An End to Revolution

1799-1802

French Revolution

The French Revolution began in 1789, with the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy. The revolutionaries sought to establish a republic based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. They sought to end the privileges of the aristocracy and the clergy, and to create a society based on the principles of democracy and popular sovereignty.

The French Revolution was marked by a series of political and social changes, including the rise of nationalism, the decline of the monarchy, and the rise of the bourgeoisie. The revolution also saw the creation of the First French Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte.

The revolution had a profound impact on European politics and society, and its legacy continues to this day.

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royalism and 'anarchy', electoral assemblies were tacitly invited once more to split, and individual Directors endorsed acceptable candidates in regions where they believed themselves influential. 'Whatever the choice of the people,' declared one provincial electoral official, 'the government will only accept those it has designated.' But, despite the lowest turnout so far in an election (influenced it is true by royalist boycotts) electoral assemblies were returned which refused to accept the direction the lead. Only 66 of 287 endorsed candidates were elected. Twenty-seven assemblies split, producing rival lists of candidates as in 1798. But this time it was the turn of the outgoing Councils to spurn the executive line. Deputies returned as reliable in Floréal now showed themselves narrowly constitutionalist, and in all but two cases they accepted the elections made by the larger factions in split assemblies. This let in some 50 Jacobins or fellow-travellers, including some purged in Floréal. Without the support of other deputies they were nowhere near a majority, but there were plenty of more moderate deputies discontented for their own reasons with the Directory. By the time the new Councils convened on 20 May news of military defeat was pouring in from all fronts. And their predecessors had ended their sittings with a final gesture of no confidence. When lots were drawn for the Directors to retire, Reubell, the most self-confident among them, lost his place. Elected to succeed him on 16 May was a long-time critic of the constitution, Sève's, currently ambassador to Berlin. In contrast to 1795, he did not refuse to serve. Apparently he believed that the moment was now ripe to make the sort of changes he had long believed necessary.

The opening of the new Councils therefore precipitated a political crisis, with a divided executive, a volatile legislature, and a military emergency potentially as serious as that of 1793. Almost at once a savage attack was launched on the Directory, with the newly nominated Sève's standing ostentatiously aside. On 6 June the Five Hundred summoned the executive to explain the defeats suffered by the armies. Corrupt and profiting contractors, Jacobins alleged, had kept the Republic's forces undersupplied, and Directors no less corrupt had connived at the malversations of these 'dilapidators.' The Directory, its unity gone, stood paralysed before the onslaught, and made no response. A week later the Five Hundred resolved to go into permanent session until it replied, and the Elders followed their lead. It was now claimed, too, that Treilhard had come to office illegally the year before, twelve months not having elapsed since he had ceased to be a deputy. The issue had been thoroughly ventilated when he had been chosen, and the same rule should now have excluded Sève's. But Treilhard chose not to fight and resigned. Elected to succeed him was Cohier, a left-leaning bureaucratic nomenity who sided with Sève's. Barnas, always the trimmer, did the same. La Revelliére and Merlin had been reduced to a minority on the executive, therefore, when the Councils turned their fire on them, accusing them of violating the constitution in organizing the Floréal purge. Their three colleagues now urged them to resign to avoid the impeachment which seemed destined otherwise to follow. Unless the military intervened first, Seyès's favourite general, Joubert, made appropriately fierce noises. After hours of agonizing, they agreed to resign, and more relative nomenities, the regicide Ducos, and Moulin, an untested general, were installed in their places on 18 June. This was the coup of Frarisi, the first and only occasion on which the Councils purged the Directory and not the other way round. The legislature, exiled Lucien Bonaparte, younger brother of the conqueror of Italy and now a leftwardly inclined deputy, had resumed its rightful leading place in the constitution. And certainly the Councils' attack had been fuelled by resentment across a wide spectrum of opinion at the gerrymanderings of the previous year. But what gave it impact was the co-ordinating role of Seyès. It placed the executive power effectively in his hands, a degree of concentration not seen since the days of Robespierre. And Seyès's aim was to diminish the power of the legislature, not increase it.

First to realize how they had been misled were the Jacobins. As the main victims of Floréal, they saw themselves as the main beneficiaries now it was avenged. Suppressed for over a year, their newspapers began to appear once more, and freedom of the press was declared on 1 August. On 6 July a new club was announced, the Manège Club, meeting in the historic and heretical surroundings of the old Convention hall in the Tuileries, and presided over by members of the surviving Jacobin old guard like Drouet, now shrewdly known as a former Babeuf collaborator. Jacobins reappeared in public office, too: Ramel was replaced at the financial ministry by Lindet. Above all, as the news from the front continued to get worse, a stream of Jacobin-inspired legislation was passed by the Councils. On 28 June the Jourdan conscription law was activated in its fullest form: all those between 20 and 25 eligible for military service were to be conscripted at once; and nobody was to be allowed to buy a substitute. Jourdan himself, as a deputy, moved this measure, which he described in so many words as a new levée en masse. At the same time he proposed a forced loan on the rich, designed to raise 200 millions for waging the war. By this time the armies no longer occupied much foreign territory off which they could live as they had done since 1794, so the Republic was inevitably thrust back on to her own resources. The rates of the loan would be punitive for the richest citizens. Both these measures evoked haunting memories of the Year II. Even worse was the Law of Hostages, passed on 12 July. Under it, resistance
to the new measures, or indeed any other, could lead to a department or district being declared "disturbed". In such places, the authorities were empowered to arrest relatives of émigrés or nobles, imprison them at their own expense, and fine them and impound their property to pay for any damage done by those causing disturbances. No proven links with those responsible were required. Taken together, these laws seemed to announce a return to sansculotte terror, threatening the rich and the property above all. Previous forced loans in 1793 and 1796 had certainly been targeted on them, while the Law of Hostages recalled the Law of Suspects, but gave those implementing it even wider powers. Emboldened by their success in pushing these laws through, the Jacobins went on to move the impeachment of the fallen Directors and their minister of war, General Schérer, who was accused of massive corruption. But under the constitution such indictments required thirty days and three readings to be enacted, and this gave time for Sieyès to orchestrate measures to curb the Jacobin momentum. As president of the Directory, he used the anniversary of the Revolution's great moments—14 July, 27 July (9 Thermidor), and 10 August—to issue public warnings against the bloody perils of extremism. A press campaign was also orchestrated against the Manège Club, which was accused of seeking to bring about the constitution of 1793. With a membership of 3,000, including perhaps 250 deputies, its stirring sessions certainly aroused memories of header times. It also encountered much barracking and harassment from royalist gangs, which in turn evoked post-Thermidorian clashes. It was therefore very easy to portray the club as a threat to public order, and on 26 July the Elders were persuaded on these grounds to expel it (like the Feuillants in 1791) from the legislature's precincts. It moved to another historic site in the rue du Bac, across the river, remantment making its members even shirller. On 13 August, finally, it was closed down by the new minister of police, a man who knew more about Jacobinism than most: Fouche. This was the lead the Councils needed. Most deputies had never been Jacobin, and they were now anxious not to be carried further down the paths of extremism. Five days later, although by only three votes, the Five Hundred threw out the indictments against Merlin, La Revellière, and Schérer.

It was not quite the end of the Jacobin resurgence, however. The emergency which had done so much to fuel it was far from over. For some weeks, in fact, it continued to worsen. Joubert, sent to Italy to establish himself as the Republic's leading general, was killed on 15 August and his army catastrophically defeated at Novi. No sooner had this news reached Paris than it was announced that the British and Russians had landed in Holland and the Dutch fleet had gone over to them. Internal Insurrection had also broken out, for the first time since 1797. Encouraged by the formation of an international coalition and its initial successes, monarchist organizations which had lain low throughout 1798 now hurriedly put together plans for risings to coincide with the expected invasions. In the south-west, they planned to engulf the Jacobin stronghold of Toulouse with a peasant army swollen by refugees from the new conscription law. Throughout the spring politically motivated lawlessness mounted around Toulouse. In July the local directorial agent reported, 'Several republicans assassinated, the properties of a greater number burned or destroyed, liberty trees chopped down or uprooted in more than 40 communes.' Three weeks later, on 5 August, the countryside rose. Ten thousand men flocked to the white Bourbon flag now raised, although most of them were unarm. For a month civil war raged along the upper Garonne, claiming over 4,000 casualties. But, despite the absence of regular troops, the rebels never captured Toulouse, and National Guards from surrounding departments rushed in to reinforce it. Supporting uprisings in neighbouring cities like Bordeaux, Dax, or Agen never went beyond a few scuffles. The defeat of this outbreak by Toulouse, the only major city to stay consistently in Jacobin hands throughout all the vicissitudes of the Directory, was an embarrassment for Sieyès, who at this very moment was trying to clamp down on the left-wing press in Paris. His enemies in the Councils saw the opportunity to recover their momentum: and on 13 September Jourdan moved in the Five Hundred that the country should be declared in danger, under the law of 5 July 1792 which gave emergency powers to all authorities. An impassioned debate followed, Jacobins urging that the revolutionary enthusiasm of former days needed to be rekindled if the Republic was to survive, their opponents arguing that to declare the Country in Danger was a makeshift expedient no longer appropriate in a better-organized state, while others warned that to suspend normal procedures would open the way, as it had before, to 1793. This was the argument which counted. On a vote, the motion was defeated by 245 votes to 177, a clear signal of confidence in the new Directory and its anti-Jacobin policy.

Within days, moreover, this confidence proved justified. Suddenly the armies began to win. In the Batavian Republic, the Anglo-Russian invaders were turned back by Brune and Daendels on 19 September and within a month had been forced to evacuate the country. In Switzerland the Russians, abandoned by the main Austrian army which Thugut now diverted to secure objectives in the Rhineland, were caught divided, severely mauled, and by the end of September had evacuated the Helvetic Republic. Sieyès saw that, with the armies once more achieving victories and the Councils in confusion, a ripe moment had come to make changes. Now
was the time to strengthen the executive permanently. Nor could it be done in any constitutional way—the procedures were too long and complex. It had to be by coup d’état, and the changes would be so profound that military support would be essential. The problem was to find a reliable general. Joubert, his original preference, was dead. Jourdan was a Jacobin. Moreau, when approached early in October, was visibly reluctant. It was at precisely this moment that Bonaparte landed. ‘There is your man,’ declared Moreau. He was right, but only in the short run.

Landing on 10 October, Bonaparte took another six days to reach Paris. His progress north was one long triumph, with deputations, addresses, and jubilant crowds gathered to greet the peacemaker of 1797, the Republic’s one undefeated general. In the capital, too, everybody sought him out—his record aroused hopes right across the political spectrum. As in the winter of 1797–8, he behaved modestly, but he needed time to appraise a situation much changed since May 1798. Nevertheless nobody could afford to wait long. The crisis in the Republic’s affairs was far from over. The Austrians were still in control of Italy, threatening the Alpine frontier, and in the west, the last fortnight in October saw a renewed outbreak of chouannerie. Alarmed by the sweeping new law on conscription, the leaders of the various chouan bands had agreed in mid-September to resume their activities on behalf of the king. On 14 October they engulfed Le Mans, 3,000 strong, and spent four days ransacking it for arms and supplies. Other major cities, such as Nantes, were also briefly occupied. Not only Jacobinism, therefore, threatened the Republic in the autumn of 1799. Both the extremes between which the Directory had endlessly see-sawed seemed as alive as ever, further underlining its inadequacies. Sieyès, accordingly, was soon in touch with Bonaparte, first indirectly, then face to face. The general did not like him, but he saw that he could use him. Sieyès for his part underestimated this soldier without experience in the labyrinthine world of Parisian politics, a man who had always projected himself as direct and simple. But, each for his own reasons, they agreed to co-operate in enforcing constitutional change. Bonaparte’s brother, now president of the Five Hundred, was also closely involved; as were Fouçhê, and Talleyrand, once more out of office and looking for a way back in.

The coup was dressed up as a final blow against Jacobinism. Alleging a plot, on 9 November Lucien Bonaparte induced the Councils to agree to transfer their sessions to the suburban security of the former royal palace of Saint-Cloud, far away from the influence of the Parisian populace: not that the populace had lifted a finger in politics since 1795. Bonaparte, who had saved the legislature from mass attack in that year, was appointed commander of all the troops available in the metropolitan area. Meanwhile the whole Directory, including Seyès, resigned—although Gohier and Moulin only did so under pressure. France was now without an executive. The aim was to induce the Councils to establish a provisional government at Saint-Cloud, the next day, 18 Brumaire, Year VIII. But matters there did not go smoothly. Despite a massive show of military strength Bonaparte was coldly received by the Elders when he demanded constitutional changes, while in the Five Hundred, always the stronghold of the Jacobins, he was mobbed and manhandled to cries of ‘Outlaw him!’ Bleeding from a scratch received in the tumult, he was carried from the chamber. His brother, emerging subsequently, declared to the troops outside that Jacobins had tried to assassinate him. In the highly charged atmosphere this was enough to induce them to obey orders to clear the hall. Some hours later a compliant quorum was reassembled to vote, as the Elders had already done, to adjourn the legislature for six weeks while a joint committee of 50 deputies worked out a complete constitutional revision. Executive power during that time was vested in a provisional government of three Consuls—Ducos, Sieyès, and Bonaparte. The Directory was over.

Why had it failed? The Brumaire conspirators blamed the impossible structure of the constitution, which made the legislature too strong, and the executive too weak. In practice the Directory had controlled and dominated the Councils throughout most of the existence of the constitution of the Year III; but only by electoral manipulations and purges. ‘It is a great tragedy’, Bonaparte confided to Talleyrand after the Fructidor coup, ‘for a nation of 30 million inhabitants in the eighteenth century to have to call on bayonets to save the state.’ But he did not see the solution in a mere technical readjustment of the balance. He wanted a complete reversal. ‘The power of the government,’ he wrote in the same letter, ‘in all the latitude I would give it, ought to be considered as the true representative of the nation.’ The legislature would be part of the government, empowered to make general or ‘organic’ laws. ‘Circumstantial’ laws would be the executive’s province. Sieyès, a self-proclaimed political genius, favoured no such open-ended executive power. He retained an Enlightened fear of despotism, and he dreamed of an elaborate system of checks and balances to keep the executive under the restraint of legality. The real problem in his view was elections. The nation was of course sovereign, as he himself had proclaimed in the Revolution’s distant springtime of 1789, but elections of the Directory type were not necessarily the best means of expressing that sovereignty. Those in authority, at every level, should certainly be people deemed worthy to exercise it by
responsible fellow citizens; but should not be dependent on those over whom they held sway. 'Confidence', he declared, 'comes from below, power comes from above.'

These were drastic solutions for a problem which arguably was more political than constitutional. The constitution of the Year III was never in fact given the chance to work properly. Its first elections were meaningless thanks to the Two Thirds Law, and all subsequent ones were sooner or later discounted. No wonder decreasing numbers of citizens bothered to vote, suspecting that after this empty ritual the Directory would exclude those of whom it disapproved anyway. After 1792, for all their talk of national or popular sovereignty, the men who ruled France never accepted the verdict of the electorate. Nor did they accept what all representative regimes sooner or later must: the inevitability of party politics. Imbued still with a Rousseauist belief in a general will which all honest citizens share, they regarded political organizations as factions, illegitimate conspiracies against the constitution, designed to sow division rather than promote consensus. Thus neither neo-Jacobin clubs nor monarchist philanthropes institutes were ever given time to develop into the party organizations they might have become. They were tolerated from time to time, but only to the exclusion of each other. No serious attempt was made by the Directors, either, to create an organized centre or moderate party to concentrate their own support—although the endorsement of acceptable candidates in the 1799 elections perhaps showed them groping towards the idea. They seem to have considered the virtues of the Thermidorian republic self-evident to all right-thinking men: who would accordingly support them without further organization. They did so, but without conviction. Bonaparte was right when he declared in the Elders on 10 November that the constitution no longer had anyone's respect. Even its self-appointed guardians had never trusted it to function freely.

Yet that stance, too, was not without some justification. The royalists in 1796 and 1797 may have been prepared to operate like a political party within the constitution, but their long-term aim was undoubtedly to overthrow it and bring in the king. That king in turn was explicitly committed to the reversal of everything done since June 1789. As for the Jacobins, they may have been sincere in professions, increasingly heard in 1799, that they were merely a party of honest democrats, legitimately organized to oppose those in power by constitutional means. If so, they were rash in the extreme to revert constantly to the rhetoric of the Year II, to keep green the memory of Babeuf, and lend vocal support to more radical elements in the sister republics. All this raised understandable fears that their true loyalty was still to the levelling constitution of 1793. And nothing in

their attitude, or that of the royalists, suggests that once in power either would have been more tolerant of opposition than the Directory was. Neither had any interest in compromise or conciliation. Neither was prepared to recognize the good faith and legitimate interest of opponents.

The difficulties plaguing the Directory, then, were far from simply constitutional, and the constitution of the Year VIII, drafted within a month under relentless pressure from Bonaparte, did little to address them. What it did was give a plenitude of power to the executive which left no excuse for not confronting the deep and still unsolved problems created by the Revolution. At the base of the political system, all citizens were now allowed to vote for 'those among them whom they believed most suitable to conduct public affairs'. But this merely meant a tenth of their own number who would then constitute a 'communal list'. The latter in turn chose a tenth of themselves to constitute a departmental list. From them, a further tenth were chosen for the national list of 'citizens eligible for national office'. This included membership of the legislature. The choice of members would be made by a new institution, the Senate, whose powers were not otherwise defined in the 95 articles of this laconic constitution. But Sève had long believed in the desirability of a 'conservative power' to vet the legality of the State's activities. In 1795 he had proposed a 'constitutional jury' to perform these functions, but without success. Now, with the Senate, the idea was adopted, and he became the body's first president. The legislature itself would remain bicameral, but whereas the lower house, the 100-member Tribunate, was to discuss all proposed legislation, it could not vote it. The upper house, the 300-member Legislative Body, did vote—but could not discuss. Neither had any initiative in legislation. Draft laws came from the government alone, and were to be elaborated in a Council of State, a revival of a key institution of the old monarchy. Most of these provisions emanated from Sève's ideas on the executive, however. Sève had long believed that the executive, however, were not adopted. Here at last General Bonaparte showed his true hand. Sève's initial proposal was for an executive of two Consuls, one for internal and one for external affairs. They would be appointed, along with other members of the state apparatus, by a supreme officer, the 'Grand Elector', holding office for life but exercising no other authority—a sort of constitutional monarch in effect. Bonaparte was envisaged in this role. But from the start he made it clear that he had no intention of being what he called a 'fatted pig'. He wanted real power, and in the final version he got it. There would be three Consuls, as since 10 November, but the first among them would have the overriding authority. Nobody doubted who it would be.

Completion of the new constitution was announced on 15 December.
Republic began creating kingdoms, and for Bourbons of all people, the end of revolution must be in sight. Nor was the Parthenopanean Republic resurrected further south. The Bourbons of Naples, who also made peace with France in March 1801, lost certain outlying territories and accepted French garrisons in key ports, but in return had their legitimacy recognized. France took more in 1801 from her longest-standing ally than from her enemies. Spain, her client since 1796, ceded her the vast, untracked territory of Louisiana. Spanish ministers thought the price well worth paying for re-establishing their influence (as they hoped) in Italy.

The effect of all these settlements was to leave Great Britain isolated once again. At sea she was still unchallenged, and unchallengeable. In the Mediterranean British squadrons thwarted all attempts to relieve or reinforce the French garrison left in Egypt, and in January 1800 Kleber, its commander, agreed to evacuate. But nothing was done before the European successes of the spring, which encouraged the French to hold out. The First Consul never quite abandoned the dream which had taken him to Egypt, even after the British landed an expedition which in March 1801 forced the surrender of the last French troops there. In September 1800, meanwhile, they had also expelled the French from Malta. Its capture completed the alienation of Paul I from his former coalition allies. As Grand Master of the Knights of St John, he still regarded the island as his by right. He now offered full co-operation to Bonaparte, and began by organizing an 'armed neutrality' of Baltic powers to deny the tyrant of the seas access to the ports of northern Europe. But when Denmark, controlling access to the Baltic with its vital naval supplies, joined this new league, Nelson appeared with a squadron which destroyed the Danish fleet in Copenhagen itself on 2 April 1801. Just over a week earlier, Paul I had been assassinated in St Petersburg, and within days Anglo-Russian contacts resumed. By then, however, nobody in London was looking for yet another coalition. When Bonaparte had proposed peace in December 1799, the lofty British response had been to demand a prior restoration of the Bourbons. A year on, they could no longer afford such disdain. France was once more in complete control of the Continent, and intense war-weaeness was compounded by economic difficulties to create a new wave of domestic discontent. Ireland, legally united with England in 1801, was still very uncertainly pacified, yet George III had set his face against the measure Pitt thought most likely to expedite that pacification, the admission of Catholics to Parliament. On this pretext Pitt, the most tenacious of all the French Revolution's enemies, resigned in February 1801. Within days his successor, Addington, was sending out peace feelers to Paris. Bonaparte responded at once, and a summer of negotiations was concluded in preliminaries signed in October.

The terms which at last brought the wars of the French Revolution to an end were an unqualified triumph for France. The Republic made no substantial concessions at all. Of gains made through her control of the seas, Great Britain retained only Ceylon and Trinidad, the first at the expense of the Dutch, the second at that of Spain. The Cape was returned to the Batavian Republic, and the evacuation of Malta promised. It was true that the French agreed to evacuate Egypt, but the British even provided the ships for that. British attempts to secure a follow-up commercial agreement or compensation for the deposed Stadtholder and the king of Piedmont, were brushed aside. There was no explicit British recognition of the Swiss or Italian sister-republics, or the annexation of Belgium, which they had originally gone to war to prevent. But the very act of negotiation was a tacit acknowledgement. The explosion of jubilation throughout England when the preliminaries were announced muted most criticism of these humiliating terms. Accordingly they were enshrined in the final peace signed at Amiens on 25 March 1802.

It was a month short of ten years since revolutionary France had turned to war as an instrument of policy. The vicissitudes of that decade of conflict had transformed the country far more radically than the principles of 1789 had promised to do, and they had transformed much of the rest of western Europe, too. Few could have dreamed in April 1792 that at the end of it all France would have extended her frontiers to the Rhine and the crest of the Alps, and would be in complete control of a blanket of client territories stretching from the North Sea to the Adriatic. Whether or not the effort had been worth while, or even necessary, the outcome was certainly glorious; and Bonaparte made sure that he got most of the credit. 'It is not sufficiently realised', he told a Prussian diplomat in July 1800, 'that the French Revolution is not finished so long as the scourge of war lasts... this Revolution could still disturb, upset, and overthrow many states in its course. I want peace, as much to settle the present French government, as to save the world from chaos.' In the event this peace did not last long, and chaos would soon be extended to areas of Europe scarcely touched in the 1790s. But that was largely the work of the Emperor Napoleon, rather than the Revolution through which he had climbed to power.

Even before war had engulfed the Revolution, French opinion had been polarized over the question of the king. The first major consequence of the war was the creation of a republic, but that proved just as contentious as the rule of Louis XVI. Within weeks of the king's execution, monarchist
rebels began a civil war in the west which was never fully won and seemed on the verge of breaking out afresh in 1799. When allowed to express themselves freely, as in the elections of 1797, massive numbers of French citizens indicated that they preferred a king to the Republic. Many more would willingly have accepted a restoration if it would bring calmer times, or if the king would recognize and guarantee some of the earlier achievements of the Revolution. Much of France, therefore, hoped and expected at the end of 1799 that the First Consul would be the Bourbons' General Monck, standing aside once his military authority had stabilized the government in favour of the legitimate ruler. The pretender himself cherished such hopes. On 20 February 1800 Louis XVIII wrote in flattering terms to 'the victor of Lodi, of Castiglione, of Arcoli, the conqueror of Italy and Egypt', urging him to seize the ultimate glory by restoring the dynasty which alone could ensure France's tranquillity. Bonaparte proved no hurry to reply. Until military victory had consolidated his power he had every interest in neutralizing monarchist opinion by keeping up its hopes. But at the same time he moved resolutely to cut off the sources of royalism's strength.

The greatest immediate threat came from the chouans, who had become active again only weeks before he took power. Yet his very arrival in power disconcerted them, and one by one the various chouan leaders began to make peace. He in turn was prepared to be generous, reminding the western departments in a proclamation of 28 December that freedom of worship was guaranteed under the new constitution, and that the notorious Law of Hostages of the previous summer had been repealed. He also arranged to meet some of the most prominent chouan leaders and urged them to rally to him. 'The Bourbons no longer have a chance,' he told them. 'You have done everything you ought to have for them; you are good men, ally yourselves with the side of glory.' A few remained unconvinced, including Cadoudal, who continued to plot with the British. But most had come to terms by the spring of 1800, and those who had not were ruthlessly tracked down. The Marengo campaign could scarcely have been fought without drawing on the 40,000 troops who only a few months before had been required to garrison the disturbed departments of the west. Success in that campaign in turn secured the First Consul's own position within France. By 8 September he felt ready to reply to Louis XVIII's overtures. Addressing the son of St Louis merely as Monsieur, he told him frankly. 'You must not hope for your return to France; you would have to walk over a hundred thousand corpses. Sacrifice your interest to the peace and happiness of France. . . . I shall contribute with pleasure to the sweetness and tranquillity of your retirement.'

Meanwhile he was conciliating the émigrés. Although the new constitution forbade their return in any circumstances, the importance of this clause lay in its last sentence: 'The property of the émigrés is irrevocably vested in the Republic.' Acquirers of such property were thereby assured that their rights were secure, a commitment that Louis XVIII had never yet made. Provided they accepted these losses, it was soon made clear to the émigrés that they were welcome to return. In March 1800 the list of émigrés was formally closed. In October a general amnesty was declared for all who had taken up arms against the Republic. By now many who had done even this had returned, but no action was taken against them. Simultaneously those whom monarchists, or those attracted by monarchy, feared the most were systematically persecuted—the Jacobins. The pretext for the Brumaire coup had been the prevention of a Jacobin plot, and in the course of it 62 left-wing deputies were excluded from the national representation. No conciliatory gestures were made in their direction, and the new constitution offered them no hope of ever repeating their electoral success of 1799. By the summer of 1800 Jacobin survivors, denounced by the First Consul as 'terrorists, wretches in perpetual revolt against every form of government . . . assassins of 3 September, the authors of 31 May, the conspirators of Prairial', were reduced to plotting in cafés, invariably eavesdropped on by Fouché's ubiquitous agents. But their talk was bloodthirsty enough, and always revolved around assassinating the new ruler of France. Thus the government, at least, was not wholly surprised when, on 24 December 1800, a huge 'infernal machine' was exploded in central Paris only moments after the First Consul's carriage had passed. There were many dead and injured. Bonaparte was convinced that Jacobin plotters were responsible. In fact it was quite the contrary. Fouché was soon able to prove that the bomb was the work of chouans sent to Paris by Cadoudal. His master, however, was not interested. This was a heaven-sent opportunity to strike at the Jacobins: there must be blood. And so there was. Sweeping aside legal formalities, Fouché rounded up 130 Jacobins whose names had been well known to the police for years, and who had grown used to arrest whenever since 1795 the directorial pendulum had swung to the right. Four were guillotined, five shot: most of the rest were deported either to Galána or (a new penal depository) the Seychelles. None of the real culprits suffered at all for the moment, apart from those blown up in the attempt.

Along with vengeance on men he hated and who hated him, however, Bonaparte had a more calculated motive. 'This is an opportunity,' he declared to the Council of State, 'of which the government must take advantage . . . A great example is necessary to reconcile the middle classes
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to the Republic.' He meant, of course, a republic headed by himself, and he knew that the surest way of defeating royalism was to make his own rule appear more likely than that of a king to guarantee stability and the security of property. Thus he struck ruthlessly against the levelling heirs of Babeuf, having already cleared away the alarming legislation passed when they had last been influential. The Law of Hostages was abrogated within four days of the Brumaire coup; the forced loan within nine, to be replaced by a small proportional surtax. The State's creditors were also reassured: in February 1800, 80 years of suspicion and prejudice were jettisoned with the establishment of a state bank, the Bank of France. The following August it was announced that all the State's debts would henceforth be paid on time, and in cash; over that summer, stocks in the 'consolidated third' of the debt reorganized by Rumel in 1797 doubled in value. Tax revenues improved dramatically as a regular system of collection, reviving many effective pre-revolutionary practices, was instituted. In 1802, the year of peace, the First Consul was able to proclaim a balanced budget. The underpinnings of these achievements were as yet uncertain, but they were self-reinforcing. The finances of the State appeared every day to be under firmer and more responsible control.

Law and order took on the same appearance. The authority of the central government in the localities was firmly established by the creation of prefects in each department, recalling the intendants swept away in 1789, and with far wider powers than the directorial commissioners who had linked central to local authority between 1795 and 1799. They confronted a situation of disorder and crime which had reached almost epidemic proportions ever since the promulgation of the journard, the conscription law, which drove thousands of able-bodied young men into lives of banditry and crime as they fled from recruiting officers. In the south, inevitably, they joined royalist gangs harassing local officials, tax-collectors, buyers of national lands. National Guardsmen off duty, former Jacobin activists, and other hate-figures. Elsewhere they blended into roving bands of criminals, known from the way some of them tortured rich victims into submission as 'warriors' (chauffeurs). In the first year of the Consulate, as all available troops were drafted to the Rhône and Italy to confront foreign enemies, this crime wave continued unchecked. With the return of peace, not only did the pressure of conscription ease, but returning soldiers were available to enforce the will of the new, centrally appointed local authorities against criminal elements. In February 1801 special criminal courts with wide powers were created to deal with brigandage. Disorder began to subside. And, despite the First Consul's brazen contempt for legal procedures at the level of high politics, in everyday terms he made careful efforts to present himself as the apostle of the rule of law. Talk of endowing France with a uniform, comprehensive law code had gone on since at least the 1770s. Successive revolutionary assemblies set up commissions to work on the project, but none had brought it to fruition. Bonaparte was determined to do so. In 1800 he set up his own commission, lodged it the papers and plans of previous ones, and pressed it ceaselessly to produce quick results. He was present himself at 57 of the 102 sessions which produced its first fruit, the Civil Code. Although not formally promulgated until 1804, preliminary drafts were circulating by the end of 1801. In all this, French citizens could admire, as they were meant to, the drive and activity which were elaborating for them a clear set of rules binding the holding and transfer of property. Neither kings nor representative assemblies had been capable of achieving so much, so quickly. And by the time the Code appeared, the last great doubt about the legitimacy and longevity of titles to land acquired during the Revolution had been removed, by a settlement with its oldest and most implacable enemy, the Church.

Nothing had done more to shatter the early revolutionary consensus than the National Assembly's inept attempt to regenerate the nation's religious life and organization. No wound of the revolutionary years went deeper, or was reopened more persistently by all parties. And despite a massive, swelling revival of everyday religious practice in France from 1795 onwards, the last phase of the Directory was marked by renewed official anti-clericalism. When Pius VI died a captive in France on 29 August 1799, his traditional capital lost to him and turned into a French sister republic, it was widely assumed in Paris that he would have no successor. The Catholic Church had challenged the Great Nation, and had lost; and, though the ignorant populace might remain fired in credulity and mindless superstition, the Church as an institution was rapidly crumbling away, to the general benefit of humanity.

Bonaparte, however, had never made the mistake of underestimating either the power of religion or the resilience of the Church. Under orders in the spring of 1796 to march on Rome to avenge the murder by a Roman mob of a French envoy, he was confronted by a Spanish emissary from the pontiff.

I told him [the Spaniard reported], if you people take it into your heads to make the pope say the slightest thing against dogma or anything touching on it, you are deceiving yourselves, for he will never do it. You might, in revenge, sack, burn and destroy Rome, St. Peter's etc. but religion will remain standing in spite of your attacks. If all you wish is that the pope urges peace in general, and obedience to
legitimate power, he will willingly do it. He appeared to me captivated by this reasoning..."

Certainly he continued while in Italy to treat the Pope with more restraint than the Directory had ordered; and when, early the next year, the Cispadian Republic was established in territories largely taken from the Holy See, he advised its founders that: 'Everything is to be done by degrees and with gentleness. Religion is to be treated like property.' "Devoid of any personal faith, in Egypt he even made parade of following Islam in the conviction that it would strengthen French rule. By the time he returned to Europe, it was already clear that Pope Pius VI would not after all be the last. A conciale of the scattered cardinals had been summoned, and the Austrians allowed it to meet on their new territory in Venice. There, in March 1800, a surprise candidate emerged successful: Chiaromonti, bishop of Imola, who took the name of Pius VII. His chief claim to fame was that in a Christmas sermon of 1797, subsequent (and understandably) printed and distributed by the French invaders, he had declared that Christianity was not necessarily incompatible with either democracy or equality, even quoting Rousseau to reinforce his argument. Here, then, was a pope whose pragmatism might match that of France's new ruler to produce a solution to the most intractable of all problems thrown up by the Revolution.

Even before the conclave had begun to vote, the First Consul was sending out conciliatory signals. The Directory's insistence on the observation of the revolutionary calendar's décadi, rather than Sunday, was quietly dropped. In December 1799 he ordered full funeral honours for Pius VI. The next month he was hinting to representatives of the clerics that their religious grievances would soon be met. And once the cardinals' choice was made, he lost no time in speaking his mind. On his second entry into Milan, in June 1800, he convoqued the city's clergy to the great cathedral and declared, even before Marengo was fought:

'It is my firm intention that the Christian, Catholic and Roman religion shall be preserved in its entirety, that it shall be publicly performed... no society can exist without morality; there is no good morality without religion. It is religion alone, therefore, that gives to the State a firm and durable support... As soon as I am able to confer with the new Pope, I hope to have the happiness of removing every obstacle which will hinder complete reconciliation between France and the head of the Church.'

Immediately after the battle, he contacted Pius VII with an offer to open negotiations for a new concordat to re-establish the Church in France.

The stakes were high. If the altars of France could be restored, the chief source of popular discontent with the new order would be eliminated. And if the enmity between Paris and Rome could be ended, the alliance between religion and counter-revolution, which had given such obduracy to both, could be prised apart. The inhabitants of sister republics would be conciliated, and new French citizens in Belgium and the Rhineland could embrace the change with relief. On the other hand the whole enterprise bristled with difficulties. Which church was to be restored? There were now two, both claiming legitimacy, both with bodies of apostolically consecrated bishops. How would bishops be appointed in the future? Would the restored church be Gallican, with all the liberties and traditions accumulated since the sixteenth century, and a rich institutional outgrowth of agencies, assemblies, chapters, monasteries, and hospitals? Or would it be more like the spare, utilitarian body the National Assembly had hoped to create in 1790? Above all, who would pay for it? The First Consul ruled out one potential solution to this problem as a pre-condition for even starting negotiations. There could be no question of returning any of the church lands confiscated in 1790 and since sold off. The Pope accepted this readily enough, although he was never to concede the legality of the confiscation, any more than that of the annexation of Avignon. With that understood, negotiations could begin in earnest, which they did in November 1800.

Success was by no means certain. Not until July 1801 was agreement reached; and then only after several near-breakdowns, angry ultimatums from the First Consul, and foot dragging by French ministers who included the arch-apostate and ex-bishop Talleyrand, and the priest turned fervent dechristianizer Fouche. There were also serious misgivings within the college of cardinals. Yet the Concordat as eventually agreed was far from the dictated peace which Bonaparte was able to impose in that year on France's secular adversaries. It began by facing facts. Catholicism was the religion of the majority of the French. Papal negotiators had wished it to be accepted as dominant, the religion of the State; and when a parallel agreement covering France's Italian satellites was worked out in subsequent years that was agreed. But in France there were hundreds of thousands of Protestants, and who knew how many sceptical disciples of Voltaire? To them the freedom of belief and worship proclaimed by the Revolution was fundamental, and the First Consul thought so too. It was reiterated in the Concordat's first article. Even so, a state Church was set up, the Catholic clergy would be paid out of the public purse and appointed, via the bishops, by the government. Bishops, as under the old order, would be designated by the head of state, and invested only with their spiritual authority by the Pope. They and their clergy would take an
Nothing the First Consul had done was more controversial. To many, the re-establishment of the Church seemed a remembrance of all that the Revolution had stood for. But yet it was a further revolutionary act, as the last vestiges of the Roman Catholic hierarchy were swept from the public stage. Under this legislation, the Concordat with Rome was confirmed, and the papal legates removed. The Pope, the Church, and the hierarchy were restored to their former positions, with the exception of the papal legates, who were replaced by French bishops and priests.

A decade earlier, the First Consul had decreed the establishment of the Concordat, but in June 1801, the Church, now called the Church of Rome, came into existence. The concordat, which had been signed in 1801, was a compromise between the Church and the state. Under the concordat, the Pope was recognized as the head of the Church, but the state had the right to appoint bishops and priests. The concordat was a milestone in the history of the Church in France, as it ended the persecution of the Church by the revolutionary government.

The concordat was not without its critics. Many felt that it was a sellout to the Church, and that it went against the principles of the Revolution. However, the concordat was necessary to bring about peace and stability in France. It was a compromise that allowed the Church to continue to exist, while at the same time respecting the rights of the state.

The concordat was a major step forward in the history of the Church in France. It marked the end of the persecution of the Church, and the beginning of a new era of cooperation between the Church and the state. It was a sign of the changing times, and of the willingness of the French to compromise in order to achieve a better future.
renewed in the Year X, but neither how nor precisely when. This was therefore declared as good a moment as any, and the Senate was ordered to conduct the operation by naming those who would remain members. Sixty names were by this means dropped from the Legislative Body, and 20 from the Tribunate. There was no resistance, and within a few months many of those eliminated had been found official positions elsewhere. Public reaction to this first legislative purge since Brumaire is hard to gauge. By this time the independent press had largely disappeared. But police reports suggested that all café talk in Paris was on the First Consul’s side, and contemptuous of functionaries who represented nobody and yet constantly bit the hand that fed them. The main source of public concern was now reported to be the safety of the First Consul’s life, a far surer guarantee of stability and order than the antics of politicians, whose incapacity more than a decade of upheaval and uncertainty had vividly demonstrated.

In this atmosphere the Concordat was at last presented to the legislature between 5 and 8 April, as news of the Peace of Amiens was trumpeted throughout the country. It was not quite unopposed, but it passed overwhelmingly. Over the next two months, a whole series of new measures would also be presented—to reorganize education, to create a new Legion of Honour, and to extend the First Consul’s term of office. Before the year was out, Bonaparte would be Consul for life, and France would almost have a king again.

Meanwhile, however, April 1802 was to be a month of celebration. It culminated on the eighteenth, Easter Day, with a solemn mass to mark the resurrection of the Catholic Church in France. It was held in Notre-Dame in the presence of the First Consul, the entire government, and the diplomatic corps. The preacher was the 70-year-old Boisgelin, once archbishop of Aix, now of Tours. A nobleman of old stock, he had delivered the sermon at the coronation of Louis XVI. As then, he celebrated a new beginning; but the jubilant crowds who thronged Paris that day, thrilled by the boom of cannon and the ringing of bells silent since 1793, and the people of quality who lit their windows when night fell, were not thinking about what the future might bring. With the end of the war, the elimination of political strife, and the restoration of religious freedom, they were celebrating the burial of the Revolution.

The revolutionary war terminated by the treaties of Lunéville and Amiens had been a far more total conflict than anything previously known. Among other things, polite travellers were shocked to discover that they could no longer go freely to countries with which their own was at war. None felt the change more keenly than the British, who for much of the 1790s found themselves cut off by French power from most of western Europe. The conclusion of the peace reopened the Continent to them, and in 1802 thousands of them swarmed across the Channel to visit the scene of the Revolution and see for themselves what George III and his ministers had been fighting against. 'I had conceived an horror idea of the populace of this country,' wrote Fanny Burney (married it is true to an émigré) when she arrived at Calais in April, 'imagining them all transformed into bloody monsters.' She found them nothing of the sort: but then, the economy of Calais had been devastated by the interruption of the Dover ferries, and the inhabitants were glad to see rich British tourists passing through again. Posting towards Paris in the hope of catching a glimpse of the fascinating hero who had brought the Revolution to an end (he was not yet the 'Corsican Ogre' he was to become in British demonology) the first thing these sightseers noticed was the roads. The highways that in 1787 had left Arthur Young awestruck were now pitted and neglected. Everywhere, too, were ruins and boarded-up buildings; defunct monasteries and convents, and abandoned aristocratic châteaux. Although, passing as they were through devout Flanders and Picardy, travellers noticed congregations flocking to mass on Sunday in their best linen, they often found larger churches pillaged and dilapidated. Rouen cathedral, noted one gentleman arriving from Le Havre, was 'blackened and dingy' from being used as a gunpowder factory. The tricolour was everywhere, and few people were seen without the national cockade; but evidence of changing orthodoxies
could be seen on public buildings, where the slogan Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death was inscribed—with the last two thinly painted out. Royal arms and insignia, needless to say, were everywhere defaced or obscured, and at Versailles the palace was deserted. 'Who could, without emotion', wrote one visitor, 'behold the windows broken and barred up, the doors falling off their hinges, the grass waving in the courtyards, where formerly a weed was never seen, and where all was gaiety and splendour.' Arriving in Paris, however, those who had known it before the great upheaval found it less changed than they expected. The Bastille had gone, its site converted into a woodyard. Those who visited the Tuileries, in the hope of seeing the First Consul now installed there, could hire guides who would point out the bloodstains left when the Swiss Guards had been massacred in 1792. There were far fewer rich private carriages in the streets, and any number of bits of furniture or other battered relics of aristocratic or pious living could be bought from street dealers. But the great city was as animated as ever, and the Palais Royal was if anything even more crowded than when Arthur Young had visited it during the ferment of 1789. Nobody, though, was talking politics there. It had become a rather frenetic pleasure garden, and was only one among several. Rich, fashionable society was on parade again, as in monarchical times, and the well-policed streets were agreed to be a good deal safer. Military parades and reviews, not surprisingly in a country ruled by a general, were an almost daily spectacle.

Such were the visible fruits of thirteen years of turmoil; symptoms, some of temporary disruption, others of permanent and irrevocable change. Almost none, however, reflected what reformers had aimed for and dreamed of as they set about national regeneration in the heady spring of 1789. For at the beginning, the impetus of the French Revolution had been intellectual far more than social or economic. Enriched and enormously expanded by three generations of widening prosperity, the leisureed classes of France had invested their gains in culture—which meant above all education. And while the clergymen at whose feet they all sat tried hard to mould their minds into habits of orthodoxy and obedience, even by denouncing it they introduced their charges to the progress which independent thinking had achieved since the Reformation. By the mid-eighteenth century an educated, critical public opinion was emerging, an expanding market for ideas which writers of all shades of opinion sought to engage, and which government itself was increasingly to court. Loss of public confidence underlay the financial and political crisis which precipitated the downfall of a system of government too little changed in its habits and priorities since the days of Louis XIV. Surprise at the rapid collapse of a state whose ambitions had outrun its means was universal. Nobody had expected it, or prepared for it, for all their disillusionment with existing ways and institutions. But once the crumbling away of the old absolute monarchy began to look irreversible, in the course of 1788, men began to turn their minds towards what to put in its place. With the calling of the Estates-General, and the drafting of cahiers that preceded it, the whole of France, far beyond the educated élite, was invited to consider this question, too. Suddenly anything seemed possible. Any abuse seemed remediable, any grievance capable of redress—any old score within reach of settlement. The message was change, and it thrilled men of education far beyond the borders of France. Here was an opportunity for enlightened men to bring about a more rational, just, and humane organization of the affairs of mankind. And enlightened men seized it. The National Assembly which launched the Revolution included the cream of the country’s Intelligentsia, who consciously saw themselves as the products, and the instruments, of the triumph of Enlightenment. All over France, men of similar background rallied to them, inspired by the same ideals. The spontaneous proliferation of the jacobin clubs, with their high-minded commitment to the rights of man and the citizen, reflected this inspiration. Among some of them, although a dwindling minority as the revolutionary years went on, it never died.

And in many respects, the labours of France’s revolutionaries did introduce greater rationality and logic into the country’s affairs on a permanent basis. The administrative reorganization into departments, sweeping away the jurisdictional jungle grown up over a millennium, survives not much altered to this day. The metric and decimal system, superseding another prescriptive nightmare, was introduced after five years of elaboration in April 1795. It has swept the world since. Scarce less successful has been the Civil Code, that succinct, lucid compendium dreamed and talked of for generations before 1789. Although it took the authority and determination of the First Consul to bring it to fruition, drafting had begun during the Revolution’s first impulse in 1790. The barbarities and injustices of the old criminal law also disappeared permanently. The guillotine proved less of a success, although it might have won more recognition as the humane refinement it was meant to be—quick, reliable, and by all calculation painless—had it not become the main public instrument of terror. Yet in some ways it was curiously appropriate that it should. For most of those it dispatched were deemed to be resisting, for reasons no rational man could accept as valid, other changes equally dictated by logic, equity, and humanity.
It was resistance that made the Revolution violent. It was naïve of the men of 1789 to think that they could regenerate the nation without opposition, and imagine that the honesty and benevolence of their intentions would be as obvious to others as to themselves. But the Enlightenment had never been afraid to impute ignorance, superstition, and selfishness to its opponents, and its disciples entirely shared this cast of mind. Critics who traced the spirit of terror back to 1789, because even then the patriots had not hesitated to use intimidation to get their way, were therefore not entirely wrong. 'Shut up, bad citizen!' yelled a spectator who threw himself upon Malouet from the gallery on 15 June 1789 as he criticized proposals to declare a National Assembly. A month later, Barnave was publicly defending the lynching of Fouлон and Bertier. It was true that in 1789 royal resistance to the formation of a National Assembly could probably not have been overcome without the threat of bloodshed; but the very success of patriotic defiance set an example of how to deal with future challenges. Even after the nation had been sickened with public carnage, politicians still found it impossible to accept the legitimacy and good faith of their opponents. In the end it took a general who openly despised intellectuals to make them sink their differences in the interests of stability.

First resistance to change came from the nobility. Their powers and prerogatives thrown into relief by resort to an Estates-General where their representatives sat as a separate order, by the end of 1788 they found themselves isolated and under attack. This attack had been launched by an intellectual coterie, the Society of Thirty, who deliberately exploited social tensions within the educated élite to marshal overwhelming public support for an undivided legislature. Frightened, many nobles took refuge in their privileges, thus exacerbating the antagonism and mistrust towards them now rampant among the bourgeoisie. The original issue was still unresolved when the Estates convened, and by the time it was settled, months of anti-noble rhetoric had cast a whole social category into intransigent opponents of national regeneration. This they had certainly never been until then. Their cahiers showed an impressive willingness to contemplate reform and surrender many of their most valuable privileges. But by now nothing would satisfy patriots but the surrender of them all. Aristocracy became the Revolution's most telling term of abuse and disapproval, describing all who opposed it. Equality, a situation where nobody enjoyed any privileges based on unfair criteria such as birth or ancestry, became one of its driving aspirations. Even Napoleon paid it constant lip-service and, though of noble birth himself and educated in a military academy reserved for the sons of poor gentry, always gloried in being a product of the Revolution's opening careers to talent.

Nobles were therefore the first, and greatest, losers from the Revolution. Even before it began they had agreed to sacrifice their tax-exemptions and fiscal privileges. Almost from the start they lost the deference and preference to which they had been accustomed since time immemorial. Years later it would creep back, and it still lingers today; but never since 1789 has it been automatic or unchallengable. In June of that year they lost the right to separate political representation and corporate powers—a fleeting enough advantage, it is true, since with the exception of a few pays d'états it had only existed when the Estates-General were in being. In August their material losses began with the abolition of feudalism. They were by no means the only beneficiaries from feudal rights, dues, honours, and prerogatives, but their stake in the system was indisputably the greatest. Relics of feudal levies lingered on in remote corners far into the nineteenth century; but to all intents and purposes feudalism, and the profits lords made from it, had disappeared forever by 1794. The night of 4 August also transformed the character of the French nobility. Hitherto an open élite within the élite, accessible to new money invested in ennobling offices, the abolition of venal office turned it for the first time into a caste. Ennoblement ceased. Within a year nobility itself had ceased to be recognized, and the display of arms and insignia was forbidden.

But nobility itself could not be abolished. Defined as a hereditary quality, it was in the blood, or at least in the minds of those who thought they possessed it—another instance though this seemed, to enlightened men, of human ignorance and superstition. Revolutionary policies drove many nobles from a country they no longer recognized as their own. At least 16,000 emigrated during the Revolution, and probably several thousand more, lost to statistics through various anomalies. The property of those who refused to return, or who were executed, was confiscated, depriving perhaps 12,500 families of all or some of their land. Many, however, managed to buy some of it back, immediately or later by gradual stages, and long before 1799 émigrés were cautiously returning. Soon enough the Emperor Napoleon would create a new nobility, and to give it tone was anxious to leave it with as many ci-devants as possible. All he demanded was sold landed wealth in addition, but they had no difficulty in showing evidence of that. In most departments under the Empire, the ranks of the highest taxpayers were completely noble-dominated.

The material losses of the nobility, therefore, were neither as great nor as irrevocable as might be imagined. But they were still traumatic enough, and the process by which they occurred was truly harrowing. As triumph persistently eluded the counter-revolution, emigration proved a life of disappointment, bitterness, and poverty.
welcomed release from their vows. France's 45,000 nuns were almost unanimously opposed to the dissolution of their convents. 'In the world,' complained the Carmelites of the diocese of Paris, 'people like to say that the monasteries are full of victims, slowly consumed by regrets, but we protest before God that if there is true happiness on earth, we enjoy it, in the shelter of the sanctuary.' The Concordat made no provision for the restoration of the cloistered life, and although monastic orders did reappear, they never proliferated as they had under the old order. And meanwhile the oath, and its various successors, had torn the clergy apart. Those who refused it and therefore resisted the Revolution, suffered most. Deprived of their benecles, refractorys soon became pariahs in the eyes of patriots, a subversive influence wherever they operated, and once war began a reasonable one. Priests were the first victims of the September Massacres of 1792. In addition to the 2,232 slaughtered there, almost 1,000 were condemned in the Terror, while nearly 25,000, almost one-sixth of the whole clergy, emigrated or were deported. Since 90 per cent of clerical émigrés were seculars, the loss of parish clergy was not far short of a half.

By 1794 even the constitutional clergy were under suspicion, having faced repudiation by Rome and the majority of the French population apparently for nothing. Some found belated vindication under the Concordat, but for others the break with Rome that their oath-taking signified could not be healed and they soldiered on into the nineteenth century in an ever-dwindling 'little church.' The French clergy had been forced by the Revolution into a bitter, tragic schism, its pain only compounded by the outrages of dechristianization. The depth of the trauma was vividly expressed by an Italian cardinal as the Sacred College discussed the last details of the Concordat.

Oh, God, [he agonized] ... what will a government do which, after having proscribed the Catholic religion, after having persecuted it by the most scandalous laws, after staining itself with the blood of so many martyrs, today reopens the door to it not as the dominant religion, but as the religious opinion of the majority of the people, not out of love, but out of fear, not from respect but from policy? Meanwhile it desires it stripped and naked, with rare ministers, ministers in its pay, ministers appointed by the government itself, ministers who, in the past, have led the flames, ministers who are supposed to pass for Catholics yet are the authors of schism, neither repentant nor reconciled. And in contrast we see legitimate pastors, confessors of the faith of Jesus Christ exiled from their homeland ... separated from their flocks ... religious hounded out from the whole of that great empire; holy virgins without refuge, chapters and seminaries without the means to subsist; temples which, after profanation, remain soiled and rualous; foundations, pious works, prerogatives and immunities abolished and destroyed; in a word, a soulless,
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were mooted throughout the 1790s, including one drafted by the last of the *philosophes*, Condorcet, in 1792. But other priorities repeatedly postponed practical action. Meanwhile, the existing system fell to pieces. Although lands owned by educational institutions were at first exempted from nationalization, other sources of support, such as impropriated tithes and standard donations from chapters and monasteries, dried up. Clerical teachers refusing the oath were dismissed; those who took it were often called away to become parish priests. Teaching orders (such as the Oratorians) at first escaped the Revolution’s attack on monasticism, but in August 1792 suspicion of all priests in positions of influence was such that they were dissolved. Finally even lands owned by schools and colleges were swallowed up as national property by a Republic desperate for resources in March 1793. Not until 1802 were comprehensive measures taken to fill the vacuum thus created, even though the constitution of 1793 had declared education to be among basic human rights. That of 1795 made no such rash commitment, and although the Directory set up a central school in each department and established a number of higher schools in Paris to replace the universities abolished by the Convention as bastions of corporatism, it left primary education to local initiative and made no public financial provision for it. Bedevilled at every level by a shortage of trained teachers (clerics being too dangerous to entrust with the education of republican youth), the Revolution, itself the fruit of unprecedented educational advance, created chaos in education, and a marked drop in numbers undergoing it. Whereas 50,000 pupils were attending colleges in 1789, only 12,000 or 14,000 were in the central schools a decade later. Basic literacy fell from 37 per cent in 1789 to more like 30 per cent in 1815.

In the field of poor relief the record was even bleaker. Again, there was no shortage of reforming intentions and bold projects to tackle a problem which everybody could see in the 1780s was getting worse. The Constituent Assembly set up a committee on mendicity which collected impressive information on the scale of the problem. The Legislative established its own committee, and in its brief existence passed no less than 35 decrees in the area of poor relief. Every citizen in need, declared the constitution of 1793, had a right to public support, and in May 1794 a ‘Great Book of National Benevolence’ was instituted where deserving cases could register their needs. Two months earlier, a comprehensive law on poor relief had been passed, which among other things forbade private alms giving on the grounds that the State would now provide. In October came the corollary: begging too was forbidden. Some of these measures would have been rashly ambitious at the best of times. In a country desperately at war and diverting all available resources towards fighting it, they were practically

And yet Cardinal Antonelli still voted for the Concordat. Its saving grace was that it restored free worship in France, a properly constituted clergy, and papal power. Despite serious material losses, in fact, the papacy was one of the great gainers from the work of the Revolution. In the 1780s it had appeared an institution in perhaps terminal decline, scorned by secularizing monarchs and defiled in Germany and Italy by Jansenizing bishops. Its apparent helplessness did much to mislead the drafters of the Civil Constitution. But before the end of the 1790s the Holy Father himself was sharing in the glory of martyrdom visited on his fellow priests by a Godless republic and its sympathizers abroad. Throughout France and the areas of Europe it dominated, meanwhile, the vast majority of the population was showing itself loyal to a clergy which had rejected the Revolution on its instructions. These were facts which the First Consul of France had the perception and the courage to recognize, against the advice and inclination of most of those who had tried to manage France’s affairs throughout the 1790s. Instant harmony did not follow. Within a few years he would find himself as exasperated as any Jacobin at priestly wiles. But he never tried to undo the basic settlement of 1801; and the clergy restored then, stripped of indefensible excesses and abuses, now for the first time ever devoted almost all of its energies to the cure of souls, under Rome’s unchallengeable doctrinal and spiritual authority. Not that they thanked the Revolution for all this. As in the case of the nobility, the experience from which it had arisen was altogether too painful. Throughout the nineteenth century the Roman Catholic Church would anathematize the French Revolution and all its works as an outburst of atheistical excess fomented by malignant philosophers and scheming freemasons, leading its full authority to the unhistorical ravings of Barruel. Republicans in turn, whose convictions were rooted in the Revolution, would see the Church as their most formidable foe, and join masonic lodges to express their antagonism. Nothing but the complete separation of Church and State, as between 1794 and 1802, would allay their suspicions. In 1905 it was eventually brought about, after decades of mounting extremism on both sides, all traceable back ultimately to 1790.

Also traceable back to that fateful divide was the breaking of the Church’s hold on the two social services it had controlled throughout the old order—education and poor relief. The men of 1789 saw education as yet another area to be regenerated on rational lines. Grandiose schemes

bloodless, powerless skeleton. That is the shadow of a religion being re-established in France, and those who thought up this sorry project are glorying in it and usurping the title of restorers of the altars...
meaningless. In some districts, local authorities made heroic efforts to establish the Great Book, but under the Directory the project was abandoned. Yet by then the problem was far worse than it had been in 1789. The poor were far more numerous thanks to the economic disruption which six years of upheaval had brought about, and previous provision, inadequate though it obviously was, had been shattered by the attack on the Church. Monastic charity dried up when church lands were nationalized and houses dissolved. Parish-based relief, largely derived from endowments and pious donations, was disrupted by the schism among parish priests over the oath, and those with money to give closed their purses for fear of drawing envious attention to themselves. And the last resorts of the indigent, hospitals and poor houses, had their already overstretched resources pitilessly blighted by almost every wave of revolutionary legislation. Like schools and colleges, many lost important sources of income in the reforms of 4 August 1789. Fiscal changes which abolished municipal tolls took away others. The value of investments was slashed by the inflation which had taken hold by 1792, and institutions which depended on direct grants from the Crown found the National Assembly unwilling to continue them. Like teaching orders, the charitable ones who were the backbone of nursing in the hospitals were at first exempted from dissolution and from the oath. But as in teaching, too, it did not last, and by 1792 the pietà with which nuns ministered to the poor was viewed with suspicion by patriots. They were not allowed to recruit novices, and in October 1793 they were at last subjected to a clerical oath. Those who refused were arrested and imprisoned, despite the clear impossibility of obtaining adequate replacements. A final blow came when in July 1794 hospital property was nationalized.

In this way the old structure of charity was pulled apart and, for all the talk, nothing constructive put in its place. Under the Directory, all thought of national provision was abandoned. Nevertheless, after 1794, some recovery began. The sale of hospital lands was halted, and those still unsold returned. Imprisoned nuns were released and resumed their ministries. Rich laity, who had played a crucial part in fund-raising and management before 1789, re-emerged gingerly to take on something like their old co-ordinating roles. Local taxes and surcharges on luxuries like theatre tickets were also reintroduced as a means of subsidizing hospitals. In Napoleonic France all these trends would be officially fostered, and charitable giving would revive. But pre-revolutionary levels were not restored. Even by 1847, the number of hospitals in France, for a population seven millions higher, was still almost 42 per cent less than in 1789. Nobody, therefore, suffered more than the poor and the sick, over several generations, from the blind destruction of established institutions before viable alternatives had been devised and funded. In no sphere was more human damage done by the French revolutionaries' failure to match rhetoric with reality.

It is true that their difficulties, here and elsewhere, were compounded by severe economic problems. In fact, the Revolution was an economic disaster for France. But much of that was the revolutionaries' own doing, too. The Revolution broke out at a moment of rare economic crisis, and this circumstance was to affect its whole subsequent character. Much of the boundless, unrealistic hope invested in the Estates-General by all classes in the spring of 1789, which did so much to ensure the success of the third estate, sprang from anxieties aroused by the harvest failure of 1788, a harsh winter, rising prices, and the slump in demand for manufactures. Popular support for the patriotic cause in Paris in July was based on the assumption that under the new regime there would be guaranteed supplies of cheap bread. In the eyes of the sansculottes, failure to achieve this would mean betrayal of the Revolution. Their determination to maintain it would constrain the economic policies of successive revolutionary assemblies down to 1795. Even when their power was broken, no government was pragmatic enough to leave the provisioning of Paris to the free market forces in which almost all men of education believed in principle. Finally, the concessions made on 4 August 1789 to appease a peasantry paranoid with fear for the safety of the harvest would become, despite the Assembly's initial misgivings, central to the Revolution's anti-feudal ideology. Left to itself, once the good harvest of 1789 was in, the economy might have been expected to improve. But almost at once its development began to be affected by revolutionary legislation.

The first series of disruptions resulted from the losses sustained by the nobility and the clergy. The destruction of a privileged society setting a high value on services could scarcely be brought about without serious shock waves which reached far beyond the immediate sufferers. Faced with the loss of feudal revenues, which in some regions might constitute as much as 20 per cent of landlords' income, their immediate reaction was to raise rents. In December 1790 proprietors were specifically authorized to add the equivalent of the abolished tithe to the rents they charged. On some estates by 1792 the notional rental had risen by a quarter. It was no coincidence that the most persistent peasant resistance to the Revolution came in areas where leaseholders predominated. The disappearance of the aristocratic lifestyle also had serious repercussions. For a town like Versailles the shock was brutal and irreparable, as the English visitors
haunting its abandoned, crumbling glories found in 1802. Formerly fashionable parts of Paris suffered a similar fate. "The Fauxbourg St. Germain can never recover," wrote an unduly pessimistic diplomatic visitor in 1796. It was 'quite depopulated; its hotels almost all seized by Government, and the streets near the Boulevards are choked with weeds.' And every city where a parlement had sat, or provincial estates regularly convened, found its economy rocked when these institutions disappeared and their rich and noble members emigrated, or shrank into unostentatious obscurity. The spoliation of the Church compounded such problems. Monasteries, chapels, and cathedrals provided innumerable jobs for the illiterate, directly or indirectly, from builders and painters all the way to washerwomen keeping surpluses clean. All were now lost as these institutions were deprived of their property, their revenues, and ultimately their very existence. Servants were dismissed wholesale. In Bayeux, for example, the nobility and clergy had employed 467 between them in 1787; nine years later they only gave employment to 76. The luxury trades were also devastated by the disappearance of their main customers and the introduction of simpler fashions that went with it. The silk capital of Lyons, already in difficulties before the Revolution, found the 1790s as disturbed economically as they were politically. Between 1790 and 1806 its population fell by almost a third, from 146,000 to 100,000. Between 1789 and 1799, the number of silk workshops fell by more than half.

Many of these convulsions were the consequence, ultimately, of the massive land transfer which proved one of the Revolution's most enduring achievements. But the use to which nationalized property was put created its own range of difficulties in the form of the inflation of the assignats. Convinced by the Physiocratic nostrum that land was the only true source of wealth, the members of the National Assembly were too willing to believe that a paper money based on land was more secure than the disastrous, still-remembered notes issued by John Law in 1720. And so it might have been if the assignats had not been massively over-issued, and had been withdrawn in an orderly way as originally envisaged. But, their minds set firmly against any forced reduction of the debt inherited from the monarchy on the one hand, and lacking both the power and the will to raise taxes and enforce their collection firmly on the other, the revolutionaries found the temptation to print money too strong. Already by January 1792 new-issuance had brought down the value of the assignat by 28 per cent; and once war began, financed as it had to be until 1794 largely by France's own resources, there was little alternative but to go on. In all, a nominal 50,000,000,000 livres worth of paper was issued between 1790 and 1797, but its total real value (at 1790 prices) was less than a seventh of that. And three-quarters of the depreciation over that time can be convincingly attributed to over-issue. The consequences affected every area of the economy. Thanks to the inflation, even the sale of national lands which was supposed to underpin the whole operation only realized 25 per cent of these lands' true value. Until the deflation of 1798, revolutionary France was a debtor's paradise, since assignats were legal tender at face value. As one of their earliest opponents had predicted, 'Every man in France who owes nothing, and to whom everything is owing, will be ruined by paper-money.' Paradise for debtors was a hell for creditors. It was no atmosphere for business confidence, and outside the black market and the enforced activity of war industries, normal production and exchange stagnated for much of the 1790s. Credit was tight, interest rates unusually high. Cash was hoarded, and what little could be extracted had to be spent on dealings with foreigners who refused to accept French paper. Wage-earners and all those on fixed incomes found their resources catastrophically eroded; and although wages eventually had to rise in the face of four-figure increases in the cost of living, they seldom caught up. Few rises equalled the 3,000 per cent achieved by government employees between 1790 and 1797. Government was the only employer whose demand for labour grew steadily throughout the Revolution. Others, faced with shrinking markets and spiralling costs, cut back and laid their workers off. By 1798 there were 60,000 unemployed in Paris, a tenth of the city's population. There were clear links between such unemployment and the rise in crime which everybody commented on under the Directory—not to mention a marked increase in urban suicides. There was no longer, after all, even the former network of charitable institutions to fall back on.

It was the war, of course, which finally made the country hostage to the assignats, although the preposterous Brissot had actually claimed on the last day of 1791 that war would eliminate the depreciation that had already occurred. And war was also responsible for perhaps the most permanent damage suffered by the French economy under the Revolution—the destruction of overseas trade. Before 1789, it had been the most glitteringly successful sector. Unlike the others, it felt few shocks in the Revolution's early stages. The trade of Bordeaux and Marseilles peaked in 1791. But that year also saw the outbreak of the great slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue, where an increasing proportion of the colonial trade of Bordeaux, at least, was concentrated. It developed into a full-scale civil war which could not have failed to disrupt trade to the Caribbean whatever happened. Then, in 1793, came war against most of Europe and, most ominously of all, against Great Britain. The French coast was now blockaded, and to compound the chaos, in August the Convention banned the
export of all goods of first necessity and embargoed all neutral ships. By the time these restrictions were lifted a year later, the British had tightened their grip, and they dominated the Atlantic approaches, at least, for the rest of the decade. The trade of the ports was not reduced to nothing, and in privateering they found a new resource; but their colonial business was largely destroyed, and the boom times of before 1789 were lost for ever. Foreign trade shrank from 25 per cent of the country’s economic activity to just 9 per cent in seven years: the population of Marseilles fell between 1790 and 1806 from 120,000 to 99,000, that of Bordeaux from 110,000 to 92,000, that of Nantes from perhaps 90,000 to 77,000.

This collapse of what had been the unchallenged leading sector of the old-regime economy proved a permanent structural shift. It was accentuated by the captive continental markets conquered by France in the later 1790s and retained, in various guises, until 1814. International commerce, reoriented itself away from the sea towards continental markets, where French power was increasingly successful in excluding British competition, too. For those able to take advantage of such changing circumstances the revolutionary years were not without their opportunities. War industries of course did well—munitions, metallurgy, and even woollen textiles, meeting an unprecedented demand for uniforms. The mines and woollen towns of Belgium, incorporated into the French national market from 1795, boomed at the expense of older centres in France proper. And the revival of the French cotton industry was almost a success story. Mortally challenged in the late 1780s by the cheaper, better-quality products of a technologically more advanced Lancashire, which flooded into the country under the ill-conceived commercial treaty of 1786, French cottons were saved from annexation by renewed conflict with Great Britain. The population of Rouen, the cotton capital, actually grew despite the loss of a parliament, important ecclesiastical institutions, and maritime trade. After 1796 much new machinery was introduced, although only of a sort used across the Channel for decades and already being superseded there; and in the first decade of the nineteenth century French cottons would boom under the impetus of a revival of luxurious fashions and continued exclusion of British competition.

In fact, traumatic though it was for those who had to live through it, much of the economic upheaval of the 1790s proved transitory. Lyon recovered when silk came back into fashion. Even overseas trade clawed itself back to the volume of 1789. But in both these areas pre-revolutionary levels were not reached again until the 1830s, and that was typical. The revolutionary years had set French economic expansion back by at least a generation, and had done little to make structures more dynamic. Certain pre-conditions for later progress had indeed been established. Internal customs barriers had been eliminated, standardized weights and measures introduced, guild restrictive practices abolished, and labour organizations restricted by the Le Chapelier Law. But none of this released entrepreneurial energy of itself. The hideous uncertainties of the 1790s did quite the reverse. Spectacular fortunes were made by shrewd speculators and military supply contractors, particularly under the Directory. But most of those with money to invest hastened to sink it into the one security that was no risk—land. It was very much the pattern of pre-revolutionary times, and the Revolution accentuated it by removing what before had been a uniquely French alternative, venal office. At the same time it placed unprecedented amounts of new land on the market when it offered the property of the Church and the émigrés for sale, and on bargain terms. Thus the long-standing tendency of the French bourgeoisie to shun commercial investment or get out of it as soon as possible was reinforced, and would persist far into the nineteenth century.

Nor did the Revolution bring any marked changes in the cultivation of the land. Benefits derived from the abolition of feudal burdens were largely offset by higher rents and taxes. Revolutionary legislation reinforced rather than inhibited the division of properties on inheritance, ensuring that most holdings remained small. Inflation increased the appeal of sharecropping, already so well established. Military requirements were a constant drain on livestock, wasting its precious manure; while conscription (or its evasion: the effect was the same) drained the most able-bodied of the work-force. By 1802, it is true, French agriculture was managing to feed over a million more mouths, a substantial achievement, especially given the deterioration in transport networks. But apart from an acceleration in the spread of potatoes, no innovations underlay this increase in capacity. The reliability of an expanding market might even have discouraged risky experiments. Even in the 1840s, the patterns and basic productivity of French agriculture were much what they had been a century beforehand. Only with the advent of the railways did fundamental change begin, here as in much of the rest of the French economy.

Was then, the Revolution worth it in material terms? For most ordinary French subjects turned by it into citizens, it cannot have been. It had made their lives infinitely more precarious, when they had expected the reverse. It had hidden fair to destroy the religious, cultural, and moral underpinnings of the communities in which they lived. The 
\textit{cahiers} of 1789 make overwhelmingly clear that most French people wanted less state interference in their lives, yet it brought far more, and fiercer. Government by
terror scarcely outlasted the Year II, but nothing like it had ever occurred before. When it ebbed, the power of the State remained, permanently augmented and disposing of coercive powers not dreamed of by the old monarchy. It was no wonder therefore, that the most persistent and massive resistance that the Revolution encountered came not from the former so-called ‘privileged orders’ but from ordinary people who simply wanted to call a halt. In alienating so many of their fellow citizens, the revolutionaries furnished counter-revolutionaries with constant hope and encouragement. But most popular resistance was anti-rather than counter-revolutionary. Though they might mouth slogans about restoring Church and king, all most anti-revolutionaries wanted was stability and autonomy after years of upheaval and intrusion by outsiders. Their resistance, however, only too often pushed France’s new authorities to further extremes of repression, gouging existing wounds yet wider and deeper.

Popular rejection of what the Revolution had become was not confined to the open rebellion of the Vendée, or even to the recurrent chouannerie of Brittany, Maine, and western Normandy, where the bonds of village communities had been severed by the impact of the new religious policy on regions where even the abolition of feudalism had brought few gains to peasants who were predominantly renters. It was endemic throughout the south, where the Revolution was perceived as designed to benefit rich Protestants; and broke out periodically in rioting on local issues in many other areas. The statistics of emigration and terror are also suggestive. Almost 32,000, a third of all registered émigrés, were peasants or workers turning their backs on the land of liberty. Of the official victims of the Terror, 8,350, or almost 60 per cent, were from the same groups, dying for their resistance. DeserTERS or draft-dodgers, tellingly defined as ‘insubordinate’ (insoumis), were another gauge. In 1789 drawing for the militia, one of the most hated institutions of the old order, had been abolished. By 1793 it was back, and in 1798 conscription assumed a far more systematic character. Evasion of military service was universally agreed to be a major ingredient in the rural crime wave which marked the directorial period. ‘Many deserters are lurking about the woods,’ wrote an English traveller through Chantilly in 1796;19 ‘and there are continual robberies and murders. We have not travelled half an hour in the dark.’ Banditti, he called them later on: bandits—a category social scientists have learned to recognize as a classic form of protest against an established order. Anti-revolution, in other words, was a popular movement—far more so than that of the sansculottes who have usually monopolized this description. Yet there is a sense in which the sansculottes were anti-revolutionary, too. They shared none of the economic liberalism of the men of 1789, and none of their extreme commitment to the rights of property. Their belief was in a moral, not a market, economy, and they were prepared to offer armed resistance to those, like the Girondins, who were overt in rejecting these ideals. Their belief in popular democracy, and mistrust for the rich and over-educated, paralleled peasant antagonism towards well-off urban patriots who intruded into largely self-governing village communities with their purchases of national lands and client constitutional priests. Sansculottes welcomed the Revolution because they knew that in its last years the monarchy had begun to turn its back on time-honoured moral commitments towards its subjects. So long as their energies could be usefully harnessed, those in power accepted and paid lip-service to their support. But most deputies never accepted the legitimacy of the sansculottes’ claim to dictate the course of national policy, and they sanctioned the popular savagery of terror and dechristianization with ill-concealed reluctance. As soon as they could they shrugged off popular tutelage, and by 1795 were openly treating the remaining militants of Paris as anti-revolutionaries. By then the latter had one more thing in common with others elsewhere who opposed it: they had no gains to show, either, for all the upheaval and disruption.

Yet some groups undoubtedly gained. In any list of them, pride of place must go to the owners of land. Freed in August 1789 from the burdens of feudalism and the tithe, they were able to proclaim property as the supreme social and political commodity. The Civil Code, when it was completed, consolidated and clarified their rights, and the means of transmitting them. Successive constitutions, in one way or another, made the effective exercise of political rights dependent in turn on property. Property would define the class of Notables who ruled France, as electors, from the Consulate down to the late nineteenth century. The social profile of property owners was little altered by the Revolution. The amount of land held by the nobility inevitably fell, although in the 1800s they still dominated the ranks of the largest and richest proprietors. At the other end of the scale the sale of national lands, especially in the mid-1790s when they had been marketed in small lots, had produced an increase in the number of petty peasant owners, though their overall share scarcely rose. The great gainers from the redistribution of church and noble property were the bourgeoisie. More than anything else, their fears about the security of their gains finally pushed the Revolution into the hands of a dictator who imposed stability and offered all property owners unconditional recognition of their title. By the time he fell, their grip on their gains was beyond challenge, and the restored Bourbons, though they returned émigré lands
still unsold and organized a fund to compensate those whose property had gone, never seriously thought of undoing the land settlement bequeathed by the Revolution.

The bourgeoisie also gained by the Revolution, in the end, as the group from which the professions were recruited. The men of 1789 had proclaimed careers open to the talents, believing that neither birth nor wealth should give privileged access to any employment. At first the implementa-
tion of this principle looked like developing into a disaster for the profes-
sions. When venal offices were abolished, compensation was decreed for the property rights thereby suppressed; but it was calculated on the basis of values declared for tax (and therefore considerably underestimated) in 1771, before the great inflation of office prices which marked the last twenty years of the old order. It was also paid largely in depreciating assignats. The dispossessed officers understandably felt cheated. Equally alarming was the Revolution's early hostility to professional associations in general, interpreting their commitment to maintaining standards as a hangover from the now abandoned world of corporatism and privilege. 'This was one of the first abuses of freedom,' recalled a distinguished lawyer, 'that the right was left to anyone, without scrutiny, or any apprenticeship, to practise the liberal professions.' Medicine, the bar, and the law in general were thrown open to the market, with minimal qualifications required from practitioners. Most of the former validating bodies, like universities, were abolished in any case. Revolutionary France was therefore a happy hunting ground for quacks and charlatans of every sort—most of them, to be sure, members of the bourgeoisie too. Not until Napoleonic times did the State take the situation in hand and reintroduce a rigorous system of licensing to restore professional standards. The solution was more bureaucratic than before 1789—but then so was France.

Although hostility to the power of royal administrators had been one of the most universal grievances expressed in the cahiers of 1789, and the constitution of 1791 placed almost all responsibility in the hands of elected officials, dispensing with the intendants and their professional staffs, as soon as France went to war this trend was reversed. Central administra-
tion, employing less than 700 in the 1780s, was 6,000 strong by 1794. The overall number of administrators expanded fivefold, to about a quarter of a million, perhaps 10 per cent of the entire bourgeoisie. These numbers fell somewhat in the later, chaotic days of the Directory, when the ranks of bureaucrats were regularly purged, but they stabilized not far below their 1790s peak under the Empire, that supreme administrative government. By then this apparatus had clearer qualifications and rules for entry, a well-established career structure, and even the rudiments of a contributory pension system—a source of livelihood as safe and secure as any investment in landed property.

Another group who did well out of the Revolution were soldiers. In no sphere were careers thrown more open to the talents, as the most successful careerist of them all was always ready to testify. Although military careers continued to attract high numbers of nobles still throughout the nineteenth century, the aristocratic monopoly of the officer corps had gone for ever. Proclaimed in 1789, equal opportunity in the army became a reality far more suddenly than could have been naturally expected when discipline collapsed and a large proportion of officers emigrated over the next two years. By 1793, accordingly, 70 per cent of officers in service had risen from the ranks. Even the officer-entry nobles who were left had their promotional chances improved by the departure of so many of their fel-
lows. And for more than two decades after this, the vastly expanded army, first of the Great Nation, then of the Napoleonic Empire, would offer glory and good prospects to those who joined it and stayed with the colours. It was, of course, dangerous. By 1802, 400,000 French men had fallen in battle, and another million, perhaps, would follow them before night fell on the field of Waterloo. The thousands of draft-dodgers and deserters who evaded each call-up showed clearly enough that the army's appeal was far from universal. Yet there was no mistaking the enthusiasm, commitment, and revolutionary arrogance of the Republic's armies. From the start sol-
diers were among the most fervent and extreme revolutionaries, scorning officers who still behaved like aristocrats, lynching generals suspected of treachery, cheering on dechristianization, and vigorously imposing the bracing discipline of liberty on defeated enemies. By 1795 and 1796, the opportunities for looting and plunder were limitless, and those lucky enough to be in the army of Italy had the unique privilege of being paid in coin. By 1797 the armies saw themselves in the former sansculotte mantle as guardians of the Revolution's purity, standing ready to intervene in domestic politics under any successful general who would mouth slogans about saving the Republic from feckless babbler. When eventually the jackest of such generals took power, military style was imposed on the State. When Lord Cornwallis, the British peace negotiator and an experi-
enced soldier himself, visited a sitting of the Legislative Body in 1801, he was embarrassed to find his entry and departure marked by a roll of drums. And throughout Napoleon's rule, whether as members of the Legion of Honour or of the imperial nobility, soldiers would stand first in the consular and then imperial hierarchy. The ease with which the returned emperor put together a new army in 1815 shows how much soldiers felt they owed to the new order.
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Ogé, on the wheel. News of these clashes provoked a new debate in Paris, and in May 1791 the Assembly, at the urging of deputies like Grégoire and Robespierre, granted civil rights to coloureds born of two free parents. It was the Revolution's first gesture towards racial equality; but before news of it could reach Saint-Domingue, the slaves, stirred up by the ferocity of the political conflicts around them, had risen in the great rebellion of August 1791. It was the progress of this uprising that forced the pace on racial issues. In April 1792 the Legislative, of which Brissot was the most prominent member, granted full rights to all free coloureds regardless of parentage. But when commissioners sent out to enforce the new law arrived in the colony, they found the situation so envenomed that it made little impact. Within months of their arrival, France was at war with Great Britain, and communications with home perilous. Willy-nilly the commissioners were forced to use their own initiative in responding to a complex and shifting situation. Thus, while on arrival they loudly reaffirmed the commitment of what was now the French Republic to slavery, by the beginning of February 1793 Commissioner Sonthonax was beginning to denounce 'aristocrats of the skin'. The latter responded by trying to drive the commissioners from the colony by force. Only non-whites defended Sonthonax; and in recognition of this in June 1793 he offered freedom to all blacks who would fight for the Republic. 'It is', he declared, 'with the natives of the country, that is, the Africans, that we will save Saint-Domingue for France.' Two months later, as Spaniards from the other part of the island invaded the troubled colony, he took the final step. On 29 August, slavery itself was abolished in the northern province. In October general freedom was proclaimed for all Saint-Domingue. None of this had been authorised by the Convention. In fact in July, after the purge of the Girondins, the commissioners had been recalled as associates of the now-discredited Brissot. But when news of the emancipation arrived in Paris in January 1794 the Convention greeted it with enthusiasm. For, if only because, like Sonthonax, the deputies saw it as a way to defeat the Republic's British and Spanish enemies in the Caribbean. On 4 February, accordingly, the Convention framed its own decree: Negro slavery was abolished in all French colonies, and all men living there were citizens with full rights.

The effect was dramatic. As soon as the news arrived in the colony, late in April, black rebel leaders began to rally to the Republic. The free black Toussaint L'Ouverture, who had joined the Spanish invaders, switched sides. The Spaniards were driven out by black forces, who proceeded to massacre whites who had welcomed the invaders. Under the peace of 1795 Spain ceded all of Hispaniola to France. Terrified whites now appealed to the British, who with slave unrest spreading to their own islands were anxious to stamp it out at its source. There had been British troops in Saint-Domingue since 1793, and now they were reinforced. But, newly drafted in from Europe for the most part, they died like flies in the pestilential climate. They withdrew in 1798 with nothing to show but 13,000 dead. Many ex-slaves, meanwhile, had been militarized under Toussaint, and they used their power to persecute and terrorize the coloureds. Toussaint remained loyal to France, but beyond French control until peace with England reopened the seas. As soon as it did so, Bonaparte took characteristically vigorous steps to reassert metropolitan authority, dispatching an army which captured Toussaint and sent him a prisoner to Europe. But the French troops were soon as ravaged by disease as their British predecessors, and when word arrived that the First Consul had decreed the re-establishment of slavery in May 1802, black leaders who had been only too willing to betray Toussaint resumed their resistance, and the renewal of war between Great Britain and France cut communications once more. Slavery lasted, restored, in French colonies down to 1848. But it was never re-established in Saint-Domingue, which proclaimed itself, on 1 January 1804, the Republic of Haiti.

Years of bloody vicissitudes lay ahead for the new state. Within 18 months of Toussaint's death in a prison in the Jura mountains in 1803, one of his former lieutenants, Dessalines, was proclaiming himself an emperor and decreeing a new massacre of whites. Yet French control over the former richest colony in the world was never regained. Haiti was thus the only truly independent state to come into being as a result of the French Revolution. Within a few years, of course, much of Latin America would be proclaiming its independence from Spain made impotent by French invasion; but it was the Revolution's heir, and not the movement itself, who precipitated the break when he deposed the legitimate dynasty in Madrid.

Even so, much of the imagery and language employed by the founders of Latin-American independence was derived from the Revolution, with their declarations of rights, constitutions, and tricolours. At least one of their leaders, Miranda, had served the Republic as a general and had been dreaming of revolutionizing his native continent since the 1780s. And by the time they came into the open the ideas of national freedom and independence which they proclaimed were well established among France's European neighbours. The impact and influence of the Revolution on Europe beyond France were far from exhausted by the mid-1800s, but already the old landscape was scarcely recognizable.

Whole states had been permanently swept away. French power had obliterated famous city-republics like Geneva, Genoa, and, most spectacular
of all, Venice. When the Revolution had apparently reduced France to helplessness, predatory neighbours had carved up her old ally Poland. The basis of other states, like the Dutch Republic or Switzerland, had been radically transformed and would be again when the Emperor Napoleon decided to set up satellite kingdoms. Even beyond France reach, the post-French uprising in Ireland in 1798 had precipitated the end of Irish legislative independence from Great Britain. The Holy Roman Empire would limp on until 1806, finally destroyed by yet another Austrian defeat at French hands. From 1797, however, from the moment the Peace of Campo Formio conceded the left bank of the Rhine to France, it was clear that the Empire’s traditional composition could not survive. Princes dispossessed would have to be compensated by territory elsewhere in Germany taken from ecclesiastical rulers. And so they were, when the settlement of Campo Formio was confirmed after the Peace of Lunéville. The states of Germany were completely secularized just three years before the Empire itself finally crumbled.

Imposed on Europe by French power, these changes outlasted it. After the defeat of Napoleon, however, France lost most of the gains she had made for herself, even within her self-proclaimed ‘natural frontiers’. Belgium became part of a new kingdom of the Netherlands and then, after 1811, a separate realm in its own right; Luxembourg became an independent grand duchy; Austria, more than content with gains in Italy, wanted neither back. Prussia inherited most of the Rhineland left bank, for nobody dreamed of reinstating the ecclesiastical princes. Even Savoy was restored to a reconstituted Piedmontese kingdom of Sardinia. Of these losses, France only recovered Savoy in 1860. The long-term gainers from the wars launched by the French revolutionaries against Europe, in fact, were the enemies they were so confident of destroying. The Austrians, having shown an almost miraculous ability to recover in the face of repeated apparently decisive defeats, emerged hugely expanded in territory and would dominate central Europe for half a century. The Prussians, when they faced French armies squarely for the first time since Valmy, in 1806, were shatteringly defeated—but they emerged with the hegemony of northern Germany first forged by Frederick the Great enormously strengthened, and far more extensive territories. Russia and Spain, for their part, demonstrated the practical limitations of even French military power. Napoleon’s failure to subdue either marked the beginning of the French Empire’s decline. Above all, the British remained invulnerable beyond the Channel, even in the face of an attempt to exclude their merchandise from Europe, first experimented with by the Directory and developed into a fullblown system by Napoleon. Meanwhile they subsidized

France’s continental enemies, and used their sea-power to strengthen their already formidable trading links with the rest of the world and systematically destroy or appropriate the assets of their rivals. French occupation completed the economic decline of the Dutch, long overtaken by England but still a substantial power in the 1780s in trade, colonies, finance, and banking. Most of this power drained away to London while Amsterdam was governed from Paris. But Great Britain’s greatest economic, competitor throughout the eighteenth century had been France herself. It seems unlikely that she could have kept up economically even if the Revolution had not occurred. From the early 1780s the British were showing signs of moving decisively ahead in volume of trade and industrial production. But the Revolution widened the gap irrecoverably, the British appropriating the overseas markets and resources that France lost. Militarily, when France became bogged down in the Iberian peninsula, British sea-power at last found a way of directly influencing the continental struggle by transporting an army there, under the general who would eventually impose the decisive military defeat on Napoleon. Appropriately, Wellington’s victory took place in Belgium, the territory for which Great Britain had entered the war in the first place. Intervention in the same cause in 1914 would herald the end for Great Britain of the century of world power which opened with the defeat of France.

The French Empire defeated in 1815 was no longer, of course, the country which had begun the war. But then the victorious powers had changed extraordinarily too. Every state which survived confrontation with revolutionary France was deeply marked by the effort. The Republic from 1793 onwards had committed itself to mobilizing the entire resources of Europe’s most populous country (Russia excepted). The monarchies against whom this drive was directed could only hope to defeat it if they did the same. Mass warfare resulted, involving huge armies and whole populations no longer insulated, as they had been during a century and a half of contained warfare for limited objectives, from the full impact of military demands. As Clausewitz, whose whole great theory of war was based upon analysis of the conflicts between 1792 and 1815, put it:13

In 1793 such a force as no one had any conception of made its appearance. War had again suddenly become an affair of the people, and that of a people numbering thirty millions, every one of whom regarded himself as a citizen of the State... By this participation of the people in the war... a whole Nation with its natural weight came into the scale. Henceforward, the means available—the efforts which might be called forth—had no longer any definite limits... the element of War, freed from all conventional restrictions, broke loose, with all its natural force. The cause was the participation of the people in this great affair of State, and this
participation arose partly from the effects of the French Revolution on the internal affairs of countries, partly from the threatening attitude of the French towards all Nations.

But these changes needed to be organized, and nothing could be done if government did not take extensive new powers. Everywhere, for example, conscription of some sort became the norm. Introduced into the Austrian hereditary lands under Maria Theresa in 1802, it was extended to Hungary. After the defeat of the old Prussian professional and half-mercenary army in 1806, a new Landwehr began to be organized, based for the first time largely on the state’s own citizens, while the spirit of the levée en masse was sought in the creation of a popular force of resistance to invasion, the Landsturm. In Great Britain balloting for the militia and other auxiliary forces was extended. There were riots throughout Ireland when a militia was introduced for the first time in 1793, the same in Scotland in 1797, and the activities of the press-gang in the ports of the British Isles were a source of constant tension. These governments seldom made the French mistake of equating resistance to conscription with treason and sympathy with the enemy; but fears that genuine Jacobins would exploit the resentments it caused, among other popular grievances, led to a general increase in police activities and numbers, and spies and informers proliferated. The burden of taxation, of course, rose spectacularly, and much ingenuity was displayed everywhere in finding new commodities to impose levies on. The first self-confessed income tax was introduced in Great Britain in 1799, and soon afterwards a similar levy was introduced in Austria. Nor were the assignats the only paper money to be issued—and depreciate. By 1800, 200 million Banknoten were circulating in Austria, and by 1809 had lost 35 per cent.

And yet, except in Ireland in 1798, resistance to more burdensome government in states fighting France never attained the scale and persistence witnessed there. This was because, in the end, the subjects of Europe’s beleaguered kings and emperors feared and hated the French more than they did their own rulers. What they learned of French behaviour in occupied territories did nothing to reassure them. An exuberant, uncompromising nationalism lay behind France’s revolutionary expansion in the 1790s: but what the French found, after this first impact of a nation in arms on its neighbours, was that the neighbours responded in kind. They found that the doctrine of the sovereignty of the nation, proclaimed by them at the outset of the Revolution in 1789, could be turned against them by other peoples claiming their own national sovereignty. In states long united by custom and language, such as the Dutch Republic, all the French example did was to reinforce patriotic sentiments already strong. In areas never before united, like Italy, it created a powerful national sentiment for the first time by showing that archaic barriers and divisions could be swept away. The first Italian nationalists placed their hopes in French power to secure their ends, but from the start their attitude was double-edged. ‘Italy’, declared the winning entry for an essay competition on the best form of Italian government, sponsored by the new French regime in Milan in 1796, ‘has almost always been the patrimony of foreigners who, under the pretext of protecting us, have consistently violated our rights, and, while giving us flags and fine-sounding names, have made themselves masters of our estate. France, Germany and Spain have held lordship over us in turn. . . . It is therefore best to provide . . . the sort of government capable of opposing the maximum of resistance to invasion.’ The tragedy for nationalistic Italian Jacobins was that, when popular revulsion against the French invaders swept the peninsula in 1798 and 1799, they found themselves identified with the hated foreigners. Elsewhere, peoples and intellectual nationalists found themselves more at one; and not the least of the reasons why France’s most inveterate enemies were able to resist her so successfully was the strength of volunteering. An Austrian call for volunteers against the French produced 150,000 men in 1809. Three years later the Russians were able to supplement their normal armed forces with over 420,000 more or less willing recruits to drive out the alien invader. Only nationalism could successfully fight nationalism: and when it did, as Clausewitz again saw, it would be a fight to the death. Wars of peoples could admit of none of the old limited, bargained conclusions of pomaded dynasts. These would be the wars of the future, and the French Revolution had pioneered them.

It was ironic that a movement that so fired and hardened national antagonisms should have been launched in the name of the universal Rights of Man. It was even more surprising that these values should have remained associated with the French cause when revolutionary France herself had turned away from most of them. But apart from French puppets, no other European state dreamed of espousing the revolutionary ideology. They knew that, whereas French power threatened their existence, French principles challenged their legitimacy. Yet for all their efforts, and Napoleon’s too, sooner or later much of this ideology still triumphed.

The message of the French Revolution was that the people are sovereign; and in the two centuries since it was first proclaimed it has conquered the world. What it means in practice is subject to constant disagreement, and was from the start. Representative government after properly held elections...
was one thing—but the deputy who declared on 15 June 1789, as he pointed to the screaming public galleries, "Let... that we are deliberating here in front of our masters and we are answerable to them for our opinions." was asking for trouble. In 1792 it arrived, when the much-feared tumultuous democracy, warned against by men of order ever since the beginning, triumphed amid the bloodshed of the storming of the Tuileries and the September Massacres. The people were now in power, or so the sansculottes and their Montagnard allies claimed, for the first time since antiquity. Later democrats have looked back on those months as the first triumph of their beliefs. Yet at the time most men of property and education were horrified, and they continued to be haunted by the memory down the generations. In the end the activities of the sansculottes probably retarded rather than advanced the cause of mass democracy. Nevertheless, prescription and hereditary right would never again command unchallenged consent as a basis for legitimate political authority. Sooner or later, even the most absolute monarchs or dictators would feel the need to confirm their right to power with a show of popular endorsement. More often than not, perhaps, elections or plebiscites would be rigged. The French revolutionaries pioneered that technique too. But since 1789 ever-dwindling numbers of regimes have felt it wise to do without any token of consent from those over whom they rule.

If asked to sum up their cause in one word, the men of 1789, and perhaps most of their compatriots down to 1802, even, would have responded: liberty. In revolutionary France, and in the countries France overrun, the imagery of liberty was everywhere—Phrygian caps, allegorical statues, and above all liberty trees, planted by triumphant Jacobins and as often as not hacked down later by counter-revolutionaries—60,000 had been planted by 1792. After 1792 the trappings of Roman republicanism became fashionable, with fasces and axes; and stern ancient patriots like Brutus, Scævola, and Cato, familiar to all men of education, were much invoked. But what did 'liberty' mean? In everyday practice it appeared to mean whatever those in power wanted. For them, Rousseau's statement that legitimate authorities should force men to be free was wonderfully convenient, and in the Year II sophistries of this sort littered the speeches of more speculative rhetoricians like Robespierre and Saint-Just. Abroad, liberty simply meant French rule. Yet less equivocal definitions were available, and had been offered by the revolutionaries at the outset. It was defined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen as the right to do anything that did not harm others, limited only by others' enjoyment of the same right. It also meant freedom from arbitrary power, which by 1792 was being routinely identified as the power of any king. Finally it meant freedom to think, write, and worship as one chose. Although it was soon limiting them in practice, the Revolution never ceased to pay copious lip-service to these values. They would remain inseparable from the creed of all those subsequently inspired by the French revolutionary myth.

The same was true of the second key to the Rights of Man, equality. If we know nothing else about the French Revolution, we know that it spawned the famous motto adopted for the state by the Third Republic and never abandoned since, except by the Vichy regime: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. In historical fact, fraternity came late, appearing only in 1793, and went soon, being largely abandoned by the end of 1794 as a now-redundant sop to the sansculottes. Equality, however, was there from the beginning. All men, proclaimed the Declaration, are born and remain free and equal in rights, social distinctions can only be based on common utility, the law should be the same for everybody. By these tokens a society based on privilege, hereditary superiority, or feudal prerogatives was denounced, and the revolutionaries of France offered a complete programme for other societies wishing to do the same. Yet the equality aimed at by the men of 1789 had very clear limits. Equality of opportunity, expressed as careers open to the talents, was one thing. Equality of fortunes or property, which alone could make true equality of opportunity a reality, was quite another, and never espoused by more than a tiny handful of political activists in the 1790s. Property, indeed (and the security that went with it), was proclaimed as one of the natural and imprescriptible Rights of Man. In March 1793 the Convention, amid scenes of general enthusiasm, decreed the death penalty for anybody proposing an agrarian law—a forcible redistribution of property of the sort familiar to all the deputies from reading at school about the ill-fated Gracchi in republican Rome. Equality of political rights commanded more support, especially in 1793–4, but it is hard to decide how much of the democratic talk heard then was intended more to impress the sansculottes than as an expression of real conviction. Certain it is that the only constitution of the 1790s to fix no property qualifications for voting or eligibility at any level, that of 1793, was never brought into force and abandoned as impractical as soon as popular pressure on the Convention eased. The constitution-makers of 1795 did not resurrect the category of active citizen elaborated in 1790, but they put effective voting power, that of the secondary assemblies, squarely in the hands of substantial property owners. The consular lists would observe the same principles, defining the political nation in effect as the Notables. Not until 1848 was this principle challenged again.

Equality between men and women, meanwhile, was brushed aside as scarcely worthy of consideration; despite the unprecedented part women
had played in public affairs in and after 1789. Whether marching to Versailles to bring back the royal family in October 1789, or urging on their menfolk to take more decisive action in most of the subsequent journées down to Prairial 1795; or whether forming, as nuns, the most solid block of clergy to refuse the clerical oath, or leading the steady drift back to religious observance over the late 1790s; women at crucial points were of decisive importance in the Revolution. Invariably their intervention pushed matters to extremes. Grégoire, despairing at popular refusal to patronize his rump constitutional Church, cannot have been the only one to lament the influence of ‘crapulous and seditious women.’ Meanwhile, whereas at the lowest level the closest influence of political wives like Mme Roland and Mme Tallien, or Necker’s busybody daughter Mme de Stael, continued the well-established traditions of the old regime, the unprecedented atmosphere of early revolutionary Paris threw up new and unusual figures. There was Thérèse de Méricourt, sitting among the men at the Jacobin Club in her National Guard uniform, rallying the faint-hearted at the Tuileries on 10 August, perhaps spying for the emperor; and eventually beaten into terminal insanity by her (female) political enemies; or Claire Lacombe, actress and enrégée, who organized a club of revolutionary republican citizenesses which fought pitched battles with market women who refused to wear the revolutionary cockade. They were so disorderly that on 30 October 1793 the Convention formally banned women’s organizations. Or there was Olympe de Gouges, playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Robespierre and offered to defend the king, and failed to avoid the guillotine by feigning pregnancy (at 45) after being arrested for demanding government by plebiscite. In 1791 she had written a pamphlet, The Rights of Women and the Citizen, in which she laid claim to equal political rights with men. But there was never any hope of that. The men of the French Revolution had vivid memories of the malign influence of royal mistresses, presumptuous salon hostesses, not to mention an empty-headed queen, under the old regime. Women in public life, all this showed, were dangerous, whether at the top or (as experience after 1789 proved) in the streets. The role of women, they felt, should be exclusively that of wives and mothers, bearing children for the homeland, but leaving politics to men. In this respect Napoleon was entirely typical, and many of his interventions during the drafting of the Civil Code were directed at restricting women’s property rights. He would not have dissented from the advice offered to women by the Jacobin Journalist Prudhomme in 1793:

Be honest and diligent girls, tender and modest wives, wise mothers, and you will be good patriots. True patriotism consists of fulfilling one’s duties and valuing only rights appropriate to each according to sex and age, and not wearing the [liberty] cap and pantaloons and not carrying pike and pistol. Leave those to men who are born to protect you and make you happy.

The practical egalitarianism of the French Revolution was, therefore, quite narrow. Even so, the Revolution also produced the most radical and imaginative attempt to achieve equality yet seen in history, Babeuf’s Conspiracy of Equals. Designed to achieve one of the fundamental Rights of Man, it drew its inspiration from another, endorsed by the declarations both of 1789 and 1793: resistance to oppression. For one thing revolutionaries could never do was proclaim revolution itself illegitimate. Every regime down to 1814 could trace its title back no further than the seizure of sovereignty by the representatives of the nation in June 1789, confirmed by the popular action of mid-July. Thus, declared the 1793 Declaration of Rights, ‘When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.’ Exercising this right, a second revolution within the Revolution had overthrown the monarchy in August 1792; and discontented elements for the whole span of the First French Republic regarded rebellion as a legitimate, if final, recourse against regimes they believed to be violating the Rights of Man. It was a reflex that would become permanently entrenched in French history; and, soon enough, in that of the whole world. The modern idea of revolution goes back no further than 1789. But once it had occurred in France, the idea that it was possible, and right, to overthrow an existing order by force, and on grounds of general principles rather than existing law, was launched. Simultaneously a new figure appeared on the stage of history: the revolutionary. There had been no revolutionaries before 1789. Nobody expected, foresaw, or planned for the catastrophe that began then. The revolutionaries of France were created by the Revolution. But that never happened again. Afterwards, revolutions would be consciously prepared for, and even when their form or occasion was unexpected (as in 1917) there were always revolutionaries there, with plans laid, to take advantage of them. Henceforth it was recognized that revolutions which were more than just sudden or violent changes at the top could be engineered, and succeed. For this new breed, the French Revolution was the classic political and social experience. It provided an inspiration: proof that revolution could occur. It provided a model: what techniques to use, what mistakes to avoid. It provided a style and a language. Self-conscious revolutionaries would adopt a tricolour as the flag of liberty, imitate French uniforms (Wolfe Tone dreamed of clothing a United Irish ‘national guard’ in 1792 in
order emerged from the cataclysm: no compromise. If the Revolution was God’s punishment on the old regime for countenancing creeping laxity and infidelity, then the best hope for lasting stability in the future was to support religion, avoid representative institutions, control opinion, and maintain vigilance against subversive plots. A whole right-wing political outlook had been born, and like its revolutionary antithesis it transcended frontiers. It would dominate many nineteenth-century governments; but in the end they would find that insurrection merely provoked what it hoped to prevent. Reformers were driven to plotting revolution because there was no hope of change in any other way; while hostility to religion and the social order was all the more virulent when, in the end, it did break out again.

Moderate conservatives feared as much. In every state there would be those who believed that reform rather than insurrection was the best way to prevent revolution. They were not always successful, but at least they were prepared to look reality in the face. For good or ill, the Revolution had happened, and the ideals, aspirations, and myths it had inspired could not be expunged from human memory. And the world of acceptance which it had shattered could never be artificially re-created.

The shadow of the Revolution, therefore, fell across the whole of the nineteenth century and beyond. Until 1917 few would have disputed that it was the greatest revolution in the history of the world; and even after that its claims to primacy remain strong. It was the first modern revolution, the archetypal one. After it, nothing in the European world remained the same, and we are all heirs to its influence. And yet, it can be argued, much that was attributed to it would in all probability have come about in any case. Before 1789 there were plenty of signs that the structure of French society was evolving towards domination by a single elite in which property counted for more than birth. The century-long expansion of the bourgeoisie which underlay this trend already looked irreversible; and greater participation by men of property in government, as constant experiments with provincial assemblies showed, seemed bound to come. Meanwhile many of the reforms the Revolution brought in were already being tried or thought about by the absolute monarchy—law codification, fiscal rationalization, diminution of vexatious, free trade, religious toleration. With all these changes under way or in contemplation, the power of government looked set for steady growth, too—which ironically was one of the complaints of the despotism-obsessed men of 1789. In the Church, the monastic ideal was already shrivelling and the status of parish priests commanding more and more public sympathy. Economically, the colonial...
trade had already peaked, and failure to compete industrially with Great Britain was increasingly manifest. In other structural areas, meanwhile, the great upheaval appears to have made no difference at all. Conservative investment habits still characterized the early nineteenth century, agricultural inertia and unentreprenurial business likewise. And in international affairs, it is hard to believe that Great Britain would not have dominated the world’s seas and trade throughout the nineteenth century, that Austro-Prussian rivalry would not have run much the course it did, or that Latin America would not have asserted its independence in some form or other, if the French Revolution had never happened. In all these fields, the effect was to accelerate or retard certain trends, but not to change their general drift.

Against all this, it is equally hard to believe that the specifically anti-aristocratic, anti-feudal revolutionary ideology of the Rights of Man would have emerged as it did without the jumble of accident, miscalculation, and misunderstanding which coalesced into a revolution in specifically French circumstances. It is equally hard to believe that anything as extraordinary as dechristianization would have occurred without the monumental misjudgement which produced the Revolution’s quarrel with the Catholic Church. Without that quarrel, the dramatic revival in the authority of the papacy also seems inconceivable. Representative government may well have been on the horizon, but how long would the ideal of popular democracy have taken to establish itself without the example of the sansculotte movement? It certainly transformed and widened out of all recognition the cause of parliamentary reform in England—although the blood-stained figure of the sansculotte probably galvanized conservative resistance on the other side. Above all, the revolutionaries’ decision to go to war, which all historians agree revolutionized the Revolution, destroyed an established pattern of warfare in a way no old regime government would otherwise have promoted. Arming the people was the last thing they would have dreamed of. The emergencies of that war in turn produced the scenes which have indelibly marked our memory of the Revolution: the Terror. Massacres were nothing new, and the worst ones of the 1790s occurred outside France. But there was something horribly new and unimaginable in the prospect of a government systematically executing its opponents by the cartload for months on end, and by a device which, however humane in concept, made the streets run with blood. And this occurred in what had passed for the most civilized country in Europe, whose writers had taught the eighteenth century to pride itself on its increasing mildness, good sense, and humanity. This great drama transformed the whole meaning of political change, and the contemporary world would be inconceivable if it had not happened.

In other words it was a profound cultural transformation. The writers of the Enlightenment, so revered by the intelligentsia who made the Revolution, had always believed it could be done if men dared to seize control of their own destiny. The men of 1789 did so, in a rare moment of courage, altruism, and idealism which took away the breath of educated Europe. What they failed to see, as their inspirers had not foreseen, was that reason and good intentions were not enough by themselves to transform the lot of humanity. Mistakes would be made when the accumulated experience of generations was pushed aside as so much routine, prejudice, fanaticism, and superstition. The generation forced to live through the upheavals of the next twenty-six years paid the price. Already by 1802 a million French citizens lay dead; a million more would perish under Napoleon, and untold more abroad. How many millions more still had their lives ruined? Inspiring and ennobling, the prospect of the French Revolution is also moving and appalling; in every sense a tragedy.