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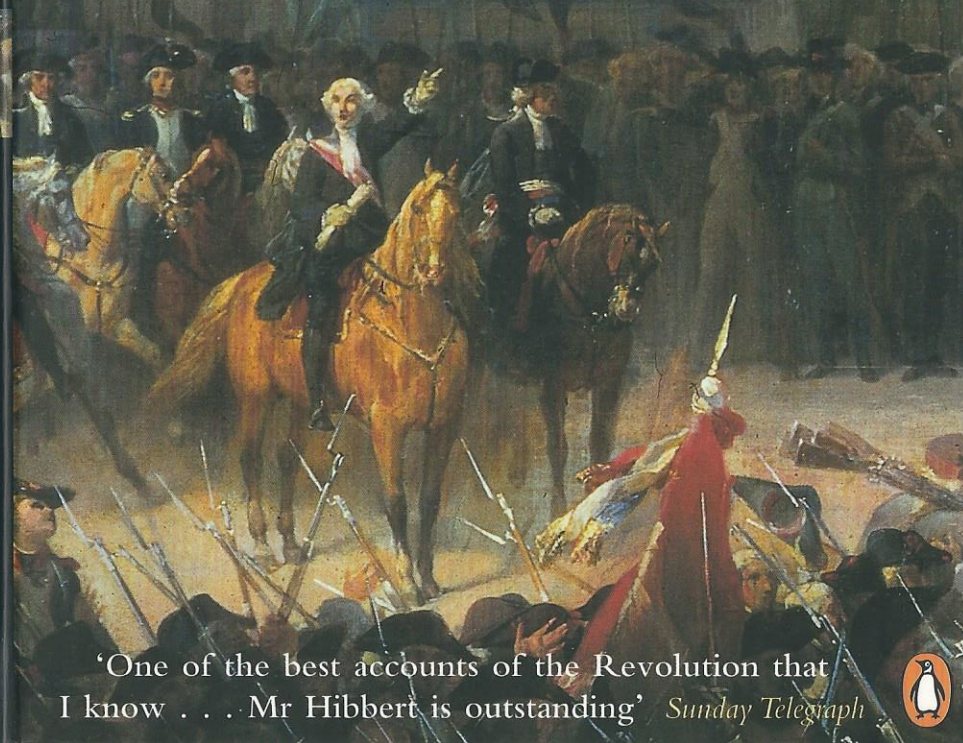


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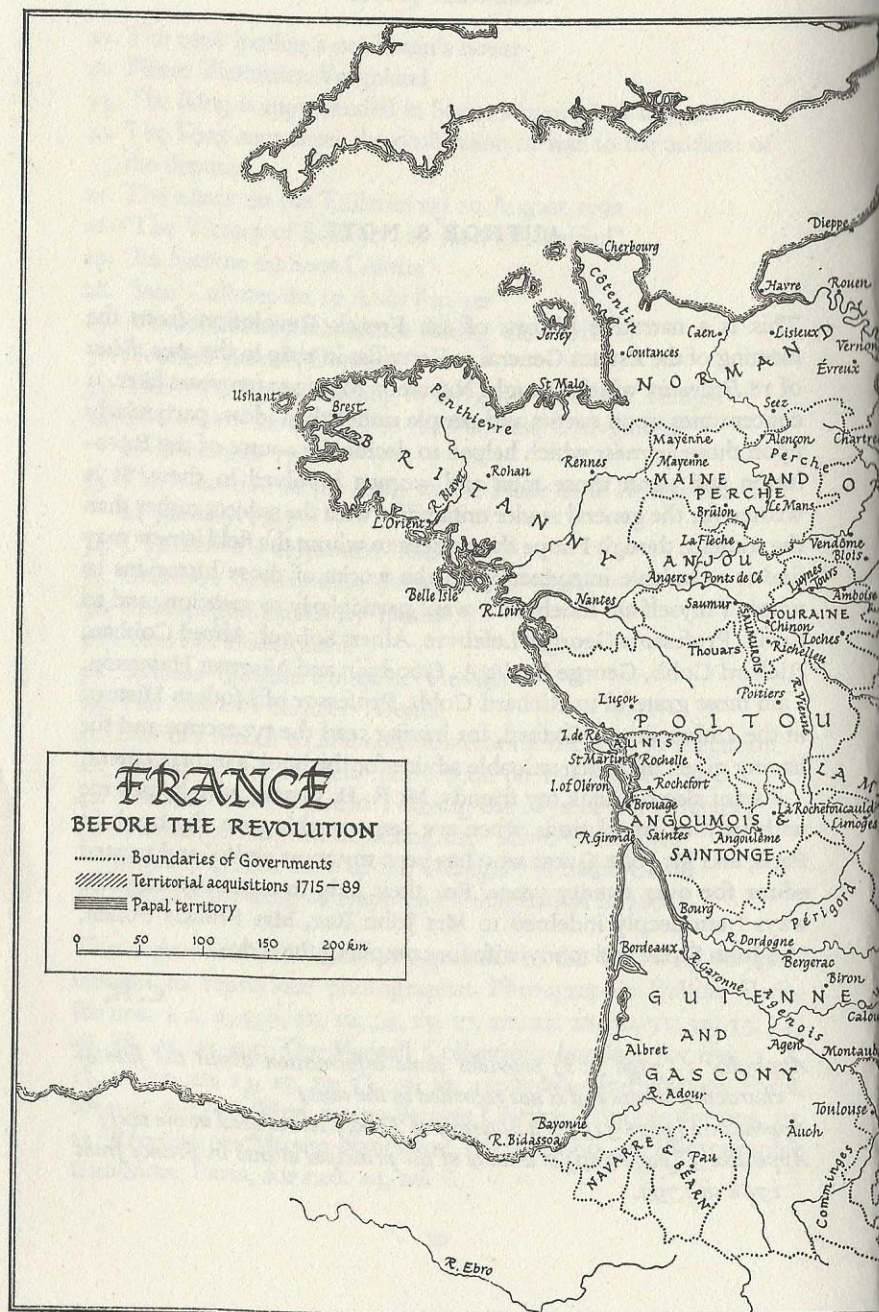
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Guard, September 1792*, 1836 by Leon Cogniet
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CHRISTOPHER HIBBERT THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

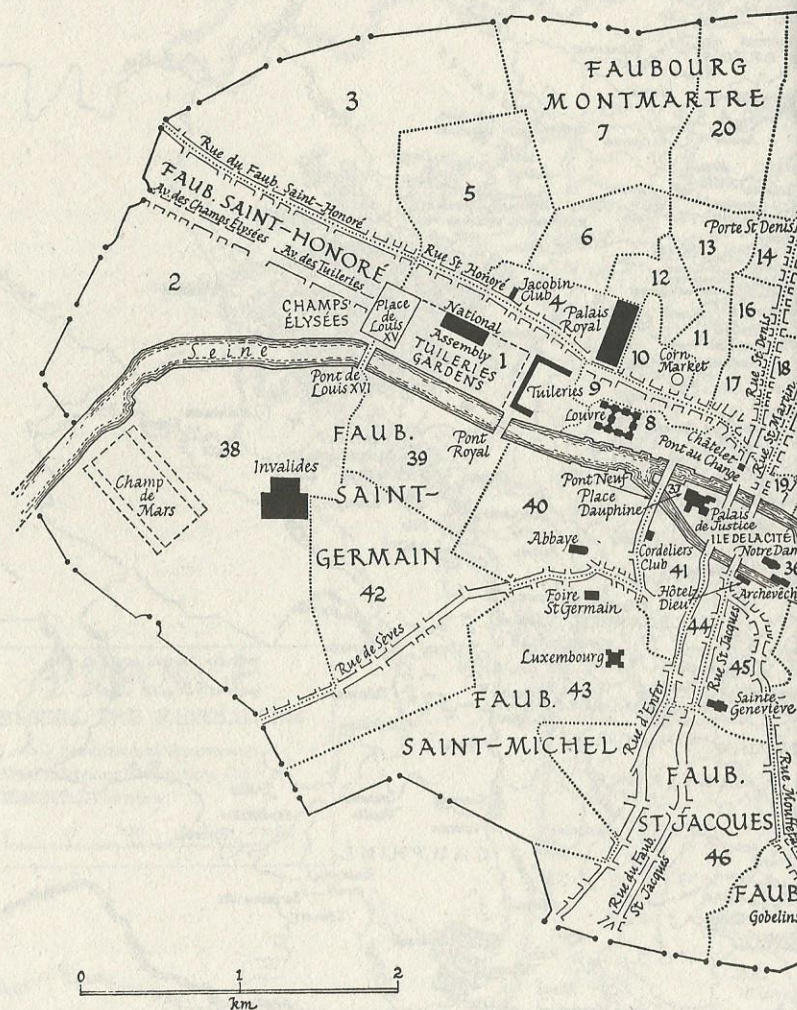


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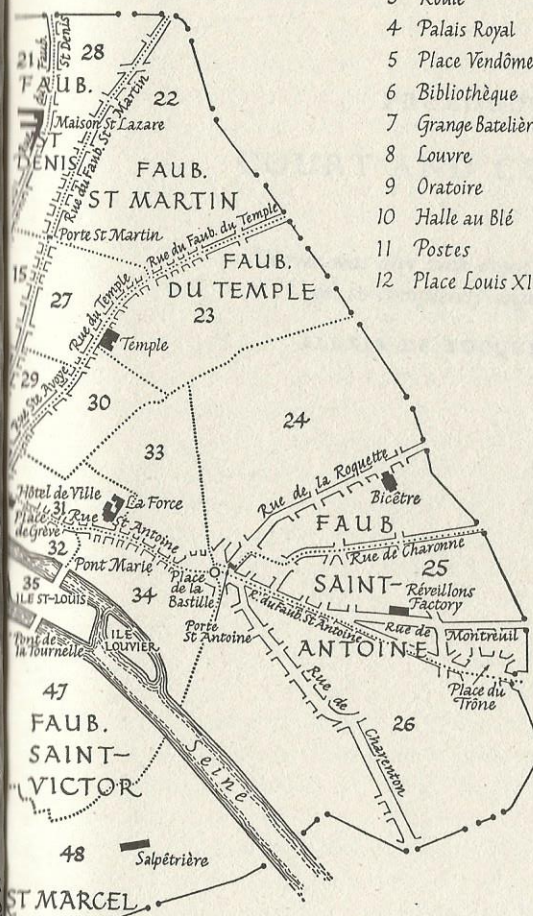


PARIS in 1790



The Sections

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Tuileries | 13 Fontaine Montmorency |
| 2 Champs Élysées | 14 Bonne Nouvelle |
| 3 Roule | 15 Ponceau |
| 4 Palais Royal | 16 Mauconseil |
| 5 Place Vendôme | 17 Marché des Innocents |
| 6 Bibliothèque | 18 Lombards |
| 7 Grange Batelière | 19 Arcis |
| 8 Louvre | 20 Faub. Montmartre |
| 9 Oratoire | 21 Poissonnière |
| 10 Halle au Blé | 22 Bondy |
| 11 Postes | 23 Temple |
| 12 Place Louis XIV | 24 Popincourt |
| | 25 Montreuil |
| | 26 Quinze-Vingts |
| | 27 Gravilliers |
| | 28 Faub. Saint-Denis |
| | 29 Beaubourg |
| | 30 Enfants Rouges |
| | 31 Roi de Sicile |
| | 32 Hôtel de Ville |
| | 33 Place Royale |
| | 34 Arsenal |
| | 35 Ile Saint-Louis |
| | 36 Notre-Dame |
| | 37 Henri IV |
| | 38 Invalides |
| | 39 Fontaine de Grenelle |
| | 40 Quatre Nations |
| | 41 Théâtre Français |
| | 42 Croix Rouge |
| | 43 Luxembourg |
| | 44 Thermes de Julien |
| | 45 Sainte-Geneviève |
| | 46 Observatoire |
| | 47 Jardin des Plantes |
| | 48 Gobelins |



PROLOGUE
COURT AND COUNTRY

*'Never was any such event so inevitable
yet so completely unforeseen'*

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

In a quiet corner of the park at Versailles stands that delightful little *pavillon* of honey-coloured stone known as the Petit Trianon. Designed for Madame de Pompadour, King Louis XV's entertaining mistress, it had become His Majesty's favourite retreat. He was staying here in April 1774 when it was noticed by the light of a candle as he bent over a table that his cheeks were blotched with red marks, symptoms of smallpox. At sixty-four, with a constitution weakened by excess, he was not expected to recover. With little hope of doing so himself he said that he would like to die where he was. He was advised, however, that the setting was inappropriate. So the doctors wrapped him in a cloak, carried him down to a waiting coach and had him transported back to the palace. And here, in his bedchamber, while priests listened to his confession and his face became swollen and dark, a candle was placed in the window to be snuffed out when he died.

His grandson, who was to succeed him, repeatedly glanced at the candle through the windows of his own room. It was still burning when he went to bed on 9 May. But in the early hours of the following morning the flame was extinguished. The Lord Chamberlain came out into the antechamber known as the Oeil de Boeuf to announce to the courtiers waiting behind the railings, 'Gentlemen, the King is dead.'

The new King, Louis XVI, was nineteen years old. Although kind and generous by nature, his manner was usually brusque, cold and formal, marked by fits of ill humour and sharp retorts. His Keeper of the Seals had 'never known anyone whose character was more contradicted by outward appearances'. He was 'really good and tender-hearted'. You could 'never speak to him of disasters or accidents to people without seeing a look of compassion come over his face, yet his replies [were] often hard, his tone harsh, his manner unfeeling'. Hesitant, reserved and ungainly, his appearance, too, was unprepossessing. He had clear blue eyes and abundant fair hair, but his mouth was over-full and flabby and his chin was pale and fat.

The French Revolution

He was so short-sighted that he could not recognize anyone at a distance of more than three paces [one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting, the Comtesse de La Tour du Pin, wrote in her memoirs]. He was stout, about five foot six or seven inches tall, square shouldered and with the worst possible bearing. He looked like some peasant shambling along behind his plough. There was nothing in the least stately in his clothes, putting on whatever was offered to him . . . His sword was a perpetual embarrassment to him.

Possessed of great physical strength, he spent days on end hunting, galloping at reckless speed through his forests after stags and deer, roebuck and boar, but he could never keep his weight down for his appetite for rich food was voracious. Religious and most exact about Mass, he ate nothing between breakfast and supper in Lent, but at other times of the year he indulged himself to the full. It was said that one morning before going down to the stables he had consumed 'four cutlets, a chicken, a plateful of ham, half a dozen eggs in sauce and a bottle and a half of champagne'. Even at his wedding banquet—though he had appeared nervous, embarrassed and gloomily apprehensive at the preceding marriage ceremony—the guests in their tiered boxes in the Salle de Spectacle had seen him put down his head with gusto at the royal family's balustraded table in the centre of the floor. 'You really should not stuff yourself so on a night like this,' his grandfather had admonished him. 'Why not?' he had asked. 'I always sleep better after a good meal.'

He had been fifteen then. His bride, Marie Antoinette, was just over a year younger, though she looked little more than twelve years old. Alert, affectionate, highly strung and wilful, she was the daughter of the formidable Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria who had given birth to her, the fifteenth of her children, in an arm-chair at the Hofburg and had then almost immediately returned to the examination of her state papers which the labour pains had briefly interrupted. Marie Antoinette had been extremely badly educated but, although she had few interests and was not in the least intellectual, her mind was much sharper and she was far more vivacious. When she had said goodbye to her family—and had been carried away in a vast cavalcade to an island in the Rhine where she

Prologue

had been stripped of all her Austrian clothing in a tent before being handed over naked to the French—she had burst into tears. But on arrival at Versailles she had soon recovered herself. She had found the Dauphin, whom she had been sent to marry, not nearly so 'horrid' as she had feared he might be, and on the day of the wedding she was seen to be looking quite happy and calm. Occasionally she betrayed a hint of nervousness during the service; yet, beside the trembling, blushing figure of her husband, she seemed a model of composure, and, indeed—with her lovely complexion, clear blue eyes and shining fair hair—of beauty.

The Dauphin's nervousness was understandable. Not only had he never known a girl of his own age, but he had been brought up in the belief that attractive women were a danger to the soul. His gloomy, fastidious father, who had died when he was eleven, had pointed out his grandfather's many mistresses to him as representatives of the kind of excess against which he himself must always be on his guard. So had his mother, a kindly, pious woman who had not long outlived her husband. So had his maiden aunts with whom he had spent much of his time after his parents' early death. Nor was it only attractive women against whom he had been warned: he had been taught to beware of the wiles of Austria, France's traditional enemy. A pretty Austrian girl was, therefore, doubly hazardous.

After supper on his wedding night he and his bride were escorted to the Dauphine's bedroom on the ground floor. Watched by numerous courtiers, the Dauphine's ladies ritually removed her jewellery, shoes and dress as custom dictated; the Dauphin then undressed while the King stood ready to hand him his nightshirt. Bride and bridegroom then climbed into the marital bed, whose sheets had been sprinkled with holy water, and were addressed by a bishop with reverentially hopeful prayers. The curtains were then drawn back to reveal the seated couple before being closed again. Soon afterwards the Dauphin went to sleep.

For a long time after their first uneventful night together, the Dauphin did not venture again into his wife's bedroom; and when, eventually, he did so, having overcome his early suspicions and fallen in love with her, it seems from Marie Antoinette's letters to

her mother that he derived as little pleasure from these visits as he was able to give her. It was the stated opinion of the Austrian Ambassador, Comte Florimond Claude de Mercy, who was naturally anxious to blame Louis rather than Marie Antoinette for their failure to have children, that the Dauphin was hampered by a physical deformity. Marie Antoinette's brother, who became Emperor Joseph II on their mother's death, believed, on the contrary, that Louis's 'laziness, clumsiness and apathy were the only obstacles'. 'As for my sister,' he added, 'she is not amorously inclined and when they are together they are a couple of awkward nincompoops.' Certainly Marie Antoinette appears to have been extremely modest: in her bath she wore a flannel shift, buttoned from neck to ankle, and when she emerged she required her maids to hold up a sheet as a screen between her body and her ladies. But there were those who hinted that this modesty was merely the affectation of a fundamentally libidinous nature. It was rumoured not only that the King was impotent but also that the Queen sought her pleasures elsewhere, both with men and with women.

Neither the King nor the Queen was an unpopular figure with the people as a whole in the early years of their marriage; on their first visit to Paris they were warmly welcomed by cheering crowds in streets decorated with flowers and triumphal arches. But pamphlets, at first attacking Marie Antoinette as a meddling, troublesome foreigner, then accusing her of adultery and lesbianism, had already begun to appear and were soon in wide circulation. Her passionate friendships with the excessively sensitive widow, the Princesse de Lamballe, the Superintendent of her Household – who lost consciousness so readily that she once swooned away at the sight of a lobster in a painting – and with the pretty, high-spirited Duchesse de Polignac, were described in these pamphlets in obscene terms that gave much satisfaction to her enemies. It was said that these two ladies, on whom she lavished money, offices, apartments and gifts, helped her widen '*la porte de Cythère*' so that her husband's '*jeanchouart*', '*toujours molle et toujours croché*', could more easily enter it.

Whatever the difficulties of the young couple may have been, it was not until August 1773, over three years after the marriage and

thanks, so some reports had it, to an operation performed on the Dauphin's foreskin, that Marie Antoinette was able to report to her mother, and then rather doubtfully, 'I think our marriage has been consummated.' And a further four years were to pass before she could write more confidently that the marriage had at last been '*parfaitement consommé*', that she was '*dans le bonheur le plus essentiel pour toute ma vie*'. In the spring of 1778 she discovered herself to be pregnant, and just before Christmas that year, following the *accoucheur*'s announcement, 'The Queen is entering labour', a crowd of Ministers, Court dignitaries and others rushed into her bedroom to witness the delivery, two men clambering on to a sofa to obtain an unobstructed view of the bed, which had been placed near the fire, behind a low screen. So intense was the crush, so hot the room that the Princesse de Lamballe lost consciousness for several hours. For fear lest his wife might suffocate, the King with unaccustomed decision tore off the tapes which hermetically sealed the windows to let in some air. A few moments later, the child, a daughter, was born.

Three other children followed her, a brother in 1781, another brother, the future Louis XVII, in 1785 and a sister in 1786. But, while his family grew, the King's self-assurance did not. He continued hesitant, undignified, clumsy, reticent and self-doubting. He appeared to have no will of his own, to act only under pressure. 'Imagine,' said one of his brothers, 'a handful of oiled ivory balls that you are trying to keep together!' Had he had any choice in the matter he would certainly not have been a king: he once remarked to one of his Ministers who relinquished office, 'How lucky you are! Why can't I resign, too?' Still impressionable and sensitive, his true feelings remained concealed behind a façade at once blunt and severe. As kind-hearted as ever, he could not bring himself to be gracious to his courtiers, to offer them sympathy in grief or illness, to speak to them other than off-handedly or with harsh and tactless banter. He still indulged in horseplay and tiresome practical jokes, trying to trip his pages up with his *cordons bleus*, making a face and childishly running away when his nightgown was handed to him, walking with his breeches hanging around his ankles. Laboriously painstaking, he occupied himself for hours with petty details, minor

cash accounts and lists of game killed in the forests, as though to avoid consideration of the wider, complicated problems of the state. He preferred to work with his hands, beating out bronze and copper, carving wood, constructing locks, building stone walls – all of which tasks he performed with competence – rather than to discuss with his Ministers their departmental affairs. He gave the impression of studiousness: he built a fine white and gold library at Versailles, he purchased a second-hand set of the *Encyclopédie*, he read a great deal – both newspapers and books, he taught himself to read English and, after a fashion, Italian and Spanish. But he rarely seemed to profit from his study or to show that he remembered what he had read.

His day began at six o'clock when one of his four *valets de chambre*, who had passed the night on a truckle bed, threw back the curtains of the four-poster to awaken him. He rose immediately, put on his dressing-gown, shaved, dressed in the clothes that the valets ceremonially presented to him, had the Star of the Holy Spirit – France's highest order – fixed to his left breast. When his hair had been satisfactorily curled, powdered and decorated with a silk ribbon round the queue, he went for a walk, returning precisely at eight o'clock for the *petit lever* during which Ministers and officials of the Household were admitted to discuss business with him. He then went up to his private apartments to read or tinker in his workshop. Mass was said at noon.

Dinner, which was usually over at half-past one, was eaten in public. The King and Queen sat next to each other in armchairs, their backs to the fireplace, a row of stools arranged in a semi-circle in front of their small table. On these stools sat various female members of the royal family and the senior ladies of the enormous Household, and behind them stood other ladies of the Household and as many spectators as could be admitted into the room. One day in November 1775 these spectators included Samuel Johnson and his friend, Hester Thrale. 'They had a damask tablecloth neither coarse nor fine,' Mrs Thrale noticed. 'Their dishes were silver . . . and their dinner consisted of five dishes at a course. The Queen ate heartily of a pye which the King helped her to. They did not speak at all to each other, as I remember, but sometimes talked to the Lord-in-Waiting.'

In the afternoon the King and Queen sometimes went to a play performed for their benefit in the Salle de Spectacle; and in the evening the Court settled down to play card games, billiards, backgammon or cavagnole, the King disapproving of – but refraining from objecting to – the high stakes gambled by his wife and his two brothers.

These two extravagant brothers, whose debts the King always paid, were the Comte de Provence, later Louis XVIII, and the Comte d'Artois, later Charles X. Provence, known as Monsieur, was a year younger than the King, an intelligent, sometimes witty, well-read, rather sickly young man with highly expensive tastes and a rigid belief in absolute monarchy. The Comte d'Artois was not so intelligent but much more athletic and dashing, taking a lively interest in women, clothes and race horses. He shared Monsieur's political views and was to be much given to declaiming his wish to fight for the monarchy, to draw 'the sword of his fathers'. The King was ill advised by both of them and trusted neither.

Marie Antoinette was as extravagant and as indulged by her husband as were her brothers-in-law. In the early days of their marriage, according to the Austrian Ambassador, there had been frequent squabbles between husband and wife. She had objected in particular to his passion for hunting and to his eating so much at hunt suppers at which he was led astray by his grandfather and his grandfather's sensual, grasping mistress – Madame de Pompadour's successor – the former prostitute, Madame Du Barry. After her husband had suffered from a particularly bad attack of indigestion, Marie Antoinette evidently 'had all the dishes containing pastry removed from his table and peremptorily forbade any more pastry to be served until further notice'.

Other observers besides de Mercy had attributed Marie Antoinette's pert and saucy behaviour to her husband's failings as a lover. Insecure and dissatisfied, she seemed to go out of her way to shock and surprise. She did not attempt to conceal her impatience with the ridiculousness of Court protocol which required, for instance, that when she was being dressed in the morning her chemise had to be handed to her by her *dame d'honneur* or, if a royal Princess were in the room, the chemise must first be passed to the Princess before

being passed to the Queen. Once, when the dressing ceremony was about to begin, there was a scratch at the door and the Duchesse d'Orléans was admitted. The chemise was, therefore, passed to her for presentation to the Queen; but before the Queen could take it another scratch announced the entry of the Comtesse d'Artois who had precedence over the Duchesse. The Duchesse could not, however, hand it directly to the Comtesse but had to pass it first through the hands of the *dame d'honneur*. While these movements were being performed, with appropriately stylized emphases, the Queen stood shivering in the cold and draughty room, murmuring to herself in the German accent which she never entirely lost, '*C'est odieux!*'

It was further held against the Queen that she made no attempt to disguise the feelings which were always reflected in the expressions that fled across her pretty face. If she felt like laughing she laughed. If she felt like teasing the King she did tease the 'poor man' as she called him. If the mood took her to throw her hat into a lake she did so. She thought it absurd that it was considered impolite to clap musicians and dancers at royal performances, so she applauded them. She considered it preposterous that she should always be expected to be driven about by a coachman, so she bought a cabriolet and drove it herself, extremely fast. She called one of the senior and most staid of the Court ladies, the Comtesse de Noailles, to whom a pin misplaced on a gown was a tragedy, 'Madame l'Étiquette'. And on one celebrated occasion when she fell off a donkey she laughingly refused to be helped to her feet. 'Leave me on the ground,' she said. 'We must wait for "Madame l'Étiquette"! She will show us the right way to get up having fallen off a donkey.'

She was often bored and even more often frightened of being bored. 'To escape the terrible obsession,' she said, 'I must have bustle; I must have endless change.' She could not bear to be still. She played with children and dogs; she dressed up in a plain muslin dress, net fichu and straw hat and pretended to be a dairymaid in the miniature village she had built at enormous cost in the grounds of the Trianon; she took part in amateur theatricals; she arranged and rearranged the flowers in her room; she went to horse-races and to

balls; she did embroidery and frustratedly put the silks and canvas down to play the clavichord, then left that to gamble. Looking for a part to play in life, she became a patron of the opera and of the ballet; she became a leader of fashion, rejecting the elaborate dresses of her day and choosing to wear those simple and natural clothes which so well suited her, buying three or four new dresses every week, and spending far more than her allowance permitted, turning to the King to supplement it and never turning in vain.

Indulgent as the King was towards her, however, and influenced as he was by her opinions, the King did not allow the Queen to interfere as meddlesomely in affairs of state as public opinion was led to suppose and her own naturally proud and authoritative nature seemed to suggest. Once, when she came into his room while he was working on some official papers, he said to her quietly but firmly, 'Madame, I have business to attend to.'

At the beginning of his reign he had called upon the services of the clever, witty Comte Jean-Frédéric de Maurepas, a former Minister who had been appointed Secretary for the Navy at the age of fourteen but who, having offended Madame de Pompadour, had been dismissed from office and had spent the past twenty-five years on his country estate. With the guidance of Maurepas, and of Maurepas's intimate friend and confessor, the Abbé Joseph Alphonse de Véri, Louis had gradually and nervously replaced his grandfather's Ministers with others more efficient and honest, including Anne-Robert Turgot, Baron de Laune, whom in 1774 he appointed Controller General of Finances. He had also decided to recall the *parlements* including the ancient Paris *parlement*.

This *parlement*, quite unlike the Parliament which had developed across the Channel, was one of thirteen appeal courts which had assumed the right of registering laws, principally royal edicts connected with taxation, but which aspired to the right of veto as well as of registration. Its jurisdiction covered about ten million people in northern France and since its influence was so much greater than the other provincial *parlements*, which were inclined to follow its lead in remonstrating against edicts its members disliked, it was usually referred to simply as *parlement*. Its members were far from being representative of the people as a whole. Their predecessors had been

granted hereditary nobility in the reign of Louis XIV in 1644, and the principal offices had come to be held by some of the most renowned and wealthy dynasties in France. Proposals for the admission of commoners were always strongly resisted.

In the past, when *parlement* had proved recalcitrant, the Crown had enforced its will by a special session known as a *lit de justice*,* or had exiled the members from Paris in the hope, usually justified, that the damage to their legal business in Paris would induce them to give way to the royal will. In 1771 *parlement* had been exiled to Troyes; and two other provincial *parlements*, those of Rouen and Douai, had been suppressed.

There had been a public outcry against Louis XV's action as, although *parlement* was far more concerned with its own interests than with those of the nation at large, it had come to be regarded in the people's mind, largely as a result of its own propaganda, as their champion; and it did, indeed, do quite as much to promote and publicize liberal political theories as the *philosophes*. Louis XVI was aware of this and would have been well advised in the interests of the monarchy to curb its powers as his predecessors, with varying success, had repeatedly attempted to do. But he chose instead to follow the advice of Maurepas who argued that he must listen to public opinion and follow it; that a monarch who recalled *parlement* would be 'considered a friend of the people'. 'I should like to be loved,' he had once declared and had since reiterated this ambition. And so, although he had known he would be making difficulties for himself by doing so, he had recalled the exiled *parlement* from Troyes. On 12 November 1774 he had driven to the Palais de Justice in Paris where the reconvened members had knelt before him in their red robes; then, rising to their feet, they had listened quietly to the King as he had assured them that they could rely upon his protection so long as they did not challenge his authority.

With the recall of the *parlements* and the appointment of fresh Ministers, the people began to hope that a new age might be

* An explanation of French terms such as this will be found in Appendix 2.

dawning. In Paris a placard bearing the legend '*Resurrexit*' was hung around the statue of that revered monarch, Henri IV, and portraits of the new King who, it was believed, was prepared to follow the example of his popular predecessor, were displayed in shop windows. 'All the nation shouts in chorus,' Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, the mathematician and philosopher, reported to Frederick the Great, "A better day dawns upon us" . . . The priests alone make sound apart, murmuring softly.' But this approval did not last long. The King's intermittently painstaking industry, his desire to be respected and loved by his people, and the cautious, tentative reforms of Turgot, Maurepas and the Minister of War, the Comte de Saint-Germain, did little to alleviate the plight of a nation whose fundamental grievances remained without remedy.

The population of France in the late eighteenth century was about 26,000,000. Of these about 21,000,000 lived by farming, many of them owning the land on which they lived. But although over a quarter of the land in the country was owned by peasants, few possessed more than the twenty acres or so which were necessary to support a family, and these few acres were generally farmed in an antiquated manner indicative of their owners' distrust of scientific agriculture. So, while some country people were able to maintain their independence in comfort and security, most were forced to work for at least part of the year as poorly paid labourers on bigger farms, or to borrow livestock, wagons and implements from richer farmers who in return claimed a share, usually a large share, of the crop. Conditions varied widely from one region to another, and French peasants were generally less ill-fed than those of Russia and Poland, but in times of scant harvests or epidemics of murrain many went hungry. Arthur Young, the observant and well-informed English landowner who travelled extensively in France at this time, frequently recorded examples of the most abject poverty, of countrywomen and ploughmen without shoes or stockings, of hungry-looking children 'terribly ragged, if possible worse clad than if with no cloaths at all'. One little girl of six or seven years, playing with a stick, made his 'heart ache to see her'. 'They did not

beg,' he wrote, 'and when I gave them anything seemed more surprised than obliged. One-third of what I have seen in this province [he was then at Montauban in Brittany] seems uncultivated, and nearly all of it in misery.' A few years before, another English traveller, the splenetic novelist Tobias Smollett, was even more appalled by the sight of the peasants he encountered travelling across France; they had the appearance more of 'ravenous scarecrows' than of human beings.

The poverty of many and the grievances of nearly all French peasants were much aggravated by their liability for taxes from which noble landowners might well be immune, and for increasingly burdensome feudal dues which were required of them by the local seigneur. It was also exasperating for the poor peasant that the tithe which he might perhaps have paid without undue complaint to the village *curé*, or as a contribution to the village church, was liable to go instead to some rich abbot of aristocratic birth whose monastery, though it might well be decaying, had as little need of the money as the abbot himself.

The clergy in France then numbered rather less than 100,000, yet they owned over one-tenth of the land, that is to say about 20,000 square miles. Despite these rich and rolling acres, most of the clergy were poor, for there existed in the Church a hierarchy quite as distinctly stratified as in the other orders of society. The bishops were all nobles, and canonrics were often considered the perquisites of well-to-do bourgeois families. Moreover, in many towns there were far more canons than there were hard-worked parish priests. In Angers, for example, where Church buildings and gardens took up half the area of the town, there were seventy canons but less than twenty priests.

Yet, although many priests were extremely poor, the Church as an institution was not only very rich but also powerful. It paid no taxes, voluntarily contributing instead a grant to the state every five years, and, as the amount of this grant was decided in the quinquennial Church Assemblies, the clergy were able to exercise a considerable influence over the policies of the Government. Nearly all schools were in the hands of the Church which had, in addition, its own courts of law. It also controlled most sources of information,

since it had taken upon itself the responsibilities of censorship. For those who could not read, the clergy were the means by which Government decrees and intentions became known.

The charges made against the Church by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment were often unjust: most clergy, particularly those of the humbler orders, were neither corrupt nor unfeeling, nor even harshly intolerant of religious dissent. But the Church's great privileges, the scrupulously, not to say severely, businesslike manner in which many of its large estates were run, the number of absentee abbots and of well-endowed religious houses whose members were exclusively aristocratic, the gradual decline in belief of the virtues of a life of religious contemplation and the spread of scepticism among the influential middle class of the larger towns, all contributed to the growing spirit of anti-clericalism.

High as feelings ran against the Church in certain quarters, the general dislike of the aristocracy, from which its leaders came, was much more intense. King Louis XIV, while recognizing the social privileges of the nobility had done his best to exclude them from the exercise of power which he endeavoured to keep in his own hands and in those of his chosen Ministers. But, despite the resistance of Louis XVI's Ministers, the aristocracy were, in the later years of the eighteenth century, beginning once again to tighten their hold on the machinery of government; and, bent upon the eventual destruction of royal absolutism, which was declining but by no means extinct, were determined, in the meantime, to resist any encroachments upon their privileges. These privileges were extensive: only they could become ambassadors; only they could reach the highest offices in the Church; only they could command regiments in the army. Indeed, since 1781 it had become virtually impossible to obtain a commission in the army at all unless four generations of aristocratic birth could be proved. The nobility were further privileged by being exempt from the direct tax known as the *taille* which fell largely upon the peasants – *tailleable* being a social indignity as well as a burdensome expense – and from the *corvées royales* which obliged those liable, again mostly peasants, to pay for the construction and maintenance of roads and for the supply of wagons for the transport of troops. And although legally liable to

pay those other more recent taxes levied in relation to income, the *capitation* and the *vingtièmes*, nobles enjoyed certain exemptions from these as well and were generally able to make a bargain with the *intendant* so as to escape paying the full amount.

Then there were seigneurial privileges by which noble landlords exercised control over manorial courts and over hunting rights and by which they enjoyed such *droits* as *droits de colombier*, which ensured that their pigeons were fed at their tenants' expense, and *banalités* which ensured them a monopoly of the local corn mill, wine press and oven. These feudal rights, demanded with ever-increasing severity, were often farmed out to lawyers and other experts who squeezed as much profit as they could out of them, who were constantly discovering forgotten *droits*, reimposing obligations, appropriating common lands, planting trees along the edges of peasants' fields and expelling them from forests. The 'feudal reaction', as it came to be called, naturally increased the peasants' resentment against the social order which made such impositions possible, and which imposed upon them, and upon them alone, the obligation to draw lots for service in the militia.

The nobility were not, however, a unified force, except in their not unjustified belief that their order, by encouragement and patronage as well as by the exertions of some of their members, had made France the most civilized country on the continent of Europe. There was once a time – some considered that the time had not passed – when the nobleman chose to suppose himself the heir of the Frankish invaders, and that the commoner, so far beneath him, was the descendant of those Romano-Celtic peoples, timid and unwarlike, whom his ancestors had conquered. The nobleman had, in fact, been a member of the *noblesse d'épée* who followed the King to war and, as a feudal landowning class, helped him to rule the country in peace. But in more recent times this could no longer be maintained. The Kings of France had not only created a new aristocracy, the *noblesse de robe*, by granting hereditary titles to their Ministers and other useful servants, but had sold these titles, together with public offices, to rich and socially ambitious members of the bourgeoisie. Daughters of these newly ennobled bourgeois families, bringing with them large dowries from their fathers, had married into less

well-off families of the *noblesse d'épée*, while matches were also made between the *noblesse d'épée* and the *noblesse de robe*. Some of the more ancient families, particularly those of the *noblesse de court*, continued to look down upon this new aristocracy from whom they were still distinguished by being allowed certain privileges denied to the *noblesse de robe* such as full membership of the Order of the Holy Spirit, whose blue ribbon the King habitually wore.

Sharp as distinctions were between certain jealous families of the *noblesse d'épée*, the *noblesse de robe* and the *noblesse de court*, the distinctions between the rich and poor nobility were, of course, far sharper still. The nobility as a whole, numbering some 400,000 people in all – about half of whom had acquired their noble status within the previous two centuries – owned about a fifth of the land in France, twice as much as the Church. But, whereas some nobles owned thousands of acres which brought in immense incomes, and some increased their fortunes by speculating on the Stock Exchange, by investing in industry or by developing their estates, others lived and worked on small farms which provided them with the barest of meagre livings. And from these small and often ramshackle farms there was little chance of escape into more profitable enterprises, all but a few of which, such as the glass industry and maritime commerce, were traditionally closed to noblemen. Nor could they escape into the army where – despite the Comte de Saint-Germain's decree that the price of commissions should be reduced every time they changed hands so as to attract officers of birth rather than fortune – commissions were usually reserved for gentlemen who could afford to maintain themselves in style.

Many noblemen, in fact, were far less well off than the increasingly prosperous urban middle class whom they considered quite as great a threat to their privileged existence as royal absolutism. Yet most of the bourgeoisie – whether in business or in the professions, manufacturers or merchants, doctors or lawyers – were for the most part anxious to break down the barriers that excluded them from aristocratic preserves rather than to destroy the aristocracy that had brought those preserves into existence. For centuries, as Professor Lefebvre has said, 'the bourgeois, envious of the aristocracy, had

aimed only at thrusting himself into its ranks . . . This ambition was not extinct . . . Bourgeois of old stock were frankly proud of their lineage, careful not to form an improper marriage . . . Nothing was more pronounced than the ordering of ranks in this bourgeois society. The wife of a solicitor was called "Mademoiselle", the wife of a councillor was "Madame" without dispute, and the wife of a barrister was usually saluted with the same title. Distinctions no less fine were placed between the doctors and the surgeons; the former had entered the bourgeoisie; the latter were knocking at the gates. In short, the bourgeoisie, looked down upon by the high born, copied them as best they could. It has therefore often been thought surprising that this class whose spirit was far from democracy, should have been so imprudent, in attacking the aristocracy, as to strike at the very principle of social hierarchy itself. But the bourgeoisie had its reasons. The abolition of the legal hierarchy and the privilege of birth seemed to it by no means incompatible with the maintenance of a hierarchy based on wealth, function or calling.' The limitations imposed upon the talents of the bourgeoisie, particularly upon those of ambitious lawyers, were to make them the aristocracy's most formidable opponents.

If the grievances of the middle classes were social rather than economic, the poorer people in the towns were more concerned about money. It is impossible to generalize about France as a whole: in the late 1780s Bordeaux was a thriving port which to Arthur Young seemed far more prosperous than Liverpool, whereas the silk industry in Lyons was passing through a period of severe depression with over half its looms at a standstill. Yet it does seem evident that French trade and industrial production were generally expanding, even though manufacturing processes were for the most part antiquated with very few factories using steam, and with mines so dependent upon manual labour that coal production was only one-twentieth that of England. But while wages were slowly rising they failed to keep pace with the more rapidly growing rate of the cost of living, and industrial unrest was becoming common. Most master craftsmen and their journeymen still remained on friendly terms: after all, they usually lived under the same roof, sharing the same interests, and, as Professor Hampson has put it, 'when food

prices rose the journeyman was more disposed to blame the baker, the farmer and the speculator in foodstocks than to demand higher wages'. All the same, master craftsmen were trying to perpetuate 'their own privileged position at the expense of their journeymen and to confine recruitment to their own families. The journeymen's attempts to organize themselves and to resort to strike action found the Government on the side of the masters and the municipal authorities – royal edicts prohibited the association of workmen for collective bargaining . . . The urban population was therefore a prey to deep internal divisions, with some of the wealthier merchants aspiring to become large-scale industrialists, the master craftsmen and journeymen united in resisting the pressure to reduce them to a mere proletariat' but at the same time sometimes at loggerheads with each other.

The attempts of the King's Finance Minister, Turgot, to tackle some of the country's problems were neither reassuring to the people nor welcome at Court where his manner, too, caused offence. He was tactless, high-minded, impatient and touchy; he interfered officiously, so it was said, in departments other than his own. A thoughtless remark of his to the effect that if a woman were to have influence on the King's decisions it was better that this woman should be Marie Antoinette rather than de Pompadour or Du Barry annoyed both the King, who had attempted to keep his wife out of politics, and the Queen who resented being compared with royal mistresses. Accordingly, in May 1776, having lost the confidence not only of the King and Queen and the Court but of the financiers, the Church and *parlement*, and being considered too much of a *physiocrate* by the interventionists, Turgot was dismissed.

The following year, the Swiss financier, Jacques Necker, the Director of the Royal Treasury, was appointed Director-General of Finance, a post which had to be specially created for him since, being a foreigner, he could not serve on the King's Council of Ministers, all of whom, unlike himself, were French noblemen; and, being a Protestant, he could not be naturalized. It was the common opinion in Paris – an opinion fostered by his formidably clever and in-

extinguishably romantic wife who held sway over a literary salon in their smart house in the Rue de Cléry – that Necker was a financial genius. It was an opinion with which he himself would not have quarrelled. Silent, ponderous and ruminative, with half-closed eyes in a pallid, yellowish face, he seemed to be constantly lost in thought. If any man could bring order to France's economy, it was maintained, surely it was he. After all, he had made a fortune for himself as a banker in Paris; and a self-made millionaire could scarcely be other than an improvement on the noble Finance Ministers of the past.

At first all appeared to go satisfactorily. The King and his new Minister got on well together, even though Necker's silences when broken tended to be succeeded by economic speculations, prognostications and lectures of inordinate length. His cuts in Household expenditure at Versailles naturally aroused resentment at Court, where his vanity soon aroused as much antagonism as Turgot's high-handedness and where he made a particular enemy of the Comte de Provence whose request for over a million *livres*, which he claimed was due from his father's estate, was rejected. Yet it was generally agreed that these reductions of expenditure at Court were not only necessary but inevitable.

When he came to study the country's inequitable tax system, though, Necker was faced with complicated and intractable problems which he was quite incapable of resolving. The various taxes and duties levied in France – the *gabelle*, the *traites*, the *aides* as well as the *capitation* and the *vingtièmes* – were all, as he discovered, subject to variations, exemptions, inequalities in distribution and abuses in collection that made the evils of the system one of the principal causes of social unrest. Yet the increasing expenses of government and public works and the costs of the country's wars – in particular France's participation in the War of American Independence which involved expenditure of about 2,000 million *livres* – rendered the collection of further and more burdensome taxes inevitable unless the state were to slide ever deeper into bankruptcy. Necker thought that he had the answer to this problem: arguing that the limits of taxable capacity had already been passed, he proposed to raise the money required by borrowing, on the dubious assump-

tion that a swollen public debt would not place an insupportable burden on the country's finances. He offered generous rates of interest and in order to attract investors published his *Compte Rendu au Roi sur les finances de la Nation*, a grossly optimistic and complacent document which transformed an actual deficit of 46,000,000 *livres* into a fictitious surplus of 10,000,000. Although the public at large, having no means of checking Necker's figures, accepted his pamphlet with satisfaction and bought thirty thousand copies of it within a week, its fraudulence was immediately noticed by most of the King's other Ministers. 'It's about as true as it is modest,' Maurepas commented when asked what he thought of it. A few weeks later, after a confidential memorandum written by him for the King's consideration and proposing a limitation of the *parlement's* fiscal powers had been copied and distributed by his enemy, the Comte de Provence, Necker felt his position so undermined that he demanded admittance to the Council of Ministers. The King refused, and Necker resigned.

Necker was succeeded as Director-General of Finance by Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, a cheerful, amiable, red-haired man of forty-seven who had been an *intendant* of Flanders. A collector of pictures and the proud possessor of no less than ten Titians, Calonne had a far more pleasant and easy manner than either Turgot or Necker and was well liked at Court. He became an even more welcome figure there when, soon after entering office, he raised further loans which allowed him to be far less severe with taxes than it was feared he might have been. It was not long, however, before Calonne realized in what a perilous state the country's finances were and that fundamental and wide-ranging reforms were essential to save them from utter collapse and to obviate the risk of the monarchy collapsing with them. He therefore drew up a detailed programme which included, together with many other less contentious measures of both economic and administrative reform, a new tax on land which was to be imposed without regard to the status of its owners and which would accordingly fall most heavily upon the privileged orders. This tax was to be a permanent one, not requiring registration for renewal by the *parlements*, and would enable the King's Ministers to disregard the *parlementaires'* remonstrances which had been the bane

of their previous existence. The apprehensions of the nobility and the clergy that this new tax would prove not only financially burdensome but also the first step towards the extinction of their privileged positions were exacerbated by Calonne's further proposal that its assessment should be supervised by newly created provincial assemblies where local landowners would have votes in proportion to the amount of land they owned rather than in accordance with their social rank.

Well aware of the opposition that his proposals aroused among both the privileged orders and the members of the *parlements*, who were now confirmed in their belief that a strong and favoured aristocracy was a necessary bulwark against royal absolutism, Calonne suggested that they should be submitted for approval to a special Assembly of Notables, a convention nominated by the King, of which Henri IV had been able to make successful use in the past.

This Assembly of 144 members, including mayors and magistrates as well as nobles and prelates, met in February 1787, and Calonne, revealing the existence of an immense annual deficit, opened the proceedings with challenging words: 'Only in the abolition of abuses lies the means to answer our need. The abuses which we must wipe out for the public good are of the widest extent, enjoy the greatest protection, have the deepest roots and the most spreading branches.' But already the opponents of Calonne's policies were combining to render them unworkable. Both the Comte de Provence and the King's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans, voiced their disapproval of him. So did Loménie de Brienne, the sickly, ingratiating and scarcely less than agnostic Archbishop of Toulouse, who hoped to succeed him. So did Étienne d'Aligre, one of the leading magistrates in the Paris *parlement*. So did the adherents of Necker who chose to believe their hero's assertion that France had been solvent at the time of his enforced resignation. So did the influential Archbishop of Narbonne who declared, 'M. de Calonne wishes to bleed France to death. He is merely asking us whether to make the incision on the feet, the arms or the jugular vein.' So did Marie Antoinette, who strongly condemned Calonne's publication of an *avertissement* which, distributed free all over France as an appeal to public opinion, was condemned by a member of her

Household as 'a terrible diatribe against the clergy and the nobility'. Obligated to listen to these voices raised in condemnation of his Minister, the King at first supported him, then wavered, and constantly asked for advice. 'He asked advice of everybody,' wrote Pierre Malouet, a well-informed government official, 'and seemed to be saying to every person he approached, "What can I do? What should be done?"' In the end Calonne was dismissed and exiled to his estates in Lorraine, whence, threatened with proceedings against him by the Paris *parlement*, he fled to England, the first of the *émigrés*.

Brienne replaced him; but when he presented to the Notables a shadowy version of the proposals he had formerly rejected out of hand, the Notables were in no mood to accept from the Archbishop even so mild a concoction of the medicines that they had refused to take from Calonne. Their Assembly was dissolved and they went home, having demonstrated the firm determination of most of their number to prevent the King's Ministers tampering with their privileges.

The land tax and other measures which the Notables had rejected now had to be presented to the Paris *parlement*. And *parlement*, among whose members were several who had sat with the Notables, was equally determined not to let them pass, protesting that any new taxation required the assent of the Estates General, a consultative body of clergy, nobles and representatives of the Commons or Third Estate, which had not met since 1614 in the reign of Louis XIII. Confronted by the intransigence of *parlement* and worried by a crisis in foreign affairs, the King and Brienne, backed by Chrétien de Lamoignon, Keeper of the Seals, the one strong man in the Government, decided to use force. They dispatched troops to the Palais de Justice and had two of the leading and most intractable *parlementaires*, Jean Jacques Duval d'Eprémessnil and Goislard de Montsabert, arrested. Three days later, on 8 May 1788, after the King had invoked his right to enforce various edicts to which they had objected, the Paris *parlement* and all the provincial *parlements* were deprived of their power of opposing the monarch's will.

That summer violence erupted all over France. 'In Dauphiny and other Provinces,' reported the *chargé d'affaires* at the British

Embassy in Paris, 'no Taxes whatever can be collected, and accounts of some fresh act of Revolt and disobedience arrive every day from different parts of the Kingdom.' Protesting that they were acting in defence of the *parlements*, nobles and magistrates came together to block the Government's attempt to impose equality of taxation. There were riots in Brittany, Burgundy, Béarn and Provence. In Pau and Rennes violent demonstrations were provoked among the population by local *parlementaires*. In Dauphiné there were clashes between troops and the townspeople of Grenoble in which twenty soldiers were wounded and two demonstrators killed. In Paris there was fighting in the streets and an effigy of Brienne was burned before cheering crowds.

As the prospect of national bankruptcy grew more daunting, Brienne turned in desperation to the clergy, but they, in an extraordinary meeting of their Assembly, condemned the Government's reforms and granted only a small proportion of the money for which they had been asked. Forced to accept defeat, Brienne announced on 5 July that the Estates General would be summoned to Versailles in May the following year; and a few weeks later he handed in his resignation. The King had now no alternative but to reappoint Necker, to recall the *parlements* and to agree to the replacement of de Lamoignon by the supposedly more moderate Charles de Barentin.

The general satisfaction aroused by the announcement that the Estates General were to be reconvened was, however, soon overcast by the further declaration by the Paris *parlement* that they should be composed as they had been in 1614, which was to say that the three orders whose representatives were to meet at Versailles, the clergy, the nobility and the Third Estate, or Commons, were to have an equal number of delegates. This meant that, if each order were to vote separately, the clergy and nobility could always combine in defence of their privileges to thwart the aspirations of the Third Estate. The popularity of *parlement*, which the middle class had formerly been inclined to view as a bulwark against despotic government, collapsed, as Professor Goodwin has observed, overnight. 'Thus it was that, in the autumn and winter of 1788, the struggle between the monarchy and the aristocracy was trans-

formed into a social and political conflict between the privileged and unprivileged classes. As the issues broadened, the solidarity of the privileged orders weakened. A split appeared even in the ranks of the *parlement* of Paris between the conservative magistrates and those with liberal inclinations . . . The Third Estate also found champions of its claims among the lay and clerical aristocracy . . . Lastly, there was formed in these months, in opposition to the coalition of the conservative aristocracy, a combination of liberal theorists and politicians who assumed the style of the "patriotic" or "national" party.' 'The controversy has completely changed,' wrote a contemporary witness, Jacques Mallet du Pan, the journalist. 'King, despotism and constitution are now relatively minor questions. The war is between the Third Estate and the other two orders.'

Politics now became of all-consuming interest. Noisy discussions took place every night in the coffee-houses of the Palais Royal where there passed from hand to hand a stream of freshly printed pamphlets, propounding the ideas of a new declaration of rights, new conceptions of national sovereignty, and France's need of a constitution.

The business going forward in the pamphlets shops is incredible [Arthur Young was soon to write]. I went to the Palais Royal to see what new things were published, and to procure a catalogue of all. Every hour produces something new. Thirteen came out today, sixteen yesterday and ninety-two last week . . . This spirit of reading political tracts, they say, spreads into the provinces, so that all the presses of France are equally employed . . . Is it not wonderful that, while the press teems with the most levelling and even seditious principles that if put in execution would overturn the monarchy, nothing in reply appears, and not the least step is taken by the Court to restrain this extreme licentiousness of publication? It is easy to conceive the spirit that must be raised among the people. But the coffee-houses in the Palais Royal present yet more singular and astonishing spectacles; they are not only crowded within, but other expectant crowds are at the doors and windows, listening *à gorge déployée* to certain orators, who from the chairs or table harangue each his little audience. The eagerness with which they are heard, and the thunder of applause they receive for every sentiment of more than common hardness or violence against the present government, cannot easily be imagined.

These orators and journalists harangued the customers in the Café de Foy, the Régence, the Caveau and the Procope. Meetings were held in the fashionable salons of Madame de Tessé and Madame de Genlis. In masonic lodges the theories and writings of the *philosophes* were disseminated. Political clubs, which had been suppressed by the Government, reopened and found scores of new members; and new clubs were founded and soon fully subscribed. In cities all over France, the common practice of the upper floors of buildings being occupied by bourgeois families and the lower by the common people made the dissemination of revolutionary ideas between masses all the more rapid and effective.

'Scarcely six months had passed since I left France,' wrote Jacques Pierre, the pamphleteer, after a visit to America. 'I scarcely knew my fellow countrymen on my return. They had advanced an enormous distance.' Some of the liberal sentiments expressed by the 'patriots' were highly suspect in their sincerity: there were professedly progressive bishops who had their idea on ministerial appointments, there were *soi-disant* 'nationalist' lawyers anxious to dissociate themselves publicly from their conservative colleagues who had now become so unpopular. But most of the leading and more influential members of the 'patriotic' party were genuinely attached to the cause of liberalism and reform.

Nearly all these leaders were members of a secretive body known as the Committee of Thirty of which very little is known. The Committee, founded in November 1788, usually met at the house of a rich magistrate and *parlementaire*, Adrien Duport. Many of its other members were equally rich, able to finance the authorship and distribution of pamphlets, the circulation of lists of grievances which were intended to serve as models for others, and the dispatch of agents to the provinces. They included the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt and the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Marquis de Condorcet and the Vicomte de Noailles. Among their number were also three men whose influence on the course of events during the next few months was to be far more profound. One of these was the Abbé de Talleyrand-Périgord who became Bishop of Autun in January 1789 and lived to become known to the world as Prince Talleyrand. Another was the Marquis de Lafayette, a tall, thin,

solemn, conceited young man with a long nose, reddish hair and a receding forehead who had fought with distinction in America and dreamed, it was said, of becoming a kind of 'George Washington under Louis XVI'. The Third was the Abbé Sieyès.

Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès was forty years old. Although of a naturally reflective, analytical turn of mind, he had wanted as a boy to go into the army rather than the Church. But his pious and ambitious middle-class parents had overborne his own wishes and he had spent ten years in a seminary. There, however, he spent more time in the study of political philosophy, of Locke, Condillac and Bonnet, than of those religious writers pressed upon him by his tutors who concluded that they might turn him into a 'gentlemanly, cultured canon, yet he was by no means fitted for the Ministry of the Church'.

He nevertheless entered the Church on the completion of his studies, and began slowly to rise in its hierarchy, though without any hope of becoming a bishop since he was not a member of the aristocracy, a class whom he consequently viewed with peculiar animosity. Ordained priest in 1773, he became secretary to the Bishop of Tréguier two years later, then Chancellor of the Diocese of Chartres and a member of the Provincial Assembly of Orléans. A small, thin man, austere, rather cynical, unfailingly if distantly polite, he made few friends, appeared indifferent to the society of women and was ill at ease with his social inferiors. As one of the twelve clerical representatives at the Provincial Assembly of Orléans, however, he did display a deep concern for the plight of the poor and argued for a programme of radical reform. But he was no orator: his voice was weak, his manner formal, his delivery, as one who listened to him commented, 'ungraceful and ineloquent'. He made little impression and was soon discouraged. So, seeing scant hope for any improvement in the social order, disliking the Church, distrusting the *parlements*, and despairing of the monarchy's ability to escape from the thrall of a reactionary nobility, Sieyès made up his mind to emigrate to America. And, having saved about 50,000 *livres*, he was just about to sail when the outburst of political discussion which erupted in France in 1788 persuaded him to change his mind. He took to writing. Never having published

anything before, he made no mark with his first two pamphlets; but his third, 'What is the Third Estate?', powerfully persuasive though rather boringly written, was as influential as any other pamphlet produced at this time. Formulating the grievances of the unprivileged classes and identifying the Third Estate with the nation as a whole, Sieyès answered the question of his pamphlet's title, 'What is the Third Estate?' – 'Everything. What has it been up till now in the political order? Nothing. What does it desire to be? Something.' That 'something' included the rights to have as many representatives as the other two orders combined as well as to have its votes counted by head rather than by order. It also included the right to share in the framing of a constitution free from interference by any outside influence.

While the great political debate, fired by such pamphlets as Sieyès's, raged in the cafés, clubs and salons of Paris, Necker gave much thought to the problems posed by the forthcoming convocation of the Estates General. In the hope that they might be persuaded to give way to popular demand by allowing the Third Estate as many representatives as the other two orders combined, as 'What is the Third Estate?' demanded, he summoned another Assembly of Notables. But the Notables were not to be persuaded. They held by a large majority to the view that the presumptions of the Third Estate were to be firmly resisted. Disregarding the Notables' verdict – and concerned by warnings from the *intendants* in the provinces that civil war would break out if the privileged orders were allowed to have their way – Necker set about persuading his fellow Ministers and the royal family to issue an edict granting what had become known as 'double representation' to the Third Estate.

There were heated discussions at Court where both the King and Queen, as well as the Comte de Provence, were eventually persuaded to support Necker's views, and on 27 December it was announced that the Third Estate would, indeed, have 'double representation'. It was not, however, made clear whether voting would be by head, in which case the Third Estate – relying on the liberals among the

nobility and the clergy – would be able to count on a majority, or by order, which would mean that their apparent advantage of numbers would be nullified.

Early in the New Year the elections began. Almost everyone aged twenty-five and over whose name appeared on the taxation rolls – or, in Paris, who did not pay less than six *livres* in *taille* – was entitled to vote; and voting in most areas was heavy. In all, 1,201 representatives were elected, 291 nobles, 300 clergy and 610 members of the Third Estate. Apart from the Duc d'Orléans there were few members of the *noblesse de cour* amongst the noble representatives, most of them being landowners of a conservative cast of mind from the provinces, though there were about ninety nobles who regarded themselves as liberals, including such celebrated figures as the Marquis de Lafayette, who was elected, with difficulty, at Riom. Less than a sixth of the representatives of the clergy were prelates; most were parish priests, many of whom had studied the *Encyclopédie*. Among the Third Estate middle-aged professional men were dominant, especially lawyers, though there were a few who were elected from outside their order, for example the Abbé Sieyès, who was chosen as one of the twenty deputies for Paris after being rejected by the clergy of Montfort-l'Amaury.

Before selecting their delegates, the electors of each of the three orders had drawn up a list of their grievances and of suggestions for reform known as a *cahier de doléances*. These *cahiers* were virtually unanimous in their condemnation of royal absolutism but none wished to do away with the monarchy altogether or questioned the King's right to choose his Ministers and initiate legislation. They were also almost unanimous in their desire for a constitution with the voting of taxes and approval of new legislation taking place in regular meetings of the Estates General, in their demands for elected Provincial Estates, for individual liberty and freedom of the press. Many asked for unification of laws and standardization of weights and measures, an end to government wastefulness, to abuses in public finance and internal customs barriers, and for reforms in the Church, though not for its separation from the state. But it was clear that the Clergy were bent upon retaining their independence; the Nobility their social rank and feudal dues.

The French Revolution

At the end of April the various deputies, travelling from all over France, made their way by private carriage and public coach towards the palace of Versailles. It had been arranged that they should meet here close to 'the King's own dwelling', 'not in any way to fetter their deliberations, but so that he could preserve in regard to them the character that lies nearest his heart – that of adviser and friend'.