going on to while away the time, ceased; the people in the front rows took off their hats—not out of respect, but so that those behind could see better; and the bells of the lemonade-sellers and the cries of the cake-sellers were hushed. This was the moment chosen by pickpockets to steal the watches and purses of the inquisitive, for everyone was absorbed in looking at the unfortunates who were seeing the light of day for the last time. The executioners seized them one after the other, strapped them to the board,

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which pivoted horizontally, and fastened the iron semicircle round their necks. For a terrible fraction of a second they looked down with vanishing consciousness into the fearful sack in which, streaming with blood, with gaping mouths and wide-open eyes, the severed heads lay. Then the heavy blade slid down—‘a steely blast’—the board swung up, the headless body was unstrapped and thrown into a great basket, and while Sanson wound up the triangular knife again his assistants seized the next man. Again, in rapid succession, the three heavy blows rang out: the swing down of the board, the closing of the iron semicircle, the fall of the blade: three swift strokes of death.

The first person died quickly; but how did the others endure their time of waiting? Mme. Elisabeth, the King’s sister, was the last to die of a large batch. Mme. de Crussol, whose name was called just before hers, curtsied deeply and asked her for the favour of being allowed to kiss her. ‘Willingly and with all my heart’, answered the Princess, and she extended her cheek for a farewell kiss to each victim before she climbed the bloodstained steps. With firmness she met her own death. When the executioner wished to tear away the cloth that covered her breast, she replied: ‘In the name of your mother, *Monsieur*, let me stay covered!’ They were her last words. Many died so bravely that a Revolutionary newspaper exclaimed: ‘The intrepidity with which the counter-revolutionaries who have been condemned by the law go to their death is truly incredible and proves that crime has its heroes as well as virtue.’ A fellow-sufferer called to the aged Marshal de Mouchy: ‘Courage, *Monsieur le Maréchal!*’ to which he calmly replied: ‘When I was fifteen I mounted the breach for my King; now that I am eighty I shall mount the scaffold for my God!’ Adam Lux, of Mainz, who had once come to Paris with Forster as an enthusiastic Revolu-

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tionary and whose almost religious admiration for Charlotte Corday cost him his life, mounted the scaffold in ecstasy, for since Charlotte's execution it was for him 'only an altar on which victims were sacrificed'. Before he died he gave the kiss of peace to the executioner, causing him no little embarrassment. Danton's words of thunder to Sanson are well known: 'Show my head to the people; it's well worth while!' Not everyone was capable of such behaviour; few realized, however, that the eyes of the world were upon them. General Custine attached no importance to making an impression on posterity; the terrible injustice of which he had been the victim had broken his heart, and right up to the last moment he continued to weep silently, the bitter tears running into his moustache. Happy were those who were already half dead with fear and did not know what was happening to them. There were some condemned people who were helpless or paralysed with old age, and some had to be laid on their sides so that their execution could be carried out. Mme. Dubarry resisted to the last moment. 'Please, just a minute, executioner, just a minute!' she cried shrilly. The terrible thing was that her head did not fall at once; perhaps the blade had become blunt, but in any case an axe had to be used to finish off the grim work.

The platform overflowed with blood and a great pool formed on the ground. An assistant called Jacot swept the planks with a broom between each execution and amused himself by shaking it over the spectators, so that it rained red drops. When the last head had fallen the detachment of gendarmes retired, the crowd scattered and the baskets full of corpses were loaded on to a cart and taken to some cemetery, where the executioner's assistants, according to their right, divided among themselves the victims' clothes. Meanwhile a trench had been dug, into which the

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stripped corpses were emptied and covered with a layer of quicklime. This happened at the cemeteries at the Madeleine, Parc Monceau and Rue Pigalle. On the eve of the Festival of the Supreme Being the guillotine was moved to the south-eastern edge of the city. Somewhere in the district of Picpus a piece of garden was found in which a new trench was dug. One day roses were to grow there.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BUREAUCRACY OF DEATH

‘Whoever trembles is guilty!’ These words of Robespierre’s explain the irresistible power of the Terror. The worse the Terror became, the more France trembled; and the more France trembled, the worse became the Terror. The country felt itself handed over helpless to that deadly State power. There was no longer any possibility of reconciliation, as the idea for which Robespierre was fighting had long become inaccessible to all non-Jacobins. Eventually he himself began to suffer under that pitiless mechanism, and his soul became weary to death. Not that his faith in his truth grew weak, but he had never thought that mankind would resist it so strongly, though it was not so much the active resistance as the sheer impenetrability, the obstinate density of human nature, that surprised him. The sharpest scythe is eventually blunted by tangled, luxuriant vegetation. Robespierre was in such deadly earnest. He believed that men, unwilling to be good, wickedly and indolently refused the splendour of the knowledge he brought them, and that they would finally be engulfed in the swamp of their own indolence. What he did not understand was that men want to be happy and to live and that their desire for life, if not respected or at least taken into account, proves stronger than any political doctrine, however honest and well thought out.

If this man, who was by now almost unquestioned ruler of France, had been able to hear the confession of someone com-

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pletely in his confidence, he would have been staggered by the simplicity of human nature and the imperative power latent in life. But, propagating his doctrine through the fearful mechanism of politics and busying himself with the organization on a grand scale of men's salvation, instead of their mere happiness, he succeeded in contriving nothing but death. Though he fought against this development with all his strength he became ever deeper involved in it. From the spring of 1794 onwards this cry of lamentation appeared in all his speeches: 'Men do not want to be good, they would rather live!' 'My reason, not my heart, is beginning to have doubts of this Republic of Virtue which I have undertaken to set up!' It was your heart, poor Robespierre! You were deceiving yourself. Never was your heart more lonely and despairing than in those days when the year was daily increasing in sun, warmth and fruitfulness, while you felt deep within you that only the helmsman of death could take you over that sea of blood.

Robespierre was very much alone during those weeks. Sometimes he would sit for hours, as if paralysed, on his hard cane chair with a blank sheet of paper in front of him, quite unable to set to work. Or he would sit alone in the midday heat on the Terrace of the Feuillants, as if under a spell. The dusty trees of the Tuileries Gardens stood motionless; nobody was about; no voice, no sound, not even a bird's call was to be heard. Sitting there he might have thought he was alone in the world. The sun glowed and nothing threw any shadow. It was as though the air were filled with a God's lament. It was the hour of Pan, when the past becomes intelligible and the future visible. In that solitary midday moment Robespierre knew that posterity would reject him and misjudge his efforts, and his sense of injustice left a bitter taste in his mouth and must have

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nearly broken his heart. And yet he understood the hard judgment, because he recognized in a flash the cause of his damnation: it was the irrelevance of pure thought. He came to grief because of the curse which he was under of relating all thought to human society. It was not given to him to have a non-related idea—an idea not pressing for application, but existing in the void, sufficient in itself. All knowledge was materialized under his hand and translated into organization—into State. The result was—death! In that burning hour of Pan, isolating the dreamer more completely than the blackest night, he experienced for a moment the unknown bliss of pure thought. Ah! If Heaven had bestowed this happiness on him! Perhaps he would then have been sitting in some unknown corner, with no one to listen to him, while his thoughts, journeying into the Infinite, increased the immense constellation of Divine truth by yet another star!

Painful and yet blessed moments of knowledge! With this insight into his error there appeared a feeble gleam of reconciliation. Anyone who has erred so deeply dies willingly, and he who had extinguished so much life recognized in the presentiment of his own death something like an acquittal. Behind death as a political institution stood death as a release and a gateway to new knowledge. Pure thought—there it was, almost within reach of his hands. It filled the dreamer with inexpressible happiness. His lips murmured unconsciously the words that future poets were to utter on attaining the profundity of detached thought. That which was beautiful seemed blessed in itself. In that hour of sublime recognition mere events ceased to count. The overwhelming flood became static, as in a dream; sometimes it roared continuously—when he despaired. Sometimes he saw himself climbing down into a field of ruins, seek-

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ing amid the cornflowers and poppies a voice, the call of a flute, the gleam of the sea. There he sat on the bank, spoke to his reflection and awaited the hour when he would be consumed as a sacrifice. For he could not change himself. He remained what he was: a prophet and lawgiver.

Although Robespierre fought incessantly against the senseless cruelties and excesses committed in the name of the Terror, he continued to maintain its principles in full consciousness of their effect and without any limitations. To do him justice, the rigour of his law did not fall only on the innocent. Traitors did exist, and conspirators, and circles in touch with the foreign enemy; there were in the midst of Paris, a few yards from the Committee of Public Safety, bold and resolute men who maintained regular correspondence with the British Cabinet and the refugee Bourbons, sending messengers to Prussia and London and receiving agents with money and letters. There were plots for the maintenance of the civil war in Vendée and the liberation of the Dauphin. There was corruption eating into the innermost circles of the Revolution. There were fraudulent war-contractors who let the soldiers perish. There were speculators who made fortunes out of the famine. The country, in fact, was threatened from without and torn from within. 'You do not know', he cried to the Jacobins, 'that in your armies treason is rife. You do not know that with the exception of a few loyal generals only the soldiers are worth anything. At home the aristocracy is more dangerous than ever, for never was it so treacherous. Before, it attacked you in open fight, but to-day it is in your midst, concealed under the disguise of patriotism.'

It cannot be said that this picture of the dangers was exaggerated; but it was incomplete as an explanation of the Terror.



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For Robespierre the Terror was not merely a weapon, but also a principle. He raged not only against those who contrived plots against the Republic, but—much more—against those who never did anyone harm, but merely had the wrong opinions or were not sufficiently ardent Republicans. All his attempts to canalize the Terror amounted to self-deception, for it was just those who were in the criminal sense innocent who perished under his definition of what was punishable.

His violent repugnance to the proconsuls who ravaged the provinces as emissaries of the Convention had a tragic side. He had the upright Dubois-Crancé expelled from the Jacobins 'for having wished to spare the inhabitants of Lyons', but made no secret of his contempt for Fouché and Collot, who had not spared them. He had them recalled, as well as Tallien, who at Bordeaux, with the lovely Thérèse at his side, had had himself drawn through the streets in triumph; Barras and Fréron, too, who in the south had ran amok with money and blood; and Lebon, who had terrorized Arras and Cambrai. Nevertheless these creatures had merely carried out his own idea, which was not to punish, but to annihilate. The Convention, however, far from being a body of incorruptibles, consisted largely of very mediocre and greedy individuals, who would not have been able to do so much damage if Robespierre had not given them unlimited power to separate in bloody fashion the good patriots from the bad.

The revenge taken by the Republic on the revolted provinces put all the Parisian atrocities in the shade. In the last days of the year 1793 blood flowed at Rennes in such streams that peasants returned from the town with their shoes covered with it. During Christmas ninety persons were beheaded. In the cemetery of St. Etienne the prisoners were shot down in rows;

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detachments of children had been got together for this purpose, though they could hardly hold their muskets and often had to begin all over again, their first shots having missed. The so-called Félix Commission, which was active between Laval and Saumur, sent the insurgents to death without trial. The prisoners were sorted out and marked with a piece of chalk; an 'F' signified 'to be shot' (*fusiller*), a 'G' meant 'to be guillotined'. Vendée was ravaged by the so-called 'Hell Column', which turned whole cantons into desert. At Nantes the morbid Carrier declared: 'We would rather make France a cemetery than not regenerate it in our own way'. He transferred the arrested priests from their plague-stricken prison-ships to boats in which holes were pierced, so that they sank in the Loire. The bloody wretch reported his exploit in the following terms: 'An event of another kind has, it appears, diminished the numbers of priests. Ninety of them, whom we had designated as non-jurors, were imprisoned in a ship in the Loire. I have just learned from a very trustworthy source that they have all perished in the river. What a sad catastrophe!' These drownings he continued for months without any intervention from Paris. Several thousand persons perished in this way and Carrier exclaimed joyfully: 'What a Revolutionary stream this Loire is!'

Barras and Fréron, having had 250 people executed at Marseilles, were in good practice by the time they got to Toulon. On 11th December 200 of the inhabitants and sailors, who had gone out to meet them with banners and music, were shot. On 20th December eighteen artillery officers followed; two days later 200 of the inhabitants fell under the bullets of execution squads, and after another two days 300 men. Then the guillotine got to work. One of those beheaded, a man aged ninety-four, was the oldest victim of the Revolution. The total bag of

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the two representatives amounted to about 1,000 persons. Fouché and Collot knew their job even better: they executed with cannon. On 4th December on the plain of Brotteaux sixty-four young people, tied together in pairs, were placed before open mass graves and mowed down with grape-shot; most of them were not killed and had to be finished off with sabre-cuts. On the following day 209 persons were executed in this manner, and the soldiers spent some time afterwards hacking the ghastly heap of mangled dying with swords, axes and picks. One of Fouché's assistants, Achard, wrote enthusiastically to his friend Gravier: 'More and more heads fall every day. How delighted you would have been if you had seen yesterday the national judgment on 209 criminals! What majesty! What an impressive scene! It was most edifying. What a host of scoundrels bit the grass that day on the field of Brotteaux! What cement for the Republic!'

Robespierre's whole instinct was opposed to these terrorists. He suspected in them a kind of voluptuousness of cruelty; he knew of their revels and orgies, their swaggering ostentation, their vicious satrapism. They were either provocative atheists like Fouché, who made an ass drink out of a chalice, or else fornicators like Barras and Tallien: in either case types of men whose coarse materialism ill agreed with Robespierre's ascetic mysticism. But were they not fully authorized representatives of the Convention, and was not their conduct nearly always approved? Léonard Bourdon while staying at Orléans fell foul of the guards one night when he and his companions returned drunk. There was a mêlée in which Bourdon sustained a few scratches. The Convention decreed that Orléans should be regarded as in a state of revolt until 'the twenty-six murderers' were handed over to the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris.

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Thirteen persons were sent off to Paris, none of whom had ever seen the representatives in his life. Nine of them were condemned to death and executed in the 'red shirt of the parricide'. Citizen Dartigoeyte, an outstanding member of the Mountain Party, was usually drunk when sent on a mission and was fond of riding through the town in an open carriage with a woman in his arms. Sometimes when in his cups he undressed in public and appeared naked in his box at the theatre. One evening while he was speaking at the Jacobin Club a tile fell at his feet, without hitting him. The presumed perpetrator of 'this horrible attempt on the life of our good and worthy Dartigoeyte' was haled before the Court, together with eight persons arbitrarily chosen from those who had lain in prison for months. All nine were condemned to death for 'conspiracy' and beheaded. The Deputy Javogue, who at Feurs had the aristocrats shot in the market-place by Piedmontese prisoners of war while he himself looked on enthroned between two ample-bosomed Goddesses of Reason, also took pains to 'combat prejudices'. He exhibited himself to the citizens from time to time in a state of nakedness 'in order to revive the ancient Republican simplicity'.

Lebon was neither vicious, like Barras, nor an atheist, like Fouché. He could almost be called a good fellow; he lived in the tenderest union with his wife Mimi and loved a well-covered table above everything. But it was just this impression of good-nature that made his fury so frightful. His homely, almost patriarchal way of massacring innocent men was worse than the morbid rage of Carrier, the methodical cruelty of Fouché, or the solemn tyranny of Tallien. At Arras and Cambrai this man Lebon lived familiarly with the judges, the jurymen, the gaolers, and even with the executioner's assistants. The good-natured Mimi served them with soup and inquired how many were to

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be executed with the words: 'How many calves' heads have we this evening?' She assisted her husband energetically in everything, helping him to draw up the lists of suspects and proposing lists of her own. She watched the executions from a balcony with an excellent view, to which she invited her acquaintances with: 'From there we can see the apricots fall'. Lebon made each execution into a popular festival, which meant that Arras and Cambrai did not emerge from a state of festivity for eight whole months. The scaffold was not so much cordoned off as framed with a detachment of children adorned with Tricolor ribbons. The band played patriotic tunes, and the hospitable man of blood took care to provide refreshments on the spot for the spectators. He himself took up his position on the balcony where he could be admired, surrounded by his wife and his courtiers, in his finery—his proud plumed hat, broad sash, and enormous cravat. He was always in the best of spirits; he knew most of the condemned by their Christian names and mimicked their speech and behaviour, so that the greatest hilarity often reigned on the balcony.

That these terrorists were actuated by the idea of a new kind of justice is shown by the fact that they treated the executioners who carried out their commands as political instruments and not to be regarded in the light of 'aristocratic prejudices'. At Lyons the scaffold was called the Altar of the Fatherland, thus effacing the sharp line separating a political war of extermination from the impersonal execution of the laws. The Deputy Lequinio, appealing for volunteers for the office of executioner, said: 'We wished to leave to the patriots of Rochefort the glory of proving themselves spontaneously avengers of the Republic; we set forth our requirements to the Popular Society. "I strive", exclaimed Citizen Ance with noble enthusiasm, "for the honour

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of striking off the head of the murderers of my fatherland." Hardly had he spoken these words when others stood forth for the same reason, requesting the favour of at least being allowed to help him. We invited him to dine with us, receive his appointment in writing, and celebrate it with toasts in honour of the Republic. We hope that the judges will in a few days afford him the opportunity to give practical proof of his patriotism.' Later Lequinio reported: 'We have given to the patriot who has so magnanimously undertaken to carry out the judgements of the Revolutionary Court the title of "Avenger of the People".'

There was no doubt that Robespierre sought a middle way between the brutality of popular justice and the tedious processes of the ordinary courts of law. The mass killings of September 1792, when the inmates of the Paris prisons were handed over to the pikes and axes of a paid rabble, were the consequences of a panic caused by the advance of the enemy—a panic which Marat enhanced and Danton at least did nothing to allay. Robespierre had nothing to do with them and even criticized them. He strove to keep the guillotine as the 'sword of the law'. He clung to judicial procedure to the end and could not help venerating justice as something abstract that acted with 'Roman' inexorability. This attempt to legalize the Terror impelled him to make more and more laws and ceaselessly enlarge the limits of what was punishable; and this became increasingly difficult as he tended to recognize the guilty, not by their deeds, but by their thoughts. The list of punishable actions finally became so lengthy that he introduced the notion of a punishable attitude. It was at this point that he became incomprehensible to his countrymen, for it is in accordance with the French character to recognize as legally punishable only those actions that are

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comprised within and designated by the law. The quarrelsome formalism of the French attitude to law originates in the feeling that it is necessary to defend oneself with all possible means against authority. In fact, the urge to freedom and the almost anarchical independence of the French tolerate no form of justice that seeks to establish a general conception of what is harmful and to judge accordingly.

What Robespierre was undertaking was only understood by himself and his closest associates. The exploiters of the Revolution took the terrorist law as a pretext for giving themselves up to coarse arbitrariness, filling their pockets and satisfying their blood-lust. The adversaries of the Revolution, however, saw in it nothing more than a hypocritical pretext for exterminating political opponents. Each showed good faith in his own way; the former, like the latter, were convinced that the darkness of absolute illegality had arrived. 'To those who act in the spirit of the Republic everything is permitted': this sentence from the instructions issued to the Lyons Commission by Collot and Fouché appeared to both groups as the kernel of the whole terrorist conception of justice; but, while the anti-revolutionaries saw in it the repression of complete despotism, the terrorists greeted it as the long-awaited appearance of a new justice founded exclusively on political opinion. The formula of the Revolutionary Tribunal's verdict in the last few months of its activity was always the same:

'There exists a conspiracy against the French nation with the object of overthrowing the Republican Government and restoring the Monarchy. So-and-so is convicted of being the author or accomplice of this conspiracy.'

'The Revolutionary Government owes nothing to its enemies but death,' Robespierre declared in his great speech of

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the 5th Nivôse, Year II. That fighting speech seemed in the eyes of posterity an unpardonable violation of law, as Robespierre claimed the exclusive right and competence to decide who was an 'enemy'. There was nothing objectionable in the fact of the State claiming the right to punish 'egoists', as Robespierre wished to do. But it was indispensable to have an exact definition beforehand of the actions that stamped men as 'egoistic'. Robespierre never undertook such a definition; he claimed for himself the function of deciding who deserved the designation and who did not. His whole administration of justice finished by recognizing only a single punishable action—namely, conspiracy, thus proving that his laws were directed, not against crime, but against opinion—that is, against certain types of men. Not until the last moment of his career, however, did he admit this and then only by the mouth of Couthon, but his confession that the Terror aimed at exterminating, not punishing, came too late. Only a few months beforehand Robespierre had attempted to maintain that his Government did not endanger public liberty. What weakness! Never did he show himself so unsure and ambiguous as at that moment. No wonder Saint-Just shook his head. Too late he pulled himself together to face the brutal truth: that the disintegration of the old Royalist conception of law had made France ripe for the rule of war profiteers and opportunists.

The first Extraordinary Tribunal—after the insurrection of 10th August, which ended the Monarchy—was demanded and obtained by Robespierre. He refused, however, to undertake the presidency: 'I could not be the judge of those whose adversary I am.' On 10th March, 1793, the Revolutionary Tribunal was created; it had a jury, there was no appeal against its verdict, and in practice it could inflict only one punishment



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—death. A few weeks later Robespierre's efforts gave his Court greater freedom of action and made its procedure more elastic. On 8th May, in connexion with the unrest provoked by the raising of troops to serve in Vendée, Robespierre demanded the arrest of all 'suspects', and on 17th September he got a law in this sense passed, which by itself was sufficient to abrogate the existing protection of law and justify arbitrary arrest. Suspects were designated as follows:

'(1) Those who, by their conduct, their acquaintances, or their oral or written observations, have shown themselves adherents of tyranny or federalism or enemies of liberty;

'(2) Those who are unable to indicate, in the manner prescribed by the decree of 21st March, their means of existence or the fulfilment of their civic duties;

'(3) Those who have been refused the certificate of citizenship;

'(4) Those who, belonging to the former nobility—including the husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters of *émigrés*, and their agents—have not given proof of their permanent adherence to the Revolution.'

With the aid of this law there was not the slightest difficulty in filling the Paris prisons, especially as it was explained in its supplementary clauses that a mere failure to exercise the right of voting or any lack of zeal or other tangible evidence of loyalty came under the head of suspicious conduct. The elasticity of these provisions resulted in the Popular Societies and Supervision Committees having to be entrusted with drawing up the lists of suspects and submitting them to the Convention.

On the occasion of the trial of the twenty-one Girondists—the flower of liberal intellect—Robespierre carried through a further extension of terrorist law while the proceedings were

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still going on. The accused exerted their world-famous eloquence to the utmost, easily demolishing the charges brought by the Public Prosecutor, and had the trial been allowed to continue acquittal in one form or another would have been inevitable. Fouquier-Tinville sent anxious notes to the Convention: 'We are held up by the legally prescribed forms. . . . Everyone is convinced in his heart that they are guilty. . . . It is up to the Convention to set aside the formalities that hinder the course of the law.' At the Jacobin Club the Court was severely criticized for its delays. Chaumette said: 'They are proceeding against conspirators as if they were pickpockets.' Finally Robespierre proposed to the Convention to enact that 'the President of the Court, after the proceedings have continued for three days, shall ask the jury whether their consciences are sufficiently convinced. If they answer in the negative the proceedings shall be continued until they declare themselves ready to decide.' Thereby the trial was ended; before the accused could open their mouths again they were all condemned to death. For a moment everyone was paralysed with horror, then a terrific tumult broke out. Quick as lightning, Valazé plunged a dagger in his heart; the others, dragged off by gendarmes, threw their speeches in their defence, their money, and their papers to the public, cried: '*Vive la République!*' and tried to drown the whistlings and ravings of the spectators with a popular chorus, which was heard disappearing along the echoing corridor. Fouquier-Tinville, pale but relieved, wiped the sweat from his brow, while the President, Herman, cool and unmoved, calmly laid his hand on the decree of the Convention.

The situation was similar in the trial of Danton, Camille Desmoulins, Fabre, Héroult and their associates, but it was made more critical inasmuch as the lion's roar of Danton carried

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farther than the fanfare of Brissot or the 'cello notes of Vergniaud. Danton appealed to the people in tones of thunder to bear witness to his innocence, and the familiar voice that had so often roused all France was heard through the open window of the room from the other side of the river. Hastily scribbled notes passed to and fro between Fouquier-Tinville and Herman. Finally the former appealed for help to the Convention. The answer was not long in coming. Saint-Just ascended the tribune and demanded a decree by which the judges could curtail the procedure and stifle the 'terrifying voices'. The young terrorist did not stand on ceremony with the Convention; he simply threatened it: 'Observe the space that separates you from the guilty!' The decree, which was immediately granted, provided that anyone who 'insulted or resisted national justice should be at once prevented from taking part in the proceedings'. With this weapon the Court stopped any further display of eloquence. Danton almost choked with rage, but Herman suspended the session and the jury retired to consider their verdict, being secretly visited meanwhile by Fouquier with a further accusation.

The announcement of the sentence of death was an almost unbearable moment. The whole Court—accusers, judges, jurymen, clerks and spectators—bent under the storm of indignation. Danton quivered like a forest tree struck by the axe, Camille crumpled his papers together, threw them at the faces of the judges, and broke into wild sobbing. Even the impassive Herman paled a little.

The whole of this terrorist legislation was the work of the triumvirate—Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon. The latter was the gentlest and quietest inquisitor the world has ever seen. He had a family which he loved above all, and to play with his

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little son was his greatest pleasure. For animals he also had a tender heart; a visitor might find him feeding a white rabbit, and on his knees there often slept a tiny greyhound. But he had a great affliction: both his legs were completely paralysed from the hips down and he went about in a wheeled chair, which he worked himself. A gendarme carried him in his arms into the Convention, up to the tribune, or to his desk at the Committee of Public Safety. He nearly always suffered from fearful headaches and a painful hiccup tormented him almost uninterruptedly. Nevertheless he was not unamiable; his manners were polite and he never raised his voice. The three members of the triumvirate were without doubt the most well-bred persons in the whole Convention.

The effect of their measures was all the more paralysing. Saint-Just had by the 23rd Nivôse secured a decree that 'all those shall be declared traitors to the country and punished as such who are convicted of having attempted in any manner whatsoever the corruption of the citizens, the subversion of authority and of public opinion', and so forth. On the 26th Germinal he extracted from the Convention, this time as the consequence of a report on 'general policy', a further extension of what was punishable. Citizens were enjoined to report all persons showing any sign of non-Republican opinion. All those accused of conspiracy in any part of the Republic were to be brought to Paris and tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The decisive advance, however, was to be made by the gentle Couthon. The originator of the law of the 22nd Prairial, which was proposed by Couthon, was Robespierre. His proposal of the 5th Nivôse, that the Committee of Public Safety should be entrusted with the perfecting—that is to say, the simplification—of judicial procedure, though adopted, had had

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no tangible effect. At the end of Germinal he made a second attempt, but was not fully supported by the Committee of Public Safety. However, on the 21st Floréal it was decided to set up the so-called Orange Commission to put down the counter-revolution in the town of that name, and Robespierre equipped it with plenary powers which practically made the infliction of the death penalty a general order. Anyone was condemned who 'sought to disturb the course of the Revolution or prevent the consolidation of the Republic'. Sufficient proof was to be afforded by 'all information of any kind whatsoever necessary to convince a reasonable man and friend of liberty'.

On this precedent the law of the 22nd Prairial was based. It suppressed the last remains of normal judicial procedure and in effect left the Courts only one task—namely, to establish the identity of those who were to be condemned to death. The duty of denunciation was this time laid down without any ambiguity:

'Every citizen has the right to seize conspirators and counter-revolutionaries and hand them over to the judicial authorities. He is bound to denounce them as soon as he recognizes them.' Preliminary interrogation was abolished. Witnesses were not tolerated any longer: 'If there are proofs of a material or moral nature no more witnesses shall be heard, unless this formality appears necessary to discover accomplices.'

Defence was similarly abolished: 'The natural defenders and inevitable friends of accused patriots are the patriotic jurymen. Conspirators shall have no defenders.'

Who was punishable? 'Those who have attempted to dissolve and defame the Convention; those who have abused Revolutionary principles; those who have spread false news, misled

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public opinion, corrupted morals, or disturbed the public conscience; and those who in any manner whatsoever have injured the liberty, unity and security of the Republic or retarded its consolidation.'

There was but one punishment: death. The proof required for its infliction was as follows: 'The proof necessary for the condemnation of an enemy of the people is any kind of document, whether material or moral, oral or written, which can carry conviction to any upright and reasonable mind. The guiding rule for judgment is the conscience of a jury enlightened by love of country, and its object is the triumph of the Republic and ruin of its enemies. The procedure consists of the simple means indicated by good sense in order to arrive at knowledge of the truth in the forms prescribed by the law.'

The Tribunal was reorganized. The two sections were increased to four and more judges were appointed. The jury was sifted; twenty-nine of its members were retained and the rest were nominated anew by the Committee of Public Safety. Robespierre devoted his personal attention to this reform. First he sorted out the 'weak'—that is, those who either dwelt on formalities or were troubled by their consciences. Then he collected from the flower of the Jacobin Club those persons who followed him blindly. His host, the cabinetmaker Duplay, was first on the list of reliable men; then came Didier, Robespierre's secretary, then Villers, who performed the same duty for Saint-Just. Nicolas, Gravier, Pigeot, Masson, Fillon and Fauvety were unconditional followers of the 'Incorruptible' and more or less intimate at the house of Duplay. Some of them had already filled the post of juryman and had acquitted themselves brilliantly. Trinchard, too, and the two painters, Châtelet and Prieur, could be absolutely relied on; and of course Leroy,

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who might be regarded as the model jurymen of this Tribunal, for he was deaf. The president, Dumas, the vice-president, Coffinhal, and the judge, Garnier-Launay, would do anything for Robespierre. In a word, the law of the 22nd Prairial can be regarded as his entirely personal instrument, as it was forged by him down to the smallest detail. It opened the way to his dictatorship and was the only political action of his life which inspired, even in enthusiastic youngsters like Buonarroti, serious doubts of his good faith.

Couthon declared that it was 'less a question of punishing than of exterminating'; and Saint-Just was no less categorical when he said: 'The law of Prairial abolishes spectres.' Such words were needed, and could have been even more emphatic, for it was time for the jurisdiction of the Terror to show its true character. In some respects the earlier violations of the law were much worse and more offensive to the human conscience; but there were in the new law certain details that exposed the terrible hypocrisy of a system of extermination masquerading as justice in a way that made the world cry out in horror. Chief among these was the provision abolishing the right of defence. The reason given for this was that patriots, when slandered, found in the jurymen their best defenders and friends, while conspirators had no right to either. Any idea that the proceedings had to prove who was guilty and who innocent was dropped. The new provision assumed that the guilty were recognizable beforehand. Robespierre even went so far as to maintain that the accused thereby saved money, as legal defenders often 'pillaged their clients in the most scandalous way'! It may be asked why he allowed the jury system to continue. Evidently he wished to keep up the appearance of a popular judgment in the old sense of the idea, in spite of having declared

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that the enemies of the people should not be judged, but exterminated.

The painter Topino-Lebrun, who during the trial of Danton served on the jury, found a noteworthy phrase to describe the whole of the proceedings in Court. In reply to Souberbielle, another jurymen, who had confided to him his qualms of conscience about the flimsy evidence against Danton, he answered: 'This is not a trial, it is a measure. We are not jurymen but statesmen. The two together are impossible; one must go. Would you kill Robespierre? No? Well, by that alone you have condemned Danton.' Statesmen—nothing was truer. The jurymen were in fact officials. Condemnation was an administrative measure, and Dumas, who then presided in place of Herman, was acting in a bureaucratic capacity just as much as the Public Prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville. And when later on, after the fall of Robespierre, the Tribunal itself was tried and one of the accused exclaimed: 'We were only the axe! Does one sit in judgment upon an axe?' there was revealed part of the whole terrible truth.

Fouquier-Tinville and his people were heavily overworked. They hardly had time to prepare the warrants for arrest, accusations, sentences and instructions to the executioner. The mere taking down of personal particulars was a labour that taxed the endurance of the strongest clerk. The numbers of the accused continually increased; the dock became a regular amphitheatre of benches, on which fifty persons could easily take their places in order to be condemned to death with lightning rapidity. The clerks had the most work, the jury the least, for the latter could not even tell all the prisoners apart. As several painters were to be found among the jurymen, the blotting-paper provided by the State was covered with



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sketches. Châtelet drew very successful caricatures of the prisoners, while Prieur covered his pad with 'obscenities and nonsense' and made portraits of those whom he wished to acquit; it need hardly be added that occasions for the latter did not often arise. The judicial officials were naturally more serious. The Public Prosecutor in his hat with black feathers looked extremely imposing, though the new President, Dumas, kept his pistols in front of him on the judge's table.

All these details were to come to light later in the trials after the 9th Thermidor which cost Fouquier, Dumas, Herman, Coffinhal and many of the jurymen—including our artists—their lives. During these proceedings a secretary of the Tribunal declared: 'For at least six weeks I saw how this Tribunal publicly murdered people. If proof of this is required let the jury retire to the office where the records are kept. Let a jurymen then be blindfolded and take up the first file that comes to hand; he will find in it sentences on forty or fifty persons who were sent to their death after proceedings lasting half an hour. It should have taken more time than that merely to read through the personal particulars of the accused, and many days would have been necessary for perusal of the papers in the case. I say that one need only look in the first file: if it does not afford proofs of crimes the like of which have never before defiled the earth, I am prepared to take the place of the accused on that bench.'

The jurymen Prieur, already mentioned, who was to leave posterity a series of fine, dramatic drawings of Revolutionary festivals, events and personalities, declared on one occasion with a frankness the orthodoxy of which must have pleased Robespierre that 'it does not matter to me whether the accused are convicted of the acts laid to their charge. What is decisive is

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that they are nobles, priests—in a word, not good Republicans. It is a way of getting rid of them.’ A group of jurymen, when asked by an official what the people condemned that day had been guilty of, answered: ‘Good God, we have no idea. But if you really want to know you can run after them; the carts have only just taken them away.’ Fouquier himself was a man who made good use of his time and did not like useless work. One day, when proceedings were being instituted against 158 accused persons and the papers were all ready, at the last moment the batch was divided into three and only sixty were dealt with; nevertheless the judge signed the sentence, which had already been made out to cover the whole 158.

On the 1st Thermidor a young man of seventeen named Saint-Pern was produced in mistake for his fifty-five-year-old father. Although the accusation did not mention him he was dealt with and condemned to death. There were ‘conspirators’ who were blind, deaf, completely paralysed, or feeble-minded, who were handed over to the ‘avenger of the people’. Madame de Maillé was to have appeared together with her sixteen-year-old son, who had thrown a rotten herring at a gaoler’s head. When the name was called out a Madame de Mayet answered, because of the similar sound of the two names. The Court took note of the mistake, but condemned her all the same, ‘as she is there’. A man called Deselle was asked if he had known anything of the conspiracy in prison, to which he answered No. ‘I expected that answer,’ declared the president; ‘were you not a noble, a count?’—‘I used to be given that title.’—‘Next!’ called out the president, thereby extinguishing his life. A steward named Balthazar Cart was asked: ‘Were you not steward of the former Princess de Marsan, whose children have emigrated?’ Cart explained that the lady was called Morsan,

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not Marsan, and had no children. He was executed the same day. The aged Loizerolles was able to sacrifice himself for his son, because nobody was listening while questions were being asked and answers given. To the question whether he was 'François Simon Loizerolles, aged twenty-two', the white-haired old man answered 'Yes' and no one showed any surprise.

It had to be done quickly—'by volley-firing', as Dumas said. Fouquier, that conscientious bureaucrat, who wore a medal of the Virgin on his breast under his shirt, thundered to the jury: 'I'll make you get a move on; I need between 200 and 250 a week.' And he got them. From the 23rd Prairial to the 8th Thermidor—in about six weeks—the Revolutionary Tribunal pronounced 1,285 death sentences. Almost all heard their sentence with the greatest resignation: 'It seemed to cast a spell over them which made them immobile,' said an observer. They meekly answered 'No' to the question whether they had anything to say, and docilely left the hall by the side of the gendarme. During the last weeks of the Reign of Terror sentences were pronounced in the prisoners' absence. They were only supers at their own destruction. They were tired of it. The world was tired of it. The thirst of the gods was quenched.

## CHAPTER XV

### 'WHAT A TYRANT LOOKED LIKE'

**D**id Robespierre want to become Dictator of France? Did he aim at making absolute rule, which he already exercised in practice, the keystone of the system of government and place his own person in the centre of that system? The Constitution of 1793, at his own wish, had not been put into force and the country had a Revolutionary Government 'until the conclusion of peace'. So long as this form of government existed it was possible to continue the Terror as an essential element in the State, and the Terror was, in fact, the distinguishing mark of the dictatorial Government. Robespierre, the master and the soul of it, would have liked to put an end to the bloodshed and restore peace between the citizens of France, but to do that he would have had to alter the form of government and probably even to put the Constitution into force. Meanwhile the sea of human blood rose higher and higher and threatened to overflow the pedestal to which Revolutionary France had raised the Incorruptible. It is certain that he dreamed of an earthly paradise and still had in view—though with daily weakening conviction—an equalitarian community in which all the citizens would live virtuously without violence. Did he combine with this pale and laborious conception a thirst for absolute power?

Nothing in his life justifies an unqualified answer in the affirmative. Robespierre was no lover of power, but purely a

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man of principle. His ambition was not to set in motion men, destinies, masses, existences and manipulate them at his will, but rather to carry his point and prove that his idea was right, practicable and salutary. A longing for truth was his motive—a motive which, though not aiming at personal enjoyment or gain or even at the fulfilment of his own personality, nevertheless had an effect no less destructive than simple thirst for power. Only a few days before his fall, when he was afflicted with the melancholy of despair, he imagined that France would soon be purified of all those elements that were not ‘the people’ and that there remained ‘only five or six more rogues’ to get rid of. No wonder it made him sad. He must have been overcome with despair at the thought that he had built nothing, founded nothing, created nothing, but only rooted out, hewn away, cleared up, purified. Only five or six more rogues, and life in Paradise could begin: poor, sterile, straightforward Robespierre! And did not the greatest of all the Republicans, Saint-Just, encourage him with the words: ‘In every Revolution a Dictator is necessary, to save the State by force!’ Finally he himself wrote in his note-book, in his neat, almost hesitant handwriting: ‘A single will is necessary.’

He was a dogmatist—a very great, a sublime dogmatist. The priest who goes to the altar to speak with God is also a dogmatist, for his lofty office rests on the conviction that he knows better than others the Divine will and alone understands the word of God. Almost all the traits that gave Robespierre the appearance of a Dictator were of religious origin. He believed that he alone knew the secret; to him alone were accessible the tables of the law by which the Republic was to be governed. ‘In the silence of his passions,’ as Jean-Jacques had said, there appeared to him these tables, before which he fell humbly on

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his knees and the radiance of which rested on his features when he showed himself to the people. Although during these weeks before his fall he had recourse to numerous measures calculated to secure his political supremacy, such measures were of less importance than the dogma of virtue applied exclusively by him, giving him almost unlimited authority and putting at his disposal that moral system of which the reverse side was death. His appearance in politics was as if a Tibetan monk appeared in the market-place of a great city or at the head of a modern army. The fearful death-ray of his virtue did not fall on the wicked, who stayed hidden in the recesses of politics, but on those who thought differently from himself. The moral corruption spread like fire. Across the face of those times glided the shadows of the dead who longed to return to the light. The seed in the earth, the egg in the nest, the bud on the tree, the infusoria in the water-drop, the spring wind laden with pollen, the mineral forming in the mountain—everything that lived and wished to grow raised a soundless voice and said: It is enough!

The revolt to which he fell victim was the consequence of that Rousseauist policy which led step by step to the annihilation of life. It was a revolt of life itself; and it is significant of the destruction that Robespierre had already wrought that only those who were eager for life dared to rise against him, while those who were most worthy to live had no more strength. The '9th Thermidor', which was at hand, was a natural phenomenon. The instinct of mankind to carry on life in an unrighteous and unequal social order, rather than let itself be crushed by an ideal vision of equality and fraternity, rose up against this prophet to throw him into the sea of blood and tears that lay between him and the future. The simple lesson of the 9th Thermidor is that life demands its rights. It seemed that

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man did not need absolute truth so much as practical goodness. The Abbé Sieyès, who when the Reign of Terror was over was discovered on a bench in the Convention—he had not opened his mouth during the events of the last weeks—replied, when asked what he had actually done during that time: ‘I lived.’ There spoke no fighting spirit, but the voice of human existence itself. And he was an old man. What would have been the answer of those whom Nature commands at all costs to live! The Terror still reigned, the death-carts still rumbled through Paris, but between the blossoming earth and the restless summer stars the invincible powers of growth were already stirring. The end of time had not yet come. Robespierre, aware of the onrush of those currents he had never studied and never taken account of, must have felt that it was time for his great ideal to set about leaving this earth which had no place for it in its fruitful bosom.

That Robespierre fell by the laws of his own being, succumbing in a conflict, not with another truth, but with his own idea, is proved by the indisputable fact that the 9th Thermidor was brought about by the fortuitous combination of radically opposed elements. On one side were the *bons viveurs* like Barras and Tallien, who felt their worthless lives threatened, and on the other honest Republicans like Billaud, Romme and Ruhl who felt the approach of dictatorship; and with these were allied political opponents long since thought to be extinct, who hoped to bring down the whole Revolution in the person of Robespierre—the men of the Right, who for years had sat in silence on their benches and were contemptuously called ‘the Marsh’, just as the party of the left were respectfully called ‘the Mountain’.

The man who brought these conflicting elements together

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and infused them with the unity necessary for action was Joseph Fouché, the only one of the numerous rogues in the Convention who was also a genius. This destroyer of Lyons and inventor of sacrilegious festivals was particularly threatened. Among the 'five or six rogues' who obstructed Robespierre's view of Paradise he occupied first place. For him, more than anyone else, it was a question of 'one of us must go'. Consciousness of this enhanced the faculties of a man already highly gifted, who though he had not the makings of a statesman had those of the greatest chief of police in history. 'He intrigues with the greatest assiduity and with his whole soul,' Barras acknowledged. He intrigued in the Convention—up in the Mountain and down in the Marsh—in the Sections, in the Commune, and even in the Jacobins. 'The whole of France knows', he was to exclaim later when it was all over, 'that—while Robespierre lorded it over you, while you slavishly bent your heads before his successes and crimes, while you paid the most humiliating homage to his wild and murderous tyranny—I fought almost alone!' A monstrous exaggeration, for others fought no less vigorously against the Incorruptible, but it is true that he it was who assembled isolated elements for the decisive blow.

Robespierre was no man of action. Action at any price, activity for its own sake, struggle from overflowing vitality—this was not his way. He was capable of unheard-of energy and almost superhuman industry when it was a question of putting a principle into effect. But it was not given to him to show titanic strength when his own life was at stake. His last great speeches consisted for the most part of moving laments over the wickedness of man; he felt himself misunderstood; he explained, justified and defended himself, and indulged in bitter



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reproaches against enemies whose names he would not mention at any price. Right up to the last moment he remained faithful to these tactics, which, however, only contributed to hasten his fall. For little by little everyone came to feel himself threatened; everyone believed that he himself was indicated—for everyone had a bad conscience—and that the announcement of new and stricter measures was aimed at himself. The circle of those who believed their lives to be in danger grew with terrible rapidity and soon embraced the whole Convention.

Fouché could have wished for no better support than this general fear. There were some Deputies who slept at a different house every night, and others who no longer dared to be seen at all in the Convention; others, again, did not visit their friends except in disguise, while yet others pinned their hopes to flight and obtained false passports. Barras, Merlin de Thionville, Tallien and Bourdon de l’Oise always went armed, and Robespierre’s spies followed their every step. At the Café Carozza and the Restaurant Doyen in the Champs-Élysées, now in the full glory of its blossoming chestnut trees, there gathered all those who were threatened and were gradually becoming conspirators. They did not know that Robespierre had noted in his pocket-book, for some reason best known to himself: ‘The Deputies at the head of the conspiracy to be pursued and prosecuted at all costs.’ But they guessed it, for out in the street below their windows they could see a silhouette, which belonged to none other than his own personal spy, Guérin. The sight made them lower their voices and later disappear by the back door, probably watched by another man. The Deputies had no leisure to study the list of those who were in danger and whose names Robespierre obstinately withheld, and in any case the list grew longer every day.

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The Committee of Public Safety had gradually become the real Government and arrogated to itself numerous prerogatives of the Convention. Deputies on mission, who under the centralization of the Revolution played a powerful rôle, enjoyed unlimited plenary powers and, representing the executive in its purest form, no longer reported to the Convention but to the Committee of Public Safety, which reserved to itself the right of recalling them—a right of which Robespierre made assiduous use. Under the law of the 27th Germinal, which had been carried through by Saint-Just with so much apocalyptic eloquence, the Committee received the right to bring suspected persons to justice and to take over a series of police functions. The next step was when Robespierre created his own police bureau, principally to supervise the administration, but also to take over 'general police' functions. The head of it was Saint-Just, but as he was generally at the front during these weeks Robespierre took his place. The significance of this was that it enabled him to be the first to see the reports of the Supervision Committees, to be in continual contact with Dumas, the president of the Tribunal, and to maintain liaison with Payan, Government Commissar for Paris, and Lescot-Fleuriot, the Mayor.

He attached the greatest importance to the Commune, for he realized that the decisive advances of the Revolution had almost all come from its initiative. But he could not rid himself of the uncomfortable feeling that it had not been enough to confide its direction to his two friends. The people were now not as completely identified with the Commune as in former days, when Jacques Roux preached Communism at the street corners and Chaumette, long since lying in the common grave, invited the *sansculottes* in patriarchal fashion to embrace atheism. Hanriot,

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commander of the National Guard and of the 17th military division, sometimes came into the new police office on the second floor of the Tuileries. This wizened and quite unwarlike little man was entirely trustworthy and would have done anything for the Incorruptible, who for his part tolerated his smart swarm of adjutants and his wild galloping through the main streets. But even the National Guard was not so homogeneous as it had showed itself on 2nd June of the previous year, when it had imposed its will on the Convention. While many Sections were entirely in the hands of indolent bourgeois who no longer wanted anything but peace, others were permeated with enthusiastic proletarians.

Robespierre sought to extend the powers of the Committee of Public Safety so as gradually to make the Committee of General Security, which hitherto had been at the head of the whole police and judicial system, a mere department of it. In the Committee of General Security he had hardly a single friend except Lebas, who was generally with the Army, and of course the painter David, who declared himself ready to ‘drink the cup of hemlock’ with him. The president was Vadier, a wizened Voltairean whose comedian’s face sparkled with malice. This man, who not only had political sense but also, being a Gascon overflowing with life and talkativeness, knew how to clasp people’s hands, clap them on the shoulders and conclude little transactions with them, had quite a different conception of ‘the people’ from the strict disciple of Rousseau. And as he was, considering the average age of the ‘Mountain’, a greybeard of almost biblical age—namely, sixty—he allowed himself to smile at the Incorruptible as an inhuman enthusiast, describing him as a parson in disguise. It was with annoyance that he contemplated the weakening of the Committee over

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which he presided, which had hitherto had unquestioned authority over the whole department of police and had reported to the Convention on all important cases. Since Robespierre had taken the liberty of declaring to the Convention that the report of the Security Committee on the Chabot case must be submitted to him before being published, Vadier and his people had felt themselves treated as subordinate clerks. The new administrative police arrested people whom the Security Committee had just set at liberty, and conversely set free those whom Vadier had incarcerated. The latter clearly saw what was happening; he knew that in the Committee of Public Safety there had emerged a triumvirate—Robespierre, Saint-Just and Couthon—which either unconsciously or purposely was heading for dictatorship. Thus the struggle of the Security Committee for its independence rapidly became a struggle against the dictatorship of Robespierre.

Three men! Even in the Committee of Public Safety there was dissension. Indeed in that small circle, whose members—with the possible exception of Collot and Barère—were all talented and even outstanding characters and ardent Republicans, Robespierre's rise to supreme power was doubly mortifying. He was no longer the good-humoured colleague of feverish day-and-night activity, the old comrade of the anxious hours of great national decisions. Billaud, Carnot, Prieur, Cambon, Lindet, Jean-Bon—all felt themselves as comrades in a camp the horizon of which was ringed with fire, death and danger. They would sit working at their desks till the light of dawn, only pausing to pass each other a piece of bread or a wing of chicken. Then they would throw themselves on mattresses spread on the floor to rest side by side for an hour or so, before more papers, more messengers, more visitors, more calls

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for help, more tasks and more duties descended on them. How often they had overborne the desperate ‘It can’t be done!’ of the administrations with a savage ‘It must be done!’ They had conjured up armies out of the ground and created fleets, set transport in motion, raised commissariat, clothing, weapons, machines, carriages, instruments, labour. They were indeed tyrants, but tyrants in the first place to themselves, then to the officials and suppliers, and last of all to the people. Little by little Robespierre, with his two faithful friends, had withdrawn from that circle of masculine confidence, and in so doing had put a distance between themselves and those who still held that the Convention was the real executive and the Committee of Public Safety only its instrument. The majority of the Committee began to wonder when Robespierre’s despotism, already existing in practice, would be converted into an open dictatorship. On all sides the wind was piling up the clouds from which the lightning would soon strike.

As early as the spring Carnot had declared in a report: ‘Woe to the Republic to which the merits, or even merely the virtue, of a single man become indispensable!’ Soon afterwards the allusions accumulated. Billaud uttered a warning: ‘Any people jealous of its liberty must be on its guard against the very virtues of the men who occupy the highest positions.’ And in the manner of those times he added a classical allusion: ‘The crafty Pericles employed popular colours to hide the chains which he was forging for the Athenians. For a long time he led people to believe that he never mounted the tribune without reminding himself that he was speaking to free men. And this same Pericles, having succeeded in obtaining the most absolute authority, became the most bloodthirsty despot.’ In the conference-room of the Committee violent scenes took place so often that people

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used to collect in the Tuileries Gardens under the windows to hear the great men shout at each other. The Committee seriously discussed whether it would not be better on that account to move up to a higher storey. The atmosphere between these men was charged with a tension the causes of which went far deeper than personal differences. It was the stormy tension between reality, whose stoutest representative was Carnot, and the uncompromising orthodoxy of principles, represented by Robespierre.

The latter was capable of an explosion of anger, but it was worse when two men like the stony Saint-Just and the steely Carnot clashed and, hardly raising their voices, exchanged insults like daggers silently thrust to the heart. One day they quarrelled over the arrest of an official in the War Ministry. Carnot patiently listened to Saint-Just's reproaches for a while and then answered that each man in the Committee had equal rights and that the 'Triumvirate' possessed no power superior to the rest. He added that soon nobody but the three would remain if they continued to blacken and compromise patriots. Saint-Just looked the 'organizer of victory' coldly in the face and declared in a polite voice that it would be easy for him to reveal his treasonable relations with the aristocrats, even with the enemy, and added: 'Understand that I have only to write a few lines in order to issue an accusation and have your head cut off within two days.' Carnot looked up from his work, considered the speaker contemptuously for a moment, and then, dipping his pen in the ink and going on writing, answered: 'I ask you, I demand of you, to exercise your utmost severity against me. I am not afraid of you. You are ridiculous dictators.' Saint-Just became crimson with anger and left the room, uttering threats against Carnot and the other members, who tried in

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vain to calm the two antagonists. Next day he reappeared with Robespierre, whom he took by the hand and led up to Carnot, saying: 'Here are my friends, here are they whom you attacked yesterday.' But Carnot would not take back his words. Even worse was the clash after Fleurus. Saint-Just, who had just returned from the front, blamed Carnot for having misplaced some troops. Robespierre interfered, voices rose, plain speaking became general, and someone hastily shut the window. This time it was Billaud and Collot who accused Robespierre of acting as a Dictator.

The sweet spring days were already too warm for the time of year—it was May. Small clouds drifted across the blue sky and people in the streets of Paris gazed at them with longing. The trees wore their fresh green, birds hopped on to the windowsills, and there was a delicious smell suggesting distance and tenderness. It was bitter then to have to go to prison. Tallien's mistress, the beautiful Thérésa Cabarrus, was arrested at Versailles and taken in a cab to a Paris prison. As the carriage with the prisoner crossed the Place de la Révolution the gendarme showed her the towering guillotine and said: 'In three days you will make a personal appearance there!' Tallien did not hear of the arrest at once; he was travelling the whole day and nowhere felt himself safe. The news threw him into despair. That woman was his whole life. Existence was splendid and desirable only because of her. How cunningly and cruelly Robespierre robbed a man of life! Thérésa should not die; he would go quickly to Barras, to Fouché, to urge them to make haste! Tallien felt for the dagger under his coat, looked anxiously round him, and continued his unresting journey. He would save her, if the Republic had to perish!

In the Rue de la Lanterne there lived an honest artisan named

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Antoine Renault with his son Jacques and his daughter Cécile; his two other sons were at the front. Cécile was twenty years old; she was a pretty girl who loved personal adornment, on which account she was a little in debt. At the end of Floréal she brought to the dressmaker Demartin a few yards of white muslin for a summer dress. She wished to have it done very quickly.

‘I suppose you are going to a wedding, mademoiselle?’ asked the dressmaker.

‘That’s none of your business. . . . However, make haste. One can’t tell what will happen. In a week I might be guillotined and I want to have everything in order beforehand.’

A week later, about nine o’clock in the evening, Cécile appeared with a bundle under her arm in the doorway of the Duplays’ house in the Rue Honoré. In the courtyard Eléonore was sitting with some friends of the house enjoying the fine May evening. The young stranger asked for Robespierre and received with a bad grace the information that he was not at home.

‘But it is odd’, she said, ‘that he is never at home. I have been waiting for him since three o’clock. And yet, as a public official, his duty is to receive any citizen who wishes to speak to him.’

The men in the courtyard found this answer rather pert, and led her out into the street. Cécile cried out angrily:

‘In the old days, when one presented oneself at the King’s palace, one was admitted at once.’

‘So you are sorry that the time of the Kings has gone?’

‘Ah! I would shed my blood to have one again. Now you know what I think. You are tyrants!’

The girl was taken to the Committee of Public Safety and interrogated. She replied with great precision and composure.



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To the question what she had wanted with Robespierre she answered that she had wanted to see ‘what a tyrant looked like’. In her bundle were found two small penknives, one with a tortoiseshell handle, the other with an ivory and silver handle. She also stated that she had left a packet behind in a café. It was quickly fetched and found to contain underclothing and a dress. What for? So that she would not lack anything necessary, she replied, where they were going to take her.

‘Where do you think you will be taken?’ asked the official.

‘To prison, and from there to the guillotine.’

The president of the Tribunal, Dumas, who was present at part of the interrogation, stated that the girl was either deranged or else had some secret reason for seeking death. By eleven o’clock that evening she was lying on the foul straw of a cell in the Conciergerie. An hour later Héron, of the Security Committee, arrested the father, who was anxious about his daughter’s disappearance, the son, and an aunt who happened to be there. All had a good conscience. The son went to a neighbour, who asked:

‘Has Cécile come back yet?’

‘No, Madame Papin. I am bringing you our cat. . . . We have just been arrested.’

‘Arrested? What for?’

‘I don’t know. . . . Will you look after our cat while we’re away and see that she lacks nothing?’

The same night there went round Paris a rumour that Robespierre had been assassinated. A new Charlotte Corday, it was said, had appeared to take from the people their best and last friend. That the furious murderess had not been able to carry out her design was not learned till later. In the Convention next day there was great excitement. But the enthusiasm with which

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the unscathed friend of the people was greeted seemed to discerning ears somewhat unconvincing. Robespierre's suspicious glances recognized among the tumultuous assembly, like spots on a mirror, the small groups of conspirators. They sat everywhere, on the 'Mountain', in the 'Marsh', to right and to left. Tallien's eyes glowed in a face pale with anxiety. The coarse Lecointre quite plainly shrugged his shoulders. Collot, on whose life an attempt had also just been made—only a real one, for a man had tried to shoot him—unwillingly shared his martyrdom with Robespierre.

Barère's report on the attempt on Robespierre was full of ambiguities. He quoted at length from English newspapers, in which Robespierre was spoken of like a king and mention was always made of 'Robespierre's soldiers' and 'Robespierre's omnipotence'. Hypocritically and ceremoniously he defended the Incorruptible from this conception of him abroad: 'one might conclude that the Convention no longer existed, or at least no longer counted, and that the armies were only fighting for a single man to whom we no longer owed justice.' Everyone understood this circumlocution. Invisibly the ring closed up. The spacious hall, filled with dust and the sound of voices, suddenly seemed to him curiously unreal; and he had to pull himself together to realize exactly where he was. Something had happened; a thread had been broken, and a black shadow lurked behind that clear light streaming through the great windows. Robespierre felt very lonely. He had half-opened the door of the future, and encountered an icy blast.

After the sitting he went to his office at the Committee of Public Safety and wrote a letter to Saint-Just, who was then with the Army of the North: 'Come quick! Help me!' But he tore it up. He did not dare to sign it alone; it would become

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known and people would say he was afraid. If only Saint-Just were there! The Convention, the Committees—they would all be silenced if that taciturn and sombre youth were to appear before them and raise his calm voice against the conspirators. Finally, however, he wrote the letter, but made it quite short, spoke of Dantonist and Hébertist intrigues, and got Carnot, Billaud, Priour and Barère to sign it too. The mounted courier hastened northwards with it, while Robespierre counted the hoof-beats, the hours, the days.

At the Jacobins all went well. There Robespierre was quite at home and among friends. Or was he? In any case the enthusiasm with which he was received was positively delirious. All were convinced that he had had a narrow escape from the blade of a determined murderess. One may ask whether he shared this conviction, whether he spoke in good faith when he said: ‘Never have the defenders of liberty believed that long life would be their lot. Their existence is uncertain and precarious. I do not believe in the necessity of living, but only in virtue and providence. The murderer’s steel has made me freer and more inexorable against all enemies of the people. We swear by the daggers that are red with the blood of Revolutionary martyrs and have since been sharpened against ourselves that we will exterminate the villains who would rob us of happiness and liberty.’

He went on like this for an hour, speaking now like a man bleeding to death, now as if he were sorry that the dagger had not struck him, and now as one who wished to fight on. The Jacobins were deeply moved, as if they saw their great man already lying on a sumptuous catafalque, such as David designed, between smoking torches. A man called Rousselin, a former Dantonist and later Barras’s secretary, then rose and

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respectfully proposed the formation of an armed bodyguard, to surround the precious person of the Incorruptible wherever he went. This Rousselin, in spite of his humble demeanour, must have been a cunning fellow, for he gave the impression that such an arrangement would be in keeping with Robespierre's true position. The latter flew into such a rage over this proposal that the Jacobins were at a loss to understand him. Nevertheless they supported Robespierre in his opposition to a measure obviously calculated to feed the rumours circulating about him. Rousselin was hounded out and hastily departed to report to those who had instigated him.

Robespierre knew quite well that in every corner whispering and murmuring were going on against him, and that everywhere other Rousselins, great and small, were lurking, in order to exaggerate his policy hypocritically and thereby expose him to accusations. Slowly, almost unwillingly, he took up his defence, but followed his old tactics of never mentioning names, while daily making fresh and more menacing allusions. He thought this clever, for he believed that the vagueness of his attacks would create a state of impalpable fear that would be sufficient to restrain the Convention. Never did he make a more capital mistake. He did not know men and had no conception of the force of simple desire for life. The wider grew the circle of those who took his eternal allusions and threats to refer to themselves, the larger became the number of those who said to themselves: 'He or I!' He did not know that Lecointre had secretly circulated an accusation drawn up against him and had already collected nine signatures. He did not know that a former associate of Desmoulins was working at an appeal to the Paris Sections, couched in the following terms: 'If this astute demagogue were not there, if he were to pay for his ambitious

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intrigues with his life, the nation would be free and everyone could openly speak his mind. Then Paris would not have to tolerate in its midst that gang of murderers commonly known as the Revolutionary Tribunal.’ He did not know that in the ‘Mountain’ Section they were making plans for putting into force the Constitution of 1793, which would mean the end of the Terror and a return to legal conditions. He did not correctly estimate opinion even in the Commune, for although it was directed by his friends the masses of its members were disappointed that true equality still tarried. Above all he underestimated the resistance in the Convention; his unspeakable contempt for ‘these worldlings and mercenary intriguers’ blinded him to the energy of a Barras, the thirst for revenge of a Tallien, the intelligence of a Fouché, and even to the obstinate instinct for self-preservation of a Lecointre, a Bourdon, or a Courtois. Not till the Festival of the Supreme Being were his eyes opened.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE RED MASS

What drove Robespierre to proclaim the official existence of God and the immortality of the soul? Did he wish to give his political idea complete totality by extending it to the domain of the supernatural, or was it the irresistible outbreak of a bewildered soul tormented by the need of religion? His sudden appeal to the human need to worship a deity had the force of a natural phenomenon. It was as if he had lit a light over the abyss; and, as men cannot think of God without revering His goodness and worshipping Him as the Creator and Defender of all life, it was not surprising that a presentiment of the end of the Terror and the bloodshed spread over France like the breath of spring. A tragic mistake, for never did more blood flow on a scaffold than in those days. How could it be otherwise, if Robespierre was led to conceive the Supreme Being only because the inclusion of the Deity crowned his system or public virtue? The true faith only lives in the Holy Church or in the community of the faithful in God. But here the Church was essentially non-divine: it was Jacobin. No, the Supreme Being was not the God who is humbly worshipped by the pious and those who are destined to eternal happiness; it was merely an institution, designed to crown all other State institutions.

In this episode there can be traced little of that moving conflict of conscience which so often tormented Robespierre and threw a sad but propitiatory shadow over his character. A

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burning Christian faith applied to an earthly institution—the French Republic; a mystical fervour instilled into the daily round of political activities; the fear of God placed at the service of a temporal power; these were the errors, violations and bitter confusions of his spiritual destiny. Even if he sometimes covered his face with his hands to pray, he only abused the enlightenment that came to him in his darkness by giving the law a touch of the divine. At the moment when he proclaimed the Supreme Being his soul was wandering, bewildered and dumb, on the edge of an abyss, and he sought to bridge it by a decree of fifteen articles. His strongest feeling was still his aversion to sacrilegious persons, in whom he saw not only anti-social elements but also shallow beings incapable of fear or suffering. Apart from that, his great speech of the 18th Floréal was less touched with religious awe and more exclusively statesmanlike than most of his utterances.

What is especially remarkable in that speech is his consciousness of the historical importance of the Revolution. ‘The world has changed,’ he cried, and for the first time there spoke in him the true Frenchman, drunk with the universality of his national idea:

‘The French people seem to be about 2,000 years ahead of the rest of the human race; indeed, one is tempted to regard them as a separate species!’

He rapidly fell into that piety which is so current among even the most unbelieving Frenchmen:

‘This precious soil that we inhabit, which Nature seems to have blessed above all other, was made to be the home of liberty and happiness; this sensitive and proud people was in truth born for glory and virtue. O my country! If fate had decided that I should be born in a strange land I should have

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envied the lot of your citizens and representatives. I am French; and I am one of your representatives. Sublime people, accept the sacrifice of my whole being. Happy is he who is born in your midst! Happy is he who may die for your good!’

This ardent language failed him when he celebrated the Supreme Being. He expressly took care not to make any other distinction between belief and unbelief than a political one: ‘It is a question of regarding atheism purely from the national point of view, as related to a system of conspiracy against the Republic.’ The dogma to which he wished to give the force of law was not in his eyes an absolute value, but the servant of politics: it was intended to enhance the authority of the law and facilitate the maintenance of order. ‘The idea of the Supreme Being, together with the immortality of the soul, consists in a ceaseless appeal to justice and is therefore a social and Republican idea.’ In a word, Robespierre’s campaign against atheism by no means worked out in favour of pure belief, nor did it give men access to the realm of religious truth; what he wanted was to create a new element of social utility, provide a further foundation for legislation, and extend the competence of the Republic to the Deity. The proclamation of the Supreme Being was a misunderstanding just as sterile as the earlier homage to the god ‘People’.

The first article of the decree adopted by the Convention read as follows:

‘The French people acknowledge the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.’

Article 15 contained the following statement:

‘There will be celebrated on the 20th Prairial next a national festival in honour of the Supreme Being.’

On Sunday the 20th Prairial—8th June by the old reckoning



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—a cannon-shot at eight o'clock in the morning announced the beginning of the Festival. It was Whit Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Ghost. The blue sky stretched like the immeasurable vault of Providence over Paris. The city was a pleasant orgy of flags and flowers; in every window hung a garland of roses, from every balcony a narrow strip of tricolor bunting. The streets were crowded with people in holiday attire streaming from every direction towards the Tuileries Gardens. How crystal clear the air was to breathe, and with what hopes were faces caressed by the wind! How had spring been so late in coming? A funereal burden seemed to have been lifted from Paris. It had wept, it had despaired and suffered hardship, and now life felt easy and friendly. Women had brought out of their cupboards long-forgotten summer dresses, men appeared in holiday clothes, and children were prettily adorned. They hurried along on joyful feet, lively voices rang out, and greetings and laughter were exchanged across the crowded streets. In the Tuileries Gardens the troops had taken up their positions, youths were arriving in detachments twelve deep with weapons or oak-boughs in their hands, and women were ranged along the river bank—the mothers carrying bunches of roses and the girls baskets of flowers. By eleven o'clock all the Sections had marched up, the drums were rolling, and the bugles rent the air with shrill blasts. The broad gardens were a sea of colour and movement: white dresses and flags fluttered in the breeze, while the blue and red uniforms, the shining gun-barrels, the horses rising above the crowd, and the press of late-comers surged against the decorated façades of the tall, slender houses.

On the principal dome of the Tuileries was an immense Phrygian cap made of tin, above which a ten-yard-long banner waved in the wind. Before the main façade of the palace an

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amphitheatre capable of holding 2,000 people had been constructed. The upper part was reserved for members of the Convention, while on the lower slopes were assembled 800 singers—men and women—and musicians with their instruments. The violins were tuning up, shrill notes came from the flutes, and the drums rolled gently as they were tested.

Punctually at noon a salvo of artillery thundered out, drowning the cheerful hum and frightening away the pigeons. Then there was silence, while the members of the Convention appeared in their blue frock-coats and broad-brimmed plumed hats and took their seats. The silence continued. In the middle was an armchair on a platform covered with a tricolor carpet. It was Robespierre's chair; but Robespierre was not there.

Robespierre was late, that was all. The Deputies looked at the raised, empty seat, messengers ran to and fro, and the Festival came to a standstill. Then the tension relaxed, the orderly groups broke up a little, and the Deputies took off their hats and made themselves comfortable in their seats.

Half an hour went by thus; then suddenly Robespierre was there. Small and stiff, he stood before the armchair in a sky-blue frock-coat and white knee-breeches, with his hair neatly arranged and powdered snow-white, and a tricolor silk scarf stretched in broad folds across his hips. Under his left arm he carried his hat with the red, white and blue ostrich feathers, and in his right hand he held a large bouquet of ears of corn, poppies and cornflowers. With a singular, almost happy smile he stood for a moment motionless, gazing at the fine spectacle.

At the sight of him the crowd was drawn as by an immense magnet back into its prescribed formations. The plumes and flags, the buglers of the cavalry, the drummers and fife-players, the rows of weapons, the pikes adorned with foliage, the green

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oak-boughs of the men, the red flowers of the women; and, behind, the blossoming chestnut trees, the distant green of the Champs Elysées, and over everything the clear, silvery-blue sky of the Ile-de-France—all this Robespierre took in at a glance. A timid pleasure warmed his heart: Paradise could not be far off; the Supreme Being would not refuse His blessing! Yes, this was his day! For a moment he forgot the anxiety about the future, the conspirators and traitors, death, blood. He so seldom turned his gaze on to the world, so seldom experienced what it was—Paris, France, mankind. There it all lay before him—splendid, full of hope, waiting for him to move—joyful and glittering. What a day! Hard reality melted away like winter's ice; a precious tear filled his eye and made everything seem dizzy and unreal. What a day! Perhaps now all would be well!

From then on the Festival went like clockwork, exactly according to the plans of David, who had covered many sheets with sketches for the groups, statues, decorations, processions and costumes, and given instructions how they were to be carried out. The choruses were staged by Méhul and Gossec, and the words by Desorgues and M. J. Chénier. They had been rehearsed the evening before in all the Sections, whose gatherings had never been so well attended. Robespierre raised his hand, the hum of voices was cut off, and he made a short address. His voice was clear that day and carried far. He spoke of the Supreme Being: 'All that is good is His work, or is Himself. Evil comes from the depraved man who oppresses his neighbour or allows him to be oppressed.' Then the thousand-voiced choir broke out. As the last chords rang out Robespierre took a torch, descended the steep steps slowly and gracefully, and approached the statue of Atheism.

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According to David the following scene then took place: 'The group went up in flames, disappeared into nothingness as rapidly as conspirators struck by the sword of the law. Out of its ashes rose Wisdom, with calm, pure brow. At the sight, tears of joy and gratitude sprang into all eyes.' In actual fact, however, it did not go quite according to plan; Atheism burned with some difficulty and Wisdom, when she appeared, was blackened with soot. The Deputies instantly recovered their good humour, and when Robespierre resumed with the words: 'It has returned to limbo, this monster that the spirit of the Kings vomited over France. . . .' the hilarity increased and could scarcely be concealed.

In accordance with David's programme a procession was then formed to go to the Champ-de-Mars. A hundred drummers, a great corps of buglers, cavalry fanfares, field artillery, detachments of infantry, the Sections, the various groups of the populace—all moved in an immense chain down the river. David hurried hither and thither like a sheep-dog, instructing and exhorting, swinging his plumed hat and urging on the stragglers. Then came the chariot of Agriculture drawn by eight cows—David had wanted bulls—and surrounded by Deputies linked together by a blue, white and red ribbon carried by children. Twenty paces in front of them walked the Incorruptible, with an empty space round him. The throng pressed against the cordon of soldiers to see him go by. Parents lifted up their children and women who were unable to see over the heads of the crowd had recourse to their mirrors to catch a glimpse of the great man. But Robespierre was no longer smiling; his expression was set, his lips were tightly compressed, and his facial muscles worked. He could feel behind him the solid hostility of the Convention. He recog-

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nized the voices unmercifully mocking and abusing him: he could hear Bourdon de l'Oise call him 'Dictator' and 'charlatan'; he could hear Courtois, Ruamps, Thirion and clearest of all the coarse voice of Lecointre, making disgusting jokes and even threatening the 'Dictator' with death. Merlin de Thionville pushed back a woman who cried '*Vive Robespierre!*' and hissed at her: 'Why can't you say *Vive la République?*' Then at last Robespierre turned round, saying in a gentle, almost sweet voice: 'Why ill-treat that good woman?' but his look was so hard and icy that Merlin felt cold shivers down his neck.

Robespierre felt that his brief moment of serenity on the festive platform had been deceptive. Men simply did not wish to be virtuous; he had not been able to change that, and now it was too late: the world would not change. The Festival had had to take place; it had been the inevitable conclusion of a year's struggle for the 'sovereignty of the people'. But there was no people: there were only men—incorrigible men, avid of life. That wonderful Paris under the intoxicating splendour of June was nothing but a den of voracious and lecherous animals. Whoever satiated them they loved; whoever wished to reform them they crucified. Robespierre no longer saw the shimmering midday light and the happy throng, no longer heard the gay music and lively cries. The world seemed to him extinguished, plunged into the darkness of death, and out of the shadows pressed the hissing voices.

The immense procession arrived at the Place de la Révolution and prepared to cross the bridge to the Left Bank in order to reach the Champ-de-Mars. The guillotine had been removed the evening before, but the place where it had stood was well remembered. A gang of workmen had tried during the night to wash away the pool of blood with hoses and had

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covered its remains with sand. The damp patch of sand gave off a curious sweetish smell, but fortunately an east wind blew the stale odour away from the procession. The people did not notice the wet sand so much as the absence of the guillotine. They did not think much about it, but hoped the rumour that it had been taken down for ever was true. In any case the roses in the hands of the laughing and singing women were much redder than the hateful patch that showed through the sand. The animals drawing the festive chariots, however, took fright at the damp sand and its smell, refused to go on, restlessly tossed their heads, sniffed the slaughter-house odour with averted eyes, shied and threw the procession into confusion. David anxiously hastened to the scene, and was glad then that they were not bulls. The drivers used their whips and goads and the procession at last moved on again, while the fanfares of the cavalry resumed their intoxicating music.

On the Champ-de-Mars there had been erected an artificial mound, crowned by a column, as homage to that Mountain Party in the Convention which Robespierre had so often called the foundation of the Republic. There people and Convention took an oath to the Supreme Being, while cannon thundered, weapons glinted, and the air was filled with shouts, bugle-calls, flowers and waving arms. It was the culmination of the Festival, but Robespierre saw and heard nothing but the hate of the men of the Convention. He stood at the top of the mound, with an empty space round him, looking like a hunted animal that had taken refuge on the highest crag, awaiting its persecutors. Some of the Deputies had mingled with the crowd and were speaking against the Dictator: Maximilien distinctly heard an old workman say: 'The b——! He's not content with being master; he wants to be God too!' The return of the Convention to the

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Tuileries became a sort of pursuit of Robespierre. The latter hurried along with his fists clenched and his head sunk on his breast. After an interval followed the group of Deputies, hardly able to keep in step. Were they followers or hunters? A wind had got up, the sky was clouding over, the dust whirled; Robespierre fled with the swarm of avenging furies storming behind him.

Late that evening he came back to his house, where everyone was collected in the living-room. They already knew that the Festival had not been a success. Young Lebas, who had taken his pregnant wife away from the crowded Champ-de-Mars before the end of the proceedings, described to her the attitude of the Deputies and added: 'The country is lost!' Robespierre came in tired, with his fine clothes covered with dust and the feathers in his hat crumpled. In his hand he still held the bouquet, clasping it like a weapon until Eléonore gently insisted on taking the withered flowers away from him. Before going up to his room Robespierre bade good-night to his friends with the words: 'You will not see me much longer!' Up in his room, he stood for a while at the window without lighting the lamp. The sky was lit up by a firework display above the Tuileries. The rockets shot up blindingly and swiftly went out. A red glare flashed, clear as day, lighting up the sky, the roofs, and the face of the solitary man; then that too went out. The darkness was dense and starless.

Like a meteor the news of the Festival flashed out across France and across Europe, and for a moment the world thought that the Terror was at an end—that Robespierre would take advantage of that day to accomplish a miracle of humanity, turning on to the countless faces that looked up to him the forgotten light of reconciliation. But it was not to be. Though the

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guillotine had been taken down it had been set up again, this time on the south-eastern edge of the city, because the authorities believed that the Faubourg Antoine, which contained the flower of the *sansculottes*, was better able to bear the daily sight of the death-carts than the bourgeois Rue Honoré. They were wrong, however. The people were no doubt coarse, but they were also compassionate, and the women at any rate crossly slammed their shutters when the convoys, with their sad burden, came in sight. They were insulted at being made to put up with a sight which it was thought necessary to spare 'better' people, and complained to their husbands: 'We may be poor, but we aren't inhuman.'

Saint-Just, who had been back in Paris a few days, had silently, but by no means unnoticed, resumed his place in the Committee of Public Safety. What had he spoken about with Robespierre? No one knew. Had he encouraged him, given him advice? What was certain was that Saint-Just thought the political horizon very black. He knew France to be on the eve of great military successes, but of the 'purging' of the Committee of Public Safety and the Convention he had little hope. He was not unaware that the establishment of an open dictatorship might still save the situation, but he lived so much in the future that he was unable to summon up the activity necessary to unravel the intrigues of the moment. He took no part in the Festival of the Supreme Being, but hastened back to the front, where, he considered, the real France was—out there in the bracing air of danger. Impatiently he ordered post-horses and was not content until he was back in that virile atmosphere of war. He left Paris almost unnoticed.

Robespierre was alone again, with only Couthon in his wheeled chair to help him face the daily mounting danger. The



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flower-wreaths of the Festival had not yet been taken away when the paralytic had himself carried up to the tribune to introduce the law of the 22nd Prairial—the law abolishing legal protection and enabling the execution of undesirable persons to be decided on by administrative action. In deathly silence the Convention listened to its own death-sentence; for this law repealed a former law stipulating that a Deputy could not be arrested except by order of the Assembly itself, and gave the Committee of Public Safety the right to make such an arrest and send the arrested Deputy before the Tribunal. It thus broke down the last slender defence of the national representatives against the tyranny of Robespierre. Ruamps exclaimed: 'If the decree is passed I shall blow out my brains!' Others roused themselves from their mortal paralysis to demand an adjournment. But Robespierre was already at the tribune; his spectacles were pushed up on to his forehead and his hard, clear eyes surveyed the benches. Terse and sharp as the knife of the guillotine came his words: 'I demand an immediate decision.' Without further resistance or spirit the Convention voted the decree of death.

The race with death had begun, and it was Robespierre who goaded on the competitors. In the Committee of Public Safety Billaud attacked the Triumvirate for having introduced the decree without asking the other members for their opinion. Robespierre, a little disconcerted, replied that as hitherto everything had been done on a basis of confidence he thought that he could proceed with Couthon. Billaud grew pale with rage, went up to his colleague with clenched fists, and said: 'You want to guillotine the whole Convention!' Robespierre's pale face winced, and his cheek muscles vibrated feverishly: 'There is a faction in the Convention that wants to ruin me,' he almost

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screamed. Billaud banged his fist on the table: 'You are a tyrant!' 'Now I know what you are!' cried Robespierre. 'So do I,' said the other, 'you are a counter-revolutionary!'

During this altercation, which made the carefully-shut windows rattle, Bourdon and Merlin in the Convention took advantage of the Incorruptible's absence to pass an amendment to the law voted the day before, restoring the right of legal protection to the Deputies. The breathing-space was of short duration. Next day Robespierre, from the president's chair, again brandished his invisible whip. Yesterday's amendment, he said, had been a mark of want of confidence; if the Convention had no confidence in them, he and Couthon were prepared to lay down their offices. The whip cracked; panting, the Deputies raced to overtake death. Bourdon rose, almost speechless with fear, to justify himself: 'I say, and I have always said, that the two Committees will save the State. But it is no crime to want a law explained. . . . I respect Couthon; I respect the Committee; I respect the indomitable "Mountain", which has saved liberty.' Merlin also begged for his favour: 'If my reason erred, my heart did not!' The amendments were repealed, but still Robespierre was not satisfied. Gazing sternly at Bourdon he warned the Convention against following 'intriguers—degenerate and despicable party leaders'. Bourdon then rose and said:

'It has never entered my head to want to make myself leader of a party!'

Robespierre looked away contemptuously and continued: 'It would be the height of shame if any of our colleagues were to let themselves be misled by calumnies about our purposes and the objects of our activities. . . .'

Bourdon interrupted him: 'I demand the proof of what has

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been said; it has just been said quite plainly that I am a wrong-doer.'

'In the name of the nation I demand to be heard. I did not name Bourdon. Woe to him who names himself!'

Then, looking over Bourdon's head, as if the latter had been dispatched for ever by this answer and had ceased to exist, Robespierre added: 'The "Mountain" is pure; it is sublime. The intriguers are not there.'

'Names! Name them!' cried several voices.

'I shall name them when necessary.'

In that moment Robespierre's fate was sealed. If he had spoken the names of those 'five or six rogues', the Convention would probably have sacrificed them with a sigh of relief, so as to have peace at last. But the continued uncertainty, with the law of the 22nd Prairial on the Statute Book, could now no longer be borne; who would be the first to go? When would the paralytic have himself carried up to the tribune by his gendarme and, in that gentle voice of his, demand fresh arrests? The conspiracy against the triumvirate, which hitherto had been carried on without any definite organization or determination, all at once became purposeful. Fouché was hard at work. He approached the men of the Right, sought out Durand-Maillane, Boissy d'Anglas and Palasne, sent mysterious messages to Barras, made appointments with Tallien and Rovère on foggy nights at street-corners in deserted suburbs. Soon he was sure enough of himself to be able to predict, within two or three days, when the nightmare would be ended.

Was Paris affected by this fever? People seemed to have a presentiment that something decisive would soon happen. Their anxiety kept them from staying at home and the theatres were crowded every evening. The papers were read eagerly

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once more and the lists of the executed, which, though they grew longer every day, had not been in demand for some time, again found purchasers.

The members of the Convention were having a bad time. They would gladly have fled from Paris or at any rate entrenched themselves at home, but thought it better to take part in the sittings; there, at least, they could follow the situation and not be overtaken by surprises. Many of them gave up their usual places and found seats elsewhere, in order not to fix themselves in the tyrant's memory. Others no longer sat down at all, but remained standing in the neighbourhood of the exit, so as to be able to disappear quickly in case of need. 'One must show some sort of good humour', said the Deputy Bandot, 'in order not to endanger one's life; one must at least assume a contented and unconstrained expression, as they had to in Nero's time.' It was as if the earth under their feet had become precipitous, and when anyone spoke of what might happen in a week's time he was laughed at. A week! When the shadow of death over France grew daily longer!

In this bitter and critical conflict the Committee of General Security attempted to forge a new weapon against Robespierre—ridicule. The old atheist Vadier had got on the track of a circle of enthusiasts who met at the house of an old woman named Catherine Théot to hear the Scriptures expounded, and in particular the Apocalypse. This woman, who was known as the 'Mother of God', had already spent some time in the Bastille for contending that she 'had no need of the Sacraments and was directly inspired by God'. She foretold the future and was convinced that God had bestowed on her the favour of immortality. This precious gift she communicated to those who came to her to be 'initiated' and took part in her devotional sessions.

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The gatherings took place in her humble dwelling near the Panthéon, in one of those dismal streets whose meagre sky is almost blotted out by Soufflot's mighty dome. Her most devoted disciple was Dom Gerle, formerly a prior, who had been a representative of the clergy in the Assembly of the States-General. 'It is time for our woes to cease,' he declared to a police spy who, disguised as one of the faithful, had slipped into the pious gathering; 'God has hidden Himself. But he has condescended to our Mother, to make his dwelling in her. She it is, the mother and daughter of God, who will rule the universe. After the resurrection we shall all be made young again.'

'God has hidden Himself;' what a moving phrase! Heaven had pitilessly closed and God spoke no more to men; they wished to listen only to their own voices, by which they were intoxicated in their headlong progress. But what became of those who had not ceased to long for the heavenly grace, who could not live without prayer and the communion of the faithful? There were no more true priests in whom confidence could be placed; the churches were closed; and the sacred flame no longer burned in the tabernacle. God remained hidden. But now all-too-simple hearts sought everywhere for a spark, however small, of the promised and unknowable splendour of the heavenly kingdom. Prophets lifted up their voices. In many parts of the country the dead were said to have risen, and in the deserted churches at midnight were heard heavenly choirs of angels. A sibyl named Suzette Labrousse appeared and made a pilgrimage to Rome to convert the Pope. Somnambulists, mediums, and fortune-tellers were besieged with clients and mesmerism flourished. Saint-Martin, the 'unknown philosopher', founded numerous communities of the 'illuminated' throughout the country, and at Strasbourg Silferhjelm preached

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with great success the gospel of Swedenborg. 'Father Raphaël,' with his broad-brimmed hat and pilgrim's staff, preached his own mysterious doctrine. The 'Prophet Elias' prepared magic charms and had a recipe for making invisible anyone who assassinated a member of the Convention. Behind all these grotesque and perverted phenomena, however, glowed a muffled and suppressed desire for worship, abandonment, consolation in God. The 'Mother of God' promised immortality, while the death-carts rumbled by in the streets outside and daily fresh battalions marched away eastward and northward to the front, and her faithful, imagining they were listening to the Word of God, ceased to hear the thunder of the merciless present.

Vadier had the old woman and her believers arrested, and conceived the idea of connecting Robespierre with these superstitious proceedings and thus covering with ridicule not only his cult of the Supreme Being but also the man himself. It turned out that Dom Gerle, who had known the Incorruptible at the time of the States-General, had in his pocket a certificate of citizenship signed by him. The search of the house of the 'Mother of God' brought to light a letter addressed by her to Robespierre, in which the latter was described as 'Son of the Supreme Being', 'Saviour of the human race', and the 'Messiah announced by the prophets'. As the old woman could not write, probably Vadier's agents had fabricated the letter and slipped it under her mattress. However that may be, it was well devised, for the expressions used in it were the sort that were often on the lips of those who tried to describe Robespierre's half-mystical, half-political power.

The lean Vadier's report to the Convention on 'the conspiracy of the Mother of God', accompanied by sly grimaces of

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his mobile face, had a great success and caused much hilarity. The singular ceremonies and still more singular believers—among whom were some pretty girls—greatly diverted the Convention. The allusions to Robespierre were so carefully made as to be hardly comprehensible, but as Vadier had warned his audience beforehand even the most obscure passages were understood in the manner in which he had intended. Robespierre not being present, Vadier had no difficulty in getting the report printed. Next morning 60,000 copies were sent out to the provinces and it was sold in all the streets. It was a striking success for the ingenious atheist, but nothing came of it. That evening Robespierre summoned the Public Prosecutor and the president of the Tribunal, Dumas, to see him at the Committee of Public Safety, and together they examined the Théot dossier. Fouquier gave notice that he intended to have the members of the society condemned next morning and executed in the afternoon. Robespierre snatched the documents from him, declared the arrested persons to be an insignificant ‘band of bigoted imbeciles’, and forbade their condemnation, in spite of the resolution of the Convention. Billaud was furious at the violation of the law, but could do nothing; Fouquier had to retire without the documents and look round for other victims. Disappointed, he betook himself to the Security Committee and exclaimed: ‘He, he, he is against it! He, he, he will not have it!’

But the Security Committee and the now irreconcilable Fouquier had other means of heaping shame on the great man. The trial of the little Renault girl, who had gone to Robespierre’s lodging with two penknives ‘to see what a tyrant looked like’, was now at hand. It had long been put off, as it was to be a great festival of sacrifice in honour of Robespierre. The young girl was made the centre of an ‘amalgam’—that is, a

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collection of persons who, though they had no sort of connexion with one another, were nevertheless accused of the same conspiracy. Fifty-four persons—including Cécile and her family, Mme. de Sainte-Amaranthe with her son and her beautiful daughter, the Prince of Saint-Maurice, a Laval-Montmorency, the Sombreuils, father and son, two footmen, a banker, a billbroker, a general merchant, a *concierge*, a nun and a priest—in short, a cross-section of the French population, appeared before the Tribunal. To the president's question whether she had intended to kill Robespierre, Cécile answered: 'I never had any intention of killing Robespierre. I simply regard him as one of the chief tyrants of my country!' To all the other accused the same question was put. In less than two hours they had all been condemned to death, for the Court now worked by the new method provided by the law of the 22nd Prairial. The 'amalgam' was loaded into eight carts, and the first driver was already brandishing his whip when an order came to wait. What had happened? The condemned were unloaded again and taken back into the chancery of the prison. The executioner's assistants and prison officials hurried to and fro. It had been forgotten that the fifty-four 'assassins of Robespierre' were to be taken to the place of execution clothed in red shirts.

A long agonizing hour went by while the fifty-four red overalls were being prepared. The Security Committee had ordained that the condemned, having attempted to assassinate the Father of the People, should die in the parricide's garb. When the procession at last set off it resembled a solemn, barbaric, sacrificial cortège. The eight vehicles were surrounded by a squadron of cavalry and followed by a detachment of artillery, while drums were beaten and the roaring of the crowds filled the summer air. High above the crowded heads of the spec-



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tators those figures in brilliant scarlet went by. Not since the execution of the King had there been such a display. It was as though a hecatomb of unexampled magnificence and solemnity were being offered to the idol, Robespierre. Each of the thousands who watched that astounding procession had the same idea: 'Is it possible? All that for a single man?' It was exactly the effect that the Security Committee, which had ordered all the pomp, wished to produce. Robespierre, who on the day of the Supreme Being had sat on a throne and received the homage of the people, to-day seemed to have been already snatched up into the clouds, and, like some supernatural phenomenon, to be receiving as homage the cries of death and the odour of blood. The red victims jolted past; the drums resounded. How long, O God, how long?

About seven in the evening the carts arrived at the south-eastern suburb to which the guillotine had been removed some days before. Voulland, of the Security Committee, had called out to one of his colleagues: 'Let us hurry and go to the High Altar to see the Red Mass!' Many had hurried there and the scaffold was closely surrounded by an inquisitive crowd. Cécile was the first to die. Shuddering with horror and pleasure the people watched the lightning sequence of executions. There were so many young women among the victims that no wonder the people spoke of acts of vengeance for love. Mlle. de Sainte-Amaranthe was so beautiful in her red surplice! She had to die before her mother, although the poor woman implored the executioner with terrible cries to let her go first. For the last time the face of the actress Grandmaison appeared before the public; it was done so quickly that there was hardly time to see her contorted features above the red cloth before she was seized and the three heavy blows rang out. The young girl Nicole

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was hardly seventeen years old, but she had secretly brought food to the Grandmaison and now had to die with her. She understood nothing of what was happening. She respected the authorities and the noble gentlemen and beautiful ladies among whom she found herself, and had never worn a dress so clean and fine as her red surplice. Docilely she laid herself down on the balancing board, which was slippery with blood, and in a timid voice asked the executioner who bound her: 'Am I all right like this, Sir?' The crowd became silent. Fifty-four human lives; in exactly twenty-eight minutes all was over.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE 9TH THERMIDOR

**F**leurus! What a day of national rejoicing! For the sixth time the armies of the Revolution had crossed the Sambre. Charleroi had capitulated. Coburg's troops had been driven back at the point of the bayonet by the ragged, ill-fed infantry of Kléber, Marceau and Lefevre, and cut to pieces by Hautpoul's cavalry. The Imperial army dissolved, while Saint-Just, carrying his plumed hat on the point of his sword, led the Republicans in pursuit. High above the smell of gunpowder and the tattered tricolors the strains of the irresistible 'Marseillaise' rent the air. On the 11th Messidor, still flushed with victory, Saint-Just arrived in Paris. Why did not France breathe more easily now? The enemy had been driven out and an end would soon be made of the Vendée revolt. The hour had come to stop the inexorable wheel of death and to say to Frenchmen: Live!

But it was too late. From the 23rd Prairial to the 8th Thermidor 1,285 executions were carried out. The Convention had got going—at last—and was to know no rest until Robespierre had been struck down. Hostility surrounded him on every side like heavy fumes. He took refuge more and more with the Jacobins, but his paralysing melancholy increased day by day and destroyed his will to fight. He complained to the Society that he had lost all authority with the Committees: 'In London they represent me to the French Army as a Dictator, and the same calumnies are disseminated in Paris. You would shudder

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if I were to tell you where. They are saying in London that in France assassination plots are being fabricated in order that I may be surrounded with a bodyguard. Here they say, speaking of the Renault girl, that there must have been a love-story behind it all and that I had her lover guillotined. What do you say when I tell you that these monstrous stories are by no means rejected by certain persons enjoying a sacred office and that even among my own colleagues people have been found to spread them? . . . Even if I am compelled to renounce a part of the functions entrusted to me there still remains to me my authority as representative of the people, and I will wage war to the death on tyrants and conspirators.'

It was just the other way round. It was the others who had declared war to the death on him. From the 15th Messidor onwards Robespierre no longer appeared in the Committee of Public Safety. The celebrations of the victory of Fleurus were still going on; flags hung from windows and flowers and bunting still decorated the tribune of the Convention. France rejoiced at this victory; now there would soon be peace and the men would come back to their homes covered with glory, with their faces shining with the glow of a new self-confidence. Soon France would be the leading nation of the world and kings would respectfully bare their heads when the 'Marseillaise' was played. Almost sadly Robespierre saw this joy of victory, feeling that the nation was filled with an ardour that passed him by. He still lived, but France had already half forgotten him. In the light of these victories there loomed a different future from the one he had dreamed of. Men no longer needed him. Joyously they seized the laurels of victory and their hearts went out to the men who would soon return from the battlefield. He had wished to bring virtue to this people, but it was content with

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victory. From a thousand throats rang out the *Chant du Départ*. The standards fluttered in a new wind—the wind of Fleurus. Among all those men who for a day forgot the pressure of the present only one was sad—Robespierre.

For weeks he did not show his face in the Committee of Public Safety. Was it defiance, or calculation, or discouragement? It was said that he sat at home preparing a great speech. This was true, but all the same he found time now and then to leave the city and roam the country. Perhaps he went out to Ermenonville once more, to the grave of Rousseau, and spoke with the shade of his dead Master. Did he thank him for the light he had received, or did he put a last question to him—a question he had forgotten to put before: how a people could be made not only virtuous but happy? Alas! It was not the blessed colloquy of the man of action with his genius, but the dumb complaint of the solitary who had lost hope. The bitterness that he was soon to express—for the last time—drifted up to him from the stony tomb, which gave him no answer. ‘They call me tyrant!’ he whispered in unspeakable sorrow. But no voice, no word, no breath came to give him consolation. The hour of grace was forever gone.

Until the 5th Thermidor neither the Convention nor the Committees managed to see the Incorruptible. He only appeared again on the insistence of the Committee of Public Safety in order to give account to his colleagues ‘of the conspiracies about which he continually spoke in ambiguous terms to the Jacobins, of the reasons for his absence from the Committee for four ‘decades’, and of his intimate relations with the jurymen and judges who were speaking only of purging the Convention and guillotining the Deputies’. The session, at which the members of the Security Committee were also pre-

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sent, came to nothing. Everyone felt that the obstacle lay not in opinions, but in the personal factor. Saint-Just told of a statement by an enemy officer who had been taken prisoner and had spoken of the hopes reposed by the Coalition in the early fall of Robespierre. David unreservedly supported the young man, saying that only the enemies of France could be behind the conspiracy that seemed to be gathering against the triumvirate. Billaud began to hesitate; he was a blunt, but upright man, to whom only the Revolution, not its personalities, mattered. It looked as if there would be peace between the two distrustful parties. Couthon even announced it at the Jacobin Club, adding, however, in the ambiguous and threatening style of Robespierre, that it should be easy for the Convention to crush 'the five or six insignificant figures whose hands were full of the riches of the Republic and dripping with the blood of the innocents they had sacrificed'. Fouché, Barras, Tallien and their associates had no doubt that this referred to them; but what about Carnot, who had always behaved with irreproachable correctness? He had just sent off to the front half of the artillery stationed in Paris; Hanriot could do nothing about it, for Carnot was within his rights, having consulted the law beforehand, if he did not already know it by heart.

On the same day Fouché wrote the following letter to a friend: 'Friend and brother, do not worry; patriotism will triumph over tyranny and over all the base and contemptible passions that are in league to enslave it. A few days longer, and the scoundrels and the criminals will be known. The integrity of honest men will triumph. Even to-day we may see the traitors unmasked.' Fouché was quite imperturbable. The most unscrupulous of all the Revolutionaries, he was conspiring against the most virtuous man of the Convention and using

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against him exactly the same expressions that the latter applied to him; in the excitement of those last days he by no means lost his head.

Another letter written at that moment contained no spark of hypocrisy; it was a suppressed cry for help, but it struck the recipient, Tallien, like a thunderbolt. He found it when he came home at night, pushed under his door. Without even going in and shutting the door he tore open the letter and read:

‘A police inspector has just been here. He came to inform me that to-morrow I go before the Tribunal—that means to the scaffold. That is not much like what I have just dreamed—that Robespierre no longer existed and the prisons were opened. Thanks to your egregious cowardice there will soon be no one left in France to make it come true.

‘THÉRÉSA.’

Tallien stood as if stunned; holding the opened letter in his hand he stared at the hastily scribbled words. Yes, it was Thérésa’s handwriting; the words seemed to breathe out the smell of death. It was late, after midnight, and the oil lamps in the hall flickered. Tallien turned round and left the house as if pursued. Whither? To Fouché!

Night or day, day or night—to those in the prisons it was all the same. The knife of the guillotine marked the passage of the hours. On the 1st Thermidor there were twenty-eight executions, including ten women; on the 2nd there were fourteen; on the 3rd again twenty-eight; and on the 4th no less than forty-six, including the Noailles ladies. Among the fifty-five persons executed on the 5th were two princes—a Rohan and a German called Salm-Kirburg, whose charming palace on the banks of the Seine had only just been finished, General Alexandre de Beauharnais and the author of the *Actes des Apôtres*,

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Champcenetz, who had made himself unpopular by saying to the president of the Tribunal: 'Tell me, M. le Président, can one do here as in the National Guard—get a substitute?' On the 6th Thermidor thirty-six persons mounted the scaffold, of whom the youngest was sixteen and the oldest eighty-four; and on the 7th there were thirty-seven, among them the famous Baron von der Trenck, who had once languished in the prisons of the great Frederick, and André Chénier, France's great poet. But still the prisons were overflowing, although the commissars went from prison to prison with their notes or lists emptying the cells, *agents provocateurs* sawed through window bars and placed compromising notes in the prisoners' pockets, Fouquier-Tinville no longer had any sleep, and Sanson now had eleven assistants. Who still wanted this blood? Who still thirsted for it? Gods and men alike rejected it. It flowed of itself; it flowed like a stream that never reached the sea.

Meanwhile where was Robespierre? Suddenly on the 7th Thermidor he appeared at the tribune. The House, which had been rather empty at the beginning of the sitting, when Barère announced the capture of Antwerp, quickly filled. The footsteps of late-comers sounded among the benches, the loud hum of conversation ebbed away, the ushers drove back the swarms of the inquisitive, and the colourless, eager voice of the Incorruptible made itself heard. He had before him a thick manuscript—his testament—written during many solitary nights spent at his table. He had shown it to nobody; not even Saint-Just or Couthon had known that he was going to speak. His eyes were hidden behind his green spectacles and his hands moved restlessly about the desk. With energy he attacked the calumny that imputed to him and his friends dictatorial aims. It was not he who filled the prisons and flooded the Place de la



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Révolution with blood. 'Is it true that a certain number of Deputies have been told that their ruin has been decided on? Is it true that a tale has been cunningly and insolently spread about that a large number of our colleagues no longer dare to sleep at night in their own dwellings?' He well knew, however—and here his voice rose threateningly—that there were conspirators in that very house, that there were 'nocturnal rendezvous where perfidy helped the guests to the poison of hate and calumny.' The Security Committee, he said, must be formally subordinated to the Committee of Public Safety. Each of them received a thrust: Vadier, Amar, Billaud, Collot, Barère and especially Cambon and Carnot.

The speech was long and ranged from subject to subject. Now scoundrels, traitors and conspirators were accused—never had he used these favourite words of his so often—now he defended his political work, now he cast his eyes abroad, now to the past. He summed up the results of his political activity: intrigues and self-seeking had triumphed, the nation was divided up as booty, the world was populated by fools and knaves, virtue was persecuted and denied, the administration was corrupt and incapable, the legislators were humiliated, the people misjudged or scorned. In a word, Robespierre saw before him a field of ruins—the Republic.

He confessed to an immense weariness: 'If I were to disguise this truth it would be better for me to receive the hemlock. My reason, but not my heart, is losing hope in this Republic of virtue, the plans of which I have sketched. For over six weeks the nature and force of the calumny and my incapacity to do good and prevent evil have obliged me to give up entirely my functions as a member of the Committee of Public Safety.' What was he but 'a slave of freedom, a living martyr of the Republic,

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a victim and enemy of crime?’ He did not fear death: he knew the past and saw into the future. ‘What friend of the nation would wish to survive the moment when he might no longer serve it and defend its oppressed innocence? . . . At the sight of the vice which the torrent of the Revolution has confounded with the civic virtues, I have often, I admit, been afraid of being sullied in the eyes of posterity by the unclean proximity of the corrupt persons who mingle with the sincere friends of humanity.’ Did he feel that it was all over? Was this not the cry of a falling man who saw his work going up in flames? ‘Frenchmen, do not tolerate the humiliation of your souls by your enemies and the weakening of your virtue by their comfortless doctrine! No, Chaumette! No, Fouché! Death is not an eternal sleep. Citizens! Efface from your tombstones that saying which throws a mourning-crape over Nature, discourages oppressed innocence, and insults death, and engrave in its stead this saying: “Death is the beginning of immortality”.’ These words spoken to the silent Assembly were his last act of volition: ‘Some time ago I promised to leave the oppressors of the people a powerful testament. I now express it with the detachment that befits the situation in which I find myself: I bequeath to them the terrible truth—death.’

With what feelings did the Convention listen to this speech? Robespierre had been speaking for almost two hours, and his voice sounded hard and strained. His hands restlessly played with the pages of the manuscript or wandered over the desk. Who was this man? He spoke of death as one who longed for its coming, and of the future as one who despaired of it. Was it worth while striking him down? Had he not already collapsed among the colossal ruins of his own austere dreams? But they could not be sure; they could not know whether this apparently

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expiring man stood on the threshold of eternal darkness or would flare up once more.

The Convention did not know what to do. Never had this pallid man been more enigmatic. Now he raised his head and scanned the rows of Deputies. Fouché was not there, but did his glance fasten on the little group of Tallien, Barras, and Bourdon? Possibly not, for he suddenly named Cambon, the honest, industrious administrator of the finances, called him a scoundrel, and criticized his work; then again made allusions to Carnot and even Barère, and finally lost himself according to his custom in vague threats: 'I dare not name them at this moment and in this place. I cannot bring myself to tear away completely the veil that hides the secret of this corruption.' And again: 'There exists a conspiracy in the Convention and the Committees to corrupt both patriots and the country.' What remedy is there for this evil? To punish the traitors, to reorganize the bureaux of the Security Committee, to weed out that Committee itself and subordinate it to the Committee of Public Safety, likewise to purge the Committee of Public Safety, and to constitute a unified Government under the supreme authority of the Convention.'

In dumbfounded silence the Convention heard him to the end. So he wanted fresh victims? Whom would he strike? Several? Or all? The Assembly seemed benumbed, but it felt that if this speech was allowed to go unrefuted all would be over. Lecointre was the first to pull himself together; he demanded that the speech be printed, in the hope that this would unloose a wave of protest. He was not mistaken. Bourdon demanded that the speech should first go to the two Committees for their approval. Barère, who was not quite sure which way the wind blew, prudently opposed this course. But Cambon was

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already on his feet; shaking his fist at Robespierre, he cried out: 'Before I let myself be dishonoured I will speak to France. . . . Hitherto I have despised all attacks; I have brought everything before the Convention. Now is the time to tell the whole truth. A single man has paralysed the will of the Convention. It is the man who has just made this speech: it is Robespierre.'

So it was Cambon who gave the signal for attack. He was no conspirator; he had not taken part in secret *rendezvous*; it was all the same to him who was in power. But let no man wrong him; let no one dare to say that he was a bad administrator, that he failed in his duty, or that he was not an honest man. That was why he pointed his finger at Robespierre. On all sides Deputies rose and demanded the reference of the speech to the Committees. Charlier called out: 'To be able to boast of the courage of virtue one must also have the courage of truth. Name the persons whom you accuse, by their names!' Wild applause broke out, and a hundred voices shouted: 'Names! Names!' But Robespierre was silent. The printing of the speech was rejected. It was five o'clock in the afternoon; the Deputies rose to leave the hall. In the tumult of adjournment hardly anyone heard Robespierre, who had fallen exhausted on a bench, whisper to himself: 'I am lost.'

These days were burning hot in Paris. Not a drop of rain had fallen for weeks; people crept along in the shadow of the houses and every step produced a cloud of dust. In the courtyard of the Duplays' house the flowers that Eléonore had lovingly tended in the little patch of soil were all dried up; the earth was cracked and a searing wind blew across the roofs and through the withered tree-tops. Evening brought no coolness. After supper Robespierre walked a little in the Champs-Élysées with Eléonore. As the sun set behind the distant hills it threw burning

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reflections in a purple sky. It was soon time to return, so as not to be late for the evening session of the Jacobins. Silently the two walked along together. Eléonore's heart beat faster as she shyly looked sideways at her companion; she would so gladly have spoken to him once more, only once, of the future. But she did not dare to; his downcast look, his tightly-compressed lips, and the spasmodic contraction of his facial muscles did not invite confidence. Gazing at the red glow of the evening sky she said in a timid voice: 'It will be fine to-morrow.' But her companion made no answer.

At the Jacobin Club the heat was stifling. Never had the hall been so crowded; the throng stretched away into the ill-lit recesses and corners of the long chamber. Sweat poured from people's foreheads as they sat tightly packed together. The women in their light dresses came off best; the men would have liked to take off their coats, but knowing that Robespierre did not approve of such slovenliness they respected his wishes. About ten o'clock in the evening the Incorruptible appeared, surrounded by his friends from the Duplays' house. For several minutes applause continued, and the hall shook as the shouts of the assembly surged round him in one long-drawn-out roar. Not without some difficulty he obtained a hearing and began to read the speech he had made that afternoon to the Convention. These Jacobins were of a different kidney from the Deputies and at any rate did not fear for their skins. He was continually interrupted by applause, and it was after midnight when he finished. The Assembly acclaimed him tumultuously, but he imposed silence again with some difficulty in order to say:

'This speech is my last will and testament. The gang of miscreants is so strong that I cannot hope to escape. I succumb without regret. I leave you my memory; you will defend it.'

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At this the assembly rose to its feet, throwing handkerchiefs and hats into the air and applauding him. The painter David, stretching out both hands to him, was distinctly heard to exclaim: 'If it must be, I will drink the hemlock with you.' And another voice rang out: 'Free the Convention from the criminals who oppress it! Away! Forward! Save liberty once more!' Collot and Billaud tried in vain to make themselves heard, to explain why they had voted against the printing of the speech; but their words were completely drowned by shouts of: 'To the guillotine!' They were hustled and struck, sticks and fists were raised menacingly at them. With great difficulty they fought their way to the entrance. Their clothes were torn, their hats lost and trampled underfoot. Strong hands seized hold of them and before they knew where they were they found themselves out in the street.

Meanwhile at the Committee of Public Safety a peaceful silence reigned. There were lights at some of the desks where bent figures sat under green shades, their pens scratching on the lighted paper, and the great room was full of shadows. Each man was occupied with his own work. It was known that Robespierre had had a great success at the Club and that Billaud and Collot had not been able to get a word in, but further details were lacking. No more peaceful and comforting picture could be imagined than that twilight room with its few lights burning under dark shades. Even the breathing of the working men could almost be heard, so profound was the silence. Carnot was bent over a map, taking measurements with a compass and jotting down figures. Saint-Just wrote uninterruptedly; a blond lock of hair fell over his brow and glistened in the candle-light. Then the door was suddenly opened and Billaud and Collot burst in, with their hair dishevelled and

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their collars torn open. Without looking up Saint-Just asked in his gentle voice: 'Well, what news from the Jacobins?' The irony of this remark infuriated Collot. He rushed at Saint-Just, seized him by the sleeve, and bellowed: 'What are you writing there? You're writing an accusation against us, aren't you?' The youth looked at the enraged man calmly and amicably, hesitated a moment, and then said: 'Quite right, my dear fellow; that's what I'm doing!' And, turning to Carnot, he added: 'I haven't forgotten you either.' Then he dipped his pen in the ink and prepared to go on writing.

But the other members intervened. Saint-Just had no right to address the Convention directly. Whatever he wrote had first to be submitted to the two Committees. After an embittered altercation he promised to do this, and then asked for peace, so that he could go on writing. Silence fell again in the great room; only Collot still walked up and down, breathing hard in his excitement. Saint-Just looked up and said: 'Collot, won't you sit down? It is impossible to write.' After that nothing more was heard but the scratching of pens. Nobody dared leave the room and glances were continually stolen in the direction of Saint-Just, who went on writing indefatigably. So long as he was at his desk all was not yet lost; but they must not lose sight of him. What was all that he was writing? How many names might there not be in that terrible report? At least he had promised to submit it first to the Committees. A dozen malignant eyes from the semicircle of darkness were fixed on the young man whose fair angel's head was bent over the paper. Did he smile? Slowly the hours dragged by.

In the early morning the antechamber began to fill with Deputies, who rushed up to one another in perplexity and tried to find out what the situation was. Their footsteps and voices

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were plainly audible to those working in the room. Suddenly it was noticed that Saint-Just had disappeared. He had taken advantage of a moment when their attention was distracted to get up silently and leave the room. All sprang to their feet: now was the moment to act. Somebody drew aside the curtains and the morning light—it was the 9th Thermidor—streamed in on to faces pale from lack of sleep. The lights were extinguished, the doors were opened, and Deputies came in. Messengers hurried to and fro. What was to happen? Should Hanriot, the commander of the National Guard, be arrested? The Mayor of Paris, Fleuriot-Lescot, and the Government Commissar on the Municipality, Payan, were summoned in haste and detained under all kinds of pretexts in the offices of the Committee of Public Safety. For it was plain to all that the important thing was to make sure of the armed Sections and the people at the Hôtel de Ville, who had hitherto always stood by Robespierre.

Barras now looked in for a moment. He had slept well, was carefully dressed, and smelled of *eau de Cologne*. He had already been conferring with Cambacérès, Boissy d'Anglas, and other men of the Right. In his pocket was a note sent to him the night before by Fouché: 'To-morrow we must strike!' But Saint-Just did not reappear, although he had promised to submit his report. Instead, an office messenger arrived with the following note from him: 'Injustice has hardened my heart; I shall first of all reveal it to the Convention.' It was the declaration of war. The day's session could not now pass without a decision being taken. If only Hanriot could be found; the best thing would be to look him up at once. While this question was still being discussed an usher of the Convention hurried up and called out: 'Saint-Just is at the tribune!'

It was true; Saint-Just stood at the speaker's desk. With his



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hands behind his back, dressed in a brown frock-coat and white waistcoat, he stood motionless, watching the excited members of the Assembly seeking their places. On his face not the slightest emotion was visible, his brow was as serene as ever, and his golden earrings dangled gently. The first words he spoke were about 'Institutions'. Never before had he expounded to the Convention that exact, statesmanlike dream. But now he was to demand them—those 'Institutions' that were more important than laws and would 'subject human pride irrevocably to the yoke of public liberty'. He continued: 'The Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety have entrusted me . . .' At that moment Tallien sprang to the tribune and demanded to speak on a point of order. He pointed with outstretched arm at the man with powdered hair, dressed in a sky-blue frock-coat, who sat on the first bench, and called out something. A thousand pairs of eyes were fixed on Robespierre. All at once he found himself the centre of the drama. Everyone tried to read his inscrutable face, everyone observed his pallor and noticed that he was wearing the same clothes as at the recent Festival of the Supreme Being. Tallien accused him of having brought the nation to the brink of an abyss: 'I demand that the curtain be now torn away!'

Saint-Just could not go on speaking; and in fact he was never to conclude his speech. For now Billaud rose and addressed him. Why had he not submitted his report to the Committee? 'It is an attempt to strangle the Convention,' he said, and went on, pointing at Robespierre: 'The Assembly would be misjudging recent events and its own present situation if it did not recognize the fact that it stands between two abysses. It will perish if it is weak!' All the Deputies sprang up from their seats shouting 'No! No!' Billaud's wild shouts rose like seagulls above a raging

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ocean. We are all ready to die with honour, for none of us wishes to live under a tyrant!

Robespierre then rose, adjusted the lapels of his coat with both hands, and went up to the tribune. Was he speaking? Nothing could be heard, for a deafening cry from a thousand throats filled the resounding chamber: 'Down with the tyrant!' There were now four at the tribune. Saint-Just had descended two steps and leaned motionless against the partition. Billaud stood in the middle, with Tallien next to him. Robespierre still had one foot on the last step; he held his hat pressed under his left arm and with his right hand clutched the speaker's desk. Lips were moving, mouths opened wide, arms were thrown up and fists raised. Suddenly Tallien was seen holding a dagger in his hand and brandishing it at Robespierre. At the same time he yelled a single word over and over again, but nothing could be heard. The hall was one great tumult; President Thuriot's bell rang, and people rushed up to the tribune. It was like the thunder of the Last Judgment.

Restrain yourselves, men of the Convention! There you are fighting for dear life—your faces streaming with sweat, the veins in your necks swollen with shouting, your collars disarranged, your eyes rolling. You wish to live, nothing more. Many of you are good men, many are able men, many are scoundrels. You have fought, endured, toiled. You have shed blood—streams of innocent blood. Now you feel you are at the end of your tether; your courage and your cowardice alike have been of no avail, your wretched human lives are threatened, and it is only fear that makes you fight like Titans. You are thinking of your personal safety, of the morrow, or at the most of the day after. But the ideals that originated in the Convention and circled the Earth will not be exhausted even in a

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hundred years. Who can blame you for wanting to save your skins? How insignificant is your fear compared with the wild century of truths and errors that your brief rule in that hall irresistibly let loose. The coming generations are already impatient to forget what in you is earthly—all too earthly—and to see in you only the race of giants that inscribed ‘To live free or to die’ on the altar of the nation. If your weak human understanding could enable you to be silent for a moment and hold your breath you might hear in the air, hurrying by on superhuman wings, the sound of a choir of genii of the future, including you all—killers and victims, victors and vanquished—in its blessed chant. Posterity, whether it believes in the truths announced by you or not, is anxious to console you for the misery of your intestinal struggles and to remind you that many of you knew how to die honourably, as befits anyone here on earth who takes a hand in the destinies of a nation. Do not forget that the country is a mother who speaks to men as to her children. Pause and listen to that voice, which you, and you alone, have made audible. There you are waving your hats, clenching your fists, and shouting, while posterity, hungry for the light, looks on from the upper windows, and while the breath of the future gently stirs the tattered flags hanging above the seat of President Thuriot.

The first voice to become audible again was that of Tallien, who proposed the immediate arrest of General Hanriot and his staff. Approved! Then the arrest of the president of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Approved! Then Barère got in a few words above the ebbing tumult and proposed measures to prevent the rising of the Commune. Then spoke Vadier, whose garrulity somewhat lessened the tension. That could not be allowed, and Tallien again demanded a hearing ‘in order to bring back the discussion to the real matter at issue.’

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'I'll see about doing that,' shouted Robespierre, and his voice still had its old keenness and haughty coldness. Would it produce its effect once more, for the last time, and subdue the Convention? The latter was by no means sure of itself, having no settled plan of campaign, but only fear. He had hardly spoken the first sentence, however, when the president's bell drowned his voice. Thuriot manipulated that bell without ceasing, brandishing it like a weapon or a furious hammer; its shrill ringing was like the paralysing voice of a malignant beast that would not let go its prey.

Not until Tallien got up did that furious ringing cease for a moment. He flung fresh accusations at Robespierre and his friends. Why during the last six weeks—the most critical weeks in the history of the Republic—had he left his post in the Committee of Public Safety, like a common deserter who in the hour of danger leaves his comrades in the lurch? Why had he created a special police force, if not to subjugate the Convention? Robespierre prepared to answer, but Thuriot's bell was set in motion again and mingled its furious ringing with the buzzing voices of the Assembly.

Hunted and surrounded, Robespierre gazed wildly round searching for help. He tried to look his former friends of the 'Mountain' in the face, but most of them turned away as if they did not understand. Did he really still hope to find loyalty in that raging hall filled with murderous cries? Did he actually entertain hopes of those men who all the time had only feared him? His desperately roaming eyes fell on the men of the 'Marsh', the Right, who for a year had been silent and whose Parliamentary insignificance had never been disturbed by him. There sat Sieyès, looking as if the whole affair had nothing to do with him. There was Cambacérès, as if to say: 'I am only an

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expert!' Boissy seemed to be gloating over the fratricidal strife of the terrorists. Robespierre called to them:

'To you, virtuous men, I now turn, and not to those robbers ...'

Thuriot's bell was on the watch, and its clapper swung to and fro—furious, malignant, invincible.

'President of murderers!' shouted Robespierre; 'for the last time I demand to be heard!'

What! thought Barère: he calls us murderers? And like lightning his decision was taken. This Robespierre and his people should live no longer and whoever supported them should succumb too. Barère had no intention of succumbing. He dropped the three men and from that moment their defeat was certain, for Barère had a sixth sense for distinguishing between victors and vanquished. He never made a mistake. Whoever he let down was absolutely lost, and whoever he approved had the upper hand. 'Murderers?' he cried and with a magnificent gesture called the crowded benches to bear witness to this shameless attack on the people's representatives. 'You heard him, citizens!' A confused noise of assent answered him. The audience guessed now that the Convention would win. The savage contempt that Robespierre put into his cries, the silent haughtiness of Saint-Just, and the disdainful shrugging of Couthon's shoulders were incomprehensible to them. Those three behaved like great lords, not like men of the people. They were better pleased with Tallien and his dagger or with the bawling Lecointre, who was foaming at the mouth. Unrestrainedly they added their voices to the raging chaos of roaring and ringing.

Robespierre raised his clenched fists towards the president and tried to shout down the bell. Suddenly his voice broke.

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His throat gave out no sound, as if his vocal cords were paralysed. A cold fear gripped him and he suddenly felt sweat break out all over his body. Where was his voice? Had it, too, deserted him? The Deputy Garnier, perceiving his vain efforts to speak, called to him: 'The blood of Danton chokes you!' Robespierre turned his bloodshot eyes on the interrupter and cried hoarsely: 'Ah! So you want to avenge Danton!' And then, as his voice slowly came back: 'You cowards! Why did you not defend him?'

That cry was almost like a sob. Danton had had to die, but worse than his intrigues had been the helplessness with which France had let that great man be taken from her. It always would be so, thought Robespierre: men would always be lured by success and not by truth. Here was this surging crowd, which had quite recently unanimously granted him the terrible law of the 22nd Prairial—unanimously!—and now they were giving him up, because they felt that what mattered to him was not power, but proof. Thus, while they would always serve anyone who showed them his fist, they would always betray anyone who contented himself with appealing to their discernment and virtue. He had no fear of meeting Danton in the realm of the shades! For Danton knew men. Was there no one else, he thought, in that House adorned with the standards of their victories and the statues of their virtues who had the courage to save the country? Robespierre quitted his place and moved about the hall, going up the steps between the rows of benches. He was assailed by feelings both of confidence and weakness. Behind those walls lay France, and behind France lay immortality. Nobody could rob him of that hope. Did not everything happen for the future's sake? Was not the whole of life only a brief struggle against the great sleep, when treason

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and suffering would be no more? The Deputies who watched the Incorruptible wandering aimlessly between the benches, drawing away from him in unconscious fear wherever he went, heard him whisper over and over again the single word: 'Death! Death!'

In the midst of the general confusion Louchet got up. Louchet came to be the symbol of the 9th Thermidor. Who was he? What had he done hitherto? Nobody knew him; he had never opened his mouth and was never to open it again. He was a cipher, the average of all those men who for quite different—even contrary—reasons had united to strike down Robespierre. Nothing united them except a common hate and they had nothing in common but their adversary. They were so different that they cancelled each other out, and into the void thus created stepped Louchet with the words: 'I propose a decree of arrest against Robespierre!'

A horrified silence followed this proposal, but only for a moment. Then suddenly everyone realized that all was over with Robespierre. Someone had dared to propose his arrest. They all sprang up and cried: 'Divide!' and in a few minutes the arrest was decreed unanimously. The Deputies greeted the event with enthusiastic waving of hats and cries of '*Vive la République!*' or '*Vive la Liberté!*'

Was there no one to raise a protest, to tell the Assembly that it was in the act of putting an end not only to the Incorruptible and the Terror, but also to itself and the Revolution? Not one. Only Robespierre the younger, named Bonbon, rose and went to his brother, took his hand, and declared: 'I am just as guilty as my brother; I share his virtues: I wish to share his fate!' The two brothers stood there alone in the midst of the storm, whose blind raging took no account of their loyalty. Then the gallant

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Philippe Lebas hurried to them. He was the friend of both, he loved Saint-Just as a brother, and he was the husband of the young Elisabeth Duplay, who had just become a mother; he was an upright, straightforward man who had no enemies. He did not ask for much; seeing his friends in danger, he went to their side. 'I will have nothing to do with this shameful decree,' he cried; 'I demand to be arrested too!'

A shudder went through the ranks of the Convention. This twenty-nine-year-old man was a good man. His clear eyes reflected nothing but simple, decent feelings. He had never done harm to anyone. The Convention felt that among themselves there were not many like him. Could they send him blindly and off-handedly into the abyss of death? A murmur of perplexity ran along the benches. Then Fréron ended their scruples by demanding the arrest of Lebas, Saint-Just and Couthon. There was no more hesitation. Within a few minutes the arrests had been voted unanimously.

Couthon had spoken hardly a word during the whole of the session, which had now lasted four hours and was slowly communicating its storm to the city outside. When Fréron called him 'a tiger stained with the blood of the people's representatives' he merely shrugged his shoulders. But when the same ranter accused him of having 'wished to make the bodies of the Deputies steps on which to mount to the throne', he smiled sadly and, drawing aside the covering from his knees so that his paralysed legs were visible to all, said: 'I wished to mount the throne—I?'

On Saint-Just, death's pale angel, the livid rays of death now rested. Since the beginning of the session, when Tallien had interrupted his speech, he had not changed his position except to descend two steps as if to avoid contact with the unclean



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people who pressed round the tribune. With folded arms he leaned against the woodwork of the president's seat, which was just above him. Motionless he gazed at the raging men, without opening his mouth once except to mutter a word to himself. Even the decree of arrest pronounced against him had not made him alter his statuesque attitude. In his hand he still held the roll of paper containing the text of the speech he had been unable to deliver. It was, he knew, a great speech. The original notes for it had been written on the field of battle, before the camp fire. It was the speech of a solitary, who already seemed to be speaking from the hereafter. It was the speech of a pupil who had excelled his master, for he had for some time felt that Robespierre, whom he had wished to make Dictator, was courting destruction. It was the speech of a lawgiver for whom the present was too small and who had cast his anchor in the future; at the end he was to have demanded from the Convention something more than laws: the 'Institutions', under which man was to submit himself finally to the supreme power of the State.

Now life was at an end. Collot demanded that Saint-Just should lay his speech on the table of the House. The latter did not move, but without hesitation gave his roll to an usher who approached him. His heart was full of contempt for these paltry intriguers who imagined themselves to be legislators and recoiled in horror before their own graves. They wished to speak and live, but he knew that one must be silent and die. His soul was filled with light; generations to come, he was convinced, would honour him as the herald of that true community which would be based, not on the will to live, but on sacrifice. A broad shaft of sunlight, thickly clouded with dust, gradually reached him, lighting up his golden hair. His great earrings

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dangled gently. He stood there stock still, as if under a spell, looking almost as if he were already dead. Ah! He could still act, could still save his skin, if he wished! But he had learned at the front that one does not leave one's side in the lurch when the battle is lost. Battle! That was the only thing which might make it hard to take leave of life! War was wonderful: the standards were superb and the 'Marseillaise' was the only thing in the world that had ever intoxicated him. To march once more at the head of the attacking infantry—youthful, with measured tread, and his plumed hat on the point of his sword!

Thus he dreamed, motionless, with abstracted eyes, and the infernal uproar of the Assembly hardly penetrated his consciousness. Robespierre was not dreaming, he was fighting; fighting for his brother and for Lebas. In the most profound sense of political destiny he felt that they were innocent. They must not die! With broken voice he stormed once more against the president's bell. His face, deathly pale and streaming with sweat, was distraught with bitterness, a white foam gathered at the corners of his mouth, and his clenched fists trembled. But he could not make himself heard: Deputies, tribunes, ushers—all joined together in a single yell of protest. The windows rattled and the tattered banners above the president's chair shook. Thuriot decided to put an end to the scene—the downfall of a world. He rose and put on his hat: the session was suspended. In the midst of the decreasing noise Fréron's exhausted voice was heard: 'What hard work it is striking down a tyrant!'

During the short interval no one left the Chamber. The Deputies wiped the sweat from their brows with trembling hands and drew deep breaths. What a day, and it was not over yet! Down below sat the expelled tyrants. Were they not to be feared so long as they remained at liberty, nay, so long as they

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lived? When Thuriot reopened the session a Bill to grant increases of pay to front-line soldiers was introduced and the House at once started to discuss it. They would have liked to appear unconstrained and act as if a minor incident had been settled and everything was in order again. But nobody was in a condition to devote his entire attention to the Bill. Glances were continually cast at the front bench where Robespierre and his friends sat. Presently an usher approached the group with a document in his hand—the warrant of arrest. Robespierre took the paper, gave it a brief look, placed it on his hat, and continued his conversation with Bonbon. The unconcern of this gesture showed the Convention clearly that Robespierre did not consider himself completely lost. And so it was. The beaten man saw two possibilities of saving himself by a last desperate effort. There was still the Commune, which was in the hands of his friends and was longing for an opportunity to give the Convention another lesson. And if no initiative came from that quarter, the Revolutionary Tribunal would hesitate a thousand times before condemning him—Robespierre. Were not the jurymen his creatures, and had not Marat been acquitted and borne in triumph from the Court? The Convention read this idea plainly on Robespierre's features, and its zeal for an increase of pay for the soldiers rapidly evaporated. Disquiet seized hold of the Deputies again, and someone nervously sprang up and demanded that the warrant of arrest of the five members be immediately executed, so that they should 'no longer sully the precincts of the Convention with their presence'. Robespierre looked coldly at the president and said sharply: 'We will wait till the end of the session and . . .'

He got no further, for the din that thereupon broke out was more furious and unrestrained than ever. For the first time since

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the beginning of the session Robespierre and Saint-Just exchanged a glance. They smiled a little to each other—a smile of common contempt and discernment. They had fought together and would go on fighting side by side or else die together. The ushers summoned the five to leave the hall. On all sides arose cries of ‘To the bar! To the bar!’ The bar! That meant final exclusion. The five hesitated. Thuriot had the gendarmes called in, and one of them seized the paralytic Couthon and lifted him on to his back. Confronted by the raised bayonets, Robespierre got up and hurriedly left the hall with his friends. Their little group was hardly visible in the middle of the compact mass of gendarmes. By then it was half-past five in the afternoon.

About the same time the death-carts were being loaded in the courtyard of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Forty-five condemned persons were about to make their last journey. There was some anxiety among the populace; the rumour of Robespierre’s arrest had got round and people were thinking: ‘Now there will be no more executions.’ But the authorities had received no instructions. Sanson hesitantly asked Fouquier-Tinville whether he had any fresh orders to give, but the latter shouted back at him: ‘Carry out the law!’ The carts departed, followed by an escort of cavalry for safety. The condemned realized that something had happened, and that a single night’s respite or perhaps even a few hours might save them. But very few had any strength left to resist. Some called out desperately to the perplexed crowd, while others could hardly keep upright with sobbing. The crowd was silent; no abuse was shouted, no oaths, no curses. The Faubourg St. Antoine was smothered in dust and parched with heat. Windows were shut and mothers took their children indoors. Slowly the carts rattled over the

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cobble-stones, while from the centre of the town a faint roar could be heard. Were those shots? Was that the tocsin? What had happened? Perhaps the Terror really was over; should these people be allowed to die all the same? Here and there someone tried to speak to the condemned, while others pressed against the horses and seized the reins. A threatening murmur arose from the crowd: the carts should not go any further. Sanson, who was sitting in the leading vehicle, gazed unperturbed at the crowd, but the sergeant in command of the escort grew angry. He had his orders and would carry them out. With the flat of his sword he hewed a path for the procession; his men made their horses rear, a woman fell, cries of fear rang out. The mob recoiled and the carts were free to go on. Slowly they continued towards the south-east in the dust and leaden mist of a heavily gathering thunderstorm.

What Robespierre had foreseen then occurred: the Commune rose. Perhaps it was already in revolt. About half-past five it assembled in full session at the Hôtel de Ville. The Mayor, Fleuriot-Lescot, and the Government Commissar, Payan—both devoted and energetic friends of Robespierre—took in hand the leadership of the movement. Their instructions began to fall like blows, one after another. Appeals were at once issued to the populace in which the arrest of Robespierre and his friends was described as an assault on the liberty of the people. All the orders of the Convention were annulled. All the municipal district authorities and the representatives of the forty-eight Sections were summoned to appear at the Hôtel de Ville and take 'the oath of loyalty to the people'. The gates of the city were immediately closed, numerous arrests were ordered, and the tocsin began to sound from the slim spire of the Hôtel de Ville. It was clear that the Commune wanted

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another 'Second of June' and was ready to fight the Convention.

The Convention, however, took its counter-measures. The session was adjourned till the evening. The two Committees met together in the conference-room of the Committee of Public Safety. The clerks' pens flew across the paper and messengers rushed in every direction. The military commanders in Paris were ordered to come to the Tuileries at once; the Sections were forbidden to arm men for the Commune; all the citizens were summoned to seize Hanriot alive or dead; the Supervision Committees of the Sections were to meet immediately and send in hourly reports on the situation to the Committee of Public Safety; the various detachments of the Army and the National Guard were to send for orders to the Tuileries every half-hour; and Fleuriot-Lescot and Payan were to be immediately arrested.

Paris with its sharp ears and rapid intuition would have realized, even without the hard sound of the tocsin, that something important was afoot. But what? Crowds of people collected on the Terrasse des Feuillants, on the banks of the Seine, in the Tuileries Gardens. Others surged round the Hôtel de Ville. Everywhere the curious were pushed aside by orderlies, messengers and officers hurrying to and fro, clinking their spurs and making their way through with set faces. No breath of wind stirred the heavy, burning atmosphere; motionless, as if permanently fixed, the dust-covered leaves hung on the trees. Lemonade sellers did a good trade, their bells tinkling cheerfully above the anxious murmur of the crowds. In the sky, which was almost black with the heat, there had now appeared a white, rolling cloud.

The citizens, called up by the Sections of the National Guard,

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were making for their places of assembly. They went in haste, buttoning up their uniforms on the way, and many carried a loaf of bread stuck on their bayonets, for no one knew when they might get home to supper. The orders of the Commune and the counter-orders of the Convention caused confusion and perplexity. From all sides calls for help from the Sections poured into the Hôtel de Ville and the Tuileries: 'What are we to do? We need a unified command.'

The commander of the National Guard was General Hanriot, whose arrest had been ordered by the Convention at two o'clock. With fearful oaths he had thrown out the messenger of the Tribunal who had delivered the warrant, and was making the most incoherent speeches. There could be no doubt that this ordinarily sober man had for several hours been completely drunk. He brandished his sword, bellowed at his adjutants and galloped aimlessly through the town on a foaming charger at the head of his plumed and glittering staff, riding down inoffensive bystanders and causing the utmost confusion with his cries and incomprehensible orders. People anxiously gazed after this sword-swinging horde until it disappeared in a cloud of dust. Hanriot had learned that Robespierre and his friends were in custody at the offices of the Committee of Public Safety and were to be taken thence to prison. With his companions he rode through the barriers, burst open the doors and suddenly found himself face to face with Robespierre, who calmly greeted him and advised him to take no action: 'Let me go before the Tribunal,' he said; 'I shall be able to defend myself!' Hanriot merely gaped, not understanding a word, and before he was aware of it the gendarmes he had pushed aside rushed up, threw themselves on him, and secured him. He was a prisoner.

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Meanwhile the tocsin continued to ring, but many citizens, unable at their places of assembly to find out anything definite, had gone home again, taken off their uniforms, and lain down to sleep, or else had joined groups of inquirers. All the while crowds surged round the Tuileries and the Hôtel de Ville, without any real comprehension of what was happening. Did even the leading figures in the drama know? Did the Commune, or the Convention, or Robespierre know who at that moment had the real power? From the Hôtel de Ville the order had gone out to all the prisons not to accept any more arrested persons. Would the order come too late? Would it be obeyed? The younger Robespierre was refused at the Lazare prison, but only for lack of room; he ended up finally at the La Force prison. Couthon was deposited on a board in the chancery of the La Bourbe prison. Saint-Just was incarcerated in the former Scottish Seminary behind the Panthéon, and Lebas disappeared into the penitentiary of the department. About eight o'clock—it was still light and the sky was filled with red-streaked storm-clouds—Robespierre arrived in a cab at the door of the Luxembourg. The policemen accompanying him discussed with the porter at the prison the order produced by the latter forbidding him to accept any more prisoners. Robespierre, in his elegant sky-blue frock-coat, was instantly recognized by the crowd, but though a few people shouted '*Vive Robespierre!*' most looked on in prudent silence. After a short consultation with the police officials he was driven to the offices of the police administration on the Quai des Orfèvres. The people standing about there saw him leap out of the carriage almost before it came to rest, and, with a handkerchief pressed to his mouth and an agitated expression on his face, disappear into the building.



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While he sat there among the police officials, listening to their subdued conversation, did not the Commune stand in need of his guiding hand? Having chosen the course of insurrection it was impossible to turn back. If Robespierre had been asked for advice he would no doubt have warned the Commune against such a course, knowing that he would have to play the chief part and that he was no good at marching at the head of revolted masses. He was no leader, but a thinker. He could make his faithful bend the knee, but he could not hurry round the Sections transforming them into shock troops eager to fight. Robespierre was a man of formalities. He was at his greatest when seated at his desk at night composing the long, well-knit periods of his speeches; but he was weak when he had to transform on the spot a bewildered, noisy crowd into a political instrument. His capacity lay in the infallible direction and realization of dogma, not in the prompt improvisation that is born of living contact with the masses. He knew this better than anyone, and it was therefore with conflicting feelings that he listened to the voice of the tocsin as it seemed to call to him: 'Come quick! Come quick!'

The philosophy and the reality of politics had suddenly approached so near to one another that Robespierre's soul was torn with doubt and trouble. Had he lived in the wrong way, occupying himself too much with principles and too little with men? The news reaching him there in the office at police headquarters showed clearly that the weapon which he thought he had brought to the highest perfection was not effective. The Revolutionary Committees in the Sections had been purged by him just as indefatigably as the Jacobin Club. His people, who held all the most important official and political posts in their hands, were not only politically but also materially dependent

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on him, for they were nearly all paid officials. It might have been supposed that at the news of his arrest they would have all acted instantly. Nothing of the sort happened; most of them did not appear at their posts at all and only in a few Sections did the Committees meet. The Club was in session, but was divided and all at once numerous friends of Fouché revealed themselves. For all these men political existence depended on consciousness of Robespierre's unlimited power. Now that his power was in question they were left in the air; he had believed in their power and they had counted on his.

The people of Paris forsook them, and it quickly became plain to them that for months past they had been governing over the heads of the masses. In wresting the conduct of public business out of the hands of the citizens they had condemned them to indifference and indolence. The hour had come when Paris had to translate the dogma of popular sovereignty into powerful and active reality. But Paris stayed at home, except for the crowds of inquisitive onlookers who stood with their hands in their pockets looking up at the lighted windows of the Hôtel de Ville or the Convention. It was this political lassitude of a populace terrorized by the violence of the clubs and cliques that paralysed the insurrection of the Commune. The workmen's quarters would have been the most inclined to obey the appeals of the Hôtel de Ville, but among their ranks still walked the shades of a Chaumette or a Jacques Roux, to point to Robespierre as their murderer and the man who had thwarted the social aims of the proletariat. And was it not barely a week since maximum wages had been put into force—a measure for which Robespierre, as the real ruler, bore the entire responsibility? No, there could be no thought of the Sections rising as one man and hastening to the help of the Incorruptible. Hesi-

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tantly small detachments made their appearance in the Place de Grève in front of the Hôtel de Ville. Slowly the square filled with batteries and companies; but if the herculean Coffinhal with his voice of thunder and imperturbable good humour had not been there it would have been quite impossible to begin to do anything with that small body of men.

The Convention had assembled at seven o'clock in permanent session to watch the course of events. The offices of the Committees were empty; everyone had streamed into the assembly-hall, and only Carnot sat in solitude at his desk under the green lamp, working at a memorandum on light artillery. Revolt or no revolt, the armies could not wait, and he was never so undisturbed as when his colleagues were assembled in the Convention and he could be alone in the silent room. Collot took charge of the session. The news continually pouring in was very bad. The appeal to the troops had not been successful. The Sections had answered the appeal for help from the people's representatives as slowly and incompletely as they had the call to revolt from the Hôtel de Ville. The Tuileries was not guarded. Suddenly a messenger rushed in breathlessly and whispered something in the president's ear. Collot rose, very pale, and announced that Coffinhal with a detachment of artillery had occupied the offices of the Security Committee, freed Hanriot, and was marching against the Convention.

A tragic silence filled the huge room. Then Collot added: 'Citizens, the moment has come to die at our posts!' The atmosphere became electric. The members of the public in the hall and gangways crowded towards the exits, leaving the Convention to take care of itself. The noise of their hastening footsteps banished for a few minutes the anxious silence. Then the Convention was alone. It waited. The flickering of the candles

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made the great shadows of the hall still more profound and mysterious. Time dragged by. Many Deputies went to sleep with their heads on their desks, while some wrote hastily, and others conversed in whispers. Was it the end? From outside came a faint noise as of weapons—of cannons rumbling and trotting hoofs, of distant voices, cries and commands blown on the wind. Would Hanriot burst into the hall any moment and disperse the Convention at the point of the sword? Hanriot did not appear, neither did Coffinhal, and the noise outside seemed to die away. What had happened? A few Deputies ventured outside and came back immediately, rejoicing: the troops of the Commune, they said, had retired.

They had in fact retired. Nobody knew why. The Convention was restored to life. Eagerness and impatience spread through the assembly; the members got up and started shouting all together, trying to make themselves heard. Finally Voul-land, of the Security Committee, managed to make himself heard. He proposed two decisive measures. First, Robespierre and all who supported him were outlawed, which meant that as soon as they were arrested they could be executed without trial or condemnation. Secondly, Barras was appointed commander-in-chief of the National Guard and of all the troops in Paris and the surrounding districts. The latter at once made his dispositions. All troops that could be communicated with in Paris, Meudon and St. Germain were ordered to assemble immediately in the Place du Carrousel to receive ball ammunition. All the bridges and the streets leading to the Tuileries Gardens were occupied. Barras then waited for the outlawry of Robespierre and his friends to take effect.

The young Mme. Lebas, who had been staying up trying to find out what had happened to her husband, shortly before

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midnight saw a curious procession pass the house. Three Deputies on horseback, wearing their plumed hats and tricolor scarves, came riding along the embankment. Before them went drummers and four gendarmes carrying aloft smoking torches. At every street corner the procession halted, the drums were beaten, the Deputies drew their swords, and one of them proclaimed in a resounding voice the outlawry of Robespierre, his brother, Couthon, Saint-Just, Lebas, Hanriot, Fleuriot, Payan, and 'all who assisted the conspirators and obeyed their orders'. Elisabeth Lebas realized that it was the end.

The outlaws were at that moment assembled in a room at the Hôtel de Ville. Till the last moment Robespierre had hesitated to leave the offices of the police administration. But when a message was brought from the Hôtel de Ville: 'The executive Committee appointed by the Town Council requires your advice; come at once!'—he resolved to go to his friends. Any belief he may have had in the success of the insurrection had completely disappeared. The news of the outlawry had removed all his doubts: all was lost, for no National Guard, no gendarme, could withstand the icy fear inspired by the word 'outlaw'. Neither could a trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal be counted on. He entered the Hôtel de Ville with the certainty that he was vanquished.

The newly-created Executive Committee, which was assembled in the Salle de la Liberté, received Robespierre with wild enthusiasm. Most of his friends were there. Augustin Robespierre and Saint-Just had been set at liberty several hours ago and brought in there. Only Couthon was still absent. Hastily Augustin wrote a message on a piece of paper and got his brother and Saint-Just to add their signatures:

'Couthon,' he wrote; 'all the patriots are proscribed; the

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whole people has risen; it would be treason to it not to come to us at the Commune, where we are now.'

The message found the paralytic fast asleep. But he had hardly read the lines before he called for his gendarme, had himself lifted into his wheeled chair, and was off. Nobody thought of preventing him. The prison where he was lay at the end of the Rue Jacques, a straight, steep street leading almost to the Hôtel de Ville. Couthon let the chair rush down the hill and the gendarme had to run to keep up with him. People looked on in horror at the singular sight.

The front of the Hôtel de Ville was brightly lit up. The Commune had ordered the building to be illuminated as for a festive occasion, so that the neighbourhood, with its narrow, winding streets and maze of small houses, could be watched. Robespierre and his friends were assembled on the first floor. Payan had already sent an appeal for help to Robespierre's own Section. They now together drafted an appeal to the armies. 'In whose name?' asked Robespierre, hastily drawing up the appeal, to Couthon beside him. The latter advised appealing in the name of the Convention, because the leading members of that body were assembled there. Robespierre opposed this: 'I am of opinion that we should write in the name of the French people.' Then, turning to the gendarme standing behind Couthon, he grasped his hand and said: 'You gendarmes are good people, remain loyal to us. Go down now and keep the people worked up against the conspirators.' At that moment came a flash of lightning, immediately followed by a powerful thunderclap. A sudden draught of wind blew dust and withered leaves into the room and the windows were hastily closed. Then the rain began at once, pouring down like the roll of drums, hard as steel.







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The thundery downpour dispersed the few troops that still remained in the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville. The gunners took refuge in taverns or else simply went home. Only a few remained by their cannon, whose barrels gleamed in the rain. Midnight passed and the thunderstorm moved slowly away. The rain diminished and the clouds broke up, showing the stars again. At once the heavy July heat reasserted itself, for during those weeks it never abated even at night. The ground steamed and the sultry air was saturated with warm humidity. Those upstairs were still sitting. The lamps of the illuminations had been extinguished by the rain, but the seven great windows on the first floor cut brilliant rectangles in the dark façade of the building.

Presently the sound of marching footsteps was heard, gradually approaching. It came both from the direction of the river and from the Rue Honoré. The troops of the Convention were on the march—two columns, under Léonard Bourdon and Barras, moving on the Hôtel de Ville. One of Hanriot's adjutants had betrayed the password, so that the two detachments encountered no resistance. The few guards remaining in the square were quickly overpowered. In three bounds Bourdon and his men stormed up the staircase to the doorway, and in a few seconds not only the square but the halls, passages and stairs were filled with armed men. Shots rang out, the doors were beaten with clubs, the tramp of nailed boots resounded along the stone corridors, and the smoke of powder rolled in thick clouds below the ceilings. Shouts were heard, oaths mingled with cries of pain, calls for help, and the dull thud of falling bodies.

The troops pressing behind in the square then witnessed a strange spectacle. A young man climbed out of a window on

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the first floor holding his shoes in his hand; looking round, he moved up and down the stone cornice for a few moments and then threw himself head foremost. The body fell among the crowd gathered on the steps, knocked two people to the ground, and lay motionless on the stone. It was the younger Robespierre, still breathing, but terribly wounded. Everyone realized that the Commune had given up the struggle. Pushing and pressing forward they overflowed the passages of the Hôtel de Ville. The invaders finally came to the room where Robespierre was and burst open the door. Lebas lay dead on the floor, his hand stiffly grasping a smoking pistol. Robespierre aimed his weapon at himself. The bullet pierced his lower jaw and he fell, covered with blood, on the first man who entered the room. Still breathing, he was carefully stretched out, while the blood made a dark stain on his sky-blue coat. Saint-Just let himself be arrested without resistance. Couthon threw himself down a stone staircase and was seized, bleeding from a deep wound in the head. Hanriot tried to hide down a shaft and fell into a sewer, where he was not found till the next day. A little before two in the morning Maximilien Robespierre was carried on a board into the Tuileries. The Convention was still sitting. The president, when he was informed of the wounded man's arrival, announced to the assembly:

'The coward Robespierre is here. Do you wish him to be brought in?'

'No, no!' rang out on every side, from voices still full of fear.

'The presence of a tyrant can only bring the plague,' called out Thuriot. 'The place for him and his accomplices is the place of execution. The two Committees must at once take the necessary measures to ensure that the sword of the law shall strike them without delay.'

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Wild acclamations greeted this short harangue. All had risen from their seats. White handkerchiefs and hats with tricolor plumes waved in the air. The public clapped their hands. The tattered standards of Wattignies and Fleurus quivered gently in the air as it rang with shouts.

Robespierre, whose wound was still bleeding, was then carried into the anteroom of the Committee of Public Safety. The 10th Thermidor had dawned.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SLEEP

**I**n the midst of the world and its great events are the millions of worlds of human suffering and human joy. Who can say which is the more important, the more living; History, breaking out of the clouds on its winged chariot and rolling across the stage of the century; or the cosmos of unnumbered hopes, experiences, and renunciations reflected in a single tear? Which was that day of the 10th Thermidor? Was it the end of the Reign of the Terror and of the Revolution itself, or the nadir of a bitter suffering, pitied by no one and condemned to consume itself in silence, until it vanished into death and the Divine pity? Poor soul, imprisoned in your nameless sorrows, how great was your desolation! You attained the furthest limits of earthly power; you tried to mould mankind into your own image, as once the Creator moulded him out of lifeless clay; and you laid your finger on that dark mirror called realization. You had no other master but your ideas and rendered homage to no power but your dream; and at the last you returned to yourself and your own sorrow.

A child dawdling on the Pont-Neuf on the way to school had an encounter he was never to forget all his life. He suddenly found himself face to face with the Incorruptible, seated in a chair, whose bearers were taking him to the Conciergerie and had set down their burden in order to recover their breath. It was morning; the Seine sparkled in the sun, the pigeons strutted

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on the cobbles, and the bridge resounded with the noise of traffic. People were hurrying along on their business and in the midst of them, like a pier dividing a stream, sat Robespierre in his armchair, with his head thickly bandaged, his stockings hanging over his shoes, and his eyes shut, waiting for his bearers to regain sufficient breath to continue the journey.

He was only a short time in the prison. Fouquier-Tinville was already waiting to produce the prisoners. As they had all been outlawed no more proceedings were necessary, so that the session went off very quickly. The batch comprised twenty-one persons, Lebas being already dead. Four litters were carried into the courtroom with the wounded men lying on them: Robespierre, Couthon, the younger Robespierre, who had severe internal wounds and was hardly conscious, and Hanriot, also the worse for his fall. The rest stood near the litters. 'Are you Maximilien Robespierre?' asked the president. The prostrate man nodded his head with difficulty. The remainder of the outlaws were called by name; and, their identity once established, the rest was for the executioner.

Paris was in a festive mood, which manifested itself particularly in the prisons. In their neighbourhood people had climbed on to roofs, from which they made cheerful signs to the prisoners in the courtyards and announced to them their coming liberation. In the Plessis prison the men broke down the partition separating them from the women, and everybody embraced and laughed and wept with joy. The gloomy walls re-echoed with gay songs, for life had begun again. The newly-arrived Robespierrists were received with ironic applause, abuse, and finally blows. A new epoch, with new powers and new victims, had come. The conspirators had achieved their object, having struck down him whom they called the tyrant,

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but they meant to replace him with their own tyranny. Very few of them had any intention of ending the Reign of Terror: they merely wished to remove the Robespierre triumvirate. But France took their victory out of their hands and made it her own; the end of the Revolution. With Robespierre the rule of the Jacobins was broken; the prophet had fallen and the community of the faithful was scattered to the winds. The artificial structure of Popular Societies and Revolutionary Committees called into being by the Terror collapsed. The Terror was like a liquid which, when the vessel is broken, pours out.

The conspirators who had made this *coup d'état* did not at the moment quite realize that they constituted no unified body, but were only welded together by fear of him who was about to die. On the morrow they were to resolve into their original oppositions, differences and hostilities; but their fear was so great that they had not been able to give a thought to the coming day. The ruler had fallen, but nothing had been decided about the succession. The Convention, which thought it had freed itself, had only entered on its own decay. The representatives were to sink lower and lower, until finally its last remnants were chased out of the windows of the Château of St. Cloud by Bonaparte's grenadiers. Where was the people yesterday? Where would it be to-morrow? Most likely at the front, under arms, for in that very hour were being born those who were to perish in the crucible of Waterloo—the ruin of the Young Guard.

The tyrant had fallen, and the Republic of business men, war profiteers, kept women, and men of the world could begin. 'Now no more blood will flow,' said the people; and although much blood was yet to flow they were right, for death ceased

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to be part of politics. The idea of the State was no longer based on death. Many were still to die at the place of execution, but, though many of the victims were innocent, from then on the State did its best to convict them of a recognized punishable action. Death was no longer to be the solemnly acknowledged basis of politics, but their painful accompaniment. The competition was no longer between virtue and death, but between the will to live and baseness.

For the present the Convention was victorious, and from nine in the morning onwards it received the congratulations pouring in from all sides. Everyone hastened to spurn the powers of yesterday and to burn incense to the powers of to-day for having 'saved the country' and struck down the conspirators who 'imagined they could arrest the majestic course of the Revolution'. For hours on end the deputations filed past with their congratulations, until finally Thuriot became concerned over the loss of time and proposed that the guillotine should that day be replaced in its former position. This was adopted. The instrument was taken down from its place on the south-eastern edge of the city, where it had stood since the Festival of the Supreme Being, and set up again in the Place de la Révolution. This took time, and the carts were not able to leave the courtyard of the Tribunal until about six in the evening.

The route from the gates of the Palais de Justice to the place of execution was packed with innumerable people. All the windows and balconies in the Rue Honoré, which were let at high prices, overflowed with people. The railings on which onlookers leaned were covered with carpets. The women were adorned with ribbons and flowers, which quickly faded, and the oppressive heat permitted them to throw off all superfluous coverings and show themselves in transparent muslin frocks.

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Their bare shoulders gleamed as they turned to their cavaliers standing behind them to pass opera glasses or receive fruit and ices.

The approach of the procession was signalled from far off by the howls, cat-calls, and shouts of abuse that accompanied it. The pressure of the crowds in the streets was so great that the carts could only move slowly, and the escort had to clear a way with the flat of their swords. In the leading vehicle sat Hanriot, with his uniform still covered with filth from the sewer in which he had been found, his cheek cut open, and one eye hanging out and covered with blood. At his feet lay the dying Bonbon. Saint-Just leaned upright against the rails of the cart; his brown frock-coat and white waistcoat were clean and neat, and except for a single straw from the prison-cell in his hair his appearance was immaculate. In the next cart sat Robespierre with his head still bandaged in the napkin, which by now was dark brown with congealed blood. The big bandage made him almost unrecognizable, and many inquisitive people asked the gendarmes which was he. The latter, pointing with their swords at each of the condemned, explained: 'That is the chief tyrant. There in the third cart is Couthon, the paralytic. That is the Mayor, and that is the bloodhound Dumas, of the Tribunal;' and so on. Among the onlookers were men in aprons and shirt-sleeves who looked out especially for the fallen masters of the Commune and shouted at them: 'Damn the maximum wage!'

The procession kept on stopping; after three-quarters of an hour it was still in the Rue Honoré. It stopped opposite the Duplays' house, where Robespierre looked up and then quickly shut his eyes. The howling of the mob grew louder and several women joined hands and danced round the cart. A butcher's



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boy dipped a broom in a pail full of ox's blood and smeared the shutters of the house with it. Robespierre saw nothing of this insult. The sorrow of his soul was so immeasurable that it overwhelmed all other feelings and rendered him almost insensible. His pain was like a wave, breaking and recoiling with a dull blessedness: Come, sweet death, he repeated; come quick, beautiful death! He did not know that within the house Elisabeth Lebas and Eléonore Duplay lay on the floor of the darkened sitting-room exhausted by long hours of sobbing and slept as if they were dead. He did not know that the rest of the family had been in prison since early morning, and that Mme. Duplay, perhaps at that very moment, had hanged herself from the window-bars of her cell, leaving behind an account-book and two pairs of spectacles. He neither knew nor felt anything more. Aimless and reeling, his soul rushed towards the brink of death's stream.

Not until about half-past six did the procession arrive at the foot of the guillotine. The enormous square, from the borders of the Tuileries Gardens to the beginning of the Champs Elysées, was closely packed with people. Couthon was first carried to the scaffold. It was found impossible to stretch out the cripple on the board. He was placed on his side, but it was nearly a quarter of an hour before his head was fixed in the iron clamp and the knife could fall. Thunderous shouts of joy greeted the fall of each head. Robespierre had been placed on the ground by the assistants, who had torn his sky-blue coat away from his shoulders so as to free his neck. Motionless, he lay there gazing at the sky while his friends were dying. Saint-Just mounted the steps, pale but impassive. He held his fine head stiffly erect and the great earrings still dangled. Coldly he looked at the bloodstained steel triangle. For him death had no

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terrors. 'Great men do not die in their beds,' he had once said. He was not death's victim, but its master. He was the genius who had pressed the future to his heart and was carried by death into another country as if by a great wind. Was there no one to whisper him good-bye? No one at all, and it was better so; for he was already too far away to wish to hear a human voice. They seized hold of him, the splendid head vanished, and the knife fell.

Robespierre was to die last but one, only Fleuriot-Lescot, the Mayor, following him. The bound and wounded man was pulled to his feet. Firmly and quickly he climbed the steps. There he stood under the clear sky of the Paris summer evening while the shouts of the crowd rose at him like a hurricane. Who was it who shouted so loudly? To whom belonged those thousands of open mouths, those countless outstretched arms, those eyes, those voices? To the people, the French people? That could not be; he had seen the people, their breath had touched him, their voices had consoled him when he worked at night at his little table. He took his secret with him. . . . But his thoughts got no further. The executioner approached him, seized the bandage he wore round his head, and tore it off. The fearful wound appeared, with the lower jaw hanging loose and blood pouring from the gaping mouth. Robespierre uttered a wild cry of pain, so wild and shrill that it was audible all over the great square. The last that the world heard of Maximilien Robespierre was the cry of a wounded creature, the cry of outraged life. The inexhaustible wound and the all-powerful cry of pain—thus the Incorruptible appeared for the last time above the heads of the people. Then the executioners seized him and laid him under the knife, which fell, inexorably.

A few moments later Tallien announced to the Convention,

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which had just assembled for an evening session: 'The chief of the conspirators has fallen. . . .' He got no further, for a tempest of applause broke out from all the benches and galleries and shook the House for several minutes. With difficulty he made himself heard again to call out: 'Let us go to our fellow-citizens and share the general rejoicing. The day a tyrant dies is a red-letter day for fraternity!'

'Amid rousing applause and cries of joy', as the record puts it, the session was adjourned.

The cemetery of Errancis lay in a corner of the Parc Monceau, right against the city wall. It was a deserted place with few houses, but had some fine trees beloved of birds. The spot had not been used for burial for some time, but it was opened once more to receive the dead of the 10th Thermidor and then closed for ever. The grave had been dug that afternoon and as light was falling the cart arrived with the corpses. Swiftly the great hole was filled, but before the earth was shovelled in a thick layer of quicklime was spread over the bodies, 'to prevent a cult of the dead men growing up one day.' There was still light by the time the work was finished. The men then quitted that peaceful place, nailing up the rough wooden door let into the wall. The oldest of the grave-diggers lingered a little. Calm and glowing, the evening light fell on the motionless trees. No bird's voice was audible. Where were you, Paris—great, hurrying city; where were you, World, with your joy and your sorrow? Time stood still for a little while—the time of a short prayer—and then streamed on. The old man by the door fumbled in his pocket, took out a piece of chalk, and wrote across the rough planks:

'SLEEP.'