

# TO THE COMMUNE AND BEYOND



WRITINGS BY  
**PASCHAL GROUSSET**

VOLUME I:  
HOW THE PARIS COMMUNE MADE THE REPUBLIC.



## HOW THE PARIS COMMUNE MADE THE REPUBLIC.

Ludwig Boerne said once, with reference to the revolution of '89, 'One man only might have prevented it, namely Adam, supposing that he had been drowned previous to his wedding.' The same remark probably holds good of any great popular movement, and would at all events be especially applicable to the revolution of March 1871. To account for its entangled causes and its dire fatality would be to recite the dark list of unmitigated sufferings which concur in making life a burden to such a large proportion of a so-called civilised mankind; to enter at full into the natural history of the human species; at the very least to review the known and untold records of the French people. There is not a social outburst which has not been made the subject of that kind of harmless speculation, a trouble which the good-natured authors might as well have spared to themselves and the public, as they can hardly hope ever to have exhausted their case; whilst persons of the opposite turn of mind have often indulged in highly virtuous denunciations of the same natural phenomena, who might as well brand the passing storm or inveigh against the raging wave.

Such hollow declamation will at least here be dispensed with. The object of this paper is neither to explain to the outsider a political earthquake, which needs no other apology than its very explosion, nor to draw a fancy sketch of its future consequences. In its growth, particulars, and casualties, it could hardly have been otherwise than it was. The reader is humbly requested to take it for granted that a city of two million men does not, without some show of reason, rise in arms, fight for nine weeks with desperate energy, and leave forty thousand corpses under the ruins of a hundred thoroughfares. The individual opinion of the writer may be that the revolution of '71 shall be ranked by history second to no other, both in importance and fecundity. He may consider it the central event of the century. He certainly holds it as the solemn initiation of the fourth (or labouring) estate to the mystery of power. Those wide aspects of the question, however, will be left aside.

What it is exclusively intended to show here is the quaint process through which the vanquished, the massacred, the exiled of that political struggle have turned out in fact its moral conquerors; and the National Guard of Paris, although crushed to atoms by the monarchical host of Versailles, has, in the strictest sense of the word, succeeded in founding the Republic. The result is not an unparalleled one. It is in keeping, rather, with the historical law which has so many a time absorbed the conquering into the conquered army. Still, in the present instance, that result has been too much obscured by time-serving pharisees not to be worthy of a strict investigation, and this will be attempted in as impartial a spirit as is compatible with earnest conviction.

## I. Two Frances.

Paris, in the first half of March 1871, was a most extraordinary sight. The capital of pleasure and the 'cynosure of the world,' now a prisoner within its walls, shaved of its trees, blockaded by a victorious enemy, and hardly breathing after the supreme sufferings of a siege; its palaces and museums still wrapped up in sand-sacks, its roofs shelled, its theatres turned into ambulances; everywhere the traces of the most fearful misery; hunger and disease at every story of its houses; all labour and business suspended for more than half a year; all rents due; one hundred and fifty thousand commercial effects unpaid; every man in arms, every woman in agonies of despair; the refugees of the suburbs still crowding the streets; whole families living or rather starving on the fifteen pence a day allowed to each National Guard, and this miserable pittance threatened with suppression; the regular troops, deprived of their arms by the military convention, encamped on the squares; nearly every person in easy circumstances gone out in a hurry for a holiday after such a terrible trial; every politician of note departed to Bordeaux for the meeting of the Assembly; railways few, telegraphs slow, hardly any regular mails as yet; flour and meat supplies measured with a scanty hand by a diffident foe: such was in broad lines the material situation. Morally, it was darker still. A patriotic and sensitive population, which for six months had trained itself in the expectation of a desperate effort that never came, was labouring under a feeling of bitter humiliation. It was as if it had been, not conquered, but cheated into defeat. With the consciousness of having done individually its very best, it had not even been granted a chance of fighting.

Fancy a champion who had prepared himself, for twenty-six consecutive weeks, for a decisive trial of strength, and who was Wd suddenly, before the competition began, that the umpires had agreed to award the prize to his rival. Suppose the prize is the national honour, five milliards of money, and two provinces. Multiply that man by three hundred thousand odd armed volunteers. Back the total with so many wives who during the same space have spent their days and nights ankle-deep in the snow, on a file at the door of a shop, for the purpose of obtaining half a pound of horse-meat or straw-bread. This was Paris.

Noble, wretched, deluded Paris, who had all along believed in the plan Trochu, and awoke to find that there was no plan! Who had been told, 'Le gouverneur de Paris ne capitulera pas;' and who saw that very same governor resigning in order that his boon companion, Vinoy, might sign a capitulation in his stead!

A strange shadow, that General Trochu; a first-rate military critic, a fluent speaker, and an absolute nonentity. Whenever it was necessary to act, he spoke.

On the night of the 4th of September 1870, just as he had been put at the head of the Government of National Defence, he happened to fall upon four quidnuncs in a dark passage of the Hotel de Ville. He button-holed them on the spot, and made a speech of half an hour duration, for their private benefit, on the difficulties of the situation. Meanwhile, the Crown Prince of Germany was advancing on Paris with speed.

Every inch a Breton, a Catholic, and a soldier, as Trochu used to describe himself, he was sincerely afraid of that sceptical and jolly democracy, which he was called to preside over, and utterly unable to realise its idiosyncrasy. The Paris workman or petty employe, it must be admitted, is quite peculiar in his ways, and different from any other being in existence. There is much of the artist in him; he has a sense of humour which is elsewhere the almost exclusive gift of more refined classes, and it was, by a thorough Philistine like General Trochu, really difficult to conceive that so much fighting power should be hidden under that everlasting jocularity.

He mistook it for Bohemianism. From the outset he looked at the hundred and seventy thousand regulars which he had hurriedly summoned to Paris as his only real army. A stupid conception, to say the least, considering that they were for the most part raw recruits, whilst the National Guard included a large percentage of old soldiers of the Crimean, Italian, and Mexican wars. If he hoped to train the former, within a few months, into solid troops, with how much more reason ought he to have entertained the same hope respecting the latter! In fact, as has been shown since by his own confession, he never had faith in either. He had faith in the three-years' system of soldier-training, in the conclusion of peace, procrastination, prayer, the interference of diplomatic or celestial agencies,—everything, in short, except the power of self-help; the conclusion being that, after one or two unsuccessful attempts at breaking the 'iron circle,' Paris, on its last rat sausage, awoke on a bitter morning to learn that Sedan and Metz had a companion, and that the Government of National Defence had lowered its colours.

This, however, was already in March an old story. Weeks had passed on the event. Bygones were bygones. The elections of February 8th had taken place, forty-three Republican deputies, with Louis Blanc, Victor Hugo, and Garibaldi at the head of the poll, had been returned by Paris. Bread was scanty still, but white again. Of the siege only the visible ruins remained, with the arms left to the National Guards. Those arms—those dear breechloaders and brand-new guns—what a comfort to have been able to keep them! Jules Favre has since shed a few extra tears at having been a party to that particular clause of the Franco-German Convention; but how could he have done otherwise, the tragedian? To have back the arms of the National Guards was no easy thing, as subsequent events have shown.

Well, they had them, and they meant to retain them for the defence of the Republic. For this was the chief thing now. To keep the Republic, not to slip again in the mire of personal power. This everybody felt, everybody saw—300,000 Parisian voters out of 328,000. To say that Paris had turned Republican would not be correct: it has been so in all times, from Etienne Marcel down to this day. Under the old monarchy as under the last ones, Paris has always looked freely in the face of tyrants, and disposed of them with a wink of the eye, a lampoon, or a laugh. This was why Louis XIV., the model king, wanted to be invisible like a god, and hid his foibles at Versailles. Republicanism is the very temper of Paris, even when Paris itself happens not to be aware of the fact. That it had been pretty well aware of it for the last twenty years may be seen by its votes. In the present instance, however, Republicanism was not a fructification of feeling: it was one of reason. After the dreadful experiences just witnessed, any street-boy understood that it was to France a case of life or death; that the country could only recover from such terrible wounds through the devotion and exertion of every one; that nobody henceforth had a right to abdicate his share of labour and responsibility. As a consequence, it was not Republic in name only which the National Guard wanted—it was Republic as synonymous with Regeneration. It seemed that old institutions alike and old men ought to be put on the retired list. Fresh schools were wanted, fresh morals, fresh leaders. What alone survived the shipwreck, on that sea of desolation, was an intense, a passionate disgust of everything, every one, who had had a hand in it. Work for all, education for all, military training for all, patience and self-government—such was the motto which sprang unanimously from the soul of Paris, and which it embodied in this single word Republic.

It borrowed from it, indeed, a sense of comparative confidence—almost of intimate and subdued joy—which to the uninitiated would have seemed singular under the circumstances. The men had in their eyes, at that very moment of defeat and misery, something bright and healthy. Strange as it may seem to those who have not witnessed it, and who have no idea of the change which the contagion of duty may bring on the most obdurate minds, crime had for months wholly disappeared from Paris. The courts of justice had suspended their sittings from actual want of cases. (The fact has been admitted publicly by M. Claude, for thirty years the head officer of the criminal service at the Prefecture of Police.) There was no more room for sin in those consciences renovated by patriotism. And just then, to symbolise the general feeling of hopefulness, spring brought on the ravaged city its smiles and flowers. Here a sprig shot from the sawn-up stump of a tree; there a patch of grass hastened to hide a ruin. It was now the uncostly fashion for National Guards to adorn with young leaves the muzzle of every gun and rifle. Battalion after battalion marched past in the sun to the tune of the Marseillaise sung out with a feeling and gusto which it was impossible to appreciate without being moved to the bottom of the heart.

Everything in the lukewarm atmosphere seemed to say: 'We are licked, that is a fact. But we are free. It is the turn of the Germans now to learn what an empire is worth!'

That the provinces would follow suit with them the Parisians never for a moment doubted. Have not the provinces in all times traditionally taken their password from the capital? Is not Paris the natural representative as well as the head of the French community? Does it not receive every day, from every department, a fresh supply of new blood, the hope and flower of the country? What America is to the Irishman, India or the Cape to the Scotchman, Oxford and Cambridge to the English public-school boy—the land of promise—Paris is to the French provinces. Frenchmen do not emigrate; they only flock to that one *He de France*, a wide arena always open to talent and enterprise. They will not take root there; it may be, they will only stay three, five, ten, twenty years, according to their wants, their studies, and their chances; but they will go, and there is hardly a man of some note in the whole country who has not breathed for a time that light bracing air. There is not one who does not possess a son, a brother, a cousin, a friend in it; who does not read a paper printed in it; who is not intensely interested in the book, in the play, in the speech, in the single word, sent from it. Indeed, he takes a kind of pride in everything which is done in Paris. No narrow jealousy, no provincial hatred, can prevail against the pet city. It is emphatically the heart of the country, the vital point of its political, literary, and artistic life. This even foreigners know well and feel intensely. How many of them, like Anacharsis Clotz, having once put their foot in Paris, have at once and for ever turned Parisians! As for Frenchmen, there is probably not one who does not say with Montaigne, from the innermost recesses of his soul, '*Paris a mon cœur dès mon enfance. Je l'aime tendrement, jusques à ses verrues et à ses taches.*'

Then, its population is constantly renewed. There is hardly such a thing as a man in possession of a long Parisian pedigree, and, when found, that *rara avis* will stand a chance of being the most insignificant of *badauds*. Your Parisian born will frequently die in a country cottage—the hobby of his whole life—or turn out the most travelling of Frenchmen. In fact, Paris is made up of a motley of Bourguignons, Normands, Dauphinois, Auvergnats, Gascons, Picards, &c., who have drifted there through a kind of natural selection, and who have brought to the common mass, every one of them, the characteristic of his province—this one its fire and ardor, another its genius for business, another its steadiness and endurance, or its thrift, or its love of art, and so on. For centuries those distinct features have been mixed up there and combined; they have contributed, each for its part, to the constitution of the national character, and that to such a degree that Paris, and Paris alone, either in itself or through its great spokesmen—Rabelais, Moliere, Voltaire, Diderot, Beaumarchais—is the true and pure image of the French unity.

Added to this, Paris is not like other great capitals—an agglomeration of distinct boroughs, each with its individual life and features. Paris is a whole—a complete and simple organism. Being less populous than London, for instance, and moreover considerably more concentrated on account of its system of six or seven-storied houses, it rises, breathes, and sleeps, as it were, all at one time. There is no distinct part of it exclusively devoted to business, which is transacted everywhere. If there are a few special places of meeting—the Exchange, the Halles—they stand in the very centre of the city, which seems to radiate around them. So are the newspaper offices, the theatres, and that most Parisian of institutions—the Boulevard, with its wide footpaths, its innumerable cafes, its continuous stream of loungers. Who, living in Paris, could help crossing it once a day, or be it once a week, once a month? It is a universal place of resort—a kind of open-air Parliament, which never gives up sitting, and never stops analysing, questioning, debating, criticising. Such a constant intercourse, such an incessant exchange of news, ideas, and opinions, no less than the composition of its people, help in making Paris the most representative of capitals; and they are undoubtedly among the chief causes which have given to it such a conspicuous, or rather such an all-absorbing, part in French history.

In 1871, Paris had never doubted that the provinces would follow its lead. Six months before, it had made, on September 4th, the revolution of disgust only to learn that Lyons, Perigueux, and a few other places had done it at the same hour as itself, whilst the other chief cities had hastened to keep pace with it. How to suppose that things would go otherwise, now, than it had been the custom for nearly a hundred years?

Still, it was a mistake. Paris overlooked that the siege had severed its links with the provinces—that for a whole half year it had been entirely insulated, and that every department had, for that time, been left to think for itself. Of the latter fact, in the truer sense of the word, the Parisians had not the least idea. Accustomed as they were to take interest chiefly in their own affairs, they had hardly noticed that they were no more in daily intercourse with the outer world; and however little they may be credited with modesty, they were certainly far from supposing how much their influence was wanted in it. At all events, when the siege ended, everybody supposed that the interregnum was equally at an end; and it was granted, as a matter of course, that Paris was again the intellectual as well as the political capital.

In fact, it was nothing of the kind. Railways and telegraphs, as before stated, were not yet quite in order. Newspapers had either disappeared from sheer dearth of paper and subscribers, or had transported their editorial offices to the new parliamentary head-quarters. The National Assembly and Government were at Bordeaux; so were all the political leaders. Communication was still so difficult between the chief town of the Gironde and Paris that the parliamentary reports were only printed in the latter place six days after date.



The above statement of trivial facts will possibly help in conveying an approximate idea of the absolute surprise which overwhelmed Paris, when the news of what was going on at Bordeaux reached it. It was like a nightmare. An evil spirit who would have tried to sketch out an exact counterpart of every Parisian feeling could not have better succeeded.

Paris had elected Garibaldi amongst its deputies, as a grateful homage to the only foreigner who had put his sword at the service of the French Republic. 'The rural assembly,' as Gaston Cremieux branded it on the occasion, by an appropriate word which cost him his life, began its sittings by hissing down the hero, and covering his voice with outrageous uproar. Paris was of opinion, with every competent general (with Chanzy, Loysel, Billot, Mazure), that the resumption of the war was possible, and preferable to the cession of two provinces. The Assembly had not lost a day in unfurling the noble standard of peace at any price, and from the first moment had thrown the country at the tender mercies of the Prussian Chancellor. Paris was passionately Republican; and it saw suddenly its representatives faced with a majority of monarchists,—450 out of 750 members.

Monarchists is not even a fit word. They were rabid emigres, men whose very names and language France had never heard since 1815, pontifical Zouaves, devotees of the Sacred Heart; a host of crusaders, who did not merely threaten the Republic, but proclaimed loudly their firm intention of doing away at the same time, and once for all, with every legacy of the Great Revolution.

It looked like one of those transformation scenes only to be seen at pantomimes. Such a miracle, indeed, was this sudden hatching by Voltairian France of a majority of Jesuits' eggs, that it has not ceased to appear suspicious. It is pretty well known that pending the war,—whilst the Republican party, and indeed the youth of the Legitimist party as well, were doing their duty to the front,—the clergy alone had thought of the morrow, remained at home, and actively canvassed their parishes in view of the coming elections. It is no mystery that the coalition of the monarchical leaders, seeing that the Republicans in power represented, or pretended to represent, the war party, had sought their platform on the opposite feeling. It is a fact that the majority of the rural populations were disgusted with the war, and listened only too readily to those who murmured into their ears that their candidates alone could procure 'peace with honour.' Even with such powerful factors at work, however, as superstition and cowardice, the lack of Parisian impulse, the organisation of the clerical army, the presence of a foreign invader, and the hurried haste of general elections—gazetted, countermanded, and concluded within eight days—the return to a French Assembly, in 1871, of a majority of Belcastels savours almost of the impossible.

To account for it, it is necessary to bear in mind two capital facts. The first, that not even one half of the registered voters were either able or willing to take

part in the ballot. The second, that in no case whatever were the returns seriously investigated. Under pretence of the pressure of circumstances, the elections were validated wholesale, at the rate of 100 or 200 per sitting; in many cases on telegraphic reports. A prominent member of the Left once pointed out that the Assembly of 1871 was perhaps the only Parliament in history which never had any archives. This is saying a good deal, as previous and subsequent elections have shown.

However it may be, one fact was henceforth impressed on every mind—to wit, that Paris and the Assembly were at the two opposite poles. Paris was in arms, and meant to maintain the Republic at any price. The Assembly, whatever its titles and authority were—it had avowedly been elected for the restricted purpose of voting on the question of peace or war—did not even care to conceal that it wanted to make a monarchy. It was as if two Frances had been confronting each other: the one fanatically attached to decayed institutions, in spite of their utter failure; the other passionately resolved on making a clean sweep of the same institutions, and looking for the regeneration of the country to an entirely fresh establishment.

That the irreconcilable antagonism could only end in civil war was obvious from the outset. It only remained for every Frenchman to make a choice between the two parties. By most of us, young as we were, that choice had been made long before. Many joined us who had just opened their eyes to the truth in consequence of the national disaster. Colonel Rossel, for one, was soon to do so in the most characteristic fashion, by sending the following letter of resignation to the Minister of War: 'Mon general,—There are two parties in the country. I do not hesitate in joining the side which has not concluded peace, and which does not include in its ranks generals guilty of capitulation.' A declaration which he completed one month later by writing to a British paper: 'It is not, as you put it, a movement of passing spite, which led me to enter the ranks of the Revolution, but ripe and deliberate disgust with the old order of things which has brought France down to the abyss.'

## II. M. Thiers.

The man whom the Bordeaux Assembly had just put at the head of affairs was not exactly the sort of person to allay the legitimate misgivings of Republican Paris. To name M. Thiers was to name one of the deadliest adversaries ever encountered in France by democratic principles. Indeed, it may be doubted whether any politician so blinded by personal hatred of the people, and so thoroughly adverse to every article of faith of the Parisian Credo, could have been found in the whole range of the century.

Much, possibly, will be forgiven by history to that grim actor, on account of the last character which he has assumed before the world. It may be our sons

will overlook the blood in which the diminutive Moloch has bathed himself, to remember only that he was, after all, the first President of the definitive Republic. As for us who have been the subjects of his vivisection, for us who have paid the cost of his final conversion—thousands with our lives, thousands with our liberty, our country, and our home—we must be forgiven for looking more closely into the realities of the presidential dummy, and showing it, not as a success-worshipping world is pleased to consider it, but as we saw it, as we were bound to see it, in March 1871—from a moral, from a democratic, and from a republican point of view.

Let the reader fancy for a while that he is a Parisian; that he has earnestly done his duty during the Franco-German war; and that either from mature conviction or from more recent illumination he has come to the conclusion that the regeneration of the fatherland can only result from self-government, practised through universal suffrage, in its logical shape of a Republic. Then let him attempt to picture for himself what would have been his feelings on seeing suddenly placed at the helm, by a monarchist assembly, the most exclusive, the most prejudiced, and the most old-fashioned of royal servants.

M. Thiers was then seventy-four. In point of administrative habits and ideas he might as well have been considered a centenarian, or rather a prehistoric being. Not one single principle which he had imbibed about 1820 from Baron Louis had he ever been known to renounce. He was personally the same enlightened individual who, some forty-five years ago, when a bill was submitted to the Chambers for the construction of the first French line of railways, objected strongly, on the plea that there would be 'no breathing in the tunnels,' and that to grant the permission would be to send the people to certain death. As an economist he was not even as advanced as the physiocrats of the eighteenth century, and he saw hardly further than protection against foreign goods and heavy taxation on raw products. As regards military organisation, he was known to oppose universal service, and was supposed, not without cause, to be adverse to every innovation just consecrated by victory. In morals he was a disciple of Talleyrand. In politics, an Orleanist. Not merely an Orleanist, but the recognised leader and the very incarnation of Orleanism. The chief actor in the original farce of 1830, he had been again and again a Minister under the monarchic bourgeoisie; he had enjoyed the pure joy in 1848 of seeing his own creation going to the dogs in the hands of his rival, M. Guizot; finally, he had remained for twenty years in his shrine of the Place St. Georges under the Empire, the sun, the centre, and the god of a constellation of Orleanist worshippers. In his drawing-room, one did not say, 'les princes d'Orleans,' but simply 'les Princes.' Any person in Europe questioned in 1871, and even, probably, in 1872, on that momentous subject, 'What is M. Thiers as a politician?' would have replied at once, 'By all means an Orleanist.'

To us he was something more; to wit, the systematic, obdurate, and bloody foe of any republican system or democratic advance. From the opening of his career on the morrow of the revolution of 1830, when he confiscated the people's victory for the benefit of Louis Philippe, we had traditionally found him in our way, ready to dispute to us not only the most modest of reforms, but even the right of asserting our political preference. Everything which we admired and we loved he had sternly opposed for a lifetime. Every object of our sympathy, every hero of our youth, he had savagely persecuted. In 1834, at Lyons, he had drowned in torrents of blood the 'insurrection of hunger,' at the conclusion of a civil strife which now, in the dim distance, looks like a horrible rehearsal of the massacres of '71. The Republican party he had year after year condemned to prison, to deportation, or to death, in the persons of Godefroy Cavaignac, Lagrange, Kersausie, Barbes, Blanqui, and thousands of others. The Parisian proletariat he had practised his hand in slaughtering with the abominable Transnonain affair, when his cutthroats, entering a large house full of tenants, murdered indiscriminately men, women, and children. The freedom of defence he had gagged in that epical proces d'avril, the one hundred and twenty political accused of which had for their counsel such men as Lamennais, Auguste Comte, and Pierre Leroux. The freedom of the press he had trampled down with the infamous laws of September 1835. The most elementary rights of labour, the very names of association, meeting, strike, or concerted action, he had unmercifully hunted down through draconian laws and constant prosecution.

A cynical tyrant at home, an habitual dupe abroad, he had been as improvident and short-sighted in connection with the future of his own party. After having, as a writer, revived the Napoleonic legend, exalted the crime of the 18th Brumaire, and thus paved the way for the fatidic nephew, who dreamed of completing the intelligent work of the first Bonaparte, M. Thiers, as a Prime Minister, had erected the Arc de Triomphe, put a statue of the 'Petit Caporal' on the column of the Grand Army, and brought back from St. Helena the remains of the useful great man. That, however, was not enough. It was reserved for him, after 1848, to supply the President Louis Bonaparte with the very pretence upon which rested the whole fabric of his coup d'etat.

If there was a conquest of the revolution of 1848 to which the French democracy was still more attached than to the name of Republic, that was most assuredly Universal Suffrage. Whole classes deprived of the freedom of voting will go a long way, as experience shows, without even dreaming of claiming it. But to let a man be for three years in possession of the right of suffrage, and then to snatch it away from him—what tyro in politics would fail to perceive the folly of the reckless proceeding? M. Thiers was no proof against such a gross mistake. At all times hoodwinked with a base hatred of what he used to call the vile multitude (although, or perhaps because, he had himself sprung out of its ranks), he was unable to forgive Universal Suffrage for having, in the first

instance, declined to give him a seat in the Constituent Assembly. The result, by the way, had been due chiefly to clerical influence, and M. Thiers, suddenly as well as sorely perceiving what a part still remained for the parish priest in the working of Universal Suffrage, had at once, unhesitatingly, turned a new leaf, and become a professed Catholic. The temporal power of the Pope had henceforth no stauncher supporter. So he had his seat at the complementary ballot, under the patronage of the Bishop of Orleans, and he took it with the firm resolve of doing away with Universal Suffrage. The ally of M. de Falloux and the old Duke de Broglie, the managing spirit of the Comite de la Rue de Poitiers, he led the campaign which culminated in the law of May 81st, 1850, and took back the electoral franchise from three million voters out of nine. Meanwhile, through his violent speeches in the Assembly, especially through his unfair replies to the otherwise weak Socialist programme developed by Proudhon, through a perfect shower of cheap pamphlets, he scared the peasantry of France, and trained it for any reaction.

Eighteen months later, the campaign went to its natural conclusion. The Pretender Bonaparte made his coup d'etat, dissolved the Assembly, shot down the defenders of the constitutional law, and took possession of France for the purpose of conducting her personally, through various adventures, to the memorable 'flagrant delit de formation' on the Rhine. The first line in the culprit's proclamation, after recording his own perjury, was the following pointed apology: 'Le suffrage universel est retabli.' At the early hours of the winter morning, when the white bills were posted on the walls of Paris, M. Thiers was arrested in his bed, and shut up in the Mazas gaol. There he was able to reflect in a cell on the danger of glorifying 18th Brumaires, abetting reactions, and playing the cat's-paw to pretenders.

'I wish all those people were dead, that I may write their story,' said W. M. Thackeray. It is not, be it stated, for the vain satisfaction of heaping obloquy on the name of a dead man, however guilty against his country and civilisation, that his career is summed up here. If such a futile aim were in view, it would be easy, forsooth, to find in his life still more revolting pages; to show him, for instance, a Home Minister, bargaining with Simon Deutz, under a tree at night in the Champs Elysees, for the betrayal of the Duchess de Berry; or again, penning the paragraphs which were to appear in the ministerial papers against her womanly honour. As a General Thumb in chambers, or a diplomatist-with-the-boots, M. Thiers would offer an easy prey to criticism; whilst his absurd conceit and unfathomable powers of mendacity could hardly be omitted in a finished sketch. His pretensions to philosophy, his alleged love of art, unreal and Ruolzied like everything in that narrow, selfish, cruel nature of a dwarf, would not fail to lend more than a touch to an altogether unpleasant likeness; and it would be found probably that, thirty years after date, the curiously witty lines written by M. Felix Pyat still hold good, when he burst forth, addressing M.

Thiers: 'If you look to politics, Napoleon is your hero. If you happen to visit Florence, you can only see Michael Angelo. With you, giants alone have a right to existence. Bonaparte and Buonarotti, these are your gods. What a pity you did not live in their times, and what a place would have been given you by Napoleon in his councils, or by Michael Angelo in his *Inferno*!' But the review would hardly be a refreshing one. Such a distressing thing it is to find only blemishes in the character of a leader of men, especially when he has for half a century played so conspicuous a part in the history of one's country, that one would jump with sincere joy at a redeeming part, and would be glad to have to point out a word, a deed, a high purpose at least, by which so many and such deficiencies were to some extent atoned for. The attempt would baffle the minutest investigation. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, in that living skinful of business-routine but what is most base and contemptible in the filthy soul of a low shopkeeper. He the rescuer and the saviour of France! The only wonder is that France should have recovered from her wounds in spite of his financial, educational, and foreign treatment. He a representative of the land of Diderot and Turgot! Let no one believe such nonsense. He no more represented it than he loved it—than he loved anything in the world except his own miserable self. The true image of a class at once upstart and degenerate, which has got neither traditions, nor faith, nor culture, nor morality, nor muscle, nor love,—only interests: that he was, by all means.

All that is wanted, however, is to retain and to convey the opinion which the past career of M. Thiers enforced on the minds of the Parisians of 1871, and that opinion can be summed up by stating that he had done no end of harm to the Republican party, either in a direct or an indirect way, whilst he never had to his credit a single liberal, progressive, or simply straightforward measure.

Neither were his latest achievements of a nature to recommend him to our veneration. Although he had always been in the Opposition during the Empire, it was only on sufferance that he had accepted the proclamation of the Republic on September 4th, 1870. 'Eh bien! faites-la, votre republique!' he had been heard squeaking at the top of his shrill voice (as if scolding Judy), when we invaded the Palais Bourbon; and next, he had flatly declined to enter the new government—what, however, nobody offered him. Then, after a few days' sulking, he had seen his way, and began to cut a part for himself in the provisional order of things. Why mince matters? That part was simply that of a traitor. Whilst invaded France had only one thought—to repel the foreign foe—and was making her last stand, as it were, with one soul, M. Thiers thought only of one thing—to appear before the world in the capacity of the indispensable negotiator. Too shrewd an old politician to keep any illusion on the possible results of his beggarly promenade round Europe, perfectly awake as he was to the fact that neither the noble lord who had initiated the league of neutral powers, nor the Imperial nephew of the King of Prussia, nor the freshly beaten Hapsburg, and

still less the gallant pretender to the succession of the temporal power, would move a finger on behalf of France, M. Thiers went none the less on his canvassing tour. When he came back he had done nothing but to pocket a few rebuffs, coupled, of course, with a proportional amount of extra courtesies to his person. His real errand, however, was all the better fulfilled. He had what he wanted—the position of the goody Nestor, who saw and spoke out the truth, in spite of the mad Achilles of national defence.

His foreign job being then at an end, he set to work at home. The rallying point and the centre of the opposition at Tours and Bordeaux, he sent all over France the pass-word which was sure to be eagerly caught by the most narrow-minded sections of the middle classes and peasantry—further resistance useless, pence necessary. A characteristic circumstance, which he took personal care to spread at that moment, showed in what light he had just tried to exhibit himself to Europe, and he wanted to be looked at in France as the liquidator elect of the national bankruptcy. ‘When Count Bismarck was in Paris, about 1862,’ he had related ad nauseam by all the papers at his command, ‘M. Thiers was much surprised on a Sunday night at the Prussian statesman calling upon him. They had never met before; but Count Bismarck wanted to make the acquaintance of the illustrious Frenchman. “Confess that you are sulking with your friends and your books,” said the iron man, in the course of the conversation; “let me make your peace with the Emperor.” M. Thiers spoke of what he owed to his old ideas and associations. “Of course, ideas a man must have,” was the prompt reply; “but he ought to serve them by power.”’ Such tales as these, at a time when France looked so helpless and friendless, had an immense grasp on the imagination of country folks. Through Bishop Dupanloup he had them circulated amongst the clergy. With him he concocted the list of candidates to the coming elections, and he applied all his genius for intrigue, all the strength of his wide influence, all the prestige of his vaunted statesmanship, in obtaining that double end: an outcry for negotiation and a non-republican Assembly. Personally, he was returned by twenty-three constituencies.

Thus, in the past the professional enemy of the Republic, Universal Suffrage, and democratic aspirations; in the present the great elector and the elected of an Assembly, the characteristics of which were above all ultra-clerical and anti-republican—such were the auspices under which he assumed power. If only that Republic, the foremost, primordial object of our worship, had been maintained in effigy—in name at least! But even such a poor satisfaction we had not. Directly on the opening of the Assembly, the heading ‘Republique Francaise’ had disappeared from all public deeds. We were under so suspicious and provisional a regime, that there was no name for it in the dictionary. All Republican officials had either resigned or been discarded. M. Thiers himself was dubbed, not President, but ‘Chief of the Executive,’ a title which we construed, naturally enough, into ‘chief executioner.’ That the Orleanist leader of forty

years' standing had no other aim in view than to make a bridge for a restoration, nobody in his senses might have doubted, especially considering that this was the admitted object of an Assembly which he had modelled himself. Supposing that he had promised, just then, to uphold the Republic, there is little probability that he would have been trusted. Was he not the same Thiers who had said, in 1848, 'La Republique est le gouvernement qui nous divise le moins,' only to strangle it in his embrace more securely? Did he not belong to the refined school of politicians who profess with their arch-master that speech has only been given to man for the purpose of concealing his thoughts? Even such a poor bone to play with we had not, however. M. Thiers uttered not a word about the form of government. Whatever may have been at that particular moment his innermost intentions he kept to himself. On the other hand, although the war was at an end and the peace signed, a formal state of siege—that is to say, the reign of martial law—was maintained in Paris, and General Vinoy, a man of December, was kept as its governor.

It was under the above circumstances that the Bordeaux Assembly took in succession three measures, which were nothing short of an open challenge to the Parisians. It resolved to transfer its sittings to Versailles instead of Paris, thus depriving the latter of the dignity of a capital; it enacted that all prorogued commercial effects would become due within three days; and insisted on the appointment to the command of the National Guard of M. d'Aurelles de Paladines, a general chiefly known as the docile tool of Bishop Dupanloup. M. Thiers personally had either suggested or approved the three measures; and they were only, to his mind, as he admitted at a later date in the course of a parliamentary inquiry, the prelude to a more direct attack, which was not long to come. On March 12th the Governor of Paris, without a warning, without even a semblance of trial, through a mere stroke of the pen, suppressed five Republican newspapers. No such thing had ever been seen in the worst days of the Empire, and for the last eight months, in spite of the war and the siege, the freedom of the press had been absolute. Any unbiassed mind who will consider the nature of the offence, the situation in which such an extraordinary proceeding took place, as well as the name which was at the bottom of the decree, will easily realise the construction which we were bound to put upon it. At the same time, strenuous efforts were made to induce the National Guards into surrendering two hundred and fifty guns which were in their possession. Those guns, it should be noted, Paris had paid for, through public subscriptions, for the special use of the National Guard, which, in addition, had quit recently rescued them from imminent Prussian seizure. Diplomacy having failed to succeed, resort to violence was attempted by the Government of M. Thiers. On the morning of March 18th all the available armed forces of the garrison, under the command of General Vinoy, surrounded the parks in which the guns were



kept, whilst numerous warrants of arrest were issued, and white bills posted on the walls addressed the population in the threatening style of evil days.

How the attempt failed ignominiously—how the people of the besieged quarters went in swarms out of their hives, cheered the troops heartily, mixed up in their ranks, disarmed them in a friendly way, and submerged regiment after regiment under a succession of human waves—is still fresh in the recollection of many. The coup was manqué. M. Thiers and his Ministers found themselves almost without a soldier, face to face with a roused and indignant capital. It only remained for them to resign or to fly. They chose the latter part, and went to Versailles. Curtain falls on the first act of the tragedy.

To speculate on what would have happened if events had taken a different turn is always hazardous. In many cases the speculation may seem as childish as it is hopeless. Serious minds would object probably to consider what other course British history might have followed if William the Conqueror, for instance, or William II., had been prevented by a storm from landing in this country. Still, there are situations in which it is difficult to escape the query, and the case of Paris in 1871 is emphatically one of them. What would have been the run of events if the attack of March 18th on the National Guard had been successful, instead of ending in failure?

The two hundred and fifty guns once secured, it is made clear by precedents that M. Thiers would not have stopped there. He would at once have requested the surrender of the rifles, about four hundred thousand in number, which were still in the possession of the civic army. How he might have got them without a battle is less clear. Be it supposed, however, for the sake of theory, that he had, through surprise or persuasion, succeeded in obtaining a general disarmament. Could any one assert, with a show of reason, that within two or three days a monarchy would not have been proclaimed?—when it is borne in mind that immediately on its meeting at Versailles, and in spite of the failure of the Paris coup de main, the majority of the Assembly spoke of nothing but the appointment of the Duke d'Aumale as lieutenant-general of The Realm! It is all very well to rest on the solemn deadlock to which monarchical schemes were doomed at a later date as evidence that they would have collapsed likewise in March 1871. But the case was wholly different. In the first place, there was then no such thing in France as a Bonapartist party to counterbalance both the other monarchist factions. When the déchéance of Napoleon III was confirmed by the Bordeaux Assembly, on March 1st, four votes only were recorded against it. Then the clerical coalition of Orleanists and Legitimists, formed in view of the elections, and in possession of the parliamentary majority, was still fresh. The Orleans Princes were perfectly willing to waive temporarily their own claims in favour of the head of the house; at all events, they were ready to let him have the title, provided they could retain for themselves the reversion, as well as the

realities, of power. Last, but not least, the Republicans in the provinces were just then under the influence of a double defeat, national and electoral.

After the excitation of the war, and the strain which had weighed exclusively on their energies, a reaction had set in. They were stunned by the bewildering succession of events. The overwhelming success of the monarchical coalition, the shifting of the political axis from one side of the compass to the other, the wholesale resignations or dismissals of Republican officials, the sudden apparition of a fresh governmental machinery, had almost completely disabled and scattered our forces. Republicans all over the country were not disheartened, but they felt like stray soldiers after a great battle. They looked around them for a signal-board—for a light—and saw nothing but the wilderness. There was a short interval of hesitation and trouble, when it was doubtful whether every man who had had a share in the work of National Defence would not be put on his trial. It seems strange that patriotism should ever be considered as amounting to high treason. Still this was literally the case. The turn of the franc-fdeurs had come at last. The generous fellows who had spent the time of the war smoking big cigars in Regent-street returned in shoals to stigmatise us with the nickname of outranciers. We were truly at one of those 'psychological hours' when a monarchical surprise would have been possible, or rather would have become unavoidable on the strength of a military success added to an electoral triumph. In ambiguous situations, high-handed measures are always decisive. Had he won the day, on March 18th, against the Parisians, it is next to certain that M. Thiers would, willingly or unwillingly, have followed the stream of reaction, and have turned out a parliamentary Monk.

As he failed, however, there was now between him and monarchy the width of sixteen miles, a girdle of forts, a line of walls, and a forest of Republican bayonets.

### III. Jacques Bonhomme in the Chair.

Here is a capital deserted by its Government, and left with no army, no police, no judges, no authority of any kind; with not a public service in working order; what is positively worse, with not as much as a franc in the national safes, whilst an armed population, depending for its daily bread on the stipend which will not be forthcoming to-morrow, is let loose in the streets. The very ideal of anarchy deliberately inflicted on a city replete with art, commercial and financial, treasures. As a matter of course, the scene must be one of wholesale plunder and pillage: every rich house must be broken into; every palace rummaged from cellars to attics; every till ransacked; every public-house overcrowded; every man and woman hopelessly drunk. Theft, disorder, and immorality must be witnessed everywhere. The spectacle must be something like the irruption on the doomed city of a horde of bloodthirsty cannibals. This, not

unlikely, M. Thiers had expected would be the case; in this at least he was sorely disappointed, and he showed how little he knew that people which he pretended to govern. Not a single instance of disorder had to be recorded. Not even so much as an attempt at pillage or brutality took place over the huge plain of houses and public buildings. Never had Paris looked so simply grand, so conscious of its civic honour, and so quiet. A stranger walking from the Madeleine to the Bastille, on that hazy afternoon of an eventful Saturday of March, would hardly have supposed that there was anything extraordinary going on.

The experiment could perhaps be unsafe in other capitals. But this is the peculiarity and the pride of Paris: it is never more orderly and positively proper than in the whirlwind of a revolution. Thieves and rogues know well that there is no trifling with the honour of its people; prostitutes feel in danger of being pelted—they always keep aloof in such cases. In former insurrections some provident busybody never failed to chalk on the doors of palaces or on the shutters of shops, *Mort aux voleurs!* The innovation this time was, that nobody even dreamed of the precaution, so useless and chimerical it would have been. Old Prince Metternich, who was not much of the sort of man to fathom a popular undercurrent, used to explain the exemplary moderation of a Parisian mob simply by the force of habit. 'The Parisians are so accustomed to revolutions,' he said, in his cynical way, 'as to feel in them like a grisette in a public ballroom—quite at home.' 'Like a priest in the temple' would have been the proper phrase. The fact is, that the first wind of a revolution awakens in the Parisian mind the only faith to which it is still amenable—fraternity, love of mankind. A moral phenomenon at once takes place which it would be as absurd to deny as futile to ridicule, and which may be described as the sudden absorption of every individual will or temper into the common soul of the city. A general transformation is witnessed. Ordinary pursuits, vanities, and vices are provisionally cast off as a worn-out set of clothes; private interests are silenced; the humblest being feels intensely that, holding as he does a vote and a rifle, he keeps a portion of the national sovereignty, and is exalted in his own estimation to the dignity of a king on coronation day. Look at that troupe of choristers waiting in the amphitheatre of a concert-hall. Some are handsome, others are ugly; some are gay, others are sad; this one is a hero of private devotion, another a confirmed drunkard or something worse; they chat and they laugh, or quarrel or be quiet, according to their individual leanings. As a whole, a more motley crowd, a more dismal-looking one, it would be difficult to assemble. Presently the conductor strikes a light dry blow on his desk; a silence, then singing begins, every soul merges in the common work; choristers there are no more, but only a choir, with a single will, the cadence—a single aim, harmony. Thus for the Parisians on insurrection days; there is not one of them who does not feel a chorister in the grand festival.

What perhaps makes the change more striking is the common error of the foreign tourist, who only sees in Paris its outward glitter of theatres and cafes, shops and restaurants, couturiers and hairdressers, male dancers and painted women. Naturally enough, he fails to perceive that this machinery of fast life is chiefly reserved for the use of a few thousand native Sybarites, with the addition of his own virtuous self from abroad. He does not know that under that veil is the real Paris, the Paris of skilled workmen and zealous artists, of thinkers and students, who never give up revolving in their collective mind the problem of social perfectibility.

As for a Government, never mind that trifling detail. The Parisians know well enough that for one lost two will be found, at the very least. So that at midnight, after the closing of the theatres, they go to bed, perfectly convinced that the Republic is safe, as it is in the hands of the civic army, and that at breakfast to-morrow they can hardly fail to find in their paper that a fresh set of ministers has sat down in the armchairs just left vacant.

Neither are they mistaken. On the morning of March 19th, the official bills posted on the walls, and dated from the Hotel de Ville, are signed by the *Comite Central*. This, it seems, is the title of the new body which has assumed the reins of the public team. But what is that *Comite Central*? A score or so of obscure names, of nobodies, whom not a living soul knows, who for the first time, perhaps, are seen in print. Bootmakers, it may be, or counterjumpers, railway-porters or chimney-sweeps or passers-by. Is that not awful? What does that mean? Nil mirari as much as you like. Still, this is a little too hot even for a Parisian. Am I to be governed by the Great Unknown?

Why not, sir? Have you not had enough of the Great Known for the last few years, and more especially for the last few months? Known men for your generals in the field, and your ministers in council, and your diplomatists in the conference-room? Don't you see where they have led you? Why would you not try entirely new men? They can hardly do worse than their predecessors, and it is quite possible that they will do much better.

All right. I am not a prejudiced individual. Let us see.

Well, honestly, those people are no such fools, after all. They find money, feed Paris, know how to maintain order; they speak a clear simple French, and go to the point at once. 'The Republic was threatened; we want to uphold it. The public offices were deserted; we have thought it our duty to attempt their reorganisation. Let Paris, which has been for a quarter of a century deprived of the right which belongs to the poorest hamlet, that of electing its communal council, proceed at once to municipal elections. We do not want to impose ourselves on the people, but merely to do duty during the interregnum. As evidence of our good-will, we summon the electors to the ballot-boxes on the shortest possible notice—for the day after to-morrow, March 22d. Vive la République!' Wonder of wonders! A de-facto Government speaking only to state

that it wants to get out of the way—which assumes power merely to record its readiness to abdicate! Rulers just sprung out of the darkness who want to plunge back in it! This went home to the heart of the Philistines, and did much to reconcile them to the idea.

On the other hand, the Comité Central was not such a mushroom production as it looked at first sight. In revolutionary as in parliamentary life, the attributes of power very seldom fell to the lot of such men as were not virtually before in possession of it. It was only on the evening of March 18th that the Comité Central assumed openly the direction of affairs; in fact, for more than a week it had been in existence, and had taken the lead of Parisian opinion. Born from the very heart of the situation, it bore deeply impressed every one of its characteristics. Thus, for the last seven months, every citizen having been a soldier as well, the Central Committee was a body at once civic and military; the ruling idea of the population being to maintain the Republic, the only mandate given to the Central Committee, accepted and proclaimed by it, was to provide for that end. The idea of confederating for that purpose all the battalions of the National Guard into a general league was so natural and so logical, that it had dawned quite simultaneously in several brains about the first week of February. Two organisations, independent one of the other, began at the same time to work towards that one goal; a few days had hardly elapsed when they agreed to amalgamate under a common name, which was Federation of the National Guard. A public meeting held at the Vaux Hall on the 15th of February laid the basis of the alliance; another held on the 25th resolved that every Parisian battalion would be requested to send delegates to a general meeting, at which the definitive principles of the association would be debated. In all that, nothing was secret or occult; everything took place openly, publicly, and freely; no exclusion was pronounced, all adhesions were solicited through the press. On the 3d of March the grand caucus was held, in which the battalion delegates framed the statutes of the league.

Said in substance their preamble: 'The Republic is the only rational and lawful government. It is the natural right of an army of volunteers like the National Guard to elect and to dismiss its officers.' The programme of Paris thus set up, the federal pact was defined in a succession of ten articles. Each company, battalion, and legion (or collective force of an arrondissement) were to send delegates to company, battalion, and legion councils, in which both the privates and the officers would be represented, and which would be the governing body of each respective unit. The supreme power over the organisation was to be vested in a central committee, composed of three delegates by arrondissement, elected by the council of the legion, and one chief of battalion by legion, delegated by his brother-officers. No simpler and fairer organisation, none better adapted to the existing distribution of the civic force and to the semi-military habits contracted during the siege, could have been

contrived. It may as well be stated here that this masterpiece of statesmanship was mainly due to Moreau and Varlin, both workmen, both superior and rare beings, who were soon to pay with the penalty of summary assassination by the Versailles the leading part which they took in that initial deed of the Revolution. On the 13th March two hundred and fifteen battalions out of two hundred and forty had adhered to the statutes of the Federation, had renewed their body of officers, and sent their delegates to the Central Committee. When the latter took possession of the Hotel de Ville, it was consequently the most regular Government which had ever taken its credentials from an insurrection, since it was the outcome of a free election, openly prepared and performed by nine parts out of ten of the responsible population.

Obscure citizens its members mostly were. But did not that very circumstance, of which Versailles was soon to make such capital, bear testimony to their intelligence and honesty? If these individuals, with nothing in them of the professional politician, with no name, no money, no journals at their command, had succeeded, through the most elaborate mode of selection, in winning the confidence and obtaining the mandate, first of their brother National Guards, then of their battalion, next of their legion,—was it not the best evidence that they were conspicuous for some quality which singled them out emphatically as representative men? So they were too. To a man, earnest patriots, staunch Republicans, brave, upright, well-meaning fellows; a triple character which they had obtained from those most discriminating and fastidious of constituencies, the company in whose ranks they had just made a winter campaign, the guard-room of a battalion, the glass house of a Parisian neighbourhood. So honest, indeed, that they began to get fidgety as soon as they found themselves treading on the official carpets. Never had they dreamed of such a thing. They felt uneasy, as if they had been walking in somebody else's shoes. 'Let us go,' they said at once; 'we were not elected as a Government, but as the managing body of the National Guard. Let us keep within the bounds of our mandate, and let Paris elect its Commune.'

The Commune! That had been for the last few months the war-cry of the besieged Parisians. But, again, what was the Commune?

From an obsidional point of view it was the right claimed by the Parisians, against a Government as obviously foolish as it was self-appointed, of participating through elected representatives in the direction of the defence. From a municipal point of view it was the claim of Paris to a common council. From a revolutionary point of view it was something higher and more to the point, to wit, the condensation of Parisian wills and energies into an exclusively Parisian assembly, resting on the armed organisation of the city by sections, for the purpose of demurring to a treacherous verdict of universal suffrage, and appealing from abused France to France better informed.

The notion was not a new discovery. For the last ninety years the Commune has been the historical remedy consistently resorted to by Paris against the stupidity of rural constituencies. Whenever the remedy has been applied, the wave of barbarity has fallen back, and the nation has been able to reconsider its verdicts. Whenever the remedy has been suppressed, the power of mind has been conquered by material interests, the brain by the stomach, Paris by the provinces. Look at the rise and fall of the Revolution of 1789-94: it is all in the rise and fall of the Paris Commune. This 14th of July of ours, the capture of the Bastille, the admitted landmark of the enfranchisement of mankind—who made it but the people of Paris, under the leadership of a body of men who, on the morrow of their triumph, turned out the first and spontaneous Paris Commune? The great Republican warning to Royalty on June 20, 1792—who delivered it but the second Commune? The decisive rising of August 10, 1792, which sealed the doom of 'Right Divine'—who made it but a third Commune, elected for that special purpose by all the advanced sections of the capital? Above all, who but the same council initiated the struggle against that faction of hopeless babblers, the Girondins, who for the sake of speechifying would have lost the Republic, the Revolution, and the national independence at one time? Who but the fourth Commune purged the Convention of that scourge, and enforced on it its greatest measures of internal and external policy? Paris, always Paris, embodied in its Commune. When Robespierre strikes his first blow at the Commune, he unconsciously greases the cleaver which is to-morrow to fall on his own neck. No sooner have the Thermidorians suppressed the Commune than the disarmament of the sections ensues, and in a few weeks Paris is virtually in the hands of the Royalists, whom it becomes necessary to treat to grapeshot on the 13th of Vendemiaire. But now the Commune is no more; Paris is stilled; and no sooner has the reaction been crushed under one shape than it revives under another, to definitely triumph with Bonaparte. Generations follow generations, and the same phenomenon reappears persistently. First in 1830 and the year immediately following, next in 1848, the laborious evolution pursued by continental Europe is in the ascendant as long as the spirit of Paris is alive, and on the wane as long as partial risings and massacres have thinned the ranks of its democratic army. So intimately, then, is the Paris Commune (either virtual or positive) associated with the progress of the foregoing Revolution, from its feudal and territorial down to its industrial phase, that there is but one proper name for that institution, to wit, the special and chief organ of the movement;—an adventitious organ called into existence by the function would be the true Darwinian definition. If the laws of social science were as precise and as well ascertained as the laws of Kepler, it would indeed be possible to determine at what future date analogous causes are sure to bring back again similar effects.

Thus, and through the same natural process, it came to pass that, the Republic and the Revolution alike being threatened in March 1871, the Commune

was anew called to the front. Ultima ratio appealed to by Paris, be it noted, not for its own sake, but for the sake of mankind at large. For it cannot be supposed that in its misery Paris was forgetful of its historical mission. No sham, that mission; no creation of morbid vanity or pedantic conceit: a reality resting on a century of continuous, self-denying, heroic experiment, through a long dreary way paved with the bones of our martyrs. To make a stand for the rights of man was to our sense the truest and noblest revanche of the national defeat. As much as we loved and revered the sweet Germany of times gone by—the Germany of Mozart, Beethoven, and Froebel—as much as we kept under our fraternal gaze the Germany which proceeds from our own Encyclopaedists—that of Goethe and Dr. Gall, Buechner and Karl Marx—as little could we have recognised the attributes of intellectual leadership in the poor ironclad Germany of Bismarck and Moltke. Letting solitary old men bow to brute force, fall in the grotesque error of mistaking for the end of France the wreck of the Bonapartist fabric—a light, rotten, impudent, stucco decoration—and forget in one day what the world owes to Paris, we at least did not despair of the clear, bright, intrepid genius of our race. In what proved bitterest to our national pride, and most threatening for our immediate future, we chose to see only a further step in advance. Whatever our particular country seemed to lose as a nation, we resolved that she should gain as a factor of civilisation.

And, in fact, what better ground could we have desired for a trial of reconstruction? Around us ruins on every side, material, political, and moral—ruins heaped up not by us, but by a succession of so-called conservative rulers. The praetorian guard of Caesarion—in custody. Himself an exile. M. Thiers a runaway. The German host was still there, it is true; but we knew well enough that the ‘protagonist of progress’ did merely want our purse, and of money-bags there were plenty in France.

So it was that the fifth Paris Commune bloomed on a spring morning, a flower of freedom and hope and human love.

There was no canvassing or individual appeal to electors. The Central Committee interfered in no way with the ballot, only recommending to the voters, through a proclamation, that they should ‘choose honest men from their own ranks, amongst those who did not court their suffrages.’ All the practical arrangements for the vote were made by the citizens themselves in each section. Freely and openly, of their own choice, in the full conscience of their civic rights, 227,300 voters sent us to the Communal Council, at the rate of one representative per 20,000 inhabitants. This gave ninety Councillors, of whom about one-third were manual workmen, and all heartily devoted to the cause of labour. We polled, some of us, more suffrages than any deputy of Paris had ever obtained within the last twenty years under the regime of district constituencies. On the other hand, our election was legally valid, as, after much negotiating and cavilling, the mayors and deputies of Paris, acting in the name



and with the consent of the Cabinet, had agreed to sign with the Central Committee the convocation of electors.

Since the days of the Federation of '89, never had so impressive a scene been witnessed as when, on the afternoon following the ballot, the Committee delivered up its provisional powers to the newly-elected Commune, and two hundred thousand National Guards installed us at the Hotel de Ville. Confidence and enthusiasm were the order of the day. It seemed to be, and it really was, the dawn of a new era. Millions of human beings lined the squares and the streets, appeared at the windows, covered the roofs. Deafening acclamations arose to heaven. Drums were beating, clarions saluting, flags and handkerchiefs waving, whilst the great voice of the guns rolled on the banks of the Seine. Paris felt triumphant over misfortune, and rejoiced in its strength. The Republic was safe; the grim phantom of civil war, everybody thought, driven away for ever. France could not fail to follow the lead of Paris, as usual. Under the collective pressure of the country called back to its senses, the untoward Assembly could not persist in inflicting on us its presence any more. Having had their way on the question of peace or war, the only pretext for their hurried and irregular convocation, the rural fogeys would have to be satisfied. A dissolution was only a matter of weeks, to be enforced through general petitions. A Constituent Assembly would be soon elected; and France would be able to proceed quietly, this time in the right direction, to the work of reconstruction before her, whilst Paris would retain in her progress the proper share of influence which belonged to the head city. Such were, at a glance, the hopes and illusions of two million Parisians.

When the last round of artillery had vanished in the air, and Paris, having achieved the bringing forth of its Commune, looked around its walls, it saw that it was quite alone and had claimed in deserto.

#### IV. The Idyll at Versailles.

Civil war might still have been averted. It would have been sufficient for the Assembly just convened at Versailles to proclaim the Republic, and to accept, as an accomplished fact, the election of the Communal Council, which was only, after all, the spontaneous recuperation by Paris of a natural and admitted right. To that very simple remedy, however, there were two obstacles: the Assembly wanted to eschew at any price a proclamation of the Republic, and, more than ever, it was part of M. Thiers's policy to build a new lease of power for himself upon a civil struggle. It need hardly be stated that, in consequence of the 18th March business, his personal prestige had undergone, even amongst his warmest supporters, no insignificant shock. There is no such wet blanket in politics as failure. His reckless attack on the National Guard, his lack of military foresight, no less than his hasty retreat from the capital, had rudely damaged

his moral position. The Monarchist majority, when it met at Versailles after the recess, was of course more bent than ever on its pet schemes, but at the same time somewhat shaken in its confidence towards its chosen leader. M. Thiers's ability was questioned; his number of years suggested; his loyalism began to be suspected by members fresh from their provincial conventicles. The great peace-or-war nuisance once cleared to their satisfaction, the Royalists flocked back to the Assembly perfectly resolved in taking at once a decisive step towards a restoration. Now M. Thiers had sense enough to perceive that anything in that line would be the complete justification of the Paris movement, put one half of the provinces at our back, and afford us an overwhelming force. He saw no less clearly that if he did not subscribe to the will of the majority, the majority would not be long in providing for a more docile tool.

A senile greed of power was the distinctive feature of the man. After a quarter of a century spent in almost hopeless opposition, he had grasped the Premiership at last. Was he to see it again wrung out of his reach, this time for ever? Rather shell ten cities, or slaughter a million men. A civil war was the only way out of the difficulty. Civil war be let loose. Against the childish impatience of the Assembly it would act as a toy and a diversion; to General Thumb personally, it would afford the life-long wished-for opportunity of mounting his military hobby. 'First of all we must overcome Republican Paris!' he implored from the fifteen delegates of the majority, in that momentous night-sitting of the 20th of March, in which they only spoke of putting in power a younger man—the Duke d'Aumale. As M. Thiers expostulated in his specious way, however, as he unfolded his plans to them, they admitted that they had perhaps as well, after all, let him indorse the odium of a civil war and draw the chestnuts out of the fire, whilst 'the Princes' would wait behind the scenes as a reserve.

Now, to conquer Paris, it was necessary first to prevent the provinces from joining in the movement, next to assemble a powerful army. Towards the latter aim the position and actual condition of Versailles were especially favourable. At all times a great place of arms, replete with barracks, arsenals, drilling-grounds, and military conveniences, located on a high plateau in a commanding position over Paris, and surrounded with the natural defence of dense woods, the city of Louis XIV had just been used as the head-quarters of the German besiegers, and, as such, hedged with formidable works, all directed against our walls. Whilst our communications with the provinces were cut, those of Versailles had been, in inverse ratio, extended and improved. It had been in fact, for the last six months, the strategical capital of the most perfect military organisation of the century. M. Thiers found, so to say, the German nest still warm from the last occupiers. With such a position as a standing ground, all the prefects and generals at his bidding, all the telegraph wires and railways in his hands, and a raw material of some six hundred thousand gendarmes, sailors, marines,

recruits or common soldiers at his command, M. Thiers had, indeed, no very difficult task before him when he wanted to set an army on foot.

With regard to preventing the provinces from joining the movement, the task was easier still. They knew nothing of the Paris feeling, and sang no longer to the tune. It was only necessary to maintain an efficient blockade around the roused capital, to prevent its voice from being overheard, and to misrepresent its revolution as a wanton outburst of folly and crime, greediness and evil passions. The members of the Comite Central and the Commune were unknown, or at the most rising, men; how easy to assume that they were professional knaves, thieves, and murderers, born foes of order and civilisation! Not a few Republican leaders in Paris, partly out of personal spite at being discarded by the population, partly out of lassitude or prudence, had chosen to keep aloof from an affray in which it was already clear that heads were at stake; how convenient to use their abstention as a conclusive argument! If only one of the acknowledged spokesmen of the conventional Republican party might be got to take the cudgels on behalf of the Assembly, and to denounce Paris to the indignation of the provinces, what a party stroke!

The man was found—nay, he courted the favour of performing the work of lie and calumny. As early as the 21st March, at the very first public sitting of the Assembly, that accomplished rhetor ascended the hastily got-up rostrum in the theatre of Versailles, and there, for a whole hour, he distilled the venom of his musical tongue upon the population which for so many years had returned him to parliament, and which had just granted him six months' credit of hunger, only to be led by him down the lowest depths of capitulation. 'Wretches,' 'miscreants,' 'scoundrels,' in pursuit of he knew not what rapacious and bloody ideal; 'cowards, who, after daring not to face the foreign foe, had reserved their blows for the fatherland.' Such were some of the compliments with which the hero of Ferrieres deigned to couple his introduction of our names to a gaping world. The 'satisfaction of low appetites,' that is what we had in view. 'Theft and pillage,' these were our aims. 'Murder and brutality,' such were our means. A lot of mutinous soldiers, themselves threatened with summary punishment, having on the 18th March shot two generals, Lecomte and Clement Thomas, we Parisians, two millions of us, who had no more to do with the accident than the Mikado or the Pope of Home, were of course the responsible authors of the deed. As for the members of the Assembly, they had only to look to their own safety, if they did not want to share in the same fate.

It is hard to realise what an evil impression such a desperate attack from the mouth of M. Jules Favre may have made at such a moment on a sensitive majority, only too ready to listen to such tales. But now, considered in the far-away past by the light of the surrounding events, what a sad heart-rending farce it looks! Pillagers, indeed—those National Guards who during nine weeks have fought without requiring anything but ammunition for themselves and bread for

their wives and children! Strange murderers, who, during a reign of two months, had to record one single assassination in Paris, and that at the hands of one of M. Thiers's Breton mobiles! Cowards, who have known no surrender, and died by the thousand for their cause! After all, those men whom honest M. Jules Favre denounced as the scum and the dregs of mankind, they have since undergone the most telling tests in the world—power and misfortune. For two whole months they were practically masters of Paris, of a budget of three millions sterling, of a reserve of ten millions in State securities, of all the treasures of the richest city in continental Europe—then thousands of them, conquered and prisoners, have undergone the most searching investigation at the hands of a merciless and unscrupulous foe; whilst thousands of others, driven into foreign lands, have had to face, year after year, all the hardships and suggestions of supreme distress. Workmen, professors, barristers, medical or literary men, employes, merchants, or artists—they have had to struggle for life on their own merits, with none of the unconscious but powerful supports afforded by habit, accumulated wealth, or familiar surroundings. Well, who are those in their number who would have cause for being ashamed of themselves, and who could not, on the contrary, cast on their accuser the smile of scorn and pity? Why, there is now but one simile for the unfortunate man in the whole range of history and literature, to wit, the 'Last Patriarch' in Little Dorrit, when Mr. Pranks, having first shot off the brimmed hat, proceeds to snip off the sacred locks that flowed on the venerable shoulders.

Like the Last Patriarch, M. Jules Favre has turned to be one of those sham contributors to the 'Great Social Exhibition,' who, with white beard and shorn upper lip, impose on an abused public 'outward accessories in lieu of internal character.' Hardly had three months elapsed after the day when he had fulminated against us his last philippic, and kindly requested from every civilised Government that it would decline to afford a refuge to such hardened malefactors as we were, when he had personally to appear at an assizes court, and there to plead guilty to crimes which, but for the prescription by time, would have secured him a berth for life at hard labour. He, a lawyer and a legislator, a Puritan, a judge wrapped up in his toga—he had lived for years with a married woman; he had committed forgery by declaring three adulterous children in succession to the public registrar as the legitimate offspring of himself and wife; he had secured for them, under a will, the money of a half-idiotic customer of his, who could not properly have left it to himself; he had repeated his forgeries at the vestry of the church which he used to attend punctually on every Sunday; he had, in short, for three or four consecutive lustres, made a mess of family, religion, and property. Alas, poor humanity! Let no one hurl the first stone at the sinner, by all means. But to think that the man, when he coiled around us his Ciceronian periods, actually writhed under a sense of his own indignity! What a

comment on his well-balanced quousque tandems, and what a dressing to our wounds!

For the present, however, the mask still partly adhered to his austere face. He had only such trifles to make amends for as the absurd bombast of his defiances to Bismarck, his pas un pouce with lachrymal sauce, his partiality for the strategical powers of Trochu, and his diplomatic achievement of an armistice signed on behalf of the whole of France whilst he was himself besieged in Paris—a piece of statesmanship for which, had Frenchmen at the time been in their senses, there would have been but one jurisdiction, to wit, a drum court-martial—especially considering that his harebrained announcement of it to the east provinces, which were not included in the articles, had for its immediate consequence the slaughtering of some thousands' extra men, and the total disaster of the Clinchant army; an infelicitous performance, to say the least, and one which would perhaps have enforced the advisability of silence and mourning on an average politician. But M. Favre was too much of a desperado to stop half way. The more consideration escaped his grasp, the more power looked necessary. He fastened to his ministerial portfolio like a drowning man to a plank; and he knew well, at the same time, that to the eyes of the Assembly his only unredeemable crime was to pass as a Republican. So that, finding a pretext at once for cancelling the notion, and exercising his biting propensities against a whole city, he could not resist the temptation. As far back as 1848 Ribeyrolles had classed him in the genus rattlesnake. He bore out the definition in 1871 by rushing at us with such sibilant alacrity that this time he broke up his fang, and he emptied—let us hope for ever—his poison-gland.

And now let the deputies and mayors of Paris make their weak attempt at pacification, and solicit from the Assembly the passing of a municipal bill. It is with vociferations and indignant cries that 'urgency' is refused for the proposition. Let one of them modestly request that the simple phrase 'Vive la Republique' should be added at the conclusion of a proclamation which only spoke of 'order.' Frantic noises will arise from nearly all the benches, and the suggestion will be trampled down with uproarious contempt. Let another hint that the Government is being led to 'launch the country into an unfortunate course of events,' he will be nearly knocked down from the rostrum.

Meanwhile, M. Thiers was not forfeiting that character for practicability which Prince Gortschakoff had given him in 1863. The Russian Chancellor had just seen him leave the roulette-table at Baden with a gain of five pounds, when he prophesied: 'M. Thiers is sure to return in power some day; he is so practical!' In fact, the time which the Parisians spent in negotiating with his delegates or electing their Commune in the most approved manner, he had put to good account: crushing in the bud the partial risings which had taken place at Lyons, Marseilles, St. Etienne, Le Creusot, Toulouse, Narbonne, or Limoges; calling to Versailles all the available forces which he could scrape out all over the

territory; above all, cantoning them into separate camps, and submitting them to the process of merciless drilling. Taught by the experience of the last few days that he could not rely on troops which would have had the least intercourse with the population of Paris, he sent them far away in the provinces and exchanged them for fresh regiments. On the front he put gendarmes, ex-policemen, and Breton volunteers. All of these he treated every morning, by way of example, to three or four military executions on the most trifling pretences. Officers and men were forbidden to leave their barracks, forbidden to read any newspapers whatever, as well as horrified with ghastly stories about what was going on. Paris, they were told, had fallen into the hands of a gang of ruffians, who ruled it by terror, pillaged the public and private buildings, let loose all the worst characters from the gaols, indulged in every excess, and, above all, had decreed death against any wearer of red trousers. To speak, or even to listen, to such miscreants was in itself a danger and a crime. Soldiers were cautioned that their only duty was to shoot at a National Guard whenever they saw his uniform. By dint of such an appropriate training, M. Thiers had by the end of March about thirty thousand men whom he could trust, with a fair prospect of increasing his strength within a few days to five or six times that total.

Versailles had by that time assumed the strangest appearance ever seen since the days of Coblenz. The rumour being current, not without foundation, that an unlimited secret-money budget has been opened for M. Thiers by the Commission des Quinze, the mere smell of it, added to the reactionist exodus from Paris, has been sufficient to fill all the hotels and lodgings in the town. Together with the deputies, for whom tables d'hote and dormitories are provided in the old palace, and their retinue of Royalist conspirers, swarms of financial sharks, camp-followers, army-contractors, professional spies, would-be agents, mercenary scribblers, generals without an army, officers with more lace than service, Parisian loafers, cosmopolitan parasites, male and female intriguers—all the dregs of the Bonapartist regime, tossed up with the dross of the national defeat, have congregated there. Every one with his pet scheme for overcoming Paris; every one boasting that he can do what his competitors will never achieve, wanting to unbosom his plan for the benefit of the Chief of the Executive, but, failing the latter's ear, satisfied with that of the passer-by. There is but one point upon which all agree, to wit, their hatred of Paris and the Republic. All the refinements of fashion are seen mingled with all the deformities of ignorance. Vice, driven away from the Boulevards, is triumphant round the Piece des Suisses. Diminutive newspapers are pouring in from every corner, stuffed with the most extraordinary legends of the Hotel de Ville—idle lies, false news, infamous inventions, such as only the imagination combined of feuilletonistes out of work and habitual sharpers could devise. Concentrated in the limited compass of the palace and the park, reactionary feeling ferments, fumes, and approaches explosion. A dense impenetrable fog of misconception

and hatred is day by day rising from that focus of corruption and prejudices—the epitome of an old world in dissolution. M. Thiers begins to feel that the time has come for hurrying on hostilities, lest he should be carried away by the storm, or he should have to face a Seine-et-Oise Vendee as well as a Paris Commune.

This is not an account of the civil war proper. It is not intended to describe the military operations which were, after two months of strenuous exertion, to culminate in the recapture of Paris against the National Guard. What it is part of the subject to mention, however, is the fact that the first shot was fired by order of M. Thiers, at the Courbevoie Bridge, on the 2d of April, and that from that day the design was obvious, on the side of the Versaillist leaders, of provoking the people of Paris to any deeds of revenge through their merciless mode of warfare. Thus, after that first outpost engagement, several National Guards who had been made prisoners were summarily shot within sight of the Parisian lines. It was on the following day that the Marquis de Galiffet, having surprised in the Isle de la Grande Jatte three federes who were quietly breakfasting on the grass, inaugurated his memorable exploits by having them shot on the public square of the village of Chatou. On the 4th again, General Vinoy submitted to the same process Duval and several other brave men who had been surrounded and overtaken on the Plateau de Chatillon. Again, our ambulances were purposely shelled, batteries of siege erected against Paris, and the same men who, two months before, were so loud in their protests about the German army firing on the Faubourg St. Germain or the Pantheon, did not shrink from covering with French shells the Champs Elysees and the Arc de Triomphe.

To describe the indignation of the Parisians in the face of such wanton and unwarrantable outrages would be superfluous. Everybody may well realise in what light a population barely out of the pangs and horrors of a siege could have looked at those who gave such orders. Still, for more than two months, be it stated to the everlasting honour of Paris, the National Guards bore such provocation without retaliating. Day after day they saw all the recognised laws of war violated in their own selves, their houses shelled, their brother-guards slaughtered in cold blood, their wounded massacred on the field, and as far as they were concerned they had the manliness of abstaining from such abominable practices. Whenever prisoners fell into our hands, their lives were respected, and for the most part they were let free in Paris. When at last, under the pressure of public indignation, it was indispensable to provide for some means of putting a bar to Versaillist atrocities, the decree on the hostages was enacted; an extreme measure, no doubt, a dreadful one, but one which the nature of the war waged against us enforced absolutely. It would have been impossible to resist any longer the outcry of our people.

The decree provided that any person suspected of intelligence with the enemy would be liable to arrest, committed for trial before a jury of twelve

National Guards, when found guilty declared a hostage, and, as such, liable to be shot if the Versaillists went on shooting prisoners of war. The practice of taking hostages in such cases, it should be remarked, is universally admitted by the law of nations. As a rule, hostages are chosen at will by the military commander, and kept at his discretion. The special feature of our decree was that, to assume the character of hostage it would be necessary, (1) to be personally charged of intelligence with the enemy; (2) to be tried by a jury of citizens drawn by lot; (3) to be found guilty.

The best evidence of the efficacy of the measure was that no sooner had it been adopted than the Versaillists suspended their assassinations of prisoners. On the other hand, the Commune deferred for a while putting its prisoners on their trial, so that none of them did in reality assume the official character of a hostage, and that there was every chance for them of escaping with their life after a short term of the mildest possible imprisonment, if only their party kept within the limits of civilised warfare.

The real nature of the decree could not be better illustrated than by the fact that, M. Thiers having in his hands our valued friend M. Blanqui, we offered, in the course of a protracted negotiation, the details of which are a matter of notoriety, to exchange the latter against any number of our prisoners, the Archbishop of Paris included. That the unhappy prelate's arrest should have been one of the first performed by the National Guard is only too easily accounted for when one bears in mind the nature of the struggle just going on, and the leading part which the clergy had just played in the declaration of war with Germany, and then in the conclusion of peace, as well as the election of a monarchical Assembly. There can be no doubt that, given the popular excitement in Paris and the provocation of the Versaillists, Archbishop Darbois was at first much safer in the Mazas gaol than he could have been in his palace. His arrest, on the other hand, led to the seizure of papers which would have made his condemnation by a Parisian jury, as a political offender, amount to a certainty. To those amongst us who looked at the question, not from a sensational or fanatical, but only from a political, point of view, it need hardly be stated that the whole affair seemed much to be lamented, and that we would rather have seen the Archbishop out of Paris than inside it. This was one of our chief reasons for proposing an exchange of prisoners; and the Archbishop himself entered so far in our views as to repeatedly urge on M. Thiers the advisability of adhering to the proposal—once through an autograph letter, which Canon Lagarde carried out to Versailles, taking his oath that he would return, by the way, but, Regulus unlike, totally forgetting to abide by his word.

M. Thiers, however, in spite of the most pressing insistence, declined to entertain the idea of an exchange. Such a tame arrangement was not at all what he wanted. It was one of the requirements of his policy that the population of Paris should be driven to excesses for the purpose of scaring the provinces, that



some of the hostages at least should be shot, some of the public buildings of the capital set on fire. It will be shown hereafter through what foul and Machiavellian means he attained those particular ends.

#### V. Lazarus Wide Awake.

The great mishap of the Commune, as a fighting power, was that it failed to lay its hand upon a Carnot, or upon a Bouchotte, or be it upon the small-change out of either of those 'organisers of victory.' Gallant officers we had, first-rate brigadiers and colonels, who knew how to hold a position and to die upon it—men that any army might have been proud of—but not a general able to manage an army corps, or a war secretary worth the name. No less than four or five of them we tried in succession, always making a point of granting them a fair trial first, and next a prison-cell. It was of no avail. Once, with Rossel, we thought that we had discovered the right man. He was undoubtedly a clever one, and a distinguished general officer he would have turned out some day in a regular and learned army, if M. Thiers had allowed him to live; but he never understood as much as the ABC of a revolutionary force. He acted like a talented pianist who would try his hand on a violin without any special knowledge of the instrument, played out of tune, perceived his mistake, and then, finding fault with everybody but himself, ended in open insubordination. On the whole, our forces kept steadily dwindling away, from losses in the field or desertions at home, whilst the Versaillist army kept no less steadily doubling its strength every fortnight. Having started with a total of perhaps one hundred thousand able-bodied National Guards under arms, we had no more than half that total at the end of one month, and less than forty thousand men by the middle of May. This was only to be expected, considering that every Parisian soldier was a volunteer (in most cases a married one), who had to enlist anew, so to say, every morning, and to see whether he thought fit or not to remain in our ranks. But it ought to have been the province of a war secretary to provide a remedy, and towards that end nothing was ever done.

From a military point of view ultimate defeat amounted consequently to a certainty. It was merely a question of time—one might say, a question of arithmetic. The catastrophe took place by the end of May, and a more crushing one it could hardly have been. However crushing, nevertheless, it came too late for the Monarchists, and was to them a barren victory; for when the Paris Government was annihilated its political task was fulfilled, and France was again a convert to the Republic.

Curiously enough, the first notion of the fact which was conveyed to the mind of M. Thiers came from rather an unexpected quarter, to wit, from rural common councils. By the beginning of April, Marseilles, Lyons, Toulouse, and the other big cities which, on the first news of the outrage of March 18th, had attempted an independent rising, were handcuffed, gagged, and blessed with a

state of siege. The weakness of the command over the Parisian army had been tested by the Versaillists, and it was clear to them that nothing beyond obstinate resistance was to be dreaded from the Communal host. For two or three weeks the Government of M. Thiers had presented its own version of facts to France, and the *Journal Official* of Versailles alone might tell to what compliments we were treated by the parliamentary leaders. It occurred to their minds that a few thousand addresses from the common councils, bespeaking unbounded confidence in the Assembly, could not but strengthen their moral position; and at once the whole array of prefects, sub-prefects, justices of the peace, police-officers, and gendarmes was set to work all over the country. How could the result have been considered doubtful? The common councils, elected years ago, dated from the Empire. They heard nothing but appalling tales of Red Paris. Hardly two months before, rural France had returned a Monarchical majority, and now it was canvassed at high pressure by the whole official apparatus. Was it possible to admit that it would not grant its unqualified support to the same majority, now confronted by a handful of insurgents?

Of course not. Addresses went in by shoals, every one ripe with overflowing effusion of loyalty to the lawful and worshipful Assembly. Still, there was in nine out of ten of those addresses something extraordinary and unforeseen—a trifle, a flaw. They expressed, at the same time as then-loyalty, their full confidence that the Assembly was bent on consolidating the Republic.

This was too shocking to be tolerated, and a remedy was at once provided for. The Assembly which had so fiercely declined, twenty days before, to grant a Municipal Organisation Bill, was now exceedingly eager to pass one in a hurry, and to decree that municipal elections should be held everywhere without delay. The measure, thought the statesmen of the majority, would at the same time dispose of the Parisian assumption that the Assembly was adverse to municipal freedom, and get the ground clear from those paltry common councils which had just betrayed Republican velleities. That the municipal elections should not be in keeping with the legislative elections, which had just put themselves in power, they could not for a moment have admitted, especially as the bugbear of the Parisian insurrection, they supposed, was sure to tell on rural minds.

Again they were mistaken. With the usual blindness of men in office, they forgot totally by what process they had succeeded in grasping it. Having been returned to the Assembly quite independently of their Monarchical principles, which they had taken good care not to proclaim, and simply as the candidates of peace at any price, they were so dazzled at finding themselves in a majority as to fancy that they had been elected as Monarchists as well, and that France—rural France at least—was at their back. A more egregious illusion—we Parisians knew well, and experience was to prove—could not have been entertained. In fact, the French peasant who had given them his vote did not care a bit either for them personally or for any monarchy. He had lent his ear in February to the

parish priest, because the parish priest preached a welcome sermon—the cessation of war, the return of a soldier son to his home, the resumption of tillage and business. But now, in April, the case was wholly different. Peace was signed, matters were squared, and it began even to be hinted that this very peace, so long wished for at village firesides, was a disastrous one, the enormous burden of which would of course fall on the peasant. This caused him to reflect a good deal on the instability of empires or realms, the cost of civil lists, the fallacy of candidates, and the danger of personal power.

To fully realise of what a paramount importance in French politics is the rural factor, it should be remembered that France, a country ruled by universal suffrage, numbers 19,000,000 inhabitants engaged in agricultural pursuits, as against 9,000,000 engaged in manufactures or industry, 3,500,000 in trades, 1,500,000 in liberal professions, and 2,500,000 living on 'independent means.' Now, of the 19,000,000 (or 53 per cent of the population) engaged in agricultural pursuits, nearly 11,000,000 cultivate their own property, nearly 6,000,000 are farmers, and only 2,000,000 odd are labourers. This shows at a glance what a conservative spirit must at bottom be possessed by the agricultural body. Indeed, 'Conservation with a vengeance' is the true motto, the one ruling idea, of the French rustic, whose life and soul may be said to be sunk in his own bit of land. He knows, too, in a kind of dim legendary way, that for that property he is indebted to the Great Revolution, either directly—through the purchase by his grandfather of some cut of biens nationaux—or indirectly, through the working of the laws on inheritance, which never cease dividing the land ad infinitum. That land, he has been told, belonged before to the old nobility and to the clergy, who cannot (he feels sure) have given up the hope of securing it again. So deep a sense of the fact he retains, that the notion may be said to have been for the last ninety years the axis of his policy. Only to lay his hand on that bit of soil he gave his support to the Convention; to keep it, he gave his support to the Directoire, which confirmed his tenure, and to Bonaparte, who was to his eyes the armed soldier of the new order of things against allied Europe. The fifteen years of the Restoration he spent in agonies of terror lest his property titles should turn out to be disputed. The Revolution of 1830 he greeted as a fresh insurance against all contestation; and so blind a love he bore to his ever-caressed and all-absorbing furrow that he was not even thankful to the Revolution of 1848, which brought him the right to vote, but no land. Finally, to cast him on the side of Louis Bonaparte in 1851, it was sufficient for the conspirers of December to allege that the Republicans were *partageux*, who wanted his land to themselves. In 1871, again, M. Thiers and his friends had calculated that the same scare might lead to a similar effect for their own benefit, and they felt confident that they had only to play freely with the name of Commune. But this time the tables were turned against them.

The report of our guns had awakened at last from its deadly torpor the Republican party in the provinces. There was no official word or telegram from Versailles—no printed or spoken fallacy—which could hide the fact that Paris stood the champion of Republic and the Assembly the champion of Monarchy. At once the counterpart of what had taken place two months before was beheld. The Monarchists, feeling convinced that the dread of the spectre rouge would be more than sufficient to retain the rural voters on their side, awaited quietly the tide of reaction which was sure to follow the fall of Paris and to lead their craft into harbour. The Republicans, perceiving clearly that they were lost past reprieve unless they attempted a supreme effort, hastened to put to good account the unexpected delay which our resistance afforded them. It was like the rising of a cataleptic. One by one all the towns were seen bestirring themselves. From the Rhone and the Bouches du Rhone, the Haute Garonne and the Gironde, the Nord and the Seine Inferieure, the emotion spread gradually to the Drome, Var, Vaucluse, Haute Loire, Nièvre, Herault, Ariège, Pyrenees Orientales. Within a few days there was hardly a department in which the Republicans were not wide awake to the importance of the crisis. They set to work, actively canvassing the country, showing the peasant where his interest lay, what a monarchy of Right Divine, as the majority of the Assembly dreamed of restoring, was sure to bring back—old abuses, wars without an end, increase of taxes, clerical tyranny, and—who knows?—perhaps a remodelling of the tenure of land; certainly early resumption by the clergy of a considerable portion of the territory. The rustic listened, and, according to his wont, followed the bent of his own interest. Marshal Bugeaud said in 1848: 'Cavaignac c'est la Republique, Louis Bonaparte c'est l'inconnu: je vote pour l'inconnu.' Rural France said now: 'The Republic is the status quo; a Restoration would be the unknown: I give my suffrage to the status quo.' Everywhere the municipal elections, held by the end of April, at the height of the civil strife, were a triumph for the Republic.

As an immediate consequence, a sudden impetus was given to the movement by that success, beyond all expectations. Republican leagues were established under the thin pretence of conciliation; a few bold spirits suggested the advisability of a general federation of all the municipalities just elected to oppose the schemes of the Assembly. Short of the resort to brute force, which was not in keeping with the temper of the provinces, France stood now morally on the side of Paris. The Versaillesist leaders felt it keenly. They hastened to take efficient measures to prevent the proposed congress of the municipalities, which would have struck the death-blow to their political fabric; but it was beyond their power to stop the continuous stream of deputations which rolled towards Paris and Versailles. To us the delegates from the provinces never failed to say: 'Hold on, you champions of the Republic; hold on as long as possible, and victory is with us!' To M. Thiers they said: 'You can see France wants the Republic. What

are we to tell our people when we return home?' when M. Thiers, as a matter of course, never failed to answer: 'Tell them I do want to uphold the Republic, which is only endangered by the miscreants in Paris.' The next minute he was laughing the matter out with the Commission des Quinze, telling them how he had given audience to those good country folks, and sent them back with a pocket full of promises. What was, at bottom, however, his precise and real meaning just then? Was he struck with the obvious strength of the Republican party, and had he made up his mind already to be false to his Monarchical backers? Who could pronounce? So shrewd a politician as M. Edouard Herve, his familiar disciple as well as the sworn friend of the Orleans Princes, firmly believed up to 1873 that M. Thiers was bent on a restoration, but wanted to abide his time. Most probably, however, the positive date of his inward (though always provisional) conversion to the Republic should be fixed towards the first days of May.

About the same time as the municipal elections, an event of incalculable importance, as bearing on the respective strength of French parties, had taken place in the revival of Bonapartism. Of all men in the world, Frenchmen had supposed it was dead and hurried in the grave of Sedan. It was not dead, however, but dormant in the hearts of the Imperial armies as they were kept captive in Germany. French papers, as a rule, had been scantily allowed to the prisoners in their camps or residences during the second part of the war. They mostly read *La Situation*, edited in London by M. Rouher, and which systematically represented the Republican party as daily insulting their misfortune. With mingled feelings of humiliation and revenge they went back to France, convinced that they were held responsible for the shortcomings of their leaders, enraged at the idea that they were individually looked upon as paltry capitulars. Had their return taken place under ordinary circumstances, a day spent in the middle of their friends and families would have been enough to dispel such cruel misconceptions. But this was not the case. In consequence of successive contracts passed between the Government of M. Thiers and the German Chancellor, they were marched back to France by the thousand, and incorporated without delay in the Versailles army. From the deleterious idleness of a foreign prison to the turmoil of civil war there was for them no transition. Some misgivings being entertained at head-quarters lest a number of them should be tempted into joining the insurrection, good care was taken to stir their natural hatred of Paris. They were told that they came back as the 'supreme reserve force of civilisation against barbarity,' the 'saviours of society,' and the 'restorers of order.' They were petted by the ladies, lionised into heroes, turned into arbiters of the situation. A marshal of the Empire, MacMahon, was their commander-in-chief. The delightful duty of shooting at Republicans was set before them. How could even stronger heads have borne safely the burden of such a concourse of circumstances?

As if by the stroke of a magic wand, Bonapartism sprang out of its lurking hole. All those ex-ministers and ex-deputies, excouncillors of state, ex-prefects and sub-prefects, ex-officials of all kinds, who either were disconsolate over their forfeited salaries, or had been imprudently kept in office, lifted their humbled heads and began to speak aloud. Modesty was never the special feature of the party, but this, indeed, was a fit occasion for putting on a brazen face. It was not Napoleon III., but France, they did not shrink from asserting, who had wanted a war with Germany. If he had been beaten, it was all the fault of the Republicans, who had prevented him from arming the nation; if a disastrous peace had been signed, it was only because the great diplomatists of the Empire (e.g. M. de Gramont) had not been allowed to make terms with Bismarck. In short, they boldly entered the path which was to culminate within two years in the exploits of M. de Fourtou, and, strong as they undoubtedly were, they began to make twice as much noise as they were strong.

In a moral sense, the revival of Bonapartism was an additional blow to France, that could not have failed to be an active propaganda which appealed to the lowest impulses of human nature, and evoked for its ideal of public happiness those very images of effeminate life, barefaced speculation, artificial luxury, and systematic corruption that were at the core of the national bankruptcy. From a party point of view, however, it must be admitted that the introduction of the new factor proved an incalculable gain to the Republicans, through the powerful counterpoise which it supplied to the Royalist conspiracy. It was the sudden apparition between the two contending forces of the fabulist's troisième larron—Caesarism—threatening to carry the prize away. Henceforth the coalition of interests which had been at the elections of February the successful standing-ground of Orleanism was broken to pieces. The Monarchical majority in Parliament remained with its scanty retinue of old women and political bishops, confronted on one side with the still mighty relique of the Empire, on the other with a democracy which was asserting more and more distinctly its Republican preferences.

M. Thiers, it may be assumed, was not the last in duly weighing the logical consequences of the event. Better than any man in France, he was in a situation to rightly appreciate the respective strength of parties. Everybody could see now that the Orleanist faction consisted of a dozen drawing-rooms, and the Legitimist party of a hundred pigeon-houses. The peasantry did not believe in the Red Scare, and were more afraid of Clericalism than of the Commune, however misrepresented. To turn Bonapartist was out of the question: no man in his senses has ever been known to do so within the last nine years. Thus the notion crept naturally into the old man's brain, as Republican deputations marched past, day after day, in his presence, that he had clearly better, if he valued power (which he certainly did), cast his lot avec le nombre, according to his own expression, and become the President for life, prime minister, war

secretary, chancellor of the exchequer, parliamentary leader, and universal factotum of a Republic—a Republic of his own make, 'Conservative and without Republicans.' Impertinent as the definition was, he had now sufficient experience of the Republicans around him to feel sure that they would swallow it for the sake of the label. It was reserved for a circumstance almost farcical in its nature to ripen the temptation into a settled resolve.

The Commission des Quinze, that was adjunct to M. Thiers as a kind of privy council, was a body preeminently fidgety. According to the time-honoured custom of vestry mediocrities turned into legislators, its members entertained the highest idea of their own statesmanship, and insisted upon taking in earnest their consultative function. Their notion of the responsibilities placed upon their shoulders, as well as their perpetual intrusion on the privacy of the chief of the Executive, had soon become offensive to their ward, who was too old to enjoy a walk in leading-strings. Above all, to a man of M. Thiers' turn of mind, it would have been impossible not to make merry over the busy incapacity of those would-be kingmakers, and, having done so, not to let it transpire. Both forces were not long in coming into collision. The Quinze complained of being slighted; they affected to feel uneasy at the outburst of Bonapartism, and were of opinion, in their high wisdom, that with 170,000 picked men, *la plus belle armée que la France ait jamais eue*, the Executive ought already to have recaptured Paris; finally, they were much disgusted (not without cause, the respectable old folks) at what they called 'his continuous coquetting' with Republican delegates from the provinces. 'Why, they come to warn me that they will rise in arms and join the Commune, unless I promise to maintain the Republic!' would expostulate the old man. 'How could I do otherwise? *Cela n'engage que moi.*' But the Fifteen would not be cheered up.

One fine morning M. Thiers heard of a lobby conspiracy, headed by the Duke Decazes, which aimed at putting General Changarnier in power. At once he tried to parry the blow by a timely offer of a Great Cross of the Legion of Honour to the veteran warrior. The latter declined the offer. This seemed to imply that he felt confident of winning the higher prize, and frightened M. Thiers not a little. With characteristic promptitude, he determined rather to throw the Assembly overboard than to be discarded; and he took his first opportunity of telling a deputation that for the Assembly 'ever to assume a constituent character was out of the question.'

Such an open defiance of the first article of faith of the Assembly—its own omnipotence—could not have passed unnoticed. Without loss of time, the Changarnierists introduced an 'interpellation,' and one of them, Mortimer Ternaux by name, challenged an explanation of the phrase. This took place on the 11th of May. The date is worth quoting, as it marks the precise moment of the secession of M. Thiers from the Right. Instead of answering the question, he resorted to his wonted humbug of an overworked old man; spoke of his

multifarious duties and failing strength; complained that in the middle of the most arduous situation he had to meet tracasseries. 'There are in this House,' he exclaimed, in conclusion, 'imprudent members, men who are in too great a hurry. I ask from them that they may credit me with eight days more. Then danger will be over, and the task will be on a level with their courage and ability.' Frantic applause from the Left and violent protests from the Right laid full stress on the insolence; but the majority bowed to it, and, by 490 against 9, a vote of confidence was passed.

Thus, after two months of civil war, M. Thiers had actually arrived at the point of upholding in the face of the majority, if not directly, at least implicitly, the very doctrine of the non-constituent character of the Assembly that we were asserting by force of arms. Supposing that the majority would not have accepted the bitter pill, what else could he have done but appeal to the country or resign? Of course, when he spoke in that strain, it was only because he had ascertained that the country was not at the back of the Monarchists. But if the country's opinion had thus apparently shifted in a few weeks, and if M. Thiers himself deemed it indispensable to adopt the country's opinion, who was to be credited with the miracle, if not Paris and its passionate effort?

Such a declaration as the Executive had been gradually led to make to a provincial deputation, and which he managed to have indorsed, however reluctantly, with a vote of confidence, would have been more than sufficient, if made at the right time, to prevent the bloody strife which was drawing to its appalling conclusion. But how could M. Thiers have delivered it, when he had not yet been converted by the national outcry? Even now, so simple an agreement as the simultaneous dissolution of the Assembly and the Commune, as suggested by *Le Temps* newspaper, would have prevented the unspeakable horrors which the world was about to witness. But who might have succeeded, on the 11th of May, in holding back the dogs of war? Paris was launched beyond hope, to stop only in the grim embrace of Death. The Assembly was ready to follow literally M. Thiers' advice, and to dismiss him after the fall of Paris, if he ventured again to oppose its will. Personally, he saw that a restoration had become impossible; he knew that the Monarchical majority was a sham; he anticipated that the conqueror of Paris would be dictator for life if only he declared himself Republican, and he quietly prepared to play one faction against another for the purpose of reigning supreme.

First of all, however, it was desirable to drown the Commune, not merely in blood, but, if possible, in shame.

## VI. Eumenides Abroad.

M. Barral De Montant, a military-looking man, age about thirty, is in the witness-box. The scene is at Versailles, in the old riding-school of the Petites



Ecuries, transformed for the occasion into a praetorium. A court-martial is sitting there, made up of a colonel, a major, two captains, two lieutenants, and a non-commissioned officer, all fresh from Sedan or Metz, the German exile, and the revanche over Paris. A dozen and a half ex-members of the Commune are in the dock. Witness examined: 'I have been an officer in the navy. I went to Paris about the 8th of April last, and entered the service of the Commune. On account of my military attainments I obtained immediate employment, and was soon raised to the rank of chief of the seventh legion in the National Guard. In that capacity I had frequent intercourse with the prisoner Urbain, the member of the Commune in charge of the seventh arrondissement.' Cross-examined by counsel for the defence: 'Did you not frequently urge on the prisoner Urbain the advisability of obtaining for himself a military command?' 'I did, in the hope of thus being able better to serve the Assembly.' 'Did you not urge upon him the advisability of establishing a system of explosives in the sewers of Paris?' 'I did. I had been told that there was some talk in the councils of the Commune of establishing a system of the kind, and I thought I had better have the thing in hand, so as to be the more able to paralyse it.' 'Was not your system of explosives to be connected through electric wires, and to be put in action through a chain of keys, a kind of piano?' 'Just so.' 'But it never was established?' 'Never.' 'Was it not on your advice that the prisoner requested from the Commune, in the sitting of May 17th, that some of the hostages should be shot?' 'It was on a Sunday. The men of the seventh arrondissement had just returned from the front, leaving seventy-two dead and many wounded on the field. A party was sent, with medical help, to pick up the wounded. He returned with the news that the party had been greeted with a perfect shower of bullets, and that a woman from the ambulance had been killed. M. Urbain reported the facts to the Commune, and suggested the advisability of reprisals.' 'Now, sir, upon your oath, when you were acting in the capacity of chief of the seventh legion, and giving such advice to the prisoner Urbain, were you not an agent in the pay of M. Thiers.' 'I HAD POLITICAL CONNECTIONS WITH M. THIERS.'

This example, taken out of a hundred of the same kind, may help in realising what sort of warfare was waged against the Commune by the Government of Versailles. It was not enough to shell Paris, to shoot prisoners of war, to massacre physicians and sick nurses on duty, and thus gradually to drive to despair and madness a population which was undergoing a siege for the second time within nine months. It was indispensable that the foul accusations heaped up against Paris should be borne out by a few facts at least, and towards that end all means were deemed legitimate. The Commune, indeed, was not easily amenable to what was expected from it. In vain did the Versaillists accumulate provocations on outrages, and atrocities on insults: no reprisals were resorted to. Hardly a few stones, the Imperial Column, the house of Thiers, the Louis XVI. chapel, had been given up to the roaring lion. Not a single

execution had taken place in Paris for two months. What is more, one of the first deeds of the National Guard after the 18th March had been to burn the guillotine on the Place Voltaire, a childish manifestation perhaps, but none the less a significant one, under the circumstances. Was it not saying to the world, 'We are no men of blood, and we do not want to reign by terror'? Not a hair had been touched on the head of the hostages, or rather there were no hostages as yet in the legal sense, as the jury provided under the decree of the Commune had never been assembled; and on the 17th of May, when Urbain (on the suggestion of the Versaillist spy attached to his person) proposed that an execution of Versaillist prisoners should take place, to prevent the return of such outrages as he had just reported, the Commune, through a formal vote, rejected the idea, ordering simply that its former decree should be put in practice, and that a jury should be convened to select such prisoners as would assume the character of hostages. The first drawing of the jury took place publicly on the following day, and the jury sat for the first and only time on the 17th May, when three prisoners were tried before it and acquitted. It follows that two days later, when the Versaillists entered Paris, although there were in the Communal gaols 1648 prisoners—namely, 1428 gendarmes or soldiers, prisoners of war made on or after the 18th of March; and 220 civilians, mostly priests, who mixed in politics under cover of their ministry, and spies from Versailles—there was not one single 'hostage,' according to the Communist legal definition. With such spies Paris bristled literally. If the French army had not made sufficient use of the Intelligence Department pending the German war, it certainly made up for the deficiency in the course of the civil strife. No less than twenty million francs secret-service money, according to trustworthy data, passed within those two months through the fingers of M. Thiers. One may obtain a good sprinkling of detective help at that price, the more so as the chief item of expense really accounted for seems to have been beer-money. The amount of Conservative 'bocks' that were drunk on the Boulevards of the period must have been something dreadful. One Troncin-Dumersan was the chief secretary and superintendent of the service under M. Thiers. He experienced afterwards the misfortune of being placed in the dock, by no means as a political offender, and sentenced to a number of years' imprisonment for obtaining current coin under false pretences. Besides unbounded powers for appropriating public or private moneys, that Versaillist Jugurtha appears to have possessed a special knack of enlisting all the rogues that were just then playing the shuttlecock between Paris and Versailles, an army by itself; but he was never able to discover a Calpurnius in the ranks of the Commune. It was not from want of strenuous attempts. Above all, the military commanders were the special subjects of his soundings. One Aronssohn, his envoy, was arrested under the name of Gutmacher, as he tried to bribe one of our war secretaries into treason, and subsequently succeeded in escaping. Another spy, of the name of Veysset, was

less fortunate. He had found means of approaching Dombrowski, who commanded on our west front, and offering him a safe-conduct to the frontier, with sixty thousand pounds, if he agreed to surrender one of the gates. Dombrowski pretended to accept the offer, but immediately sent advice of it to the Commune. He was instructed to give an appointment to the spy, who was carried off with the earnest money he brought on account, put in safe custody, and finally shot. Admiral Saisset was mixed up in the business, and very narrowly escaped experiencing the same fate.

All similar attempts aimed at the leaders of the movement failed ignominiously. But the disease was none the less at the root of the tree, and it was chiefly instrumental in procuring an entrance in our walls for the Versaillists, by spreading at the proper time false news and discouragement amongst the National Guards. One of the successful devices of the spies, for instance, was to approach individually our artillerymen, who made great havoc among the troops, and to enlist them for desertion at a high premium, through the very simple argument that they had much better stay at home and draw double pay. In some cases the spies succeeded in getting guns in important positions spiked. Above all, they kept their employers most accurately informed of the weakness or occasional want of attention of some outpost, an occurrence almost unavoidable with volunteer forces; and to a surprise of the kind, on the afternoon of Sunday, the 21st May, was due the entrance of the Versaillists into Paris.

This was still fairplay, under the common standard of war morality. But the general work of the secret agents can hardly be considered in the same light. Whenever they did not openly play the agent provocateur, as in the case of Barral de Montaut, or they found it unadvisable to advocate desertion, they acted as a latent dissolving force on the morals of the soldiers of the Commune, appealed to low impulses, bestirred evil passions, and helped to incense the thirst for revenge which the sudden prospect of a defeat beyond hope and without mercy, succeeding a period of wild hopes and unbounded confidence, was sure to break loose. This is an element which could not be overlooked in the analysis of the last convulsions of Paris, as it is found unmistakably at the bottom of everything which was wanton and useless in the supreme struggle; and when it is added that upon the invasion of the Versaillists all masks were at once taken off, and the spies turned out to be the regular scouts of the army, the boon companion of the day before turned out a denouncer, the commanding officer in some cases a traitor, the friendly house a deadly trap—the surprising fact is, not that some of the champions of despair indulged in a few deeds of revenge, but rather that such deeds of revenge were not more numerous and more terrific. The story is a simple one, and can be told in a few lines.

Seventeen hours after having got hold of the gate of St. Cloud, the Versaillists had lined the walls of Paris, inside the west and north fronts, with

an army of 130,000 men, the pick and flower of the trained strength of France. To face such a force, hardly 25,000 odd defenders of the Commune stood behind four or five hundred embryos of barricades. Here, again, improvidence and treachery played a foremost part. Whilst a logical scheme of defence, tying together a system of barricades into a kind of inward stronghold, and supported with the artillery of such positions as the heights of Montmartre, the Pantheon, and Belleville, might have made it possible to resist for days, and to inflict such heavy losses on the enemy as to drive it to retreat, our War Secretary had the fatal idea of breaking loose all ties of discipline, appealing solely to individual devotion, and calling upon each man to fight in his own district. 'Assez d'états-majors galonnes; place aux combattants auz bras nus!' wrote Delescluse, in the most disastrous proclamation which might have been posted on the walls under the circumstances. Three days later he was to die the death of a soldier, and to crown with the last sacrifice a life of unflinching devotion to the cause of democratic advance; but the unreserved respect due to his pure memory could not bar the fact that his proclamation was the deathwarrant of the Commune. His reason for issuing it, as given from his own lips to a young colleague who ventured to remonstrate with him on the subject, was, 'I have only put the official stamp on what grows unavoidable in a street battle—contempt of authority.' The force of the argument was more apparent than positive, however, and up to the last hour what the Communal army wanted, what it craved for and was unable to obtain, was a logical system of defence and a commander. Left to their own devices as they were, and scattered in small knots over the huge city, its remains withstood for six whole days, up to complete extermination, the formidable pressure of that mass of one hundred and thirty thousand men. Thus what might have proved a regular battle turned out a series of partial disasters. In nearly every case the tactics of the Versaillists were the same. They advanced under cover of a row of houses, through which their sappers had opened communication, or operated turning moves round the barricades previously beaten with artillery; then, opening a plunging fire from high windows in the back of their opponents, they succeeded in overcoming the last resistances with comparatively little losses on their side. These tactics, by the way, first led the defenders of the Commune to the burning of houses, especially in the Faubourg St. Honore and on the left bank of the river in the Kue de Lille. When it was found out by the National Guards that the defence of capital positions was not compatible with the conservation of the adjoining houses, as a matter of course orders were given to set them on fire.

It has been freely alleged since, that the sight of those fires was the chief cause which drove the Versaillists out of their senses and led them to the wholesale massacre and fiendish achievements which will for ever stamp the 'Semaine Sanglante,' even by the side of the St. Bartholomew and the 2d of December, as the most shameful date in the French annals. But the assertion

does not hold water, and cannot bear the lightest investigation. As a matter of fact, the shooting of prisoners by the army was resumed on Tuesday, the 23d of May, at one o'clock, immediately after the capture of Montmartre, at a time when not one single building in Paris had been set on fire. It was not ascribable to individual passion, but to precise orders from the men in command; for the victims were formally selected, made to wait for one hour, and marched off before being despatched. The holocaust was supposed to be a propitiatory sacrifice to the manes of Clement Thomas and Lecomte, and took place in the Rue des Rosiers. There can be no doubt that 'no quarter' was henceforth the password given to the army, as it had been in former times by that Oliver de Clisson who earned for himself the nickname of the Butcher. True it is, that what the Versaillists did with some method on the 23d they did at random on the following days. At first they merely shot prisoners of war, which was bad enough; they came to slaughter indiscriminately men, women, and children, friends and foes, Communalists and others. Ho sooner was a street taken than all the houses in it were searched. Denunciations and private feuds were at work. Persons were murdered for the most futile causes—because they kept a breech-loader, or they had the kepi of a National Guard in their wardrobe, or they sported a beard, or they were beardless, or they had a pair of boots on which a private set his eye, or a debtor of theirs chose to settle his account in that convenient fashion.

It is no part of this paper to retrace the glowing horror of those nights and days, when, under the continuous bursting of shells, the whizz of rifle-shots, the rounds of mitrailleuses, the whirlwind of smoke, by the glare of twenty public buildings and eight hundred houses in a blaze, on both sides of a river literally red with human blood, Frenchmen were hunting Frenchmen to death. Of the fires, some were a strategical measure, others were a political precaution against the seizure of papers which it was found impossible to destroy otherwise; some had been lighted by the fall of a shell on combustible materials; some were the result of the destructive mania which seizes armed crowds on the brink of death. For months Paris had been deluded with protests of 'no surrender,' and oaths that 'the city would bury itself under its ashes.' There were men in earnest who thought that their honour was at stake in abiding by the word. As for the so-called 'hostages,' shot in separate batches on the 24th and 26th May, to the number of sixty-three, not only their execution was not the outcome of any orders from the Commune, but it took place in downright defiance of our decrees. At that date the Commune held no more sittings. Its members were scattered over the various parts of the town. None of them had any share in the deed. Some of them personally opposed it to the utmost of their power, and to the peril of their own lives, in the face of the infuriated crowd which avenged on the ill-fated men the atrocities for which the Versaillists were responsible. These men were no hostages. They had never been declared as such

by a jury of their fellow-citizens, as provided by the special law of the Commune. They were merely persons in custody, charged with being in the active service of the enemy. Their execution was emphatically an irregular and fortuitous measure of reprisals, the individual work of an irresponsible, minority, maddened with the smell of powder, harassed with four days of carnage, and doomed to certain death in its last trenches. That there were Versaillist wire-pullers at its back amounts to a certainty, whilst most of its elements had personal wrongs to retaliate, and had just heard of the shooting by the army of a son, of a father, in some cases of a mother or a sister. When they caused some of the foremost prisoners of the Commune to bear the weight of their irrepressible fury, they overlooked the fact that they had no right over the lives of non-combatants; above all, they did not remember that the tumultuous shooting of threescore priests, gendarmes, spies, and stock-jobbers could only serve the purpose of the Versaillists, without conferring any practical advantage on the cause of Paris. In that sense, it was again 'more than a crime—a fatal mistake.' But for it, no revolution in history would have stood so pure from blood and violence as ours. It should be noted here, that some Versaillist newspapers recorded on the 23d as an accomplished event the tragedy which only took place on the 24th. The only possible inference is that they were commissioned to suggest what M. Thiers had clearly shown to be his most earnest desire, by declining to grant the exchange of M. Blanqui for any number of prisoners. *Hic fecit cui prodest* is generally found to be a most applicable axiom in such cases.

Supposing, however, that those sixty-three corpses are to be put down to the debtor account of bona-fide defenders of the Commune, what a balance when one turns to the account-sheet of the Versaillists! Here assassination is recorded not by the dozen or the score, but by the thousand. Here the shooting of the prisoners is not the outcome of a passing fit of frenzy, but the execution of a preconceived system pursued with unflinching barbarity, over a space of ten days, by a disciplined army. Priests are not shot this time, and are satisfied with playing the part of purveyors of human meat in every district; but women are bayoneted when they happen to be poorly dressed or to carry a milk-can, under pretence that they are 'petroleuses,' and when they are pregnant under pretence that they hawk ammunition under their petticoats; old men are despatched because they must have seen the days of '48, and children that they may not witness another Commune. A member of the National Assembly, Milliere, who not only did not take any part in the rising, but was opposed to it, is shot by order of a staff-officer (who afterwards boasted of the exploit and was promoted for it), in the presence of another member of the Assembly, M. de Quinsonas, who not only does not deny the soft impeachment, but coolly relates the incident to a Select Committee. A mayor and a philanthropist, Dr. Tony-Moilin, is arrested in his study, and executed after twenty-four hours' reprieve, during which he is allowed to marry. A physician on duty at the St. Sulpice ambulance, Dr. Faneau,

is murdered with all the wounded under his care. Two, and in some cases three, persons unknown are shot in succession, as being such or such a member of the Commune, who, however, is now surviving. Others, like Varlin (arrested after the battle, on the denunciation of a priest), are given up to the tender mercies of a mob in broadcloth, and literally torn to death in the streets. The well-known economist, M. Cernuschi, an energetic opponent of the Commune, is doomed to death by General Cissey, simply as having subscribed four thousand pounds against the Imperial plebiscite of '70. Then, for days, there are in every corner of the city slaughter-houses in which human blood is flooding the kennels. The battle has long ago breathed its last smoke, when wholesale murder is still going on in the Pere Lachaise cemetery, in the Park of La Muette, at the Luxembourg Palace, at the Military School, at La Roquette gaol, at the Lycee Bonaparte, at the north and west termini, in the Parc Monceaux, in the Jardin des Plantes, at Bicetre, in the forts, in the Lobau and Dupleix barracks. At one single place over 1800 prisoners are massacred in one night. At another, the men are caused to dig up the trenches over which they are to be shot. In the Bois de Boulogne, mitrailleuses are put to work, as the executioners are tired with firing. Blood everywhere, heaps of corpses in every street, haggard, anonymous, barefooted, with pockets upturned. Who could tell their names—or even their number? The consistent critic of the misdeeds of the Commune, and special admirer of the good deeds of Versailles, M. Maxime du Camp, has made an attempt towards a computation quite lately, by summing up the official entries at the Paris cemeteries between certain dates. He then comes to a grand total of 6667 Parisian carcasses, which is certainly ghastly enough, and he is so kind as to concede that *c'est beaucoup, c'est beaucoup trop*. But what about the dead bodies which, having been hidden where they had fallen, were never unburied? What about the train-loads which were sent out to Mery-sur-Oise? What about the mountains of human remains which were sprinkled with mineral oil and burned out on the bastions of Paris? The current estimate of the army, immediately after the event, was that 25,000 persons at the very least had been shot. Many witnesses put it at over 35,000. MacMahon admitted 17,000 in the parliamentary inquiry. The real figure is probably between the two extremes. When the butchers stopped, it was merely from fear of some infectious disease that might arise out of such a focus of putrefaction, and because it was so difficult to dispose of the bodies, as murderers know well. At the complementary elections of July, two months later, 100,000 Parisian voters were found wanting. Putting aside about 50,000 prisoners that had been taken in custody to Versailles, and were cramming the forts, the isles, the pontoons on the roads of the Atlantic, awaiting a mock trial at the hands of their foes; taking into account 10,000 odd persons who succeeded in escaping to foreign lands, and it may be as many who passed unnoticed,—a margin remains of 30,000 former beings, that tells its own tale, which does not prevent many people from confidently believing

that the members of the Commune were mostly cannibals, and the Versaillists models of self-respect.

To consider such horrible data in the abstract, simply as evidence of the fierceness of the forces in conflict, is more than any one could do who has been a party thereof. Indeed, it is a question whether such extraordinary excesses were really the outcome of uncontrollable passions. The impression which the scene left on the mind was rather one of cool and deliberate progress towards a given aim. There can be little doubt that the Bonapartists, who were dominant in the army, earnestly believed that, by killing as many Parisians as possible, they were killing the Republic. The result was hardly what they had anticipated. They overdid it. To the mind of such outsiders as were simply and exclusively 'men of order,' the experiment showed that an irresponsible body like the Assembly was most probably the only government that might have crushed such a formidable insurrection, and the feeling went rather to the benefit of a Republican form than the other way. Then the Versaillists fell into the same mistake as the Commune, and having once taken hold of Paris, thought that they disposed of France; whilst the Republican party in the provinces, being almost untouched, pulled the more vigorously against the tide of reaction, as it felt keenly the depth and imminence of danger. In Paris itself the weight of military rule was felt too heavily not to provoke an immediate though latent undercurrent of protest. On the whole, the respite afforded to France by the rising of the 18th March had been put to such good account, and had so well allowed her to consider all sides of the question before taking a decisive step, that the man best placed to feel her pulse, M. Thiers, was led to make in the Assembly, on the 9th of June, the following significant confession. This was less than two weeks after the definitive suppression of the Commune:

"The time has come for speaking the truth, gentlemen, the whole truth. I have had to enter with the country into serious promises. During the terrible struggle which has just come to a conclusion, nearly every city has sent delegates to Versailles. Do you know, gentlemen, what those delegates said to me? They said: "We cannot help being convinced that the Assembly wants to do away with the Republic." As for me, I have never ceased to protest that this was a mistake; that the Assembly most assuredly entertained Monarchical preferences, but knew how to overcome its feelings for the sake of the public peace. "It is not the Assembly," I told the delegates, "but you Republicans, who threaten the Republic! Be prudent and wise. Do not lend your help to the miscreants who have taken hold of our unfortunate capital, and you will save the Republic." They went on saying: "We believe in your word. But on the morrow of the fall of Paris, what guarantee have we that you will keep the same influence over the Assembly?" I have ventured to assure the delegates that whenever I may tell you, honestly and simply, what I believe to be the political necessity of the hour, you will give me your hearty support.... Well, gentlemen,



who would argue that, in the face of those men, incensed with feelings as vehement as they were sincere, and who were about to return to their provinces, I ought to have held a different language? It is only thus that I have succeeded—allow me to tell it to you, for it is no exaggeration, you would see that it is no exaggeration if you could peruse the whole correspondence of our agents in the provinces—it is only thus that I have succeeded in soothing a distrust which was a formidable danger as long as we had not reentered Paris. If the departments did not stir, it was exclusively on the strength of such declarations, which I never was tired of renewing... Now, gentlemen, if you are of opinion that I was wrong, you may disapprove me. But such was my line of policy, and I do not think I could wisely have followed another.'

No better apology for the Commune is needed, from a Republican point of view, than the above testimonial from its conqueror. Whenever the conventional Republicans have sufficient manliness and honesty to admit the simple truth that but for the self-sacrifice of Paris they would under all probability have had, in the summer of 1871, no heads left on their shoulders, and the tremendous reaction of which we bore the burden would have fallen on the men of the 4th of September, it may be hoped that a modest memorial will be raised over the bones of our heroes, with the speech of the 9th of June as an epitaph. They were the real fathers of the Republic. It was their stubborn resistance that converted France and made her contradict her own vote at two months' interval, as it was the pressure of France which converted M. Thiers. Of course, after the great crisis, history resumed its natural course, and the conflicting forces set again to work; but the crisis had impressed on the wheel a decisive turn. If M. Thiers, having diverged from the Assembly, was not upset at once, it was simply because he lived on the foreign occupation, and because he had to cast a shipload of Republicans bound for the antipodes to the Versaillist sphinx as often as it grew troublesome. The occupation over, he fell a victim once more to the passions which he had helped in breaking loose. Like the Commune, having dared to oppose the Assembly, he was overcome. Like it, he bequeathed to the conqueror the political legacy which was, in the long-run, infallibly to prevail. In the moral world, as in mechanics, there can be no forces lost. When forty thousand men die freely and willingly on behalf of a cause, the odds are that they bore in them the real strength, genius, fire, and soul of their race. The Commune, it need hardly be added, was something more than Republican. It was the government of the fourth or working estate, the landmark of its first conscious advent to power. But when its members knew how to merge provisionally the class interests of their constituents into the national interest, it is difficult to see why the very men who profit by the sacrifice would persist in ignoring it. Lawyers they are, and it seems that the 18th March was somewhat unlawful. So were the 4th of September 1870, the 24th of February 1848, and several other orthodox dates—were they not? Would it be that our fault was to

make the Republic against the rules? We did like Claudine in the Bourgeois Gentilhomme: we used the foil without parrying first en tierce; and although our thrust went home, and saved the life of M. Jourdain, the stern old gentleman complains that we had no patience, and did not let him be stabbed in the most approved fashion, as he richly deserved.



A CORVUS EDITION  
[corvuseditions.com](http://corvuseditions.com)