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THE APOLOGISTS OF THE FRENCH TERROR OF 1793-4

By H. N. FIELDHOUSE

During the course of the present century the study of the French Revolution has been almost entirely in the hands of the neo-Jacobins. The leading French specialists, MM. Aulard and Mathiez, differed in their choice of heroes, but they were both defenders of the Government of Public Safety and apologists of the Terror. Together, they have set the contemporary fashion, which is inclined either to explain the Terror as a necessary stage in the work of reforming France, or alternatively, to claim that its victims deserved their fate. Mr. E. L. Woodward¹ has recently made the timely point that the French Revolution has been so analysed into a multitude of remote causes and results that the expert now requires a certain philistine courage in order to admit that there ever was a French Revolution in the literal and catastrophic sense in which it appeared to Burke, and if this is true of the study of the Revolution as a whole, it is still more true of the study of the Terror. To dwell at any length upon the bloodshed of 1793-4 is to be guilty of a *gaucherie* in the academic drawing room. Our more modish tendency is, if not to cover the blood with sand, at least to suggest that its spilling was a necessary, and on the whole not very important, by-product of the Revolution. In the result, the Terror is resolved into inevitability, and the majority of recent writers have absolved themselves from the task of passing judgment upon it by adopting Danton's convenient axiom that "no throne was ever shattered without its fragments wounding a few good citizens". Some seem even anxious to agree with Barère that among the citizens wounded by the fragments of this particular throne, there were none who were "good".

The most familiar theory of revolutionary defence, and that which has been accepted by most secondary English and American writers on the Revolution, was that of which M. Aulard was the greatest exponent.² It explained the Revolutionary Government negatively, as a reaction to circumstances. "The Revolutionary Government", wrote Aulard, "began on 10th August, 1792 and remained until October 1795. . . . In the interval France lay under the mutilated Constitution of '91, adapted empirically from day to day according to circumstances. All was provisional, everything varied with the vicissitudes of external and internal war, and according to the needs of the national defence." It will be seen that M. Aulard has specialized the formula. The Revolutionary Government appears as the reaction of Jacobin France, not merely to circumstance, but to the special circumstance of war. Thus considered, the Terror becomes an "*expédient de guerre*", a provisional thing improvised to meet the unique circumstance of a people fighting Europe. Hence, though a tyranny, it was not a system. It was the means to save the Revolution from the Monarchist Powers, and it follows, therefore, that it was not the work of a minority but of the whole of Revolutionary

¹*Three Studies in European Conservatism* (London, 1929).

²*Histoire politique de la révolution française* (Paris, 1909).

France. Such theory as it possessed was admirably stated by Toulougeon. "An instinct of public safety", he wrote, "permeated and penetrated all. France consented to a collective dictatorship as Rome to a personal. Frenchmen, besieged by Europe, gave themselves unconditionally to those who promised to defend them. . . . The people imposed on itself its own tyranny in order to avert the despotism of the foreigner, and supported not only the fact, but also its most arbitrary abuse."³ "The Republic", said Barère, "was nothing but a great besieged city."

This view of the Terror as a national state of siege is still accepted, in one form or another, by most English and American secondary writers. Thus Mr. J. M. Thompson⁴ believes that the Terror aimed its severities only against spies, royalists, aristocrats, non-jurors, counter-revolutionaries, profiteers, corrupt officials, and treacherous generals, and adds, "but there were not many who felt themselves seriously threatened by these measures". Dr. Gottschalk, after exercising himself to minimize the number of its victims, disposes of the Terror with the claim that it "forestalled counter-revolution and rebellion for years to come" and prevented "the conquest of France by her enemies".⁵ He carries the essential connection of the Terror with the War to the point of seeing the construction of each separate piece of its machinery, and even the addition of particular members to the ranks of the Terrorist Government, as the particular consequences of particular counter-revolutionary or foreign "plots". Dr. Gershoy is more moderate. True, he thinks that "under the circumstances, sanguinary and arbitrary violence was unavoidable" and that the chief of these circumstances was that "France was beleaguered by the foe without and honeycombed with enemies within", but he admits that "the spirit of intolerant suppression of opposition was firmly embedded in Jacobin practices long before the Revolution entered upon the Terror proper".⁶ In this last admission he has the support of the thoughtful work of Mr. C. C. Brinton who, in speaking of the suppression of freedom of speech and press, says that "Signs of the Terror in this matter as in so many others can be seen quite early, long before the foreign pressure which republican historians make responsible for the whole Terror had begun to have any reality".⁷ In England, J. Moreton Macdonald stated roundly that "The idea that the Terror was introduced and maintained in order to secure victory for the French arms, or that it conduced to that victory, is as unwarranted as the belief that it was sanctioned or condoned by the nation as a whole".⁸ Mr. Brinton and Mr. Macdonald, however, have been almost alone in their respective countries, in caring to go beyond Aulard in the analysis of the Terror.⁹

³C. A. Dauban, *La Démagogie en 1793* (Paris, 1868), p. 433.

⁴*Leaders of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1929), p. 197.

⁵*The Era of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 246-8.

⁶*The French Revolution and Napoleon* (New York, 1933), p. 277.

⁷*The Jacobins* (New York, 1930), p. 85.

⁸*Cambridge Modern History*, vol. VIII, chap. xiii.

⁹Thus analysed, the Terror is reduced to a war-time-emergency-cum-shoot-the-spy hysteria. One objection to such a comfortable analysis lies in the fact that it ignores the conveniently wide connotation which was given to such terms as "aristocrat" and "counter-revolutionary". Thus in October, 1793, when the revolutionary committees had been required to certify to each prisoner the cause of his arrest, a deputation from these committees ingenuously protested that "the measures which are taken against suspects are often determined by moral conviction, and it would be difficult to state

In the current view, then, the paramount feature of the Terror was its patriotic purpose. The Revolutionary Government was what the name of its chief organ implied: a Government of Public Safety. In effect, republican historians have accepted the thesis which provided the text for all Barère's speeches of 1794. All those speeches were variants upon the single theme: that only the severities of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security could save France from the foreigner and from the foreigner's friends inside the frontier. If the enemy was repulsed, if conspiracy was suppressed, if the Republic was saved, if liberty and the French armies were everywhere triumphant, it was only because of the governmental vigour and direction supplied by "those most terrible but beneficent institutions", the committees.

Now no one will deny that once France was at war, and the cause of the counter-revolution confounded with that of the foreigner, the Jacobins were able to exploit the naïve and vehement passion of all those who had gained materially by the Revolution, and who feared lest with the return of the old order they should be compelled to disgorge their gains. No one need deny, also, that there was a close and mutual connection between the threats of the *émigrés* beyond the frontier and the violence of the *enragés* in Paris. Nor will anyone claim that *salus populi, suprema lex* has been the peculiar property of the Jacobins in time of war. Whenever the acts of a government reach a certain point of arbitrariness, they are sure to be represented as essential to the public safety. There were, in the France of 1793, all the elements of a state of siege, and in so far as it embodies this fact, the "theory of circumstances" commands general acceptance.

To this view of the Terror as simply an instrument of national defence, however, there are two outstanding objections. The first is that it confuses cause and effect. The neo-Jacobins hold that the war justified the Terror. It might be added that that was its purpose. In other words, certain of the revolutionary groups deliberately engineered and welcomed the war as providing them with a pretext to set up a Government of Public Safety. M. Albert Sorel has shown how the Girondins launched the war upon the kings in Europe in order to destroy the King in France. With Louis XVI's loyal acceptance of the Constitution, the Girondins felt that some extraordinary step was required if the throne was finally to be shaken, and to that end they saw only one means: to inflame the dominant passion of national pride by provoking foreign war. They hoped by confounding the cause of the King with that of the *émigrés* and the counter-revolution, to exhibit him as in alliance with the foreigner, and so sweep away the monarchy in a fit of patriotic fervour.¹⁰

the reasons for their arrest in a procès-verbal". Chaumette, at the Commune, defined as suspect, "All those who having done nothing against liberty, have done nothing for it". With such simple categories at command, one is reminded of Mr. Irving Babbitt's remark that every revolution is preceded by revolution in the dictionary. It is one thing to argue, as did Mr. Godfrey Elton (*The Revolutionary Idea in France*, London, 1923) that the Terror was the period in which, at the cost of some cruelty and extravagance, the essential aims of the Revolution were achieved, and another to suggest that there was no cruelty and no extravagance.

¹⁰A. Sorel, *L'Europe et la révolution française* (Paris, 1885), vol. II, pp. 314-9. "Four months before Dumouriez entered the Ministry", said Brissot, "I had made known my opinion to the Jacobins and had proved that war was the only way of exposing the treachery of Louis XVI." The same *arrière-pensée* was voiced by Guadet: "Let us mark *before hand* a place for traitors, and let that place be the scaffold." "Great treasons", retorted Robespierre, "will be disastrous only to the traitors. *We have need of great treasons.*"

The Girondin policy was deliberately to manufacture war and treason in order to bring about the overthrow of the throne, and once assured that its fruits would not fall exclusively to their rivals, the Jacobins were not slow to see its possibilities. "You will be able to take in a state of war", said Héroult de Séchelles, "measures which in a state of peace might be found too severe. All the measures which you take for the safety of the State will be as just as was the consular authority which the Romans erected in time of distress The moment has come to throw a veil over the statue of liberty." The bearing of Sorel's study of French foreign policy upon that of the origins of the Terror has not been sufficiently emphasized outside France. While it would be absurd to suggest that France should bear the sole responsibility for the war of '92, we are entitled to ask that those who see in the Terror only the reluctant severity of patriots besieged by Europe, should take account of Sorel's demonstration of the undoubted plans of the revolutionary groups deliberately to *create* a state of siege. So far as the leaders were concerned, patriotic fervour was a myth. As Mortimer Ternaux¹¹ wrote, they were much less occupied with means of defending the frontier, than in overwhelming the monarchy.

Once war had been declared, indeed, it was clear to all parties that the Jacobins' chief concern was not with the national defence but with making capital out of the foreign danger for use against the throne. So obvious was this to contemporaries that the day arrived on which the Terrorists had an embarrassment of victories. Barère, as their mouth-piece, was reduced to the lame pretext that "the conspirators seem to multiply in proportion as our armies are victorious". For the chief need of would-be saviours of their country is a demonstrable peril from which the country can be saved, and it was difficult to maintain that the Terror was necessary in order to avert invasion, at a time when French troops were everywhere overrunning foreign soil.¹² Thus by the summer of 1794, Barère found it necessary to reprimand an Assembly which was becoming sceptical of victories which brought neither peace abroad nor a cessation of the bloodshed at home.¹³

Furthermore, if we accept those historians who find the cause and justification of the Terror in the circumstances which surrounded France in 1793-4, we should expect to find the Jacobins of 1789 free from that appetite for bloodshed which they betrayed in later years. In actual fact, the tendencies to cruelty and violence which culminated in '94, can be seen both in individual leaders such as Robespierre and in general Jacobin practice long before the appearance of those circumstances which have been held to explain them. So far from being invoked by the conditions of '93, they were present from the earliest days of the Revolution.

¹¹*Histoire de la Terreur* (Paris, n.d.), vol. II, p. 104.

¹²On August 3, 1793, proposals were made at the Jacobin Club for the recruiting of cavalry. Robespierre scouted them, and declared that it was not difficult to raise men and guns, but that this was not the question which should absorb the attention of the society. "What we must do", he said, "is to consider above all, the destruction of the enemies of the public good in general." He even hinted that the success of the army was being glorified only in order to distract the people from its internal vengeance (see R. Clauzel, *Maximilien Robespierre*, Paris, 1927, p. 291).

¹³M. Stephens, *The Principal Speeches . . . of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1892), vol. II: Report on the capture of Antwerp, July 26, 1794—"If the Committee of Public Safety comes daily to announce with patriotic enthusiasm the success of the French armies, it is because it sincerely shares their glory. Woe to the day when the victories of the armies shall be coldly received within these walls."

Thus Robespierre's latest biographer, M. Raymond Clauzel, points out that as early as 1784 he was making a merit of denying human feeling.¹⁴ "Each citizen", he wrote, "is a part of the sovereign body . . . ; when the safety of the Republic requires their punishment we must not spare the guilty however dear they may be." He expressed the same stark civism in August, 1790: "Everyone is aware that the public safety is the supreme law. Friendship does not consist in sharing a friend's faults, and the sentiment of humanity is not to be conceived in terms of individuals." Within two months of the first meeting of the States-General he was already proposing to extinguish hate by vengeance. "I invoke the full rigour of those principles which require punishment for men held suspect by the nation. If you wish to calm the people, speak to it in the language of justice and reason. Once it is sure that its enemies will not escape the vengeance of the laws, sentiments of justice will replace those of hate." It would be tedious to multiply examples, but it seems incontestable that the ideas which came to a head in '93 and '94 were in existence long before that danger to the fatherland which formed the pretext for their enforcement. We can trace their continuous growth and follow their transformations from the fall of the Bastille to Thermidor. There was no foreign threat to France when Marat in his "C'en est fait de nous" was calling for five hundred or six hundred heads to assure "peace and liberty and happiness". The Brunswick Manifesto was as yet undreamed of, and the frontiers were safe and inviolate when Barnave gave currency to his ominous sophistry, "Was this blood then so pure?"

The "theory of circumstances" has naturally been dear to liberal parliamentarians in England and North America. If they cannot defend the savagery of '93, they can at least hope to show that it was only a temporary obscuring of the liberal dawn of '89, and not its natural consequence. Taine always maintained Malouet's view that the Terror began on July 14, 1789, and Dr. G. P. Gooch has recently complained¹⁵ that by adopting this view, Taine "brushes aside the traditional distinction between the principles of 1789 and 1793". It is none the less true that the events of July 14-22, 1789, proclaimed that the defences of society were down, that euphemisms would be found for murder, and that any outrage, provided it were thorough and terrifying enough, would be condoned as a *fait accompli*. It is true that there were genuine friends of liberty in the first Assembly, but they did nothing to secure those conditions of moral and material order without which liberty cannot be exercised. The Feuillants permitted, and the Gironde created, the hysteria and swelling crescendo of violence which the Jacobins crystallized into a system of government. In practice, the distinction between 1789 and '93 is largely that between indiscriminate and sporadic outrage, and systematic proscription. Thus in March, '93, Vergniaud declared that, "From the day when the murderers of Simmonneau [killed in March, '92] went unpunished, the courageous resolution to die in defence of the law has naturally weakened in the hearts of the magistrates of the people. The audacity which violates the law has on the other hand naturally increased in the hearts of our rascals." Vergniaud spoke as a Girondin, to whom the revolutionary violence only appeared as unfortunate when, in '92, it was turned against himself and his fellows. The historian might well feel with Taine that no violence would be done to the truth

¹⁴Clauzel, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-3.

¹⁵*Studies in Modern History* (London, 1931), p. 124.

if the names of Foulon and Berthier (killed in July, 1789) were substituted for that of Simmonneau.

Given his theory of a Government of National Defence, it was natural that Aulard should find his hero in Danton. Albert Mathiez found his in Robespierre. His various works on the Revolution form a corpus of Robespierrist apologia (if apologia can be used of work which is usually sufficiently truculent in tone), but it is doubtful whether their reading can bring much comfort to the orthodox defender of the Terror. In the whitewashing of Robespierre, artistic relief required the blackening of the general revolutionary background. The hero is shown to have been truly the "Incorruptible", only at the expense of admitting that in all that Jacobin world he was almost the only figure to whom that term could be applied. Mathiez has made a good case for believing that Robespierre intended that the Terror should mean virtue, but he has succeeded only too well in showing us what the Terror meant without Virtue.¹⁶ He allows us to see the process by which the Talliens, the Barras, the Frérons, the Roveres, the Courtois, the Rewbells, and the Merlins, grew rich. He shows us a Bernard de Saintes auctioning the confiscated property of nobles to the benefit of himself and his cronies. He allows us to see the Jacobins in possession, speculating in army stores, and looting national property. He shows us the proconsuls in the provinces, throwing rich citizens into prison in order to extort bribes for their release. He allows us to see, above all, the opportunity allowed to the spy and the informer, and to the activities of all that Jacobin "tail" which under the guise of patriotism, made a trade of denunciation and grew fat on the plunder of their victims.¹⁷

Unfortunately, M. Mathiez's real research, and his powerful presentation of its results, were carried on to the accompaniment of a strident controversy with his former master, Aulard, a controversy which degenerated into an acrid exchange of personal charges. Even so, it is impossible not to reckon with his exposure of the political morality of many of the "patriots" of '94. It is only in this indirect sense that Mathiez offers us any criticism of the "theory of circumstances". He is really preoccupied with the fortunes of a class which, whatever its share in the Revolution, was only a small minority in France, *i.e.* the Parisian proletariat. He sees the Terror as a class struggle on economic lines. While admitting that Robespierre and St. Just never formulated any constructive

¹⁶*La corruption sous la Terreur* (1917); *La conspiration de l'étranger* (1918); *L'affaire de la Compagnie des Indes* (1921); *The Fall of Robespierre and other Essays* (London, 1927). Mathiez's work is as prolific as it is controversial, but its main thesis has been anglicized on this side of the Atlantic by Dr. W. B. Kerr in *The Reign of Terror* (Toronto, 1927).

¹⁷Probably the greatest service rendered by the historian who writes under the pseudonym of Gustave Lenotre, is that he too has directed attention away from the civic Sermons on the Mount preached by the pontiffs of the Revolution, and has examined the way in which the Terror actually worked amid the biliousness, the parochial envies, and the social revenges of the provincial town and village (see his *Rise and Fall of Robespierre*, London, 1927). Can any analysis of the Terror be exhaustive which does not allow for the sheer sadism of some of its practitioners? See the letters from Pilot and Achard glorifying mass executions, printed by Lenotre in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, March, 1926. In any great upheaval some rascals will find their account, and it would be foolish to pretend that the Terror should be judged solely by its Pilots, but as against those moderns who claim that no good citizen was hurt by the Terror, it is necessary to insist that the activities of the Pilots were as much a "fact" as the organizing of a Carnot, and rather more of a "fact" than the paper Constitution of the Year III or the theorizing of a Robespierre upon the relation of morality to republicanism.

policy of economic reorganization, he still regards their régime as a short-lived attempt at a *sansculotte* republic. That republic, he thinks, was defeated by the silent pressure of the nervous commercial and bourgeois classes, of whom he regards the Girondins, the Dantonists, and the Thermidorians as being merely the successive parliamentary representatives. It is significant, however, that even Mathiez admits that the Jacobin political terrorists repeatedly used the protests of the Paris populace against economic misery, in order to press their own measures on the Convention. Thus, when the mob called on the Commune for bread in September, '93, the response of the Jacobin chiefs was to carry decrees for the instant arrest of all suspects, the sending of their Girondin rivals before the Revolutionary Tribunal, and the reorganization of that Tribunal to enable it to punish more expeditiously. Even the establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal itself was a terrorist red herring drawn across the demands of a people which was asking not for penalties against "aristocrats", but for remedies against high prices, speculation, and monopoly, and the ruinous fall in the value of paper money. If Mathiez defends the Terror, then, it is only because of his socialist sympathies with the lower classes of Paris, and the net result of his work is to discredit rather than rehabilitate the reputation of those Terrorists in whom Aulard sees only the military saviours of France.

The most important, because the most general, attack upon the whole neo-Jacobin position was that which was interrupted by the death of Augustin Cochin in the Great War. The full importance of Cochin's treatment of the Terror cannot be appreciated without some reference to his general thesis as to the nature of the Revolution as a whole.¹⁸ In Cochin's view, the opposition which the "theory of circumstances" establishes between the benign principles of '89 and the savagery of '94 is untenable. For Cochin, the Revolution is a "bloc". The ultimate subject of his inquiry is the "people", that "vast anonymous personage which mingles on the stage with real individuals" and which is the real hero of most of the republican historians. Cochin was impressed by the fact that while information abounds as to the actual events of the great revolutionary "journées", we are still comparatively ignorant as to their preparation. Current analysis as to their origin went no farther than to say that "the people was in motion", or that "the nation was asserting itself", and Cochin has no difficulty in showing the considerable degree to which the official school of French historians had sheltered themselves behind such terms.¹⁹ Thus in Mathiez, the King is prevented from dissolving the Assembly in June, '89, by "the violent fermentation which reigned in Paris, Versailles, and the provinces"; his dethronement is proposed by "certain movers"; a new France is born after August 4 as a result of "the ardent impulses of the poor"; particular outbreaks are the work of "the districts", or of "a crowd of women". Sagnac, also, deals in "the power of the people of Paris, a power formidable and anonymous". As for Aulard, Cochin sees in his work the epopee of the impersonal. "In September 1792 the people saw that the monarchy was powerless . . . people were disgusted with it . . . the people overthrew it. Six months later the people was again disturbed . . . men feared that the Girondins lacked the

¹⁸*La crise de l'histoire révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1909); *Les Sociétés de pensée et la démocratie* (1921); *La Révolution et la libre pensée* (1924); *Les Sociétés de pensée et la Révolution en Bretagne* (1925).

¹⁹A. De Meaux, *Augustin Cochin et la genèse de la Révolution* (Paris, 1928), pp. 14-6.

necessary energy . . . they proscribed them." Who then, asks Cochin, were these always unspecified actors? How numerous were they? How assembled? How represented? What was the reality behind these terms of "people", "Paris", "districts", "patriots"? It is a problem of which Taine had been conscious but which his exclusively psychological method had precluded him, in Cochin's view, from resolving. To describe a movement as spontaneous, to ascribe it to the intervention of "the people", is in Cochin's opinion to admit that we are really ignorant of its authors and its antecedents.

Cochin's central conclusion is that the Revolution was not spontaneous in origin, and that it never received the consent of a majority of Frenchmen. It was a work continuously prepared and organized from the days of the "philosophes" to those of the terrorists. The birth, propagation, and practice of the revolutionary ideas was the work of special groups, of the groups to which he gives the name of "Sociétés de pensée". Under this term he includes all those diverse types of literary coteries, provincial academies, reading associations, masonic lodges, and clubs which covered France from 1759 onwards. That these societies should attain to such vital importance requires a certain social *milieu*, such as the France of Louis XVI was specially fitted to provide. Such a *milieu* could only be formed in a large and unified state, in which long internal peace had contributed to a high degree of civilization. In the France of the later eighteenth century, leisure and material well-being provided a forcing house for the commerce of ideas among the aristocracy, and the taste for polite speculation passed easily to the bourgeoisie. "Between 1769 and 1780", writes Cochin, "there emerge hundreds of these small societies . . . their political tendencies barely concealed under the official pretexts of science, benevolence, or pleasure: academic societies, literary societies, patriotic societies, . . . even agricultural societies." On the eve of the Revolution, France was intoxicated with sociomania.²⁰ Not a small town but had its society or academy, and between the societies a regular and permanent correspondence was maintained. Paris supplied not only the ironical, sceptical tone of the discussions, but also their material. Provincial societies received books, memoirs, and pamphlets from Paris; their members received letters from their correspondents in the capital, and on these communications about affairs, motions were made, voted, and transmitted to other societies. Every topic of religion, art, science, or government was open to these "philosophers", who met to debate and not to act, and long before '89 the bases of existing society had been sapped by these coteries of gentlemen, merchants, ecclesiastics, and lawyers, who in part, at least, were deliciously unconscious of the subversive nature of their own activity. The business of the societies was the establishment on paper of the ideal Republic, and in this combination of irresponsible political idealism, with the tone of the salons, lay the germ of what followed. For on the heels of the dilettante and the *flâneur* came the more serious bourgeois who would try to realize the theories which they had learned to admire. When that attempt was made, their theories would collide with the facts; and men who had dealt exclusively in the academic would be apt to try to make the theories prevail against the facts. Hence, Cochin argues, the essence of the Terror. The "theory of circumstances" is merely one method of

²⁰De Meaux, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

envisaging the irreducible opposition between the ideology of the societies and the logic of the facts.

It is in the essential character of these societies that Cochin finds his thread of continuity between '89 and '93. In the philosophic societies of 1785 he finds the same mechanism and methods as in the popular societies of 1794. The vogue, the moral level, the personnel, the nature of their actions might change, but the "law" remained the same, and the politer brethren of '89 obeyed it with the same delightful unconsciousness, but with the same rigour, as the coarser brethren of '94. There are two features of the societies in which Cochin is able to show their close resemblance to the later Jacobin Clubs: their insistence on a forced union both among the initiates of each society and among the societies as a whole; and their practice of "purification" or the elimination of all who differed from, or were left behind by, the accepted "opinion".

Union, says Cochin, was the sole rallying cry repeated daily in speeches and pamphlets, the sole argument offered to the hesitant, the sole cause assigned for victory. Now he has shown that the Societies of Thought were associations founded with no other object than to arrive at by discussion, fix by votes, and propagate by correspondence, the common opinion of its members. It followed that the union so much insisted upon was not based on any common conviction, on the ground of which its members had come together. It was a union established inside the society, and was a matter of constraint. The society was unified not by the Truth but for the Truth; not by a personal and previous adhesion to a pre-existing Truth, but in order to bring to the birth and create in common, a truth which could only emerge from the opinion of the society and which might change with that opinion from day to day. The members were bound by the pressure which they exerted on one another; by the impersonal force exerted by the society on each of them. Certain members would judge that an idea was useful for the "progress of enlightenment". By prior concert they would support it in the society. The mass of indifferent members would accept it, and fortified by these adhesions, the authors would press it upon the recalcitrant. It was then no longer their opinion, but that of the society of equals. Later, by reason of the correspondence between the societies, it would become the opinion of "the people". Each member submitted to what he was told was the general opinion. To any group which hesitated was addressed the irrefutable argument: "You are the only ones not to adopt this motion. Hasten to adhere to the national opinion." This, says Cochin, was the peculiar requirement of the societies, as later of the clubs; submission in advance to conformity, and where conformity has not yet declared itself, silence.

As for the indispensable original "makers of motions", they selected themselves by zeal and aptitude. The one essential condition of their activity was that they should not be known. The motion was always that of "a citizen" or "a patriot". In order that it should be adopted and propagated it must be thought to be the opinion of everyone, and it could only be the opinion of everyone if its authors remained anonymous. In the nature of things, the societies and the clubs, of whose essence it was that they were composed of equals and recognized no chief, left the initiative to obscure wire-pullers. Such "motionnaires" had no personal authority and no personal responsibility. They gave an impetus but not a direction. Their force came from the intoxication of the societies,

and its incarnation in the idea of "the people" elaborated by the Revolution. For the doctrinaires of the régime, the "people" meant the "legitimate people", and just as the legitimism of princes had rested on the dogma of hereditary right, so the legitimism of the people was grounded on the dogma of the general will, the will "conformable to principles". Those who did not conform were not part of the people and could be suppressed. This is the perennial revolutionary case. Is there to be justice for the enemies of "justice", liberty for "slaves"? May we not, as in '93, veil the statues of liberty and justice, the better to defend them against those who would deface them? So the Republican defence runs on, until in '93 and '94, to save the ideal people, the real people is guillotined. For once let the "patriots" relax their vigilance, and the masses will return to their vomit, to their "intérêts particuliers", to the matters of ordinary life. The further the Revolution moved, the plainer did the divorce between the "people" and the masses become. The more the "people" was master, the more the people were proscribed, until in a final apotheosis of paradox, the enemies of the "people" among the people were held to be more numerous than the "people" itself, and if allowed to speak would place it in a minority. In Cochin's vivid phrase: "The Jacobin-people had subdued the Crowd. The general will had enslaved the majority."

The nonconformists in France were many, and an original feature of Cochin's work is his demonstration that the régime of denunciation, which was aimed against them, antedates 1789 itself. The apparatus of "purification" was well established even by 1780. In the societies, the brethren of yesterday, who had been left behind by the march of "opinion", were stigmatized as infamous and voted to public execration; as the Revolution drew nearer, the violence of denunciation became more marked. In the earliest days of 1789, the Liberals of 1788 were already being denounced as "traitors" and "bad patriots", for holding the opinions which had been fashionable the preceding summer. Only the sanction behind "purification" varied. In 1788 the societies could only employ expulsion and social and literary boycott. By '93 the clubs could employ the guillotine. The extreme consequences are familiar. To "purify" thoroughly, one must unmask the traitors, and to unmask them, one must begin by suspecting them. In Cochin's view, the "purifications" of 1788 lead directly to the committees of surveillance and the laws of the suspects of '93.

It is in terms of this belief that the practices of '93 were a logical development of the essential ideas of '89, that Cochin criticizes Aulard. It is in terms of the idea of "the people", as elaborated by the societies, that he develops his own view of the Terror. Aulard saw the Terror as a battle against a hostile army. Mathiez saw in it the brief triumph and then the crucifixion of his proletarian Messiah. Cochin sees in it the triumph of a principle, the principle of direct democracy. Circumstances, he thinks, may account for an act or an accident, but not for a dogma. In '93 we are in the presence of a dogma, the actual intervention of "the people", an Absolute Being whose will is superior to all justice, and whose defence justifies all fraud and violence. For five years, says Cochin, this anonymous Being did govern and command, speak and act, as one. Aulard had said that the characteristic feature of the revolutionary régime was the confusion of the executive and legislative powers. Cochin added that they were confused because they rested together in

the hands of "the people". Jacobin theory was direct democracy, the people in perpetual, and not merely periodic, exercise of its sovereignty. Obviously, however, the people, as such, could neither administer nor govern. It must have representatives. What it could do, however, was to keep an eye and a hand always upon these representatives, to preserve "the means of intimidating them at every step". Hence the unique instrument of the Terror, the popular societies. As Cochin claims, "since the people cannot be always met together in the primary assemblies, it is disseminated in the partial societies in order to keep an open eye upon the depositaries of power". From such a rôle, the societies passed easily to usurp that of the people itself. "Sovereignty", said the Jacobins of Lyons, "rests immediately in the popular societies." Inevitably, Cochin thinks, this principle postulates the organization of the Revolutionary Government. Once admit the people to rule, and if it is to do so effectively, it must deliberate and vote in permanence. In place of temporary electoral assemblies, there must be permanent vigilant societies. Orthodox parliamentary democracy is the régime of assemblies. Pure democracy implies the rule of the Societies, the Clubs, or the Soviets.

As against Aulard, Cochin insists that these principles are independent of external circumstances, and that it is from these principles that the essential features of the Revolutionary Government were derived. Thanks to the vigilance of the societies, the Sovereign People never abdicated. Its representatives were in a position at once perilous and omnipotent. They were watched over at every step; to-morrow they might be summarily recalled. To-day, however, no law or principle could limit their power, for their orders were the orders of "the people" itself. "Le peuple est la loi vivante." The war may have justified the Revolutionary Government; it does not explain that government itself, the incarnation of "the people".

We have seen that Cochin realizes that this hyphenated god, this "Jacobin-people", was not the mass of Frenchmen. In practice it meant the will of the "patriots". Cochin makes it clear that Robespierre's "Virtue is always in a minority on earth" was no isolated phrase indiscreetly dropped, but the normal expression of Jacobin practice. He shows that the Jacobins were a minority priding themselves on forming an exclusive *noblesse* of civic virtue.²¹ He depicts the paradoxical results of their régime: "a people oppressing the majority, liberty in principle destroying liberties in fact, a philosophy which executes for opinions, a justice which slays without trial, a fraternity which spies, the despotism of liberty, the fanaticism of reason."

It is perhaps unfortunate, therefore, that Cochin has troubled to invent such terms as "the Jacobin-people" and "the god-people". He has shown that the Jacobins were a self-conscious minority, determined that if France did not recognize the new evangel, she must be forced to be free, and pending that, forced into submission to the law of the Public Safety. The whole tenor of his work has been to expose the sophistry which may lurk in the use of such terms as "the people". He is even prepared to agree with M. Charles Benoist that "pure" democracy cannot

²¹Couthon wrote from Lyons asking for a "colony of patriots" since they were in a perilous minority in the city. Lacoste could only find four "patriots" in Strasburg, and less than twenty in Troyes. Legot destroyed a whole village because "there is not a spark of civism in this commune". The commissioner sent to purify the Jacobin Club at La Ferrière reported simply, "It is too numerous to be pure".

exist save on condition that popular societies usurp the rôle of the actual people. Yet there are times when he appears to be taking refuge from the results of his own research by applying to the societies the mysticism which Michelet applied to the people as a whole. Thus he appears to deny altogether the importance of individual leaders in the Revolution. The Jacobin rule, he said, was no conspiracy. It was a tyranny perhaps, but the tyranny of an impersonal Being, a tyranny without tyrants. There was an oppression of the majority, but no fraud, no turning of the common force to the profit of any men or party. These men were not a faction; they ruled not of or for themselves, but by virtue of this impersonal force which they served without understanding and which, in the end, broke them as easily as it had raised. "We are far", he writes, "from the tales of Plutarch which exalt the human individual and make great men the kings of history. In the new régime men disappear, and there opens even in morality, the era of unconscious forces and human mechanics."

Now, of this view of Robespierre and his kind as the mere motionless representatives of the Jacobin principle, there may be some misgivings. It would seem to diminish too much the stature of individuals. Once admit M. Cochin's "collective force, this mysterious sovereign", a general will which is not the will of the majority, and no limit can be set to the claims of any minority which is strong enough to arrogate to itself the right to interpret this will. The way is open to all the self-constituted saints and saviours of mankind. In the words of Anatole France, "The Revolution has erected the national will into an absolute dogma, but it has found no way to disengage it from individual caprices. Thus it inaugurated the reign of adroit rascals who pretend to interpret and represent the collective will, but who betray it even while they capture it." Theoretically, leaders such as Robespierre were equalitarians. In practice, in the name of that ideal collective "people" of which Cochin sees in them merely the mouthpiece, they were ready and eager to rivet their own personal wills upon the actual people. As Mr. Irving Babbitt has pointed out, the Rousseauistic conception of the general will does not eliminate leadership. It produces highly violent and tyrannous leadership; for the only common denominator between a Robespierre, a Danton, or a Hébert, each alike contemptuous of the majority and each claiming to interpret the general will, is force.

M. Raymond Clauzel has joined in the attack on the neo-Jacobins by the use of a method which is at the opposite pole from that of Cochin. His work, though by no means popular in the bad sense, is in line with the popular fashion for psychological biography. His chief emphasis is laid upon personality. So far from dealing in "human mechanics", he believes that the history of events is primarily the history of the men who have determined them, and that in consequence it is necessary to study the psychology of the men who have played a preponderant part in the crises of his nation. So far from sheltering behind "blind forces", he believes that "responsibility is the essential condition of our personal dignity, of our altruistic worth, and of the integral development of our personality".

Clauzel's work, though savouring too much of the contemporary fashion to have a scholarly appeal, is useful as a corrective to that modern school which treats the Revolution in terms of social evolution and material determinism and whose practice, in consequence, is to prefer

minor actors as witnesses and to select unimportant facts as evidence. Clauzel regards Robespierre as the perfect type of political votary and fanatic. He sees in him a subjective whose motive ideas sprang from his own soul, and whose aim was to impress the unity of that soul upon the society around him. He depicts the Incorruptible as living in the close isolation of his own personality until the Revolution became for him a cult detached from its cause or its end, and not so much a national movement as an ideal in the shadow of which his own destiny might be fulfilled. Thus he came to exercise a perpetual priesthood of himself until he ended by leading the Revolution to his apotheosis in the Feast of the Supreme Being, the great day on which he stood as pontiff before France and the world, as the substitute of God and the living symbol of liberty and the fatherland. In his sombre craving to give external form to his moral personality, he never wavered. In all his tactical changes of front, his flag was always his own subjective self. His supreme aim was to plant that flag upon the highest peaks of opinion and to maintain it there with the aid of the secular arm of public authority. His ambition was to dominate by a moral ascendancy, to exercise a dictatorship of principles, to reign and not to govern, to touch nothing and dispose of everything.

It is in this personal fanaticism of the Jacobin leaders that Clauzel would find the source of the Terror. Like Anatole France, he insists on the political and social dangers which may attend the rise to power of men who combine a virtuous temperament with excessive sensibility.²² He depicts Robespierre as living in extreme psychic isolation until the manifold aspects of human and social reality became repugnant to him. Hand in hand with his love of humanity in the abstract went a real misanthropy towards men in the flesh, and this reputed humanitarian was ready to mutilate humanity in order to adjust it to the framework of his own ideas. He was willing to cut off whole social strata from a living France in order to shape it to the Spartan Republic of his reign of Virtue.²³ A similar thesis was sustained by Mr. Irving Babbitt in his *Democracy and Leadership*.²⁴ Mr. Babbitt suggested that it was not strange that the sentimental humanitarianism of the eighteenth century should have ended in the Terror. It was not that external foes and forces compelled Robespierre and St. Just to fall short of their ideal. That very ideal led straight to the violence and bloodshed which it was supposed to prevent. Men who conceived all moral obligations as so narrowly defined, who judged human actions not by their natural consequences but according to abstract principle, and who believed themselves to be incarnate absolutes of Civism and Virtue, could not govern the rank and file of men without doing them violence. In the words of Chateaubriand, "They hymned nature, peace, pity, benevolence, simplicity, the domestic virtues; these devotees of philanthropy cut off the heads of their neighbours with extreme sensibility, for the greater welfare of the human race."²⁵

²²Marcel Le Goff, *Anatole France à la Bechellerie* (Paris, n.d.).

²³Clauzel points to the effect of the exaggerated classical studies of the century in producing, in minds such as Robespierre's, a Republican idealism based on the legendary perfection of Plutarch's heroes. The result was to nurse such minds in a romantic conception of civic virtue, "virtue" being interpreted as an impossibly austere and stark devotion to the public good. See also Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, n.d.), vol. II, pp. 63-4.

²⁴Boston, 1924.

²⁵*Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (ed. Garnier), vol. II, pp. 12-4.

Enough has been said to show that even the Terror has its doctrines. It is doubtful whether any of the four analyses which we have reviewed can stand in isolation. Aulard and Cochin emphasized a condition, a conjunction of events; Clauzel emphasizes a personality. Aulard thought chiefly of the republic in arms, and Cochin has shown that his terms "republic" and "people" exclude whole aspects of reality. In practice Aulard offers a palliation of tyranny. Cochin has constructed a valid criticism of Aulard by showing that the "people" of the revolutionaries and of the republican historians, was never the mass of Frenchmen. By analysing the developments of the revolutionary idea he has discredited the "theory of circumstances" by showing that the traditional opposition between the liberal dawn of '89 and the tyranny of '93 is untenable, and that the Revolution must be treated as a "bloc". On the other hand, it is possible that in his treatment of the Terror as an essay in "pure" democracy, he minimizes too much the impact of outstanding personalities upon its development. At the other extreme, Clauzel's desire to father all the ills of 1794 upon Robespierre has led him to be over-kind to those revolutionary politicians who crossed Robespierre's path. With Clauzel, it suffices for a politician to have opposed Robespierre, for him to be metamorphosed into a true representative of the undying soul of France. His flattering portrait of the Girondins as moderate liberals can hardly have taken account of the work of Sorel, and his view of Danton as an impeccable patriot will hardly survive the researches of Mathiez.

Clauzel realizes, indeed, that it is not sufficient to analyse the character of a Robespierre. Some explanation must be offered of the influence which a Robespierre undoubtedly enjoyed. In the immediate sense, of course, that influence was due to the hypnotism exercised by terror over vulgar minds. In the general collapse of 1792 the Jacobins succeeded because they had that violent energy and audacity, that revolutionary sense of reality, that callous indifference to the justice of their means, that familiarity with, and willingness to use, force—in short, that monstrous instinct for self-preservation which was their special virtue. That such a minority could seize power, however, argues some radical weakness in the existing situation, and it is because that situation had been created by the men of '89, that, in Cochin's phrase, "le quatre-vingt-neuvisme" is indefensible in history.

In this connection, Clauzel points out that the collective mind of France in '89 was made up of two warring trends: on the one hand, a clear desire for sane reform, and on the other hand an irresistible urge to what Clauzel calls "principles grown sacrosanct and sentiments grown infinite". Counsels of prudence and practical policy could be found both in the heralds of the Revolution and in the first Assembly itself. The men of '89 had Rousseau to remind them that "our task is not to inquire what is good for men in general, but what is good for them in certain times and places". Mably had already expressed his fear "lest having once begun the reform of abuses, you should wish to become perfect beings at a blow". Adrien Duport protested against those who would set up a Chair of Natural Law in the Assembly. Mirabeau warned his hearers that France was an old and sophisticated country for whom abrupt transition would be dangerous, and repeatedly contrasted the ease with which the metaphysician can construct systems in the abstract with the problems of the statesman "who ought to reckon with past de-

velopments and future obstacles". Side by side with this moderation, however, there was an intellectual temper which was inclined to enlist its sentimental ardours in support of general principles. Once this appetite was given play, the question of securing immediate reforms became subordinate to that of proclaiming absolute rights and regenerating the human race. Moreover, while the more responsible leaders of '89 regarded these sentiments as providing merely the general principles in terms of which they should legislate, the future Jacobins professed to treat them as actual ends which should be attained. In consequence, the idea of the Revolution and its reality were placed in opposition from the first, and its features had become ideally sublime before their first faint lineaments had been traced in fact. The union of this illuminism in the Assembly with the anarchy in the streets, gave rise to demagoguery, and as usual demagoguery made for ardent enthusiasms, balanced by equally ardent hates. The people of Paris was never won for democracy; it only became Republican long after the men whom it was to execute as enemies of the Republic; but from an early stage a section of it absorbed the fanaticism of the Revolution, regarded in its mystic form as a sentiment, a mental state, a religion with its dogmas, its worshippers, and its sacred horrors.

In this analysis of the illuminism of '89, Clauzel is obviously close to Cochin. As against the sociologists and material determinists, both find the origins of the Terror in the character of public ideas. As against the exponents of the "theory of circumstances", both see in the development of those ideas, an element of unbroken continuity between '89 and '93. Clauzel, however, with his insistence on personality, points out that certain leaders were peculiarly fitted to appeal to this demagogic piety. The men to whom the demagoguery gave its support were those whose principles would admit of no compromise; those who never ventured on the thorny ground of practical reforms, but who wrapped themselves in sibylline sentiments. Of these, the chief was Robespierre. Never emerging from his eternal principles, but deducing his conclusions from them by a sort of rectilinear logic, he combined the certainty of a mathematician with the narrow and absolute faith of an ascetic.²⁶ Between his temper and the spontaneous demagoguery of the capital there was a natural affinity. "The real danger", said Duport, "which though concealed by the mirage of opinion is none the less widespread and profound, lies in the exaggerated and incoherent character of public ideas." Robespierre, the man of peculiarly subjective mind, the pretender to an antique heroism, was essentially fitted to exaggerate still further this cult of ardours, and it was in this correspondence of his temper with that of the Paris of the hour that the source of his influence lay.

The temptation is obvious to make a synthesis of Cochin and Clauzel; but at whatever point we take our position between the former's intellectualist insistence on the importance of Jacobin ideas, and the latter's psychological emphasis on the personal fanaticism of Jacobin chiefs, we are equally far from the fashionable "theory of circumstances" and its corollary, the opposition between the benevolence of '89 and the bloodshed of '93. It seems impossible not to admit the force of Cochin's demonstration that the dogmas, the temper, and even the mechanism of the clubs, were all to be found in the Societies of Thought for a decade before 1789, and of Clauzel's demonstration that Virtue was already in-

²⁶For some precious examples, see Clauzel, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

dissolubly bound up with Terror in the minds of the Jacobin pontiffs long before Europe began to take alarm at the Revolution. We may agree with Aulard that the war rallied patriotic feeling to the support of the Jacobins, and made it easy to confound the cause of moderation with that of the counter-revolution and the foreigner. A natural impatience with the ineffectiveness of Feuillants and Girondins alike may make us agree that, amid all the nebulous constitution-mongering of 1791-2, the will of the "patriots" was the only will capable of translation into decisive action. To make these admissions, however, is not to explain either the Terror or Jacobinism itself. For that explanation, we have to turn to the intellectualist method of Cochin. For we may notice, finally, that Clauzel makes it clear that the Terror is a phenomenon in the explanation of which the economic interpreter of history can give us little help. The Jacobins cannot be differentiated from other Frenchmen of their day on any grounds of social environment, economic occupation, or wealth. The clubs included men of a wide diversity of social origin and class, and Clauzel rightly insists that no distinction of social environment or class antagonism can be drawn between Feuillants, Girondins, and Jacobins. The revolutionary parties of 1789-94 were all recruited from a common social *milieu*, and they fell apart only upon a question of temperament and ideas. Jacobinism was not an interest or a programme; it was an intellectual and emotional temper, a political fanaticism. Hence its intolerance of the heretic. For as Cochin shows, the orthodoxy to which the "patriots" required conformity, itself varied with patriot "opinion" and could have no finality. The Constitutionals, the Feuillants, the Girondins, the Dantonists, all claimed in turn that in them was the true depository of "principle" and that beyond them lay demagoguery. The reply of the "pure" was always constant: the Revolution goes always on, and woe to him who cries halt. On April 10, 1793, when the Terror had gone too far for his taste, Vergniaud told the Convention that "Men are always talking of . . . revolutionary measures. I also want them, these terrible measures, but only against the enemies of the fatherland. I do not wish that they should compromise the safety of good citizens." In November, when Danton was beginning to tread the path along which he had helped to send the Gironde, he echoed Vergniaud, "I wish that Terror be the order of the day. I wish for the strongest penalties, the most frightful punishments, for the enemies of liberty; but I wish for them for them alone." Clearly there was some difficulty in defining who were the "good citizens", and who were the "enemies of liberty". What was it which made Robespierism orthodox, and Girondism, Dantonism, or Hébertism, heresy? One step aside from the path marked out by the "pure", a moment's hesitation in following it when it changed direction, too much or too little zeal in its pursuit. In the words of Prudhomme, "Outside the Church, no salvation; outside the Jacobins, no patriotism".

That the Jacobins could seize power in '93 is not difficult to understand. That the revolutions tend, at certain stages, to make for the seizure of power by a disciplined minority, is a matter of common observation. The ineptitude of Court and Assembly alike between 1789 and '91 had suggested to the bilious and the bold that the reins of power in France were floating loose and were to be had for the seizing, and the second Revolution of '92 was carried through by those who had not had time to climb to power or profit on the shoulders of the first. Among these men

were two types: those such as Robespierre who had become enamoured of grandiose and universal principles, and who were impatient of every attempt to bind their feet to earth; and those such as Fréron or Tallien who simply proposed to fish in troubled waters. Both types, for their different reasons, were opposed to any attempt to limit the Revolution or consolidate its gains, until they had themselves reached office. Once in power, they had no common principle upon which to exercise its tenure. Revolutionaries, they could not undertake to rule by traditional loyalty. A minority, they could not claim to rule by popular will. They remained, in essence, a knot of self-constituted saviours of the Revolution, and they had no claim to rule in any terms save those of their own right judgment. The appeal to the numerical majority in France was for all of them impossible, and in consequence, the only common denominator of all their factions was force. The application of that force was the Terror.