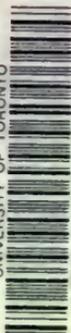
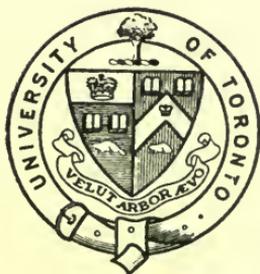


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Danton

BY

LOUIS MADELIN

AUTHOR OF

"THE FRENCH REVOLUTION"

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papers of the time as the source of information in discussing the debate in the Assembly, has been of such great service to me that I take this occasion to speak of the high esteem in which I hold it. Mr. Fribourg has also shown me some of the notes which he has made for an edition of the letters of Danton which he is bringing out. For this I am also most grateful.

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GREAT was the excitement in the Salle du Manège at the Tuileries on September 25, 1792. The Convention was in session, and for the first time since its sittings had begun, just four days previously, the two parties destined to tear each other in pieces for many a month had come into collision.

A fierce attack on Paris and her deputies—"massacrers!"—had been delivered by Lasource, a member of the Gironde, which claimed to represent the "Provinces." And then, amidst the liveliest commotion, one of the Paris deputies was seen to move towards the rostrum. A broad mask, like the muzzle of an ox, an ill-shaped mouth that terrified, so fiercely did it work under the influence of its owner's passion, bushy eyebrows shading eyes that were small, indeed, but that shot flames of fire, a skin all pitted—a hideous face, in fact, but luminous with intelligence and flushed with fury—a huge forehead under thick-growing locks, an air at once ferocious and imposing—this was Danton! His left hand, with an accustomed gesture, clasped his mighty hip; the right was outstretched threateningly, and seemed to seek his foe, denounce him, well-nigh tear him from his seat, to cast him into the pillory. Now and again he dropped his head, and then, with his neck all swollen with sheer rage, he was like some bull about to charge, and demolish everything upon his path.

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But generally he seemed, as by a violent effort, to restrain his feelings. The man of fury kept his temper under, and proffered peace to the foes intent on waging deadly war against him. And then his countenance would light up with a smile some men thought kindly, while others saw naught in it but cunning. The Tribune who had lashed all Paris into frenzy had disappeared. This was some honest country lawyer, ready and anxious to attain a friendly understanding. In the space of a few short minutes a full half-score of expressions had flitted across those heavy features, while horrid yells of defiance and cordial appeals for agreement poured forth in a succession so swift that he almost seemed to speak them all at once. There you have Danton!

Fiercely he defended Paris—then, his voice softening suddenly, he cried, “As for myself, I do not belong to Paris! I was born in a Department to which my eyes always turn back with pleasure!”

In a second, amidst all that tumult and fury of men’s passions let loose, a vision must have risen up before the Tribune’s eyes: a sleepy little town, clustered about its church, the château in its park, the cool river with its ferry-boat all splashed with water—a splendid fishing stand!—the modest home in which his kinsfolk dwelt, the big house on the Place des Ponts, the garden with its shady walks, and the porch of the old church of Saint-Etienne, whence, after Mass, old “Maman Danton,” in her full cap trimmed with fine laces, would sally out into the street. Round and about it all, the great plain, its monotony unbroken save by the poplars that fringed the river banks—his own Champagne, his Val d’Aube!

He had spoken truly. Just as they were, he loved them all—the quiet kinsfolk, the little town, with its touch of mustiness, his native place, even though they were a trifle dull. The urchin of Arcis-sur-Aube was still strong in the Tribune the Paris electors had just chosen for their own, above all other men: his whole destiny, as we shall see, was to be affected by his extraordinary devotion to his childhood’s home. In any case, it is one of the most curious aspects of his being—

FROM ARCIS TO PARIS

a being complex, storm-tossed, perpetually driven this way and that.

Yet the thoughts of the traveller who wends his way across the Champagne plains towards Arcis-sur-Aube turn less, perhaps, to Danton than to another mighty figure—Balzac.

Arcis-sur-Aube! How many folk, some seventy years ago, realized the existence of the little town thanks only to a book, the *Député d'Arcis*, a most extraordinarily vivid picture of provincial existence in the days of Louis-Philippe! Such memories would seem to lead us far away from Danton. But this is not the case. If Balzac chose that little town "lost in the depths of the country" to be the scene of the provincial drama he proposed to write, it was because he was not sorry to find a pretext for evoking the shade of the "gigantic revolutionary" in those narrow streets.

There was no great difficulty about it; it would not be very difficult even now. In spite of the ruin wrought at Arcis-sur-Aube by Russian cannon in February 1814, the scene described by Balzac in 1847 differs but little from that in which Jacques Danton spent his early years, to which he returned, several times over, to gather fresh strength, or escape the nightmares that assailed him. And to this day the little town presents much the same appearance.

Standing in the very midst of that chalky Champagne country—between Troyes, Saint-Dizier, Châlons, Provins—Arcis is one of the most typical towns of the province. The Val d'Aube, lying in the centre of the barren plain, is something of an oasis, but a dreary one at that. The town itself seems fast asleep. "Nothing," says Balzac, "gives one a better idea of provincial life than the profound silence in which this little town slumbers. . . . Here life is, becomes, so conventual that, except on Sundays, the visitor never meets a soul on the boulevards, nor in the Avenue des Soupirs—nowhere, not even in the streets!" The only exception is the river. The mills behind the château have necessitated the construction of an artificial weir, and the water still works itself into eddies even below the bridge over which Danton

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so often leaned to see "his Aube" flow past. Taking it all in all, the scene is melancholy enough.

And further, when the boy was playing his urchin's pranks, the town was already given over to the production of knitted wares. Ever since the year 1751, when one of the great lords of the country had introduced this peaceful trade, down through the silent days, under the white Champagne sky, remote from noise and tumult, Arcis had been engaged in knitting nightcaps.

Nowadays the only resonant note in the surroundings is the statue of Danton, and even in this case the artist has not cared to endue his work with any appearance of the fiercer and more boisterous attributes portrayed in the bronze Danton erected in Paris. Here at Arcis, the Tribune, as though overcome by the torpor that environs him, would seem to have sunk into a state of calm. The Paris Danton overturns a State, gives the word for action of the most audacious kind, and thus drives Europe back: the Danton of Arcis shows us no more than the authoritative gesture and imposing figure of a leader of men. None the less, the traveller who gazes on this statue is filled with a twofold astonishment: first, that from so quiet and small a place this Titan should have issued forth; and second, that he should never have ceased to worship the sleepy little town.

To this almost inexplicable affection, it may be, Danton owed the popularity that clung to his memory at Arcis, at a period when he was generally reviled elsewhere. It was during the reign of Louis-Philippe that Balzac heard a native of the town avenge some detractor's careless sarcasm on the sleepy place with the exclamation, "Danton belonged to it!"

Arcis was living peacefully on, with its church and its château and its knitted caps, when, on October 26, 1759, the wife of M. Jacques Danton, *procureur* of the place (her maiden name was Madeleine Camut) gave birth to her eldest son, Georges-Jacques, the Danton of our story. That very day the child was baptized at Saint-Etienne by the Abbé Leflon, curate, in the presence of Georges Camut, carpenter, and

FROM ARCIS TO PARIS

Marie Papillon, the daughter of a *chirurgien juré* (surgeon attached to the local courts), his godfather and godmother.

The Dantons came from Plancy, a large village four leagues below Arcis, where the newly born child's grandfather was still farming in the year 1760. This peasant had "educated" his son; and in 1750 the young man, then twenty-eight years of age, had settled "in town" as a bailiff, and finally risen to the position of *procureur*. His affairs had prospered. He had bought a fine house of middle-class appearance in the Rue de Vilette, and his family had become quite middle-class likewise. Having lost his first wife, the daughter of a bailiff, Jacques Danton married Marie Madeleine Camut, whose father was a Contractor for Public Works. One of her brothers was posting-master at Troyes, the other was a shopkeeper. Another of Danton's uncles was parish priest of Baberey. All this proves the family to have been fairly established as small *bourgeois*. Though still very near the soil, the Dantons, as was the case of many of the families from which the majority of the Revolutionary leaders sprang, had risen above it. This family, no doubt, whose roots, like those of the Colberts, were deep in the Champagne soil, had begun to rise in obedience to the natural law, thanks to its own strength and intelligence.

Strong the Dantons certainly were; their genealogical record proves it. The peasant of Plancy left eight children. His son Jacques, father of the future member of the Convention, had no less than eleven—five by his first wife, within five years, and six by his second, in the space of seven. Almost every child that outgrew infancy lived to be very old. The last of Danton's sisters died when she was ninety-eight, and the conviction is borne in upon us that, but for Sanson's knife, the Colossus whose life we are now about to write might easily have attained an extreme, but brisk, old age. Judging by this Danton of ours—the only member of the family whose portrait has come down to us—they must have been an athletic race. Of the father, indeed, we have no picture. On the other hand, we have an interesting portrait of the mother. Madeleine Danton-Camut, at the age of sixty or thereabouts'

DANTON

is a pleasant-looking old lady, and we feel the likeness to be a true one: under the huge cap with its ribbon bows, in the fashion of 1780, we note Danton's broad intelligent forehead beneath the strongly marked eyebrows, the eyes shine quick and eager, and there is a certain caustic humour about the expression of the mouth.

Before this record we should pause; after her widowhood, this woman was to bring up the unruly boy. Let us add that he adored her, and, at a later period, extended his ardent affection to his stepfather. This Madame Danton must have been a strong woman, too. After having borne Danton six children, she bore her second husband four more within four years. Jacques Danton died on February 25, 1762, and his widow married Jean Recordain, a cotton-spinner, who fell into business difficulties, and was fain to appeal to his stepson. Danton, always open-handed, saved the cotton-spinner from ruin by advancing his own patrimony. A modest little patrimony it was: in 1787, when Danton married, his marriage contract set forth "land, houses and hereditaments at Arcis and in the neighbourhood, of the value of 12,000 *livres*."

In certain families we notice children who would seem predestined by fate, or their own petulance, to be the victims of accident. The little Danton was one of these. Handsome he never would have been, but a cruel fate dealt mercilessly with him, moulding his face into that hideous lion's muzzle which was to startle all who beheld him. When he was only a year old, a bull flew at a cow, whose udder the child was sucking, and with a thrust of his horn tore away his upper lip; his mouth never recovered the disfigurement. At a later period, when the boy had been made aware of his misfortune, he declared open war against bulls, all and sundry, and from one of the "enemies" he thus provoked received a kick which broke his nose. The smallpox, which left his face all seamed, finished the work. And, indeed, he threw himself in the way of every blow, being one of those schoolboy leaders who thrash others, are thrashed themselves, and scoff as loudly at the cuffs they get as at those they deal. He was very nearly

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the death of one schoolmistress, and when he passed into the hands of a pedagogue was far too fond of breaking out of school. He openly declared that "all habit was antipathetic to his character." He would read, indeed, but only when he carried his book along the banks of the Aube, into which river he would cast himself in every kind of weather, for bathing was his passion.

Is all this very certain? It would hardly be safe to swear it. The historian who thus bends above the cradle of any of these demagogues of politics is driven to deplore the fact that no one has cared to take note of the child's ways and doings. In this case we possess two witnesses only, neither of them exceedingly reliable. Rousselin de Saint Albin, when he was very young, was much in Danton's company. He had opportunities for taking down more than one anecdote from his lips, and put them forward in a published notice—but this was done in 1864, when Rousselin was an old man and Danton had passed into the realm of legend. He would seem, besides, to have drawn on that other source to which I have referred, and which, as it revealed itself in 1836, offers better guarantees of every kind. Louis Béon, Danton's contemporary and fellow-townsmen, was likewise his comrade at school and in college. A native of Arcis himself, he had always heard much talk of the restless, audacious childhood of "the Dantons' little boy." He may, indeed, have been one of the band he led. At the Oratorian College at Troyes, Béon watched Danton's passage from the Sixth Class to that of Rhetoric. His notice, published in 1836, is interesting. Yet we can hardly believe everything these little stories relate. Are we better informed, indeed, concerning the majority of our great men when they were little fellows? In the course of his study of the history of the College of Troyes, M. Babeau has been able to trace our hero's career in the college registers; and this is more instructive, particularly as Babeau's researches check Béon's assertions, which they frequently confirm, and thus strengthen their credibility.

As the boy was restive under the management of the local

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schoolmaster, and far too much in love, besides, with the thickets that clothe the banks of the Aube, he was removed from his own neighbourhood when he was ten years old and sent to the Seminary at Troyes. Here his stay was but short. The rule of the establishment (it was almost conventual, he declared) drove him mad. The sound of the bell sent him distracted; "it will end by ringing for my burial!" he cried. His fury disturbed the discipline of this pious house, in which, we are told, he was nicknamed the "anti-superior." His family had to remove him, and placed him at the college ruled, after a more liberal fashion, by the Oratorians. A boarding-house, kept by one Richard, who conducted its inmates to the college every day, sheltered the unruly schoolboy.

Although he does not appear to have done brilliantly, the college life suited the little fellow fairly well. These Oratorians, as I have already pointed out in the course of my life of Fouché, were exceedingly large-minded instructors. They were much inclined to follow the trend of general opinion. In the Grand Siècle, classical pieces had been presented at the theatrical representations in the College of Troyes; and these had been replaced, in 1728, by comedies, sentimental and philosophic. In Latin verse, the Collegians sang not the victories of our armies only, but the progress of Science, and after having offered liberal sacrifice to "sensibility" (as when, for instance, they played *Le Riche bienfaisant* in 1771, *Le Triomphe de la Vertu* in 1772, and—not to mention other works—*Abdolonyme ou La Vertu malheureuse et récompensée* in 1775), they reached the political phase. In 1778 the College Academy set the subject for a public speech, "*On the best form of Government.*"

This inclination to applaud progress by no means excluded devotion to the classics. Everything there is to say I have already said, concerning the influence of this worship of the ancient Greeks and Romans on the youths brought up in our colleges—Plutarch was these boys' Bible. The reader will recollect Desmoulin's words, "We were nurtured in the schools of Rome and Athens, and in the pride of the Republic."

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Danton, like his fellows, fell in love with the classics, and remained faithful to his passion. On August 13, 1793, an appeal being made in his hearing for the suppression of these colleges, his recollection of their teaching led him to rebel against the idea, and in the very heart of the anti-clerical reaction to claim amnesty, in the name of Plutarch and Corneille, for Jesuits and Oratorians. ". . . It is to the Jesuits, whose political ambition has been their ruin, that we owe those sublime outbursts which now elicit admiration. The Republic was in men's minds twenty years at least before it was proclaimed. Corneille . . . was a genuine republican!" Thus, on the benches of the College of Troyes, had Corneille conspired with Plutarch and Tacitus to transform this youth from the Champagne plains into a Gracchus!

Yet he must have read many other books in secret; for though we see him make full use of his classical memories, he proves himself far more deeply read than his contemporaries in such Gallic authors as Rabelais, Montaigne and Molière—not to mention foreign writers, scorned in those days, such as Dante and Shakespeare. He knew both English and Italian—languages then but little taught in the colleges. There is no doubt that he was one of those pupils who have a fondness for acquiring knowledge outside the borders of the school curriculum.

Thus he was not one of the "leaders." That natural indolence on which I shall so often touch, and the stubbornness of which he had already been accused at Arcis, deprived him of his masters' favour. Yet now and then his intelligence forced him on their recognition. On the registers he does not appear among the "remarkable" pupils, *inter insignes*, but amongst the "good," *inter bonos*. In *Humanities*, Georges Danton-Camut won the prize for a fable, and was honourably mentioned for his Latin speeches, for French composition and for Latin verse. "*Georgius Danton-Camut fabulae proemium meritis, ad proemia solutae orationis compositionis vernaculae et strictae orationis accessit.*" The following year, in the Rhetoric class, he was still less fortunate; though he continued to be *inter bonos*, he won no

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prize at all, and fell, indeed, under the displeasure of Father Béranger, the future author of *La Morale en actions par l'Histoire*, who was his professor.

To this period the famous episode of Danton's journey to Rheims belongs. Louis XVI was to be crowned at that place on June 11, 1775. In a sudden freak, the youth made up his mind to go and "see how a king was made." And slipping away from Troyes, he footed it to Rheims. The story, if genuine, is a stirring one: the young king, moving in pomp and splendour to receive that "eighth sacrament" destined to render his person sacred and inviolable, while the country schoolboy, edging through the crowd, is driven back, it may well be, by his guards. And our thoughts fly to that sitting of January 17, 1793, whereat Danton, amidst rapt attention, casts the vote thanks to which the head on which he had seen the sacred oils poured forth is to be severed from the trunk. So strongly does this anecdote appeal to the imagination that some minds will be disposed to doubt its truth.

How did he win forgiveness for his prank? By a splendid "composition," says Béon, in which he described the coronation, and by certain unexpected scholastic triumphs won at the eleventh hour. He was always to be one of those lazy fellows, capable of sudden effort, who succeed where more laborious students fail. At last he was written down "*insignis!*"

For a moment his uncle, the parish priest of Baberey, had a hope of turning the scholar so tardily admitted *insignis* into a recruit for the priesthood. Danton declined, most fortunately—if he had assumed the cassock, there would soon have been another unfrocked priest in France. His longing was for another gown, the lawyer's, and he desired to put it on in Paris. His family decided to give satisfaction to this twofold desire by sending him to a lawyer. So one fine day in 1780 the young man climbed into the public coach at Arcis, and a few hours later Georges-Jacques Danton, with a light purse, but a head full of the future, had watched the tower of Saint-Etienne and the river poplars fade out of

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sight, and was rolling on his way to Paris—which was to take him for her god, first, and make him her victim, at the last.

The city of Paris contained special inns patronized by travellers from particular provinces. Burgundians lodged in one house, Normans preferred another. The men of Champagne frequented the *Cheval Noir* in the Rue Geoffroy-L'Asnier, behind Saint-Gervais. There Layron, the host, provided accommodation for man and beast hailing from the banks of the Aube and Marne; and there Danton, on his arrival, took up his residence.

This done, he looked about him for a lawyer who should teach him his business. This was in 1780; at that moment many of the future leaders of the Revolution were to be found in lawyers' offices: Brissot had just left Maître Nolleau, in whose room, we are told, he had engrossed parchments with Robespierre.

It would have been a curious thing, indeed, if Danton had been the third to take his seat at one of Maître Nolleau's desks. But it was at the door of Maître Vinot, in an old house in the Rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Isle, that he knocked. He offered neither reference nor recommendation, not even that of his personal appearance, which was not in his favour at first sight. But he brought his own splendid daring: the important point, very often, is to venture to push a door open, and Danton, as we already know, was bold enough to break several down. Maître Vinot listened to the young man's request, made him seat himself at a table, and gave him a document to copy. The attempt was disastrous, as any one who has had to decipher the few existing autographs in Danton's hand will readily believe. Maître Vinot expressed some doubt as to the future of a man whose handwriting was so poor. If Danton had been anybody else, he would have retired; but he replied that he had not come to be a copyist, but a lawyer's clerk. By this time Maître Vinot had clearly read the expression of intelligence and the spirit of enterprise that marked his physiognomy. "I like

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assurance," he said; "in our profession it is a necessary quality." And Danton was taken into the lawyer's office.

His employer gave him food and lodging. So he left the *Cheval Noir*. And before long he was to be seen at "Le Palais." The very fact of his writing being so bad had rendered him good service: as he wrote so ill, he was sent to attend the Courts. The elder Berryer has related the nature of this duty, and told us that, for a clerk, it constituted "a quick advancement." In any case, it was a great advantage. This young clerk, who had to "learn his Paris," heard all the great barristers of the time, from Hardouin to Tronchet. Yet, between the Palace of Justice and Maître Vinot's office, the son of the Val d'Aube might have felt stifled, if he had not spent his few hours of liberty in violent exercise—tennis, fencing and swimming more especially—for he took constant plunges into the Seine, even as he had formerly plunged into the Aube. Too much bathing, indeed! One of these river baths brought him nearly to his grave.

"A fortunate illness," says Rousselin, since Danton spent his convalescence in "reading the whole of the Encyclopedia." He read Montesquieu, too, and fell in love with him. "I've only one regret," he said, "and that is, to discover that the writer who carries you so high and so far was President of a Parliament!"—the words of a very youthful *basochian* who, if he criticized at all, was far more inclined to overthrow Parliament than the Throne. But above all, he read Rousseau and Diderot. Diderot, his compatriot, was always to be his great master. The son of the Langres cutler left two descendants behind him—*Le Neveu de Rameau* and Danton, and they resemble each other like two brothers. When the young clerk's convalescence was over he went back to Maître Vinot's office; his higher studies were concluded: he had absorbed the Encyclopedia.

He might have done better, perhaps, to have frequented Tribonien and Cujas, for the question of his licentiate's examination was coming into view. This clerk's life was a hard one. Berryer, who used to meet Danton at the Palace of Justice, gives us a description of their pleasureless exist-

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ence. The clerk was up at six, he breakfasted at nine, dined at two o'clock in the afternoon, and, after one hour of freedom, returned to his work till nine o'clock at night. Escape from this strict rule was only to be found in an opening at the bar, but for this it was necessary to possess the degree. Danton departed to Rheims. There, so Brissot acknowledges, diplomas were obtainable at a cheap rate; when he had to take his own degrees he went and "purchased them at Rheims." In a letter dated August 7, 1778, Roland humorously relates how he completed his legal studies at Rheims "in the space of five days." A prospect of this nature would have its charm for Danton, who loved to do things quickly. He had his parchment in a jiffy. We do not know whether, as in Brissot's case, the members of the examining board took the trouble to make him undergo a sham examination. In any case he returned to Paris with the right to wear the black gown, that "lawyer's armour" at which the wearers of armour of another kind were so apt to sneer. As a matter of fact, though he did become a barrister, the causes he actually argued were few and far between. Life did not promise to be very easy for him, but this outlook does not seem to have depressed the jovial fellow. He managed matters inexpensively with the money sent him from Arcis, moved his household goods to a lodging in the Rue des Mauvaises Paroles (an evil name, truly, for the street in which a legal advocate was setting up his dwelling!), and took his meals at the Hôtel de la Modestie—the very name a programme in itself. His happiest moment was when he left this restaurant, to drink his *demi-tasse* at a café close to the Châtelet, and there indulge in that game of dominoes which, as the Café Procope was to see, remained a passion with him to the end. Now and then the performance of some tragedy at the Théâtre Français would draw him to the quarter of the town in which he was shortly to lay the foundations of his fame. Often, after he had been applauding Cinna or Brutus, he must have passed along the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain, without ever dreaming that those old houses on the left bank of the Seine were to witness the first act of

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another tragedy, unwritten as yet, which was not to bear the name of Brutus, but of Danton.

Meanwhile he looked about him for briefs, and the briefs came not. This state of things, it may be, inspired him with that hatred for men of law, attorneys and judges, which we shall hear him express in such bitter terms on September 22, 1792, and, in a more general way, with the idea, so familiar to needy men, that a change of some kind in the State would not be an altogether evil thing. He would seem to have joined the famous *Loge des Neufs-Sœurs*, where he had opportunities of meeting, somewhat humbly accoutred, many of the future leaders of the Revolution—Bailly, Condorcet, Brissot, Pétion, Collot-d'Herbois, Desmoulins—although he does not at this time appear to have entered into friendly relations with any of them. At these meetings, the members habitually abused the existing regime and sighed for equality.

Yet he still seems to have been reckoning on the protection of the noble families of his own province to help him out of his difficulties. The Loménie de Brienne were shortly to come into power; all the inhabitants of the Val d'Aube were more or less clients of this illustrious house. Danton had written his name on the Cardinal and on the Marshal. But in those early days of 1787 neither could do much, as yet, for the young provincial, whose lack of briefs must have begun to fill him with alarm. As a matter of fact, fortune—a modest fortune, indeed—came to him, not from the splendid Hôtel de Brienne, but in very simple fashion, from the café where he sat over his coffee and played his game of dominoes with his comrades of the law.

This Café du Parnasse, at the corner of the Place de l'École and the Quay, almost opposite the Palace of Justice, offered very natural attractions for the youth of the legal profession. It was "one of the most highly reputed coffee houses in Paris." Its owner was on his way to making a little fortune, for, besides his coffee-house, François-Jerôme Charpentier had bought himself the post of *Contrôleur des Fermes*, and had thus turned "Père" Charpentier into "Monsieur." "We fancy we see him yet," says one of his former patrons, "with

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his little round wig and grey coat, and his napkin under his arm . . . most attentive to his customers, who treated him with friendly regard." By dint of waiting on men connected with the law, the worthy fellow had ended, no doubt, by fancying he belonged to the Palace himself. The coffee-house-keeper's dream was to marry his daughter to a lawyer.

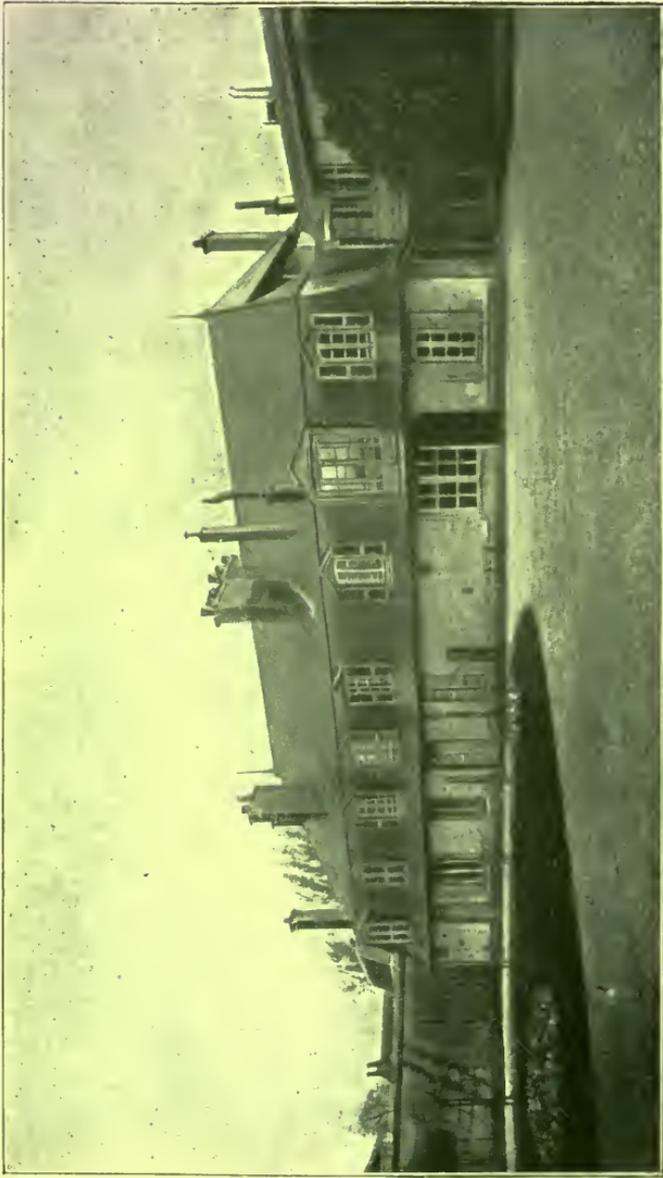
She could pick and choose; she was to have a dowry of 20,000 *livres*, and, besides the business (worth 40,000 more, as documentary evidence proves), her parents owned a capital sum of 127,000 *livres*. Such parents-in-law were not to be despised. And Gabrielle Charpentier was good-looking and fresh-complexioned to boot. Lameth, who saw her in her own house in 1792, after five years of married life and the birth of three children, thought her "young, pretty and gentlemanly." And we have better testimony still, that of David. My readers will recollect the portrait belonging to the Troyes Museum, which appeared in the last exhibition of David's works—that of a fresh-looking young woman, a beauty, indeed, of the robust rather than of the delicate order, with plump, rosy cheeks, black eyes and well-marked eyebrows, a full bosom beneath her lawn neckerchief, and a white and open forehead under dark hair crowned by a high cap. It is easy to understand that Danton should have fallen in love with this strong, handsome, healthy girl, who, though David has not painted her with a smile—in 1792 everything had to be Spartan—has been described by other witnesses as both merry and kind. The Charpentiers, mother and child, occupied the cashier's desk in the Café de l'Ecole. The many leisure hours at the young lawyer's command permitted him to lay siege to that well-defended position. Ugly he was, indeed, but his talk was merry and good. And then he was one of those bold fellows who would carry a fort without dallying outside it. In the earliest days of 1787 the fort had surrendered to Georges-Jacques.

In spite of his longing to have a barrister for his son-in-law, "the père Charpentier" had managed his own business too well to endure the idea that this same son-in-law should idle about on the chance of getting briefs. The young girl

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was to have 20,000 *livres*; would not this sum enable the young man to buy himself some post? That of an *Avocat ès Conseils* would cost 60,000 or 80,000 *livres*. But might not Georges-Jacques, backed by Charpentier's credit, make up the sum by applying to his own friends and relations? He opened a campaign, and his campaign was successful. Before the marriage was celebrated, the Charpentiers had advanced 15,000 *livres* on the security of Danton's aunts at Arcis. A certain Demoiselle Duhautoir advanced 36,000 *livres* on the same security. True, Maître Huet de Paisy was asking 78,000 *livres* for his practice, but he agreed to accept 56,000 down, the rest to be paid shortly. And thus it came about that on March 29, 1787, Danton purchased Maître Huet de Paisy's office.

The deed has been published; in it Danton enumerates the lenders of the money and the security given. The whole of his family at Arcis, indeed, guaranteed the payments. And it must have done more, for, on the 24th of the following September, Danton paid over the remainder of the money owing to Huet de Paisy. We may add that, though he paid 78,000 *livres* for the business, two considerable book debts, one of 11,000 and the other of 1000 *livres*, were handed over to the purchaser, so that the real price only amounted to 66,000 *livres*. On June 12 of that same year, 1787, "Louis, by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre . . ." made it known "that in the full and complete confidence he placed in the person of his dear and well-beloved Sieur G.-J. Danton, and in his sense, competence, loyalty and probity, capacity and experience, fidelity and affection . . . gave and granted him . . . the office of Advocate in his Councils." At that date Danton had been married just two days. He had espoused Antoinette-Gabrielle Charpentier in the Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. The night before the marriage, the contract had been signed. In it Danton set forth his fortune as consisting of his post (the full price of which he still owed, either to Maître Huet de Paisy, or to the persons who had lent him the instalments already paid over), and also of the "lands, houses and hereditaments" at Arcis,



DANTON'S HOUSE AT ARCIS-SUR-AUBE

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valued at 12,000 *livres*. The Charpentiers gave a dowry of 18,000 *livres*, and the bride brought a further "sum of 2000 *livres*, the produce of earnings and savings." By the terms of the contract, the young people enjoyed common rights in their property.

Danton set up his practice in the Cour du Commerce in the parish of Saint Sulpice. In the *Etat actuel de Paris* for 1788 we find at No. 1 in this Court: *Cabinet de M. d'Anton, Avocat ès Conseils*. D'Anton! As a matter of fact, his name, just at this time, was frequently written thus, and he actually signed himself d'Anton—which must have been a satisfaction to the Charpentiers. The worthy Dr. Robinet, who spent his life demonstrating that Danton was always more than right, asserts that the title of *Avocat ès conseils* carried a certain rank with it, but he does not prove his case. We prefer to say, as an excuse for Danton's having signed his name d'Anton, that during the closing years which witnessed the final flicker of the prejudice in favour of noble birth, the signature "d'Anton" was more likely to attract business. Here we have a very sufficient excuse for a very trifling crime.

What was the nature of the post which, according to Dr. Robinet, conferred noble rank upon its holder? We have no intention of following in the footsteps of M. Bos (author of a very interesting work on *Les avocats ès conseils*) and re-telling the history of the institution. We will simply remind our readers that side by side with the law courts of France, a form of administrative justice dispensed by the King's Councils had always existed. In 1645, titular offices had been created under the name of *avocats* in these Councils. These offices were purchasable, subject to the Chancellor's consent, and the appointments to them granted directly by the King.

The duties of the post necessitated a tolerably genuine capacity. The variety of the business laid before the Councils necessitated an exact knowledge of the various branches of administration. These had been defined and regulated by

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D'Aguesseau. The advocates, so Guyot tells us, in his *Repertoire*, brought forward "les instances d'évocation de parenté et alliance, celles en règlements de juges, les oppositions au titre d'offices, les demandes en rapport de provisions et lettres de justice expédiées en chancellerie, les demandes en cassation d'arrêts ou de jugements rendus en dernier ressort dans tous les tribunaux qui jugent souverainement, ou en dernier ressort, les demandes en cassation de jugements de compétence rendus en faveur des prévôts, des maréchaux, ou des sièges présidiaux, les demandes en contrariété d'arrêts, les demandes en révision des procès criminels, les appels des ordonnances ou jugements des intendants ou commissaires départis ou autres juges commis par le conseil, et des capitaineries royales."

The corporation of lawyers was acquiring a somewhat alarming member in the person of Maître Huet de Paisy's successor. From his first childhood Danton had been filled with that instinct of rebellion which, as we are told, had won him the nickname of *Anti-superior* at Troyes. His entrance into the legal body coincided with a crisis in a small way, the outcome of a greater one, affecting not this authority, nor that, but authority in its essence. Between the corporation and its syndics and seniors an unacknowledged warfare raged. Perhaps some indication of the new-comer's attitude of mind had come to hand, perhaps his expression, apt, often, to be insolent, roused prejudice against him; an attempt to sound him was made forthwith. The custom was that "after having waited on the officers of the order, and handed his patent to the syndic," a solemn sitting should be held, during which the new barrister "stood in his gown, with his square cap in his hand," and underwent a cross-examination by the members of the Council, after which he had to deliver a speech in Latin on a subject then prescribed to him. Danton's reception took place in the course of the summer of 1787, and he was ordered to discourse, without any preparation, on *the moral and political position of the country with regard to the administration of justice*. "This," said Danton, "was to ask me to walk on open razors." He held his ground,

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spoke boldly, and sketched out a whole programme of government intended to prevent a revolution, which was imminent. Danton (he may have been boasting) told Rousselin how the words *motus populorum ira gentium, Salus populi suprema lex* had seemed to strike the elders with dismay. But he spoke in Latin, and they pretended not to understand.

Was he really so taken up with political questions at this moment, and had his ideas already assumed so definite a shape? Rousselin admits the fact. According to what he writes, Danton even had an opportunity, a few months later, of setting forth his views in high quarters. Barentin, First President of the Court of Aids, had been his client, and the lawyer's vigorous mind had charmed him. When he was appointed Keeper of the Seals, he offered the young advocate the secretaryship attached to that office, and Danton would have accepted the post, on condition that a plan which must have broken down the opposition of the Parliaments to the reforms he considered necessary, if a revolution was to be avoided, should be adopted. This suggestion appears to have fallen on deaf ears. But a few months later, we are assured, Barentin renewed the offer. "What," cried Danton, so we are told, "do you not see *the avalanche* is upon us?" The whole of this story, or much of it, at all events, would appear to be incorrect. It will probably be wiser simply to accept the statement that Barentin, who certainly was one of Danton's clients, did think of associating him with the management of his office in 1788, and that Danton, feeling the approach of "the avalanche," refused. If Rousselin ever had the rest of the story from Danton's lips, it was on a day when the man of Champagne was talking like a Gascon.

And, indeed, his own duties occupied him more than is generally understood.

For a considerable period Danton was asserted to have been a "briefless barrister." The results to be deduced from this legend are evident, and Taine has not failed to emphasize them. According to him, the young couple lived on the occasional louis d'or bestowed by the coffee-house-keeper father-in-law. Taine may well be excused for having taken

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the lawyer to be a needy man. It was only after careful researches that so competent a student as M. Bos succeeded in proving that Danton had been employed even in three lawsuits, and from this briefless condition he drew conclusions which Taine was quite justified in accepting.

But M. André Fribourg, in his remarkable collection of Danton's speeches, and more particularly in his excellent statement of his authorities, has completely modified the current idea of "M. d'Anton's" practice. One document should certainly have opened men's eyes. In the inventory, now in the author's possession, drawn up after the death of Gabrielle Danton in 1793, the following clause appears: "*Item*, twelve documents which are memoranda of fees due to the said Sieur Danton, in his quality as former lawyer to the Council." Here we have proof that a dozen suits, at all events, had passed through the lawyer's hands.

M. Fribourg set himself to discover what cases Danton argued. And though the secrets of certain series of archives could not be wholly revealed, for various reasons, and though others were incomplete, he was able to compile a list of twenty-two suits in connection with which Danton certainly laboured between June 1787 and January 1791.

A curious thing is that the future democrat seems to have made a speciality of the confirmation of claims to noble rank, and to have taken pleasure on such occasions in rendering an occasionally emphatic homage to the ancient services. For instance, casting away the dry language of ordinary legal procedure, he compliments the Vicomte du Chayla, "whose valour contributed to the rout of the formidable column which, on the field of Fontenoy, long held the fortunes of the august ancestor of his Majesty in the balance." The day was to come when Danton was to use less reverent language with regard to Louis XV and Louis XVI.

He almost always won his cases, and it is tolerably certain (that the Prince de Montbarey succeeded Barentin as his client would seem to prove it) that in 1789 his practice was a very good one.

Thus his life was a pleasant life, for, on the other hand,

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Gabrielle kept a comfortable home for "M. d'Anton." In 1788 she had borne him a son, who died, indeed, on April 25, 1789, but he had reason to hope for other children, and they came. The "père Charpentier" had sold his business well—for 40,000 *livres*—and had bought an excellent country house at Fontenay. The atmosphere of the apartment in the Cour du Commerce was anything but melancholy. Friends found a hospitable welcome there. Danton, cordial, jovial, good-natured, was a popular man. His clerks were fond of him; two of them—Paré and Desforgues—were to cling to him faithfully. He was to reward them, at a later date, by making one Minister of the Interior, and the other Minister for Foreign Affairs. For Danton's office was to be a nest of future ministers.

Existence, in fact, was certainly giving Danton more than he had hoped from it when he took up his quarters at the *Cheval Noir* in 1780. A barrister on the high road to success, a comfortably housed citizen, a happy husband, he might, no doubt, have led an easy life. But the "avalanche" destined to tear both those it carried with it, and those it swept before it, out of the normal path of destiny was upon him.

CHAPTER II

THE REPUBLIC OF THE CORDELIERS AND THE "DANTON BUSINESS"

July 1789—The Cordeliers District—The Fight with the Hôtel de Ville—Danton attacked—Elected to the Council of the Commune—The "Marat Business"—The "Danton Business"—Final Triumph—What Danton gained by it.

ON the evening of July 13, 1789, a barrister of the name of Lavaux had found his way into the Cordeliers Convent—the central meeting-place of one of the "districts" of Paris. Perched upon a table, he beheld an orator who was imploring his fellow-citizens, "in a frantic voice," to take up arms and "repulse 15,000 brigands gathered at Montmartre, and an army of 30,000 men, all ready and waiting to fall on Paris, sack the town, and cut the throats of its inhabitants." The speaker, who seemed "a fanatic," declared a rising to be absolutely necessary; he continued his adjurations till he was "exhausted."

In the person of this "fanatic" Lavaux recognized, to his astonishment, a former comrade of his own in the legal profession, whom he had hitherto considered a peaceable member of the burgher class—Danton. Drawing nearer, he assured him (somewhat artlessly) that his fears were quite unfounded: that he himself had just arrived from Versailles, where everything was quiet. "You know nothing about it," was the reply; "the sovereign people has risen up against despotism! Join our side! The throne is overturned, and your occupation is destroyed—think of this seriously!"

The era of "daring" had begun, that much is clear. The burgher was merging into the tribune. Yet he was not to be seen hurrying to the Bastille on the 14th. Perhaps—as was often to be his case—he was himself surprised by the event for which he had seemed to yearn.

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This abstention must have caused him some regret—a regret evidenced by a peculiar incident: the Bastille was taken on the 14th, but Danton would seem to have desired to take it over again, alone and unaided, in the course of the night between July 15 and 16.

La Fayette had placed a warder in charge of the old fortress, the “elector” Soulès. Was La Fayette, at that moment king of Paris, already, in Danton’s eyes, the foe to be beaten down and outbidden, the new despotism to be noisily opposed? Be that as it may, Soulès’ slumber was disturbed, during the night of July 15, by the sound of a violent altercation. A band of men was endeavouring to gain admittance, with the object, no doubt, of making sure that no victim of the old tyranny had been left in any of the dungeons of the place. Soulès went down and parleyed with the “captain,” a burly man, loud-voiced, of whom it was shortly to be asserted that he had a “really repulsive countenance.” This was a “certain Danton,” at the head of a troop of men from the Cordeliers. When Soulès refused to grant them admittance, the “captain” ordered “the traitor’s” arrest, and had him dragged to the Cordeliers, and thence to the Hôtel de Ville, attended by a threatening mob. As the hackney-coach drove slowly along, Danton gave out that he had just laid hands on the “Governor of the Bastille”: the crowd ended by believing the unhappy Launay had come back to life, and must be killed over again, so much so that on the Place de Grève, “certain hot-headed fellows were already talking of taking his head off.”

“No doubt,” adds Soulès in his bitterness, “it was for this that the Sieur Danton hoped!”

I do not believe it: Danton cared little or naught for poor Soulès and his neck. What he desired was that his own name—the name of Danton, captain of the Cordeliers—should resound on the Place de Grève as that of a “pure” politician—so pure, indeed, that even on July 16 he had set himself to “purify” the work of La Fayette.

At the Hôtel de Ville, La Fayette secured his henchman’s freedom, and the Assembly of Electors, having reached a

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clearer understanding of the business, bestowed a certificate attesting his zeal for liberty on Soulès, and, so the official report runs, "strongly censured the way in which he had been treated." None the less was everybody connected with the Cordeliers convinced that "Monsieur Danton" had stifled a fresh plot against liberty. For from that moment "Monsieur Danton" was the most prominent man in the District, and leader of the extreme Revolutionary party.

At what particular moment did he cast away his law-papers and begin to climb on tables? We know not. If he really did warn Barentin, in 1788, that the "avalanche" was upon them, he does not seem to have taken advantage of his own powers of foresight. We do not discover that he either helped to draw up the "*cahier*" of the Cordeliers District, or took any part in the elections in the Val d'Aube, mentioned by Beugnot.

Creature of impulse as he was, with very little of the calculator in his composition, he may indeed have felt the approach of the Revolution, but he waited the coming of the "avalanche" to cast himself bodily into the torrent. In July, even before the avalanche actually fell, he did so cast himself, and by the autumn he was suddenly to outstrip the "men of '89," whom the electors had already sent to the National Assembly and the Hôtel de Ville—Mounier, Bailly, La Fayette, and their fellows.

Looking at the part he would have to play, the clay he must surely knead, Danton must have hung back for a moment. He was heard to complain, at the close of a breakfast party in his own house, "If people would only think of the filth that must be stirred up . . . to make a revolution out of it!" There we have the farewell sigh of the *bourgeois* hovering on the brink of the "avalanche," which had already lost its immaculate whiteness. In September he was drawing up his *memorandum* "for Benjamin Dubois," which, like its predecessors, he intended to carry to Versailles in the following month. Events were to take such a course that, contrary to all expectation, he was to read it in Paris: for by that time a fresh convulsion was to sweep the King and "his Councils" back to the banks of the Seine.

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On October 3 Thibaudeau, the deputy, took his son with him to the Cordeliers, whose reputation was beginning to spread far and wide. There had been a fresh outbreak of excitement in Paris that day, for not only was there hunger in the city, but news had just arrived, with many and grossly exaggerated details, of the anti-revolutionary blusterings of the Versailles Body-Guard. Many a year afterwards was the younger Thibaudeau to recollect Danton's appearance, on that fever-stricken night, in the presidential chair at the Cordeliers Club. "Struck by his tall stature, his athletic figure, his irregular features, seamed by the small-pox," he listened for the first time to "that harsh, rough, resonant utterance," punctuated by "dramatic gestures." To this young man the tribune appeared a second Mirabeau, only less studied—for that which struck him most in Danton was his "sudden outbursts, from his very soul, his natural impetuosity and freedom from constraint." "The effect," adds Thibaudeau, "was prodigious." And besides all this, he was a skilful chairman, ruling the gathering with "the decision, swiftness, and authority of a man who is conscious of his own power."

Danton, so Desmoulins tells us, was "ringing the tocsin at the Cordeliers" that evening, and he goes on to say, "On the Sunday his manifesto was posted up by the immortal District." Danton had written this manifesto himself: "My placard for the risings on 5th and 6th October," he was to say before the Tribunal. Yet he was not seen at Versailles; Desmoulins, again, tells us it was the Cordeliers battalion that marched on the hated town: but though Danton was its captain, M. de Crèvecoeur was its commandant, and he "slackened that martial ardour" to such good purpose that the battalion was forced to limit its performance to acclaiming the King's removal, without having borne any active share in obtaining it. On October 11 the Cordeliers sent MM. Danton and Dumesnil to the Tuileries to congratulate Louis XVI on his decision to reside in Paris. And on the 19th Danton argued his case in Paris instead of at Versailles, an arrangement which suited both his convenience as a lawyer and his aspirations as a "patriot."

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October saw him in full possession of the presidency of the Cordeliers Club, and his chair was something very like a throne. In the course of the past three months the District had advanced further and further in the direction of constituting itself a State within the State, and very nearly a Republic within the Kingdom.

When the elections of deputies to the States-General took place, the citizens of Paris, invited to delegate their "electors" to the Hôtel de Ville, had been divided up into sixty districts, corresponding, more or less, with the ground covered by the old city parishes. But these districts, instead of dissolving as soon as the electoral operations had come to an end, had either constituted themselves as permanent local bodies, or reconstituted themselves on the eve of July 14, with the nominal object of "giving Paris a municipality"—in reality with that of "standing erect against the enemies of the Revolution." They had forthwith elected their officials and appointed delegates—two for each district—to the Hôtel de Ville, and these had joined the "electors," who had also remained in permanent possession of their functions, in forming the *temporary* municipality. More sturdily than ever, after the fall of the Bastille, did these districts hold their ground, until a fresh organization should be set on foot in Paris.

The Cordeliers District covered very much the part of the city now occupied by the Quarters of the Odéon and the Monnaie, between the Luxembourg, the Church of Saint-Sulpice, the Hôtel de la Monnaie, and the ancient buildings of the Sorbonne. It swarmed with men connected with the law, printers, booksellers, writers, actors (the Théâtre Français was within its boundaries)—all of them disposed to embrace the new ideas with the utmost eagerness.

The central office of the District was in the old Convent of the Cordeliers (Franciscan monks), and the name itself had a certain importance: all down the course of French history these Franciscans had been quarrelsome friars, downright tribunes in monkish habits. Their principal monastery, founded by Saint Louis, stood on the spot now occupied

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by the Musée Dupuytren in the Ecole de Médecine. In the huge refectory of this building the citizens of the district gathered to cast their votes, and here, from this time forward, the "Assemblies of the District" were held—hence the name *Cordeliers*. If old stones could speak, these would have counselled revolt more loudly than any other stones in Paris.

And, from the outset, indeed, a most revolutionary spirit reigned within these walls. The Cordeliers was soon regarded as the most formidably "pure" of all the sixty districts of the city. "The terror of the aristocracy, and the refuge of the political opinion of the capital," exclaims Fabre d'Eglantine, "its vigorous decrees put *the municipal despotism* then rising on the ruins of all the various tyrannies out of countenance." A letter of the period tells us that the District, which had been raised to the position of a righter of wrongs, "believed it gave the law to Paris": its leader, adds the writer, is "the energetic Danton."

He had forced himself into this position in the course of the month of September. His popularity was already well established when he was elected president, and the District forthwith entered on a course of the most extreme audacity. On July 21, in fact, the Cordeliers had begun their encroachments on the central power: at that date they boldly decreed that "whenever delinquencies were committed in the town, the battalion of the District was to arrest the delinquents and bring them before the "commissaries"—this in itself was an exorbitant pretension. But from the month of September onwards a series of measures was announced, every one of them intended to astonish Paris, terrify the "enemies of the Revolution," and thwart the will of Ministers, Mayor, and General in command of the National Guard.

To begin with, there was the enunciation of a general principle—no law, no regulation, no order was to be valid, if the Cordeliers had not accepted it as such. The struggle with the Municipal authority was to begin on September 3: we shall see the manner in which it was carried on, and how the District contrived to hold its ground against the Mayor and foil all his efforts.

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In direct opposition to the law, it imposed binding instructions on its own representatives at the Hôtel de Ville, and claimed, on the other hand, a controlling power over the elections in all other districts. This is the true sense of the resolution of October 25: it provides (with the object of preventing the election of "indifferent citizens") that the list of the members of the municipal body shall be posted up for a fortnight in all the districts, the assemblies of which are to ratify or invalidate the nominations. This was to confer the power of invalidating elections in one constituency on the electors of any other. And such was the influence wielded by the Cordeliers that this *ostracism*, copied from the Greeks, was to be accepted by the Hôtel de Ville in May 1790.

This District, indeed, which was no more, theoretically, than a permanent electoral body, turned its attention to every sort of subject, and arrogated the right to wield executive powers as to every one of them. We note a succession of decisions of the most varied and unexpected kind, all of them improper in their very essence. One day (September 15) it is a decree to rehabilitate the actor, "who is a citizen," and give him his rights as such. Is not the District that in which the Théâtre Français stands? and must not Danton pay his long-standing debt to the interpreters of Racine and Corneille? And are not Collot-d'Herbois and Fabre d'Eglantine numbered among its most influential residents? Another day (October 20), and without a trace of apology, a decree to which Danton's signature is appended regulates the flour trade: yet another deals with the arrival of a convoy bringing in bread, and a fourth with financial reform.

And what was the subject, indeed, concerning which the District did not boast a policy of its own? Even in the matter of the coinage it claimed to have its say. On December 21 Danton, without the slightest hesitation, had a convoy consisting of twelve boxes and two barrels of gold ingots stopped on its way through the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain: this gold, so the District had decreed, was not to be coined at Limoges, but in Paris!

The District kept a jealous eye upon the King. Hearing

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General La Fayette has demanded the recall of the Gardes du Corps, it "protests against the formation of any special body which would tend to deprive the citizens in general of the right to guard a prince who is the restorer of Liberty!"

I pass over other instances: between the months of September and December the Cordeliers had expressed opinions, and issued decrees, on every imaginable subject.

At the foot of all these daring documents, we read one name, "*d'Anton*." For this riot of democracy was already culminating in a miniature dictatorship. The presidents of the other districts came and went: Danton, shortly to be proclaimed its "beloved president" by the Assembly, was re-elected every month "by unanimous agreement" and with "overflowing hearts." This "Republic of the Cordeliers," as it was already called in Paris, was the kingdom of Georges-Jacques Danton. Bronze tokens may still be seen, the face of which bear the inscription "District of the Cordeliers. The Law and the King. Union. Fraternity." But on the reverse side we discover the words "Under the presidency of Georges-Jacques Danton." The "president" is soon "Captain" as well, and then "Commandant," and the passionate affection of the District discovers his possession of a "really military" talent.

Danton, then, had his Assembly and his Battalion. He likewise had his Press. The very effectual protection he extended to journalists of extreme views had attracted most of these to the "sacred" area, if indeed they had not already settled within its borders. Momoro, the printer, was one of his henchmen, and a stream of political tracts and pamphlets issued from his presses. Loustalot—the "great Loustalot"—was writing his *Révolutions de Paris* in the district: and never ceased pouring forth praises of the area which, amidst the most patriotic of all, had "displayed the most fervent, the most correct behaviour [*sic*], and the greatest prudence." The future Marshal Brune, then a journalist and printer's foreman, was setting up the type for the *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville* in the Cour du Commerce. Doctor Marat had

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come to live, under circumstances I shall presently relate, in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain, where, under the shelter of Danton's powerful arm, he was able to print his "incendiary" *Ami du Peuple*. And though he spared no other mortal, he spared Danton, and lavished praises on the District.

But the journalist *par excellence* of the District, "Danton's pen," was that ardent, excitable, deep-feeling, daring young fellow, Camille Desmoulins, who had already won universal celebrity. Danton had brought him to the District. His weak and easily influenced nature was always to need the support of some strong arm. Hardly had he slipped from the influence of Mirabeau when he fell under that of Danton. A nervous and stammering speaker, he admired his leader's unflinching flow of oratory: and Danton, the laziest of men when he was set before a sheet of writing paper, noted the young journalist's ready pen, took hold of it, and never let it go until the end. "It was Danton," writes Mirabeau, "who composed Desmoulin's last instalment," and four years later, again, Robespierre was to point to Danton behind Camille's newspaper articles. He did the writing, Danton inspired the sense.

And besides his Press, Danton had his Theatre. For the District was full of resources. Tragedy was represented by Marie-Joseph Chénier: the huge success of *Charles IX* was a "success for the Cordeliers": Danton, wild himself about the play, came down in person to "warm up" the audience, led the *claque*, and was even arrested, on July 24, 1790, thanks to his over-violent display of admiration. But Comedy, too, had its representative, in the person of Fabre d'Eglantine, whose *Philinte, ou la suite du Misanthrope*, was to be performed in April 1790. During the sole and only period in which Danton did not preside over the District, the "immortal author of *Philinte*," as he was called there, occupied his place, and his play, so Desmoulins writes, "does honour to the District, which shares the common glory with him." The District was quite ready to claim that with Danton for its Demosthenes and Desmoulins for its Tacitus,

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it could likewise boast its own Corneille, in the person of Chénier, and its Molière, in that of Fabre.

Like Desmoulins, Fabre and Chénier were Danton's near neighbours. They were not the only men of the group gathered within the Cordeliers destined to play great parts in the Revolution.

A "man of letters" who has left Memoirs behind him relates that in the course of the meetings held in the District, he saw Danton surrounded by a regular staff of men—an incongruous medley, fanatical, formidable—of whom he gives us a description. All the men who composed this staff were to be the leaders, the officers, the non-commissioned officers of the fighting Revolution. The whole district, in fact, was in a state of effervescence: every street had its tribunes, and all these were Danton's men. Just opposite the "Nouvelle Comédie"—the Odéon of the present day—dwelt the Desmoulins, husband and wife (who had been Danton's immediate neighbours for a short time previously), Fabre d'Eglantine, the poet, and, before long, that Stanislas Fréron, son of Voltaire's adversary, Elie Fréron, and godson of a king, who had joined the extreme revolutionary party. This was the "smart" corner of the Cordeliers District: the Desmoulins were well-to-do people, and led a merry life, Fabre frequented the theatres, Fréron was always to remain what was later to be known as a "dandy." Behold, on the other hand, a terrible fellow, Legendre—a butcher, and an unlettered savage too—who had been heard to declare "it would be a pleasure to him to rip open a nobleman, or man of substance, a statesman or a man of letters, and devour his heart," and who, when he became a deputy, refused to leave the street in which he dwelt—the Rue des Boucheries Saint-Germain—because he loved its blood-soaked pavement. Here, too, we see another wretch, the cobbler Simon, famous by his connection with the captivity of Louis XVII: a brute, embittered by poverty, and perpetually occupied in nursing his own bile. Many were Danton's other friends within the District: Marat lived in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain: Billaud, a briefless barrister, whose dramatic efforts had been

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hissed, and whom Danton had turned into his "secretary," lived in the Rue Saint-André-des-Arcs: Manuel, one day to be Procureur under the Commune, was in the Rue Serpente, and Momoro, whose wife played the part of Goddess of Reason in the profaned churches of the capital, in the Rue de la Harpe: Anaxagoras Chaumette, who was to forsake Danton, one day, and follow Hébert, dwelt in the Rue du Paon. Then there was Paré, Danton's old comrade and clerk, whom he made a Minister under the Republic: and Dr. Chevetel, who was to act as Danton's secret agent in the West of France, when the insurrection there was on the point of breaking out, and who lived in the Rue des Fossés with his mistress, Mlle. Fleury of the Comédie Française: and Collot d'Herbois, an actor, who consoled himself on club rostrums for his failure on the boards: and Brune, who was to bear arms in Italy and Holland: and Oudotte, a Franciscan monk. All, dissimilar though they may appear, were bound together by their fierce fanaticism: from Desmoulins and Fabre, well-provided men, both of them, to Legendre and Simon, mere club ranters, they formed the staff of which Danton held command, and which was to be joined, on a certain day, by Mlle. Théroigne de Méricourt herself, she being admitted to the Assembly, so Desmoulins informs us, with a "consulting voice."

The company thus gathered in serried ranks about Danton helped to make the District famous, formidable, "sacred." "I never move about its territory," says Desmoulins, "without experiencing a religious feeling . . . and on all its streets I read but one inscription, that of a Roman street, the *Via Sacra*."

The excitement that held sway all over the District, in every one of those "sacred" streets, by no means prevented Danton from indulging his personal taste for a domestic middle-class existence. At his own fireside, the tribune who would set all the constituted authorities a-trembling from his chair in the Refectory of the Cordelier Convent, was ever the same cheery being, who loved to bring his "old friends" (not unfrequently friends of yesterday's date) to "eat our soup,"

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and "share our chicken." Even in 1789, Fabre, Brune, Desmoulins, Legendre, Paré, Chaumette, Billaud and their fellows were treated not merely as Danton's deputies, but as the habitual guests of the Cour du Commerce, where that excellent housekeeper Gabrielle Danton successfully flattered the taste of every member of the band for good and hearty eating. And of an evening, after dinner was over, they would adjourn to the Café Procope, there to meet other friends, and play the quietest game of dominoes! This Café Procope seems to have been the necessary complement of the Cordeliers: the meeting-place, in old days, of Voltaire and Diderot, it was now "the only refuge," so Camille writes, "in which liberty has not been violated!"

This was the style the Cordeliers affected. Fanaticism, in Danton's circle, was overlaid with lyricism. He himself, with his noisy laugh, his rough merriment, and a certain unceremoniousness which flattered the butcher and amused the literary man, ruled, like a dictator, from the Café Procope to the Cordeliers Convent, by virtue of his talk, daring and grandiloquent in one place, amusing and familiar in another, fascinating always. For it he was "cherished," and thanks to it, Georges-Jacques Danton reigned like a king over the Republic of the Cordeliers.

But his real desire was to raise himself, supported by his own District, far above this local sovereignty, to that of Paris itself. Thus his dream was rather to overthrow the kings of the Paris of 1789 than to drive out the monarchs of the Tuileries, and to occupy their seat. The Cordeliers were to be the weapon wielded by his vigorous hand against the Hôtel de Ville, where Bailly the Mayor and General La Fayette throned it side by side.

The struggle with the Hôtel de Ville opened in September, over the "affair of the binding instructions."

On August 30 the provisional Municipality had called on each of the sixty districts to elect five delegates, who were to form the provisional Commune. At the same time Bailly invited these districts to consider the plan of reorganization in virtue of which the Assembly was to be convoked, and

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practically to give it their formal approbation in the space of a few hours. The Cordeliers took this to be "a violent measure on the part of the Mayor," and protested against it by a resolution dated September 3, appointing commissaries charged with the duty of considering the Mayor's decree. Having received their report, the District Assembly announced, on September 12, that "it would only accept the plan for municipal reorganization in its entirety, not in successive fragmentary instalments, and that without being hurried," and above all, that "it would not tolerate any partial application (of the plan) until it had been submitted to the District Assemblies as a whole, and accepted by them." This declaration bore Danton's signature.

Logically speaking, the Cordeliers had no business, after this outburst, to appoint any delegates themselves. But when they saw the other districts sending their delegates to the Hôtel de Ville in spite of them, they made up their minds to follow suit. Evidently Danton did not choose to be elected himself: he preferred to remain shut up in his fortress and carry on the battle against the Hôtel de Ville without venturing into its precincts, as yet. And inspired by him, the District reduced the importance of the part to be played by its representatives in a remarkable way. The five delegates were given instructions which were not only provisional but binding. And on October 22 the District, passing from theory to practice, "enjoined" on its representatives the "order" to call on the Assembly of the Hôtel de Ville to request that the National Assembly should have that "traitor," M. de Bésenal, transferred to the prison of the Châtelet.

This injunction was communicated to the provisional Commune on October 29: the principle was thus put forward in such a fashion that the Assembly could not escape the necessity for discussing it. The Assembly demurred: "Considering that each deputy for a district became a representative of the Commune, and that in this capacity he could not receive an injunction from his constituents, because that would compromise the dignity of the Assembly . . ." that body "called on the Cordeliers District to express its wishes,

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on future occasions, in a manner better suited to the confidence with which it no doubt honoured its deputies." And at the same time it made a deliberate endeavour to put the troublesome district in its place, begging it would "*cease to disseminate, print, and placard, resolutions likely to disturb the union which ought to exist between the citizens of a great city.*"

The clamour this lecture caused from the Luxembourg to the Mint may be easily imagined. Danton was not the man to leave it unanswered. They were dubbed troublesome fellows: but they would point to the men of the Hôtel de Ville as despots, encroaching on the imprescriptible rights of the people! On November 2 the District passed a resolution of which the most notable passage follows here: "Seeing that the representatives of the Commune who have no powers beyond those necessary for governing *provisionally*, and suggesting a plan of municipal organization to the districts, cannot have desired, without attacking rights already granted, to stifle the correspondence kept up by the districts by the method of impression—a correspondence which for the sake of the general warfare, should be carried on with the greatest activity . . . until the capital can be governed by a constitutional organization prepared according to the wishes of the majority of its citizens, and emanating from the *august National Assembly* which alone can impose the limits *the representatives of the Commune would vainly desire to define for the Districts. . .*" And going on to the question of instructions, the Cordeliers declared that nobody could contest the fact that "the different districts had the right to enjoin on their special representatives the duty of requesting the Commune to turn its attention to any particular object."

And to affirm this principle more clearly yet, and more utterly defy the Hôtel de Ville, the District drew up a form of oath to be taken by each of its representatives before he took his seat, which acknowledged that his own election and those of his fellows might be reversed, "*whatever regulations to the contrary the representatives in general might attempt to make*"; on this, three of the representatives resigned,

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only two remaining ready to take the oath. And, finally, Danton and his followers sent a petition to "the august National Assembly," appealing against the decisions of the Hôtel de Ville.

This appeal was to put the finishing touch to Bailly's annoyance. He accepted battle. His influence in the National Assembly was still so great that the restless demagogue and paltry lawyer who ruled the Cordeliers would be quite insufficient to counterbalance it. The National Assembly, duly informed of the facts, censured the Cordeliers and decided in favour of the Hôtel de Ville: declaring that the deputies of the District who had sent in their resignations must return to the Hôtel de Ville and take their seats. But this they refused to do, fearing, evidently, the severe treatment the District might mete out to them. Quite disheartened, the Commune was fain to accept their successors on November 28, and though beaten in law, the District triumphed in actual fact.

Danton was quite disposed to push his advantage home. He had no intention of accepting any indirect triumph. On the 17th the Cordeliers passed a fresh resolution formally affirming the genuineness of their right to give binding instructions to their members. They spoke, so they declared, in the name of the rights of the democracy, which the Hôtel de Ville had ignored: "*By what forgetfulness of civic rights*" had the provisional Commune been able to persuade itself into the belief that the Cordeliers District could not make its representatives swear "what they are known to have sworn"? So long as there were none but "provisional representatives at the Hôtel de Ville, the District would persist in inserting whatever clauses it deemed right into its instructions."

The Commune realized it was beaten: on the 24th it tried to close the debate, but the formula adopted was a pitiful acknowledgment of defeat. It declared itself "pained" by the District's attitude. It hoped to see the Assembly "proscribe a doctrine so dangerous to the repose of the capital that its consequences might well be fatal to the safety of the kingdom."

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But the Hôtel de Ville was bent on vengeance. It had felt that Danton stood behind all the resolutions passed by the rebellious Cordeliers. A campaign against the demagogue was organized, and led by Bailly: Danton's name had hardly become generally known before evil report began to dim its lustre.

Some men took him for a kind of mad fellow of a grotesque sort. "He is a patriotic madman," wrote the Bailli de Virieu. "He had been shouting out that all these blackguards (the deputies) ought to be hung, and the next day he changed his mania, turned tragedy into comedy, and put forward the following motion: 'Any person who has taken advantage of the wife or daughter of a citizen can never claim the title of an active citizen.'" In the eyes of others, he was something worse—a hired detective, paid by one party, by another, by them all. One man swore he served the Duc d'Orléans: another vowed that both he and Paré, his constant companion, were in the pay of England: others, again, were convinced, during the winter of 1789, that he was the tool of the Court in its war against the moderate party: a deputy of the moderate Left, Duquesnoy, wrote on January 22, 1790: "He is a lawyer, *and at this moment in the pay of the Court.*" The most moderate of his critics asserted him to be an instrument in the hands of Mirabeau, who desired to sit in Bailly's seat.

A more definite accusation came from the Hôtel de Ville: "Danton had only secured the unanimous vote of the Cordeliers *by buying them!*"

But the Cordeliers were determined to stand by their man. On December 11 their Assembly presented him with a regular certificate of good behaviour and morals. "Informed as to the slanders spread abroad against M. d'Anton, its president, by the enemies of the public weal . . ." it set forth that "the continuance and unanimity of its support of him was no more than the just reward of the courage, the talent, and the civic virtues of which M. d'Anton had given the strongest and most brilliant proofs . . . that the gratitude felt by the members of the Assembly towards their *beloved president,*

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their high esteem for his uncommon qualities, the heartfelt enthusiasm attending the honourable agreement of the electors at each fresh election, constitute the strongest denial of any idea of seduction or indirect intrigue." Prolonged and joyful acclamations on the part of the more advanced portion of the press greeted this apology, and were intended as a reply to these "vile calumnies."

The source of these "calumnies" was well known: so the war against Bailly was prosecuted with greater activity than ever: every action of his life, whether public or private, was mercilessly sifted by the Cordeliers. This Bailly, who had but lately lived so austere a life, was now inflamed with "aristocratism," and indulged in the most insolent display of splendour: "Why should he have mounted guards in front of his coach and liveried lackeys behind it? What was the meaning of this salary of 110,000 *livres* a year which the Mayor of the capital had granted himself?" . . . This Bailly was a "satrap," nay, worse, he was a "thief!" And what an absurdity to see this astronomer distributing captaincies in the National Guard!

The Cordeliers had already come to the conclusion that their Danton had been far too gentle with this wretch of a Mayor, who was certainly a traitor to the nation.

And they made no bones about defying him to the uttermost. On what struck him as being the most favourable day, Danton made the lay figures he had sent to the Hôtel de Ville in the previous November hand in their resignations, and announced his own candidature. My readers will imagine how willingly the "beloved president" was elected. The road was open now, and he was to attack Bailly in his lair, and make his own formal appearance on the scene of battle.

But just at this moment, events with which Bailly's resentment had a certain connection were to go very near preventing the Cordelier leader from taking his seat at the Hôtel de Ville, in the first place, and in the second, were to endue him with a notoriety far greater than that his behaviour in the Communal Assembly would have won him. I mean the

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"Marat business," destined to be so swiftly transformed into the "Danton business."

In September 1789 the terrible *Ami du Peuple* had likewise fallen foul of Bailly. And the Mayor, determined to make an example, had obtained one warrant to arrest the pamphleteer from the Châtelet, on October 6, and another on October 8. The police surrounded the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, in which Marat lived, but the bird had flown. The journalist took refuge at Montmartre, and then, having placed himself, by a formal letter of appeal, under the protection of the District and of its President, came back to live in the "sacred" district, at the Hôtel de la Fautrière, in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain, close to Danton's own residence. On the reception of this letter, the District Assembly, "persuaded that the liberty of the press is the necessary outcome of that of the individual . . ." announced that it took "all the authors of its district" under its special protection, and expressed its intention of "defending them against any violence with all its strength. . . ."

It had been whispered, indeed, that Danton did not approve of everything Marat wrote. "M. d'Anton is suspected," writes one deputy, "of only supporting him because he desires disturbances." He must have been anxious for a dispute of some kind.

The threat of danger still hung over the Cordeliers' new guest, and the District took its measures accordingly. On January 19 it elected five *preservers of liberty*, who were to prevent any arbitrary arrest by counter-signing every warrant granted against any inhabitant of the district, such warrant not to run unless thus signed. This precaution was aimed at the Châtelet authorities, whose intention to lay hands on their "prey" was considered certain. Feeling himself so well protected, Marat, now a naturalized inhabitant of the Cordeliers District, ventured to retake the offensive: he made a bitter attack on Boucher d'Arcis, Councillor to the Châtelet, and on the Châtelet itself, and joined in Desmoulins' abuse of Bailly.

Bailly's patience came to an end, and this, after all, was

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probably his attackers' object. He made up his mind to have the warrant executed. But expecting a lively resistance (in that district anything and everything was to be feared), he requested La Fayette to dispatch a strong military force with orders to support the agents of the law : thus, on January 22, the "sacred" territory beheld itself invaded in most sacrilegious fashion by a body of three thousand men, drawn from the various battalions of the National Guard, and more especially from that known as the Bataillon Henri IV. Impropropriety had been carried to the point of bringing in heavy guns, the authorities no doubt thinking the opportunity for striking terror into the "republic of the Cordeliers" a good one.

Backed by this little army, Councillor Fontaine, with the two bailiffs, Ozanne and Damiens, who were to arrest the pamphleteer, betook himself, at nine o'clock in the morning, to the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain. A cordon was drawn round the Hôtel de la Fautrière. In a shop on the ground-floor of the house (of deliberate intent, no doubt, for Marat was guarded as though he had been a prince), the Guard-room of the District had been established, and the "preservers of liberty" had their office on the next floor.

Probably the District Guards made some difficulty about allowing the Councillor and bailiffs access to the building : the Cordelier captain told them to apply to the committee of the "preservers of liberty."

There they found Danton with the whole of his staff. He pointed out to the Councillor that the guards had only executed the order issued by the District. The warrant of arrest must be counter-signed by the "preservers." And so the dispute began.

Meanwhile (here I follow the Councillor's report, corroborated by that of the bailiffs, and by the testimony of the witnesses at the subsequent trial of the business) a large number of people had gathered round the door and a small band had invaded the "preservers'" office. In street and office alike there was considerable uproar. Complaints were raised about the bringing in of "foreign troops" to secure

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an "arbitrary" arrest. The Cordeliers, the people vowed, would defend themselves! Fontaine specially notes the entrance of the formidable Legendre, in his butcher's smock, shouting that "all the butchers were going to close their stalls and take up arms." Then it was that Danton stepped forward, "like a Mirabeau of the rabble," and spoke these words: "What is the use of these troops? We have only to ring the tocsin and beat the drum to arms: we should soon have the whole of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine with us, and more than 20,000 men, at the sight of whom these troops would turn white [*sic*]!" Even the tribune's own friends must have thought the speech a dangerous one. One of them exclaimed, "Dost think of what thou art saying?" Whereupon Danton responded, we are told, "What I say is only my private opinion. I do not claim to turn it into a maxim, but I have the right, like any other citizen, to say what I think." Other witnesses (and the bailiffs more particularly) assert that he prudently added "that the business, being a good one, must not be spoilt." "God forbid," said he, further, so we are informed, "that they should resort to violent measures!"

Then he entered into a long discussion with the bailiffs to prove (by arguments which I shall shortly set forth), that the lately published decree had no legal value, and that the legal proceedings were invalid too. And he further announced that the District was about to meet in general assembly to discuss the point.

Councillor Fontaine did not adventure himself into that nest of hornets, but the bailiffs proceeded to the sitting. They were very uneasy in their minds. Heads were beginning to be hoisted on pikes with considerable swiftness at that moment, and a great many unpleasant remarks fell on the poor men's ears. Danton must have gone down into the street, for a member of the National Guard, Minier, a jeweller, was to testify that he had heard "a man with a repulsive countenance," whom he afterwards recognized to be Danton, "wearing the uniform coat of the National Guard," say in a loud voice, "Where is that — Commandant of the Henri IV battalion?"

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Meanwhile the meeting of the District Assembly had begun, and was pressing its assault on the bailiffs. It was explained to them, probably by Danton, that the order for his arrest issued on October 8, 1789, "was the outcome of a procedure based on the old formula prescribed by the decrees of the National Assembly published on 7th and 8th October 1789," that according to the seventh clause of the Declaration of Rights, "no man could be accused, arrested, or detained in custody save in cases determined by the law, and according to the forms therein prescribed," and that this particular warrant not having been issued in the form prescribed by the decrees of October 7 and 8, could not be put in force.

The bailiffs' one desire was to discover a pretext for getting away. They said they would go and ask for fresh instructions at the Châtelet, and rejoined Fontaine, who departed from the accursed District in their company.

But the troops remained: in vain did Fabre d'Eglantine issue from the Hall of Assembly and urge the Commandant to retire: he hesitated, waiting on for orders from La Fayette. Then Danton came out, and poured forth a fresh volley of "uncivil remarks," so the Commandant asserted; the officer, very much alarmed, caught hold of the tribune's hands, and besought him to avoid a conflict, whereupon Danton calmed down, and promised to do his best.

The Cordeliers had sent a deputation to La Fayette, who had not betrayed any great inclination to order the evacuation of the District. This made Danton very angry: in a violent rage he addressed himself to M. de Plainville, an officer on the staff: "You can stay till to-morrow morning if you choose," he sneered, "but you will never get in, and you will be able to report the fine victory you have won here, and the number of prisoners you have taken!"

All these incidents had been spread over a period of almost five hours. Danton, who was everywhere at once, had obtained the dispatch of a deputation to the National Assembly, not to apologize, but to boast that the District had defended the deputies' decisions against the encroachments of the Châtelet, "a striking proof of its zeal for the main-

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tenance and execution of their decrees." He himself headed the deputation. It met with a cold reception, and was hardly given time to retire from the presence of the Assembly before that body instructed its president, Target, to write and inform the Cordeliers forthwith that the Assembly disapproved of their conduct and appealed to their sense of civic duty to put a stop to such incidents.

Thus, when the bailiffs, armed with formal instructions from headquarters, returned to the charge at six o'clock in the evening, they found Danton and his friends in the most conciliatory frame of mind. They were at liberty, so they were informed, ironically perhaps, to execute the warrant. Marat had had plenty of time to get out of the way: and so it turned out that towards seven o'clock the agents of the law and La Fayette's soldiers all quitted the District, while the crowd watched them with a grin. They had been as thoroughly fooled as men well could be—Bailly with them—and were laughed at in every quarter. But the District, fearing the adventure might end ill for it, published a resolution embodying an energetic protest against "the seditious remarks which have been slanderously ascribed to M. d'Anton."

One threat, however, still hung in the air: those unlucky words about the "20,000 men from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine" had circulated all over Paris. And the Châtelet was inquiring into the matter. On January 29 the Public Prosecutor addressed a memorandum to the magistrates, describing the incidents of the 22nd, and reproducing the tribune's language, which promised to transform this business about Marat into a business about Danton. The motions passed by the District notwithstanding, the Court demanded the inclusion of all the documents connected with the affair in the suit just brought against the "Friend of the People." Councillor Delagarde-Desmarets, who was in charge of the business, began his operations, and on March 17 the Châtelet issued a warrant for the arrest of "the said Sieur Danton."

Feeling ran high in the District, as will be readily imagined. Since the "invasion" by "M. de La Fayette's troops,"

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Danton's position had grown more powerful still. To silence the current report that he held a dictatorship within the Cordeliers District, his friend Paré replaced him, for a moment, in the presidential chair, but it was restored to him, without a dissentient vote, on the very morrow of the 22nd. Further, he had been elected to the Commune, had overcome the opposition offered to his entrance there, by the adherents of the Mayor, and now held a seat on the General Council to boot. Even at this period there was no stopping "a Danton" as though he had been a "common boor."

For himself he had no fears, but he was anxious to be talked about. All Paris should know the story: the very independence of the districts was at stake, the Cordeliers declared. For it had been asserted (and very unwisely, as the Councillor's report affirmed), that the expression under dispute had been used within the precincts of the District Assembly. Then the districts were to be deprived henceforth of the right of free debate!

This position the Cordeliers took up, with equal cunning and boldness, on March 18. According to their protest the most innocent remarks made at the sittings of their assembly being liable to be "poisoned," to permit of proceedings being taken against their authors, "freedom would soon be replaced by the most tyrannical of despotisms, and citizens who, with the purest intentions, had revealed their opinions with vehemence and energy, would be sacrificed." The District appealed to its fifty-nine fellow-districts, to whom it denounced "the attempt" thus made on the rights and liberties of all. Clearly, if M. Danton was to be dragged to the Châtelet, liberty would be in permanent jeopardy, the democracy insulted, and the Revolution stifled. In this way a "fine business" was worked up. The ringleader of the whole undertaking was the person most interested in its success: the huge resolution dated March 18, crammed with methods of defence, was his work from beginning to end: his habitual forms of expression, and all his lawyer's phraseology may easily be recognized in every line.

An address sent up to the National Assembly was likewise

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his production. In this he paid himself liberal compliments. The *Committee of Reports*, to which the business was submitted, decided that its chairman should request the Keeper of the Seals to place the papers connected with the case before it. The Minister wrote the Châtelet to the effect that "the King desired him to ask for a copy of the charges," and having obtained the documents, forwarded them to the Committee. The reader will perceive that the higher powers were all astir, and that Danton's name was beginning to echo to and fro between the corridors of the National Assembly and the King's own cabinet. And the presumption that the Assembly would be sorry to see any prosecution opened already found general acceptance.

The Commune, it is true, which had also been brought into the matter (as who was not?), betrayed scant inclination to pursue it. Was not the Mayor the moving spirit behind the Châtelet? When the Cordeliers made an application to the Hôtel de Ville, the Abbé Mulot, who was in the chair that day (the 19th), responded in soft but perfidious fashion, praising the "zeal for individual liberty shown by the District," and added the Commune's hope "that M. Danton would have no difficulty in justifying himself," although hitherto he had "appeared to be satisfied with the testimony of his own conscience." But just because M. Danton had been a member of the Commune for several days past, that body would look, if it took up the cudgels for him, as if it "had desired to stand together out of *esprit de corps*," and would only harm the accused person "by trying to prevent him from appearing before the mirror of truth." This was sure to make difficulties for Danton, and the worst of it was that, in spite of a fiery attempt at intervention by the Abbé Fauchet, the Commune ended by siding with its president and refusing to consider the matter further. But within the districts, where every one took one side or the other, the movement was fully under way.

The Cordeliers' protest had been received by the other districts on March 19, and from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to the outskirts of Chaillot, from Bonne-Nouvelle to the

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Luxembourg, nothing was talked of, for the next fortnight, but "the case of M. d'Anton."

Only two of the districts held back their reply, and sent unfavourable answers in the end. On the 26th Saint-Antoine declared itself wounded by Danton's remarks, "all the more injurious as regards the dwellers in this district, because they have always manifested the most perfect obedience to the law." The District considered it a dangerous thing "to oppose the execution of the decree of a tribunal *which had gained the confidence of the National Assembly.*" The Récollets expressed a hope that Danton might come out of the business as white as snow, but refused to make any attempt "*to check the consequences of legal proceedings*"; this District advised M. Danton to "demonstrate his innocence *by the means afforded him by the law*"; he would thus "add this fresh proof of patriotism" (there was a touch of sarcasm in the remark) "to those which had already endeared him to all good citizens." Several other Districts declared they were not sufficiently informed, and reserved their right (as in the case of the Mathurins) "to protest against a legal procedure which would tend to stifle the free expression of opinion." But thirty adhered, with more or less eagerness, to the protest of the Cordeliers. Saint-Eustache expressed "*a legitimate sorrow,*" the Petits-Augustins called on La Fayette not to lend aid or assistance to the carrying out of the *pretended decrees* of the Châtelet: Saint-Gervais demanded that "a procedure which *outraged the national liberty*" should be annulled.

To sum it up, the great majority was in favour of intervention by the National Assembly: this, till better things happened, would at all events defer the execution of the warrant.

And as a matter of fact, Danton was left in peace. The Cordeliers heaped public homage on him. When he was re-elected president of the District, the result of the poll was announced to him with quite unusual solemnity. In the heat of his excitement, he began to take the offensive, and placed his signature at the foot of a resolution by the terms of which

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the Cordeliers demanded neither more nor less than the total suppression of the Châtelet.

And further—for he trusted the carrying on of the campaign to no hands but his own—he published a statement casting ridicule on the prosecutions ordered by the court. M. Aulard rightly recognizes his hand in the apologetic pamphlet entitled “*Great motion on the great crime of the great M. Danton, perpetrated in the great District of the Great Cordeliers, and on the great consequences thereof.*” It rings with his loud and rather vulgar laughter, and his popular wit stirs in every page. After a joke or two concerning “M. Danton’s crime,” we come on a sketch of a burlesque decree, with satirical comments thereupon: “Seeing there is nothing better for the establishment of liberty than to force the citizens into silence, because then the executive agents being free to act as they choose, can give more prompt and efficacious support to the system of public and individual liberty,” this sham decree provided that the District should be occupied by 20,000 men with eighty guns and thirty mortars, the discharge from which was to fall on the hall of the District Assembly, and that sappers should be mounted on the roofs, so that “if the incendiary, M. Danton, should attempt to escape by balloon, these sappers might hack the car off with their axes”; the “incendiary” once taken, “a *Te Deum* shall be sung at Notre-Dame, etc. . . .” This production, crammed with tasteless pleasantries, was the evident result of an evening sitting at the Café Procope. Poor though it was in taste, it raised a laugh in Paris, and that meant yet another trump in the sorry jester’s hand.

Meanwhile the Cordeliers’ petition, couched in terms of a far more tragic nature, had been transmitted to the *Committee of Reports*, and d’Antoine, a deputy, had presented a report on it strongly opposing any continuation of the prosecution. “M. d’Anton’s cause,” so runs one notable passage, “soon became that of the whole of Paris; his misfortune seemed to become the misfortune of the general public.” Forty districts had responded favourably to the appeal sent out by

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the Cordeliers, who "had turned M. d'Anton's *chains* [sic] into a civic crown," and re-elected him their president.

D'Antoine, though he seemed to doubt their authenticity, justified the remarks ascribed to Danton: the Châtelet, he said, had abused its powers: and the Assembly, if it annulled the Court's decree, would be making a legitimate use of "the sovereign's rights."

The decree must be declared "unconstitutional, and contrary to the national liberties."

The very violence of d'Antoine's report may have caused him to overshoot his mark: in spite of its desire to show consideration for the districts, the Assembly was not yet so persuaded of its own "sovereign rights" as to feel it might thus mercilessly quash the proceedings of a court of justice. It decided to adjourn the matter *sine die*.

But even an adjournment implied the suspension of proceedings. Danton might now keep a quiet mind. Any attempt by the Châtelet to enforce the orders it had issued—and indeed it was cowed, by this time—would never have been forgiven by anybody. The Tribunal itself was in danger, and was soon to pay dearly for its action. On the twentieth of the following October, when Le Chapelier brought up his report in the National Assembly on the subject of the organization of the High Court which was to replace the Châtelet in the matter of political prosecutions, Robespierre demanded the complete suppression of a tribunal "hated by every good citizen." And it was the Danton business that was in the public mind at that moment, for though the Assembly did not follow Robespierre's lead, it nevertheless decided that all the prosecutions ordered by that court should be suspended—otherwise speaking, extinguished. And for a considerable time already, in fact, Danton had looked on his own business as dead and buried.

It really was brought to a close by the end of May.

I have deliberately paused to consider this matter—a small one, as regards the commonplace incidents out of which it arose, but which, as so often happens when politics are carried into judicial affairs, ended by attaining excessive



MARIE-MADELEINE CAMUS, DANTON'S MOTHER

(From a picture by Lanueville in the Musée de Troyes)

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dimensions. Before long, the restless demagogue who had been the cause of the business was lost to view, and replaced by a whole political party, that of the advanced supporters of the Revolution, and certain skilful persons soon transformed this party matter into a question that apparently affected all the most important principles of government.

Personally, the episode did Danton excellent service. He had been pitied as a victim (twice over d'Antoine had talked about his "chains") and admired as a champion, a two-fold advantage. He had displayed—it is only fair that this should be acknowledged—remarkable qualities of cunning and daring in the course of the struggle. Now breaking the law and railing against the administration of justice, now entrenching himself, with a splendid display of judicial terms, behind an appearance of legality, he had been turn about—nay, even at one and the same time—the tribune who cowers his adversary and the lawyer who entangles him with arguments. He first raised the enthusiasm of his supporters to the boiling-point, and then set all Paris a-laughing at his enemies, whose odiousness, to hear him talk, was even exceeded by their absurdity.

The Cordeliers had stood by him with remarkable fidelity, but he, on his part, had won them a victory that set the seal on their reputation, and by so doing had transformed this knot of ferocious democrats into a sort of Pretorian Guard. Little did it matter, now, if the organization of the districts were broken up: henceforward the Cordeliers would stand firm around their chief, and rise again from their own ashes.

And thanks to this "business" of his, Danton was more, now, than the popular President of the District. The obscure lawyer of yesterday was known all over Paris. From the Committees of the National Assembly to the benches of the Commune, from the rostrum of the Salle du Manège, where he had been extolled by his defenders, to the nine-and-fifty districts, where his case had been the subject of such passionate discussion, Danton had caught the echo of his own name. Satisfaction must have filled his soul. This business had brought everything he had hoped from it—noise and sensation,

CHAPTER III

DANTON STIFLED—HE REAPPEARS

Danton at the Hôtel de Ville—Shouldered out, he goes back to his Briefs—First Rumours of Corruption—Danton's Campaign against La Fayette and Bailly—The End of the District—The Cordeliers' Club—Retirement—The Ministers dismissed—Danton at the Department—Shouldered out again—The King's Move to Saint Cloud—"Bought by the Court"—The Evening of June 20.

It may seem a curious thing that after Danton had loomed so large in the public eye, after he had been sent to the Hôtel de Ville, after he had triumphed over the Châtelet, he should have dropped suddenly out of sight, as though literally smothered, all through the summer and autumn of 1790.

Yet the fact is easily explained. Just because the President of the Cordeliers had lately proved himself the champion of the Revolution in its most extreme expression, and the enemy, above all others, of the moderate party, he was evidently fated to be the object of that party's most hostile manœuvres. That nothing was to be gained by attacking him openly had been abundantly demonstrated. Therefore the wisest tactics seemed to lie in stifling him, instead of knocking him squarely down. His adversaries, Bailly and La Fayette more especially, were encouraged in this course by the very unobtrusive attitude he himself apparently assumed, once he had crossed the threshold of the Hôtel de Ville. The part Danton played at the Hôtel de Ville has been a surprise to most people. Personally, it inspires me with but little astonishment. If he was to reveal the full measure of his capacities, Danton, as he strikes me at this particular moment, stood in essential need either of an extremely cordial or a fiercely antagonistic atmosphere. The atmosphere he found in the Hôtel de Ville was hostile, certainly, but the quality of slyness that marked

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the manner in which Bailly's adherents displayed their animosity must have both chilled and embarrassed the newcomer. There was no open opposition, so to speak, but the eyes that watched him were full of hatred.

Elected in the middle of January, he only just escaped being refused admission. On the 22nd, La Fayette came down to the Hôtel de Ville, and related the incidents with which we are already acquainted. The members appeared to feel these fresh happenings ought to delay their acceptance of the new colleague. But on the 23rd Danton appeared and pleaded his own cause. He was allowed, at last, to take the oath. "M. Danton," wrote the *Chronique*, on the following day, "whom Paris has long watched *with admiration* in his position as President of the Cordeliers, has *at last* become a member of the Assembly."

Once received into the bosom of the Commune, he became a different man. Nothing could have been more circumspect than his behaviour. (I take this opportunity of pointing out the existence of a touch of prudence in his nature.) He had no mind to increase the difficulties to which, thanks to the prosecutions, after all, he had found himself exposed for weeks and weeks. He held his peace, and even fell in, to all appearances, with the policy of the moderate party. During the very first week, the *Chronique*, bitterly disappointed, wrote that "the People, whose eyes were fixed on him as on the most zealous defender of its rights," had noted his new attitude with surprise. His colleagues, anxious, no doubt, to put his good behaviour to the test, deputed him, with several other members, to present the expression of their "love" to the sovereign; he went with his fellows. Otherwise the majority seldom allotted him a seat on any important commission. On March 3 and 5 he was appointed to a few, but they were of no very important nature. On June 19 he was directed to draft an address to the National Assembly on the subject of the property of the clergy; this he submitted on the 23rd, but so copiously was it corrected by the Abbé Mulot that nothing of the original document was left.

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He seems to have submitted to this almost invariable exclusion with great patience. Even his colleagues were astonished by it. Pouchet, one of the most moderate, expressed surprise; the man was "more worthy of indulgence than of severity." The moderate members at the Hôtel de Ville looked on the wild man of the Cordeliers as a very tolerable fellow.

But the extremists were at a loss to recognize their old friend. Babeuf, that Gracchus of a future day, wrote to him, "Brutus, you slumber! And Rome is lying in chains!"

Only when he escaped from that stifling atmosphere did he begin to rage again. At the Cordeliers, he still put his name to the most audacious resolutions, and now and again would carry his campaign across the Seine: in May 1790, a certain pamphlet represents him as one of the "Chief Justices" of the "National Court at the Palais Royal"; thus his voice mingled with those of the tribunes of that celebrated spot.

In spite of all this, he still argued cases, though not very many of them. It is a somewhat curious fact that the petition presented in the name of the Prince de Montbarey, ex-Captain of Monsieur's Guards, and a former Minister of War, bears a later date than that of the warrant for Danton's arrest. Consequently, we see a man who is a prisoner in theory put on his lawyer's gown to defend the interests of a great nobleman. And in the process the Cordelier demagogue pays homage to the memory of Henri IV, "beloved by all Frenchmen." It was a remunerative business.

But remunerative though it was, we still ask ourselves how the lawyer contrived to live. His presidency of the Cordeliers and—however light the duties his colleagues allotted him—his sittings at the Hôtel de Ville absorbed a great part of his time; and neither brought him any emolument. Yet his household expenses were increasing: Gabrielle had borne him a son, whose baptism was registered at Saint-Sulpice on June 18, 1790. The patriots greeted the birth of this "Dauphin of the Cordeliers" with pæans of joy. "Tremble, ye tyrants! ministers! *impartials!*" (Bailly's adherents) "a

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new Danton has just come into the world, and will follow, doubt it not, in his father's footsteps! Already he bears the stamp of the Public Safety. The first words he will lisp, so the stout Danton has declared, will be, '*I will live free, or I will die!*' Mme. Danton forgot her sufferings, and her first care was to fasten the National cockade upon her son, who will be better brought up, I believe, than the Dauphin. Yes! than the Dauphin!" But this particular dauphin was making his appearance in a family which possessed no Civil List! However liberally Montbarey may have paid his counsel, I can hardly believe those fees can have sufficed to support a whole family, even if we add the pecuniary results of the five other and far less important suits which occupied Danton more or less in the course of the year 1790.

In any case, the question would appear to have been asked. His enemies lost no opportunity of discussing it, and added insinuations without end. As the man must be suppressed, the simplest plan, perhaps, would be to cover him with dishonour.

I have said a word, already, as to these disgraceful reports, and shall say more when I turn my attention to the whole question of Danton's venality. But here I must make another pause, for the evil stories were already assuming a somewhat serious character.

La Fayette accepts the fact that Danton "received money from Montmorin subsequently to October 6 (1789)." I have already quoted Duquesnoy's remark to the effect that in January 1790 he believed Danton to be "in the pay of the Court." On the other hand, a perusal of Mirabeau's celebrated letter, to which we shall refer again, would lead us to the belief that this purchase of Danton's support by the Court did not take place till much later—in March 1791. But this, as his present critics object, does not remove the possibility of his having received money from Montmorin several times over. Curiously enough, an argument which none of his adversaries, past or present, have employed, so far as I am aware, is to be found in the great consideration with which, on November 10, 1790, Danton treated Montmorin—the sole

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and only person he excepted from his terrifying philippic against the Ministers. This moderation, coupled with La Fayette's accusations, is decidedly disturbing. As it was not till towards 1791, according to his accusers, that Danton's principal piece of venality was perpetrated, we will not now examine the question closely; but it is quite evident that his purchase at this early period by the Court is not an impossibility. And to this state of things his enemies ascribe his violent opposition to La Fayette, more odious to the Court than the "purest" Jacobin of them all. Myself I do not know what to think.

If he took money from one quarter, may he not have taken it from others? Among the dispatches addressed by La Luzerne, the French Ambassador in London, to his Government, we find one which rouses our suspicions. At that moment, a persistent rumour was current to the effect that England had a finger in the disturbances in France, and certain indications, indeed, lead us to believe this to be true. Now in one of La Luzerne's dispatches, dated November 26, 1789, we find the following passage—written, it may be, in answer to some question addressed to him by Montmorin: "In Paris there are two private individuals, *Englishmen* [sic], one named Danton, and the other Paré, who are suspected by some people of being private agents of the English Government." And after perusing Payne's letters, the English historian, Alger, had a clear impression that the English Government made particular use of Danton in its efforts to fan the flame of French affairs. None of this amounts to downright proof, but it is all very disquieting.

The most generally received opinion was that the Duc d'Orléans was supplying Danton with the wherewithal to support himself and his family. If we are to accept the idea that he was paid, it is in this quarter, I believe, that we must look for his chief patron. La Fayette (but he is so unsafe a witness!) formally accuses Danton of having been the principal and constant agent of the dastardly prince then labouring to cast the King's throne down and set up another for himself. All his life long, as I shall later show, Danton

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was an Orleanist. Was it because, like his friend Camille, he really admired that worthless prince, "a lofty and republican soul," that he extolled him? There lies the question! The Duke, who was the richest man in France, spent his wealth freely. Did he spend it on Danton? Here again we are forced to be content with suppositions; to assert any settled conclusion would be both imprudent and unjust. But it must be acknowledged that if only the rich can contrive to borrow money, Danton must have struck other men as being singularly unscrupulous. In 1790, accusation was rife against him. But may not all that have been part of a campaign on the part of men who desired to drive him out of sight?

The campaign itself was explicable enough, for though he kept so quiet at the Hôtel de Ville, at the Cordeliers he was still dealing mighty blows at his two enemies, Bailly and La Fayette. But they were soon to gain the upper hand.

His hatred of La Fayette was to remain with him till the end. I really believe the Marquis to have been the most serenely conceited man that ever lived. He looked down on the popular tribune, a "desperado," a "worthless fellow," and this sufficed to infuriate Danton. Their first interview in the Cordeliers' Hall, into which the General had boldly walked, to be forthwith challenged by "the famous Danton," had been quite devoid of amenity on either side. From that moment war was declared. The "man of providence," extolled by the whole of Paris, struck Danton as being a fool, a "eunuch of the Revolution." When the report of his resignation spread about the town, and the District of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois besought the General to retain a position "which seemed made for him alone," Danton's fury knew no bounds. It may be traced in the resolution of May 29, 1790, the style of which, at once violent and ironic, is the Tribune's own: manifestations addressed to the servants of the public must no longer be, "as in former times, the tribute of a cringing flattery, which *pours forth the reward before the benefit has been received.*" This was to deny La Fayette all right to public gratitude. As a delicate attention, the District

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ordered this cutting document to be forwarded not only to its fifty-nine fellow-districts, but to "M. le Commandant-Général" himself, who must have greeted the blow thus directly aimed at him with that cold smile of his, which hid such depths of bitterness. He was making ready for the apotheosis of the Fourteenth of July, and scorned the outrage. He was so far above it, in those days!

But if there seemed no possibility, for the moment, of destroying the General, Danton may have hoped to prevent the re-election of the Mayor, necessitated by the reorganization of the municipal government of Paris. A permanent Commune was now to take the place of the provisional body. This reform caused the Cordeliers great uneasiness: the Districts were to be abolished, and Sections substituted for them. These being fewer in number, the "sacred District" was to disappear, absorbed, with that of Saint-André-des-Arcs, into the *Section of the Théâtre Français*. This was believed to be Bailly's doing. Still one item of vengeance did seem attainable—Bailly's own return as Mayor might be prevented.

From that moment, Danton appears to have taken advantage of every incident, within the Hôtel de Ville or outside it, to stir up bad blood between the Mayor and the Council, or the populace. The most important of these occasions occurred on June 25: that day the Council had its first sight of the real Danton. The Abbé Fauchet, a high-hearted fellow, overflowing with enthusiasms, had brought in a motion in honour of the victors of the Bastille, and had further suggested that "a civic crown should be placed upon the Mayor's head, for having saved the country." This proposal (it really was exceedingly absurd) put Danton into a fury. It ran absolutely counter to all his hopes and feelings. He spoke against it, so the report of the proceedings informs us, "with the greatest eloquence" and secured its rejection.

But a time was drawing near that was to show which of the two, Danton or Bailly, was to carry the electors with him. Danton must have felt uneasy, for the election of the new Council was put off, at the Cordeliers' request, until

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July 25. They hoped to control it, and scattered abroad some 2000 copies of their "Advice to Citizens" on the choice of their municipal officials. These hopes were doomed to disappointment. The new Council proved more moderate than its predecessor.

Danton himself still laboured to stem the receding tide. From the closing days of May, when he was almost rid of his own "business," he lavished civic demonstrations in all directions. He was to be seen at the Jacobins' club, where he spoke fiercely of the counter-revolutionary attempts made on the army; at the Salle du Bois de Boulogne, where, surrounded by the members of the *Société du Jeu de Paume*, he declared that "patriotism should know no bounds save those of the Universe" (he was to alter his mind), and proposed a toast to "*the happiness of the whole Universe.*" On the occasion of the Federation of July 14, 1790, he organized a festival in his own District, to which he invited "any brothers in arms from the Departments who were lodged within its area." And at a banquet in Vaux Hall, in presence of 200 guests, he protested against the drinking of "healths to order"—those of the sovereigns—and vowed he would only drink the toast of "the Fatherland." But all this "civism" did not attract men, it alarmed them. His first disappointment came when Bailly was triumphantly re-elected, on August 2, 1790, by 12,550 votes out of 14,010. "The Duc d'Orléans," writes Virieu, "*and the rabid Danton, lawyer to the Great Council [sic],* shared the remaining votes between them." As a matter of fact, "the rabid Danton" only received forty-nine votes in all, a result which, coming after his much-talked-of "affair" and his many "labours," would have amounted to a failure of the most cruelly mortifying kind, if the ex-President of the Cordeliers had not refused beforehand to present himself for election.

Even so, it was a serious matter, more especially as the suppression of the Districts, and consequently of the Cordeliers, left Danton without a platform, and, we might almost say, without a point of vantage.

This soon became clear. True it is that when the active

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citizens of the new Section of the Théâtre Français met to elect their deputies to the Council-General, Danton was one of the three members chosen. But according to the new municipal constitution, the elected members had to secure acceptance at the hands of all the other Sections, before they could take their seats. A strong campaign was opened against the chosen of the Théâtre Français. It was pointed out that the man whom Mirabeau was scornfully to describe as "a factious fellow" was still an accused person in the eye of the law. This being so, what about his eligibility? I have already referred to the reports of venality and corruption. This "madman in the pay of the Jacobins," as one pamphlet called him, might very well be in many other people's pay as well. In short, he was looked on as a "crapulous fellow." Out of the forty-seven Sections invited to ratify the choice of the Théâtre Français, forty-two declared themselves in favour of striking out the name of "the Sieur Danton." And—a peculiarly humiliating detail—he was the only one of the ninety-six notables elected on August 11 to whom this "ostracism" was applied. The Cordeliers of the old times would have re-elected him, no doubt, and forced him ultimately on the Council-General. But the Section, apparently, did not dream of doing this: on September 17 it elected Garran de Coulon in his place; the only consolation Danton was left (if consolation it was, indeed) was that Garran was one of his own friends.

He does not seem to have made any protest. For the moment, he commanded no support whatever. The Assembly of the Section could only vote, and then disperse till the next election came round. During the interval it had no power to meet, or discuss business, unless fifty active citizens put in a formal request, and then only for some single definite purpose. Within a few months the Sections were to break this rule, gather in tumultuous assembly, and prepare the way for the destruction of the throne. And we shall see Danton quite naturally resume, in his own Section, the functions of the Tribune to whose sayings all men hearken. But at the beginning this was impossible. And, indeed,

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the whole period between August 1790 and May 1791 is marked, to a certain extent, by a sort of lull. I have indicated elsewhere, in my history of the Revolution, the causes that produced this lull. The Municipal elections of August 1790, which were favourable to the Moderate party, were one symptom of this short halt on the giddy slope, and Danton's defeat was the most interesting of all these signs. He must have realized that he had gone too fast, that he would have to put on the drag, or hold his tongue. This last he did, and for a moment, indeed, he seemed to be putting on the drag as well.

This was all the more remarkable because under his auspices, and hard by his own dwelling, the Cordeliers' Club had just been opened, and was to replace the defunct District Assembly as the defender of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" (the formula, I believe, was Danton's own invention).

On August 5, in fact, the *Chronique de Paris* announced that, in the course of the previous July, "the old District had formed itself into a club." From the very outset, the Club took up its stand as an extremely advanced body. It claimed to stand shoulder to shoulder with the great *Society of the Friends of the Constitution*, vulgarly called the Jacobins' Club, in the fight to prevent the Revolution from "stagnating." Founded under Danton's own auspices, it was sure to be a daring body: within its bosom that "additional Revolution" was to be prepared which the Tribune was soon to demand at the hands of the Jacobins. And still more definitely, it was bent on a merciless war against Bailly and La Fayette, both of them more hateful than ever to the frequenters of the Cordeliers' former Convent. Naturally the Club took up its quarters, in the first instance, in the famous hall in which the District had so often held its assemblies. But the Convent now belonged to the Commune; a municipality of which Bailly was the head could hardly extend any lengthened hospitality to men who were keeping up a blaze of fierce opposition to it within walls that were its own property. In May 1791 the Cordeliers were turned out. After holding their sittings, for a time,

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in the former Hôtel de Mouy in the Rue Dauphine, they returned, in 1790, to the Cordeliers' Chapel, of which Chateaubriand has left us so striking a description.

The kernel, the directing body, of the Cordeliers' Club seems to have been the small knot of men who had fought under Danton's leadership in the days of the District: Legendre, Desmoulins, Momoro, Fabre, Brune, Fréron, Marat, to whom Billaud, Manuel, Vincent and Chaumette had now added themselves. Led by this staff, the Club, which for two years was to keep all the extremest demagogues of the time together, was the very quintessence of "sans-culottism," "the elixir of the Jacobins," and during that summer of 1790 every man who attended it, whether a dweller in the Section or a mere visitor who only came there to hold forth, was considered the adherent, and some the devoted partisans, of the leader who, from 1790 to the year 1793, was to be universally known as "the Cordeliers' man."

Mere legend! cries M. Mathiez. Danton never spoke nor took the chair at the Cordeliers, consequently he played no part of any importance in connection with the Club! I am not so sure of that. The reports of the proceedings of the *Society of the Rights of Man* (the title assumed by the Club) are in a most fragmentary condition. We certainly find no reference to Danton in them. But it seems pretty certain that he was there—even when he was unseen—invisible, but present. With that robust confidence in his friends which was one of his characteristics, he trusted the care of keeping up the "Dantonism" of the Club to his representatives, and the event proved he had done wisely. "Whatever colour Danton chose to put on," writes Théodore de Lameth, "he could always reckon on the Cordeliers' devotion." But being just as lazy as he was fierce, and believing, as he did, in the docility of his followers, he never placed himself at their head except on great occasions—and invariably found them ready to follow him to the end.

If he fell into the habit of showing himself but little during those first months, it was partly because he seems to have

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been determined, just then, to drop out of sight—from weariness, disgust, prudence or indolence. Bailly and La Fayette had triumphed: he had been driven from the Assemblies; he hid himself. It is a striking fact that the correspondence of the summer of 1790 contains no reference to Danton. Mirabeau expresses an opinion that the "factious underling," "set in motion, it may be, by the Lameths," has made his final disappearance.

He shut himself up in his own house. He still lived in the Cour du Commerce, and entertained freely there. The bonds of friendship which had originated in the District were drawn closer round his hospitable hearth.

From 1790 to 1792 that dark house in the Cour du Commerce was really the corner of Paris in which the preparation of "the second fit of Revolution" was carried out. The student of history who cares to visit what still remains of the gloomy court, two-thirds of which disappeared when the Boulevard-Saint-Germain was constructed, may easily reconstitute the features of the old passage-way. It ran parallel with the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain, now called the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, from the Rue Saint-André-des-Arcs to the Rue des Cordeliers (now the Rue de l'Ecole-de-Médecine), out of which access was gained to the court by an archway just below the house in which Danton lived. This house and all that portion of the court have now disappeared, and on their site the statue of Danton stands. The new archway, through which the court may now be entered from the Boulevard-Saint-Germain, is opposite this statue, and a little to its right. Passing under it, you are astounded to behold, only a couple of paces from the modern boulevard, a corner of the Paris of bygone days, dark and dank and smoke-stained: blackened old houses, narrow windows adorned with rusty iron bars, low-ceiled stalls and mean little shops, among them that in which Marat used to print his *Ami du Peuple*, and another in which the future Marshal Brune set up the type for his own newspaper; at the end of the court stands the wretched dwelling beneath the roof of which Simon, later appointed "tutor" to Louis XVII, soled

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and heeled his customers' boots and shoes. No great effort of the imagination is needed to reconstitute the appearance of this corner—Danton's corner—as it must have been in 1790.

Danton was the most important tenant in the whole court. Many of his windows looked on the Rue des Cordeliers, and if we wander through his rooms, armed with the inventory taken in 1793, we shall realize the respect with which "Monsieur Danton" must have been surrounded, and how, when he made butchers and cobblers welcome, in his jovial, familiar way, to his "grand" apartment, with its fine furniture, everybody cried, "What a worthy fellow!" Moreau de Jonnès enquired, one day, who that big man might be whose boisterous laugh and ringing voice had attracted his attention. "What!" was the answer, "you don't know him? That's the excellent M. Danton!" The population of the quarter said, no doubt, that, for a *bourgeois*, "he was not stuck-up!"

Here, then, driven as he was out of the Assemblies, he had come to earth. His wife, his child, his friends, a good table, his evenings at the café, all the items of his comfortable middle-class existence were the realization, to some extent, of his bygone dreams; and now and then a visit from his old mother and his sister, Mme. Menuel, brought him a whiff of his own native air.

He had gone back to his legal occupations: the King's Councils were still in existence, for the time being. On July 18 we find him peacefully pleading in favour of the Chevalier de l'Hôpital, and when we note his close, precise, moderate statement of the facts of his case, the idea that this can be the loquacious lawyer whose "incendiary" language had only lately been the talk of Paris seems utterly impossible. He made another appearance at the bar, to support the petition of the parish of Metz-Robert to his Majesty, and that of the Sieur Desvoisins, of Saint-Domingo, against Mme. Lambert, a widow, and her infant children: in a lengthy memorandum he sets forth the case against the "widow and the orphan," excusing himself for so doing by the fact that "the law is impassive, and knows no respect of

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persons." And then, again, he had to prepare a defence of the interests of Antoine de Busseuil against Mme. de Vauban.

Did he ever go down to Arcis? It seems likely. In any case, Arcis reminded him of its existence. The one and only incident during the summer months of the year 1790 that drew attention to the name of Danton was the arrest of Necker, who, having resigned his office and turned his back on France, was arrested, most unjustly, by the National Guard of Arcis. Danton was accused of having warned his friends that the Minister was to pass through the town. He may, indeed, have himself been at Arcis at that time. And forthwith a pamphlet appeared, entitled, "The great motion passed in the Department of the Aube, to deliver M. Necker out of the hands of the Danton Family." No reply was vouchsafed to this aggressive publication. The Tribune seemed really quite snuffed out, and not another word was said about him, even in the matter of abuse.

All of a sudden he reappeared upon the scene.

In August 1789, when Louis XVI offered office to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Champion de Cicé, to whom he confided the Seals, and the Comte de la Tour du Pin, whom he appointed Minister of War, he fancied he was satisfying liberal opinion—for prelate and soldier alike were considered to be "men of '89." As a matter of fact, Champion de Cicé had been the enthusiastic supporter of the Declaration of Rights, and La Tour du Pin was to shut his eyes for many a long day to the effervescence of democratic feeling raging in the ranks of the army.

But August 1789 was in the far past, by this time, and in the eyes of the democracy the "men of 1789" were traitors and humbugs. The proof of this lay in the fact that La Tour du Pin (after he had left a good five-score crimes against discipline unpunished) had not hesitated to strike at certain liberty-loving soldiers, and put down the noble-hearted rebels of the Nancy garrison with a bloody hand. These last repressive measures had been approved by the Assembly, though not by the Cordeliers, who had expressed the "sorrow" they had caused them. Thus nobody ventured to make any open

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attack on the Minister of War; nevertheless, there was a settled resolve, in democratic circles, to make him pay for his behaviour by the loss of his office. And it was time, besides, now "the traitor" Necker had departed, to make the King dismiss all his retrograde ministers. On October 19, in a speech in the National Assembly, Menou demanded that the King should be invited to send them about their business. But on the 20th his motion was lost by 400 votes to 340.

The democrats were exceedingly angry. On the 22nd the Mauconseil Section, which was to march in the very forefront of the democracy till the Tenth of August came, impeached the Ministers. By the 27th all the other Sections had joined in the accusation, and together they called on the Mayor to lay it before the National Assembly. While he was making up his mind, the forty-eight Sections appointed commissaries, who met at the Archiepiscopal Palace, drew up an address to the Assembly, and forthwith called on Bailly to place himself at the head of the deputation that was to present it to the Assembly. The Mayor, in his alarm, consented to conduct the delegates from the Sections to the Manège. Great must have been his vexation when he discovered that the orator he was thus to introduce as the chosen spokesman of the Sections was no other than his own personal enemy, Danton!

This was inevitable. The moment a doughty blow was to be struck, Danton had naturally been summoned from his retirement.

And so it came about that, on November 10, the "man of the Cordeliers" appeared at the bar of "the august Assembly." His speech was ultra-violent. At the very beginning of it he was rudely interrupted by the Abbé Maury, and an indescribable tumult ensued. Amidst noisy interruptions, "which M. Danton overcame by the sheer strength of his own organ," so runs a report written on the following day, "he demanded the prompt, the immediate dismissal of the Ministers." In the most virulent style, he cut up each of the persons he accused. "M. Champion" had "tampered with the text of the decrees, and chosen the King's Com-

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missaries among the open enemies of the new order of things." "The only patriotism with which M. Guignard" (Saint-Priest) "was acquainted was that he had drawn from the policy of the *Divan*; he had threatened all patriotic heads with his Damascus blade." He had "tried to organize an army of malcontents in Brittany, and in September 1789 he had paved the way beforehand for a counter-revolution at Versailles." As for La Tour du Pin, he was nothing but a fool, "incapable of any personal initiative, but he was a foe to the Revolution, because he took his parchments and his vanity to be a genuine nobility." These insulting words roused loud murmurs in the Assembly, but in spite of them the orator continued his merciless arraignment of the Minister of War, who, "though less guilty than others, for he was too blundering to be dangerous," had nevertheless stripped the frontiers, oppressed and disgraced numbers of soldiers and non-commissioned officers, and brought the *lettres de cachet* back to life."

"These three Ministers," he went on, "must no longer use the indulgence of the People's representatives as their weapon against the People itself." And then came the question, Why should this dictum not affect the fourth "aristocrat" Minister, M. de Montmorin? Because the People had discerned "his intentions," and he had obtained "an honourable distinction." I have already indicated the nature of the thoughts naturally stirred by this exception, and by the friendly tone of comments which the excessive violence of the orator's preceding remarks rendered all the more extraordinary. It was to be hoped, said Danton in conclusion, that the Assembly would set up a National High Court—this was always to be his idea—and that "the Ministers would be taught by some striking example that their responsibility was no imaginary thing." Meanwhile he besought the Assembly to report these Ministers to the King, as unworthy of the public confidence. More than once the insolent terms of the speech had stirred the audience into a tumult. Fierce protests had come from the Right, noisy applause had risen from the Left. Chasset, who was in the chair, granted the

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petitioners "the honours of the sitting," and Danton retired in triumph, boasting that he had put even the Abbé Maury to silence.

He had good reason to triumph, for within a few days the unlucky Ministers he had so mercilessly used handed in their resignations.

This provided a sensational reappearance for Danton. He had added yet another to the tale of his "services": he could hold up "the heads of three Ministers" before the people, and in any case he had proved that "Danton knew how to wake up."

Yet he does not seem to have shown any desire to presume on his new laurels. It almost looked as though he were hastening his retreat before the hostility of Bailly and La Fayette, which had also raised its head. On October 24, thanks to his election to the command of the Cordelier battalion, in the place of the Marquis de Vilette, he seemed to have recovered his coign of vantage. The *Ami du Peuple* declared this election had "made La Fayette and Bailly tremble with *rage and fear*." And it certainly must have disturbed them sorely. Did Danton think the moment premature for a conflict between an officer and his general? He resigned, in any case. He was particularly anxious not to be taken for a "troublesome fellow" by decent folk, for his dream, now, was to reappear in a very different character.

He aspired to a place in the Department. My readers are aware that this description was applied to the Assembly of administrative officials deputed to manage the business of the Department of Paris (the Seine). These were elected by the assembly of electors, themselves chosen by the Sections. In the month of October, the Section of the Théâtre Français had sent Danton to sit among the electors, but within their Assembly he had seemed, at first, to meet with an almost open hostility, and between October 1790 and January 1791 the number of votes he polled at each ballot was ridiculously small.

How was it, then, that towards the end of January these numbers began to go up? For it is a fact that when the

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Assembly had to elect a dozen administrators to the Department, in batches of three, Danton obtained 94 votes, while Talleyrand received 151 and Mirabeau 91. And though Talleyrand and Mirabeau were elected on the second ballot, and Danton dropped out, he held his ground, and tried his chance at the subsequent ballots. On the 21st, 22nd, 24th and 25th he failed again, always on the second ballot, after reaching a position close to the majority in the first. This looks almost as if some kind of veto (probably Bailly's) had been systematically employed against him in the background. But on the 28th he was at the head of the three men to be elected, on the 30th he was still leading, with 130 votes, and on the 31st, to the general surprise, he was finally elected by 144.

How, when his candidature for less important posts had been so constantly and unanimously rejected, had he contrived to collect minority votes of such respectable dimensions, and to attain victory in the end? The electoral Assembly was frankly moderate and royalist. Mirabeau's election was due to the fact that for some weeks past he himself had been supporting reactionary views. All the elected officials, with the exception of Danton, were men who belonged to what we should nowadays call the Centre. Conjectures crowd upon us.

One of these conjectures sounds plausible enough. Robespierre, in his Notes, and Saint-Just, in his address to the Court, were both to charge Danton with having owed his election as administrator to "the protection of Mirabeau." At the Jacobins' Club, on the very evening of the day of Danton's execution, Arthur alluded to this as to a publicly accepted fact. Sigismond Lacroix considered these accusations to be void of foundation: "Danton," he tells us, "was Mirabeau's enemy; only a month previously he had handled him very roughly at the Jacobins' Club, and was able to boast, at a later date, that he had hampered his action."

It certainly is true that Danton and Mirabeau had come to loggerheads in 1790. But Mirabeau was passionately anxious, at that moment, to obtain the control of the "Department," and himself become its chief. Just because he believed

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Danton to be an "agent," and knew him to be hostile to La Fayette (his own adversary), he may have wished to see him enter the Department, in the hope, possibly, of making use of him, and though, only a few weeks later, we see him furious and disgusted with the Cordelier leader, that may have been because he had just discovered that though the man might be bought, he could not be held. Anyhow it is clear that if Danton, who had hitherto held the lowest place in the electors' estimation, suddenly obtained one of the most desirable posts they had to give, he must have had some very influential person at his back. This was not La Fayette, it was not Bailly, nor Siéyès, nor Talleyrand—it can only have been Mirabeau. At a later date he was to attempt to make little of his success, hoping he might thus render it more explicable. "I was elected," he said, "the *last* on a triple list, by a *small number* of good citizens." I find it difficult to believe that his 144 votes (the number is not very much below that given to the other elected candidates) all belonged to Dantonists.

But the Cordeliers hailed the victory as their own. "A triumph for patriotism!" writes the *Orateur du Peuple*, of which Fréron was editor. "While the news, as might have been expected, roused murmurs and complaints in the Municipality, the numerous acclamations of the Society of the Jacobins set the seal, so to speak, on an appointment from which the citizens promise themselves the happiest results, in the repression of the despotic aspirations of the Municipal members."

The Department was full of "men of 1789," almost all of them going through the process of casting off their original Jacobinism; most of them, too, were great lords or wealthy *bourgeois*, little disposed to any sympathy with Danton; not one of them, we may be sure, but considered him a violent fellow. He felt it. We have already learnt that he could be an opportunist when that served his purpose. His object, now, was to reassure. This is clearly indicated by his letter accepting the post, which was read to the electoral Assembly on February 2. ". . . I shall not disappoint," he wrote,

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“the hopes of those who have not believed me incapable of uniting to the enthusiasms of a fervent patriotism . . . the spirit of moderation necessary if we are to taste the fruits of our happy Revolution. Desirous as I am to have the last remaining partisans of despotism for my enemies, I do not aspire to reduce calumny to silence; I have no ambition save that of being able to add to the esteem of the citizens who have done me justice that of the well-intentioned men who cannot be for ever led into error by false suspicions. . . . Firm both as to my principles and my conduct, I undertake to offer no opposition to my detractors save that of my own actions, and to take no vengeance save that of proving, more and more, my attachment to the nation, to the law, and to the King, and my eternal devotion to the maintenance of the Constitution.” With such astonishment did the style of this letter fill its hearers that after the president had read it aloud, a second reading was demanded, and duly given by a secretary. This incident proves the stupefaction of the audience to have been considerable. Had the former tribune of the Cordeliers grown so wise in his retreat?

To tell the truth, the Council of the Department does not seem to have been very sure of this. There, as in the Council of the Commune in past days, Danton seems to have been put aside. This disgusted him. “I have not made a single recruit among the asses of the Department,” said he, at the Café Procope. Between February 18 and April 25 he never attended a single sitting at the Hôtel de Ville, and though he was present on the 5th, 7th and 10th of May, he did not go back again, after that, till June 9. By that time he had given himself over altogether to the extremist policy, and was not seen again. His colleagues were justified in forgetting him: when the business of the Department was divided among three offices, his name was not put down for any one of them. In his horror of feeling himself shut out, he quite made up his mind not to return. And then that inherent indolence of his was to prevent him, ever and always, from taking advantage of his victories, even when he had risked everything to win them! So—furious, no doubt, with

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the "asses" of the Department—he threw himself back into the politics of the Clubs.

He was perpetually at the rostrum of the Jacobins' Club now. His policy seemed to grow more and more extreme. "I see with sorrow," he exclaimed, "*that we must have an additional Revolution!*" A significant phrase, proving how far from the constitutional declarations of his letter to the electors the speaker had travelled, by the end of March. And, indeed, on March 30 he was heard to go further even than Collot-d'Herbois, calling the "executive power" a "*hostile body*," demanding the convocation of a new legislature to replace the stagnant Assembly, and carrying on a ceaseless attack on the men of 1789, the "moderantists," from La Fayette to Siéyès.

One particularly famous incident was to prove the rapid falling away of the *ci-devant* Cordelier from his constitutional beliefs. On April 18, 1791, Louis XVI desired to proceed to Saint-Cloud. For certain reasons, described by me elsewhere, the people regarded this journey with suspicion. The mob gathered, and opposed the sovereign's departure, and the National Guard actually went so far as to stop his progress with crossed bayonets. The tribune, if we are to believe La Fayette, was one of the first to reinforce these shameful mutineers by bringing up the "Cordeliers' battalion," and Danton himself was to boast of having "caused Louis XVI's road to bristle with pikes and bayonets." La Fayette hurried up to recall the Guard to its duty, and the people to its respect. He was hooted. Then, according to Desmoulins, the General hastened to the Hôtel de Ville and begged the Directory to proclaim martial law—in other words, to give him leave to fire on the crowd. Danton alone, we are assured, opposed the application and secured its rejection. A lively altercation, if the journalist's testimony is to be accepted, ensued between La Fayette and Danton, who said very hard things to the General. According to Fréron, Bailly had associated himself with La Fayette's request, and the conclusion drawn was that Danton himself ought to be forthwith appointed in the place of so villainous a Mayor.

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At the Jacobins' Club, that evening, Danton was to be heard rejoicing over the fashion in which the National Guard had treated the King, a treatment, so he declared, which had met with the approval of the Department. In his own Section Assembly he went further still, and referred, no doubt, to the La Fayette business. The Assembly took fire, and passed a resolution acknowledging M. Danton's declaration, which "it accepted as an accusation," and stating that "the *sieur La Fayette* and the Mayor had done everything in their power to obtain the Department's leave to fire on the people." And the Section ordered this resolution to be placarded.

La Fayette was moved to anger: the story was untrue. On May 7 the Council of the Department sat, and forced Danton to eat his own words. The Council, delighted to have this opportunity of showing him up as an acknowledged liar, and hoping to ruin him utterly, drew up a declaration to the effect that Danton had not even been present at the sitting during which La Fayette had made his application, and obliged him to put his name to a regular retractation, which barely preserved appearances. The manuscript statement is now preserved in the Musée des Archives, as a specimen of Danton's handwriting. A thing of this kind might, perhaps, be taken to be the work of some posthumous detractor; but it really is the formal confession of a clumsy invention.

The Cordeliers did, indeed, cover Danton's retreat. Desmoulins, commenting on an exceedingly harsh letter addressed to the King by the Directory of the Department, even attributed its composition to Danton, but all the probabilities are against this. "A friendly imposture," as M. Aulard indulgently remarks, evidently intended to wipe out the memory of the incident that had preceded it. But who shall stop the march of legend? A few days after these things had happened, and in spite of Danton's own retractation, the German Oelsner was to write that "La Fayette having asked for the proclamation of martial law, Danton and Lameth had very properly opposed any resort to these desperate methods." The Cordeliers, no doubt, took it as a matter of doctrine that the "great Cordelier" had saved the people yet once again.

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And, quite undisturbed, Danton and his friends held on their triumphant way.

La Fayette was firmly convinced that the odious agitator was working for the Court, and believed the incident of April 18 to have been deliberately planned for the purpose of stirring up a reaction. One thing is certain—the Court did at that time buy the services of certain subaltern agents, who were to stimulate demagogic movements for the purpose of weakening the popularity of such men as La Fayette and Barnave, and disgusting the sincere royalists who had been swept away by the theories of the year 1789—a dangerous policy, a two-edged weapon with the perilous effects of which the royal family was one day to be made acquainted. Was Danton one of the persons employed by the Court to forward this process of outbidding the enemy? Perpetually we find the hideous question of venality standing in our path. Here again we must face it, for in this spring of the year 1791 we come upon the most disquieting of all the testimonies against Danton's innocence.

It was on March 10 that Mirabeau wrote La Marck the letter in which, as though the incident were one concerning which his correspondent must possess as much information as himself, this most corrupt of men angrily complains of the blundering way in which the funds set apart for the work of corruption are administered, and gives an instance, asking for 6000 *livres* to be distributed by himself, he adds, proof that it was Danton who wrote Desmoulin's last number. *There is no making head or tail of it.*" And further on, after asking for 6000 *livres* to be distributed by himself, he adds, "Quite possibly I may risk wasting these 6000 *livres*, but they will be thrown away in more innocent fashion, at all events, than Danton's 30,000!"

We shall show that La Fayette and Bertrand de Molleville agree in affirming that Danton was in the pay of the Court all through these months of the year 1790, and for a long time after that, and that half a score of witnesses, whose testimony we shall discuss in due time, confirm this opinion more or less.

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What form did the bargain take, if bargain there was?

At that moment, the old "judicial" posts were being bought out. La Fayette was ready to swear that Danton had been bought out in advance, for a sum twice as large as that he had originally paid, and Robespierre made the same assertion. Now this assertion falls to the ground, in face of two documents still in our hands: the deed of purchase, dated March 29, 1787, to which we have already referred, and the deed of liquidation, dated September 27, 1791, which we shall presently examine more particularly. Danton had bought his post for 78,000 *livres*, and he was bought out for 79,031: this convicts La Fayette and Robespierre either of slander, or of being misinformed.

But what of Mirabeau's words, so precise in their tenor, and his letter, so natural in tone? What of the excuses made by Garat, Danton's own friend, for the "purchase"? How is it that whenever his enemies talked about this same purchase, in 1793 and 1794, they were readily believed? And what about those buyings at Arcis of which I shall presently speak?

For the moment, let us simply note that many believed this more or less hypothetical "purchase" had taken place in the spring of 1791. Lord Holland, indeed, attributes to Danton the cynical reply that "people are glad enough to pay 80,000 *livres* for a man like me, but a man like me is not to be had for 80,000 *livres*!" And that, perhaps, was the idea condensed in his exclamation before the Revolutionary Tribunal, "Such a man as I cannot be bought!"

My duty, at this stage of my story, is to point out the fact. It may have taken place at the very moment when Danton was resuming his position as a leader of the advanced guard in the Departmental Council, in the Section of the Théâtre Français, at the Jacobins' Club, and thus giving full play to those lungs Rivarol had counselled Louis XVI to employ in his own secret service.

He had ceased to use them at the bar. He argued his last case on March 16; and the "Councils," indeed, were dying out. But he continued to employ them at the Jacobins' Club,

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where his position grew more important every day, and where he thundered against every one and everything, acts and individuals, tainted, in his eyes, with "moderantism," and never loosed his grip on La Fayette, whom he attacked on any and every pretext, and perpetually. Against La Fayette he vented his fury afresh on the evening of June 20. He seems really to have had a sort of presentiment, that night, that Paris was on the brink of tragic happenings, that a fresh convulsion was within the bounds of possibility. Relating, in more or less truthful fashion, an attempt on La Fayette's part to draw him towards his own party, at a moment when "he was banished by the ostracism of the Sections, whereas M. Bailly had been re-elected," he exclaimed, "*I answered him that the People, when it chose, would sweep away its enemies with one single stroke.*"

And once again, in the fever of that hot June evening, he cried, "My life has long been at the mercy of the daggers of the foes of liberty! Whatever masks they choose to wear, I fear them as little as I feared the weapons of the Châtelet!"

When Danton left the meeting-place in the Rue Saint-Honoré at eleven o'clock that evening, and took his way in Desmoulin's company (he it is who gives us this detail) back to the Cour du Commerce, he must have crossed the river by the Pont-Neuf. Towards a quarter past eleven, then, as he passed along the Tuileries, through the dimness of that sultry night, he might have seen shadowy forms slipping with furtive steps out of the Palace precincts. For at that very hour Louis XVI and his family were hurrying towards the coach that was to convey them to the frontier.

CHAPTER IV

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The King's Flight—Danton at the Tuileries—The Campaign against Louis XVI—Danton Outnumbered—The Clubs favour Dethronement—The Evening of July 15—Danton at the Champ-de-Mars—Prosecution—Retirement to Arcis—Journey to England.

TOWARDS half-past nine on the morning of June 21, the noise of three cannon-shots spread terror all over Paris. And suddenly the tocsin began to clang from the belfry of the Hôtel de Ville. But for a full hour already the news had been passing from mouth to mouth—the Royal Family had disappeared! With one consent the mob poured into the gardens and courtyards of the Tuileries, eager to know the truth.

The Assembly, called together in haste, summoned the Department. The trembling administrators had hard work to force their way through the mob. All at once they caught sight of a sudden eddy in the crowd, and a noisy clamour fell upon their ears. Attended by four fusiliers of the Cordeliers' Battalion, their colleague Danton was hurrying to the spot. As he joined them, a great shout went up. The mob's special fury was directed against La Fayette, who, when he took charge of the King's person, had declared he would answer for it "with his head." Thus, if not the accomplice of his flight, he must be guilty of a most criminal carelessness, at all events. Danton did not conceal his exultation: all at once his colleagues saw him stop short, and heard him cry in that stentorian voice of his, "You are quite right! Your leaders are traitors, every one, and they are fooling you!" Once more loud shouts rose up "from every quarter." "Long live Danton!" was the cry. "Danton shall triumph!" And the Department moved along, perpetual shouts of "Long live

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Danton! Long live our father Danton!" attending on its way.

Here was a matchless piece of good fortune for a man who, only on the previous evening, had been accusing La Fayette! Taken by surprise, and not knowing, yet, whether an attack on the King might or might not be safely undertaken, Danton had one thought only, for the moment—to seize his opportunity, and demolish the General—"a traitor!"

All that long day the General held his ground. He contrived, at last, by a resort to measures of the most energetic kind, to recover his credit, partially, at least, and ventured, when evening came, to put in an appearance at the Jacobins' Club. There Danton had hoped to secure him a reception of his own preparing. "If the traitors present themselves," he had exclaimed, "I give you my formal promise either to leave my own head on the scaffold or prove that theirs must fall at the feet of the nation they have betrayed!" Hardly had he spoken the concluding word, when, in the midst of an extraordinary tumult, La Fayette made his entry, arm in arm with Alexandre de Lameth, with whom, only the night before, he had been on the reverse of friendly terms, and who had only been driven into a reconciliation by the pressing necessities of the hour. For an instant the unexpected sight put Danton out of countenance. But in a flash he pulled himself together, and applied himself to procuring the General's destruction. He delivered a regular philippic: "I challenge M. de La Fayette as to this. . . . I challenge M. de La Fayette as to that . . ." and set forth an array of grievances, some of them, as it strikes us, far less weighty than others.

The King's flight, he went on to say, was simply the outcome of "one huge plot. It would never have been possible unless some understanding with the leading public functionaries had existed." "And you, M. de La Fayette!" cried the orator, "you who so lately assured us you would answer for the King's person with your own head, do you think you can pay your debt by making your appearance in this assembly? You swore the King should not depart! You

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are either a traitor, who has betrayed his country, or a simpleton who undertook a responsibility, he was unfit to assume! Looking at it even in the most favourable light, you have proved yourself incapable of being our leader!" The General, "but for whom France might have been free," ought to hand in his resignation: he besought him to do it. The speech, so Théodore de Lameth tells us, closed with the following words: "M. de La Fayette told us he would answer for the King with his own head: we must have the King, or else we must have his head!"

"In vain," writes Mme. Roland on the following day, "did the sturdy Danton exert his eloquence against the Commandant!" La Fayette, in fact, after a short speech from Lameth, made a somewhat vaguely worded declaration to the effect that he had really saved the country in the course of the day, and thus, apparently, secured a decisive victory. An Order of the Day expressive of patriotic unity was duly passed. Though Danton returned to the charge on the 22nd, he met with no success. La Fayette's popularity was still too strong to permit of his being driven out. And besides, a graver question still had come into view—one Danton himself had not ventured to put forward, but which his Cordelier friends were raising at that very hour. All round the Théâtre Français the idea of a Republic had suddenly sprung to life. And Danton, lest he should find himself outstripped by his own followers, was fain to leave La Fayette to enjoy the good fortune which seemed never to forsake him, and make his own position clear on the question of the necessity of the King's dethronement, and the destruction of the sovereign's power.

I should begin by saying that Danton was not a Republican. I will explain myself on this point when we come to the question, "What was he, then?" But we must in all fairness take note of his feelings at the moment when this most unexpected crisis revealed itself. Plutarch and Corneille had, of course, turned him into a so-called "republican," but his "republicanism" was purely theoretical and platonian. Never, even in 1790, had he dreamt that France could be

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a republic. Up to a given point he was a democrat, but there was a certain social conservatism about him too; his habits were the habits of the middle class, he was a man of liberal mind, he certainly belonged to the category of thinkers capable of conceiving the idea of a monarchy revolutionary as to its origin, and middle class as to its immediate surroundings, which should protect the new interests, and be completely free from priestly and aristocratic influences. Even before the Flight to Varennes, a Louis-Philippe would surely have been "the best of Republics" in Danton's eyes; if the worst came to the worst, he would have been well content with Louis XVI, protected from counter-revolutionary influences, and held in tutelage by the Assembly.

But the King had fled: his place was empty. Yet for the first forty-eight hours, as we have seen, Danton does not seem to have thought there could be any question "affecting the King, and the King's office." But the People had already set the question, and travelled far on the way to answering it. More accustomed than its leaders to taking the Royal Family at its word, it had said, "You chose to depart? A pleasant journey to you!"

The ferment was strongest round and about the Théâtre Français, and this was very natural. Was the former "Republic of the Cordeliers" to suggest the idea of a Republic to the rest of France?

On the 21st the Section, without going quite so far as that, thought the hour had come for replacing the suffrage qualification which had hitherto existed, by universal suffrage—on its own authority. And it further decided on the removal of the word "King" from the terms of the oath taken by elected persons. The neighbouring Club, bolder still, declared its readiness for "tyrannicide." And Camille, who that day, surely, did not submit his article to Danton's friendly criticism, clamoured for the death of the "*animal roi*." The word "republic" was not spoken, indeed, but Oelsner, whose ear—the ear nearest the Cordeliers—was always on the stretch, heard them shout it on and after the 22nd.

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Shouted it was, indeed, but only to be scouted in the higher spheres. In La Fayette's immediate circle any attempt at a republican régime in France was declared impracticable, and Robespierre, both in public and in private, shrugged his shoulders at the very word. At Pétion's house, Mme. Roland heard him inquire "with a sneer," on June 21, "what a republic was!" Marat was ready with a solution of his own, the appointment of a dictator. But the Jacobins, led by Gorsas, repudiated the idea of setting up a Republican stork in the place of "King Log."

"I do not believe," writes M. Aulard, "that Danton thought of the Duc d'Orléans." But the very doubt he here expresses is most suggestive. To me, on the contrary, it would seem impossible he can have done otherwise than think of him. I have already referred to the cordial relations between the Cordelier leaders and the Prince: I have just noted the fact that the tribune's personal leanings had prepared his mind to accept the enthronement of this man, at once the leading Prince of the blood-royal and a high Masonic official, a professed Voltarian, with a touch of humanitarianism as well, and further, a second-rate intelligence, of moderate powers and vacillating will, easily ruled by any one who cared to take the trouble. How far better it would be to have a sovereign of this calibre at the head of a democratized state, than to see it in the hands of a Cromwell or a Sylla, such as that madman Marat would fain discover, and far better, too, than any Republic, be it La Fayette's or even the Cordeliers'! And besides all this, was not the Prince La Fayette's sworn and mortal foe?

In a very curious volume devoted to the history of the Duke's agent and confidant, Choderlos de Laclos, M. Emile Dard has given us a study of the attempt made by the Orleanist camarilla at this moment. "The supreme effort," he calls it. Laclos it was who directed the game. There can be no doubt he hoped to have his prince acclaimed king, between June 21 and 25. But the Prince himself, a timid, pusillanimous, disingenuous being, would not declare his pretensions openly—trusting always he might see his hand forced.

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Laclos, himself a member of the Jacobins' Club, was in hopes the proposal might come from that quarter. Now Danton was very intimate with Laclos. Even in the previous April couplets embodying a supposed confession by Laclos had been generally sung—

"Je travaille le militaire,
Danton range les Sections!"

Laclos saw a great deal of the Cordelier leader. And, indeed, when the Duke's confidential agent found himself compromised in the unsuccessful attempt we are about to describe, he continued to be one of Danton's henchmen, and was employed by him up to September 1792.

I repeat that there can be no doubt as to the existence of this Orleanist intrigue. On the 21st, Philippe—with the exception of Conti, he was the only Bourbon left in Paris, now the King and his two brothers had departed—began driving all over the city in an English gig, and coaxing the mob to cheer him. The 23rd brought another attempt at theatrical effect; the Duc d'Orléans applied for admission to the Jacobins' Club. He had only just been accepted, when Laclos moved for an expression of the Club's opinion on the "question of knowing what was to be done about the King," and then it was that Danton himself, who had hitherto kept silence on the matter, uttered a suggestion more fitted, apparently, than any other to lead up to the establishment of the Duc d'Orléans on the throne.

"*The individual who has been declared to be King of the French,*" he cried, "has taken to flight, after having sworn to maintain the Constitution, and yet I hear men say he has not become unworthy of his crown!" This King is either "criminal" or "imbecile." "Once the royal individual has become imbecile, he cannot continue to be king, and it is not a Regent that we need, but a Council of Lunacy. This Council cannot be chosen in the Legislative Assembly," he adds; "the Departments must be called together, and each must appoint an elector who shall then help to choose the ten or twelve members to compose this Council, and these,

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like the members of the Legislative Body, must be changed every two years."

In a letter dated June 24, Mme. Roland, whose zeal for the Republic kept her in a state of frenzy all through those critical hours, betrays extreme anxiety as to Danton's motion, "the false or unintelligent energy of which can discern no expedient save that of a regency!" She must have grasped Danton's real intention, when, even while seeming to put the thought of a regency aside, he most skilfully insinuated the idea of such a plan. And with this idea she unhesitatingly connects the "pitiable" manner in which Philippe d'Orléans had been admitted a member of the Club, "thanks to a cutting short of all the usual formalities." There is no doubt in my mind that the far-seeing republican lady was right, and that the business really was in full swing.

But haste was urgent. Danton himself was being outnumbered. The address sent up by the Cordeliers to the Assembly on this occasion, after a formal statement of the fact that the King had "abdicated," continued thus, "*it remains to be seen whether it would be a good thing to appoint another.*" And the Assembly was entreated to "declare France a Republic."

Marat, who still pleaded for a dictatorship, openly named Danton as suited to the post. Danton's own friends were thinking of this: Brune let fall several remarks of a somewhat curious nature at the Café Procope. Others put Danton on his guard against such notions: Gorsas gave him a public warning on the subject: "This patriot, who possesses a great deal of wit and good sense, and powers of penetration, is indicated in these cruel encomiums, which cause him to be taken, in the minds of honest men (unaware of the profound distress they cause him), for a scoundrel striving, under a mask of patriotism, to bring back despotism by means of anarchy."

Danton was not so very "profoundly distressed": but he certainly was not dreaming of a dictatorship for himself. One of the witnesses at the trial in August 1791 testified that he believed "this manœuvre to have been directed by an

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invisible hand," and evidently pointed to the Duc d'Orléans. The Duke, on pretext of denying any pretension to the regency, had written a letter to the newspapers which had drawn the public attention still more closely to his person. In spite of this, another of Danton's friends, Réal, proposed that the Club should appoint "a guardian of royalty, to be selected by the eighty-three Departments." Danton supported him, and on July 3 he secured the passage of an order to print the speech in question. Meanwhile, Laclos continued to bear his part in the campaign against Louis XVI. The whole of this agitation was inspired by the Palais Royal, and kept up after the King had been brought back to Paris.

Round about the Théâtre Français, indeed, a fierce popular agitation had been set on foot, immediately after the King's return. Desmoulins was playing the demagogue with a vengeance at the Café Procope. One night he read his friends a petition he had just drawn up in the name of the workmen employed in the "charity workshops" (who thought themselves ill-paid, and had applied to him for help), which contained phrases of the most dangerous kind. It was on July 1 that Camille imparted this statement, intended to strengthen the political agitation by the addition of one connected with social matters, to his friends at the Café Procope; and several persons who were present have assured us he declared Danton "had given his approval to the petition." But certain members of the audience roundly asserted the demagogue's object was to "turn Danton into a second Cromwell." By this time the Café had become a hotbed of agitation of the fiercest sort. Witnesses at the proceedings in court testified that "the before-mentioned Fréron, Legendre, Desmoulins, and Delacroix constantly used the most incendiary language there," and that Delacroix preached "the worst of all doctrines—that of the naked sword."

Louis XVI had been brought back to Paris on the 25th, but he was still "suspended," and kept a prisoner within the Tuileries. Yet the Assembly had decided on his reinstatement, as soon as the Constitution should be complete. When the Cordeliers came to the Bar of the House on July 9,

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with a petition praying it to defer any decision until the eighty-three Departments had been duly consulted, Charles de Lameth, who was in the chair, would not even read the document. The petitioners, furious, protested fiercely: the very next day, at the Jacobins' Club, Danton poured forth the angry vexation with which the Assembly's evident determination had filled his soul. "The man who proposes to re-establish Louis on the throne is either a fool or a traitor!" he cried. And after a few further remarks, as bitter as that just quoted, he concluded in his usual grandiloquent style: "Let the National Assembly tremble! . . . The Nation, in its new birth to liberty, is even as Hercules, who crushed the serpents that sought to devour him! It will bring its twelve labours to a close by the destruction of all its enemies!"

On July 15 the Assembly replied to these asseverations. In response to an appeal from Barnave—"Barnave the traitor," the Cordeliers openly called him—it declared Louis XVI free from responsibility with regard to his own flight. This amounted to a paving of the way to the sovereign's restoration. Was it likely that Jacobins and Cordeliers would tamely accept the destruction of all their plans? Would Danton cease to lend them his countenance? Nobody believed it.

The Clubs resolved on one desperate effort to make the monarch's dethronement appear an absolutely necessary thing before the Assembly could reach its final decision on the subject. That very evening—on the 15th—a memorable scene was enacted on the boards of the Jacobins' Club; the occurrence of the final split between "the old Jacobins"—Barnave, the Lameth brothers and their adherents, and the extreme Jacobins, almost all of them belonging to the Cordeliers. At the very beginning of the sitting, Danton, referring to the presence of the gentlemen I have just named, ironically suggested that tickets of admission should be offered likewise to MM. Maury and Cazalès (two of the most prominent members of the extreme Right). But he left Laclos to open the real battle, and this proves that to the very end the

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management of the business remained in the hands of the Duc d'Orléans' agents. Laclos, so Brune informs us, "energetically" proposed that the Assembly should be induced to cancel its decree—passed under a misapprehension due to its having been misinformed—by the presentation of a *monster petition*. In this, if we may believe Brissot, who sat beside him that evening, he was eagerly supported by Danton, who, from his place, had already shouted his opinion that the decree was "infamous." Once he reached the rostrum, he spoke in the most violent fashion. "If we possess energy, let us show it . . . let those who have not the courage to raise their heads as free men, refrain from signing our petition! Do we not stand in need of a purifying ballot? Well, here we have it to our hand!"

Thereupon the Club was invaded by a deputation from the Palais Royal, the spokesman of which announced the citizens' intention to proceed the very next day (the 16th) to the Champ de Mars, and there take an oath "that they would never recognize Louis XVI as King." D'Antoine, who was in the chair, told them Laclos' proposal appeared well fitted to promote their view, and the gathering, which had completely lost its head, proceeded to vote in favour of the motion. Five citizens were to be appointed to draw up the "monster petition," to be laid, on the following day, on the Altar of the Fatherland in the Champ-de-Mars, and thither the citizens were to go to sign it. These five commissaries, Brissot and Danton among the number, were at once selected.

Danton left Brissot to draw up the terms of the petition with the help of Laclos, who, no doubt, intended to direct its expressions in a sense favourable to his princely patron's cause.

While the moderate members of the Club were still shaking off the dust of their shoes against him, Danton had gone back to his own quarter of the town. The evening of July 15 would seem to have been particularly stormy round and about the Théâtre Français. Leaving the Jacobins' Club, Danton, Brune, Desmoulins and La Poype, joined, no doubt, by

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Legendre, Fabre, and Leclerc de Saint-Aubin, all of them Cordeliers, returned, a somewhat boisterous party, to the Cour du Commerce, "to bid good-night," so Brune's deposition was to run, "to the Sieur Danton's lady." There they spent something like an hour, discussing the next measures to be taken: the commissaries were to proceed in person to the Champ-de-Mars and read the petition aloud. Brune went on to the Café Procope; he was a Southerner, and his tongue was apt to wag somewhat freely. He talked again, and far too much, in the open street: "Forty thousand men," he declared, "were expected to sign the petition . . . the Assembly had been bought by the executive authorities . . . luckily the republicans had their bayonets . . . before a fortnight was out, there would be fresh developments!" He is even reported to have gone so far as to assert that Danton would be proclaimed "the Tribune of the People." The future Marshal was in a state of violent excitement: he came across a patrol, the commander of which called Danton "a factious fellow and a rogue": and answered him with a volley of threats. The quarter certainly was patrolled by troops. One patrol chanced upon Danton and his friends: "There goes the *cabal*," quoth one of the guards.

In the Rue des Boucheries, meanwhile, Legendre was holding forth in the fiercest way against "le Mottier" (Mottier de La Fayette), whom he was to accuse, the next day but one, of having "murdered the citizens": before two days were out, he declared, Mottier and Bailly would have "contrived the King's escape." The "Cabal," in short, was fuming and raging up and down.

While all this was going on, Brissot was drawing up his petition. It was couched in the following terms: "The Frenchmen whose names are signed below make a formal and special request that the National Assembly should be called on to accept, in the name of the Nation, Louis XVI's abdication, on June 21, of the crown which had been assigned to him, and to provide for his being replaced by *every constitutional means* . . . the undersigned hereby declare that they will never accept Louis XVI as their King, unless the

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majority of the Nation should express a desire contrary to that of the present petition." Brissot tells us that Laclous wanted to slip in a sentence as to the necessity of "choosing a successor to Capet." But the expression, "to replace the King by every constitutional means," which was left unchanged, excluded all idea of a republic: it meant the proclamation of the Dauphin, but it implied a regency, that of the Duc d'Orléans. Thus the ultimate object of the petition continued to be Orleanist in its nature.

On the morning of the 16th the Cordeliers set forth, each man wearing the card of the Club, with its "open eye," in his buttonhole. At the head of the procession, one of its members waved a banner bearing the words "*Liberty or Death.*" At the Champ-de-Mars all the Jacobin and Cordelier leaders were assembled, amongst them Brissot, Legendre, and Danton. The crowd soon gathered around the Altar of the Fatherland, at each corner of which a commissary stood, and read the petition aloud. Danton, so an eyewitness informs us, "wore a grey coat," and was easily recognized by "his stentorian voice." And indeed one of his friends, Verrières, was pointing him out to all and sundry. He was the most prominent figure in the demonstration, and the crowd gathered thickest round his whereabouts.

But in the evening it became known that the Assembly had passed a resolution explicitly declaring that Louis XVI was to be maintained on the throne. From that moment this undertaking of the Clubs became a frankly factious business. Sorely crestfallen, the Jacobins held a meeting and decided the petition must be withdrawn. But the republicans, already very much displeased by the use of the expression "constitutional," made up their minds to present a fresh petition on the following day, and this time to demand the trial of the guilty king, and the "organization of a new executive power." At dawn on the 17th, numerous groups of men were already on their way to the Champ-de-Mars.

Neither Danton nor any of his adherents, except Legendre, took any part in this fresh business. This is not at all sur-

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prising. The republican petition ran quite counter to the real plans of the Duc d'Orléans' friends.

Towards ten o'clock Sergeant, President of the Section of the Théâtre Français, made his appearance at Danton's house, where Desmoulins, Fréron, Brune, Fabre, Santerre, Momoro, and Duplain were already assembled, and informed them that the mob had massacred two men who had been found on the Altar of the Fatherland. The business was beginning to look tragic. La Fayette marched several battalions of troops to the Champ-de-Mars, where he was hailed with threats: he then requested, and obtained, the Mayor's consent to the proclamation of martial law; and, having duly called on the rioters to disperse, the General, on whose person an attack had been made, gave the order to fire, and a number of citizens were laid low. After this, panic fell on the mob, and it took to flight.

Legendre flew to the Cour du Commerce. On his way, he called at his own house, and there received a visit from two persons closely connected with the Lameths, who had come to tell him "We are sent to warn you to get out of Paris and go to dine in the country this evening: *take Danton, Camille, and Fréron with you*: they must not be seen in the town to-day. Alexandre de Lameth sends you this advice." The Cordelier leaders did not wait for a second hint, and forthwith departed to Fontenay, where the Charpentier couple entertained them to dinner.

On the whole, Danton did not appear so very seriously compromised. Before very long we find him speaking of his "imaginary share in a too tragically famous petition." But on the very morrow a reaction was to begin, and he had been too much mixed up with all the preceding incidents for his name to escape association with those of the "madmen" whose behaviour had forced La Fayette into ordering the troops to fire.

On the 18th, Thomas Lindet, who can hardly be accused of any anti-revolutionary feeling, wrote as follows: "Here is a check for the Brissots, the Dantons, the Laclos!" Virieu, more violent by nature, wrote, on the same day, that the whole

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business had been worked up by "*that scoundrel Danton, whose countenance alone would warrant his being hung with a quiet mind and without the smallest scruple.*" As early as on the 18th, the whole matter had been brought to the notice of Bernard, the Prosecutor attached to the Tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement, by the Keeper of the Seals. The constitutional party was quite resolved to rid itself, once and for all, of certain troublesome members of the Jacobin Club—Robespierre and Pétion, and more particularly Danton and Desmoulins. On the 22nd, Mme. Roland foresaw "the proscriptions of Sylla": Danton was to be "put in chains." In a memorandum drawn up on the 17th, before the message from the Keeper of the Seals had reached him, Bernard had demanded information as to "the authors, abettors, and accomplices of the dangerous designs manifest in the said events (those of the 17th), *circumstances, and dependencies.*" These "*dependencies*" might be far-reaching indeed, and Danton might be implicated in them: he was one of the men aimed at by the Prosecutor, when he pointed to the "factious persons" who had "mised" the patriotic societies, "which had thus, quite contrary to their own intentions, promoted plans of the most sinister description."

And indeed the hue and cry against Danton was very general. Without a moment's hesitation his colleagues in the Department denounced the language he had used in their presence at the Tuileries on June 21, and La Rochefoucauld, President of the Department, forwarded their accusations to Bernard.

The preliminary inquiry lasted from July 23 to August 8. The public trial opened on the 12th. A warrant for Danton's arrest had been issued on the 8th, solely on account of the language he had used on June 21—a very frail foundation on which to base a prosecution. Generally speaking, none of the charges in this trial were very strongly established. Before long, Bernard himself was fain to ask the Court to discharge Brune, and most of the prosecutions were withdrawn perforce. Camille was free to go back to his news-

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paper work. Further, once the first flush of excitement had died down, the Assembly began to fear the reaction might go too far. In Danton's case, however, the warrant was not withdrawn. And for this reason he thought it as well to spend a few weeks on his newly purchased properties at Arcis.

On July 26 he reached his beloved little town. His presence there is mentioned, and dwelt on, in a somewhat curious document found among the papers of the Committee of Inquiries, and published by M. Aulard. On July 29 the Sieur Boniceaut, a former bailiff at the Châtelet (this explains his antipathy to Danton), who had retired and settled at Arcis, warned the Committee of the presence of this "factious individual" in the household of another person of the same kidney, of the name of Courtois. He was said to have brought "valuable luggage" with him. No sooner had this prisoner awaiting trial arrived, than he had ventured to invite the Mayor, the municipal officials, and the President of the District to a banquet, "so as to get the passport he needed from them." Neither had the King's Commissary, though warned by a private letter (sent him, no doubt, by the eager Boniceaut), dared to have Danton arrested, "because he is in his native place, because the populace has been won over by the faction-mongers, etc., etc. . . ." It is certain that "a large number of persons would be needed to effect this capture: a detachment of troops from Troyes would be very necessary."

That there was a violent current of feeling at Arcis in Danton's favour is undoubtedly true. The local Jacobins had asserted, in a resolution crammed with praises of the "proscribed" man, that the whole district would have to be destroyed "before his sanctuary was violated." But to do that nobody seemed to have the least desire. Beugnot, who afterwards served as a Prefect under the Empire, was then at the head of the judicial affairs of the Department. Wherever he found himself, he was never to fail in his consideration for the feelings of the ruling powers of the day, and even of the powers of the morrow ("that bigoted old woman of yours,

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Beugnot"; so Danton described him, soon after this, to Courtois). He sent the Tribune word that he might sleep in peace.

His absence was now beginning to disturb his Paris friends. On July 22 the *Courrier Français* had anxiously remarked that he had not reappeared in the city. It was not till August 9 that a short paragraph in the *Feuilles du Jour* informed their readers that "M. Danton . . . had retired to Arcis, his native place." This reassured every one. And then, apparently, a feeling of regret at the promptness of his departure began to spread. Brissot, especially, seemed rather bitter on the subject. "How easily might Danton, bound and dragged before the examiners, have crushed those ambitious cubs (the Lameth brothers), whom he had perhaps too heartily supported, and who have now become his persecutors!" Desmoulins, indeed, stood up for Danton: his friend, he vowed, had run great risks at Fontenay: an attempt had been made to murder him. Meanwhile those of his own townsmen who disliked Danton probably inveighed against him. Old stories were raked up. Why was he not arrested? Why did the Court spare him?

Danton answered nothing at all: an argument *pro domo* is never a very easy thing, and besides, he loathed the very act of writing. But inspired by him, we may be sure, Courtois sent up a long apology to Brissot's paper, the *Patriote*. He desired to defend "his friend Danton, that honest man, hitherto unceasingly slandered by a devilish cabal, with a ferocity only equalled by its meanness." Danton's fortune was by no means what it was described as being: in any case, its existence was explained by the honourable earnings of a lawyer in whose office, at the moment of writing, "business worth twelve millions, and more, was lying neglected." Danton, he added, was making a most generous use of the little fortune he had thus acquired, "paying over part to his excellent mother" (this was true): for, "good son, good father, good husband, good friend, as he was, what titles did he not hold to that of good citizen?" And after yet more praises, Courtois' feelings seem to carry him away: "Brave

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and generous Danton!" he cries, "much more than the regret of honest men does the frenzied rejoicing of the wicked shed honour on thy retreat! *Better spend one's life in the desert, than dwell with beings in whose mouth the word Republic has become a mortal insult!*" To endue this letter with a special character of authority, the *Society of Arcis*, having heard it read aloud, "resolved that it shared its sentiments."

Why, then, if he was so hedged about with sympathy, did the tribune forsake his beloved Arcis and depart to England? He may have thought it better not to return direct to Paris, as though Brissot's objurgations had forced him back. His father-in-law was going to England to purchase a new loom; he knew no English, and Danton spoke that language fluently. This may well have been the only reason. The journey would put the last touch to his appearance as an exile. He crossed the Channel.

On the subject of this journey, which would really seem to have been an entirely private undertaking, Dr. Robinet has compiled a whole volume, entitled "*Danton émigré*," a fine sample of the effect produced by a biographer's excessive mania for extolling his hero. If Danton could return to earth, he would probably be heartily astonished to find how huge a pile of hypothesis has been based on that short trip of his. Danton, we are assured, was received into the house of an English Liberal, Dr. Christie, who introduced him not only to Thomas Payne (and as a matter of fact, he did enter into friendly relations with Payne), but to various Whig statesmen, such as Fox, Stanhope, and Sheridan. Or again, we are told, Talleyrand, then living in London, was the medium of communication: for it is a well-known fact that subsequently to this journey Danton treated Talleyrand with considerable favour. During the conferences the exile, it is taken for granted, held with the Whigs, the most important political questions must have been discussed: and his intercourse with England, after he came into power, is thus explained. Yet there is no proof, absolutely none, that Danton had any opportunity, during this trip to London, of conversing with any of the great lights of the English Parliament,

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and the whole story would appear to be mere fancy, bred in the author's brain.

And further, Danton must have been boiling with impatience. The elections to the Legislative Body were approaching. Was he to be prevented from taking part in them? Already Paris was beginning to feel anxiety in this connection. The Section of the Observatory addressed an inquiry to the Committee of the Constitution as to whether the warrant issued against Danton rendered him ineligible for election. And Marseilles, too, approached the Paris Club for information as to M. Danton's disgrace.

It looked as though the Constituent Assembly were anxious definitely to prevent the little cohort of Cordeliers from forcing its way into the new Assembly. On August 30, when the sentence restoring Brune to liberty was read aloud in open court, there had been cries of "And Danton? and Legendre?" "Keep your minds easy," a well-informed person had replied, "they will be given back to you *after the elections!*"

But Danton had no intention of asking anybody for leave to return and play his part at the ballot boxes. He was an elector still, and even a member of the administration. He meant to go back, and that done, to cast his own vote, and induce others to vote for him. On September 5 he heard his friend of the old District days, Garran de Coulon, had been elected a deputy. A clear proof, this seemed, that the Paris elections were turning in favour of the supporters of the advanced policy. "I came back," said he later, "when Garran was elected." Suddenly, on September 7, he started for Paris, and arrived there on the 9th, hungering for vengeance, and resolved to force himself on the Assembly.

CHAPTER V

AN EXPERIMENT IN MODERATION—THE TENTH OF AUGUST

Danton's Candidature for the Legislative Body—The "Damiens Business"—Fresh Retirement—Danton elected "Deputy Procureur Syndic"—Greater Moderation—Danton "prepares" the Tenth of August—The Historic Night—The Municipal Coup d'État—Danton Minister of Justice.

ON September 13 the National Assembly voted the amnesty which was to deliver the "victims" of the Tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement from every cause of fear. The same day witnessed another of those incidents which, under a skilful process of exaggeration, may be occasionally turned to most effective use in politics.

At two o'clock on the 13th, then, and in the bosom of the Electoral Assembly, a particularly eager elector asked leave to formulate a complaint: a bailiff had ventured to enter the precincts within which the deliberations of the Assembly were taking place, and was actually drawing up an official report of the proceedings—"the most deliberate possible infringement of the liberties and dignity of an Assembly exercising a part of the popular sovereignty." The bailiff's name was Damiens: he had presented himself at the Archiepiscopal Palace, and asserted his right to execute a warrant for the arrest of "the Sieur Danton." Damiens was haled to the Bar of the Assembly and duly questioned. This cross-examination, and those which followed (a mass of papers dealing with the subject are still in the National Archives), prove that the warrant had been in the bailiff's hands for a week, and that on the previous evening he had been summoned to the Palace of Justice, and ordered to proceed to its immediate execution. He had been told Danton was in the habit of going down to the Electoral Assembly every day, and had intended to arrest him as he left it. But after waiting out-

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side for him in vain from nine in the morning until two in the afternoon, he had made up his mind to enter the building and beg the President to tell him what he had better do. When a member asked why he had not gone to M. Danton's house, and arrested him there, the worthy man replied that "*knowing M. Danton to be very quick-tempered, he had not dared to go there.*" The bailiff was put through three cross-examinations, and the discussions that filled the intervals between them were as feverish and eager as though the overthrow of the State had been really and seriously threatened.

Next day the electors sent their delegates to the Bar of the Assembly, with an address the terms of which endued the episode with quite formidable dimensions. "A great infringement of the public liberties had been committed . . ." and all the documents relating to the affair were laid before the National Assembly. Meanwhile the Commissary of Police, at the request of the President of the Electors, had caused Damiens to be conducted to the prison of the Abbaye. He, too, entered his protest. The National Assembly ordered an inquiry. It ended by expressing its disapproval of the bailiff's arrest, and ordered his release, for which Danton, with scornful good nature, had already pleaded.

The Jacobin Press made numerous comments on the incident. The language used by the Cordelier papers was at once violent and grandiloquent: the *Courrier* itself, "*although its opinion of M. Danton was not over healthy,*" made a great outcry in defence of the principles thus violated, so it declared.

And this is just where the business did Danton such an extraordinary service. Though the Jacobins had acclaimed him on the 12th, certain prejudices arising out of the events of July 1791 still clung about his name, and these had been strengthened by the hostile campaign prosecuted by his enemies during his recent absence. His desire, now he had come back, was to be elected to the Convention, and this Damiens business, which put him forward, once more, as the incarnation of the threatened liberties of the people, had cropped up at the most apposite moment possible.

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It was a most fortunate occurrence—so fortunate, indeed, that it has inspired M. Mathiez with feelings of the strongest suspicion. What! Danton had been back in Paris five whole days, he had been seen “every day of his life” at the Archbishopal Palace and at the Jacobins’ Club, and the authorities had waited to arrest him till the very day on which the Assembly was to vote the amnesty! And then this incomprehensible blunder which had sent the bailiff to lay hands on his “victim” in the very manner most calculated to set a halo round the head of the prisoner he had come to arrest! Should not all this be regarded as an intrigue got up by the Lameth brothers, both of them influential men, at that moment, and who had been rendering service to Danton and receiving service from him perpetually—these Lameth brothers, whom he had been threatening, too, since his return—if the testimony of a letter written on September 11 is to be accepted—with very unpleasant revelations! The whole thing, then, must have been a pre-arranged scene got up between Danton and these two gentlemen. This is possible. It is likewise possible that M. Mathiez’s dislike of Danton may have led him to fancy the blunders of a bewildered bailiff had their foundation in some altogether deep and dark design.

In any case, and whether purposely or not, the blunder promised to be most useful to Danton. Everybody was sure he would be elected, twice over perhaps. On September 18 the *Babillard* asserted that now Brissot’s election was an accomplished fact, report had it that Danton would shortly be elected also. The Cordeliers were “positively assured he would be chosen.” The Court feared it: La Marck wrote Mercy that as Brissot had been elected, “a certain Danton would perhaps be elected likewise”—he was a strong “republican element.” There was a report, too, that he was to be the chosen of the Cannebière: “Since Marseilles is electing Danton to the next Legislature,” wrote Desmoulins, already.

As a matter of fact, neither Paris nor Marseilles did elect him. The Electoral Assembly of Paris, though it had defended him, showed no inclination whatever to do more.

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On September 10 he had 3 votes, and on the 17th he had 25. On the 19th his poll rose to 49. This progress was somewhat disturbing to the moderate party. One of the Paris electors made a speech against Danton, calling him a "hot-headed fellow," "a friend of liberty," indeed, with "most persuasive powers of oratory," but whose principles were much to be regretted. Another speaker asserted Danton to have said in his presence that "my ideas are republican, but nobody will listen to any talk of a republic: therefore I will speak as an hypothetical supporter of the Monarchy." The campaign bore fruit: his poll dropped gradually from 49 votes to 15, 12, 8, 5, and even 2. On September 27 he polled 6 votes. He fought his way up again to 22, but on the 28th—the closing day of the elections—he only received 14. That ended it: Danton was not to be a deputy. His non-election in 1791 is much to be deplored. When we see him, after his election to the Convention in the following year, calming down and growing almost moderate in his treatment of public affairs, we cannot but regret that the electors of 1791 failed to provide his eager spirit with a wider field and a nobler object of activity, and thus lift him altogether out of the realm of subaltern intrigue and factious enterprise. Danton's advent to the highest spheres of government, and his chance of attaining a spirit of moderation, were thus put back for a whole year.

It was a bitter disappointment. And he did what he always did after any violent stress of excitement, or unexpected failure: he hid himself out of sight.

On September 12, probably, he had moved out of a modest lodging into a larger one in the same house: one of those imprudent performances (considering the stories afloat as to his fortune) in which his constitutional indifference to what anybody might say of him, led him constantly to indulge. Neither did he refrain from adding to his little landed property at Arcis. On October 20 and November 7 and 8, he was to buy more land, for a sum total of 3176 *livres*, and further purchases in 1792 and 1793 were to bring the whole price of his acquisitions in landed property to the sum of

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125,152 *livres*. He must have spent his time between his new apartment in Paris and his enlarged possessions in the country: he himself relates that he took advantage of the leisure time at his disposal to work the farm of Nuisement, which he had bought from the monks at Ancenis on March 24, 1791. From September 14 to Decembre 14 he literally sank out of sight: he never showed his face either at the Jacobins' or the Cordeliers' Club, he argued no case, he carried on no intrigue, he stirred up no rebellion. He settled himself down in his convenient new lodging, the comfort of which I shall presently describe: he was happy in it: Gabrielle Danton was expecting the birth of another child, which came into the world on February 2, 1792.

Yet his friends were still mindful of him. On December 4 a post as Deputy *Procureur Syndic* fell vacant, and Vilain d'Aubigny went to the Jacobins' Club and asked it to support Danton's candidature. Robespierre seems to have been the one person who desired to put him aside. Nobody was more anxious than this "friend" to leave Danton in his retirement. And the very next morning a letter from Gorsas declared that, "for the sake of the public peace, Danton's candidature must be dropped."

Therefore the general surprise may be imagined when, two days afterwards, on December 6, Danton found himself elected by 1162 votes against the 654 cast for Collot-d'Herbois.

This Deputyship was a temporary, but an honourable position. Cahier de Gerville had just resigned it, on his appointment to the Ministry of the Interior: a pleasing precedent. Further, it carried a yearly salary of 6000 *livres*. And then Danton was to find himself, at the Hôtel de Ville, in the company of Pétion, the Mayor, and Manuel, the *Procureur*, and reckoned on ruling these two inferior intelligences, and through them, swaying the great city to his will.

He made no secret of his satisfaction, which expressed itself in declarations of a most extremely moderate kind. And indeed retirement always brought Danton excellent counsels. Anything more curious than the speech he

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delivered when he entered on his new office, on January 20, 1792, can hardly be imagined. The man's whole nature is revealed in it—his urgent need of pouring out his heart, whether in the way of confession or of boastfulness, his longing to gain acceptance even at the hands of those who had rejected him, his perpetual and haunting thought of his own personality, his own talents, his own appearance, and his evident desire, at the same time, to reassure and please his audience. All one important side of his character is here.

He congratulates himself on having passed "from the Tarpeian Rock to the Capitol"; public opinion has "reversed the verdict of fools" and called him out of that retirement in which he had been about to cultivate "the farm which, though bought with money well known to have been paid him for his office, had been transformed by his detractors into a huge domain, the price of which had been supplied by he knew not what agents of England or Prussia." (He does not care to dwell on any save these utterly improbable reports.) He has been represented as being a madman. Now, though resolved to "fight to the death against the Counter-Revolution" and "never to disappoint the fervent friends . . . of the Holy Revolution," he is thoroughly determined "to win the esteem of all those well-intentioned persons" who "desire Liberty as much as he does, but dread its storms." He has been accused of exaggeration. His physical nature accounts for much of this. "Nature," exclaims this very peculiar magistrate, "has endued me with an athletic frame, and the fierce countenance of Liberty!" It was true, indeed, that he had "*consented to appear exaggerated rather than be weak,*" but though he had seemed to shield the "fanatics of liberty" (Marat) this was only in order to keep the "traitors who were protecting the serpents of the aristocracy" in check. He had unmasked "some of the men who fancied themselves the pivots on which our Revolution turned" (La Fayette and Bailly, of course), but it was all-important that the People should realize what it had to fear from persons so skilled in the art of holding themselves in perpetual readiness to pass, according to the turn of events, into the party

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offering the loftiest opportunities to their ambition." As for his last proscription, it was due solely to the fact that he had never acted "otherwise than in obedience to the eternal laws of justice."

"Such had been his life" (and the historian is probably well-advised if he does not put absolute trust in the speaker's complacent summary of his past existence)! But now came the definition of his future attitude, and his astounded auditors saw a Danton rise up before them who must have struck them, remembering past stormy incidents, as an utter paradox—a Danton who was to be the most moderate of functionaries, a well-disciplined defender of the Constitution. He would maintain the Constitution, and nothing but the Constitution. "To this Constitution the King had just given a further proof of his attachment, by summoning the speaker's own predecessor, Cahier de Gerville, to office"—the thought was a pleasant one to Danton. "The People," he added, "whose choice I am, is at least just as eager to preserve the Constitution, and it has therefore granted its powerful support to the King's purpose." And I suppose Danton would have believed himself to be dreaming if anybody, at that moment, had reminded him of the Tribune who, only six months previously, had set the Nation between the horns of his expressed dilemma, "a guilty king," on one side, or "an idiot king" on the other.

Yes! for we now find him fondling the hope that "constitutional royalty will live centuries longer in France than despotic royalty has endured!" And here the tribune raises his voice, but the loyalty it expresses grows deeper yet. We hear him make a solemn profession of devotion, fidelity, respect. "Yes! I must say it once more! Whatever may have been my individual opinion as to men and things when the revision of the Constitution took place, now that revision has been established by oath, I would clamour aloud for the death of the first man who should raise a sacrilegious hand against it, were that man my friend, my brother, my own son!"

Yet he was bent on showing that beneath all his noisy

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asseverations of loyalty the heart of the foe of tyranny, the passionate friend of the democracy, still throbbed. "I have devoted my whole life to the People, that People which no man will ever again betray or attack, and go unpunished, which will speedily purge the earth of all its tyrants, unless they renounce the league in which they have bound themselves against it! I will perish, if need be, in the defence of the People's cause! To it alone shall my last vows be given! It only is worthy to receive them! Its enlightenment and courage have lifted it out of its abject state of nothingness; its enlightenment and courage will make it eternal!"

The effect of this speech—one of the most interesting records concerning Danton we possess—was something tremendous. Generally, when officials took up their offices, they pronounced a few dull, colourless phrases. And now, this new Deputy, "in the masculine tones and thundering voice the patriot was already known to possess," had made the Hôtel de Ville ring with his fervid eloquence, extolled the patriots, even while he flattered the moderate party, touched all men's hearts, and contrived not to disturb their minds. Every sentence was applauded, but when he exclaimed "I will perish, if need be, in the defence of its cause!" a shout rose up from all the galleries, "We will perish with you!" One of the newspapers poked fun, next morning, at Danton's "athletic frame, and the fierce countenance of Liberty," but when he spoke, his words rushed by like one of those torrents that swirl a muddy flood all flaked with gold.

Pétion, the Mayor, replied: he spoke in praise of men who found themselves incapable of pursuing a neutral course, but congratulated the new official on his resolutions as to his future conduct. "His behaviour in the important post to which he had been called would no doubt be the despair of his detractors and the consolation of the friends of the public weal."

At one touch Danton was transformed into the Deputy and the man of moderate views.

It was a highly successful reappearance, and does not seem

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to have cost him the smallest loss of favour on the part of the Cordeliers. The Nation was still passing through a period of disturbance and trouble, but now the Constitution had been voted and accepted, many men shared the new Deputy's optimistic views. Was his optimism genuine? and genuine, too, the great appearance of moderation that accompanied it? That may have been. In addition to the fact that Danton did probably share the mental attitude of the moment, we know that behind the tribune's mask the *bourgeois* sat concealed. The *bourgeois* was well pleased to have attained a "good post," and who knows whether, with Cahier de Gerville's good fortune shining before his eyes, he may not have hoped for one that would be better still? Till the following month of March, when these hopes were to be disappointed, he really became a very different man.

Those who read his speeches of the winter of 1791-1792 will clearly detect, in spite of some inevitable outbreaks of demagogic declamation, a real desire to be *constitutional*. True, he does not relinquish his attacks on his old enemy La Fayette (December 14), and this is not at all displeasing to the Court; he still stigmatizes the action of those who would fain "give France an English Constitution, in the hope of soon giving her that of Constantinople." But on December 16, when "the war question" is first brought forward at the Jacobins' Club, he declares that "he will now defend the People . . . with the club of reason and the sword of the Law alone." As to the question itself (which as my readers know, and I have already insisted on the point elsewhere, was to bring Robespierre, who opposed war, and Brissot, its partisan, into collision), he maintained a cautious neutrality. On January 4, when Carra ventured to suggest, at the Jacobins' Club, that an English prince should be invited to occupy the throne, Danton fiercely opposed the proposal "*in the name of the Constitution.*" And when, on that same January 4, a motion to send one of Robespierre's speeches to the armies was proposed, he once more objected, in the name of the Law. I pass over other occasions, on which we

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see him employ a rather rough-and-ready common sense to serve the cause of a somewhat factitious moderation.

In reality, the part he had been playing was irksome to him. When Beugnot, lately elected Deputy for the Aube, reached Paris, and took up his place in the Assembly among the members of the Right, Danton invited him to breakfast on three separate occasions, but so little was he able to curb the expression of his real yearnings, that he inspired "that bigoted old woman Beugnot" with a genuine alarm. Before very long he was heard to exclaim that "for a considerable time I have been maintaining a most painful silence." A most "painful" constraint the Tribune must have felt it, never to speak save "on the lines of the Constitution and about nothing but the Constitution!" And suddenly, in the most absurd way, and on the very eve of the day on which the possibility of his attaining ministerial office made itself apparent, his natural temperament played his policy false, and after the most incomprehensible fashion, he forgot himself.

For indeed one fails to discover what induced him to speak so bitterly against the Court at the Jacobins' Club on March 4, and that precisely in connection with a demonstration of "civism" on the part of Louis XVI. The soldiers of Châteaueux, condemned to the galleys after their mutiny at Nancy in 1790, and then released, were to be reinstated; preparations were even being made to carry these "victims of the traitor Bouillé" in triumphal procession, and, as a preliminary, money was being collected in all directions for their benefit. An announcement was made at the Club that the Royal Family had contributed a sum of 110 *livres* to this subscription. The President of the Club made a declaration to the effect that the "Society's records preserved the memory of the *sacrifices* of the Civil List." This was perhaps a rather excessive (if intentional) acknowledgment of the somewhat unusual step the sovereigns had taken. But Danton roughly put aside the "scanty dole." "*Is it by a scanty dole like this that the executive power is to expiate its sins?*" The gifts of the citizens are fraternal gifts! I say—is it by giving alms that the executive power thinks it can reward the men it

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exposed to the bayonets of the traitorous Bouillé? *What impudence is this, which leads the royal family to venture the offer of such alms? How can you dare to ratify this insolence?*" And the Tribune, encouraged by the applause around him, and excited, too, by his opponents' murmurs, fell back into his old snarling way: on he went, exaggerating his language as he spoke, realized what he was doing, no doubt, and braved his hearers' indignation, exclaiming, "I am accustomed to speak my mind without sparing anybody": the very habit he had seemed, for several weeks previously, to have lost; in conclusion, he proposed that the royal subscription should be struck out of the list. But the Society did not follow his lead: its members, accustomed to less intemperate methods, were scandalized at seeing an action which, after all, had proved its authors' civic feeling, made the pretext for such insult and invective. Robespierre himself begged the Club to leave the unwonted proposal alone, and pass on to the order of the day. He added (with a touch of perfidy, perhaps, for he seemed to have caught Danton in the very act of falling back into *Orléanism*) "that he preferred the individual that chance, birth, and circumstance had given him as King, to all the other kings anybody might wish to give them." Thus Danton beheld his insulting motion thrown out; the very use to which his secret enemies instantly put it enabled him to gauge the measure of the gross blunder he had committed. He had thrown away the fruit of five months of wisdom. Once more, in the eyes of all moderate men, he was the tactless fanatic, the "madman," of the old days.

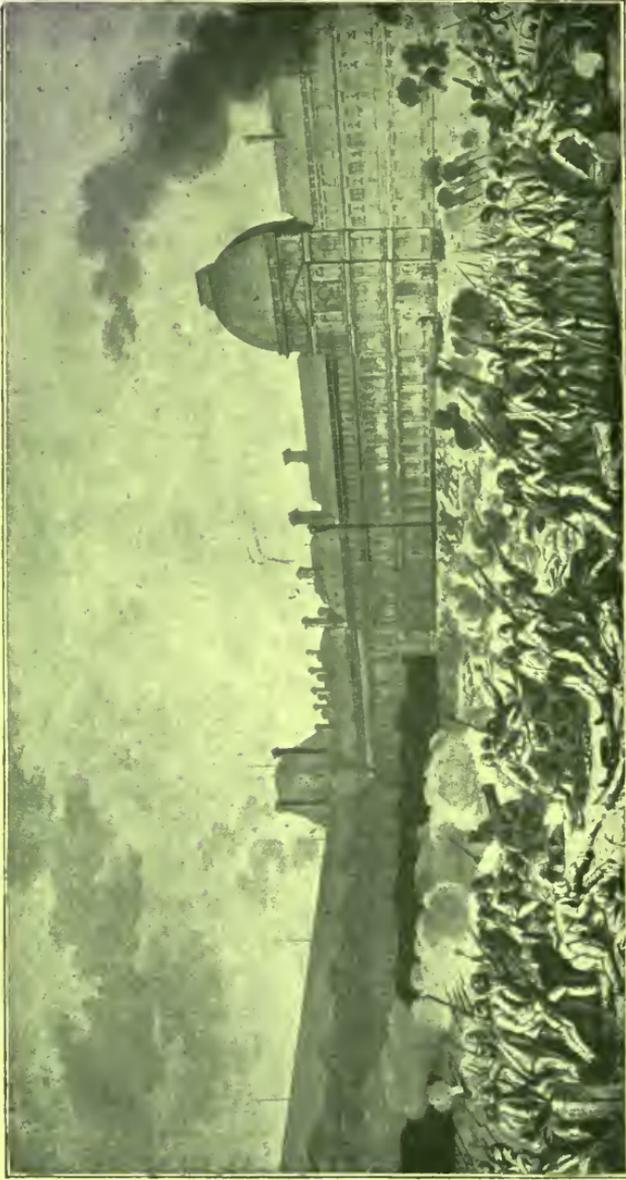
Now hardly a week had gone by, when all of a sudden, just after Vergniaud had made a famous speech, the ministerial crisis by which Danton might have profited, began. Narbonne, a Minister much liked by the Left, had been dismissed; thereupon the Legislative Body had overthrown the whole Feuillant Ministry, and the King, faced by this unprecedented situation, made up his mind to accept a new Ministry, drawn from the Jacobin party.

My readers are aware that the Constitution forbade any

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Deputy to hold ministerial office. Therefore the Jacobin group in the Assembly must perforce choose its nominees among its adherents outside the Chamber. The Jacobin deputies, now about to choose the Ministers, were the future Girondins—Vergniaud, Gensonné, and above all, Brissot. For several months past, cordial relations had existed between Brissot and Danton, and an evident agreement existed between them, to Robespierre's great vexation. It seemed most natural that Brissot's choice should pitch on Danton, rather than on such lay-figures as Clavière, Duranton, and even Roland, all of them destined to emerge from these secret consultations as full-blown ministers.

And it was currently believed that he was to have office. In the *Correspondance secrète* of March 19 we read: "*For the department of Justice, MM. Manuel, Danton, Panis, Chauveau-Lagarde, all of them Jacobins, are mentioned.*" And on the 20th, Barbaroux, who was particularly well-informed, wrote more definitely yet: "*MM. Danton and Collot d'Herbois are on the list—the first-named for the department of the Interior.*" Now on the 22nd the Ministry was formed, with Roland at the Ministry of the Interior, and Duranton, an obscure magistrate from the Gironde, at the Ministry of Justice. It may have been thought impossible to ask Louis XVI, tractable though he was, to accept the incorrigible demagogue who had only lately assailed him so insultingly and unsuccessfully, as his Minister. Thanks to an intemperance of language of which this was not to be the final instance, Danton had missed his chance of entering the Ministry. No office was offered him at this juncture, though M. Mathiez is of a contrary opinion. When he asserted, before the Tribunal, that Dumouriez "*sounded him as to the Ministry,*" he must have been referring to the ministerial crisis of the following June. Then only could Dumouriez, who held the King's confidence for a moment, subsequently to the convocation of Roland, Clavières, and Servan, have been in a position to offer anybody a portfolio. "I replied," cried Danton, "that I would *only be minister to the sound of cannon!*"



AUGUST 10, 1792

From an etching after Monnet in the Bibliothèque Nationale



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I will repeat, as to this circumstance, what I have already said as to Danton's defeat in the legislative elections. Who knows whether, if he had been summoned to the King's council-board, he might not have found a very different future awaiting him. Roland was to behave like a fool, and the King treated him accordingly: how can we tell whether Louis XVI would not have preferred Danton, with his roughness and his jovial temper, swift to wrath, but ready too, for friendly reconciliation, to the stiff and second-rate minister imposed on him, and have made shift to keep him far longer? How can we tell, again, whether Danton, so easily touched, as we shall see, when he was treated with friendly kindness, so ready to mend his ways, when appeal was made to his real good sense, so capable of energetic government, when circumstances called for it, would not have devoted his life to the defence of the sovereign he had once attacked and to the foundation of that government, royal and revolutionary, which was the last and only resource open to Louis XVI in his extremity? No man more than Danton, to my thinking, was capable of justifying Mirabeau's assertion—an assertion marked by his usual clear-sightedness, "A Jacobin in the Ministry is not always a Jacobin Minister."

Be that as it may, his failure drove him back into the most violent opposition. This in itself cannot have been disagreeable to him. And on the other hand, he would not have been human if he had not felt the grudge against Brissot which made a breach between the two men, and drove Danton into the arms of Robespierre, a "pure" politician, who felt no special tenderness for the Ministry of March 22, seeing he too had reckoned on holding office in it.

At this juncture, previous to which Robespierre and Danton had spent five months in constant readiness to do each other an ill service, it was Danton, of course, who, turned about in his course, as it were, by recent occurrences, suddenly declared himself in favour of his former adversary. He took his part in the most fiery way, in connection with an incident at the sitting on May 10. "There may be a time, and that time may not be far distant, when it will become necessary

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to inveigh against those who, for the last three months (the expression would seem to be aimed at Brissot), *have been attacking a virtue hallowed by the whole of the Revolution*, a virtue which its former foes had styled obstinate and harsh, indeed, but which they never slandered as it has been slandered by those of the present moment." As always, Danton overstepped the bounds of moderation: Robespierre himself may have been flattered, but he must have been astounded too.

The fact was that the tribune's manifest exasperation had outrun all possibility of control, and he had travelled far away, indeed, from the moderate language he had used on January 20. On April 19 the Hôtel de Ville was the scene of certain deplorable incidents which very nearly cost him his Deputyship. Manuel had moved that the busts of Bailly and La Fayette which adorned the Municipal mansion should be removed. Danton, with his "domineering voice," strove vainly to give efficacious support to the *Procureur* and the Jacobins, who formed a noisy minority in the Council, the majority in which consisted of La Fayette's supporters. For the first time, perhaps, the "domineering voice" was held to be mistaken, and Stentor was reduced to utter silence. And when Danton, in his rage, left his seat and marched to the door, he was "flouted," so the next morning's story went. At the Jacobins' Club it was even asserted that he had narrowly escaped being knocked down. Some gendarmes, people said, had joined the members of the Council, and "flouted" him after a somewhat rough-and-ready fashion. The business was expected to cost him his post at all events, if not "his head."

He kept both, but from that time onward Pétion, Manuel, and Danton formed a hostile trio, standing face to face with the Council-General, and henceforward the Deputy may very possibly have vowed an equal hatred against the Court that had not called him to the Ministry and the "Fayettist" Council that had scorned him. Before long, on the Tenth of August, he was to find means of destroying both at once.

His attitude towards the Court at once assumed a strangely

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threatening character. When the "patriot" Ministers were dismissed, he was more violent than anybody else. At the Jacobins' Club, on June 13, he exclaimed, and a significant gesture accompanied the words, "*I undertake to carry Terror into a perverse Court!*" and on the 14th his fury attained the most extreme limit, in a ferocious attack on Queen Marie-Antoinette, "whom the King would be forced to repudiate and send back to Vienna."

Finally, on June 18, when La Fayette addressed his famous letter to the Assembly, recalling it to a sense of loyalty, Danton surpassed himself. All his pent-up hatred for the General burst forth: this traitor, he declared, must be deprived of his command on the frontier. Suddenly he called on the Sections instantly to combine, and appoint deputies who should proceed to the Bar of the Assembly and there demand La Fayette's dismissal. For this purpose some one must be dispatched to work upon the various Sections. The great idea that was to rule the *Coup d'État* of the Tenth of August may even then have been stirring in his brain: there must be no ill-considered insurrection: but a coalition of the Sections to be directed against La Fayette in the first instance, and after that, to be utilized against the Council of the Commune, and even against the Throne itself.

Consequently the riot on June 20 must have caused Danton great annoyance. He bore no share in it. The Revolution, in his opinion, ought to be "prepared" before it was attempted. And in this sense he was to labour from that time forward, supported by the Sections, to whom he appealed for help to compass La Fayette's destruction.

His eyes were now fixed on an object far above the "eunuch of the Revolution." On July 6 Gouverneur Morris writes: "Danton publicly remarked to-day, talking of the citizens of the Court, 'that they would be got rid of on the 14th.'"

He was only twenty-seven days out in his reckoning.

Those twenty-seven days carried Danton into the front rank. On July 14, 1792, he was no more than a mob leader, an agent of the Revolution, not one of its chiefs, by any

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means. On August 11, 1792, Danton, Keeper of the Seals, and head, to some extent, of the executive power—destined to be, on the morrow, the first deputy elected by Paris to the Convention, and the day after that, an influential member of the Committee of the Public Safety—had become one of the great leaders of the Revolution. For between July 14 and August 11 the throne which had endured for eight whole centuries had toppled over, and Danton was reputed to have brought about its fall.

At the end of his own life, Billaud-Varennes, whose acquaintance with Danton's work and the way it was performed was very close, declared that he "was *the maker* of the Tenth of August." Garat, who was to succeed Danton in the Ministry, said a thing that was more just, perhaps, seeing it was less merciless, "Danton *arranged* the Tenth of August." This was the general opinion. In a letter to Jefferson, written shortly after this, Morris points to Danton as having been in the forefront of the whole business: Moore, an Englishman, writes, a few months later, "everything had been *arranged* by a faction of which Danton *is considered to have been the leader*." According to Dr. Robinet, of course, he did everything, and according to M. Mathiez he did nothing very particular. M. Aulard regards him as the incarnation of the spirit of the populace, which was to bring about the Tenth of August. Perhaps we shall do well, this time, to abide by the statement of the person most interested in the matter. In the presence of the Tribunal, Danton himself said, "I *prepared* the Tenth of August."

The expression strikes me as being a happy one. In a two-fold manner, he "*prepared*" the Tenth of August. In the first place, during the three weeks that preceded it, he started that movement in the Sections the object of which was the King's deposition; and secondly, on the night between the 9th and 10th, he carried through the municipal *Coup d'État* which disorganized the defence of the Tuileries, and so left the palace unprotected. And how, indeed, are we to explain the fact that the Legislative Assembly (by no means partial to him) should have unhesitatingly put the reins of power into

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his hands on the 11th, unless it was because every one looked on him as the author of the events of the Tenth?

I make no claim to write a fresh history of Danton's campaign in this place. But it is important that the nature of his plan, and the manner in which it was successfully carried through, should be recalled to my readers' minds.

The incidents of June 20 had brought about a very evident reaction in favour of the throne. Lively protest had been made, even in "patriotic" quarters, against the shameful riot which had sullied the Tuileries with its filth. On the morrow, royalty seemed more firmly established than before. The Directory of the Department of Paris itself urged the King to take repressive measures, and on July 7 it suspended Pétion and Manuel, whom it held responsible (and justly) for the unheard-of disorder that had reigned for a whole day. On the 12th this suspension was confirmed by the King.

As a consequence, the number of the obstacles set up between the throne and the leaders of the "second Revolution" had increased. These obstacles were of various kinds. The Departments, to begin with: on the occasion of the "execrable" incidents of the 20th, they had manifested their indignant loyalty with unwonted zeal. The Assembly, though it appeared to be under the domination of the "Brissotins," felt the weight of this provincial opinion, and countenanced La Fayette's "counter-revolutionary action" when he hurried up to Paris to avenge the King. Even the party in the Assembly known as "the Left," which simply desired the recall of the dismissed Ministers, who shared its political views, had offered to save the throne if the recall was granted, and was engaged in secret negotiations with the Palace. The Directory of the Department of Paris was openly hostile to the mob and even to its accomplices in high places, and had lately proved it at Pétion's expense. The large majority of the members of the Council-General of the Commune, which had cast scorn on Manuel and Danton, only the night before, was constitutional and moderate. And the officers in command of the National Guard, still imbued with the spirit of La Fayette, were quite resolved to defend the King's

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person, even if they had to order their men to fire in the process.

This was the state of affairs on July 14. It does not appear to have caused Danton any alarm. All he had to do was to contrive to paralyse these various oppositions, whether by turning them aside, or breaking them down.

In one particular the Provinces were at a disadvantage. They were not on the spot. Once the thing was done, it could be imposed on them : the great point was that the blow should be swift. The Assembly could be intimidated by means of the Sections. The Directory must be brought into disrepute. The Commune must be changed by revolutionary means, and the new Commune, having the whip-hand of the officers of the National Guard, would soon disorganize the action of the Guard by the swift application of a few new measures. And then the *Federates* from Brittany and Marseilles, brought up to Paris on some patriotic pretext, would be hurled, with the ruffians of the Faubourgs, on the Tuileries, thus shorn of all protection.

The essential point was to get possession of the Mairie. Pétion had proved himself a master of deliberate inertia on June 20, and it was decided that this Pontius Pilate should be continued in his office. On July 13, then, the Mayor, who had been suspended from his functions, appeared before the Council-General and informed it of the order made against him. Danton instantly attempted a great stroke : he rose, he uttered a protest : "The law of the People was the only law he recognized and invoked : he invited Pétion's supporters to follow him to the National Assembly." The Council, full of moderate men, took good care not to do anything of the kind. Pallid with fury, Pétion retired : but Danton, who reckoned on the mob, followed him, and on the very steps of the Hôtel de Ville, while the Mayor was "getting into his coach," the Deputy *Procureur* stood and shouted, "No ! No ! virtuous Pétion ! the People will support you ! People ! They are trying to deprive you of your friend !" The mob did not appear greatly moved : but the next day the populace, stirred up by the leaders, yelled

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"Pétion or Death!" and this was the cry that greeted the royal family on the 14th at the Champ de Mars, where the festival in commemoration of July 14 was being held.

The Assembly took alarm. On the 11th, in face of the imminence of a foreign invasion, it had formally declared that "the country was in danger." The support of the populace, which was being called on to enlist, was a matter of urgent necessity. It seemed expedient that the "patriot" Mayor should be given back to his admirers. Thus on the 16th, and by a real abuse of its power, the Assembly restored Pétion to his office, and the King, in his fright, ventured no protest. Danton had won the day: he could now reckon on the Mayor as his accomplice.

The time had come to make the Sections play their part. The day had long gone by when they had been content, according to the plan of organization laid down by Bailly, to hold peaceful ballots, and that done, disperse as peacefully. For weeks, now, the Sections had been holding meetings mimicking those of the Section of the Théâtre Français, now completely reconquered by the holders of "Cordelier" opinions. Danton, as my readers will recollect, had been the first to suggest the idea of a meeting of the Sections to discuss La Fayette's case. Now a decree, signed by Pétion on July 17, set up a Central Correspondence Office for the forty-eight Sections, at the Hôtel de Ville. On the 20th the forty-eight delegates to this office, summoned by "one of the Deputies" (probably this was Danton), met, and sketched out an address to the army—this may be described as a mere dress rehearsal. The weapon which was to trick the Commune and the Legislative Assembly, if need be, lay ready to hand.

And the objects for which the ringleaders were labouring soon became evidently clear. On the 28th, in the Section of the Fontaine de Grenelle, there was a debate, the tendency revealed by which was in favour of presenting a definite request to the National Assembly to vote "the dethronement of the king." The Mayor called a fresh meeting of the delegates; they commissioned M. J. Chénier, a good Cordelier,

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to draw up a petition in the sense of the request just mentioned, and this petition the Mayor presented at the Bar of the Assembly on the 26th. On the 31st the Mauconseil Section passed a resolution still more revolutionary in tone: declaring it had ceased to recognize Louis XVI as king, and calling on the Assembly to follow its example. But when the Assembly, instead of obeying the audacious resolution, simply annulled it (this was its final attempt at loyalty), the Sections seemed to waver, all at once. Only fourteen pronounced in favour of the Mauconseil resolution: the rest either disowned it or held their peace. This was a check: the truth is that the Sections, composed of the "*active citizens*," middle-class men of means, were most of them recovering their self-possession. They did not intend to be swept into any more extravagant decisions.

Danton may have foreseen this. On the 31st, the Section of the Théâtre Français published, over his signature as its president, a tremendous declaration. The Fatherland, it asserted, was in danger, and as all citizens were called on to defend it, they ought all to have the right to share in the deliberations of the Sections. Consequently the Section summoned all citizens dwelling within its borders to the meetings. There was a chance that the other Sections might follow this lead. They did follow it: most of them, without passing any similar decree, admitted every citizen, without distinction, from that day forward. Thus the middle-class men would be swamped. This was the first step towards illegality, and the first of the many *coups d'état*, great and small, which made up the Revolution of the Tenth of August. In this modified form the Sections stood ready, at the first signal, to send deputies to the Hôtel de Ville who were to replace those of the regular Commune by sheer revolutionary methods. Thus one of the elements of the Revolution had been prepared.

The second condition necessary to success was the disorganization of the Staff of the National Guard. Here again the Section of the Théâtre Français was simply to demand its suppression (August 4): the only superior officers left in the

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Guard were to be the forty-eight Section Commanders : and no commanding officer was to execute any order without the express permission of the civil (let us say the municipal) authority. And one final demand shows how thoroughly the plans for insurrection were being laid. A park of artillery had been stationed at the Pont Neuf, the only road whereby the Cordeliers (and the men of Marseilles, who were to be their guests, as we shall see) could march upon the Tuileries : the Section of the Théâtre Français put in a request that these guns should be served by its own battalion.

While efforts to forestall all attempts at defence were thus being made, the attack, too, was in course of organization. The *Federates* were coming in from every part of the country. It was Danton again who, in a fierce speech delivered at the Jacobins' Club on July 13, had urged them to remain in Paris : they must swear, he said, "never to disperse until the traitors (these were the sovereigns) had been punished by the law, or had crossed over into a foreign country." Above all, the leaders built their hopes on the men of Marseilles. They had arrived on the 30th : Danton was anxious to have them under his own hand, and Panis, a good Cordelier, who had undertaken all the arrangements for the *Federates* at the Hôtel de Ville, changed the destination of the Marseilles men from the Faubourg Poissonnière to the Cordeliers' Convent. Chaumette tells us that Danton himself went to fetch them and settled them into their quarters within the confines of his little empire, during the night of August 4. The troops were ready for the attack.

Last of all, it was indispensable that when the movement once began it should meet with no opposition on the benches of the Assembly, and that the Left should, at all events, resign itself to the necessity of sanctioning the riot. Fabre tells us of a dinner given shortly before the Tenth, at which Danton gathered together a certain number of "Brissotin" members, and adjured them to adhere beforehand to the popular movement.

The Revolution was ready. What was to be its end? Was Danton now contemplating the establishment of a

Republic? There is considerable testimony in favour of the impression that he was much more probably pursuing his own dream of a revolutionary monarchy. Prudhomme, we are told, received a visit, during the closing days of July, from Danton, Desmoulins and Fabre, who were desirous of obtaining the support of the *Révolutions de Paris*. "Who would you put in the place of Louis XVI?" inquired the journalist. "The Duc d'Orléans," replied Desmoulins. The story is confirmed by Barbaroux. And, in fact, a police report, still preserved in the Archives, and on the testimony of which, to my surprise, no writer seems as yet to have relied, informed the Ministers, on August 8, that "Factious undertakings were in process of preparation," and added, "*there is no further doubt that the Duc d'Orléans is the principal mover in them.*"

This report by Police-agent Goret gave a fairly exact account of the efforts made by the faction. The Duc d'Orléans had caused the Sections to be worked on, and inspired the efforts made to secure the disbandment of the grenadier and light infantry companies of the Guard, which were more loyal in feeling than the artillery companies. "*There is much reason to fear for Thursday next. . . . It is the Sieur Danton who gains them over, at the Cordeliers.*"

So the Court was warned. It is a curious fact, if we are to believe La Fayette, that the name of Danton, instead of striking terror in that quarter, seemed to reassure. The Queen, he declares, on the very eve of the Tenth, "thought she could reckon on Danton." It is a fact that Malouet and Morris agree in asserting that the Royal Family, which was completely deluded, believed it had a hold on certain of the Cordeliers. "Our minds are quite easy," said Madame Elisabeth, we are assured, just before the insurrection broke out, "*we can count on M. Danton.*"

Whatever the belief these stories deserve (my own, I confess, is far from strong), it would certainly appear that somehow or other Danton, while making his preparations for the insurrection, had succeeded in lulling all the suspicions of the Court.

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Thus, by August 3 or 4, everything was ready. The Sections, now in the hands of the populace, were only awaiting the signal to appoint an insurrectionary Commune, and appoint it in the space of a few minutes. Cartridges were being served out to the *Federates*, and more especially to the Marseilles men. The Deputies had been sounded, and seemed prepared to sanction anything, and the Court, in spite of warnings, seemed asleep. Now in all these things we have perceived the hand of Danton. Truly, as he was to boast on a later day, he had skilfully "prepared" his insurrection!

What must have been the stupefaction of his Cordelier friends when they learnt, probably on August 5, that he had left Paris, and gone down to Arcis!

The man's life was crammed with *coups de tête* of this kind—"coups de cœur" would be a better expression for this occasion.

This insurrection was a perilous business, in spite of all his preparations; Danton was playing his last card; while the battle lasted, he would be running innumerable risks, and if he failed, he would probably be hanged. "I went to Arcis," he said afterwards, "because Danton is a good son, to spend three days there, bid farewell to my mother, and set my affairs in order. There are witnesses who can prove it." The testimony still exists—the sheets of a deed duly drawn up on August 6, in the presence of a notary, M. Finot. On the 15th of the preceding April, the son had made over a yearly income of 600 *livres* to his mother. This was payable in half-yearly instalments, and in the event of her death 400 *livres* were to pass to his stepfather, Jean Recordain. On more mature reflection, he did not think this liberality sufficient, and on August 6, Georges-Jacques Danton, having slipped out of Paris, settled a residence for life on his mother, in his lately acquired house on the Place des Ponts.

"Desiring to give his mother proof of the feelings of respect and tenderness he has always felt for her,"—so runs the preamble of this deed. It would really seem as though some irresistible instinct of tenderness had driven him to journey to Arcis in this hasty fashion on August 5. And then he

desired to look once more on his native town, the steeple of the church of Saint-Étienne, the Avenue des Soupîrs, and his own little domain.

While the very pavements of Paris burnt hot, and the stones seemed to be rising up under a wind of insurrection which the Brunswick Manifesto was soon to transform into a perfect tornado, while the great city was boiling over like some mighty cauldron, the ringleader of it all, sitting between his old mother and his stepfather, and listening to the murmur of the river Aube, seemed to have forgotten all about it.

On the 8th a summons must have reached him: Robespierre goes so far as to assert that it became necessary to put pressure on him. However that may have been, the 9th saw him back in Paris, and swept into action once more. "They saw me come back in stout condition!" he was to exclaim, before the Tribunal.

The details of the progress of the Revolution of the Tenth of August are well known. On the evening of the 9th, between 8 and 9, a hurried word to the Sections brought them together in tumultuous meetings, which, in agreement with the plan set down on paper a week previously, proceeded, in the most irregular and noisy fashion, to elect Commissaries who were to converge on the Hôtel de Ville from every corner of Paris, the moment the Cordeliers' bell began to toll. The substitution of a revolutionary Council-General for the loyalist body sitting at the Hôtel de Ville was all-important. Having once forced its way in, this new Council-General was to cashier Mandat, Commandant of the National Guard, whom the Court had empowered, earlier in the day, to take the necessary steps in the Tuileries Section for putting down a possible and, as it really appeared, a probable insurrection.

At the sound of the tocsin, the real Council-General assembled at the Hôtel de Ville. It despatched a summons to Pétion, and while it waited the coming of the Mayor, who plainly betrayed his disinclination to obey the call, it took the responsibility of giving Mandat the order he begged, to

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beat to arms, marshal the National Guard, and organize the defence of the Palace, whither he carried off Pétion, who put in an appearance at last. But terrible faces suddenly showed themselves in the Hôtel de Ville: these were the "chosen of the Sections," who proclaimed the "new Commune"; the Council-General continued to sit, and the "Commissaries of the Sections"—men in the style of Danton—took possession, very noisily, of a neighbouring apartment, whence the real Commune (and this concession was the ruin of everything) did not venture to expel them. By degrees its neighbours' wild uproar began to fill the old Council with alarm: they sent deputation after deputation to interview it: for before telling their predecessors, barefacedly, that they must clear out, the newcomers were bent on forcing the "former representatives" to do one thing more: they must summon "the traitor Mandat," then engaged, "with the connivance of the Court, in preparations for the massacre of the People," to the Hôtel de Ville. Once Mandat was recalled, these men, "the new elect of the People," would make it their business to get rid of him, even by violent methods, as we shall see. And the Palace would capitulate. The legitimate Commune defended itself weakly, indeed, but it was still fighting on, when suddenly—it was half-past one by this time—there was a great shout: Danton entered the room in which the "Commissaries" were assembled. Danton! "Danton, the rallying point!" as Mme. Robert exclaimed at that moment. The leader had come, and now the advance was to begin all along the line!

He had not chosen to make his appearance until the Commissaries had arrived in goodly numbers, and his calculation had been exact. He arrived at the very moment when one fresh onset must break the Council-General's last resistance down. But he had himself given the signal from the Cordeliers for the first attack.

His own very brief account of this tragic night, addressed to the Tribunal, does not supply us with more than the most essential facts. Happily for us, close to him, losing not a single gesture he made, Lucile Desmoulins was writing her

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journal, and Danton fills its pages. Thanks to her—and how natural is the style of her story, as precise as any official report, as poignant as a scene in some play, full of sudden exclamations and terror-stricken outcries!—we are informed of the smallest incidents of that historic night, by one who watched it from Danton's own hearth. And this testimony is completed by the *Mémoires* of Chaumette and Fournier, both of them residents in that quarter of Paris.

The afternoon had been sultry and the night promised to be fine. For a week past, the quarter had been in a fever, which was beginning to rage fiercely: the nerves of the ring-leaders, who moved restlessly to and fro between the Club and the Section, even the nerves of the women of the smaller *bourgeoisie*, were tightly strung. Very soon, in a paroxysm of fury, Fournier was to exclaim that "we must instantly proceed to cut off the heads of the six hundred conspirators who have taken refuge in the royal lair," and "carry them to the Assembly, saying, 'Here, legislators, are your masterpieces!'" Chaumette had hard work to control "the American's" patience: to the Tuileries they would go, indeed, but not till the next morning: these were Danton's orders. Nevertheless the Section, first among them all, declared itself "in insurrection" by a solemn decree, posted up its proclamation of the fact, and announced it to the other Sections.

Just at that moment Desmoulins and his wife were entertaining certain of their friends to dinner: they made much of the Marseilles men, and "amused themselves pretty well." Dinner over, the husband and wife bade their guests farewell (the Marseilles federates were to be supplied with plenty of work for the morrow) and left their own house on the Place du Théâtre Français to go to Danton's dwelling.

There, too, nerves were on the stretch: in the case of Gabrielle Danton, a tender-hearted woman, this nervousness took the form of never-ending tears: she "was crying," and her little Antoine "looked quite dazed." Danton himself was as usual, "very resolute," but restless too. Lucile does not seem to have brought peace into this disturbed household.

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Her own nervous excitement showed itself, that evening, by making her "laugh like a madwoman." Danton and his wife betrayed some doubt as to the success of the "business," and she reassured them, "without being very sure of triumph herself," but all this time she laughed on and on, and her laughter ended by irritating Gabrielle. "How can anybody go on laughing like that!" she cried, at last. Lucile grew grave. "Alas!" she said, "it foretells that I may have to shed many tears this evening!" The vortex of politics into which this young creature had been cast was overstraining her: her tears, too, began to fall. To divert her thoughts the two ladies attended kind-hearted old Mme. Charpentier home to her own dwelling on the other side of the river.

When they got back to Danton's house in the Cour du Commerce, late that evening, they found a great gathering there: little Mme. Robert-Keralio, a fervent Republican, knew none of the terrors that assailed Lucile Desmoulins or Gabrielle Danton. Her one desire was that the "business" should not fail: her dream, that it might bring her, together with the Republican form of government, a good fat post for her burly husband. She was laying regular siege to Danton, and he, no doubt, had told her certain things, for when Lucile anxiously inquired of the tribune as to whether the tocsin would be rung, it was Mme. Robert who replied, with a self-important air, "Yes, it is to be to-night!" Danton was restless, but he said nothing. Profoundly interesting it is to see the man, thanks to Lucile's narrative, at the very moment when the tribune, in his fever, was moving into action, when the modest *bourgeois* of Arcis was about to give the signal for the destruction of the throne!

Suddenly Desmoulins entered the room, carrying a musket, and accompanied by Fréron: so terrified was Lucile that she ran into the recess in which Danton's bed was placed, to hide her tears: then, unable to bear any more, she took "her Camille" aside and told him all her dreadful fears. He reassured her. All at once, Danton rose to his feet: he was about to give the signal: the Cordeliers' bell was to warn

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the Quarter first, and then the whole of Paris, that the hour had come. Desmoulins and Fréron followed him out of the room. First he went to the Office of the Section, which was close by. Here he received a visit from Clavière: the "patriot" ex-Minister had come, it may be, to preach moderation in the name of the Council-General. Danton replied, so he assures us, with the "too late" of all opening revolutions. He gave orders that the bell should be tolled, and then went and threw himself upon his bed, "like a soldier," he was to say later, "and leaving orders that I was to be kept informed."

This detail is confirmed by Lucile. While she and Gabrielle sat sighing, side by side, they saw their heroes returning to them. Danton went to bed, and though constantly disturbed by calls from his friends, betrayed "but little alacrity" about receiving them. Suddenly, through the open windows of the apartment in the Cour du Commerce, the sound of the tocsin floated in. At the order of the worn-out man who lay sleeping in that room, the great bell of the Cordeliers tolled out its heavy notes, and anon the bell of Saint-André-des-Arcs, close by, joined in the concert. Before long the call to insurrection was ringing out from every steeple. "The tocsin rang," says Lucile, "it rang for a long time," and she knelt by the window, "bathed in tears, and listened to that fatal bell," her face "hidden in her handkerchief." Danton, who had gone out, came back again: to Mme. Robert's anxious questioning he gave none but vague replies. He felt, no doubt, that the hour for his appearance at the Hôtel de Ville had not yet struck, and "went and threw himself on his bed" again. By this time Mme. Robert had become affected by her friends' emotion, and her anxiety grew tragic: "That Danton!" she cried, pointing to him. "If my husband should perish, I am woman enough to stab him!" Then Camille came back from the Section. He, too, was worn out, and fell asleep with his head on Lucile's shoulder, while down in the street the roll of the drums rose above the tumult and the shouting. The two men woke up at last: they went out. Danton believed

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the time had come for him to betake himself to the Hôtel de Ville, and carry out the great undertaking.

The women seem to have been in despair. Lucile was beside herself. "I can bear no more!" she writes. "Camille! my poor Camille! What will become of you? I have hardly strength to draw my breath. This is the night, the fatal night!" And suddenly we come on her terrified prayer: "My God, if it be true that Thou dost exist, oh save these men who are worthy of Thee!" Thus, most unforeseen, while Danton, with heavy and resolute tread, went hurrying along the narrow streets towards the Hôtel de Ville, a petition to the Deity waited on his footsteps.

In the Hôtel de Ville clamour reigned supreme. The Commissaries of the Sections were furious: Mandat, who took his duties as officer in command of the resisting force most seriously, had not only endeavoured—and this was by no means easy—to establish some sort of order in the ranks of the defenders of the Palace (a most heterogeneous company, unfortunately), he had even attempted to prevent the rioters from getting to the Tuileries. The ringleaders' most serious anxiety was connected with the detachment holding the Pont Neuf, to which reference has been already made. Mandat had directed a battery of artillery to take up its station there, and had thus cut off the Tuileries from the left bank of the river, where the Cordeliers and the Marseilles men were taking up arms. The moment this piece of news became known, the "Commissaries," now pretty numerous at the Hôtel de Ville, raised a cry of "Treason." That Mandat should have fortified the Tuileries indicated insulting suspicion of a generous People; but the drawing up of a battery of guns on the Pont Neuf was a most evident proof of his intention to join in the sanguinary measures of repression the tyrant and his henchmen were preparing to apply.

Meanwhile the Council-General's alarm was steadily increasing. The moment Danton reached the Hôtel de Ville he proceeded to the room in which the Council was sitting, and then passed on to that occupied by the Commissaries: his determination, Deputy *Procureur* as he was, to invest

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these last with an official and legitimate status, was quite manifest. The Council, cowed by his attitude, was ripe for capitulation. Pressed by Danton, it decided to cancel Mandat's orders as to the guns on the Pont-Neuf, and further—this was what the ringleaders really wanted most—to call on the Commandant, who was at the Tuileries, to come back to the Hôtel de Ville and give an explanation of his conduct.

This was a trap: the order must have reached the Commandant at the Tuileries towards five o'clock: at first he decided to stay where he was: but Roederer, *Procureur général* of the Department, advised otherwise, and he started for the Hôtel de Ville. He had only just entered the office of the staff of the National Guard when a being apparently beside himself with fury rushed in upon him; this was Danton, attended by a certain number of the "Commissaries," all of them pouring forth volleys of abuse. In the name of the People, the tribune ordered the soldier to "follow him that very instant to the Commune" (already Danton referred to the Commune of the insurrection) "and there give an account of his conduct." The Commandant replied that he could not take orders from this so-called "Commune," and "that he only owed an account of his conduct to that composed of honest men." At the words, Danton literally flew at his throat. "Traitor!" he cried, "you will soon be forced to obey this Commune, which will save the People you are betraying, and against which you are conspiring with the tyrant! Tremble! Your crime is discovered, and you and your vile accomplices will soon receive its price!"

Mandat, meanwhile, had made his way into the room where the "honest men" were assembled, and easily "cleared himself" to them. But he had hardly finished speaking, when he was dragged into the presence of the insurrectionary Commune, which, thanks to the presence of the *Procureur* and his Deputy (the only men in authority in the room, for Pétion, the Mayor, had shut himself up, like a coward, in his official residence on the Quai des Orfèvres), was growing more and more into the likeness of an official body. The "Commissaries" now proceeded to pass a resolution whereby the

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“traitor” was dismissed, and his command given to Santerre—Santerre of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine—a trusty friend. And they further ordered the vile traitor to be confined in the prisons of the Hôtel de Ville.

Then it was that the commissaries, strong in their own impunity and drunk with the glory of their first autocratic dealings, cast off the mask. “The Commissaries of the majority of the Sections, assembled together, with full powers to save the public weal, have decreed that the first measure demanded by the Public Safety is to take possession of all the powers delegated by the Commune . . . and that the Council-General of the Commune shall be suspended.” In reality, they suppressed it, and usurped its functions. When the Council-General made as if it would resist, the Commissaries invaded the Council Room: “When the People places itself in a state of insurrection,” they cried, “it takes away all powers, and assumes them itself”: and the Council-General ended by dispersing.

Then the “new Commune” decided that Mandat, whom it had shut up in the Hôtel de Ville, should be sent to the Abbaye, “for his greater safety.” The unhappy man had hardly taken three steps on his way out of the Hôtel de Ville when he fell, just as he began to descend the staircase, his skull shattered by a pistol shot.

As a proof, among others, of his active participation in the events of the Tenth of August, Danton said, “*I was the maker of Mandat’s death-warrant.*”

Clearly he took this death, or rather the dismissal which preceded it, to be the decisive act which, by disorganizing the defence of the Tuileries, handed over the Palace to the populace, and thus ensured the success of the insurrection. I think he was right. Mandat’s dismissal spelt ruin for the King. For he alone, by his presence at the Tuileries, might somehow or other have contrived to secure united action on the part of its defenders—old soldiers of the Bodyguard, who had hastened to the spot, Swiss Guards, called up in a hurry, too, National Guards, more than half of them inclined to play him false. When the leading bands, more especially the

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Marseilles men, who had nothing to stop them, now, on the Pont Neuf, began to surge up to the Tuileries, they were to find no difficulty in forcing their entrance into the courtyards: the gunners handed over the gate to the rioters, and the King, losing courage, betook himself to the Assembly, abandoned his Palace, and confided his own person to the Deputies, who, having begun by suspending him, ended by handing him over to the Commune. All these things were the outcome of the blow that felled, with such marvellous appositeness, and just when he was deep in his preparations, the one and only man who really desired and intended to defend the Tuileries. All this lay at the back of Danton's thought when he proudly asserted himself to have been "the maker of Mandat's death-warrant."

That done, he might seek rest. It is very unlikely, whatever may have been said on the subject, that he took any part in the attack on the Palace. The only ground on which such an assertion can be based is a word dropped by Fabre, and certainly misunderstood. He had more important work to do (from the revolutionary point of view) than to fire off muskets on the Carrousel. His part was to support the first footsteps of the new Commune. It was certainly owing to Danton, who had established himself at the Hôtel de Ville, where he utterly overshadowed even the Mayor himself, that the Commune demanded that the Assembly should forthwith convoke a Convention, and that before this was done, the dethronement of Louis XVI should be pronounced. The Assembly did not dare to do more than refuse to dethrone the King, though it declared him suspended from his functions: but all through that day of the Tenth of August the Hôtel de Ville was sending forth messages couched in language the imperious tenor of which clearly indicated where the power really lay.

Meanwhile, as daylight waned, Danton, quite wearied out, had been fain to get him back to the Cour du Commerce, and his bed. At three o'clock in the morning, when he was fast asleep, he was suddenly awakened. Desmoulins and Fabre were shaking him. "You are a Minister!" they said.

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Fabre, a poet now and then, but on the look-out for advantage always, was bent on capturing the spring before others tapped it. "You must make me Secretary of the Seals," said he. "And I," said Camille, "must be one of your secretaries." But Danton, half asleep, gazed at them with astonished eyes. "Are you quite sure I have been appointed a Minister?" he asked. "Yes, yes, of course!" they cried, quite out of patience.

So he rose from his bed to go and take over his new office, "the Seals of France," to which he had been carried by "a cannon ball."

He was much more than a mere Minister: the Assembly, having first decreed the appointment of an Executive Council composed of Ministers to be elected by the Deputies, further decided that a preponderant authority should be bestowed on the first Council-member it elected. And then, by 222 votes out of 285, it chose Danton, Minister of Justice, to this position. The author of this appointment, if we may believe his own assertion, was Fabre. He had addressed himself to Brissot, who had been regarded, for weeks past, as Danton's adversary. "Certain patriots," quoth the poet, "desire to carry Danton's appointment to a Ministry: would you oppose his nomination?" "No," replied the other, "on the contrary, that shall set the seal upon our reconciliation." Besides this, Condorcet—an oracle in his way—had openly supported the tribune: what was wanted, he said, was "a man who could command the confidence of the People, whose agitators had just upset the throne." It was hoped that "his ascendancy" would enable him to "restrain the very despicable instruments of a useful, glorious, and necessary revolution." In a word, his appointment was to satisfy the rioters, and to curb them, in case of need.

Thus it came about that before many hours were out, Danton, having taken the oath at the rostrum, entered on his duties at the Place Vendôme, and Desmoulins, who, with Fabre, had accompanied his friend, was able to write his father that exquisitely artless phrase: "*The cause of Liberty has triumphed! Here am I lodged in the palace of Maupeou*

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and Lamoignon!” “That poor dear Camille!” as Mirabeau had been used to say, in the old days, with a shrug of his shoulders!

It was no lobbying manœuvre, whatever Fabre might think, that had carried Danton to “the palace of Maupeou and Lamoignon.” As Camille truthfully put it, he was “Minister of Justice by the grace of cannon.” A certain Deputy of the Right tells us, “Danton was appointed to the Ministry, or rather he *reached it with a bound.*” Right and Left alike had bowed the head in the face of Destiny. On the night of the Tenth of August, each had recognized Danton to be the man who had won the fray, and was now to impose his will upon the victors.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGES-JACQUES DANTON

His Personal Appearance—*Bourgeois* and Tribune—The Weaknesses of “the Man of Daring”—Danton’s Venality—His Fortune—The Orator—The Politician—Danton’s Views—The Opportunist—The Patriot.

THE man had reached power. The Tribune had become the Minister. The orator was face to face with the necessity for action. A critical moment, this, in the life of any political man, and more especially in circumstances such as these. What was he going to be? But above all, what was he at that moment?

His name, hitherto known in Paris only, was noised abroad over the whole of France, and echoed far across Europe. Everywhere the same query was heard, “Who is this man?”

Even we, who have followed him from his home at Arcis to the Ministry of Justice, are driven to ask ourselves the question. What was this man’s real nature? Was he an ambitious *bourgeois* or a hot-headed democrat? A brutal agitator or a wily politician? A tribune crammed with formulæ or a man overflowing with ideas? And in his private life, again, was he a worshipper of domestic joys? or was he a debauchee? Was his soul stained with cruelty, or did his heart brim over with generosity? Was he an honest man? Was he a rogue? I have already drawn the attention of the readers to whom I have been telling the story of a career which, though stormy, indeed, has hitherto been rather modest than otherwise, to this question, and each of them is free to answer it in accordance with his reading of the facts with which I have supplied him. But the moment has now come when we must look the man in the face, and paint his full-length portrait.

A complex man, if I may use the expression—yet his was

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no double nature. There was a close connection between every part of him : his person, his language, his private life, his friendships, his ideas, his gestures. More than in any man that ever lived, perhaps, his attitudes were dictated by his temperament and character ; whether he obeys his own nature or acts against it, the nature itself, full of life and clamour, is invariably evident : sometimes it spurs him on, sometimes it oppresses him ; there are not two Dantons, one of them the public man and the other the private individual. And yet, in the man, whether in his private or his public life, there really were ten men, because he was torn hither and thither, perpetually, between his temperament and his policy, between his natural tendencies and the necessities of his situation. Can any successful study of a man as he appears upon the stage of politics be ever made unless we follow him behind the scenes as well, and spy beneath his rouse—if he lays any on—to discover the genuine colour of his face ? But as to this man we have a score of witnesses, even if we do not reckon the most precious testimony of all, that of hard facts. On one point the whole score—friends or enemies—are fundamentally agreed : he was a man of muscle, a full-blooded athlete, whose natural temperament was apt to break all bonds without a moment's warning. What was the nature of this temperament ? A contemporary observer said of Mirabeau, on whom our mortal eyes can never look, "*If you had only seen the monster!*" Let us look, now, at this other "monster."

He was huge : so tall that he towered above the whole assembly, strong-shouldered, broad-chested, bull-necked, and so corpulent at thirty that he looked ten years older, at the very least ; we cannot imagine him to have been different ; a portrait of him when he was Lawyer to the Councils, sketched before he had reached his thirtieth birthday, shows him already with the full cheeks, fat neck, and ample chest of the member of the Convention of 1794. The most we can say is that those eight stormy years had aged his face to some extent. But then his face never had looked young : disfigured by accidents, as I have already said, seamed by



CONTEMPORARY PORTRAIT OF DANTON

(Musée Carnavalet)

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the smallpox, the action of fierce feelings as fiercely expressed, ever since the year 1789, had contracted his features; even in his most unbending moments, the mark of that celebrated and terrifying "grin" remained. The broad high forehead, under thick waves of hair brushed back from the brow, gave promise of intelligence and daring; the flashing eyes, that seemed to lie in wait beneath the heavy black eyebrows knitted into a perpetual frown, revealed their owner's habit of looking friends and enemies, men and things, squarely in the face. The strongly marked nose, broken in early childhood, gave an aspect like that of a beast's muzzle to the face; the mouth, more especially, set between heavy cheeks, was frightful; drawn up as it was into a grin caused by the deformation of many years gone by, it would take on an expression of unspeakable disdain, furious rage, or bitter irony, according to the feelings of the moment. And the whole of this countenance, with its heavy devastated features, lighted up by those unflinching eyes and flushed "with a red brown" colour, breathed a sort of daring insolence which none of his portraits, so his contemporaries have declared, has ever reproduced.

A still more riotous touch was added to this audacious appearance by the style of its owner's attire. Not that his dress was careless. Like many other men of the revolutionary party, he seems to have had no leaning whatever towards such sordid untidiness as Marat's; nor did he affect the austere and quaker-like apparel of Brissot. The inventory of his wardrobe, which we happen to possess, betrays a certain care for elegance, and almost luxury: shirts and cravats of fine material, shirt-frills, cuffs, gloves, and stockings, of good quality, a quilted dressing-gown and quilted trousers for indoor wear, suits both elegant and varied, and so forth, without mentioning the scarlet coat he would put on for great occasions, and which he was to carry, like a flag, upon his back through the great massacres. His wardrobe, like Robespierre's, was the wardrobe of a middle-class citizen of refined tastes. But while Robespierre wore his blue coat and silken breeches like a steady, trim, well-to-do house-

holder, Danton's dress always betrayed a touch of its wearer's boisterous nature. There was something tempestuous in the very bow of his cravat and the lapels of his coat: he looked a "warm" man, but there was a kind of unruly appearance about him, too. This was not the result of any art, it was the outcome of a sort of general hastiness that almost amounted to a constitutional inclination to mutinous behaviour.

This "Tartar" countenance, as Garat called it, inspired alarm. He himself was to ascribe some part of that reputation for "frenzy," from which he was now determined to be relieved, to his physiognomy. But, like Mirabeau, to whom he bore a slight resemblance, he might well have said, "My ugliness, too, is a power!"

Every inch of him, indeed, denoted power: his forehead, his eyes, his mouth, his broad shoulders, his mighty arm—an arm of steel, it seemed—that hand of his, with "its free picturesque gestures," as Lakanal describes it, while its fellow "was pressed to his left side," and that "stentorian voice," that "thundering organ," mentioned by every newspaper of the period. Danton could only be compared to the giants of ancient fable, and his contemporaries did not fail to draw the analogy: a "gigantic revolutionary," as Choudieu called him, a "revolutionary sovereign," according to Baudot, a "Gracchus, a true tribune of the people," so Dubois-Crancé describes him, the "god who created the Republic," whom Lakanal extols, is the "Cyclops" of La Révellière, the "Atlas of the party" of Harmand (of the Meuse), the "Titan," the "Stentor," the "Hercules," of half a score other admirers.

The power his whole person seemed to breathe was heightened by his own delight in strength of every kind: "he was carried away," says Lameth, "by everything that possessed huge proportions." And his outpourings of eloquence, thrilling with eagerness and energy, were always replete with powerful ideas, embodied in most powerful imagery. His athletic frame had carried him safely through accident and sickness, and even driven back Death, when he

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would have laid his cold hand on him. To all appearances, he was cast in steel.

On many people he produced a mingled impression of horror and alarm. This was because with the "energy" and daring" which were his boasted qualities he united a sort of cynicism, occasionally so offensive as to render him thoroughly odious. "*Have I the face of a hypocrite?*" he exclaimed to his judges. No, his face was assuredly not the face of a hypocrite, and the frankness of which he boasted on March 4, 1792—"I am accustomed to speak my mind without any consideration for other people"—sometimes went beyond all limits. Both in his conversation and in his public speeches the vulgarest dross was mixed up with expressions of the noblest kind. The idea he was expressing, if it happened to be unpleasant already, was made more brutal yet, and well-nigh insulting, by the coarseness of the terms with which he would season his remarks. And the broader the jest the louder were his fits of laughter. For the old French love of spicy wit was in the marrow of his bones.

This brings us back to the subject of his origin. Born in a country that is French above all others, in the province of Champagne, one generation only parted him from peasant forefathers who had lived, no doubt, for centuries on that soil, at once so fruitful and so harsh. Arcis, Danton's birth-place, is just half-way between Château-Thierry, the birth-place of La Fontaine, and Langres, where Diderot saw the light. All three men were the product of the same province, a country whose inhabitants are realists to the verge of being materialists; apt to be caustic, truculent on occasion, men of strong and rugged intelligence, full of a good-nature by which the stranger should not allow himself to be deceived, for the most unexpected daring, combined with a certain craft, may frequently underlie it. My readers may think it strange I should thus group three men of such different character, the fable-writer, the "philosopher," and the tribune. Yet these three "pantheists," these "realists," these "men of Gaul," really have much in common. And it is anything but surprising that in Danton's library (our knowledge of

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which we owe, once more, to that inventory of the year 1793, so providentially preserved) an honourable place should have been occupied by copies of the Fables and Tales, "with handsome pictures," though we find no reference in the list to the *Neveu de Rameau* (the work was unpublished as yet, indeed), a figure to which, by sheer natural affinity, Danton, one of Diderot's most faithful readers, already bore a close resemblance.

Like La Fontaine, then, and like Diderot, Danton was *gaulois*. His nature was more cordial in its essence than theirs, and he loved life. "*Happy is the man,*" he exclaimed at a later date, "*who has never slandered life!*" Life was delightful to him under all its forms: he worshipped Nature, and more especially Nature in his own Champagne country: he was in love with *his river, his earth, his trees*; sometimes, amidst all the stir of his life in the Cour du Commerce, a sort of hunger for the country would seize him, and down he would rush to Arcis, to drink deep draughts of the wind that blew over the plain and listen to the murmur of the river; but, in spite of this, he was far from disliking the hubbub of his Paris home, the clatter of the Rue des Cordeliers, and the tumult of the Assemblies—for all these, too, were life, and life he loved even for the sake of his hearty meals, the rounds of merry laughter at the café, and cheery junketings in joyous company.

It has been asserted, and very freely, that Danton, "an insatiable lover of sensual pleasures" (so the poet Arnault describes him), was "a debauchee." Certain words attributed to him by Sénart as having been uttered just before his execution do not in themselves bear the stamp of utter improbability—for he was as apt to boast of his vices as of his crimes. But if his conduct had been so loose, his enemies would not have failed to let us know it. Robespierre, who did accuse him of immorality, found nothing he could quote against him save an expression of his own, and this referred only to the passion of his conjugal relations. A few months later the puritan deputy publicly acknowledged that, "*looking at his family life, Danton deserved nothing but praise.*"

And this is one of the contradictions (we shall come on several more) in the man's character. He was a domestic man. I do not venture to say that during Gabrielle Danton's life, and more especially during his widowhood, he lived a perfectly virtuous existence. He has been said to have had a *liaison* with Mme. de Buffon, while he was at the Ministry, but there is no proof of the story. In any case, we have very authentic testimony in favour of the truth of the remark (a characteristically brutal remark) with which he accounted for his second marriage, only four months after his first wife's death, "*because, after all, he could not live without women!*" If only that had been the question, he need not have married again; what he meant was that he must have a wife. Voluptuous and sensual, he desired a wife who should be both pretty and charming; this is proved by his two marriages. Though he did not, either in Robespierre's company or before the Tribunal, dissimulate his pride in his conjugal exploits, he does not seem to have sought enjoyments apart from those his own home afforded him. But, on the other hand, he expected that home to be comfortable, and this liking for a life of ease and well-being was simply another manifestation of his voluptuous tendencies.

Everything proves him to have adored the two women he chose to be his wives. I shall dwell later in this work on his extreme despair when Gabrielle Charpentier died, and on the violence of his passion for Louise Gély after he married her. All this will justify the title of "good husband" bestowed on him by Courtois. And further, warm-hearted in all things, he loved his "Danton boys," orphaned so early, he loved his mother (we have already quoted one proof, among many others, of this affection), he loved his relations at Arcis, his old comrades there, his friends in Paris. Nobody can deny his possession of a great confidence—a somewhat dangerous confidence, sometimes—in his friends, whether old or new. As we know, he was always ready to treat the persons among whom he chanced to find himself as intimate friends, and delighted in showering benefits on them all; this last trait, indeed, amounted to a downright weakness. These

people compromised him, they hampered him; but he never knew how to refuse a request. And—a still more curious feature in this “cynic’s” character—he was astonished, so Barras tells us, to see himself slandered by Billaud, whom he had “saved from poverty,” and forsaken by Brune, whom he had regarded as “his own man.” He believed in friendship, and treachery “astounded” him.

As I have already said, indeed, within this noisy “revolutionary” a *bourgeois* slumbered—and the *bourgeois* was perpetually waking up. A domestic man, a family man, a good friend, a kind-hearted fellow, I can quite imagine him, if the Revolution had not broken out, living his life out simply and extremely happily, between his wife, his family board, his legal occupations, his dominoes at the Café Procope, his holidays at Arcis, where he might have spent happy weeks in the pursuit of that piscatorial sport which was to delight him to the very end. None of this can be any invention of mine, seeing that even while the Revolution was in full progress, Danton did his utmost to lead this sort of life, partly in his apartment in the Cour du Commerce, partly in his beloved home at Arcis, not to mention his stays with his wife’s parents, and frequent excursions to their home on the outskirts of Paris. With the Paris apartment we are familiar, thanks to the inventory of February 25, 1793; the house at Sèvres is made known to us by the report of the inquiry of 2nd Prairial, Year II, the house and domain at Arcis, by the inventory of 18th Germinal, Year II. I will not enter, as other authors have before me, on an enumeration of the numerous and comfortable pieces of furniture adorning the three residences, and will content myself with saying that the impression I have retained is that of a middle-class home of a somewhat refined type—from Mme. Danton’s pianoforte, white armchairs covered with Utrecht velvet, and pier-glasses, in the drawing-room, to Danton’s own “large wooden writing-table, with bronze mounts and ornaments,” from the jewels and plate, in Paris, to the well-filled cellar at Sèvres, from the “cabriolet” and horses, and the fishing-stage, to “the nets with their leads,”

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found at Arcis. A really curious aspect, this, of the life of this "fuming tribune," who would betake himself for rest, after his terrible exertions, to the house of a comfortable *bourgeois*—this *bourgeois* being none other than himself!

And the *bourgeois* was a landed proprietor, too, piling up the domain he loved so dearly, scrap by scrap, with all the persevering tenacity of the peasant-purchaser of land. Here we have another form of enjoyment born in this true son of the province of Champagne—the genuine "son of the soil" who goes seven-and-thirty times over, and joyfully each time, to "see the notary" and "sign the papers" that are to add woods to the meadows, and fields to the woods, round the roomy country dwelling the purchase of which has already brought him so much happiness.

All this proves Danton the son of French peasants: almost everything he possessed had come to him from the soil—and first and foremost his love for that kindly earth which I can almost see him crumbling tenderly between his great fingers. And we shall see that the soil had given him other things, among them his love of reality, his mixture of cunning and audacity; and, last of all, that passionate love of country which, as it seems to me, was the noblest quality of that strange nature. The Paris tribune was a peasant of Champagne, jovial, cordial, fond of enjoyment, caustic—a boon companion from the banks of the Aube.

"Hatred is foreign to my nature!" he was to exclaim one day; "I have no need of it." He knew himself: his nature, strong to the point of brutality, had not a touch of rancour in it. Certain of Danton's posthumous admirers are fond of quoting a saying of Royer-Collard's. Some one had enquired in his presence, "Is it really true that Danton was generous?" "Generous, sir!" cried the old man; "say rather that he was magnanimous!" Even the word "generous" sounds surprising to those who look on Danton as "the man of massacre"—but "magnanimous"!

Yet there was more magnanimity than generosity in his nature. Heart, brain, and hand, with him, were ever open, and thus he had cast off, once and for all, all prejudice of

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party and spites of a narrow clique. He disliked acknowledging that he had "enemies." He would do his utmost to disarm such persons; when at last he lost his temper with them, he would crush them; but before long he was trying to set them on their feet again. He claimed no merit in this connection: "*I bear no malice: this is no virtue, it is my nature.*"

This "nature," of which he thus reminds us, by no means fitted him for the struggles of his political career. At once brutally violent and generous to weakness, his very nature rendered him prone to sudden and ill-considered action. In a moment of excitement he might order, or at all events authorize, massacre of the most horrible sort; cynical and jeering, as we have already shown him to be, he would cheerfully assume, and even claim, responsibility for what was done, though the bloodshed might draw the "great tears" of which Garat tells us from his eyes. But never for one instant did he think, like Robespierre, of setting up the Terror as a system of government. He strove to rescue a few heads, at all events, from Sanson's clutches. Even when the massacres were at their height, he fought with his own friends to save the persons whose cry had reached him from the murderers' steel. Generally speaking—and here again all witnesses agree—he was not fond of striking, once his first rage had passed, and—a serious blunder, this, in politics—he would not finish off his enemy when he had him on the ground. He easily forgave the wounds inflicted on himself, and those he had dealt others, which is more uncommon still.

His was, indeed, a hearty nature: ill-will paralysed him, kindness made him expand. Thus he was perpetually torn between two feelings, both of them inherent in his own disposition: impulsive violence and instinctive generosity. This makes him, once again, a type, in the most exaggerated form, of the French character. His first impulse was always towards violence, his second was reasonable, moderate, and even generous. In one and the same speech we note, at a few minutes' interval, the roarings that should precede some scene of carnage, suddenly followed by moving appeals for

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the union of hearts and fraternal forgetfulness of wrongs. The recently published *Memoirs of Théodore de Lameth* furnish us with fresh testimony touching this branch of our inquiry.

Further, there was not an ounce of calculation in his nature. Thus he is far from presenting a perfect type of the ambitious man. He loved noise, indeed, more than he loved power, and preferred battle to victory. Popularity always went to his head: he was ready to do anything to procure it; so long as he was leading his "friends," he was able for any attack; but when he had reached the seat of power, and found himself, as a necessary consequence, surrounded by the snares of his enemies, and obliged to stand a siege, his faculties ceased to do him useful service; he failed to keep a watchful eye on the postern doors of his fortress, he never suspected any man of treason, and thus became the author of his own ruin.

Though energetic in the extreme, in moments of crisis, capable at once of the most astounding daring and the most indefatigable toil, when the turmoil was over he would suddenly collapse; he would vow he was "annihilated," and as a matter of fact he was very quickly exhausted, for he never learnt how to calculate his own strength, and always overtasked it. When disappointment or distress was added to fatigue, this swiftly transformed itself into downright neurasthenia. Reaction of this sort is certain to overtake a man so swayed by impulse; in this particular case, Danton, who had the heartiest confidence in life, looked on its disappointments as a sort of ingratitude, and the treacheries of other men as a thing so monstrous that nothing but clear proof would make him believe in its existence. When that came about, "sick of men," as he said, he would take to his bed, or hide himself out of sight.

These sudden collapses were not caused solely by the reaction of his overtaxed nature; at the very bottom, Danton was a sluggard. A middle-class man, with an innate love of enjoyment, he was little fitted for lengthy labours, long-drawn battles, and enduring sacrifice. Perpetually the tribune

and the statesman in him were fain to lecture the *bourgeois*, and drag him out of his idleness. This last failing was well known: letters before me bristle with allusions to its existence. "Well do I know thy genius, and consequently *thy natural indolence*," writes Chabot; and Delacroix: "I have written thee many letters, thou hast sent me no answers. This is not the moment for *idleness*." The sight of letter-paper, more especially, filled him with an invincible repugnance; the pen would literally drop from his fingers. "If ever I write," he said, at the beginning of one of his speeches. Yet there is not a speech of his which one does not feel to have been, I will not say written (though this was a constant habit, at the Convention), but prepared. As to his letters, there are none, or hardly any, in existence. Even when he was at the Ministry his indolence led him to hand over his signature-stamp to his underlings.

To this indolence, in part, we may trace the scorn he was so apt to affect. This was another of the man's curious traits. If he did not seem indifferent to attack, he certainly seemed to scorn any idea of reply. Perhaps his hands were over full, and at certain junctures his indolence may have been deepened by a touch of embarrassment. However that may have been, he was confident in his own strength, and his disdain was openly expressed: "As an individual, I despise the strokes that are levelled at me!" Calumny and slander might rage against him for months on end. Then, with a bitter or a haughty word, he would brush them aside—and deign no answer—thus strengthening his enemies' hand.

I say it again, there may have been more prudence in all this than has been suspected. These two sides of his nature, the violent and the indolent, have somewhat overshadowed another feature, the existence of which can surprise no one more than it surprised myself. Side by side with his violence, this grandson of peasants possessed a sort of rough cunning, which, though seemingly at war with the rest of his character, really tempered its excesses and repaired the mischiefs it was apt to work.

It is an undoubted fact that Danton, though so fierce at

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certain moments, was at others the most legal-minded of men. Impulsive he may have been, but he was never a fool, and he was quick to perceive his own mistake, if mistake there were. When the fierce tribune made a false step, the lawyer came to his rescue instantly. And this cunning, though not his most prominent quality, was so well known that several hostile contemporaries have actually underlined it. Mme. Roland looked upon him as a "hypocrite." In the ordinary sense, the description is incorrect: he simply possessed the gift of exaggerating the usual good-nature of his manner, when he perceived the necessity for so doing. This good-nature it was which earned him the title of "that excellent M. Danton," from Saint-André-des-Arcs to the Pantheon.

Was this "excellent" man an "honest man"? Here we approach the grievous question of Danton's venality. I have already set forth the elements of the accusation, in the course of the preceding pages. And to the reproach brought against him in 1789, and more especially in 1791, other accusations, of extortion and of breach of trust, were to be added after he rose to power. Meanwhile it will be well to look into the question as a whole.

We must not allow ourselves to be too much impressed by the fact that the veracity of these charges was always more or less accepted. Though somewhat disturbing, this is not conclusive. Let us remember that in this matter, as in so many others, Danton braved public opinion far more than he considered it. He openly led a life of great ease, if not of actual opulence, and gave a great deal away, in the most unconcealed fashion, to his friends. Further, he seemed to take a sort of delight, when he spoke from the rostrum, in displaying an acceptance of the most alarming theories. If our understanding of a certain speech delivered on September 6, 1793, be correct, his opinion was that anything in the world might be done with money: perpetually we find him suggesting that millions of money should be handed over even to governing authorities with whom he was not at all in sympathy, because "the most enormous prodigality in the

cause of liberty is an investment that will bring in huge interest"; he makes this assertion on August 1, 1793, and again, on the 6th, he returns to the charge, adding that he fails to understand how the Committee can "be afraid to spend money on secret service," such hesitation, in his eyes, being "pure cowardice." When he said "Robespierre is afraid of money" he had no intention of paying homage to the incorruptibility of the politician; his words were a reproach levelled at the "cowardice" of the ruler. His enemies took all this as a proof of wasteful extravagance. They went about saying, "Generous, indeed! like every thief!" Now in every quarter, the Right, the Centre, the Left, he had a swarm of mortal foes. They found it an easy task to stir up suspicion against him; not only was he regarded as an intemperate man, but he was surrounded by rogues into the bargain. Thus a prejudice grew up against him; but we must beware even of this prejudice. Unfortunately, certain facts do exist, in the face of which we cannot feel otherwise than sorely perplexed.

Certain charges, in the first place. I have already spoken of those formulated between 1789 and 1791: that Danton had been bought by England, by the Duc d'Orléans, by Mirabeau, possibly, and by the Court, through the agency of Montmorin and Lessart. After these came accusations of jobbery in connection with the "extraordinary funds" of the Executive Council, and of cheaterly in Belgium. On these last I shall shortly dwell, and shall be forced to leave the matter quite undecided. With the earlier charges I have already dealt, and my readers will have noted my anxiety to avoid being led into any false judgment. Even if we put aside the denunciation by La Luzerne, the ambassador, of Danton's connection with England, and those relations with the Duc d'Orléans which may, after all, be explained by his political plans and sympathies: even if we refuse to accept the idea that the understanding between Danton and Mirabeau which may have existed for a short period necessarily included financial relations between the two: the "purchase by the Court" still remains.

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In this case, too, I have allowed for the tales spread by biased persons. Duquesnoy kept a private journal; but he may have been deceived. La Fayette is perpetually harking back to this purchase by the Court as to an undeniable fact; but not only was he mistaken, as we have seen, and grossly and evidently mistaken, with regard to the manner in which Danton was bought out of his legal post (which tends to weaken our confidence in his other assertions, when we find it impossible to verify them), but from the very outset his testimony is liable to suspicion, because of his evident and bitter grudge against Danton. Yet La Fayette had other enemies, against whom he never brought any charge of corruption.

Bertrand de Molleville was one of Louis XVI's Ministers; he served with Montmorin and, at a later date, with Lessart; this last, we are told, confided to him, as they left the council-room together, that he was going, that very moment, to "hand 24,000 *livres* to a person who was to carry them to Danton, for a motion he was to induce the Jacobins to pass on the following day"; but when Bertrand writes this, he is smarting under the keen irritation Danton's subsequent attitude had stirred in the royalist party. Yet we are bound to note the fact, though certain details, evidently inventions, may well provoke distrust. Lord Holland, who returned to Paris a few months later, repeats—it had been told him as a "certainty"—that when La Fayette had thrown the accusation of venality in Danton's face, "he had confessed he had received money, but asserted it to have been an indemnity for a post as attorney" [*sic*], and added, as we already know, that "people were glad to give 80,000 *livres* for a man like him, *but that such a man as he was not to be had for 80,000 livres!*" But Holland, I repeat, was only quoting La Fayette's words. Brissot's assertion still remains. But Brissot wrote in 1793, at a moment when Danton was odious in his sight, and when he honestly believed him capable of any crime. When he boasts of having "seen" the receipt for the "100,000 crowns paid over by Montmorin," I feel exceedingly incredulous: where can he have seen it?

Amongst the papers in the iron chest? But these were discovered in December 1792, and from that time forward Brissot and his adherents waged war to the knife on Danton. If the receipt had ever existed, and had been among those papers, the Girondins would never have scorned so precious a weapon just when, as we shall see, they were snatching at anything and everything that might serve them against their "enemy."

Mallet du Pan does, indeed, refer to "*the sums received by Danton out of the Civil List*" as to a proved fact (March 8, 1794); but Mallet du Pan writes from a circle of *émigrés*, in which all the stories told by Bertrand de Molleville were current. And the testimony supplied by Hua, the deputy (a very upright man), may have been drawn from the same source. I have had the opportunity of perusing a declaration, lately unearthed from the Archives, dated Floréal of the Year II (a fortnight after Danton's death), and addressed to the Committee of the Public Safety, which embodies a report by five citizens to the effect that they have learnt, on the authority of one Philippe, of Arcis sur Aube, Danton's own cousin, that he (Danton) had received 150,000 *livres* in assignats from the Lameth brothers (who acted as the agents of the Court after 1791). But this Philippe brought his charge against Danton's memory just when every man was striving to deliver a fiercer farewell kick than any of his fellows at the lion—not even a dying, but a stone-dead lion—and striving all the more desperately because every one of them, like this Arcis cousin, was quaking with terror lest the recollection of a bygone friendship should compromise him now.

Thus if we only had these seven witnesses—La Fayette, Bertrand, Lord Holland, Brissot, Hua, Mallet du Pan, and Danton's kinsman Philippe—we might fairly look on their accusations as possessing but a flimsy foundation in fact. But I must confess that Mirabeau's testimony, quoted in a previous chapter, strikes me as sufficing to inspire, if not an absolute conviction of his guilt, the most serious doubt, at all events, as to the accused man's innocence. Let us recall

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the most interesting sentences of that celebrated letter of March 10, 1791.

Mirabeau writes to the Comte de la Marck, the intermediary agent between the Court and himself, and much mixed up in the business of buying men's consciences, to complain bitterly—himself more corrupt than all the rest—that money is being squandered in useless purchases, and in proof of his assertion, adds, “. . . Yesterday Danton received 30,000 *livres*, and I have proof of the fact that it was Danton who wrote Lucien Desmoulin's last number, yesterday.” Then, after asking for 6000 *livres* to be laid out on less expensive consciences, he continues, “I may be risking these 6000 *livres*, but at all events they will be squandered in a more innocent fashion than Danton's 30,000.”

Even if Mirabeau had written to one of his colleagues that “Danton has received 30,000 *livres*,” it would have been a serious matter; but here we find him writing it to an agent of the Court, a man already evidently informed of the fact. And he comes back to it twice over, as to an undeniable thing, the truth of which La Marck never contests, indeed, in his subsequent letters. What then?

I have also pointed out the strangeness, in my view, of two coincidences, which nobody as yet appears to have noticed, though they are most undoubtedly worth our attention. In the first place, the friendly way in which, on November 10, 1790, Danton, when he poured abuse on all the other Ministers, spared Montmorin, whom everybody, even in 1789, believed to be his sleeping partner. And then we have the remark made by Rivarol, and reported by Brissot, who tells us the famous writer advised the King to win over the Sections “with money and dinners,” a phrase that suddenly reminds me of a passage in a later letter from Danton to his wife, which advises her, in December 1792, not to worry her head about Rivarol's stories, and adds, “*You know that if I did run the risk of dining (?) with certain people, for the better service of my country, I have worked so successfully to give them a ball that we are completely quits.*”

All this shows that Danton—to keep ourselves to the

question of venality, pure and simple—did have some intercourse with the Court. The question as to whether the Court paid him 500,000, 100,000, 80,000, or 30,000 *livres* is of little importance. We remain impressed with a clear conviction that he did accept money. It is equally true that we feel certain the Court was fooled. Garat fancied this to be an excuse. "*It is possible,*" he says, "*that he did receive something: it is certain that if any bargain was made, no goods were ever delivered by him.*" This imprudent admission on Garat's part (and he was one of Danton's great supporters) suffices, in my opinion, to render the fact exceedingly probable, at the very least.

Further testimony, which will, no doubt, serve to convince a still larger number of readers, has been contributed to the inquiry by M. Mathiez, one of Danton's posthumous adversaries. An adversary, indeed, but a well-informed adversary, for the proofs on which he relies are legal documents, inventories, contracts. And though I do not accept all his conclusions, I am bound to admit that, as to many points, his statement of his case has carried conviction to my mind.

How, he inquires, if Danton did not receive abnormally large sums of money, are we to explain "his fortune"? For Danton's "fortune" was worthy of mention in 1794, and even in 1792.

To what sum did Danton's fortune amount in the year 1787? And again in 1794? The first document on which any certain calculation can be based is the contract for the purchase of his office, dated March 29, 1787; the second is his marriage contract, dated June 9 of the same year. His post, it will be recollected, was bought for 68,000 *livres*, which sum covered all the contingent expenses. Danton made the whole purchase on credit; thus he owed money to the amount of 68,000 *livres*, the larger half of which sum, 36,000 *livres*, was supplied by a Demoiselle Duhauttoir (whose personality continues something of a mystery). His marriage contract, dated June 9, sets forth that his property reaches a value of 12,000 *livres* only, made up of land, houses, and heritages at Arcis. Gabrielle Charpentier did, indeed, bring him a dowry

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of 20,000 *livres*, but out of these Danton paid back 15,000 lent him by his future parents-in-law. Thus the 5000 *livres* remaining, with the 12,000 at Arcis, really constituted the whole of the fortune owned by the young people, who still owed 53,000 *livres* of borrowed money.

Danton enjoyed his post for four years; in 1791 the holders of all such posts were paid off, according to the Decree of 1790. An official document proves that he handed in his title-deeds on April 20, 1791, and received an acknowledgment of the value of 69,031 *livres*, for which he gave his receipt. *No difficulty was made about paying over the money*, a fact which proves that by the spring of 1791 Danton had paid back all the sums lent him when he purchased the post. In the course of these four years, therefore, he must have paid back 53,000 *livres*, and interest as well—a fact which leads M. Mathiez to increase the probable sum; to do this, Danton must have earned 60,000 *livres* at the very least.

I was certainly among the first to recognize the fact that Danton was not the "briefless lawyer" made over to Taine by the hands of M. Bos. Yet I hesitate to believe that in four years his post can have brought him in 60,000 *livres*, a sum equal to the whole price he paid for it. If that were so, Maître Huet de Paisy must have been extraordinarily easy-going as to the price he asked. To this we must add that Danton had to live—and he always lived most comfortably—and pay rent and household charges, clerks' wages, and various other expenses. We shall thus be led to the conclusion that a post sold for 68,000 *livres* in 1787 must have brought in over 100,000 *livres* by 1791. A very astonishing thing, more especially since Danton, as I have already pointed out, was by no means desperately addicted to hard work.

M. Mathiez has likewise extracted, from the Archives of the Aube, an inventory, drawn up after his death, of all Danton's property in that department; and to this we shall frequently refer. By March and April 1791 Danton had bought various properties belonging to the Nation for a sum of 57,500 *livres*, and had likewise paid 25,300 *livres*

for the house at Arcis he was to inhabit from that time forward—82,800 *livres* in all. And though the law permitted him to purchase all National property by twelve yearly instalments, he paid the money down, on April 10 and 20. Thus, in April 1791, and before the value of his post had been paid over to him, he had 82,000 *livres* at his disposal. It may be suggested that he borrowed the money from his father-in-law and repaid him later. Yet when the provisional acknowledgment of the value of his post was handed to him, on July 9, 1791, no opposition to its payment was put in. "So here," says M. Mathiez, "we have a man who declared his sole fortune, in 1787, to amount to a value of 12,000 *livres*, and who, only four years later, has completely paid off the price of a post as *avocat ès Conseils* which he had bought with borrowed money for 66,000 *livres*, and has further found means of buying, with ready money, houses and lands worth 82,000 *livres*, before the value of his post has been handed over to him."

We might almost end our inquiry here. It would already seem impossible to admit that Danton should have been able, solely by his practice as a lawyer, to earn the 140,000 *livres* which represent the real amount of his fortune in 1791. Even if we allow for the depreciation of the assignats with which he may have paid for his properties, the striking nature of the fact remains. When M. Mathiez brings documentary evidence to prove that Danton spent a further sum of 43,650 *livres* in completing his landed property by the purchase of more land, I may accept that as an outlay justified by his having come into possession of the money paid him for his post. And I will say the same thing as regards the large quantities of furniture placed, as the inventories prove, in his residences in Paris and at Arcis, and, at a later date, in those at Sèvres and Choisy. M. Mathiez, following the very low estimates of the various inventories, sales, and inquiries, values this at about 28,644 *livres*. I prefer to arrive at a more speedy conclusion. This man, who stated his fortune, in 1787, to amount to the value of 12,000 *francs*, and married a young girl who brought him 20,000 more,

owned, at the time of his death—though he had never occupied any position that should, legitimately, have been lucrative, for more than a few months, and had been unable to make any exceptional amount of money as a lawyer—a fortune which cannot have amounted, on the most moderate computation, to less than 140,000 *livres*. Let us take note, too, of the fact that when he married again, a certain Mme. Lenoir, the bridegroom's aunt, increased Louise Gély's modest dowry of 10,000 *livres* by the addition of 30,000 more; now Danton, on his wedding day, explained this matter of his marriage contract to the Jacobins' Club, and seems to have acknowledged that these 40,000 *livres* had come out of his own pocket: "they are simply 40,000 *livres* which he has owned for a considerable time."

The continuation of these sums in addition—very simple ones, at that—would seem a useless task. One thing is clear, once we have looked over the documents connected with the case—the purchase agreement, the deed of liquidation, the two marriage contracts, the inventories, and the list of the purchases in the Aube—in 1794, at the lowest computation, Danton owned 180,000 *livres*, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain how he came by them.

"One hundred and eighty thousand *livres*!" I hear somebody cry. What is that? Was he not to be accused, before long, of having stolen millions? That merely proves how much easier it is for the rich man to borrow, and, indeed, we find nothing to prove that he did not accept, or lay hands on, a great deal of money.

But he gave it away, too, by the handful. And this brings us back from our lengthy but indispensable consideration of this charge of corruption to the man's own character.

Nothing would appear more contrary to Danton's natural qualities, and even to his faults, than this miserable defect, which some of my readers, no doubt, will take to be clearly proven. Yet he really has not the ordinary appearances of the vulgar rogue. There is little of the sharper about the big, jovial, choleric fellow, with his hasty impulses and his occasional fits of generosity. And yet it is in his nature—a

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very disorderly nature, on the whole—that we shall find the real explanation of his venal behaviour.

Though I have no positive knowledge on the subject, I am persuaded Danton never kept an account in his life. In this, as in everything else, the meaning of the word "calculation" was unknown to him. Further, he loved to spend, and even loved to see others spend—out of a sort of general delight in the sense of overflow. And again, as early as in the autumn of 1789, he had formed and developed a theory that in a period of Revolution all things were lawful: this he was to make an article of doctrine. More particularly he was to admit that money must be spent in the most liberal manner in the service of the good cause, and that no inquiry need be made as to whence it came. Thereupon, as I fancy, an offer of money was made him by the Court. For centuries past, the idea of receiving money from the King had been accepted as the most natural thing in the world: it almost amounted to taking back something of one's own. Numbers of people drew pensions they had never done anything to earn. Danton must have accepted the Court's money with an evil smile; it would come in usefully for the revolutionary agitation; the Tuileries would be fooled. But presently the money for the agitation and the money for the household got mixed up together, and the household's share ended, perhaps, by being a little too large. Later on, when he was in the Government, where he had the handling of money, and money in huge sums, the same thing was to happen over again. This condition of disorder, complicated, indeed, by a total lack of principle, was increased by the pilferings of the men about him. Before long we shall see Fabre clinging like a leech to the Treasury, to treasure of any and every kind. Danton's friends were all very needy men; they plundered "the chief," and he laughed and let them do it. To sum it up, he was by no means the sort of man to stretch out his hand first, shut it swiftly up the moment he had received money, or taken it, and then speed away to hide the proceeds of his corruption or his thievery in some dark hole. His hand was never closed: money might be poured

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in, but almost as much flowed out. Now and then a little was left. The miracle is that this happened at all, seeing such greedy fellows as Fabre, Robert, Delacroix and the rest were hovering perpetually about him. When Danton perceived some scanty leavings were still in his grasp, he probably salved his conscience with the easy excuse that he had worked very hard, and gained but little, in the service of the Revolution; and as land was what he loved, he bought it (the incautious wight!) openly—cynically, said his enemies; imprudently, we will rather say. And this again was characteristic of the man. He never was capable of weighing any matter beforehand.

We note the same lack of order and equilibrium in his oratory. If eloquence consists in fiery thoughts and vigorous expression, Danton was a great orator indeed. But if the orator is really to be the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, he was a pitifully bad speaker. In fact, he never knew how to compose or even arrange the sequence of a speech, and of no one may it be more truthfully asserted that "the style is the man."

His great merit was his enthusiasm. He would mount the rostrum as if he meant to take it by assault, and hold it, as it were; his nostrils would quiver, his outstretched arm would seem to challenge battle, as though the discussion had been at its height even before he had opened his own mouth. And when he did begin to speak, there was no pompous exordium (then considered almost indispensable), but an eager commencement, *ex abrupto*: "No, citizens, there is not a doubt about it, the hope your Commissaries give you is not vain. Yes! your foes, the foes of Liberty, shall be exterminated! Wherefore—" etc. And instantly, with a touch, a striking phrase, he forced his subject and himself upon his hearers' attention.

Then came his speech, a strange one. If it was short and virulent, it affected his audience strongly; when it was long, it was the strangest medley: powerful and noble thoughts, oratorical formulæ of the most commonplace description, striking imagery, glaring in its truthfulness, and halting

metaphor, that swelled and limped, words that were noble beyond compare, and words, again, of a triviality that was almost painful, sharp and cutting phrases, coarse abuse, unexpected jests, tragic appeals. It was like some turbid flood that carried everything before it, and rolled its disordered course between steep banks, sweeping all things along with it, indeed, but casting them all up again as it swirled along. For in certain of his speeches Danton repeats himself over and over again, sometimes in the very same words. Often he is diffuse, and well-nigh incomprehensible. Then suddenly a flash of lightning, breaking through the clouds, lights up the whole discourse.

The attractive quality of his oratory is the directness of its style, his evident desire to call things by their right name, even at the expense of prudence and good taste; and also the constant personal note in all his speeches. His own individuality certainly did not strike him as being hateful. He would take a man by the throat and lash him mercilessly, but as he did it, he would lay bare his own existence, boast, confess his ways, talk of his own character, his own face, his own home, his wife, his children; he would be deeply moved, or filled with indignation, or radiant with enthusiasm, and through it all produce a constant impression of a sincerity that occasionally went beyond the limits of discretion. His style was crudely personal: Danton would speak from the rostrum, every now and then, just as he would have spoken at the Café Procope, without the least regard for oratorical correctness, but pitching, without the slightest effort, on the expression most calculated to move his audience to terror or to laughter. I have no intention of making any complete study of his oratory in this place, and shall, therefore, refrain from quoting expressions of his which have attained celebrity, and, twenty times over, brought the Assemblies into whose midst they fell like thunderclaps to their feet in a frenzy of excitement, simply because everything the man said sprang from his very heart. I will confine myself to pointing out his natural predisposition to a powerful materialization of every idea, to choosing comparisons drawn

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from Nature rather than from history or morals—thunderbolts, electricity, lava, the sea, the mountain, rocks, torrents, or physiological phenomena of various kinds. This endues his speeches with a truculent power, and differentiates them in a striking manner from others of this period, during which the Ciceronian form of address was the only one that met with general approval.

And, I say it again, his speeches were quite unfettered by the rules that usually govern rhetoric: they had no parts, no divisions, no plan. Almost all of them bear the stamp of the dual character that passed, in their case, out of his nature into his discourse. Not only are they devoid of sequence, but his ideas would evidently change while they were in course of expression, growing more moderate or more extreme, according to the reception given to the speaker and the suggestions presented to his mind. Generally speaking, Danton, when he spoke from the rostrum, was more prone to moderate than to increase his vehemence. He would mount the steps with his face all flushed, his eyes flashing, his hand threateningly outstretched, fulgurating, fulminating, like some mighty storm: his words would be vehement, his voice occasionally terrifying; then suddenly, as though the tempest he was about to loose filled him with terror, he would seem to call himself to account, and the speech he had begun so fiercely would end with an appeal for moderation, or follow a declaration of war with an offer to make peace.

The real truth, and this must be the end of our argument, is that Danton's ideas were by no means clearly defined, and his plans had no certain foundation.

He had not many ideas of his own, and did not care, I may add, to possess any large number. He belonged to a generation of ideologists, and had certainly shared their "philosophic" education; he had read far more widely than any of them. It was, perhaps, because he had not shut himself up with the French philosophers, and had escaped the thrall of the ancient classics—because, as the inventory of his books proves, he had added and probably preferred his Rabelais, Brantôme, Montaigne, Corneille, La Fontaine,

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Shakespeare, Dante, and Boccaccio to Ovid, Virgil, Lucretius, and Plutarch—because, after having fed on the Encyclopædia of Diderot and Rousseau, he had cultivated his taste for Cervantes and Molière, too, that he had broken out of the circle, a somewhat narrow circle, on the whole, of the ideas of such a man as Robespierre, for instance, with his mixture of stale philosophy and classicism. But the great peculiarity of this man, who put aside the writers of his own time and country to study the expression of foreign thought, is his superior power of gauging the relative value of most *ideas*. The result of Danton's reading, in all probability, had been to confirm him in his natural leaning towards realism. In that wild riot of *ideology* which the Revolution really was, from 1789 till 1793, Danton was a great *realist*.

Given a certain situation, he would face its uttermost consequences, he sought the remedy for the evil, not in ideas, the Tenth of August. And once he had foreseen the consequences, he sought the remedy for the evil, not in ideas, but in facts, which he fought hand to hand. There was a Revolution in the country; so be it! Once the Revolution had begun, it must be made to yield the democracy that which it had been promised, but no more than that, not an "impossible equality of property," but the equality of all citizens in the sight of the law; and to break down resistance to the law no sacrifice would be too great. Should everything be overthrown at once, to gain this end? That was not his opinion. There must be a slow transition. Property must be carefully protected; the richer classes were, indeed, "sponges that must be squeezed" when times of danger came, because their interest in the salvation of the country was greater than that of any other men. But the rights of property must be declared "eternal"; for there could be no founding of a "republic of Visigoths." In the same way, he openly avowed himself, and I believe really was, a Freethinker, more thorough than the immense majority of the supporters of the Revolution; but in his eyes, a whole abyss lay between this fact and the idea of proscribing the clergy. Was it his sense of toleration that led him to object

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to persecution? Perhaps; but above all it was his common sense. The poorest of the people seek "consolation" in religion: religion helps and sustains them, regulates their morals and softens the bitterness of their suffering. So precious a treasure must not be snatched away from them. Some day, perhaps—a day far distant as yet—the propagation of knowledge (he was to formulate all the steps to be taken for the popular education) would enable the People to live without the "consoler," but for the moment he would have him kept in his place, and even supported. Hence his constant and lively opposition not only to every form of persecution, but likewise to any separation between Church and State. And speaking of the believers in the populace, he cries, "*Do not take its error from it!*" He would not have the "old song" hushed, though he himself heard it no longer.

This was opportunism of the purest sort. Danton was an *opportunist* in the best sense of the word, and therefore a better statesman, tenfold, than Robespierre, with his dogmas. He would have said, even in those times, that circumstances do away with dogma. All he proposed for the future was a very democratic system of public education, and he was content to rely on the progress of knowledge. But for the moment none of these matters were in question; between 1789 and 1792 the chief thing was to ensure the triumph of the Revolution; from 1792 till 1794 the great object was to be the defence of the country. These were the two realities to which every idea, even the noblest and the wisest, must be sacrificed. His view was that under such circumstances nothing must stand in the way of the *Public Safety*. And he who, like all the rest, had shouted "*Long live Liberty!*" knew but one longing, after 1792—the longing for a strong, a very powerful government, whose powers should be perpetually reinforced; some Council or Committee which, though it must certainly lean on the people ("*Soyons peuple! Il faut être peuple!*" he would constantly say), should wield a dictatorship that would be all the more legitimate on that account. Only an arrangement of this sort must be purely

temporary; a good constitution must be set up as soon as possible.

For the moment, the great peril lay on the frontier. Once the shock of contact with the foreigner was experienced, one feeling overcame all others, in Danton's heart. He may, like many of his contemporaries, have lost his way, for a moment, in the realm of humanitarian fancies: in 1790 he was still toasting "the happiness of the whole universe." But he was no dreamer, and he soon cast his humanitarian views aside. Born Frenchman that he was, clinging to his native soil and going back to it for refreshment and for rest, at the very first threat of war his national instincts woke within him. And before long he was above all other things a patriot. The human race in general did interest him, indeed, but his view of it was confined to France and what was best for her. This feeling, like all others in his case, took on a somewhat brutal form. "*Will all these altercations of ours kill a single Prussian?*" he exclaimed, one day. And facts, as we shall see, brought him back, realist though he was, to an idea, a traditional idea, both simple and essential: everything must serve the safety and the greatness of the Fatherland. And following this course, his volcanic soul poured itself forth, in all directions, far and wide. To him everything was legitimate that served his threatened country: all things must unite to save her—vice, virtue, heroism, crime, appeals to human feeling, the purchase of men's consciences, the madness of hearts wound up, if need be, to the lust of blood; sanguinary speeches, secret negotiations, force, cunning, violence—all were right in his eyes, if only they kept the enemy out. And by the time the foe was driven back, he had forgotten all the dreams of the Constituent Assembly: "No conquests!" Yes! Conquests indeed! to bring about the birth of that greater France, the dream of twenty generations. Thus Danton was to be the incarnation of the Fatherland, not only the Fatherland of that moment, the Fatherland crowned with the Phrygian Cap, but the eternal Fatherland, which knows neither governments nor men: *The Fatherland*, in short.

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He was not a very lovable figure, nor altogether estimable, either, this Titan with "a Tartar's face." But Fortune did France a signal service when—just as inevitable dissolution seemed upon us—she swept this one man, of all others, into power "upon a cannon ball." A pure enthusiast would have perished, and the country with him; a great calculator would have lost his way amongst his combinations. This muscular, full-blooded man, this athlete with his hot heart and his realistic mind, this tribune with the powers of a statesman and the inspiration of a true Frenchman, was, thanks even to his vile faults, the man for the situation. Trampling on his own indolence—for he was strong enough to do it—and calling his astounding power of work into full play, he was to join magnanimity with brutality, daring with cunning, joviality with dishonesty; everything that lived within that gusty, complex soul was to be devoted to the service of his country! His very vices were to serve her cause—that absence of scruple that led him to scatter gold broadcast, while, to all outward appearance, the work was being performed with lead alone. Yet his virtues—for he had virtues—were to help to keep him upright on his feet, and the day was to come when he was to point the tremblers to the hearth—his own hearth, whither he had summoned "the old mother" to take her seat between the wife and little ones whom he adored—the hearth, I say again, the corner-stone on which he built the Fatherland!

CHAPTER VII

THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE—THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

In "the Palace of Lamoignon and Maupeou"—Danton's "Tail"—The Clock with the Fleur-de-Lis—The "Work" of the Keeper of the Seals—The Circular of 18th August—The Situation—Danton takes Possession of the Council—All Men look to him.

DANTON was Minister of Justice! Quite early on August 11 the news was spread abroad. And that very day, when this strange Keeper of the Seals made his appearance in the Assembly, he found the galleries crammed with a populace still brandishing its weapons in hands blackened with powder, or even reddened with blood—for all night long the massacre had been in progress. Thunderous acclamations greeted the victor.

"Citizens," he said, "the French Nation, weary of despotism, worked a Revolution. But being over generous, it made terms with the tyrants. Experience has proved that no alteration can be expected from the ancient oppressors of the People. *It is about to retake possession of its rights.* But at all times, and more especially in matters of private debate, at the *very point at which the action of justice begins, popular vengeance must cease.* In presence of the National Assembly *I undertake to protect the men within its walls: I will march at their head, and I answer for them!*"

Though the sentence was not particularly clear, the Assembly applauded the speaker. Danton accepted the position the Assembly intended for him; popular leader though he was, does he not seem to have undertaken to curb the very men he had despatched to the attack?

The chair was occupied by Vergniaud, a far better representative than Danton, certainly, of the general mind of the Assembly. As president, he had signed the decree conferring

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the seals on Danton, and thus seemed to embody, in his own person, the momentary abdication of the Brissotins in favour of the Cordelier. Even the royalists appeared to consent to this election; in the course of that same sitting, Vergniaud was handed a letter from the late Keeper of the Seals, de Joly, a royalist, to the effect that he "would have liked to hand over the Seals" to his successor in person, "but that the Department had sealed up his cabinet in the Place Vendôme, and therefore he was only able to send the keys of the cupboard and the boxes." This symbolic gesture on the part of d'Aguesseau's successor almost looked as though he, too, were conferring his new functions upon Danton.

Danton had proceeded to "the Palace of Lamoignon and Maupeou," as Desmoulins called it, and the terrified members of the office staffs had watched the installation of "that Cyclops" and "his band with considerable alarm." Their alarm was fully justified: the new Minister, "finding himself obliged by circumstances to place persons marked out for the purpose by public opinion at the head of his offices," was shortly to invite these gentlemen "to take advantage of their right to retire"—such were the terms in which he wrote, on the 30th, to the chief official of the Seals Office.

In the intoxication of his sudden elevation, Danton seems to have been bent on making a clear sweep not only of individuals, but of things. His terrible glance fell on the clock in his cabinet. The point of the hand that marked the hours, on the Tenth of August, was fashioned like a fleur-de-lis. A fleur-de-lis! On the 22nd, when Blanchet, the clockmaker, came to wind up the clocks, the Keeper of the Seals was to step hastily forward, and with a flick of his thumb, to break that hand off short! Very like Danton was this strange gesture! Then again, he discovered that the "Hôtel de la Justice" contained "a silver-gilt chalice, with its *patera* [*sic*], four altar candlesticks, a crucifix, two flagons, and a bowl." They were handed over to the Mint. And as to the "two chasubles" he likewise found, God knows whither they were sent! There still remained—and this was more serious still—the Seal itself. Could a man called

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Danton use a Seal "representing the effigy of the King seated on his Bed of Justice"? On August 14 the Minister requests the Assembly will take measures to replace the Seal, and change the formula employed in the promulgation of laws; for Danton will not consent to administer justice in the name of any king.

Yet Louis XVI was only suspended from his functions; but in the eyes of the "Man of the Tenth of August" the King was deposed, and everything he did, every action, even the most puerile, was to underline his view of the position. There could be no doubt, now, that Brutus was installed in Lamoignon's armchair.

Nobody was more convinced of the change at the Place Vendôme than the ushers connected with the Ministry. What a scandal the "setting up" of Danton's "cabinet" must have seemed to these men, with their powdered heads, some of whom (my readers know what perennials these ushers were) had seen the old Chancellors of Louis XV's days! The "Chief," to begin with, rolling out oaths in his mighty voice, hustling the men under him, affecting an air of licence, as though of deliberate intent.

In his wake, the younger Cordeliers had made their way into the Chancellor's office. Fabre had secured the best place for himself: he was General Secretary, and was really to manage the whole Ministry. This was his full intention, for nobody, better than he, knew how careless—between two fits of activity—his leader was apt to be, and how completely, too, the important business of the Executive Council was to absorb him. Before a fortnight had gone by Fabre was not only in possession of the Seals, but—a gross abuse—of the Minister's private stamp. But the real abuse lay in the fact of his presence there at all, with his loose habits—those of a *ci-devant* actor—and his cynical wit, and intolerable chatter, and easy morals, and that odour of dishonesty he spread wherever he went. Desmoulins was Secretary to the Seals, and here was another unusual denizen of the Chancery. He looked like a child there. The letter already quoted, revealing his joy at being where he was with such boyish artless-

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ness, portrays him faithfully ; with his journalist's pranks and sensitive nerves, though quite incapable of giving any sensible counsel, he was very capable of following the vilest possible advice. Much influenced by Fabre, he understudied the dubious Secretary-General, and handled the Seal as though it had been a splendid toy. Robert, whom the Rolands, to his wife's great wrath, had not chosen to employ, forced himself on Danton, who, as he himself acknowledged, had literally saved him from starvation. He was made the chief of all the secretaries. An apartment was actually furnished for his use. "For the furniture bought for M. Robert," we read in Danton's accounts, 2400 *francs*." But Robert, like Fabre, was dishonest : one trafficked in boot-leather, the other in rum.

It was inevitable, indeed, that so good a comrade as Danton should desire to see everybody else share the marry-making and the windfalls. Every soul he had known since 1789, and even before that, might come and claim his share ; he took one of his old colleagues at the King's Council, Nicolas Dupont, to be his private secretary, and he had to provide, of course, for his old friend Paré, his college comrade, and his clerk, in later days.

He even hoped to quiet discontent by the bestowal of places, and was very often disappointed in his calculations, for his hearty comradeship was stronger than his psychological gifts. He sent the four members of the Judicial Committee "charged with the duty of preparing the speeches made by the Keeper of the Seals" about their business, without ceremony, and filled their places by appointing Paré and Barère—this last a trimmer, but he desired to have him on his side—Collot d'Herbois, with whom he had frequently come into collision, and Robespierre, whose dissatisfaction he had guessed. Paré, Collot, and Barère accepted. Robespierre, soured by his disappointment at not being head of the Ministry himself, uncivilly refused the secondary position offered him. And, indeed, the austere mode of existence Robespierre affected led him to avoid the Chancery, as organized by Danton, as though it had been a house of

ill fame. A Ministry where Fabre, Desmoulins, and Robert led the dance, and Paré, Barère, and Collot—not to mention others—were trusted counsellors, was a dubious spot, in his opinion. He was not the only man who thought so. The general opinion was that when Danton accepted the Seals, he ought to have “cut off his tail.”

The matter was all the more serious because Danton, much occupied with the far more important anxieties that beset the Government, was really leaving the management of the Chancellor's Office to his friends.

Dr. Robinet vows his demi-god exhibited a most devouring activity at the Place Vendôme; within a week, he declares, 123 decrees connected with the administration of justice were published there. But the very number proves how the business, to use Danton's own expression, was “knocked off.” We find him, with a most unusual docility, referring questions of the most delicate or important nature to the Assembly. This was simply the result of his indifference to the business of his own department. Mme. Roland strikes me as being in the right here. “Danton,” she says, “took very little pains to perform the duties of his office, and hardly gave any of his attention to it: the enemy made the wheels go round, he handed over his signature stamp, and these tactics were steadily carried on, without the smallest interference on his part.”

Once a week a conference of all the Heads of Tribunals was held, under the presidency of the Keeper of the Seals. On August 16 the thirty-second meeting of the year 1792 took place, the first since the Revolution which, as Desmoulins puts it, had “hoisted” Danton into power. The magistrates, who met at seven o'clock, dispersed a few moments later, “the Minister of Justice not being at home at this moment.” A week later Danton did make up his mind to put in an appearance, but he flashed in and out like a meteor; at the thirty-fifth meeting, the Minister once more appeared; Target took advantage of his presence to thank him, in the name of the Parisian Tribunals, for a letter in which the Minister had put them forward as “models for

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all the other tribunals in the kingdom," and to protest against an accusation of unpatriotic behaviour brought against one of them by the Section of the Théâtre-Français, now become the Section of Marseilles. The Minister promised to "interpose his good offices to prevent the ulterior consequences of this denunciation." This done, he retired, and was not seen again for weeks and weeks. There, as elsewhere, he had been cordial, compliant—and hurried.

He knew his management stirred criticism: he desired to defend himself against any charge of carelessness. In a lengthy letter addressed to the Convention on October 6 he endeavoured to prove that he had carried through a genuinely Herculean task, the Chancery having been a mere Augean stable before his arrival. He had purified the Tribunals, sent out 800 decrees, etc., etc. But there is a hollow ring about it all.

As a matter of fact, the only striking token of his presence at the Ministry of Justice is the celebrated circular to the Tribunals, issued on August 19. This document, though it is far less a "circular letter" from the Keeper of the Seals than a manifesto published by the *Minister of the Revolution*, deserves our attention here. Nominally addressed to the judges, it is addressed, in reality, to the country at large, the necessity for creating an impression upon public opinion being ultra-important at that juncture. And Danton's circular, the apology for "the memorable insurrection of the Tenth of August . . . blessed and a thousand times happy," offers—and herein lies its extreme interest—the official (and lying) interpretation of the "memorable" day put forward by the man who was its principal author.

In the Provinces, which were uncertain in their allegiance, the Tenth of August must not be looked on as a triumphant revolution worked by the Paris mob, but a *Coup d'État* planned by the Tuileries, and brought to naught thanks to the resistance of "the Nation" (represented in real fact by a handful of men from Marseilles). In this connection, the opening sentence is simply a masterpiece of cunning of the most audacious kind.

"A huge plot has just broken out in the palace of the Tuileries, and failed at the very moment of its eruption, stifled by the courage of the Federates of the 83 Departments and the 48 Sections of the capital." "Bands" of "knights of the dagger" had been destroyed; and in the Palace archives "a mass of proofs . . . of the blackest plots" had been discovered. And every detail of the day was set forth in blazing splendour: traitors put to confusion, whose heads had paid for "their villany"; printing-presses, used by the Court to disseminate counter-revolutionary literature, now smashed to atoms, and so forth. And then Danton himself appears upon the scene. "In a post which I have reached thanks to the glorious suffrages of the Nation, *which I enter through the breach in the walls of the Tuileries Palace*, and at a moment when cannon has become the people's final argument, you will find me constantly and invariably the same president of that Section of the Théâtre Français which did so much for the Revolution of July 14, 1789, under the name of the Cordeliers District, and for the Revolution of August 10, 1792, under the name of the Section of Marseilles. The tribunals will ever find me *the same man, the sole object of whose every thought has been liberty, political and individual, the maintenance of the law, the public peace, the unity of the eighty-three Departments, the splendour of the State, the prosperity of the French people, and not an impossible equality of property, but an equality of rights and happiness!*" And now, he thinks, the Provinces, Liberal and Conservative alike, must feel reassured; the agitator has never agitated, save "for the sake of public peace," the Cordelier of the Théâtre Français has never worked for anything but the "unity of the Departments"—and the Democrat is no Communist.

He goes on to inquire whether the judicial functionaries of the country had not been responsible, to some extent, for the reactionary movement the Tuileries had endeavoured to set up. The magistrates chosen by the people had served the old régime, and the Court may have succeeded in winning them back to the standard of despotism. This object had

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been pursued by his predecessors in his present office, as their counter-revolutionary circulars proved. "You will not expect such circulars from me. . . . Who should be the National organ of truth unless it be the Minister of Justice, whose functions are chiefly concerned with the elucidation of truth? That organ I have become, *and I will transmit the truth to the Departments, pure and complete, without any of those cowardly reticences*, so hateful to my own character and ill-suited to the dignity of the Ministry confided to me by a nation numbering twenty-five millions of men, the most free and powerful in the Universe.

"Tell the citizens . . ."

And then, distorted by that "organ of pure truth," recent events were set forth in a fashion calculated to intimidate not the downright royalists (hardly any were left), but the moderate and lukewarm men in the provinces, the "Fayetists" and "Feuillants": La Fayette, "whom my predecessors called the most patriotic of leaders," was formally accused; writers, "wretches who had sold themselves," were revealed as traitors, thanks to the seizure of the Civil List accounts; the relations between the King and the Coblenz exiles were published; and the intention of the Court to "bathe in the blood of the people on the eve of the Tenth of August" was likewise proved, for "the first cannon was to have been fired from the Palace." In the name of "pure truth" again, the citizens must be told it was the Swiss Guards in the Palace who, by a vile stratagem, tempted the "Federates of the eighty-three Departments" into the courtyard of the Tuileries, and there murdered them—which accounted for the legitimate reprisals taken against the wretches.

After this fashion is official history written on the morrow of every revolution, and Danton has had many imitators in this respect.

But having thus retraced, in most emphatic form, the events of the Revolution—the passage consists of some 210 lines of printed matter—Danton once more recalls the fact that he is himself the supreme chief of the judicial system of

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the country. He is resolved justice shall be dispensed in a truly civic sense. "The incivism of many judges has created great prejudice against the tribunals. The judges of the VIth ward of Paris" [here the memory of the Keeper of the Seals takes him back to the injuries of the Cordelier tribune] "gave the signal for the persecution of the friends of liberty, and so many imitators has this example found in the Departments, that a general cry has been raised for a renewal of the tribunals."

Such misconduct may have had its excuse in the circulars issued by Keepers of the Seals who had been unfriendly to the Revolution, but "now that the *truth about the treasonable conduct . . . shines in all its brightness*, now that they are filled, and *as it were invested with its light*," the magistrates must "hasten to enlighten those to whom it is their duty to dispense justice *with the knowledge of these facts, transmitted to them ministerially.*" *Very ministerially*, we might add.

"Turn the sword of the law, which others would fain have directed, in your hands, against the apostles of Liberty, upon the enemies of the Fatherland and of the public well-being. *Let the justice of the Tribunals begin! Then will the justice of the People cease!*"

Let us take note of this expression, which Danton was constantly to employ in his justification of the September massacres.

Over these judges, whom he so evidently suspects, and feeling, perhaps, how faint must be the hope of teaching them civism by sheer terror, Danton proposes to set a resolute Public Ministry. A decree of the Assembly had dismissed all the King's Commissaries at the various Courts. On September 7, Danton wrote that body to the effect that the new agents must be energetic, and should therefore be chosen among the younger men. "Though such a man, tossed by the numerous passions that assail him, may sometimes allow himself to give way to violence, *does not this very violence feed the fire of his genius, elevate his ideas, and endue his character with a strength and energy necessary, always, and*

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more especially in times of revolution?” And he requested the “competent age might be lowered to twenty-five years.”

But there must be no lawyers! On September 22, in the course of an extraordinarily violent outbreak, he exclaimed that, far from the exercise of judicial functions being confined to lawyers, there should be power to exclude these “men who had dabbled in the science of justice” from the new tribunals altogether. This would prevent the formation of a *judicial caste*, a magisterial body. “Those who had made the judging of other men into a profession were like priests: both classes were eternal deceivers of the people.”

Thanks to these three specimens of official literature, we are informed as to the Minister’s opinions: no lawyers on the benches of the tribunals; the magistrates, till they had been weeded out, to render “civic” justice, which would forestall any intervention by the superior but dangerous justice of the People, and these terrorized judges to be assisted by young Commissaries, in the Cordelier style, the “violence” of whose passions was to inspire them with “the energy necessary in times of revolution.”

A new spirit, indeed, reigned in the Chancery on the Place Vendôme. What more eloquent than this account of the “hundred thousand francs drawn by M. Danton, Minister of Justice,” discovered in the Archives! Sixty-eight thousand six hundred and eighty-four *livres* were spent in all, and in that sum a very small hole is made by the 2400 laid out for the furniture given to Robert and his wife—though this was a heavier outlay than the modest sum of 360 *francs* for “night-work done by the extra stampers.” But one large item strikes us most forcibly: “*Given M. Santerre to pay for pikes made in the Sections, Thirty thousand livres.*”

Thus the rioters’ arms were supplied by the Ministry of Justice,

It is more than clear that “the house of Lamoignon and Maupeou” changed masters when Danton and his friends entered its portals!

At the bottom of his heart, Danton never took himself quite seriously as Minister of Justice. He was “the Minister

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of the Revolution"; and this title, in his eyes, endued him with the right to order all things in the State.

To a certain extent, as we know, the Assembly had encouraged him in this belief. Having begun by deciding that the first man elected to the Council should enjoy a preponderating situation on it, it elected Danton to the Ministry by 222 votes out of 285; M \acute{o} ng \acute{e} , who was elected to the Ministry of Marine, only received 154 votes; Le Brun, who was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, only reached the wretched total of 91; Roland, Servan, and Clavi \acute{e} res were appointed, on a show of hands, to the Ministries of the Interior, Finance, and War; thus Danton was undoubtedly the "first chosen" and the preponderant member.

He would have forced himself into the position, in any case. A born ruler, as Sorel calls him, he proved himself, from the very outset, the man for the government, and that a government which was just what was wanted at that particular moment. In any normal period, very probably, he would have so jarred on the Council of Ministers that it would have promptly turned him out. The fashion in which he rushed business through; treated his colleagues with a high hand, usurped their offices, hustled individuals and even events, all those floods of ideas, powerful indeed, but often brutal too, of exaggerated plans and objectionable sallies, would not have forced him on the acceptance of his comrades by any means; they would have made him simply impossible, neither more nor less.

But this was a time of crisis, calling for a man quite out of the ordinary, and Danton really appeared capable of coping with it. His qualities, even his very faults, seemed valuable. "The chaos amidst which he laboured," writes Sorel, "was his natural element. He found his way through it, he was even invigorated by it. He discovered men for every post, and decrees to suit every question."

Chaos! The word is not too strong. Never, for centuries, had the country been brought to such a pass. In the course of the past three years, the Revolution had worked universal overthrow. Destruction there had been, but no creation, as

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yet, save anarchy. Even supposing the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies had voted none but the most admirable laws, the time had been too short to permit the new form of government to fill the old one's place. Everything was in a nebulous condition. An attempt had been made to organize a constitutional monarchy; but the Assembly had not endued it with real life, and the dynasty had not given it a whole-hearted acceptance. The two lines of policy had so clashed that government had been everywhere and nowhere, all at once. In this respect the fall of the throne had cleared the situation; anything is better for a nation than the rule of anarchy—anything, even the rule of frenzy. On August 11 the situation was clearly defined; theoretically, the government was in the hands of the Assembly alone.

But other perils arose. The Assembly no longer retained the smallest moral authority. When it sentenced the monarchy to death, it condemned itself. For it was the violence of the mob which had forced it to sacrifice the King, and so discredited were the deputies—"Traitors!" the populace had been shouting, for three weeks past—that when they decreed the King's suspension, they had been fain to decree the convocation of another Assembly—that Convention which was to be elected between September 4 and 20. Until the meeting of this Convention, the Legislative Body—"that Rump Assembly"—a bare 300 of whose members, out of 750, dared to show their faces again, once the storm was over, was to continue its sittings, but flouted all the time by the victors, represented by the Commune, a body which, being originally rooted in rebellion, constituted a permanent outrage on the principle of legality impersonated by the Legislative Assembly. This Commune, composed of coarse and subaltern agitators, was resolved to act with an acknowledged and, further, a preponderating authority. Thus the fatal dualistic system the fall of the throne had promised to destroy was re-established, while the regular power, that of the Assembly, was held in check.

The Commune was supposed to represent Paris. We know

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the truth about this, and that, under these "representatives," the inhabitants of the city quivered far more with terror than with delight. The Provinces, in any case, were in a frenzy of anxiety and indignation. For a considerable time they had ceased to "keep step," as the "pure" politicians called it. Once the soil was liberated, the peasants felt quite satisfied, and the small *bourgeoisie* was just as content now the Constitution had been voted. The fall of the throne had terrified the Provinces. They made no protest, but this was solely because they had been assured (we have just read Danton's circular) it was the dwellers in the Tuileries who had sought to stifle the Revolution and annul the conquered right to Liberty and Equality. But though Paris may have boasted the presence of some solid Republicans, in the Departments these were few and far between. From Provence to Normandy, from the Lyonnais to Brittany, once the first bewilderment was over, a general rising was to take place. In the west (I shall come back to this) the shiver that preludes the storm was already stirring the country. In all directions, the ground the new Government was about to tread was undermined. Marat's friends might lift the paving-stones of the capital once more; the friends of the Marquis de la Rouerie were already beginning their secret agitation in the villages of Western France.

All this was serious, nay, terrible, for a Government which owed its birth to insurrection, and was bound to content those who had set it up and reassure those whom that insurrection had distraught. It would have been better, too, that the leading men of the Revolution should be united, and they were divided. On an impulse of self-sacrifice, the Girondins had voted for Danton, but they loathed him, and between the extreme Jacobins themselves, such as Marat and Robespierre, there was no love lost.

In any case the situation would have been alarming, but what was it likely to become when the country was invaded, a whole province occupied, the capital threatened by the enemy? On April 20 war with Austria had been declared. Prussia had instantly joined hands with Austria, and very soon the

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"Empire" was added to these two. All the forces of Germany were marching against France. And behind them stood the whole of Europe, ready to swell their strength. On the northern frontier, the French troops had been put to shameful rout in the course of the preceding spring. Then, after certain hesitations due to international intrigue, the Prussians had moved on Lorraine, uttering open threats, vowing they would fall on Paris and parcel out the country when they got there. On August 19 an army numbering 80,000 men was close upon the frontier, and in less than a month it had obliged Longwy and Verdun to capitulate, forced the passes of the Argonne, and entered Champagne.

The worst of it was that nobody, on August 11, could possibly reckon on victory. Half the officers in the army had emigrated. Who could then foresee the brilliant fashion in which their places were to be filled? The Generals, even those who had apparently accepted the Revolution, were not particularly reliable. As for the men, who had been piling rebellion on breach of discipline ever since 1789, they promised to be more of a danger to their commanders than to anybody else. The volunteers of the year 1791 were desperately eager, but of the profession of arms they knew but little, as yet; those of the year 1792, as the most sanguine of their leaders admitted, were a mere rabble of ruffians, far more likely to complete the destruction of the army than to strengthen it.

While the land forces thus seemed incapable of checking any invasion, the fleets had gone to ruin on their own account; in their case the emigration had carried off nearly all the officers, and anarchy had scattered all the crews. Not one efficient squadron could have been dispatched to meet the ships of Spain and England, both of them ready to take action.

As for "the sinews of war," they simply did not exist. The finances were in a terrible condition. So low had the value of the assignat already fallen that producers preferred selling nothing at all to accepting paper-money. Business was at a standstill. The taxes were unpaid, the treasury

practically empty. It was even to be said, before very long, that Danton, in his need for money, had been fain to get sham thieves to steal the treasures of the Garde-Meuble, the Crown Jewels. And the story was believed.

Thus all things seemed working together for the ruin of the country : utter anarchy, three years old, already, in many places—anarchy in the Government, the administration, the finances, the mob, the Assembly ; a clean cut between provincial and Parisian opinion, between nine-tenths of the French nation and the new Government ; bitter divisions even amongst the men who were assuming charge of public business ; and this country, self-forsaken as it seemed to be, face to face with two first-class military Powers, four others only waiting their opportunity to join them, and the enemy, before long, within four days' march of Paris !

Such was the situation that greeted the Executive Council when its members gathered for their first meeting in the "Hôtel of the Ministry of Justice," at two o'clock in the afternoon of the Tenth of August.

The very choice of the meeting-place in the Place Vendôme shows how the members of the Government were turning instinctively towards the one man able to cope with the situation. Public opinion—revolutionary opinion, at all events—imposed his leadership upon them. The Rolands themselves, subjugated for the time, if not won over, accepted him without a sign of bitterness. To all of them this "Cyclops" appeared the only man able to hammer out the weapon of defence upon the revolutionary anvil. Everything was left to him—the direction of public opinion, of the war, of diplomatic affairs. He was himself to acknowledge that though he had possessed "nothing but his voice," he had nevertheless acquired "influence." The word was modest ; Roland calls it "a terrible preponderance." This was because he was strong, in the first place, and because the men about him were weaklings, in the second.

Monge was a savant ; Condorcet had fetched him from his Academy and had him hailed Minister of Marine. Mme. Roland describes him as a "bear" who might be induced to

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dance. Let us rather believe, with Sorel, that, like many another mathematician, he was "dismayed by realities." Danton won him over by doing his business for him, and frightened him into the bargain. When Roland remonstrated with him, on one occasion, he replied, "Danton will have it so, and if I refuse . . . he will have me hung!" Really and truly, Danton, who would certainly have cut a sorry figure at the Academy of Science, was far more fitted than Monge to issue orders to admirals in command of naval squadrons.

Servan was a very different man. In spite of his weakness for meddling with politics, he was a soldier, and capable, under good leadership, of doing excellent service to the national defence. He had no liking for the Cordeliers, who, so he declared, "brought in motions instead of throwing up redoubts"; but he was a patriot, and he had recognized Danton to be the potential saviour of the country. When Mme. Roland reproached him with having allowed the Minister too free a hand, he replied that, "ill as he was" (he fell ill after a fortnight of an existence that was well-nigh infernal), he had allowed himself to be intimidated, into the bargain, by a man "who had a whole troop of others at his back, ready to murder him." But this was said to satisfy the lady. The truth is that his patriotism went hand in hand with Danton's, and there is no real sign of his having been afraid of him.

The Foreign Minister, Le Brun, was a journalist, whose cosmopolitan connections had seemed to recommend him for the post, but whose mind was ill suited to the broad views so necessary at that crucial hour. Danton, I must say it in fairness, did hold such views; dazzled, Le Brun accepted these, and with them the agents Danton considered fitted to serve them. And Danton, who was on good terms with Talleyrand, soon learnt many things about European matters from him, of which Le Brun was never to be informed.

Clavière had come back to his "dear finances," if, indeed, the finances could still be said to exist. This Genevan, expelled from his native city, had but one longing in the

world—to avenge himself by destroying the Government that had proscribed him. To secure his support, Danton had only to acquiesce in this idea.

To sum it up, these four men, all of them reputed to be creatures of the Girondins, submitted themselves without a murmur to the mighty hand that was able to support them against all men, or destroy them at a blow, according to its owner's will. Swiftly their answer came to Mme. Roland's reproaches: "What would you have? He has been useful to the Revolution, and the populace loves him. We must make use of what he is!" In reality it was he who, having begun by bringing them into subjection, then made use of them!

Last of all, there was Roland. But Roland was an inferior man, and badly advised, at that moment, by his wife. The poor wretch was born to be fooled. He, too, was a learned man of a kind; he had contributed to the Encyclopædia, on economic subjects. Quaker-like in face, he practised a sort of sour and pompous puritanism; he was full of words and feeble in deed, holding forth when he ought to have been hurrying to his work, altogether like the pedagogue in the fable, who stood and lectured the child that was drowning before his eyes. At that particular moment, when the fear of drowning was so pressing, people left him to preach, and clung to Danton's sturdy arm. Poor Roland's annoyance at the sight made him completely and extremely tiresome, nay, ridiculous. He was left to write his letters, prepare his "homilies," and draw up his circulars. Even then he acknowledged he did not do these things alone. "My wife," he confided to Barras, "is by no means a stranger to the business of my Ministry." Most true, indeed! It was Manon Roland who managed it!

This woman, passionate by nature, but noble too, and intelligent, had constantly directed the policy of the "Patriot Ministry" during the three months of its existence. Her house was the meeting-place of the Bordeaux party—of all its younger members, at least: Buzot, Barbaroux, Brissot, Genoué, Lanthenas, Pétion. They listened to her, they

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gave her reverence, even love—passionate devotion in some cases, a sentiment born of enthusiasm in others. She might have been a strength to them, if she had known how to guide them. The misfortune was that though she took herself to be most manlike, because she would fain have been born “a Spartan or a Roman,” she really was the most feminine creature in the world: all sentiment and resentment—and therefore doubly weak. She had occasional flashes of clear-sighted intelligence, no doubt, when other wits were wandering, but when passion swayed her she was capable of the most extraordinary blunders. She loved adulation: the man who failed to bend the knee before her was “a bear,” and even a poor patriot. She had been the Egeria of the Ministry of March 23, had presided at the breakfast-table round which the Ministers and leaders of the Legislature had been wont to meet, and had led the struggle against “Antoinette.” Ever since her husband’s fall, which had enraged her, she had been labouring to upset the throne. She was by no means disinclined to the belief that the Tenth of August had been her personal victory: the man who should deny her the merit and benefit of this success must be an impostor and usurper. Though she had certain qualities superior to those of the Ministers who were her friends, and her own husband more especially, she had faults that quite wiped out their value. A more insinuating, more crafty, more self-contained woman might, in her position, have been the most dangerous adversary Danton could have had; she might even have succeeded in cajoling the “Cyclops,” and so winning him over to her side. But she had an instinctive horror of the man, and she obeyed her instinct. Now this instinct of hers proved a poor guide; she made Danton hate her, without being able to stem the onrush that bent or broke everything standing in his way.

When the Ministers gathered at “Danton’s house” on August 13, they came in obedience to his summons. His desire, apparently, was to turn his own Ministry into the home of the Executive Government. Until the 16th, every meeting was held there. On that day Roland induced the

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Council (which Danton, it may be, had not yet won over entirely to his side) to promulgate two decisions: Every Minister was to act as president for a week in turn, and the meetings of the Council were not to be held at Danton's Ministry, but at the Tuileries. And there, in fact, they were held, for some time, in a room in the apartment formerly occupied by Mme. de Tourzel. But trifles such as these were not likely to check the progress of the man who had been "borne on a cannon-ball," and he probably cared very little that his own personal assumption of the presidential functions did not take place till the twenty-fifth meeting, on September 9. Beaumarchais, summoned to the Council one day, to explain some business connected with Le Brun's department, took his seat, being somewhat deaf, close to Le Brun himself; but noticing that Danton was the one Minister who seemed to take the lead, he forthwith went and sat down nearer him. The same thing happened, in all probability, with all the persons received in audience by the Council.

It was Danton who drew up the Proclamation of the Council to the French People, on August 25; all his favourite expressions occur in it. The language is exceedingly firm; there is no concealment as to the "sacrifices" the "great undertaking" would necessitate on the part of the people "called to it."

After pointing out that the enemy, already in possession of Longwy, was threatening Thionville, Metz, and Verdun, and might "come to Paris," he added, "*There are traitors in your bosom! Ah! but for that, the battle would soon be over!*" An imprudent sentence, which, although all citizens were exhorted to be "united and calm," seemed to justify every violence. Triumph was "assured." Even if it did not come, the struggle must be carried on. "Yes! Even if we were to perish in the fight for liberty, we should at least carry with us the consoling thought that sooner or later the efforts of the most magnanimous of peoples will destroy all obstacles, and all tyrants."

It was Danton, again, who mounted the rostrum on

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August 28 and spoke, in the name of the Council, "to inform the National Assembly as to the measures the Council considers necessary to save the public weal" and formulate certain violent proposals, on which I shall shortly be obliged to dwell.

And it was Danton, once more, who, again in the name of the Council, was to deliver, on September 2, a yet more celebrated speech—that famous "speech of daring" the opening words of which, dignified, almost majestic, were spoken in the name of the "Ministers of the free People."

Thus the Ministers certainly depended on him to represent them, but this was because he really made them take whatever decisions he pleased. If we read Roland's complaints, we shall see that the Council discussed its business quite in Danton's way, amidst a feverish agitation. The dull, dry reports left us by Grouvelle, Secretary to the Council, convey no idea, we may be sure, of those tumultuous sittings. Yet a study even of these shows us that the Council, rather humble, at the outset, in its dealings with the Assembly (and it resumed this attitude of humility after Danton resigned his office), gradually arrived at claiming every right and assuming all the duties of the Executive power. After admitting, on the 14th, that it had no claim to more than a share, with the representatives sent out by the Assembly, in the dismissal or appointment of military officers, the Council betrays the liveliest impatience on the 28th, because these very Commissaries are hampering its actions. It decides on the dispatch of Commissaries of its own to the Departments and the Armies. It directs the campaign as it chooses, and before long it assumes absolute powers, and under cover of public declarations, more or less deceptive in their character, sends out ambassadors, and claims the right to discuss terms of peace and enter into alliances without any reference to the Assembly. One day we see it suspending the directory of some department, and annulling the decisions of another; the next, it reorganizes naval squadrons, protects the Prince of Monaco, and condemns the Genevan Republic to death (to Clavière's satisfaction)—sets itself up, in fact, in every

particular, as the sovereign authority. But Roland would tell us, even if all other signs did not lead us to that conviction, that the finger of Danton was in every one of these decisions; all the Council did was to ratify them, and take them for its own.

Outside the Council, too, every one turned to him. In the provinces, of course, he was looked on as the universal Minister. We constantly see him referring letters containing direct applications to himself from administrations and municipalities to the Minister of the Interior (in most cases), and adding somewhat imperious counsels on his own account. Such small matters as these enable us, better than anything else would, to understand the jealousy that must have devoured Roland, whose wife had hoped the morrow of the Tenth of August would have carried her husband to the foremost place. She now beheld him ignored even in his own department. Yet for a moment Danton had thoughts of making the fair Manon his own ally. He had no taste for silly quarrels; he took pains to see something of his colleague's wife, and frequently—every day, in fact, during the first few weeks—would ask her, in his unceremonious way, to "give him something to eat." She herself was fain to admit that nobody could have "shown a more lively desire to get on with his colleagues"; but she thought him altogether too ugly, she confesses, and "could not apply the idea of a good man to that countenance." On the whole—probably she was not so childish as all that—she considered his preponderance a greater drawback than his ugliness. She could have forgiven him his "hideous face," if he had only been modest. But the very heartiness of the man oppressed her. To husband and wife alike, he was an offence; above all things, he blocked their path. Manon made herself disagreeable, no doubt; he saw she was an obstacle in his way; he took no notice of her; whoever was not with him was against him, so, with a twist of his great hand, the "cautious old man" and "Queen Coco" were brushed aside. But he, who so seldom bore malice, kept a grudge against the woman whose improper interference in ministerial business he was

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shortly to denounce to a full sitting of the Convention, amidst the indignant murmurs of Manon's friends.

The thing he could not forgive was that her "silly quarrels" had hampered his action, for a moment. France was invaded, the Revolution was in danger, unity was the one great need. Woe to those who failed to understand it! And since his own preponderance was universally accepted as necessary to the salvation alike of country and of Revolution, the persons who sought to thwart it must take the consequences. Roughly he sent them about their business, and far from drawing in his horns, sate himself down more squarely yet before the Council board, where his position, it must fairly be confessed, was one of overwhelming power.

Then, in the face of growing anarchy and of the approaching foe, Danton, now master of the Executive power, swore to defend France in her hour of peril against the whole wide world.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NATIONAL DEFENCE, AND THE MASSACRES

Danton's Views—The Invasion—Distraction reigns: Danton holds his Ground—The Appeal to the Nation—The "Legal" Terror—Danton and the Massacres—The Defence—Valmy—The Theft from the Garde-Meuble—The Convention—Danton resigns Office.

As we have seen, none but a statesman could have coped with the situation. And this statesman was being evolved out of the tribune. The programme conceived in the midst of the tempest bears his mark. It is tremendous.

There must be no trembling—outward trembling, at any rate. Government, Assembly, Commune, Parisians, must all stand firm before the approaching foe, must never seem to dream of any eventual discomfiture; and the invaders, if they ever reached Paris, must be buried under the ruins of the capital. The whole of Revolutionary France must share this attitude, but the attitude itself must be so conceived as to permit the largest possible number of Frenchmen to associate themselves with it. Those who failed to do so must be regarded as internal enemies, and treated accordingly. Thus the postern gates of the besieged fortress would be safe from any traitorous blow.

To ensure the defence of France, a dictatorship of a sort must be secured to the Revolutionary party, but this dictatorship must be supported by every patriotic element, from the royalists of yesterday, who must be gathered in, to the adherents of the Commune, who must be taught discipline. To this end (and without sacrificing the earliest friends of the Revolution to its newer adherents) the alarm of property-holders must be quieted, the priests must not be too hardly pressed, a Constitution must be promised, and cordial relations between the "three powers"—Assembly, Council, and

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Commune—must be insured. In a word, an agreement between all revolutionaries, and all patriots, if possible, must be brought about. This united France—an artificial and temporary union, it might be, but union, all the same—must be summoned to meet the invader, money must be found, even by resort to violent measures, and soldiers too, even if the most incendiary language were used. While the new legions were being forced out of the soil of the country, as it were, the present moribund army must be re-cast: for this purpose a perfectly free hand must be given to the generals, whose loyalty must be trusted, even if it seemed to waver: officers to fill the highest posts must be chosen, if necessary, amongst those men who, even if little favoured by the Commune, were well informed as to the business of war; agreement between the various commanding officers must be diplomatically fostered, and the unity of the chief command must be re-established. Then, when patriotic excitement was wound up to its highest pitch, officers and men, aflame with confident enthusiasm, must be hurled upon the Prussian troops.

Once vanquished, the Prussians must be handled in such a way as to secure, before all other things, the evacuation of French territory, and that in time to prevent the threatened outbreak of civil war. Further, brisk negotiations must detach Prussia, the “natural friend,” from Austria, the “hereditary foe,” and thus the coalition must be broken up.

A great effort must be made to obtain an English alliance—a constant anxiety, henceforward—and thus counteract the loss of the fleet, which could not possibly be repaired in a single day.

And when, before many weeks were out (for it must all be done swiftly) the enemy had beaten a retreat, the state of siege in the country must be raised, and a Republic established, founded on respect for ownership, which is “eternal,” and respect for Liberty, which is “sacred.”

This or something very similar, as far as we can attain a really clear conception of its details, was Danton's idea. This, at all events, was what he desired and what he did.

There were terrible drawbacks to the plan, indeed. He

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knew that to stir this "magnanimous nation" into flame, he had only to appeal to all its inborn national pride. But to "terrify the traitors," he must carry the state of siege to its utmost limit, to wholesale imprisonments, to "exemplary" executions; and to insure the support of the Commune, he must permit the temporary establishment of the Terror. If these hecatombs were demanded, if the "blood of the traitors" was claimed by those for whose own blood he was asking, then that "traitor" blood must flow. If only he might "save the country" meanwhile, this man cared little that his own "name should be tarnished."

I need hardly say that in my own opinion the execution of his plan down to all its extreme consequences was not indispensable to the safety of the country. Still the fact remains that, at a moment when one act of weakness might have worked the ruin of that country, Danton fixed bold eyes on the terrible realities to which I have referred, and vanquished them all because he simply *dared* to see them. "Let us dare!" he would cry. His greatest daring of all lay in this—that he dared to *see!*

A week had gone by, and the situation, to all appearances, was hopeless. "In vain do we spend sleepless nights and exert a superhuman activity," wrote Mme. Roland on September 2 in the name of the Council, "the consequence of four years of treason cannot be repaired within the space of a few hours!"

By August 11 the Prussian army was massed on the frontiers of Lorraine. A more formidable army did not exist. These were "Frederick's Soldiers": their appearance and their reputation alike inspired both admiration and alarm. Suddenly, on the 19th, the Prussians, supported by a body of Austrians, and by the tumultuous "army of the Princes"—the *Émigrés*—crossed the frontier at Rédinge. The *Émigrés* were full of going to Paris, before long, to "hang the Jacobin," and the German officers were making appointments to meet in the Palais-Royal, towards the middle of September. Events seemed likely to justify their presumptuousness: 80,000 of their troops were in Lorraine, 25,000

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Austrians and 4000 *Émigrés* were threatening Lille, while 17,000 troops of the Empire and 5000 men under Condé were ready to invade Alsace. Against these 131,000 troops of the Coalition, France had only 80,000 men—and such men! Dumouriez's army was nothing but a medley of old soldiers and young volunteers which had yet to be welded together. In another work I have described the manner in which this was done. But time must elapse before the men in command could possibly bring together a homogeneous, disciplined, well-trained army. From Dumouriez at the Camp at Maulde, from Kellermann at Metz, anxious letters kept coming in: not that they despaired of making good soldiers out of the youths who were howling out the *Ça ira*—but time they must have!

On August 20 Longwy capitulated. On September 2 the gates of Verdun were opened. Within another week the Germans, and the *Émigrés* with them, might reach the capital. That would be the end.

The capitulation of Longwy became known in Paris on the 24th. General distraction was the result. From the Assembly to the various Ministries one cry rose up: *We must get out of Paris!* The Girondins especially were almost frantically anxious to be gone. The Convention must assemble on the banks of the Loire. This would be a clear gain, for it would thus escape the dictation of the mob. Even Servan, honest man, declared it would be better to seek refuge at Blois. Blois! that was not far enough away, cried Barbaroux, the central tableland of France, rather, or even Corsica, if that must be! This wild talk gives some idea of the general demoralization. Kersaint, a deputy just arrived from Sedan, added fuel to the fire: according to him, the entry of the Germans into Paris was a mere question of days. Roland was seen to issue from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a conference had been held, in a state of pitiful depression: Fabre describes his appearance in the garden of the Ministry, pallid, trembling, "leaning his head against a tree": saying, over and over again, that a move must be made to Tours or Blois.

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But in the midst of all these terror-stricken folk, one man raised his head and cried: "*France is in Paris!*" This was Danton. In his eyes the removal of the Government was a piece of cowardice that must ruin everything. And he began to swear oaths, after his usual fashion: "I have sent for my aged mother, seventy years old," he exclaimed (it was quite true), "I have sent for my two children: they all arrived yesterday. Sooner than see the Prussians get into Paris, I would have my family perish, I would have 20,000 torches set Paris alight and turn it into a heap of ashes," and turning to Roland, he went on, so we are told, "Roland, Roland, take care not to talk of flight! beware lest the people hear thee!" All his contemporaries acknowledge him to have been superbly fierce, magnificently obstinate.

There can be no doubt that he, too, had his ulterior political designs, that he had divined the secret of the Gironde, and was resolved, at all costs, to maintain the Revolution, the city's own child, within the walls of Paris. But—and this fact remained unknown for many a day—he was in possession of information that filled him with desperate alarm, not in case the Assembly stayed in Paris, but in case it moved to the Loire. At that very moment the Marquis de la Rouerie was conferring with other noblemen in Brittany, and Danton knew for certain that the whole West was on the eve of breaking into flame. Clearly, if the Government left Paris, bands of anarchists would devastate the capital, but it was equally clear, on the other hand, that the Western Provinces were on the very brink of rising to support the King. And these people wanted to go to Tours, to throw themselves, almost, into the very hands of men who would be insurgents before many days were out! He dared not tell all he knew, but he poured forth volleys of entreaty, objurgation, indignant outcry, he frightened his opponents, reassured the timid, carried conviction to the minds of honest men, stirred every courage up—and so they all stayed on. "M. Danton," we read, in a letter written on the 30th, "opposed the proposal, which was rejected. M. Danton is perhaps the only man able to rise to the level of the danger."

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But the danger was still urgent. Then it was that the Minister resolved to order fresh levies. Most especially he was bent on kindling the souls of all his countrymen into the fire that devoured his own. On August 28 he thus addressed the Assembly: "Our enemies have taken Longwy: but Longwy does not make up the whole of France. Our armies are still unbroken. Only through a mighty convulsion have we succeeded in destroying despotism within the capital, *only through a national convulsion shall we succeed in driving the despots out. . . .* It is time to let the people know that the whole nation must fall upon its enemies. When a ship is wrecked, *the crew casts everything that may expose it to destruction overboard. In the same way, everything that may harm the Nation must be cast out of its bosom,* and everything that may do it service must be placed at the disposal of the Municipalities, without any necessity to indemnify the owners." And he called on the Assembly to order each Municipality to "collect all the men within its jurisdiction who were fit to carry arms, equip them, and supply them with everything necessary to enable them to fly to the frontiers."

His speech was punctuated with bursts of applause. Everywhere he said the same thing: nothing was lost, as yet: the Nation would rise in arms. The Nation was rising up indeed. An aristocrat, Mme. de Marolles, was to write that "volunteers seemed to be springing out of the earth." The truth is that wherever Danton went he poured oil on the flame of enthusiasm. It was beginning to attain the point of paroxysm on which he had counted. The volunteers were enlisting, taking up their arms, and marching away, chanting the Marseillaise. When they began to sing the line "Amour sacré de la Patrie," everybody would fall on their knees and break into tears. The Nation was in a fever, and from that fever Danton hoped all things. "*The only way to wage war well,*" he would exclaim, "*is to do it with enthusiasm!*" Every man, to his thinking, ought to hurry to the post of danger. Already he was in the mind that made him exclaim one day in the following year, to a deputy from the Eastern

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Pyrenees, which had been invaded by the Spaniards: "The homes of thy country are a prey to the enemy and still thou art here! *Come, come, stuff thy pockets with assignats, and hurry away to save us!*" He must have said much the same kind of thing to the Commissaries he dispatched to the West, even at the risk of their laying their hands on assignats in every quarter.

These Commissaries had been chosen, or rather Danton had forced them on the Assembly, on the 29th. He intended them to carry his spirit into the Departments, where they were to superintend the levies, and above all, to carry it to the armies. Therefore he caused his own men to be selected, "a swarm of intriguers from the Sections and muddlers from the Clubs," said Roland, but Roland himself accepted them, all the same. As a matter of fact, they were the flower of the Cordeliers: Fréron, Momoro, Peyre, Parein, Billaud, Clémence, Brochet. The Commissaries in the East, more especially, were Danton's own men, and above all Billaud-Varennes, whom he was to call his "secretary," and Laclos, who was still the Duc d'Orléans' agent, a fact which makes his appointment all the more suggestive. Generally speaking, these Commissaries behaved more like brutes than like useful agents. Complaints of them were made on every side. "*Rubbish!*" cried Danton. "*Did you think we were going to send you young ladies?*" In reality his hope was to use them as agitators, and thus instil fear. We still possess the commission handed to Citizen Brochet, "charged with making whatever requisition he deems necessary for the safety of the country." For a period of several weeks these petty pro-consuls insured Danton a dictatorship that extended far beyond the walls of Paris.

In the name of the "safety of the country," too, he strove to bring all the revolutionaries in Paris into agreement: this was an essential item of his programme. It was a difficult task: the pretensions of the Commune disgusted the Assembly; "our mad Commune," wrote Mme. Roland. This "madness" alarmed the Council and exasperated the Assembly. On August 30 the Commune reached the highest

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pitch of daring, and on pretext of laying hands on an unruly journalist, sent its myrmidons to invade the Ministry of War. Forthwith the Assembly decreed its dissolution, but the Commune had the Sections, the Clubs, the mob, at its back. It stood out. And "so great was its energy" that in the general opinion that "termagant of a Municipality" seemed likely to get the better of the Senate.

To Danton this conflict was a source of cruel annoyance. For a whole fortnight he went back and forth between the Hôtel de Ville and the Tuileries, preaching the necessity for concession on either side. This Commune was his own work: all his chief helpers belonged to it, it was the nursery ground from which he took his agents. On it he depended to conjure volunteers for the National defence out of the very paving-stones, for in it alone he perceived the "vigour" necessary for his purpose. But these men of the Commune were terrible fellows to deal with. Danton asked the Assembly to show forbearance, but at the Hôtel de Ville he dared not do more than "insinuate" the necessity for moderation. He was quite convinced the only hope of ensuring the public safety lay in the dictatorship of Paris: "The Tenth of August," he told the Council, "has divided France into two parties, one of which is attached to royalty, while the other desires a Republic. . . . *This last, which, as you cannot conceal from yourselves, is an extremely small minority in the State, is the only one on which you can depend to fight. . . .* My opinion is that to foil their measures and check the enemy, *we must frighten the royalists.*" It was through the Commune that he "frightened" not the royalists only, but all moderate men, and forced the Assembly to pass his measures for the Public Safety.

Inspired by him, a regular hunt for "royalists" had been organized, on and after August 12. The populace, its appetite whetted by the bloodshed of the 10th, was calling out for executions: there was no possibility of hurrying to the frontiers till the traitors had been put out of the way. Everybody knew the massacres must soon take place. Danton may have fancied he could prevent them by the organization of

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a sort of "legalized terror" which might satisfy the hunger for executions. On the 15th a decree passed by the Assembly at his instigation declared all parents, wives and children of *Émigrés* to be hostages, and, as such, ordered their confinement within the borders of their own municipalities. On the 26th the priests' turn came—they were to be imprisoned. On the 28th Danton obtained authority to order domiciliary visits, most of which ended in the incarceration of the victims.

Was this the outcome of a frenzied resolve to put down opposition, or was it simply caused by a desire to prevent summary executions? This last idea is apparent in several of Danton's letters and speeches written or delivered during the closing days of August. On the 28th he exclaimed at the Assembly, "If 30,000 traitors must still be made over to the hands of the law, let it be done to-morrow!" but a document which was never published betrays his real thought: the only way of preventing massacre was to cast a certain number of heads to the mob.

Some of the Swiss Guards had escaped the massacre on the Tenth of August: they were arrested: when their trial began, they pleaded a "privilege" which rendered them unamenable to the ordinary tribunals: Real, the Public Prosecutor, referred the matter to Danton, who replied that he had handed the matter over to his colleague at the Foreign Office, but did not conceal his own lively hope that, in spite of their "privilege," sentence would be pronounced on these men, who had assassinated members of the populace and thus been guilty of "treason to the Nation": and he added the following words, "*I have reason to believe that the outraged People, whose indignation against those who have attacked Liberty is undiminished, and whose character indeed seems worthy of a Liberty which shall be eternal, will not be forced to do justice for itself, but will obtain it through its representatives and magistrates.*" Was this a clear-sighted prophecy, or the mere threat of a political agitator?

One thought haunted him: examples must be made. When Montmorin, the ex-Minister, was acquitted, on the night of August 31, Danton, in a frenzy of anger (or alarm),

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decided that Montmorin, who had been detained in prison, should be sentenced forthwith, and that Botot-Dumesnil, the Commissary whom the people had accused of treason in connection with the business, should also be haled before the judges. He urged these last to hurry through their work and pronounce sentence. We know in what scant honour this Minister of Justice held the independence of his judges.

But this "legalized" terror, far from calming the populace, only deepened its excitement. And this was inevitable. The very words perpetually uttered by Danton and by other leaders fostered the growth of feverish rumours. More particularly was this the case as regards the Proclamation of August 25, which, while claiming to preach calmness, had warned the people that "You have traitors in your bosom!" And on the 28th Danton had spoken of 30,000 traitors, all of them amenable to the law. In popular circles men were already beginning to declare that, if the judges failed in their duty, the People would enforce justice for itself.

And besides all this, the Commune was determined there should be massacres. I have already said that on September 1 the Legislative Body had finally decided that the rival assembly must be dissolved. But this last was resolved to force itself on the other, and for that purpose, to inspire it with terror: in this it was to attain complete success. Further, the Cordeliers foresaw the next elections would be unfavourable to them: the massacres would produce an excellent effect: the moderate section among the electors would regard them as a warning. Within the Commune a Committee was shortly to be formed to organize the carnage. All this was well known.

Was Danton, even then, one of the men who really wished for bloodshed? Was he preparing the way for it? In all honesty, I do not believe he was. Was he one of the number who regarded bloodshed as a contingency possessing but few drawbacks and a certain amount of possible advantage? That I do believe. He was bent on the triumph of the Commune, and this was the only method whereby that triumph could be attained. He was a candidate for the elections, and

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he desired these elections might be "good." It seemed to him, too, that the army he was strengthening would feel a sense of ease, and almost of comfort, if it heard, before it marched against the Prussians, that "the internal foes" had been wiped out. He did not desire the massacres, neither did he organize them, but they did not interfere with his plans, rather the reverse. Any assertion that so clear-sighted a man was taken unawares would be absurd.

In the course of the night between September 1 and 2, he learnt that the surrender of Verdun to the Prussians was a mere question of hours. This time the road to Paris would be open: the entry of Frederick William into Champagne appeared inevitable. The news would soon be known all over Paris. Danton hurried to the Assembly, reaching the Tuileries at about nine o'clock. What was his plan? To work up feeling to its highest pitch, but strive, from the very outset, to lay hold of it and direct it to the defence of the country? That may be.

Logically speaking, the Minister of War ought to have appeared at the rostrum. But it was Danton who spoke.

The first sentences of the famous speech were reassuring, though they were exciting too: "It is very satisfactory, Gentlemen, to the Ministers of the free People to have to announce that the Country will be saved. Everywhere there is a stir, all are moving forward, all are burning with eagerness for the fight. You know that Verdun is not as yet in the enemy's power. You know the garrison has promised to immolate the first man who shall suggest surrender. A portion of the population will proceed to the frontiers: another section will dig intrenchments, and the third, armed with pikes, will defend the interior of our towns."

Having thus concealed with a gesture (a really superb gesture) the rout of the existence of which he had certain knowledge, the Minister set himself to take advantage of the occasion to extol the lately proscribed Commune, and the city of Paris, which lay under suspicion.

"Paris will second these great efforts. The Commissaries of the Commune are about to proclaim a most solemn in-

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vation to the citizens to take up arms and march to defend the country. At this moment, Gentlemen, you may declare the capital has deserved the gratitude of the whole of France." The words were applauded. "At the present moment the National Assembly is about to become a real War Committee. We call on you to join us in directing this sublime impulse on the People's part, by appointing Commissaries who will assist us in taking these great measures. We ask that whoever refuses to serve in person, or hand over his arms shall be punished with death. . . . *The tocsin which is about to ring is not a signal of alarm; it sounds the charge against the foes of the country.*"

The Assembly broke into a tumult of applause. And then, with a gesture which remained graven on the memory of one who was present at the scene, "after forty years," he cried, "*To defeat them, Gentlemen, we must dare, and dare again, and dare for ever, and so France will be saved!*"

At that overwhelming cry a thunder of acclamation rose. "How," writes Choudieu, the deputy, "am I to give any idea of the effect his speech produced in the Assembly? It seemed to us that some tribune of the people was haranguing the Romans in the public square, urging them to fly to the defence of their country. . . . *Never did he seem to me more splendid.*"

Meanwhile, one of Danton's henchmen, Delacroix, was embodying the Minister's demands in the form of definite motions, and these were duly voted: the death penalty was imposed on all who, whether directly or indirectly, "should refuse to obey the orders given and the measures taken by the Executive Power." Danton, according to one version of his speech, had called on all able-bodied men to proceed to the Champ de Mars and there take up arms.

When he left the Assembly that day he may have hoped he had stirred up the People's daring against "the enemies of the country" without letting loose a flood of blood. But could such words as his be safely dropped into the ears of a population so prone to feverish excitement? Be that as it may, they were to be the signal for massacre.

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The tocsin was ringing, the drums were beating. While all good citizens were hurrying to the Champ de Mars, whither the Minister had summoned them, the Commune was turning the assassins loose upon the city. A "Committee of Surveillance," chosen among its members and acting under the direct influence of Marat, decided that "the prisons," which the "legal" terror had been filling, for a week past, "must be emptied."

My readers have perused the story of those hideous days, in the course of which 1600 prisoners, at the very least, were murdered in Paris, while Fournier l'Américain, armed with an order from the Council, went down to Orléans, where fifty-three persons imprisoned on the charge of "treason against the Nation," were awaiting their trial before the High Court sitting in that town. He laid hands upon them, started with them for Saumur, and had them all murdered at Versailles, on the way.

For the space of four days the Paris massacres went on, without any attempt to check the murderers' hands. The deputies, after betraying a somewhat uncertain inclination, not to put the riot down, but to find out what was happening, feigned to "cast a veil" over the whole business—a system urged on them, in his terror, by Roland himself. On the 3rd the Council employed the poor man's pen to proclaim that the "People, terrible in its vengeance, *still endued it with a sort of justice.*" And from the 3rd till the 6th the Extreme Left sat rejoicing over the doings of those awful days, during which, as Couthon, the deputy, was to write, "the People exercised its sovereign justice." Even Condorcet was fain to assert, as an excuse for the cowardice of the Assembly, that the People, "kind and generous by nature, had been *constrained* to apply itself to vengeance." On the 3rd Gorsas, a journalist belonging to the Girondin party, had exclaimed, "Let them perish!"

On the 5th, however, Mme. Roland wrote the words, "*Danton is the secret chief of the horde.*" Even before the stream of blood had ceased to flow, the passionate natured woman had begun to bespatter the hated face of her enemy with gore.

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She sets us a question which many historians have striven to answer. A very grave question it is: for according to whether Danton is held responsible or not, according to the weight, greater or less, of that responsibility, his figure must stand sullied or purified, in our sight. Let us pause, therefore, and consider the matter.

I have already said that by September 2 his excitement had certainly risen to paroxysmal height. The threat of invasion, the intoxication of his own oratory, the extreme difficulty of putting an end to the conflict (a very bitter one, on September 1,) between the Commune and the Assembly, his constant interviews with the ringleaders at the Hôtel de Ville, most of whom were his personal friends, the anxiety (it may have been a personal anxiety) caused him by Montmorin's acquittal, the exhaustion resulting from a fortnight of overwork, which would have laid other men low, but only wound him up to a more desperate pitch: all these things, together with his natural disposition—exceedingly brutal, as we know, when it was not cordial—combined to lead him into taking extravagant decisions, and, let us say it frankly, into countenancing acts of bloodshed. We must remember his words to the Assembly, his haunting sense of "treason," at a moment heavy with threatening danger. And this was not all: on the night of September 2 a man made his appearance in the Chancery, a Dr. Chevetel, one of the oldest adherents of the Cordeliers, who informed the Minister, Fabre and Desmoulins being both present, of the existence of a whole web of secret conspiracy revealed to the speaker by the merest chance: that plot headed by the Marquis de la Rouerie which was to raise the whole of the West of France in revolt the moment the enemy set his foot in the province of Champagne. It is not difficult to imagine the state of the man's mind all through those four days. Were these traitors, who might quite possibly succeed in crushing the patriots of France, whom they had thus caught between two fires, worth a quarrel between himself and the "good patriots" of the Commune, the defenders of the Revolution, the defenders of their country, just for the sake of saving the necks of their brother

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traitors, shut up in the Paris prisons? Everything, truly, combined to *drive Danton into agreeing to the massacres, even if he did not give the order for them.*

But did he go no further than this? Did he give no active help? There is a great deal of witness against him. It is the testimony of his enemies, I know, but these enemies quote facts and words which do not appear to have been pure inventions. And there are other indications which must be considered. My readers will recollect the words of Real in a letter dated September 1: "I have reason to believe the People which has been insulted . . . *will not be reduced to taking its own vengeance.*" The sentence may have simply embodied a sense of fear: but this fear really is a confession, in a threatening form, that the massacres had been foreseen. Thus they cannot have caused Danton any surprise. And for a week before they occurred he had been filling up the prisons with the persons he had publicly denounced twice over, at least, as "traitors." "*But for them,*" he said, "*the struggle would soon be over.*" The expression, if not a downright incitement to bloodshed, was certainly imprudent to the point of madness.

Thereupon, at nine o'clock on the morning of September 2, the Minister called on all good citizens to meet on the Champ de Mars. "What service," writes Thiébault, who was present at these scenes, "could this agglomeration of men render to our armies? Was not the object of the gathering rather to abandon Paris to the mercy of the leaders of the vilest mob, and to their satellites? This question, which every one was asking . . . was settled all too soon." Not at all! say Danton's friends, the tribune endeavoured, on the contrary, to draw the Paris populace to the Champ de Mars so as to prevent it from committing murder. But how can a man with a brain like Danton's have possibly believed that an appeal to which nothing obliged them to respond would induce the murderers to forego their hideous project?

On the contrary, it would seem, according to certain witnesses, that Danton thoroughly entered into the feeling which made the massacre appear "legitimate": there was a danger,

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so he asserted, that the conspirators would set out to murder their adversaries. Just as the tocsin of which Danton had spoken began to ring, Prudhomme rushed into his house, exclaiming, "There is a talk of murder!" "*Yes! all our throats were to have been cut to-night, the most ardent patriots' to begin with.*" "All that seems to me rather fanciful, but what means are to be taken to prevent the execution of the plot?" "What means? The People, *infuriated and forewarned in time, is resolved to exercise justice itself!*" "It seems to me," objected Prudhomme, "that less violent measures might be taken!" And Danton replied: "*Moderate measures of any kind are useless: the People's rage has overflowed: it would be dangerous even to try to check it. Once its first fury is sated, we shall be able to make it listen to reason.*"

And then news of the beginning of the massacre began to spread. Grandpré, Roland's collaborator, hurried from the Hôtel de Ville to the Ministry of the Interior, where the Executive Council was sitting. He met Danton coming out of the Council room (the accusation, this time, is Mme. Roland's), and described what was happening: "Certain prisoners, at all events, must surely be protected!" But the other, "with his eyes starting out of his head, and the gestures of a madman," broke out in the most brutal fashion: "I care not a — for the prisoners: let them take their chance!" Danton went back to the Chancery: there he found Brissot, who, if we are to believe what Louvet tells us, made a complaint about the massacres, "in which innocent people are being mixed up." "*Not one! Not one!*" cried Danton. "How do you guarantee that?" inquired the deputy. "I had the lists of prisoners brought to me, *and the names of those who ought to be discharged were struck out.*" (We shall shortly come on the corroboration of this fact.)

Then one person after another came in, among them a Dr. Seiffert, who begged the massacre might be stopped. "The French People," replied Danton, in a threatening voice, "has its chiefs in Paris. The population of Paris is its sentinel. What that population is realizing, this day, is the

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death of its slavery and the resurrection of its liberty. *The man who would attempt to oppose the exercise of the popular justice must be the People's enemy!*"

On September 3 the Council held a meeting. Danton appeared "in a scarlet coat." "The firmness of his attitude," writes Prudhomme, again, "was a contrast to the anxiety depicted on all the faces about him." Théophile Mandar, in the name of the Section of the Temple, preferred a request that steps should be taken, at last, to end the shedding of blood. "*Sit down!*" said Danton, roughly; "*it is necessary!*"

And when, at the close of the massacres, Lavaux, a lawyer, and a strong opponent of the Revolution, sought out the man whom he regarded as "the chief ordainer of the hideous feast," and reproached him with what had just occurred: "This," quoth Danton, "is the national justice: the proof of it lies in the fact that you breathe, that you are free, that you yourself draw confidence from it, since you dare to show your face before me at this formidable moment. *You are not mistaken: the Sovereign People is waging war to the death, not against opinions, but against traitors!*" Only a few days later, the Comte de Ségur met Danton, whom he believed, as everybody else believed him, to have inspired the massacres, and reproached him with the frankness the Tribune always permitted those who dealt with him. The Minister, who was walking along beside the *ci-devant*, turned on him sharply, saying: "Sir, you forget to whom you are speaking: you forget that we belong to the mob, that we come out of the gutter, that if your principles were followed, we should soon be back in it, *and that our only chance of ruling is to inspire fear.*"

Gossip, it may be said, the slanderous tales of enemies, circulated months and years after the event, and at a time when abuse of Danton suited everybody's book. That may very well be: yet these various witnesses have all given their testimony independently of each other, and in every one of these reports we note the same threatening gesture, and hear the echo of the same voice, promising amnesty to

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the assassins even while they perform their bloody work, justifying it even while they slay, and explaining how it is that they do right even when they murder in cold blood.

On October 29, 1792, Pétion, ex-Mayor of Paris, spoke in the Convention: the massacres might have been prevented, he confessed: "But I am bound to say, because it is the truth," he added, "*that many public men and defenders of the country, looked on those days as necessary.*" And everybody recognized the allusion to Danton, in whose company Pétion had constantly been all through those days of bloodshed. The speech, some will say, was simply that of a whilom friend, now transformed into an enemy, a candidate whom Danton had beaten at the elections, the perfidious thrust dealt by a man who had lately joined the Gironde. But here we have another witness, Prudhomme, of the *Révolutions de Paris*, who was still a patriot after the Cordelier model: certain accusations resting on Danton's name, to which Louvet had referred from the rostrum a week previously, and on which I have so far laid no stress, had disturbed his mind. He may have thought Danton mistaken in laying no stress upon them, either: "*And you, Danton,*" he cries, on October 20, "*you hold your peace, you do not open your lips, save to disavow your subaltern agent, Marat, like a coward! . . . Yet, faithful to our impartiality, we will do you justice as to one act: you did issue the countermand that saved the lives of Roland and Brissot!*" M. Chuquet points out that this despairing challenge, which was left unanswered, constitutes the most overwhelming piece of testimony we could have.

Yet I should perhaps marshal a further array of presumptions, the very number of which will transform them into proof.

On September 1, a certain Paris notary of the name of Guillaume had been lying in prison since the Tenth of August, charged with having held commerce with the "knights of the dagger." Danton, who was acquainted with him, desired to save him: he sent a pressing letter to the Commissary of the Executive Power at the Criminal Tribunal, begging

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him with remarkable persistence not to prolong the notary's arbitrary detention in the prison of La Force: he must either be sentenced forthwith, or set at liberty. (This letter is in the Archives.) At the very same time, Camille Desmoulins procured the release of one of his friends, a priest, the Abbé Lhomond, from the same prison, and Fabre made a hurried demand for the liberation of a former servant-maid of his own, who had been imprisoned for theft. If none of these three men foresaw the massacres of the 1st, why did they take such hasty measures to ensure the safety of persons in whom they felt an interest?

And let us look at the list of the members of the "Committee of Surveillance" which ordered the massacres to take place. Sergent and Panis were Danton's personal friends, but besides these names, another attracts our attention, that of Desforgues. This Desforgues was one of Danton's special myrmidons, a former clerk in his office, who had continued to act as his subaltern representative, and whom he was to raise, before many months were out, to the position of Minister in charge of the Foreign Affairs of the Republic. How can we possibly suppose that such men as these would have lifted a hand contrary to Danton's intentions and instructions? And while it was all going on, Billaud—the man of all others, next to Fabre, whose services Danton was most fond of employing—was passing up and down in the prisons, shouting, "Bravo," to the murderers, and "Out upon you!" to their victims. And every witness agrees as to Fabre's own behaviour, he rejoiced over what was happening. Now we all know what Fabre was to Danton.

Danton, then, who was evidently kept informed, from hour to hour, of the progress of the Paris massacres, seems to have encouraged them, at all events, by an apathy which certainly had not been otherwise apparent in his character, for several weeks. But the fashion in which he accepted the Versailles hecatomb is equally well known.

Accepted, I say. For I will not bestow any attention on the assertions of Fournier l'Américain, who managed the business. In all probability it was to rid himself of his

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responsibility (though that does not seem to have lain heavy on him), that Fournier, who had been sent by his friend Danton on September 2 to fetch the State prisoners incarcerated at Orléans, declared that on the 3rd a courier from Paris informed him that the massacres were in progress, and "hinted that he had better do much the same thing." But when the prisoners reached Versailles, where they were in imminent danger, Alquier, President of the Versailles tribunal, hurried up to Paris, and straight to the Chancery. "Well, what does it matter to you?" replied Danton. "*These people's business is no affair of yours. Discharge your own duties and do not mix yourself up with anything else.*" "But the law obliges me to watch over the safety of its prisoners!" objected the magistrate. "What is that to you?" answered the Minister, as he walked up and down, taking long steps. "*There are some very guilty men among them: we cannot tell, as yet, what view the People will take of them, and how far its indignation may carry it.*" And with that he turned his back on Alquier.

The prisoners at Versailles were massacred on the evening of the 9th. Fournier went up to Paris, to report the event. It has always been asserted that he and his acolytes were received by Danton, who congratulated him: "*It is not the Minister of Justice who congratulates you, it is the Minister of the Revolution!*" cried the Keeper of the Seals, so we are told. The authenticity of the remark has been questioned: Fournier says nothing at all about it. An examination of the papers connected with this business, now in the Archives, has established the fact that both Fournier and his men received liberal payment for their work: this would certainly not have been the case if their "services" had not given satisfaction. And it is a very serious matter—for the whole Council, indeed.

One last item of Danton's responsibility remains to be noted. On the morrow of the massacres a circular was issued, entitled, *An Account rendered to the Sovereign People*, in which the murderers ventured to put forward an apology for their deeds, with the avowed object of carrying the

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Provinces with them. Now this circular, *countersigned by the Minister of Justice*, was received by all the Jacobin Societies. In the reports of the proceedings of the Jacobins of Rouen I find an unpretentious note to the effect that the "official placard," entitled, *An Account rendered to the Sovereign People*, had been received "from Danton, Minister of Justice." We know that Fabre, who always played the part of Danton's evil genius, held the Minister's official stamp: in this case he probably affixed it without his master's leave. But even if we grant that Danton knew nothing about the matter, we must feel his henchman was very sure his action would never be disavowed: and this fact, again, is not devoid of gravity.

The best we can say, on the whole, is that Danton allowed the "royalist" prisoners to be murdered without feeling any sense of indignation or making any attempt to put a stop to the bloodshed. Three of Louis XVI's Ministers had lost their lives, Montmorin died in Paris, de Lessart and d'Abancourt perished at Versailles. The men of a bygone régime were being wiped out. Why then did Danton, just at that moment, make an evident effort to save a former member of the Constituent Assembly, Adrien Duport by name? It is a fact that this Adrien Duport, a friend of the Lameth brothers, who had been arrested at Melun, attracted Danton's special attention, but in a way, this time, that brought him singular good fortune. Danton prevented his transfer to Paris, and ultimately secured his liberation. In the process he did not hesitate to come into collision with Marat, who, in his fury at seeing his prey snatched from his clutches, accused Danton of being a traitor. A fierce altercation ensued between the two men, followed by a reconciliation in the course of which Danton was obliged to submit to an embrace from his adversary—"and to wash himself after it," so Michelet tells us. The real meaning of the incident would seem to be either that Danton, for certain reasons of his own, intended to continue to spare a whole group of men, amongst whom the Lameth brothers held an important place, or else that after ten days of bloodshed, he was beginning to grow sick of murder—and this is not impossible.

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The thing for which Marat really did not forgive Danton was, that he had set his burly person between him and certain individuals whom the Friend of the People had reckoned on destroying perhaps even more surely than the royalists, thus ridding himself of two birds with one stone; I mean Roland, Brissot, and their adherents. We hold proofs, at the present day, that the Commune had intended to clear out the Assembly and the Council, after it had finished clearing out the prisons. To certain of the ringleaders, these massacres were no more than a monstrous election manoeuvre. Collot-d'Herbois makes no secret of the fact that the Girondins were to be put out of the way, even if their throats had to be cut. On the 3rd a band of ruffians invaded the Ministry of the Interior armed with a warrant for the arrest of Roland, which Danton intercepted and burned. He was still bent on fusing all the elements of the Left together, and by no means inclined, in any case, to permit the arrest of any colleague of his own: it would have been an objectionable precedent. "Do you know," said he to Pétion on the 3rd, "what they have taken it into their heads to do? They have actually issued a warrant to arrest Roland!" "Who did it?" "*Why, that mad Committee!* I took the warrant—see, here it is: but we cannot allow this sort of thing to be done! The Devil! Against a member of the Council! I'll bring them to reason!"

In fact, he was evidently beginning to feel alarm. On the 2nd he had stopped the departure of the Commissaries the Hôtel de Ville was sending down to the Provinces to propagate massacre there. And on the 7th he informed the Assembly he had given orders that no persons arrested in the neighbourhood of Paris were to be transferred to the capital.

On these last facts Danton's defenders naturally lay great stress. They prove, so they declare, that far from having desired the massacres, he certainly strove to moderate their fury, and therefore as certainly disapproved them. This really is to be more Dantonist than Danton himself. Without attaching more importance than it deserves to the phrase

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(it may not be authentic) ascribed to him by the Duc de Chartres, "*I did it,*" let us confine our attention to his official utterances. On October 29 he cast sand over the blood: the massacres, he affirmed, were "only the consequence of that general commotion, that national fever, which have wrought miracles that will be the wonder of posterity." On January 21 he proclaimed them the work of "a People which had never obtained justice on the worst culprits." And it was not till March 10 that he was able to bring himself to acknowledge that over "those bloody days" "every good citizen had wept."

On the whole, and with the knowledge we possess of Danton and of his policy, all through that summer of the year 1792, I believe we may discern his real attitude with tolerable clearness. He did not *wish* for the massacres, in the sense that *he did not make ready for them in cold blood. He foresaw them*, that is quite certain, and *he would not prevent them*, because he regarded them as likely to assist in raising the fever of patriotism to a still higher pitch, to give satisfaction to the Commune, whose support it was essentially necessary for him to retain, to impose silence on the discontented populations in the Provinces, and to stifle, by sheer terror, any attempt at agitation in the West. Between September 2 and 5, when both royalists and priests were being abominably murdered in their prisons, *he not only would not lift a hand to stop the bloodshed, he was determined no one else should stop it either.* He expected the massacres to render him a service (a hideous phrase, but fairly applied, I believe, in this conjunction), by enabling him to keep his hold on power, for some time yet, and this being so, he was not sorry to let it appear that he directed or at any rate approved them: this accounts for his behaviour in the presence of Prudhomme, Roland, Brissot, Lavaux, Alquier, and even Ségur, at a later date. When he perceived that the Commune was endeavouring to extend its "repressive measures" to "patriots" such as Brissot and Roland, he nipped that early attempt at an anti-Girondin revolution in the bud, for it suited neither his hopes of republican union

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nor his plans for the National Defence. Capricious as he was, wayward, prone to fits of pity, easily touched, he saved some heads even while he approved and favoured the massacres as a whole. And towards the close of that horrible week he began to think there had been bloodshed enough. The thing was done, now, and he had no intention of disavowing it. On the contrary, it struck him that the terror of these massacres might serve the cause of the terror he himself was not averse to inspiring, now and again. And further, he had no liking for being thought timid, and almost preferred the world should believe he had ordered the thing to be done, to letting anybody conclude he had merely permitted others to do it.

To sum it up. He may not have been guilty of the massacres, but—and not without many good reasons for so doing—he has assumed the responsibility for them: of that responsibility we are unable, in all justice, to relieve him.

“The consequence of that general commotion, that national fever, which has wrought miracles,” he exclaimed, to excuse, or justify, the massacres. And the anxiety of the defence of the country had driven his own excitement up to fever point. On the 3rd he heard Verdun had capitulated. The King of Prussia’s advanced guard was pushing on to the Argonne: Dumouriez had sworn, indeed, to defend “the Thermopylæ,” and it was believed that the Metz army might succeed, by dint of forced marches, in getting round to the south of the Argonne, and joining forces with the Sedan army behind the passes. But confusion still reigned among the Sedan troops, and there was many a gap that Kellermann must fill up before he could leave Metz.

The nations which had hitherto remained neutral seemed to be growing more hostile. England and Spain recalled their ambassadors. The ring was closing in. The Prussian entry into Champagne might be the signal for all the rest to fall upon us. I have already related that to make matters worse, Danton had been informed, during the night of August 2, of the Breton conspiracy, the secret of which had accidentally fallen into the hands of his friend Chevétel: in

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that case, too, the entry of Frederick William into Châlons was to be the signal. At all hazards, the rising in the West must be delayed, an effort must be made to keep England quiet, and check the Prussian King's advance.

Chevetel was sent back to the West. Far from concealing his intercourse with Danton, he was to make it known, but was to add that Danton being secretly determined to save the King (and this was not absolutely untrue, as we shall see), he advised the conspirators not to ruin the monarch's chances by a premature rising. Chevetel played his dubious part with admirable skill, secretly thwarted De la Rouverie's plans, and nipped his insurrection in the bud.

As to European matters, Danton did his utmost, as Sorel calls it, to "pick up the threads." On August 11 he had an interview with Talleyrand, who had returned from England on the 20th of the preceding June, and obtained full information about the Continent from him. He further persuaded him to draw up a circular to the European Cabinets, which "explained" the Tenth of August as being no more than an internal Revolution which need cause no alarm to anybody, England least of all. Thanks to Talleyrand, the Minister of Justice knew more about Foreign Affairs by the middle of August than Le Brun himself; he was in communication with the various agents of French diplomacy, and not only the direction of foreign business, but the very management of the secret service money connected with it, was made over to his care. This is no mere supposition. M. Frédéric Masson has discovered and published a financial account which, to my mind, bears very cogent witness to the truth of my statement: an examination of this document, entitled "*Avances à M. Danton*" will prove that a sum of 148,000 *livres* belonging to the Foreign Office passed out of Le Brun's hands into Danton's, and was no doubt destined to be spent in buying over foreigners.

Every day of his life he was growing more of a realist, and in spite of all his fine talk, he had little or no real intention of waging "mighty war against the despots." He would have been glad indeed to see no despot save "the tyrant of

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Vienna," with the "tyrant of Spain," at most, standing in his path. But his dream was to turn Prussia against Austria and Spain against Great Britain; such dreams, at this distance of time, seem wild indeed. England, in his opinion, was the one Power he must endeavour to win over. He liked the country, he was on friendly terms with some of the English Liberals, he still hoped to see them return to power. Meanwhile, he must avoid any sort of rupture. When the British Ambassador left Paris, Chauvelin ought, logically speaking, to have been recalled from London. Danton left him there, and until he sent Talleyrand back to England, he decided to dispatch a trusted man of his own, Noël, to share Chauvelin's responsibilities. This Noël was "one of Danton's secret agents." He himself acknowledges in one of his letters that it was to Danton he revealed, just before his departure from Paris, "his inmost soul and every item of his existence": and indeed his letters of September 14 and October 4 prove it was Danton's hand, rather than Le Brun's, that guided the London agent, who was further accompanied by Danton's own nephew from Arcis, Mergez. The impression these agents produced in London was not sufficient, indeed, to permit of their carrying any complicated mission through. Now the business in hand (the solution of the financial problem was most urgent) was the negotiation of a loan, guaranteed on the island of Tobago, to be offered to England for that purpose. Her mind was also to be set at rest as to the Low Countries: and there was to be a hint of a partition of Spanish America, then on the brink of rebellion. Talleyrand consented to go over to England and shelter the little knot of negotiators under the wing of his own prestige: but what he really sought was an excuse for getting out of Paris, and he afforded them but little real assistance. All that could be effected was to delay English intervention for a few months, by talking the time away.

But this was always something, for while the West delayed its rising, and England dilly-dallied, France had time to ward off the most pressing of the dangers that assailed her.

Danton spent even more of his time in Servan's office than

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in Le Brun's. "*I have been Adjutant-General to the Minister of War as much as I have been Minister of Justice!*" he was to exclaim, before long. And in fact he was so perpetually on the heels of Servan, and of his chief assistant, Lacuée, spurring them on, that the conduct of the war was practically in his hands. He kept up an incessant interchange of communications with Dumouriez, he influenced the choice of officers—in the most eclectic way, for though he had a certain number of Cordeliers appointed, he insisted on Servan's employing the worthy Frégeville, who was anything but a Jacobin: in this case patriotism, as he understood it, involved a necessary exercise of broad-mindedness.

And further, bent on maintaining an almost personal contact with the armies in the East, he sent them agent after agent of his own—Billaud, Westermann, even Fabre himself. Dumouriez welcomed Danton's men with a good grace: "Billaud," he wrote Servan on September 18, "was never away from me, night or day." And Kellermann's aide-de-camp even kept Fabre informed as to the General's military operations. It was the reports sent in by Laclos that led Danton to his determination to rid the armies of old Marshal Luckner, who was getting into difficulties himself, and carrying others with him. Whenever Dumouriez wrote to Servan, he took care to inform Danton of the fact. Danton, in short, far more than his colleague, held all the threads connected with the army in his hand, and the "Adjutant-General" took precedence of the Minister of War. This precedence did not go to his head: he was far too intelligent to fall into the blunder common to most lawyers turned into military leaders: this lawyer never dreamt of transforming himself into a strategist. He never worried either Dumouriez or Kellermann with his advice: he tells us himself that he "knew" their plans, but that he "never mixed himself up with the war except in its political aspects." His great object was to inspire the generals with confidence, by proving his very hearty confidence in them.

The King of Prussia seemed likely, by his constant delays, to give every one else a chance of pulling himself together.

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The very presumption of our enemies was our salvation : so sure were the Allies of their prey that they fancied they might pounce on it when and how they chose. Now Prussia, who suspected Austria, lived in constant terror of being fooled : the partition of Poland was close at hand, and though Frederick William's feet were on French soil, his head turned perpetually in the direction of the Vistula. His generalissimo, the Duke of Brunswick, was not the man to hurry him forward : a philosopher, this war against the new France was most repugnant to him : and the spirit of his troops was not such as would sweep their leaders on : the attitude of the Lorrainers, who staunchly opposed them, had greatly demoralized the invaders. The Prussians feared that once they had crossed the Argonne they might find communications with their rear had been cut off. Abominable weather and a plague of dysentery combined to chill the ardour of even the hardiest among the troops.

On the other hand, the exciting influences of Paris had wrought the enthusiasm of the French soldiers up to the highest pitch, and by the time the Prussians had made up their minds to force a way through the Argonne (on the 17th), the labours of the previous fortnight, not a day of which had been wasted by Danton and the Generals, had sufficed to change the face of everything. Dumouriez had received reinforcements—and what was better still, cheer and encouragement : Kellermann had sallied out of Metz, and was moving by forced marches *viâ* Bar le Duc upon Champagne. The Argonne had been forced on the 18th, and my readers know the story of the meeting of the two armies on the plateau of Valmy on the 20th, and how the enemy, thus checked, became apparently afflicted with a sudden fit of paralysis.

Nothing could have served Danton's turn better than this battle of Valmy : his dream, as we know, was to bring over Prussia to his own side, and turn her against Austria : to place the King in difficulties suited him far better than to crush him utterly. On the very morrow of the engagement his personal agents entered into negotiations with the Prussian camp. Westermann was the first to put in an

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appearance: he hinted that the Council, which consisted of reasonable men, had no desire to carry on a foolish war. He tempted the other side into opening negotiations, induced Manstein, the Prussian, to come to the French camp, and on the 25th he brought Danton peace proposals which were to depend, indeed, on the steps taken with regard to Louis XVI. The fact that Manstein had been sent to the camp was a huge point in Danton's favour. The King of Prussia had consented to enter into relations with the men of the Tenth of August, and this meant that Europe was bowing the head—ever so little indeed—before the accomplished fact. True, the King of Prussia demanded the restoration of Louis XVI to his throne. And on the 21st the Convention (we shall return to this point) had met and proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy. Danton, anxious as he was to negotiate, would not compromise himself: ostentatiously, the Council declared that "the Republic could not entertain any proposal until the Prussian troops had finally evacuated French territory." Danton, having read this uncompromising declaration to the Convention, amidst thunders of applause, sent back his two agents, Westermann and Benoît, forthwith, that very night, to continue the negotiations. Thus must government be carried on when it has to deal with an Assembly! The negotiations succeeded as to their most urgent object only. Danton had hoped to turn his foe into his ally. The King of Prussia slipped through his fingers. Still, he marched away.

He was allowed to go without much interference. The Prussians took their way back over the Argonne, abandoned Verdun first, and then Longwy, and within a fortnight were across the frontier, without having fired a shot. The country was cleared as though by a miracle.

No wonder it appeared a miracle, and even a miracle twice told. That the King of Prussia, after one trifling engagement, should have beaten a retreat without even attempting to garrison the towns he had occupied, and that the French Generals should have allowed him to retire without treading on his heels and doing their best to turn his retreat into a

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rout—here were two events so strange that every one looked about him for an explanation.

The *Émigrés*, in their fury, accused Brunswick of having allowed Danton to buy him over. They even quoted the sum (that sort of thing is always easily done)—it was thirty millions of *livres*. Where had he found the money? In a very simple fashion, was the reply, by causing the Garde-Meuble to be broken open, and the Crown Jewels to be stolen.

This strange tale of the theft from the Garde-Meuble is one of the dark corners of History. I know very well that it was cleared up apparently and very quickly: the thieves who ventured, between September 13 and 16, to rob the Garde-Meuble of the treasures that had been stored in it—after a very careless fashion—jewels worth some twenty-five millions, of which not more than half a million's worth were left when the theft was discovered, were arrested and brought to justice. I have looked into the documents connected with this business, which are in the Archives: there is not a single sign of Danton in them: the affair was nothing but a splendid specimen of thievery, which simply proves the state of utter anarchy existing in Paris at that time. It is most unlikely, if there had been any sleeping partners in the business, that the thieves, who were sentenced to death and duly executed, would have refrained from informing on those who sent them to do the work. And besides, the diamonds were found before the thieves had been able to dispose of them.

Yet it is easy to understand that this pillage—the operation extended over several days—of the splendid accumulation of precious stones stored close by the Chancery must have seemed more than strange. Mme. Roland goes further yet: she gives precise details. Fabre came to her one morning, and with an appearance of great distress, informed her of the robbery, whereupon she instantly guessed him to be a thief “who had come to see whether he was suspected or not.” It is true that when the worthy Roland cried “How canst thou know it?” she could only put forward suppositions: “Why, so daring a stroke can only be the work of that audacious Danton! *I do not know whether this truth will*

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ever be mathematically proved, but I feel it!" As so often happened, she must have "felt" a little too fast, this time. Roland believed her, as he always did. A note found among Brissot's papers when these were impounded states that the Minister of the Interior attributed the theft to persons who had ordered the massacres, and wanted to pay the murderers. All this strikes me as rather fanciful. But it is curious that the story should have found acceptance. That happened because Danton was considered capable of every kind of daring.

Did he buy over Brunswick? This is just as doubtful. Two millions of secret service money had been set apart for the Council: this was divided. After the first division had been made, Danton (I shall return to this matter) persuaded the other Ministers (except Roland) to hand him over large sums, the application of which remained shrouded in mystery. But even if he had been in a position to dispose of the entire two millions—and he was not—they would have been a very paltry price to offer for the purchase of a German prince, however insignificant. Or do I rate the value of a princely conscience far too highly? Yet I am bound to draw attention to the fact that though Danton's enemies immediately cried out upon this bargain, certain of his friends approved it fully. A letter dated October 4, in which Noël requests Danton to supply him with funds, seems to prove its writer believed millions of money must have been spent in buying the German retreat. "Let us build the enemy a golden bridge," he boldly says; "this old-world maxim is applicable at every period." If Danton did succeed in providing Brunswick with a golden bridge, the fact would certainly involve far greater dishonour for the German General than for the French Minister. But until we know for a certainty that Danton commanded funds as to which we have no certain information at the present date, or that the Duke was content to sell himself for no more than a single million of money, I shall not believe the thing was done at all.

And indeed Sorel has found a thorough explanation of the German retreat in the huge intrigues at that moment

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paralysing Europe, and M. Chuquet discovers another in the misfortune that had attacked the very bowels of the Prussian army. As for Dumouriez, his passive attitude is easily accounted for: he was filled with a burning desire to throw himself on the Low Countries, the moment the Prussians were over the German border. And Danton's chief longing we already know: to draw Prussia over to his own side, and consequently to avoid destroying her now.

The Prussian retreat was what he had desired: there was no symptom of any movement in the West: Noël was writing him from London that he had hopes of winning over the English Ministers, and Austria, embittered by Prussia's inexplicable weakness, seemed ready to cast off her Prussian alliance. His desires were in process of realization. He began to think of giving up his office. Now that the Convention had assembled, his presence at the Council board had ceased to be legal. Plurality of mandates was forbidden, as my readers know. And on the 6th Danton had been elected a deputy, under circumstances which I must now relate.

The Paris electoral campaign had been managed by the Cordeliers, by Marat more especially. He had sworn that not a single "Brissotin" should be elected, and had set forth a list of "pure" politicians in his newspaper. Robespierre figured at the head of this list, and his name was followed by Danton's, and those of most of the members of the Commune. In any case the two retiring "Moderantist" deputies, Condorcet and Brissot, must be kept out, and so must Pétion, who was suspected of "Brissotism." Danton probably leant towards a less exclusive course. His friend Delacroix had proposed that both Pétion and Robespierre—whom Danton had advised, on the 4th, to forget all his quarrels "till after the expulsion of the enemy"—should be elected. But Marat was set on striking out the "lukewarm" men, and Robespierre, always greedy, would not share anything with anybody.

The one thing that seemed absolutely certain was Danton's own election—"in several departments," indeed, so Desmoulins told his own father. This was a piece of self-

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deception: the Cordeliers were exceedingly unpopular in the Provinces. Danton could not reckon safely on any but the Paris electors.

But on the 5th, when these Paris electors met for the first time, Danton was not chosen. This I can understand. Pétion's candidature was still before the electors: it may very well have happened that Danton, then in a most conciliatory mood, did not choose to stand against him, and left Robespierre to face the first ballot. He (Robespierre) was elected by 338 votes, Pétion only securing 137.

That very day Danton informed the electoral assembly that Pétion had been chosen by the electors of the Department of Eure-et-Loire. This cleared the ground, and Danton's own name was proposed. He was triumphantly elected by 638 votes out of 700, almost twice the number polled for Robespierre, and larger than that cast for any other deputy.

But it was most important that when he entered the Convention he should do so surrounded by his own adherents. Seeing Desmoulins attacked, on the 7th, he defended him "with a great deal of energy and eloquence" and secured his return. In the same way, so Mme. Roland writes, he actively "pushed" the candidature of Robert, his own creature. Still more active must have been his support of Fabre, his *alter ego*, of Manuel, his old comrade in the days of struggle, of Billaud, his "secretary," Legendre, his fanatically devoted friend, and all his old comrades of the District, Boucher, Saint-Sauveur, Sergent, Fréron, and the rest. When the Paris elections came to an end, the whole of his "cabinet" at the Chancery had been returned by handsome majorities, and out of a total of four-and-twenty elected deputies, ten, without reckoning his friends David and Panis, were "old Cordeliers."

One most singular candidate presented himself at this election, and Danton would seem to have done more to push his claim than any other. This was the Duc d'Orléans—we should rather say the "Citizen Égalité." His candidature, if we may credit Louvet, was put forward by the Cordeliers on

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the 19th: it was supported by Marat, whom the *ci-devant* Duke had obliged in certain matters, and greeted with hostility by Robespierre, who, as my readers are aware, never could really appreciate a joke. He tells us Danton himself came and pointed out to him that "the nomination of a prince of the blood would render the Convention more imposing in the eyes of Europe, more particularly if he was the last member to be elected." Elected the Duke was, by 297 votes out of 592, a result exactly fulfilling Danton's expressed desire. At a later period, Danton was to deny that he had "given his vote to Orléans," or "had him elected." Though I feel little inclination to depend on Robespierre's Notes, the reliability of which is open to suspicion, I believe he may be in the right as to this matter. The continuance of the relations between Danton and Laclos prove that he still kept up some intercourse with the Palais Royal. But, on the other hand, must we accept the story of the famous interview between him and the Duc de Chartres, stated to have taken place a few days after this election? All the items of the story susceptible of verification certainly are correct, and this would lead one to believe it true. The Keeper of the Seals, we are told, summoned the young Prince, who had lately distinguished himself by his conduct at Valmy, to the Chancery. "You have many years of life before you," he said. "France has no love for the Republic: she has the habits, the weaknesses, the needs of a Monarchy. . . . Who can tell what destiny Fate may hold in store for you?" And thereupon he advised him to go back to the army, but to try to keep out of imminent danger. We have more than one reason for believing Louis-Philippe was not averse to relating the story of this interview. It does not go to prove anything beyond that which we had already suspected: Danton looked with considerable favour on the idea of keeping the son with the army, under Dumouriez' command, and the father at the Convention, under his own eye: he certainly felt France to be anything but republican in sentiment: and my personal impression is that he clung to his favourite solution of the difficulty—a revolutionary throne on which, failing the father, already fallen into sore

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discredit, the son, crowned with his Valmy laurels, should be seated—till a much later period.

Legally, as I say, Danton should have resigned his portfolio on September 6—on the 21st, at any rate: Desmoulins wrote his father that this was to be done. But Danton did not resign: he was determined to hold on till the Prussians had really beaten a retreat. And further, when the Assembly neglected to appoint his successor, it authorized him, by implication, to stay on where he was. Dumouriez kept beseeching him to remain at the Ministry: "I am most terribly afraid of your leaving the Ministry. . . . I *need your head there.*" Everybody "needed his head." Philippeaux proposed, in the Convention, that the Minister should be requested to retain office, to serve therein "with the energy of character and vigorous talent he was known to possess," and for this purpose, to resign his seat in the Assembly. The Assembly broke into loud applause, but Danton declined the second item of the invitation. He kept his seat in the Convention, and sat at the Council board as well, down to October 11, and thus continued to "harry the Ministers," says Roland, who became so exasperated that he ceased to attend the Council meetings.

But on October 11 the Commissaries of the Convention in the East wrote that the enemy was "retiring with great strides." Then Danton prepared to depart. When he was sure the Prussians were on the further bank of the Meuse, he sent in his resignation. He carried with him to the Convention—he was never averse to creating an effect—"the old Seals of State, in their silver-gilt box, and the two silver maces intended for the use of the ushers of the old Chancellor's Office," which were to be destroyed. And with this theatrical gesture Georges-Jacques Danton brought his fantastic tenure of the seat of d'Aguesseau to a close. At the forty-third sitting of the Council he bade his colleagues farewell.

In the course of those two months—they had seemed more like two years—he had succeeded in proving the measure of his powers, and that measure had been recognized to be enormous. As early as on September 8 Marat had suggested his

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being given the title of President of the Council, "the most efficacious method of ensuring the working of the machine." And a word from Dumouriez, most evidently sincere, has shown how earnestly the men at the head of the armed forces desired to see him continue at the helm. The smaller fry had come to the conclusion that he had by no means proved himself the "savage fellow," as the worthy Bouquet puts it, they had been led to expect. On October 2 an exceedingly impartial observer was to write (after a thorough-going arraignment of the methods of Robespierre and Marat), that in Danton, on the contrary, the public admired "a statesman possessing great political virtues, a strong and intrepid heart, an irresistible eloquence, an immense clear-sightedness." "*His conduct as a Minister,*" he adds, "*has deserved the public esteem.*" Even after his defeat in Paris, Condorcet was to exclaim, "I chose him, and I do not repent it!"

More than probably, indeed, that summer of 1792 saw Danton save his country.

CHAPTER IX

DANTON AT THE CONVENTION

Danton a "Moderantist"—Union a Necessity—Madame Roland's Salon "misunderstands" Danton—Danton's "Accounts"—The Rupture with the Girondins—The King's Trial—Danton in Belgium—The Regicide Vote and the "Natural Limits" of the Country—Danton sent back to Belgium.

ON the morning of September 21 the Convention, which had formed itself, on the preceding day, and behind closed doors, into a Legislative Body, opened its first public sitting in the Salle du Manège. This was the "Assembly of Romans" for which a passionate "female patriot" had so ardently sighed. Its proceedings promised to be the most virulent expression of revolutionary ideas presented as yet to the world at large. Were not its members, every one of them, from Vergniaud to Robespierre, "pure" politicians? Their very first act would surely be to proclaim a Republic and decree the establishment of a Democracy? And lo! the first deputy to approach the rostrum was a man whose very name was an expression of the great idea—Danton! What proposal did he make? The answer is something of a surprise: he moved for a solemn proclamation of the theory that ownership was "eternal."

Let us hear him speak. He begins by expressing his readiness to resign the functions "received amidst the roar of the cannon wherewith the citizens of the capital had laid despotism low." Now he is the "representative of the people" he spurns "all those phantasms of dictatorship . . . all those absurdities invented for the purpose of terrifying the people." He desires, moreover, to calm the minds of those good citizens "who may have presumed that the

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fervent friends of liberty might injure social order by any exaggeration of their own principles." "Well," he continued, "*let us here abjure all idea of exaggeration: let us declare that all ownership, whether territorial, individual, or industrial, shall be maintained for ever.*" The remark was greeted with unanimous applause. Thus the first proposal submitted to the Assembly, and that an essentially conservative proposal, was laid before it by Danton. And presently, when the Convention, somewhat blunderingly, approached the question of the Republic and the Monarchy, the man of the Tenth of August—who eventually spoke exactly thirty times in the course of forty days—was to sit upon his bench in utter silence.

This was because he was more of a *realist* than any other member of that Assembly of realists. He was a realist by temperament, and for the last five weeks, besides, his searching glance had been fixed on the convulsions of his country, and the idea of gathering up the fragments of this nation in disarray, and forming them once more, and without any apparent check to the Revolution, into one social body, had become the revolutionary's dream. He had ceased to look for elements of division; he only sought for elements of union. The Nation had never longed for a Republic, but from the peasant who had freed the soil on which he laboured to the *bourgeois* who had bought it up, the whole Nation, terrified by the convulsions it foresaw, desired one thing only—to cut the matter short, and enjoy its own in peace.

The fact is disconcerting to men whose cradles, like ours, were rocked to the songs of Michelet and Lamartine. The tremendous financial operation involved in the transfer of the property of the Nation, and the interests thus created, have almost slipped our notice. And for this reason Danton's singular attitude astounds us: seven years before Bonaparte came into power, France was invited to make a firm settlement of the results already acquired. The Convention hailed the conservative proposal with applause, and the author of the conservative proposal was Danton!

His object, now, was to have the country constituted as

a State. His personal situation made him specially lean towards this process of "reconstitution." He was a middle-class property-owner, now, and very well-to-do; his little landed domain was growing larger and larger: within five months, on August 20 and 22, October 20, November 1, 22 and 23, and December 1, 5, 12 and 27, we see him put his name in a notary's office to eleven deeds, each of which adds woods and meadows to his original holding. This fact, apart from higher views, might well inspire a desire to see "the ownership of property maintained for ever." But, on the other hand, this well-provided *bourgeois* had just spent two months in the Ministry, and when he left the Chancellor's Office as the senior elected representative of Paris he was not only a richer but a most successful man. Politically speaking, his position was magnificent. It was clear that, at his own election, he had not only received the votes that had elected Robespierre on the preceding day, but also those polled by Robespierre's "moderate" opponent. Every party seemed desirous of electing him. Hardly had he resigned his Presidency of the Council, and handed over the Seals with what was an almost condescending air, when he found himself elected to two of the most important Committees—the *Committee on the Constitution* and the *Diplomatic Committee*. The moment the *Committee of the Public Safety* was formed, he was one of its members. Every party expected to see him "on the field of honour." In short, he was considered the one and only man capable of "establishing the Revolution."

He had no intention of presuming on his popularity. He shrugged his shoulders in all good faith when he talked about the "phantasms of dictatorship." And Prudhomme was in the right when he exclaimed, defending him against the charge of being a Cromwell, "His desire is to be left free to work for the freedom of his country."

His zeal for the Republic was no greater on September 21 than it had been on the Tenth of August. The Republic caused him very little personal inconvenience, but he did not believe it would live, because he did not believe the



ANTOINETTE-GABRIELLE CHARPENTIER, DANTON'S FIRST
WIFE

(Musée de Troyes)

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country, cared to have it. Nothing can be more characteristic, in this connection, than his speech of October 16, wherein, with an appearance almost of alarm, he opposes Manuel's imprudent motion for a plebiscite to sanction the establishment of the Republic. But when he adds that "nobody can doubt that France is resolved to become a Republic and will eternally remain one," I am persuaded he is talking mere political claptrap. He considered the Republican feeling of the country very weak; even if he had not asserted this so clearly in full Council, and also in his conversation with the Duc de Chartres, we should easily perceive it to have been his real opinion. The most he did, in face of the opposition the Orléans candidature had evoked in certain quarters, was to defer his hopes of success to a more convenient season. When he found he could not have his "revolutionary King," he made up his mind to a kind of conservative Republic. His desire was that the country, now it had weathered "the storms," as he nobly phrased it—"escaped from the filthy democracy," as he put it, more brutally, to one of the Lameth brothers—should end by setting up this Republic, which must never, as he exclaimed on April 27, "be a Republic of Visigoths." "Once it has been founded," he said, "we shall know how to make it beautiful."

To begin with, he seems to have been little disposed, in the month of September, to imbrue his hands with the monarch's blood. Robespierre writes that "he did not wish for the tyrant's death: he desired we should be content to banish him. The strength of public opinion forced him to make up his mind." We shall see that he promised Lameth he would save the King. This may have been the result of his constitutional magnanimity; or he may have been anxious to avoid a war against Europe, from which every thought of forgiveness must be utterly excluded.

Noël had sent him warnings from England: the Cabinet there would break off all relations with France if so much as a hand were laid on Louis XVI, and Spain would instantly follow this example. Rome and St. Petersburg were only looking about for a pretext to transform the war into a

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crusade; Prussia would rejoin the Coalition, which, for the moment, had fallen apart. Danton far preferred to avoid regicide and the merciless war it would entail—a war during which the Republic would find it quite impossible to “bring itself into order.”

But the war was an established fact. His view of it, however, was not that of the Girondins, who looked on it as a war to defend principles; he regarded it as a war for the old-fashioned purpose of conquest.

On October 17 we find him pleading that no undertaking should be given to any hostile population, that France (this was in connection with Geneva) ought to retain the “power to occupy,” so as to be in a position to ensure peace by means of exchange of territory! There was no duty on the Republic, nor had it even any right, to “renounce its conquests.” In any case, its opposition to Europe must not be one of abstract principles, but of a strong and indignant national feeling.

He was a passionate “nationalist,” and his dearest dream, consequently, was a national understanding which no quarrel was to disturb. “Your discussions are worthless things. I see nothing but the enemy! We must beat the enemy!” From September 21 onwards, strong in his endeavour to hold the country’s ground against Europe, and endue the Republic with the stability it so sorely needed, we see him labour without ceasing in the cause of union, of a spirit of conciliation, which should bind together the most advanced and the less extreme elements, and so lead up to a policy of comparative moderation.

One thing is certain: he desired an understanding with the Girondins. To begin with, some members of that party frankly acknowledge the fact. Garat, the new Minister of Justice, asserts that though he had been afraid of Danton at first, Condorcet had pressed him to go and see him, as being “*a man who would easily become attached to good principles,*” and he adds, “The hopes of observant and thoughtful men pointed to Danton as the person *through whose intervention the genius which was to organize the new Republic might*

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hold converse with the past which had given it birth."

Vergniaud would have been quite ready to travel the road to Damascus hand in hand with the Cordelier leader. We shall see how this alliance, which might have resulted in the foundation of a Republic never to be soiled by the blood-stained Terror, was brought to naught through the bitter hostility of Mme. Roland and her circle. Half a score of times does Robespierre cast this reproach upon them; Danton both offered peace and preached it, pleading for union on the basis of mutual concessions.

This idea of union, again, led him to condemn all religious quarrels and all disturbance of social peace. I have already described his views on religious policy. But never were they so clearly expressed as in the course of the winter of 1792: his speech on November 30 certainly embodies the most categorical enunciation we possess of a *conservatism* that was all *opportunism*. France, he said, "would be utterly unsettled by a too hasty application of philosophical principles, which, indeed, were dear to him personally, but for which the people, and more especially the country districts, were not yet ripe."

When a man who possessed nothing, he went on, sees "a rich man gratifying his tastes . . . he believes in the other world . . ." he must be "left in this error;" though he, in his own case, "knew no god save the god of the Universe," the countryman "added to this the Man of Consolation," whom he looked on as a saint "because to him he owed a few happy moments in his youth, his early manhood, and his old age."

What benefit could there be in letting loose the dogs of religious strife? Above all, what good could come of social warfare? This was not the only occasion on which he stood out against levelling theories; at every opportunity he did his utmost to quiet the minds of the property-owners these theories threatened to affect. Even when he spoke of requisitions, he always added a rider to the effect that the "owners were to be indemnified." Not only was the maintenance of ownership one of the articles of his programme of resistance, it was on the maintenance of property that he would have built

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the foundations of his new Republic. "I will put a drag on the chariot of the Republic," he says to Lameth, in his usual boasting way, towards the end of September. On the 21st he sought to delay it by the application of the idea of social preservation; the next day, to repeat the operation by applying that of national conciliation.

His speech on the 21st seemed to disarm the hostile feeling of the Right. His declaration as to the maintenance of ownership "for ever" brought an agreeable sense of confidence to the provincial deputies, who were all uneasy, so Rabaut tells us, as to "the doctrine in favour of the general division of all property and land, which had been preached in Paris for some time past." Danton's speech was a relief to them. His conservatism was even considered a trifle exaggerated. The Assembly, though it passed his motion, struck out the words "for ever." That Danton should have been thought too conservative strikes one as being almost comical! But the fact earned him considerable support in this "revolutionary" Assembly.

And further, his very straightforward explanation of the reports as to his dictatorship quieted men's minds. Gorsas makes a note of this: "Danton's conduct had been distorted: the *Friend of the People* had desired to turn him into a dictator: he protested against the idea, and the applause he so richly deserved followed him long after he had left the rostrum."

Thus, surprising though that may seem, Danton's beginnings in the Convention were successful. So strong was the impression in his favour on the Right that on the 29th he was the only member of the Mountain elected, with the most prominent of the Girondins, to the Committee on the Constitution, and that on October 18, again, the chief officials of the Assembly having been elected exclusively from the Right, he, with Barbaroux, Gensonné, and Kersaint, was appointed a secretary, under the chief-secretaryship of another Girondin, Guadet.

But though the majority of the new-comers on the Right and in the Centre thus openly hailed his new political attitude,

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the general body of Girondins, still swayed by memories of recent disagreements, and by their own obstinate prejudice against him, regarded this attitude as a hateful and dangerous piece of mere hypocrisy. Vergniaud was the only one of them who did him justice. For the great lawyer, now quite enslaved by the charms of Mlle. Candeille, of the Comédie Française, was slipping away from Manon Roland's influence. This lady, meanwhile, was gathering the Girondin leaders about her chariot-wheels in still closer array: "Buzot, the well-beloved," Barbaroux, Lasource, Lanthenas, Brissot, Gensonné, Guadet, Isnard, Grangeneuve, and Pétion, too, who in his bitterness over his Paris failure had definitely joined forces with the party. Now, since the massacres, Mme. Roland had looked on Danton as a monster, pure and simple. Quite recently, certain virulently worded pages, entitled "Danton," have been added to this lady's celebrated Memoirs. Not satisfied with the abuse lavished, in her original work, on the man she certainly detested more than any other mortal, she resolved to concentrate all she had said of him, here and there, into one compact account. In this most interesting statement we discover, depicted with even greater clearness than the individual it describes, the overflowing rancour of its writer's heart. At their very outset, this woman, a prodigiously, I will even say an admirably, passionate being, herself tells us that she is never able to cast off a conception she has formed once and for all time. She can never think of Danton, "that semi-Hercules," without "a dagger in his hand," or else "gorged with gold and wine," and making "the gestures of a Sardanapalus." All through these sheets, she piles accusation on accusation against the man. I give a summary of them here: this Danton, with his "coarse shape," whose "size proclaims his natural ferocity," who, "with daring written on his forehead and the laugh of the debauchee upon his lips, vainly strives to soften the bold glance of the eyes beneath his mobile eyebrows," the "ferocity of whose countenance denotes the ferocity of his heart," who "vainly borrows an appearance of good-nature from Bacchus," but "is betrayed by the fierce-

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ness of his language, the violence of his gestures, the brutality of his oaths," is, if these ten pages crammed with scandalous stories are to be believed, guilty of every vice and every crime; or capable, to say the least of it, of them all.

My readers will imagine the feelings of this lady when she beheld the Tribune's efforts in the direction of moderation; this meant, in her eyes, that he was adding hypocrisy to all his other vices, and an hypocrisy likely to be even more harmful than his brutality. He must be "unmasked."

All her friends followed her lead. And, indeed, one common feeling ruled them: their hatred of Paris, which had cast them out. Neither Pétion nor Brissot could forgive the Paris electors. And their fellows, since the massacre—the blame for which they laid, quite wrongfully, on the city in general—shared Mme. Roland's opinion that it was a "city of lust and blood." Danton's dictatorship, they declared, had changed the very nature of the Revolution, and transformed it into a debauch of crime; the first thing to be done was to pinion the guilty city, and chastise it. Now this view must necessarily bring them into collision with Danton, who held the "dictatorship of Paris" to be absolutely essential, till peace had been declared and the Revolution brought to a final close, at all events. And this was to be the rock that caused the final split.

In all justice, I must add that we cannot altogether blame those Girondins who recoiled from the thought of any alliance with Danton. They were very sincerely convinced he was responsible for the massacres, for the theft from the Garde-Meuble, for all sorts of vile jobbery following on horrible scenes of bloodshed. His name was synonymous with "crime," said Guadet, and with "crime" no terms could possibly be made. This mask of false moderation must be torn from its wearer's face.

Unhappily it was anything but difficult to drive Danton not to "unmask" (I have already spoken of his perfect sincerity), but to turn his back time and again on the part he was forcing himself to play out of sheer duty to the State. On the 22nd he was seen to bounce up in a fury, and only

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regain his calm with a mighty effort, so stung was he by the hostile interruptions of the little knot of "Rolandist" deputies.

On the 25th, the inevitable quarrel broke out. Lasource, one of the most faithful frequenters of Mme. Roland's circle, speaking of an incident the connection of which with the vexed question would seem to have been exceedingly remote, referred in the most bitter terms to Paris, declaring the city ought to be reduced, at last, "to its eighty-third share of influence" in the country. Osselin, a Paris deputy, made a sharp reply, and the tumult had already risen high when a deputy belonging to the Right asserted that a whole faction, supported by the city, was endeavouring to set up a dictatorship. Danton—and he may not have been mistaken—fancied the thrust was meant for him. For the last four days, indeed, there had been a great deal of what had borne the appearance of deliberate talk of measures which had become urgently necessary, against "the cut-throats" and "their accomplices." And further, he was aware, no doubt, that his enemies were getting up the "business of the Council accounts" against him. He must have been at once furiously angry and far from easy in his mind. Yet so closely did he cling to his new methods that his speech betrayed no violence. "The day that brings about a brotherly explanation between us all," he said, "is a great day for the Nation. If the culprits do exist, if there be one perverse being who desires to wield despotic rule over the representatives of the people, his head shall fall the instant he is unmasked." But the imputation concerning a "triumvirate" was vague, he declared, the attacks on the Paris deputies void of all foundation. For the past three years, he himself had "done all he thought it his duty to do in the cause of liberty." During his ministry he had "used all the vigour of his character," "brought the Council all the zeal and activity of a citizen on fire with love for his country." And then, in his anxiety to disclaim all thoughts of violence, he drew a distinction between himself and Marat: he had nothing at all to do, as had been asserted, with "that man's writings." And thinking he had

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thus restored the confidence of the moderate party, he called on its members to respect the union and the unity of the country. Neither was he himself a native of Paris; he loved his own province. "But none of us belong exclusively to this or that department, we belong to the whole of France." And when this assertion was greeted with applause, he added that he was willing that any man who asked for a dictatorship should be put to death, on condition only that the same penalty should be applied to any persons "who might speak of parcelling out France"; an angry hit at the "federalism" with which certain of the Girondins were already reproached. And he closed his speech with another appeal for union. "The Austrians," he said—and my readers will observe that in his desire to spare the feelings of the King of Prussia he makes no reference to the enemy beaten at Valmy—"will not hear without a shudder of this blessed harmony: and then, I swear it to you, your foes will be dead indeed!"

There was a regular ovation; all his proposals were "accepted with enthusiasm." The Assembly was grateful to the tribune for his self-control, and for having separated his own cause from that of "the man Marat." When the Convention, spurred by his closing appeal, proclaimed "the Republic, one and indivisible," it seemed as though the triumph of this Republic, now given its title for the first time, were mingled with that of Danton, and even the Right must have shared the general enthusiasm, for on the 29th, alone among all his colleagues of the Mountain, the orator of the 25th was elected to the Committee on the Constitution—a valuable personal triumph.

But the "pure" *Rolandists* held that Danton had merely turned the conversation. They continued to attack both him and Paris. He determined to strike back. On that same 29th, Buzot, one of Mme. Roland's prime favourites, proposed that Roland and Servan, who had both been elected to the Convention, should be requested to retain their ministerial offices and let their seats as deputies go by the board, "out of devotion to their country"; Danton (and rightly) took the suggestion to be an indirect thrust at himself. And this

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time he allowed his annoyance to get the better of him. Knowing the source of the campaign against him, he thought he saw his opportunity to strike a blow at the heart of his enemy—male or female. "If," he said, with his ironic sneer, "you make this proposal to Roland, *make it to Madame Roland too*, for everybody knows that Roland does not work alone in his department!" The words were discourteous, and therefore impolitic. He made things worse. "The Nation," he said, so we are told, "needs Ministers who can act without being led by their wives." Murmurs and protests rose about him; that very evening, the Girondin Press flew at him; Brissot's paper, the *Patriote*, pointed out the coarse impropriety of his remarks; Garat, who had hitherto maintained an impartial attitude, declared the phrase stank of Marat, and the indignant members of the Roland circle swore to wage war without mercy on the man who had spoken it. The business of the "Accounts" should be let loose on him forthwith.

He hoped to overawe them by going up to the Capitol. On October 4, amidst loud murmurs, he proposed, now the Prussians were in retreat, that a declaration should be published to the effect that "the country was no longer in danger;" the war was now to be carried into the tyrants' own country; Dumouriez hoped to "make his winter quarters at Brussels"; Custine was to march upon the Rhine. The orator saw "Liberty triumphant" everywhere. He shared her triumph, and left the Council room in a blaze of glory.

But this departure was just the event for which his enemies had been watching; since he was leaving the Ministry, he must hand in his accounts. And here it was that the Rolands and their friends were lying in wait for him.

On the 6th, Danton had laid his accounts on the table of the Assembly. They set forth that as Minister of Justice he had received 100,000 *livres*. Out of this sum he had spent 68,684 in payments the items of which he supplied; 31,316 *livres* remained, and these he was ready to refund. The account was remitted to the Committee of Finance.

These 68,684 *livres* had been laid out in a somewhat peculiar

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way. No complaint would have been made as to the furniture for Robert and his wife, which had cost 2400 *livres*, nor even, perhaps, as to the 30,000 handed over to Santerre—though the making of pikes certainly did not lie within the province of the Minister of Justice. But this was not the crux of the matter. These 100,000 *livres* granted the Minister for his official expenses constituted the smallest of the sums that had passed through his hands. The Legislative Body had allotted to the Ministry, as a whole, a sum of two millions of *livres*, one million of which was to be applied to “extraordinary expenditure.” At the instance of Danton, and in spite of Roland’s opposition, the Ministers—with the exception of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, already most liberally supplied—had divided this sum between them. Each of the five had taken 200,000 *livres* out of the million set apart for extraordinary expenditure. But some of them, as I have already said, had subsequently made over a portion of the funds thus divided to Danton. If we could find any straightforward accounts handed in by Monge and Servan, they would certainly reveal items similar to those we note, if we follow M. Frédéric Masson, in that of Le Brun, who ended, as we know, by paying over more than 40,000 *livres*, in large instalments, to Danton, or to Fabre, as representing him. If each of the Ministers did the same thing (and Mme. Roland vows they did), Danton must have handled, besides the 200,000 *livres* for his “ordinary” expenses, something not far from half a million of money. And of the employment of this money, he supplied no account whatever.

On October 10, Mallarmé brought in a report on “M. Danton’s account.” This expressed regret that the account contained no reference to the extraordinary expenditure. Cambon pressed the matter. From the very outset the deputy for the Hérault, who was to make himself, as Danton expressed it, “Comptroller-General of the Finances of the Republic,” betrayed his enmity against the ex-Minister. In this enmity there was no political feeling; it was simply the instinctive antipathy of a careful accountant to a man whose whole nature breathed the spirit of carelessness. He spoke

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severely. The Ministers, he said, had no business to divide those millions between them: "their division of the responsibility had weakened" (the word was a hard one) "the confidence of the Nation." He moved that "the Ministers should be ordered to return an account even of their secret expenditure."

Danton went to the rostrum. He began by saying a flattering word or two about Cambon, went on to assert that "what he suggested had already been done in the Council," and did not go beyond this vague statement. In a letter written somewhat later (on November 7) he gave fuller details, saying that when the Ministers of War and Justice resigned their functions they had handed in the account of their "extraordinary expenditure," and had produced "receipts" which every member of the Council had had the opportunity of examining." It was true, he added, that this proceeding had not been embodied in the record of the Council's deliberations, but this was because it had been decided that "as the outlay in question was and must continue to be *secret*, the details to which the Council had just listened could not be placed on record." This, as all the other Ministers certified, was a fact.

Why, then, did not Danton offer this simple explanation when he spoke on October 10? I know not. He was a voluble speaker, as we know; he had a horror of figures, and always preferred to take a lofty view of any question. And then, frankly, my impression is that this money had been spent, as money always was spent by him, with an exceedingly free hand. We find proof of this in the details of the 68,684 *livres* of "official" expenditure: how many pikes were delivered for the 30,000 *livres* handed to Santerre? And on what account did "Citizen La Touche-Cherette" draw a sum of 4000 *livres* concerning which no explanation is vouchsafed? What sums did Danton's "friends" pocket out of the secret funds? It is possible that his colleagues, even though they did accept his "verbal account," supported as it was by the "receipts" to which his letter referred, may not have proved over easy to manage, and that when he

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refrained from appealing to them on October 10 (though he did it on November 7), his abstention may have been dictated by prudence. He may have felt the matter was still too fresh in his colleagues' recollection.

Certain it is that he might very well have defended himself by putting forward the argument pleaded by the Council: the true definition of *secret funds* is that describing them as moneys of which no account can be rendered. All Danton left to be understood was that as he had come to the help of the Minister of War, he had spent the money on patriotic objects. Did he desire, when he mentioned Servan only, to sanction the idea that he had really built a "golden bridge" for the Prussians? In any case, he stopped short. "If it seemed surprising that any money should have been laid out for extraordinary expenses," he concluded, "this must be ascribed to the circumstances under which they were incurred. The country was in danger, and, as I told the Council, we owed an account to Liberty, and of liberty we have rendered a good account!" These were fine words, but those who were not overawed by them were strengthened in their conviction that the speaker was trying to slip out of a difficult position. The Convention, cold as ice, passed Cambon's motion to oblige Ministers to justify their expenditure of secret funds. And Danton, splendidly daring, affected a belief that the measure would have no retrospective action, and gave it his support.

An impression remained that Danton, for reasons he did not care to put forward, had refused to hand in his accounts; there was but a step between this and asserting he had squandered millions of money. From that moment the delighted partisans of Mme. Roland believed themselves fully armed. On October 18, Roland, with a great affectation of puritanism, laid his own accounts upon the table of the Convention, and one of the Girondins, Rebecquy by name, moved that every Minister be called on to follow his example. Then Danton, at whom the whole manœuvre was aimed, had to explain himself forthwith. This time he put forward the really valid argument: "There are certain items of expendi-

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ture that cannot be mentioned here, there are certain emissaries the revelation of whose identity would be impolitic and unjust: there are certain revolutionary missions *which are approved by liberty, and which entail a great sacrifice of money.*" This time he won general applause. But when, in the flush of his triumph, he went on to say that after the enemy had taken possession of Verdun, it had been necessary to lay out money without receiving "very legal receipts" for it, the murmurs rose again, and all he could obtain from the Assembly was that it should agree not to insist on these special accounts, but only on proofs of the fact that the Council had checked them all. Sharp words were exchanged in the course of the tumult that ensued. One of the Girondins, Larivière, mentioned "embezzlements," Lasource laid stress on the suggestion, and Danton must have felt his adversaries would never let the question rest.

And, indeed, from that time forward reminders from the Right were perpetually thrown in his face. On October 26, just as he was going to the rostrum, Lidon shouted, "And the accounts?" A cry like that of a wounded beast was the reply. Then it was that he wrote the letter of November 7, which he considered his justification; but so great, evidently, was his dread of stirring up the question that the president of the Convention, Héroult, one of Danton's own friends, abstained from reading the letter aloud. Thus Brissot could still vociferate, "Let Danton give an explanation of his accounts!" and the matter remained in an unsettled state, for even on March 30, 1793, a member of the Right broke in on the debate with the words, "Let Danton hand in his accounts!" and another shouted, "Let him tell us what he has done with the four millions [*sic*] of the secret service money!"

Danton only shrugged his shoulders. Money certainly had been squandered. Though the other accounts cannot be discovered, we have those Le Brun was forced to supply, of sums which, theoretically, ought to have paid all the secret expenses of the diplomatic service. In these we find 3050 *livres* given to a police agent; 40,000 to the Commissaries

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of the Commune; thousands of francs to journalists; 500 to Chamfort, a former member of the French Academy; 1500 to Fréron; other sums to Brune, etc.—all this apart from the funds handed over, without any visible justification, to “M. Fabre d’Eglantine,” or “M. Danton.” It may be that Danton really could not explain the manner in which this money had been employed. How could he say, “I bought over such and such a Member of the English Parliament, or German General; I paid for this act of espionage, or that piece of treason”? Whatever the case may have been, whether he was guilty of downright robbery or not, he was forced to hold his peace; but innocent or guilty, his rage must have been equally great. I have felt obliged to pause and consider this business of “the accounts.” It stirred the Rolandists to offer battle, but it stirred up Danton too. They fancied they would be able to roll him in the mire of his “jobberies.” And he, losing all patience, allowed himself to be tempted into furious utterances against the “stupid” crew which was driving him back into the arms of the violent party. There, at least, he was not badgered for any accounts save those “he owed” and had already “handed in to Liberty”—a far more convenient process.

And the Jacobins were determined to keep the man, or win him back; for they were cleverer than the Girondins, and realized his value. On October 10 the Club, which had just turned Brissot out, chose Danton to be its President. Either because he did not intend, as yet, to be swallowed up by the extreme party, or out of his own constitutional indolence, he hardly showed himself in the chair (only on the 12th, 17th, and 19th)—so much so that on the 21st Bentabole made a bitter complaint of his disdain; but the faithful Legendre obtained the benefit of extenuating circumstances for his master, who occupied the chair on the 25th, 27th, and 28th, and then once more forsook it. But on November 5 Fabre was sent down with an apology which Danton’s lukewarmness had no doubt rendered necessary. And in several of his speeches to the Assembly, more especially on the subject of the *Emigrés*, the leader fell back into his old “Cordelier style.”

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The fact was that the Right was wearing out his patience. On the 26th he let himself go. A deputation from the Commune, then fiercely attacked by the Girondins, had presented itself at the Bar of the Assembly, and its leader, who had addressed the deputies with the arrogance usually affected by his colleagues, was interrupted by murmurs from the Right. Danton, his stock of moderation evidently exhausted, sprang to his feet in a rage: "Even a criminal is allowed to speak without being interrupted, and *people here have the audacity . . .*" There was a tempest of shouts. The words may not have deserved such a reception, but the delighted Rolandists laid stress on Danton's excesses and stirred him up to others. The "tribunes" applauded him, the Right shouted, "*Order! Order!*" and the president, Guadet, who was a Girondin, rose to his feet and said, "Danton, I call you to order for having used a most improper expression!" Whereupon, to wind the whole thing up, or with the deliberate intention, it may be, of goading the wild bull to madness, the Right sent up a yell, "*The accounts!*" He tried to defend himself, but the shouting drowned his voice. This sitting of the 26th may be considered the decisive turning-point. It drove him into the arms of the Left, all the more because it was publicly reported, already, that the Right, which controlled the majority in the Assembly, was resolved to push the matter further yet. "It is expected," says the writer of a private letter dated October 28, "that Robespierre, Danton, and Marat will be charged with criminal behaviour."

I have shown elsewhere how blundering the behaviour of the Girondins was, at this moment. They detested Marat, Robespierre, and Danton, all of them, in a greater or less degree. But not one of these three men really held by the two others. The Right should have singled out its victim; instead of this, it made irregular attacks, now on one and then on the other, and drove them to join forces against it. When Marat and Danton, on whom the first onsets were made, frightened their attackers off, Louvet fell upon Robespierre, who was reputed a poor orator. This was the occasion

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of his famous Philippic, "I accuse thee, Robespierre . . .," to which the Assembly listened with bated breath for a full hour, and which seemed to stifle and well-nigh overwhelm the man to whom it was addressed.

Danton had but little liking for Robespierre. I shall shortly indicate the reasons which had naturally evoked the mutual antipathy of the two men. But every day, for the past few weeks, he had seen the Girondins growing more and more "impudent," and, which was still worse, gaining valuable ground both within the Assembly and outside it; this was beginning to alarm him. When Robespierre, with his usual circumspection, refused the battle Louvet had offered him, Danton threw himself into the breach. "It is time all this should be cleared up," he cried, and while he disowned all connection with Marat, he defended Robespierre.

"I declare that all men who talk of a *Robespierre faction* are, in my opinion, either prejudiced persons or bad citizens." And then, taking the offensive, he attacked Roland, who (this had been the beginning of the whole debate) had just brought in a most bitter report on the excesses of the Paris populace in the past, and the danger threatened by the factions in future. An allusion to the massacres had stirred Danton to fury: he remembered the attitude of the Minister of the Interior at that particular juncture; had Roland forgotten the circumstances under which they had been obliged to permit the effusion of blood? "I say," cried the orator, "*that no throne was ever shattered without wounding some good citizens with its fragments: that no complete revolution was ever carried through in which that huge destruction of the existing order of things did not bring ruin on some one!*" and then it was that he ventured to justify the massacres, "*the result of that generous commotion . . . which has wrought wonders that will be the astonishment of posterity.*"

The terrible words must have sent a shudder of disapprobation round the Assembly, and recalled the speaker to the part he was now resolved to play. He softened his tone, appealed for reconciliation, proposed that the report of the Minister of the Interior, which had caused the quarrel, should not be

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made public. "Fraternity alone should guide the Assembly on that sublime course which would be the distinguishing mark of its career." His words were applauded. He had saved Robespierre, but when he took up Robespierre's defence he definitely turned the Right against himself.

For this he seemed to care but little, now. As a matter of fact, he had given up all hope of appeasing either the small group of Rolandists, or the increasing number of deputies of the Right it was continually sweeping into its conflict with himself. It was with a touch of regret, perhaps—and this will have deepened his bitterness—that he felt himself driven back, thanks to their enmity, into the arms of such men as Robespierre and Marat.

His disappointment must have been all the greater because the King promised to be the chief victim of this failure of conciliatory methods; and everything leads us to the belief that Danton would fain have saved him.

In the beginning of October, Théodore de Lameth, then a proscribed man, had ventured back to Paris with the object of beseeching Danton—bound to the Lameth family by some mysterious service rendered in old days—to take the salvation of the King in hand. Early in the morning, Lameth paid his man a surprise visit at his home in the Cour du Commerce, and finding him in bed, closeted himself with him. Danton had been rough, as was his wont, but friendly all the same. Encouraged by his reception, Lameth told him the object of his visit. "You have had no direct share, at all events, in the King's deposition:" (the expression is peculiar); "save him! Then you will leave nothing but glorious memories behind you!" The words seem to have softened Danton; he made no protest. "All that you deplore has been his own doing," he said, simply; then they discussed the merits and the failures of Louis XVI. Lameth pleaded extenuating circumstances, at all events. "How can you sit in judgment," said he, "on a man who has always—and that by the will of the whole nation legally and solemnly expressed—been held to be sacred and impeccable?"

"Mere childishness!" cried Danton. "What is all that

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to men who choose to do a thing and have the power to do it? Was the death of Charles I a legal proceeding?" "Then do you believe that the majority of the Convention would sentence him to death?" "*Without a doubt! Few men care to give their lives for another's: the majority will never do that. Once he is brought to trial, he is lost: for supposing even that the majority acted as you would, the minority would have him murdered. Yet there are generous hearted men in the Assembly, and the Girondins, guilty as their conduct has been, would not condemn him: their party is a large one.*" But Lameth was bent on obtaining more than that: he wanted to have the King snatched out of the Temple "by some daring movement," or else to find some means of procuring his escape.

"That," cried Danton, "is what ought to be done! *Can any king be saved once he has been brought to trial? He is dead before he appears in the presence of his judges!*" "What you say is horribly true, but what can you expect from this most hideous of crimes, save to see France, at a later day, repudiate it, and your Republic loathed by those whose ignorance and lack of reflection now leads them to believe in the possibility of its existence?" "Just try to make Robespierre and Marat and their adorers listen to that!" "But you, Danton, what do you desire, what can you do?" "What can I do? you say! What do I desire? *As to what I can do, I know not: in our present circumstances, what can any man, even the most popular, affirm as to the morrow?* But let us end this. I will not pretend to be any better, nor any worse, than I really am. I have every confidence in your character. My inmost thought, my hidden intention, which you have decided, is this: *Though I am not convinced the King does not deserve some punishment, I think it both just and wise that he should be delivered out of his present situation.* For that purpose I will do all I can, at once prudently and boldly. *I will expose my own safety if I perceive any chance of success, but if I lose all hope, I warn you that as I do not choose to endanger my own head with his, I shall be numbered with those who will*

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condemn him.” “Why,” said Lameth, “do you say those last words?” “*For the sake of being sincere!*”

Who can vouch for the exactness of the terms in which the conversation has been reported to us? Thirty years had gone by when Lameth committed them to paper. Yet let us remark that they were set down at a time when Danton was regarded as the vilest and most ferocious of all the revolutionary band. Any influence the legend exercised must have been most unfavourable to him. To my thinking, the substance of the conversation is correctly reported: it is in fair agreement with the man's character and with his policy at that particular moment; if it had been described as occurring two months earlier or later, the language put into Danton's mouth would have seemed to me less probable.

He may have thought, at that moment, of joining the Girondins for the purpose of saving the King; but the Girondins repulsed every advance he made. He had not hesitated to tell Lameth that he himself would condemn the King the moment he saw that was likely to be done. By the end of October his frame of mind had grown considerably darker. He was living in a state of tumult and bitterness of spirit. And though he may have shown some inclination to save the King, he was forced, now he was acting with Marat and Robespierre, to forestall them by affecting a fierce and noisy civism. On November 6, when Valazé (a Girondin, by the way) set forth the incriminating facts touching the King which he had been collecting, a motion to have them printed was proposed, and backed by Danton, who further said, “It is evident that if the *ci-devant* king has attempted to violate, betray, and destroy the French nation, it is in the eternal justice of things that he should be condemned.”

Yet the painful problem he was thus called upon to solve must have cost him singular discomfort. All the King's friends attached great importance to his vote: he was known to have great influence, and to be more merciful by nature than Robespierre. Lameth's appeal had touched his heart. Bertrand de Molleville, if we may believe him—but, indeed, his stories are often very unreliable—even went so far as to

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try to frighten him by sending him a letter in which he asserted that, having found among the papers belonging to Montmorin, his former colleague, "a dated list of the different sums of money Danton had received," and a note bearing his signature, he would send both papers straight to the President of the Assembly if Danton took any step to harm the King. "He sent no answer to my letter," says de Molleville, "but I saw in the public papers that two days after that on which he must have received it, he had had himself sent to the Army in the North: he never came back till just before the King was sentenced, and confined himself to voting for his death."

Danton did travel to Belgium on November 30. Without necessarily accepting the authenticity of Molleville's letter, we may very well believe the King's trial had something to do with his departure. He was not sorry to be out of the way when the discussion began. He made a declaration, indeed, on the eve of his departure, to the effect that "honest republicans were indignant at the slowness with which the King's trial was being prosecuted." And yet, whether the words of his conversation with Lameth still echoed in his ears (and other conversations, too, it may be, of which no trace remains), or whether we are to credit Molleville's story, it is certain that till the very end the King's friends reckoned on Danton's assistance. I shall presently refer to the strange and characteristic outcry of disappointment with which the Right greeted his vote in favour of the monarch's execution.

So he departed, to escape the worry that beset him. And he departed for yet another reason. The failure of his attempts at conciliation had disgusted him, and he did not care to continue advances which bore no fruit, nor to plunge head-foremost, as yet, into a policy of violence.

And further, external questions were calling aloud for his attention. A most serious problem had arisen in connection with the conquest of Belgium. France had declared the country "delivered"; and the Belgians, who took the expression literally, were eager to set up a republic of their own. But a variety of reasons militated in favour of the absorption

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of Belgium into France. This matter was connected with a number of questions in which Danton was now most passionately interested. He resolved to proceed to the spot and find out the real feeling of the Belgian people. And he likewise hoped to recover his influence with Dumouriez, whom the Girondins were doing their utmost to appropriate. On November 30 he caused himself to be sent to Belgium, and started for a stay of six weeks in that country.

Dumouriez had entered Brussels on October 15. On the 28th he overthrew the rule of the Prince-Bishop at Liège. An Assembly convened at Brussels proceeded to proclaim the deposition of the Hapsburg family, and despatched delegates to Paris to claim the country's independence. Events in other quarters had given rise to formidable problems. The Prussians had hardly evacuated Lorraine before Custine occupied the left bank of the Rhine. In the south, Montesquiou had delivered Savoy, and the "Assembly of the Allobrogiens" had demanded the union of that province with France. The inhabitants of the county of Nice, which had been conquered by Anselme, had forwarded a similar request to Paris. And Geneva, too, had been occupied by the French troops. All these conquests brought the Convention face to face with a situation that was big with consequences. Savoy, Nice, Mayence, all desired to be incorporated with France; the Belgians desired the recognition of their independence. If all these countries were absorbed into France, what became of the famous principle proclaimed on May 22, 1790, by the Constituent Assembly: "*The French Nation renounces any idea of war for purposes of conquest*"?

The fact is that by this time the ideological conception of peace as it had obtained in 1790 had quite died out. The bitter teachings of experience had forced men's minds back to political realities. And apart from this, the national instinct had once more wakened into life; the very fact that the Germans had crossed the frontiers had sufficed to stir up the traditional hatreds of the French people, and with them its traditional ambitions. The hereditary leaven was working in the revolutionaries whose hostility to the policy of

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the monarchy had been so bitter only yesterday, and the mind of Danton the Cordelier was haunted—now and again, at first, and then more clearly and continually—by the very thoughts that had filled the brain of Richelieu,—Duke, Cardinal, and a “tyrant’s” Prime Minister.

Since war there was, it must be accepted with all the consequences victory carried in its train. Would not the country have endured the consequences of defeat? And what could the corollary of victory be, other than conquest and annexation? Away with all the Utopias of the Pacifists! France must issue from all this struggle greater than she had been before it, and more formidable; once she was formidable, she would impose peace—but it should be a “glorious peace” such as had ever been the country’s dream. Danton put that dream into words. “Our limits,” he cried, and he was the first to say it, “are marked out by Nature!” Sorel seems to think he only embraced this doctrine in 1793, and that after considerable hesitation “on his road to Damascus”; he might have discovered it at Brussels. Yet even on October 17 we notice a feeling in favour of the necessity of conquest in his short speech on the independence of Geneva, which city, he declared, must certainly be occupied “*if that occupation is absolutely indispensable to our own safety.*” At the Club, on the 28th of the same month, he foretold the union of Savoy with France. And this union was duly decreed by the Assembly on November 27. On that occasion somebody called out, “No conquests!” and Danton replied, “*Yes! the conquests of reason!*” a specious phrase intended as a sop to the few remaining champions of ideology.

Now the question had cropped up again in connection with Belgium, and it was even a more serious question here, for to absorb Belgium entailed marching on the Rhine. On the other hand, it seemed a very dangerous thing to allow the constitution of a Belgian State, which, though nominally a republic, would really be the home of a spirit very different from that of its French neighbours. And besides all this, Belgium was a wealthy country; she would feed the war, and actually nourish the Revolution. Even in November Danton

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was inclined to favour union. Only this time he was resolved to go and judge the matter on the spot. Thus, on the 30th, he had himself appointed Commissary, together with Gossuin, Camus, and Delacroix—this last one of his own most active supporters.

The object of the mission, to all appearances, was not to make preparations for the union. For a month past, Dumouriez had been complaining that Pache, the Minister, was leaving the army without supplies, while his agents, the dregs of the clubs, were plundering Belgium. The deputies sent out by the Assembly were to use most vigorous measures to end all this anarchy, "on condition they held all their deliberations in common, and remitted their decisions to the Convention forthwith." But from the very outset, Danton and Delacroix left their colleagues to inquire into the condition of magazines and stores and army accounts, while they themselves assumed a purely political duty: their inquiry was not concerned with the condition of the occupying army, but with that of the country it had occupied.

In every town they found clubs, on the model of the "Society" in Paris. These were all clamouring for union, but their excesses stirred a very legitimate reaction amongst their terrified fellow-countrymen. The "*Statists*," who desired to see Belgium a Republic governed by its own "States-General," were in an enormous majority. And they relied on Dumouriez' promise, in the name of France, that liberty should be bestowed upon the country. The General, disgusted by the behaviour of the Belgian "Jacobins," supported this idea.

Danton and Delacroix, who started on December 1, found the country in an uproar, and the General still in the same mind. But their deliberate judgment, arrived at in direct opposition to Dumouriez's opinion, was that annexation was the only means whereby the benefits of the campaign could be secured to France. The feeling they noted among the *Statists*, who were all shouting, "*Down with the Jacobins!*" led them to fear a Belgian Republic might end by becoming even more troublesome as a neighbour than Austria had been.

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Dumouriez writes that Danton and Delacroix were the chief artisans of the union. On the 4th, the Belgians, scenting their danger, dispatched a deputation to Paris to claim formal recognition of their independence.

The Convention kept them waiting. It wanted to hear what Danton had to say. He came back on the 10th, and appeared before the Committee with Gossuin: from their report, Cambon, eager to see the treasures of Flanders swell the "*Pactolus of the Republic*," drew the only logical conclusion, union there must be. On the 15th, after a speech from Cambon, the Assembly, not daring to decree union outright, decided that Belgium was to set up a temporary organization of its own. But this was not to be done by the "States-General," a body liable to much suspicion, but by the people itself; the elections, of course, were really to be in the hands of the clubs. There was an understanding with the popular clubs, in fact, that the way to complete union was to be gradually paved. The Belgians grasped this clearly; the *Statists*, encouraged by Dumouriez, made a fierce protest. The General, infuriated by the Convention's decree, seemed determined, in fact, to put obstacles in the way of its execution. Danton, who had returned to Belgium, was bent on winning him back; he felt as if his General were slipping between his fingers, and the Nation's too.

His General, indeed—for since August 1792 he had regularly adopted him. And Dumouriez, when he came up to Paris after Valmy, had sought his society incessantly. True, the Girondins had done their best to capture the General. Without actually spurning them, he had preached the necessity of their allying themselves with Danton. At the Jacobins' Club, Danton had embraced the leader who had "destroyed the enemy and deserved well of the country." The "Conqueror of the Prussians" had appeared at the Opera and at other theatres flanked by Danton and Fabre, though he had been seen, too, in Girondin circles, where he had been flattered and acclaimed. Finally, he had departed, after advising the Girondins, still more pressingly, to join their forces to Danton's, were it only for the sake of saving the life of

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Louis XVI. Danton looked on the General as a dangerous man, who must be "kept busy" at the seat of war; he valued his "art of exciting and encouraging the soldier," and was to extol it again from the rostrum on March 8. When Delacroix, in his desire to frighten Dumouriez, used very rough language to him, Danton, we may be certain, spoke to him in far more friendly fashion. And between the two men a most cordial feeling continued to exist. "You have just returned from Belgium, my dear Danton," writes Dumouriez on January 20, 1793; "the important functions confided to you there make you a witness whose testimony cannot be gainsaid: relate what you have seen with that impartiality and energy which are your characteristics! *Be my advocate!*" And Danton heard his appeal and defended him. In this case, too, Danton's friendly pressure must have broken down the General's opposition. He yielded.

This point once gained, Danton had not intended to remain in Belgium. Yet he tarried there till January 14, hurrying from Brussels to Liège and even as far as Aix-la-Chapelle, a true *missus dominicus* of the Convention. The clubs had acclaimed the idea of union. At Liège, on January 20, 9660 citizens out of 9700 voted for it. Over the country in general the progress was not so rapid, but when Danton returned to Paris on the 14th, the ultimate success of the operation seemed ensured. He quite intended to go back to Brussels, and proposed, meanwhile, to serve the cause in Paris, whither, indeed, he might have returned at an earlier date, and this, for his own part, he would have most gladly done; this extraordinary man, apparently absorbed in public business, soon began to hunger for his own fireside. In a letter to his wife, expressing the "pleasure it gave him to have news of her," he goes on to say (on December 17): "Do not forget to look after *the despatch of my trees to Arcis*, and beg your father to hurry on the arrangements of his house at Sèvres. *Kiss my little Danton for me*, a thousand times over. Tell him *his papa will try not to be away much longer*." And on receiving a sad letter from Gabrielle, he writes: "Our friend Brune has exaggerated things when he gives you reason to

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think my mission will keep me away more than two months. *I quite hope to kiss you on New Year's Day, after having spent a day or two at Arcis.*" But even stronger than the man's longing to be back on his own property, by his own fireside, and with his own dear ones, was the uneasy feeling that kept him far from Paris, where the King's trial was in progress.

Yet it would be dangerous not to return for the final vote. He had pushed the advantage of his absence to its utmost possible limit. On January 15 his name once more appears on the list of absent deputies: *Danton, deputy for Paris.* But on the 16th he had to be there, perforce.

He had made up his mind to vote for the King's death.

For since his early morning talk with Lameth, events had been hurrying on. And had he not warned him, besides, that he would only expose himself if he saw a chance of success? This "chance" was a factor in the agreement between Danton and the Girondins, and in that between the Girondins themselves. These men, who, he had hoped, would secure the King's salvation, apparently controlled the majority in the Convention. He would have helped them to save the monarch in his hour of danger, but that they seemed bent, just then, on his utter destruction. Roland, by his denunciation of the compromising secrets discovered in the iron chest, had supplied a terrible confirmation of the accusations against Louis XVI, and Barbaroux, on December 11, read the "enunciative record" which brought the sovereign to the Bar of the Assembly. "If he is brought to trial, he is lost," Danton had said to Lameth. The King had been brought to trial: he looked on him as a lost man. From that moment, he trampled down all feeling and brushed all his half-promises aside.

On the 15th he had left the others to put the question of the King's guilt, and had delayed his own appearance till the 16th—the King having been declared guilty, and an appeal to the People rejected, on the previous evening.

On the 16th the "question of the penalty" was to be decided. My readers are aware that Vergniaud was the first man to vote for the King's death.



DANTON'S SECOND WIFE AND ANTOINE DANTON

(From a picture by Boilly in the Musée Carnavalet)

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From the very outset of the sitting, Danton, who did not care to seem more lukewarm than the Right, had behaved with great brutality, supporting every measure likely to lead up to the death-sentence.

Contrary to his usual habit, his speech was somewhat brief. "I do not belong," he said, "to that numerous body of statesmen" (this was a thrust at the Girondins, though some of them were voting for the death penalty) "who are unaware of the fact that no terms can be made with tyrants; who are unaware that the only way to strike at kings *is to strike them on the head*; who are unaware that we must expect nothing from the kings of Europe except by the force of arms. I vote for the tyrant's death."

Harsh words, these. And yet such was the conviction, on the benches of the Right, as to Danton's real feeling, that till the very end the hope that he would support methods of comparative clemency, at all events, obtained there. On the 17th, when the Assembly was called on to decide the question of a respite which might end by saving the King's life, Danton said "No!" An "Oh!" of disappointment rose from the Right. Those who, following so many historians, regard Danton as a revolutionary of the most extreme kind, cannot understand this strange ejaculation. To me it seems less difficult of explanation: his recent behaviour, and the magnanimity of which Royer-Collard was to speak, had led many to hope for better things. At the bottom of his heart, he may have hoped better things from himself, and from events; and knowing him as we do, we may be sure he was not the least disappointed man in the Assembly. But his plans were never founded on principles, and as an inevitable result, they crumbled away before his very eyes. He would gladly have seen the King escape: and he condemned him to death.

One sentence in his speech on the death-sentence demands our attention: "*Nothing can be expected from the kings of Europe save by the force of arms.*" The words betray the disappointment which helped to aggravate the brutality of the expressions used by him on January 17. The occupation

of Antwerp had roused a most tremendous feeling in England. One wonders that Danton, anxious as he was to regain the friendship of England, should have pressed for the occupation of Belgium in October, and its annexation to France in December. All this goes to prove him a novice in the art of diplomacy: any diplomatic agent could have told him that Antwerp once occupied, England must become the irreconcilable enemy of France.

But though a novice, Danton was a quick learner. By the beginning of January he had realized that the presence of Dumouriez in Belgium was a much greater cause of anxiety to England than the fate of Louis XVI. Pitt, Granville, and the other Ministers were furious over it. Maret (afterwards Duc de Bassano), who was despatched to London, found every door shut in his face. War was drawing very near.

This was a disappointment to Danton, and as to Prussia a still greater befell him. Frederick-William, in his anxiety to secure a safe retreat, had received Danton's agent, Westermann, at his own table. Westermann, in his delight, foretold a complete rupture between Prussia and Austria. But the King, after a period of bitter discussion with his Austrian ally, unmasked his batteries: what he really wanted was an assurance that he should receive his fragment of Poland; now he was sure of that, he was beginning to turn on France again. This failure had infuriated Danton. And further, he had returned from Belgium worked up to the highest pitch of excitement by the sight of the conquered territory, and his trip in the neighbourhood of the Rhine had once more filled his brain with his country's ancestral dream. France must stiffen her back, annex more countries, make fresh conquests, and impose peace, at last, "by force of arms."

Between January 22 and January 31 the Convention received the expression of the wish of Liège and Hainault to be united to France. Cambon pointed out that Nice was soliciting the same "favour." Then it was (on the 31st) that Danton made his appearance at the rostrum, and the conviction that his speech was to be a notable one was soon borne in upon his hearers.

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Sorel, indeed, in his study of the relations between France and Europe between the years 1789 and 1815, pauses, with a touch of real emotion, before this famous oration. And there is good reason for it. This speech of Danton's is the connecting link that binds together the ancient policy of the Monarchy—the French Rhine, and the French Alps, and France, armed with the works of Cæsar, imposing her own conditions upon Europe—on one hand, and on the other, the policy of the new France, enunciated in the crudest terms by the peasant-born deputy from the plains of Champagne, who little dreamt, we may be sure, that he was clearing the way for another Cæsar, then serving as a modest captain in the armies of the Nation.

A decree to unite Nice to France had just been passed. Danton, in the name of the Belgian Commissaries, appeared to request a similar favour for Belgium. But he treated the matter with a high hand: this was no question of merely bringing a people into union with France, but the renewal of a very ancient right; and then came the great words expected by his hearers, words which for two-and-twenty years were to remain the essential expression of French policy: "I say that any attempt to inspire dread of a too great extension of the Republic will be made in vain. *Its boundaries are marked out by Nature. We shall reach them all, at the four corners of the horizon: on the side of the Rhine, on the side of the Ocean, on the side of the Alps. There must the limits of our Republic end, and no power on earth will be able to prevent us from attaining them!*"

Looking closely at French history, we shall perceive that for the next two-and-twenty years its roots, every one of them, were in that declaration—the general warfare, and all its fierce resolve, the great victories, the great conquests . . . and Bonaparte. On January 21 the King's head had fallen. Ten days afterwards Danton signified to Europe in general that the Republic proposed to recover the inheritance of Charlemagne, and by so doing, perhaps, brought Napoleon into being. The rest of his speech presents no interest, compared to that contained in those few sentences,

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which sent the Revolution on its way armed, not with the shield of 1792, but with the sword of 1793—the sword destined, in due time, to be wielded by the hand of Cæsar.

The decree that united Belgium with France was voted amidst a storm of acclamations, and to ensure the performance of the operation by a master's hand, Danton, accompanied by Camus and Delacroix, was sent back to Brussels.

There they found the other Commissaries, and the conquered territory was forthwith divided up between them. Danton and Delacroix kept Namur, Liège, and Aix-la-Chapelle, with the country round them, for themselves. A strong resistance was offered, but the French were determined, now, to break this down. The "Jacobinization" of this Catholic country, with its well-to-do population, had become an indispensable necessity. Spiteful jokers hinted that there was only one *sans-culotte* in the whole of Belgium, the *Mannekenpiss*, but optimists believed that once the red cap of liberty had been set upon the country's head, the hearts of its people would turn towards the Republic. "Nobody," Volney confessed, "can turn a nation into Frenchmen with red cockades and caps, but if we begin with the dress, time will do the rest."

Those early days of February saw Belgium forced into a strait waistcoat—the *carmagnole* of the Revolution. Mons voted on the 11th, Ghent on the 22nd, Brussels on the 25th. But the Commissaries of the Nation had declared "the elections must be backed by force of arms," and the deputies despatched to Belgium by the Assembly applied to the Minister of War for something between twenty and five-and-twenty battalions of infantry and two squadrons of cavalry. The result was inevitable. With bitterness in their hearts, the Belgians cast their votes. The happy days when Belgium had greeted the Revolution in Paris as the dawn of her own liberty were forgotten, now; the whole character of that Revolution had changed; the clever and sentimental men of the States-General of 1789 had disappeared, and the harsh reign of the Jacobins of 1793, with Danton as their leader, had begun.

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It would seem as though Danton's own character had undergone a change, or at all events as though the passions that shook his soul had just then risen to their apogee. Did the death of Louis XVI, which drove so many of the men who voted it in January 1793 (Fouché and Sieyès, for instance) to a sort of madness, affect Danton likewise? This seems most probable. From that January 21 we may date not the natural violence of his character, indeed, but the gloomy frenzy which was to increase as time went on. Had he left his wife on a bed of sickness (she was to die before very long)? That is not impossible. Above all, had not his short sojourn in Paris supplied him with proof of the Girondins' fierce and bitter hostility? A furious altercation with Louvet on January 16 must have brought him to a more complete conviction than ever of the hopelessness of his dream of conciliation. He had been forced to ally himself with Marat and Robespierre, and the King's head had been the guerdon of the compact.

Be that as it may, he seems, during those last weeks in Belgium, to have behaved like some frantic creature. M. Chuquet, a very impartial historian, makes a more serious statement yet. "Danton and Delacroix," he writes, "earned *an evil reputation* during this mission (the second)." They seem to have gone out of their minds: they were rough, brutal, they counselled violence, and besides all this, they appear to have caused a scandal in the disgusted country by a course of cynical debauchery. Delacroix deliberately advised Miaczynski to plunder: "Treat them roughly, make up for all you have lost!" Such suggestions give some colour of probability to a story which has never been clearly explained, and which, after having fed the gossips of the Convention for over a year, was to play its part in the great trial of Germinal in the Year II: I mean the stoppage at Arras, in April 1793, of two wagons which Dumoulin, "Commissary for seizures in Belgium," was taking to Paris, and concerning the contents of which the suspicions of the population of Arras had been roused. Dumoulin, who had been detained at Arras because he had no passport, wrote Danton

a letter, still in our possession, which states, in so many words, that "two wagons of property belonging to him (Danton) and also to the Citizen Lacroix (Delacroix)" had been stopped, and that Danton must take measures to procure the writer's release, and that of the wagons as well.

What did these mysterious wagons carry? "Valuable property worth 400,000 *livres*" was the assertion made before the Tribunal. "Linen for the use of the representatives of the People, the purchase of which had been absolutely necessary," replied Delacroix. But we do not understand why he should have suddenly added the very grave admission that "a vehicle laden with plate belonging to them had been plundered in a village." Danton's denial was far more energetic. "The inquiry shows," he exclaims, "that the only things belonging to me were my personal odds and ends, and one quilted bandage." But his colleague's confession is exceedingly convincing. What plate was this? What was this linen? Table-linen bought by Brune, he declares. "In Lacroix's native place," writes Robespierre, "people can talk of nothing but the napkins belonging to the Archduchess which have been brought from Belgium, and the marks taken out in this country." They had probably fallen, by dint of using them, into the habit of looking on both plate and linen as their own property, for there had been a world of feasting. One contemporary writes, in reference to Danton and Delacroix: "They are always eating and drinking, and with loose women." Merlin (of Douai), one of the representatives sent to Belgium, was fain to acknowledge that his two colleagues "were almost entirely absorbed in their pleasures."

And it must be added that with this love of debauchery they had developed a frenzy of bloodthirstiness which had really not existed in either of them before the King's execution. The men of Liège found all sorts of difficulties in their way; then why did not they make an example by cutting off a few heads? "Revolutions cannot be carried out on tea!" they would cry, so we are told. "The principles of justice and humanity are all very well in theory, and in the works of the philosophers, but in practice, other means must be applied!"

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Liège was soon ground down by a band of terrorists. And on February 11 the two deputies wrote: "It is satisfactory to us to be able to inform the National Convention that the new impulse of energy it has imparted to the whole of France by declaring war against the tyrants of England and Holland has produced its effect on the people of Belgium. The citizens of Mons have just voted their union to France. . . . Cries of 'Long live the Republic!' rose on every side: the town resounded with the noise of cannon and of bells: and sports of every kind followed on these first moments of delight!" We know what lay beneath all this "delight."

But since the operation was being performed "amidst delight," Danton was free to take his way back to Paris. So on February 2, having thus indited one of the vilest pages in his life-history, he departed. So complex is our human nature that he may have longed, after those three weeks of violence and debauchery, to find rest and peace, once more, at his own fireside. But when he reached the city, he found his home deserted, seals on all its doors, his children gone. On the 10th poor Gabrielle Danton had died, and on the 12th she had been borne to her grave, carrying away with her the memory of their happy youthful years, of the days when peace had dwelt in two faithful hearts.

CHAPTER X

THE DUEL WITH THE GIRONDE

The Death of Gabrielle Danton—Danton's Fierce Grief—Attacked, he accepts Battle—The Speech of March 10—Danton and the Treason of Dumouriez—"War and Death"—The Sitting of April 1—The Downfall of the Gironde—Danton Victor and Vanquished.

DANTON loved his wife deeply, as I have already said, and she worshipped him. Certain sentimental historians have been tempted to believe her kind heart was broken by what she heard of the September massacres. It is certain that Gabrielle, a sensible and also a tender-hearted woman, had no love for violence and disorder, that she doted on her husband and her "little Dantons," and that the happenings of the three months just gone by had tried her cruelly. Lucile Desmoulins has described her state on the night between August 9 and 10—starting at every stroke of the tocsin her husband had set ringing, weeping for hours on end, and fainting away at last in her friend's arms. During the past three years she had heard many a tocsin ring, and many cannon fired: she had endured altogether too much misery about this terrible husband of hers: she would seem to have been quite devoid of any personal ambition: no proud hope, hidden in her heart, helped her to withstand the shocks of the tempestuous existence that had been her portion. On September 2 yet another tocsin clanged upon her ears—that tocsin Danton had predicted from the rostrum, and which—in spite of him, it may be, but none the less in fact—had given the murderers their signal. After that he was away for weeks. The only letter of Gabrielle's in existence reveals her to have been uneasy, full of terrors, without him. She pined away. A premature confinement seems to have brought the end. Whether Danton's own conduct had been loose or not, the poor soul's death certainly lay at his door,

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Thus the man's grief may well have been poisoned by remorse. He loved his wife still, with a fierce affection that the sight of his desolate home transformed into a wild beast's fury. He had not seen her again: he was resolved to look upon her face once more. He had her grave opened, and her coffin too, he had her shroud taken off her, and when he had kissed her face, he made a sculptor friend of his, Deseine, one of Pajou's pupils, take a cast of the poor woman's features. The bust is still in existence: it was exhibited in the Salon of 1793, and thus described: "Portrait of the Citoyenne Danton, exhumed, and the cast taken, seven days after her death." It passed into the possession of the Troyes Museum, where it now stands. Its pedestal bears a similar inscription. When all this was done, Danton laid his wife back in her grave. The incident supplies an eloquent picture of his frenzied nature.

His sorrow must have been overwhelming, for every one about him strove to soothe it. Interesting, in this connection, is Robespierre's letter of condolence. "If, amidst the only misfortunes capable of shaking a soul like thine, the certainty of having a *tender and devoted friend* may bring thee some consolation, I offer that to thee. *I love thee better than ever, and till death. From this moment forward I am thee.* Close not thy heart to the words of an affection that shares all thy suffering. Let us weep together for our friends, and *let us make the tyrants who are the authors of our public misfortunes and our private woes, realize sharply the effects of our deep sorrow.* . . . I should have gone to see thee, had I not respected the first moments of thy legitimate affliction. Embrace thy friend. Robespierre."

Collot d'Herbois thought it incumbent on him to publish abroad the sorrow felt by Danton's friends. In a speech delivered at the Jacobins' Club, he referred to Gabrielle's death, and, incredible though it would seem, endeavoured to use it against enemies as to his struggle with whom Danton, according to the speaker's view, had hesitated for too long a time. "The Girondins have brought about the death of a Citizeness whom we regret, for whom we all of us shed tears.

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Ah! let us pay her the tribute of those tears! The generous wife of Danton deserves them well! Her husband was away, she was stretched upon her bed: she had just brought another citizen into the world. Roland and his partisans seized on the opportunity afforded them by Danton's absence. *The cowards! They represented him as having pointed out the victims whose throats were to be cut on the 2nd and 3rd of September! When she read this infamous imputation in the newspapers, his wife received her death-blow.* Those who know how this woman loved Danton will be able to conceive her suffering," etc.

Meanwhile a certain anxiety was abroad: would Danton allow himself to sink under the blow? Delacroix wrote him from Belgium: "I have heard of the loss thou hast just sustained. I know it to be irreparable: but after all, thou art a father, thou owest thyself to thy children and to the Republic! Leave Paris, leave the care of thy business matters to thy brother-in-law, and come to Brussels: here thou shalt find a friend who will comfort thy distress and wipe away thy tears!"

Thus each one sought solely to draw Danton in his own direction, cast him back into the vortex, use his sorrow to render him yet more terrible. And Gabrielle Danton, the unhappy victim of these struggles, was dragged out of her grave twice over, first by her husband's own grisly whim, and then thanks to the hateful interference of politicians. Yet the priest of Saint-André-des-Arcs, whom the magistrate—so the official report tells us—met on the staircase, as the body of the "Citizeness Danton" was carried away for burial, had pronounced the words "Requiescat in pace" over her poor corpse. But who, even among the dead, might dare to hope for "peace" in those dread times?

Peace, at that moment, was the very last thing Danton was to know. The King's death-sentence, Gabrielle's death, the attacks which, at bottom, rankled in his heart, the distressing anxieties of his position, private and public alike, must all have combined to exacerbate his misery. No touch of balm was laid on the cruel wound this death had wrought him.

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On November 30 he had spoken, with an emotion tinged, perhaps, with regret, of the priest, that "*man of consolation*," to whom childhood, youth, old age, all owed some glimpse of happiness. But there was no place for "the man of consolation" beside the ravaged hearth of such a man as Danton!

He must have shut himself up with his sorrow. Between February 17 and March 8 he never showed his face in the Convention. Yet on March 3, yielding to Delacroix's appeal, he took his way to Belgium. On the 5th we find him at Brussels organizing the National Guard: his intention at that moment was to hurry on to Liège, then threatened by the Austrian forces.

In the course of the preceding fortnight, in fact, the situation had become terribly alarming. Dumouriez had invaded Holland on February 17, and had been almost immediately forced to retire. The Austrians had fallen on Belgium: on March 3 they were threatening Miranda at Liège, on the 5th they drove him out of the town. Belgium, in a quiver, stood awaiting her deliverance from the Jacobins by the Austrian arms. On the 7th the Commissaries of the Convention met at Brussels, and decided to "despatch Danton and Delacroix to Paris to hasten strong measures." They tore back to Paris, and appeared in the Convention on the 8th, booted and spurred. Delacroix reported what had happened. Then Danton, gloomy and resolute, went to the rostrum.

"Several times over," he said, "we have learnt by experience that the French character is so constituted that *only in the face of danger does it resume possession of all its energies*. Well, the time has come. Yes, we must say it to the whole of France: if you do not fly to the help of your brothers in Belgium, if Dumouriez is surrounded, if his army has to lay down its arms, how shall any man calculate the incalculable misfortunes of such an event? The destruction of the public fortune, the death of 600,000 Frenchmen, may follow on it! Citizens, there is not a moment to be lost!" Paris must instantly "give France the impulse which had brought forth triumph in the preceding year." Commissaries from the Convention should hurry to every Section, and there call on

the citizens to fly to the rescue of Belgium: France would follow Paris. The motion was duly passed. Its author really seemed to have harked backwards several months, long previous to the period of his momentary dream—that of an amicable Revolution. It was to be a terror-striking Revolution, now! This attitude was in accordance with his own sensations—those of a sick man, devoured by a fever. His prostration once over, he had fallen into a state of delirious excitement. None but the most ferocious sentiments now found a home in that embittered soul. No longer was his hand outstretched in friendship. If the Girondins continued their attacks on him—if, what was more, they threatened to hamper the action of the Revolution—he would crush them utterly.

And they continued their furious attacks. On January 16, when Danton intervened, after a despotic fashion, as it seemed, in the debate that ended in the vote on the King's sentence, Louvet exclaimed, "*Danton, thou art not yet the King!*" He entered a fierce protest, and to show, no doubt, he was not the man to accept a blow without returning it, moved, on the 21st, that Roland should be dismissed, "for the good of the Republic." Yet in the course of that very speech, he once more "adjured" the Girondins, and Brissot especially, to make a frank acknowledgment of his efforts "to bring about union everywhere"; and exclaimed, "*I desire to be known,*" a final appeal to which Roland and his adherents, all resolved to "mis-know" him, turned a deaf ear.

Meanwhile Danton had made the most of his advantage over these men. The *Commission of General Defence*, renewed, at his request, on January 21, had been crammed with deputies of the Mountain, and he had himself been one of its earliest members. But this check infuriated his enemies, whose pamphlets bristled with denunciations of "the new Cromwell," and the "agent of the d'Orléans." Absorbed in his Belgian mission, he vouchsafed no reply.

Then Gabrielle's death, skilfully turned to account by Robespierre, Collot, and the rest, fell upon him and overwhelmed him. These men assured him his wife had been

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killed by slanders put about by the Girondins. When, after weeks spent in a state of concentrated fury, he made his reappearance at the rostrum, his countenance wore a still more ferocious look. Generally speaking, the speeches he delivered during the month of March are marked by a sort of frenzy: the fury, men said, of a wild beast bereaved of its mate. Though this frenzy threw the statesman off his balance now and then, it certainly inspired the orator: the eleven speeches belonging to the period between March 8 and April 1 are some of the most eloquent he ever made: but what a mischief the passionate tribune wrought the conciliatory politician!

Was he bent, in his rage, on hastening the end? Was he behind the leaders who strove to stir up Paris against the Girondins on March 9 and 10? That may be. The signal came from the Cordeliers. In any case, after the riot failed, he opposed Vergniaud's demand for the punishment of the culprits. Yet one sentence pronounced by the great Girondin leader might well have arrested his attention: "It is to be feared that the Revolution, like Saturn, may end by devouring all her children in succession." The execution of the Girondins, within the space of eight months, was to prove the truth of Vergniaud's saying, and Danton's own fate was to supply a further proof of it before thirteen months were out.

If Danton really desired the world should close its eyes to the facts of the riot, this was partly because the support of Paris was necessary at the moment. Even as in 1792, "the country was in danger." Dumouriez was retreating, and threatening, in his exasperation, to commit treason into the bargain. Once more everything seemed about to crumble into pieces. Far from repressing the spirit of the Revolution, it must be stirred to its highest point of excitement, great measures, "revolutionary measures," must be taken. And Danton, his eyes bent threateningly upon the Right, demanded them.

On March 10 he made two speeches: the morning speech is that of a great patriot: the evening speech is the utterance of a revolutionary leader whom the most trivial incident would throw into a state of fierce excitement.

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His appeal to the national courage was magnificent: "All we need is men, and France swarms with men!" These were his opening words. France must spring to her feet. And against whom was the blow to be directed? Here we recognize Danton, the political genius. Casting away his former sympathy for England, his clear vision recognized that country to be the key-stone, henceforward, of the Coalition. England, from that day, was to strive to drown French liberties under a lavish stream of gold. Bonaparte, in later days, poured forth perpetual denunciations of Albion, the eternal enemy of France. But Bonaparte only had to cast a backward glance over the drama that had been in gradual enactment ever since the year 1793. In that year 1793 none but a very singular political instinct could have so unerringly discovered the identity of the real foe of France. . . . From that moment France was "Rome," England was "Carthage." But how bring Carthage to her knees? By striking at her commerce (here we have the idea of a blockade already). "Let us lay hands on Holland, and Carthage will be ours!" Driven to starvation, England would send Pitt about his business, and amend her ways.

On this clear statement of the situation followed a passionate appeal to the nation's energy. "Let your Commissaries depart instantly—this very night—let them say to the rich men, 'Your wealth must pay for our efforts: the people has nothing but its own blood, it is giving that lavishly: Come, ye wretches, pour out your money!' . . . Firmness is what we need. . . . There has been a lack of that. . . . I was in a position just like this one when the enemy entered France. I said then to the sham patriots, 'Your dissensions are harming the cause of liberty: Your discussions are shameful: I cast you all off, you are traitors, every one of you!' 'Let us beat the enemy first, and then we will dispute,' I said. 'What matter to me, so long as France is free, whether my own name be branded or not? I have allowed myself to pass for a bloodthirsty ruffian! Let us quaff the blood of all the enemies of humanity, but at least let Europe be free.'" And after further appeals, thrilling, heartrending, as it were,

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"Fulfil your destiny! away with passion! away with quarrels! let us follow the wave of Liberty!" The speech, punctuated by outbursts of applause, ended amidst an ovation which, so the reports assure us, was "universal."

This was Danton at his best. But he had pleaded with the nation for money and soldiers, that was all: those about him wanted something more: the "Mountain" was bent on the establishment of the Terror: a Revolutionary Tribunal there must be. Between the morning and the evening sittings Danton had adopted the idea. The motion was proposed: the Right still hoped to elude the difficulty; at six o'clock the sitting was just about to rise, when Danton rushed to the rostrum, and in a ringing voice exclaimed, "I call on all good citizens to remain at their posts!" So terrible was his accent that every man stayed motionless, "in profound quiet."

"What!" he cried, "when Dumouriez may possibly have been surrounded, you would disperse without having taken strong measures against the internal enemies who are braving the People? *Snatch them yourselves from the popular vengeance!*" The phrase woke terrible memories. A voice cried out "*September!*" Then, once more, Danton excused the massacres: if a Tribunal had been in existence, they would never have taken place. Therefore the lesson must be laid to heart. "Let us be terrible ourselves, so as to prevent the People from being terrible!" He asked for the organization of a Tribunal and an Executive, both of them invested with stronger powers. His tone must have been haughty, for somebody on the Right called out, "*You behave like a King!*" and he retorted, "*And you talk like a coward!*" He persisted, besought, implored, was applauded, carried the motion, and secured the creation of the Tribunal before which, after the Queen and the Girondins, he was himself to be haled within a year.

But the strengthening of the executive power was even more necessary, in his opinion, than the establishment of the Tribunal. The weakness of the Government arose from the mistake into which the Constituent Assembly had fallen

—that of forbidding any deputy to hold office. Thanks to this arrangement the ministries could only be confided to subordinates, and hence arose a dangerous state of inaction on the Council's part. Evidently Danton himself was growing weary of playing the part of a mere exciter, so long as he remained a member of the Assembly. He tried, no doubt, to impart an appearance of disinterestedness to his proposal; "swearing for his country" that "he would never accept any ministerial post," he demanded that deputies in general should be allowed to join the Ministry. Who, indeed, amongst these deputies, failed to "feel the necessity for a great deal of cohesion" between the agents of the executive power, and the members "charged with the external defence of the Revolution"?

The motion was both realistic and practical in spirit. But so violent were the charges of a desire for dictatorship levelled against its author that none but an incredibly bold man would have dared to formulate it at all. His precautions failed to appease; Larevellière, with his sharp voice, stood up to oppose "*a fresh tyranny.*" He did not hesitate to stir up all the Assembly's latent suspicion of the "*men of exceeding boldness*" whose advent to power might very possibly be the signal for the dissolution of the Assembly. "I shall not cease," added this member of the Right, "*my pursuit of these robber tyrants, who, well housed, well fed, well clothed, and leading a life of pleasure, as they do, rise up furiously against any man enjoying a certain ease of fortune.*" The allusion was evident: delighted, the Right acclaimed the hunch-back, swept the Centre with it, and the very Mountain left Danton in the lurch. He withdrew his proposal—the most reasonable he had put forward. But Louvet, in his pamphlet on the "Orléans faction," was to exclaim that "Danton had revealed one of the most important portions of his plan" and failed ingloriously. Whether this were slander, or a lucky guess, Danton must have carried away fresh grounds for fury from this sitting of the Assembly.

He judged, and rightly, that the *Commission of Defence*, the majority in which had once more passed to the Girondins,

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was incapable of making head against a really frightful situation.

Dumouriez, in his exasperation, was threatening the Convention. On the 12th he had written the President a comminatory letter, which he, in great alarm, laid before the Commission privately. For a moment the interests of the members of the Commission, both Girondin and Dantonist, appeared identical. All of them had put the General forward and had even squabbled to possess him. The existence of the letter was concealed, and it was settled that Danton and his faithful Delacroix, with a few other men, should forthwith start for Belgium, and bring the troublesome Dumouriez to reason.

The General and the Tribune had remained on friendly terms. A year later, Robespierre was to endeavour to crush his foe under the weight of this memory : Danton, according to him, had been the General's accomplice, had prepared his way to a dictatorship, and instigated the unsuccessful riot of March 10 to provide him with the pretext for an armed intervention in Paris. All this strikes me as very unlikely. Danton nursed no dreams of a Cæsar, but Dumouriez, whom he considered a good military leader (this fact he had proclaimed on March 10), was necessary to the defence of the country. It was Delacroix and Danton who had suggested, at the sitting of the Commission on the 14th, that an effort should be made to retrieve the unfortunate fellow, who, so Danton asserted, "had lost his head as to politics," but "still possessed his military talents." The Commissaries were either to "cure him" or "strangle him."

It was not till the 20th that Danton was able to join the General at Louvain. Dumouriez, who had been beaten at Neerwinden, was beside himself. Danton clasped him in his arms, "wheedled him," persuaded him to hand over a written retraction, and took his way back to Paris on the 21st.

Dumouriez had not been sincere. Once Danton had departed, he prepared to play the traitor. This was foreseen by the Commissaries who had remained in Belgium : in three

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letters to Danton, dated March 25, 28, and 29, Delacroix warned his friend that the General was becoming decidedly "dangerous," and advised his arrest. These confidential letters suffice to destroy the legend of the "complicity" of Danton with Dumouriez.

The event proved Delacroix to be right. On April 4, not finding his army the docile instrument on which he had reckoned, Dumouriez suddenly sought refuge in the Austrian camp.

For every one these events were big with consequences—for Danton most of all. No doubt they dealt a blow to the Gironde, for the Gironde had been supporting the General since the year 1782; but Danton had adopted his cause more openly still: and had defended it, within the few preceding days, with a tenacity which was beginning, as Thibaudeau tells us, to cause "astonishment." Now even on the 28th a rumour had gone round that Dumouriez, in spite of Danton's asseverations, was really playing the traitor. Girondins and Dantonists forthwith strove to overwhelm each other with the onus of this accusation. The Girondins, indeed, would seem to have been first in the field. They are said to have demanded Danton's arrest, and as a matter of fact a report of his arrest did gain currency. In any case, so fierce did the onslaught become, from the political salons to the Assembly itself, that Danton, in his exasperation and alarm, at last determined to give battle. Henceforth there was to be no quarter on either side.

To the very last—in spite of the rage that overmastered him at certain moments—Danton had hoped for an understanding. On March 15 a supreme effort at reconciliation had been made. Conferences were opened: Bancal, a member of the Girondin party, expressed a hope that "something might come of these fraternal conferences, in the course of which truths had been told on both sides." Vergniaud favoured an agreement. But the hostility of the Roland salon was greater than ever, and greater, too, the hatred of Robespierre, sitting perched upon his Mountain. Still, at a final interview, Danton pressed for a settlement: concord,

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he said, must be built up on oblivion of all by-gones : brutally Guadet replied, "Everything, everything, *except immunity for the cut-throats and their accomplices!*" Danton stood stock still as though the insult had taken his breath away. But Guadet cried out again, "Let it be war, and let one side perish!" Then the other, moved at the sight of the abyss the words had opened before the feet of them all, caught Guadet by the hand, and looking at him fixedly, exclaimed, "Guadet, Guadet, thou art bent on war? Thou shalt have death!"

Thus were the bridges broken, and the campaign against the Gironde begun. Robespierre, whom Danton supported, was bent on driving the party out of its positions. On March 25 the Convention replaced the *Commission of Defence*, in which the Girondins held a majority, by a *Committee of Public Safety*, from which the Right, in a minority from the very outset, was shortly to be expelled. Current events served the cause of the Mountain by inevitably eliminating the moderate men at the very moment when all things were assuming immoderate proportions. Guadet had desired "war," he was to have "death."

In the eyes of the Girondins, Danton was the leader of this intrigue. They resolved to strangle him with the Dumouriez business, before he could succeed in carrying his undertaking through.

On the 30th they provoked him with bitter words. The official report tells us that while "several voices were raised to accuse Danton"—notably in connection with the celebrated "accounts"—one deputy shouted that Danton would do well to speak about his mission to Belgium, concerning which many disgraceful reports were already in circulation. Was Danton uncertain of his position? His halting speech produced that impression, in any case. And at the Jacobins' Club, that evening, he delivered another, which, though full of ironic sallies and fervid tirades, betrayed the same difficulty as to any straightforward explanation. Danton's enemies believed him to be embarrassed, and resolved to strike him down at a blow on April 1.

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It was Lasource who laid the match—an accusation of complicity with Dumouriez in his treason. To this Danton replied with comparative moderation, discussed the facts, and demonstrated the differences that separated him from Dumouriez, “the idea of arresting whom he had relinquished solely out of patriotism, in the first place—for the country was fighting against Austria; and prudence, in the second—for as he himself possessed no executive powers, he was unable to prevail against the prestige of the Staff.” The very moderation of this first reply led Lasource to believe his adversary was in a fright. So he went back to the rostrum, and this time put his accusation into definite form: Dumouriez had intended to “restore Royalty, after he had dissolved the National Convention.” Delacroix and Danton had been his accomplices, “*the two ends of the thread of conspiracy being held by one of them in Belgium, and by the other in Paris.*” This, if Lasource’s contention was logical, was tantamount to a demand for his two colleagues’ heads.

Danton had made but one protest, from his seat. But a witness of the scene relates that “sitting motionless in his place, his lip curled with an expression of scorn peculiar to himself, *he inspired a sort of terror*: his glance betokened both anger and disdain: his attitude was a contrast to the working of his countenance, and this strange mixture of calm and agitation proved that he only did not interrupt his opponent because it was easy for him to answer him, and he was certain he could crush him.”

Meanwhile Birotteau, who had followed Lasource to the rostrum, was going further yet: Danton “*had desired to make himself King.*” “You are a villain,” cried Danton, “and some day France will judge you!” But the Convention seemed to hesitate: the campaign against Danton—it had been carried on for a week past, with the most unheard-of vehemence—was bearing fruit, and the embarrassment betrayed by “the accused man” had evidently stirred suspicion against him. The Assembly decreed the constitution of a Commission of Inquiry. The triumph of the Right was apparently assured. Then Danton seemed to make up his

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mind, at last, to burn his boats. He was seen to rush towards the rostrum, his features swollen with fury, resolved to crush those who sought his destruction. Passing along the benches occupied by the Mountain, he said in an undertone, as though speaking to himself, "*The wretches! They are trying to shift their crimes upon us!*" The Left, says Levasseur, realized that "his impetuous eloquence was to break down every dam at last," and its members, all of them on their feet, seemed ready to follow him to the assault. But all in vain did he ask leave to speak: the Right refused it: he was to explain himself before the Commission of Inquiry! For a moment he appeared to give up any idea of forcing himself on the Assembly, and made as though he would have returned to his seat. Then the Mountain rose up again, "and invited him to return to the rostrum and let himself be heard," while long volleys of applause came from the galleries. Danton called out: "You would have the patriots murdered, but the People will make no mistake . . . the Mountain will crush you!" And suddenly, with a fresh burst of fury, he rushed to the rostrum, and held his ground there. At the very outset, he turned to the Mountain, and joined himself to it utterly. "I must begin by paying you my homage, Citizens set upon this Mountain, as to the true friends of the welfare of the people; *your judgment has been clearer than mine!*" Here was the disavowal so impatiently awaited by Robespierre, Collot, Marat, of the pacific policy Danton had been pursuing, after an intermittent fashion, for the six previous months. The Mountain burst into applause, it had won back the man of daring: "I have long believed," he went on, in a ringing voice, "that it was my duty, whatever my natural impetuosity might be, to restrain the powers Nature had bestowed on me, and employ, in the difficult circumstances in which my mission had placed me, the moderation for which current events appeared to call. *You taxed me with weakness: you were right, I acknowledge it before the whole of France. . . .*"

"His stentorian voice," says Levasseur, "resounded in the midst of the Assembly like the *alarm-gun that summons*

soldiers to the breach. At last he had turned his back on temperate measures. . . .”

“Well,”—this was the substance of what he said—“we, who are called to denounce those who, whether out of incapacity or out of villany, have constantly desired the tyrant should escape the sword of the Law. . . .” Then a great tumult arose: Right and Left cast abuse at each other. But above it all his voice resounded: “Well, it is these very men . . . who are now assuming the insolent attitude of accusers!” So furious became the tumult at these words that even the “stentor’s” voice was drowned. But a moment later it was heard again: in bitter terms Danton discussed the charges brought against him by Lasource, returning his assailants blow for blow, amidst the yells of those he struck, and lashed, and tore to pieces. The speech is a very long one. He began by defending himself, foot by foot, repeating, with increasing violence, the arguments he had just set forth: then suddenly all the bitterness of his soul overflowed, and he struck home. The Right had sought to recall him to counsels of moderation and respect: “Why did I abandon the system of silence and moderation? *Because prudence has its limits: because when I feel myself attacked by those very men who ought to be congratulating themselves on my circumspection, I am at liberty to attack in my turn, and step beyond the bounds of patience. . . .*” The great majority of the Assembly applauded his words, and then, affecting to defend Delacroix rather than himself, he asserted that the attack on them both was simply aimed at men who, unlike some others, had sought to soften the “prejudice of the Departments against Paris,” and to secure the unity of the Republic.

“We want a king?” he sneered; if Dumouriez had desired a king, it had been at the instigation of the Girondins, who were perpetually about him. Delighted, Marat exclaimed, “Yes! say something about their little suppers!” “They are the only men who supped in secret with Dumouriez when he was in Paris!” “Yes! Yes! Lasource, Lasource was one of them!” yelled Marat. “Oh! I’ll denounce all

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traitors!" "Yes! They alone," Danton went on, "they alone are the accomplices of that conspiracy!" Thunders of applause came from the Mountain and the galleries. "And I am accused!" Yes! these Federalists dared to accuse him! . . . "*Well, then, I believe there is no further truce between the Mountain, the patriots who have sought the death of the tyrant, and the cowards who, to save him, have slandered us to France!*"

Thereupon he let himself go in a flood of accusation and recrimination against his "enemies." "*No more terms with them!*" There was fresh applause, and he wound up with one of the phrases to the use of which he was addicted. "I have intrenched myself in the citadel of reason: I will issue from it armed with the cannon of truth, to pulverize all my enemies!"

He had not taken three steps out of the rostrum when he was assailed by the Left: the whole party fell upon him, embraced him, bore him in triumph: "*Your Danton!*" Guadet was soon to exclaim. Yes! he was *their* Danton once more: they well-nigh smothered him under their caresses. Quite honestly Levasseur tells us he and his friends had feared they had lost him. "Though he sat on the top of the Mountain," he writes, "he had hitherto been *if not the man of the Right, a sort of leader of the Swamp, at all events,*" seeking to "bring about the union of the Girondins with the Mountain." Now, "transported with electric enthusiasm," they believed—since he had acknowledged they had been right as to his own past conduct—his declaration of war against the Gironde to be "the signal for certain victory." The delirious joy of the Mountain showed Lasource and his friends the immensity of the mistake they had made. They had transformed the man they hoped to destroy into a triumphant victor, and his triumph meant their own mortal defeat.

So genuine was the struggle, that even on April 2 Danton, now quite himself again, was agitating, at the Jacobins' Club, for the recall of all members of the Mountain despatched on missions by the Convention, for "every patriot must hurry

back to the Mountain, to ensure the passing of decrees which would save the Republic and *purge the Convention of all cowardly intriguers.*" On the 5th he moved, in the Convention, that the Revolutionary Tribunal should come into action, so as to avoid "the sanguinary scenes which would be the result of the popular vengeance." He did indeed continue to express bitter regret that union had proved impossible, because, owing to the menacing attitude of Europe, "they must now all of them perish, or all of them save the Republic." But in his own mind the Girondins were sentenced, if not to death, at all events to expulsion: "*Let them take themselves off,*" said he to his confidants, "*and leave us to do the work.*"

Work he did, indeed. The Committee of the Public Safety, which had been constituted on March 25, was reconstituted by April 6: the Gironde had been eliminated, and Danton ruled supreme. This was the *Danton Committee*, which was to direct public affairs in the fashion I shall shortly relate, till it was superseded, in July, by the *Robespierre Committee*.

For the moment let us simply recollect that the very institution of this committee had been a terrible blow to the Gironde. Revenge, it fancied, lay within its grasp: on April 12 it succeeded, in spite of Danton's warning threats, in having Marat haled before the Tribunal: on the 24th Danton's predictions were realized: Marat, acquitted, returned in triumph to the Convention, and Danton, now completely won back to the Mountain, sang the praises of "this festive day, on which an accused Deputy has been reinstalled within the bosom of the Convention."

Overwhelmed by this event, the Gironde was left a prey to the most terrible misfortunes.

The Commune was preparing a riot against the party. To this end a General was needed, and was duly appointed. The Gironde's reply to this daring innovation was to demand the suppression of the Assembly at the Hôtel de Ville, and a Commission of Inquiry numbering twelve members having been appointed, the Right succeeded, on the 24th, in laying

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siege to the fortress. It decided to arrest Hébert, Procurator of the Commune, and the life and soul of the whole movement. On the 27th, when a deputation made its appearance and demanded, with various threats, the enlargement of the Procurator, Isnard, who was presiding that day, poured forth the vials of his indignation not on the Commune only, but on the whole of Paris, threatening both with "total destruction" if they ventured on any attempt against the Convention.

Danton's attitude during these days of conflict had been such as might have been expected. On April 24 he had opposed the measures suggested by the Commission of Twelve: Paris was being slandered: a fresh Commission should be elected, to inquire into the crimes of those who were "leading the Departments astray." On the 25th it was Danton who went to the rostrum to reply to the "President's imprecations" against a people but for whose energy "there would have been no Revolution at all," and a city which "deserved to be embraced by every Frenchman."

On the 27th his rage would seem to have reached fever-point. The offensive tactics of the Girondins alarmed him: if they succeeded, he felt he himself was lost. Thus he plunged into the tumult of the discussion as to the Twelve, and once more we behold the Danton of the great days. "*All this impudence is beginning to weary us!*" he cried from his seat. "*We shall resist!*" and then came a passionate denunciation of reactionary measures, of the plot that was to "snatch the People's magistrates from their functions." The Mountain acclaimed him. And forthwith he spoke out more clearly still. "It is time we should coalesce against the plotting of all those who would fain destroy the Republic . . ." he exclaimed on the 29th. "Paris shall not perish. . . . The sections . . . will surely wipe these cowardly Moderates, whose triumph will only last a moment, out of existence!"

So strained was the situation that catastrophe seemed inevitable and imminent. Danton, apparently, was hurrying things on, and yet, as always, when it came to the rupture, terror seemed to take hold upon him. Robespierre was to

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use this as a grievance against him. "He looked with horror on the day of the 31st May," he was to write. And indeed a rumour that Danton had disapproved of its events was current on the morrow. This is a great exaggeration. Danton felt no "horror" at the sight of the preparations for that day, but he did feel regret, because it must mark the end of his dream, and anxiety, because its proceedings, by driving the Girondins from their benches, must hand over him and the Republic bodily to the Extreme Mountain.

Regret and anxiety together spurred him to a final attempt to calm the fray. Inspired by him, the Committee charged Barère, on May 30, with the duty of drawing up the report "on the condition of the Republic." For a considerable period the authorship of this report was ascribed to Barère alone. It is now proved that Danton undertook the essentially political portions of the work. Knowing himself detested by the Right, and not choosing to provoke fresh ebullitions of hatred, which would run counter to his object, by making a fresh appearance at the rostrum, he preferred to confide the reading of his report to the bland-voiced Barère. It embodied a final plea for concord: "Let earnest men beware of driving from their ranks those whose soul is less in the forefront of liberty than theirs, but to whom liberty is no less dear than to themselves. . . . Let us adjourn our personal hatreds till the Constitution has been voted!" And when the Right, as was very natural, broke out into applause, Cambon, who, being a member of the Committee, was in the secret of the arrangement, was unable to conceal it, and exclaimed to the Girondins: "The passage you have just applauded was written by a man who has been slandered—by *Danton!*"

But it was too late, now, to restrain the populace by any speech-making. Danton hoped the movement might possibly have one effect only, that of forcing the Convention to suppress the Commission of the Twelve. Barère affirms—and Cambon confirms—the fact that Danton, with Delacroix, drew up the very petition presented to the Assembly by the delegates of the Commune, even while the tocsin was ringing

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out over Paris—a formal deed of accusation against the Commission and all connected with it. These men suspected it. They always regarded Danton, even more than Robespierre, as the leader bent upon their deaths. On the morning of the 31st, when the sorely threatened Girondins entered the hall of Assembly, they found Danton established, almost alone, in his accustomed seat. “Dost thou see,” said Louvet to Guadet, “dost thou see what a horrible hope lights up that hideous face?” “Of course,” replied Guadet, “this day Clodius is to exile Cicero!”

Did Clodius desire to exile Cicero? Of this there is no certainty. But he certainly meant to reduce him to a state of impotence. Just about the same moment, Garat, coming upon Danton at the Convention, expressed his fears to him: “Who is pulling these strings? What do they want?” “Pooh!” said the tribune, “you must let them break up a few printing-presses and then send them about their business!” “Ah, Danton! I fear they mean to break up more than printing-presses!” “Well! You must look to it! You have the means of doing that much more than I!” Danton may possibly have been sincere; Garat was certainly right. It is a dangerous matter, always, to send the populace to the assault, and privately assign a limit to its audacity.

However all that may have been, when the petitioners were introduced into the Assembly, Danton backed their plea. “An impolitic Commission,” he said, “had been created: it must be suppressed”: if this was not done, “the People would rise in insurrection for its liberty.” Yet it was Robespierre who pressed for capital punishment. This the Assembly would not grant, but being beset and growing frightened, it did suppress the Commission.

There is little to prove that Danton had intended more than this. May 31 satisfied him: June 2 outstripped his desires. My readers know that on that day the Convention, beset once more, but by a regular army this time, capitulated before the guns of “General” Henriot. We are told Danton was seen shaking hands with this “General,” and heard

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exhorting him to "stand firm." That may be. He had not desired these violent measures, but neither did he care to quarrel with the populace in the defence of those who had so lately been his "enemies."

He still hoped the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention as a sop to the rioters would in no sense necessarily involve their deaths, nor even their imprisonment. A proof of this lies in the fact that he proposed on June 7 that the Convention should "give pledges to the imprisoned deputies." This was the last symptom of any tendency of this kind on his part. He was to mourn their deaths, but after having allowed four months to go by, as we shall see, without attempting to do anything for them. He said, and repeated it over and over again, that for six months he did everything within his power to avoid the conflict, and that they "*had refused to believe him, so as to give themselves the right to destroy him.*" On the eve of his own death, haunted as he was by remorse for having sent the unhappy Girondins to the guillotine, by bringing about their overthrow, he asserted, as his final justification, that "Brissot would have guillotined him just as certainly as Robespierre" —but this is by no means a certainty. In any case, he kept one bitter grudge against them, and put it into words in the last days of his life: by their false judgment of him, these men had driven him into the arms of Robespierre.

His regret was justified, for the events that drove him into the arms of Robespierre gave him over into his hands. Once the Gironde was proscribed, the supreme power passed to the Mountain. But many men on that side did not really forgive Danton's conciliatory attitude during the first few months of the conflict, and suspected him of "weakness" from that time forward. Before long, Robespierre was to take advantage of this fact to eliminate him from the Committee, paralyse his action in the Convention, and finally drive him over the edge of the precipice. In the winter of 1794, when Danton sought the support of the Assembly for an anti-terrorist reaction, his eye was often to rest on the tragic emptiness of the benches once occupied by the Girondins of

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the Right. June 2 was the day of his enemies' defeat, but their defeat, by a strange consequence, was his likewise. A foreboding of this had oppressed him. And for that reason he had striven against his own temperament, for many months, to avoid the conflict, and postpone the final catastrophe.

CHAPTER XI

DANTON RETURNS TO POWER, AND LOSES IT

The "Danton Committee"—He insists on "Moderation"—Negotiations with Europe—Demagogic Declamation and Moderate Measures—His Second Marriage—Danton driven out—He returns to a Jacobin Policy—Robespierre triumphant—Danton prostrate—He retires to Arcis.

ON April 1 Danton had been elected—by 223 votes, and fifth in order out of eight—to the Committee of the Public Safety. This Committee, an executive power possessing nine heads, destined to be re-elected twice over in its entirety—on May 10 and June 10—was to be the ruling authority in France for the space of three months. Its deliberations were held in common, but public business, to secure its proper preparation and execution, was divided up into Departments, each entrusted to one of its members, or more. Danton and Barère received, or assigned themselves, the Department of Foreign Affairs. But Barère was prone, at all times, to bow before the stronger will, and the Department was really ruled by Danton. And indeed he ruled the whole Committee. Before a fortnight had gone by every one of its members, won over by the broadness of his views, and that astounding power of work he would exhibit between two fits of indolence, was following in his train.

Thus he was on the way to recover the power he had resigned, in the previous October, with such deep regret at not having been able to do more than "patch things up." Was he indeed to succeed in doing better now? He did his best to formulate a programme of government. "I solemnly declare," he said, on April 10, "that you will be unworthy of your mission if you do not keep your eyes perpetually fixed on these great objects—to *vanquish our foes, re-establish order within the borders of the country, and set up*

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a good constitution." He still aimed at "fixing" the Revolution and the country—both drifting, at that moment. The whole of Europe was against us, and as Austria had reconquered Belgium, the frontiers of France were threatened once more. Its own defeat and the defection of its leader had momentarily demoralized the army. And meanwhile the Vendée still held out against the troops of the Republic, and throughout all the provinces there was a seething under-current of revolt which the fall of the Girondins was certain to let loose.

So great were the dangers both within and without, that looking back upon it, the position of affairs in August 1792, as compared with that of April 1793, may well have struck Danton as having been comparatively easy.

He was too good a patriot not to shudder at the sight of these accumulated perils, too intelligent a man not to realize the lessons they taught. From the first hour he sat himself down—with Le Brun, who, having remained at the Office of Foreign Affairs, now resumed, and this time officially, his service under him—before the chess-board. And he considered it with perfect coolness—the frenzy which at certain moments seemed to turn his brain, hushed, as by some miracle, into calm, before the map of Europe. Faced by such concrete facts as these, the tribune, in a flash, became the "Avocat ès Conseils" of the earlier days, scanned documents, discovered "means."

It might be possible, even yet, to detach one German power from the other: even England might be won back, perhaps. Meanwhile, one solitary chance of retaining any particle of influence in Europe remained: to win the friendship of the smaller powers (this had been the traditional policy of France), Sweden, Denmark, Venice, and the Porte, who would act as a drag on Austria, Prussia, and Russia. But nothing of all this could be attempted unless Europe were reassured by an exhibition of "moderation."

In a moment of super-excitement, Danton had contributed more than anybody else to the passing of that motion sanctioning the theory of the "natural boundaries," which had

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done as much as the "propagandist policy" to alarm the Powers, both great and small. But Danton troubled himself little about former declarations. He would simply make fresh ones now, and these, perhaps, would end by bringing peace. For this he longed, were it only to insure the fall of the régime of the Public Safety, a dangerous expedient that must be brought to a speedy end, so as to "organize the Republic"—the "adornment" of which might be accomplished later.

The pacific leanings manifested in all Danton's speeches and actions during the three months his power endured were a source of serious uneasiness to Robespierre. Already he cannot have failed to experience both jealousy and alarm at the sight of Danton installed on the Committee in which neither he himself nor his friends commanded a single seat. If this pacification continued, would his own hour ever come? Under his leadership, a whole bevy of men poured forth complaints against Danton, and only waited their opportunity to do better still. On April 6 one newspaper made a reference to Danton's "tortuous behaviour": he was aiming at the dictatorship. On June 5 a Marseillais wrote that "Danton was giving just a hint of his real game." The Clubs and the Commune kept suspicious eyes upon him.

Hampered by his past performances, or embarrassed by the fear of being thought lukewarm, he was driven to hide his best feelings and most sensible ideas as though they had been faults, and cover everything up under the noisy racket of the demagogue. Garat, who saw a great deal of him at this period, shows him to us "bellowing out threats of vengeance that made the vaults of the sanctuary of the laws shake again, and *insinuating* measures destined to bring these vengeancees to nought." He adds: "His transports are nothing but hypocrisies now: the real feelings of his heart are his love for, and need of, humanity: *he showed himself barbarous for the sake of preserving all his popularity, and he desired to preserve all his popularity so as to bring the people skilfully back to a respect for human blood.*" A frightfully dangerous policy: the populace listened to the "shouts of vengeance,"

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but turned a deaf ear to the "insinuations" concerning clemency.

The most pressing need—for the "fixing" of the Revolution—was to reassure Europe, and so stop her advance. On April 13 Danton made his appearance at the rostrum to mitigate the effect of a step taken by Robespierre, who, bent on his Macchiavellian war-policy, had "demanded sentence of death on the cowards who should suggest any composition with the enemies of the Republic." This would have cut off the new Committee from any possibility of taking diplomatic action. Without directly opposing Robespierre, Danton affected a desire to explain his motion. "It was time," he said, "that the Convention should make Europe aware that it *knew how to ally policy with republican virtues.*" The decree as to the propagandist action of the Republic caused him special anxiety: "In a moment of enthusiasm you have passed a decree the motive of which was certainly a noble one, since by it you bound yourselves to give your protection to all nations who might desire to resist the oppression of their tyrants. . . . Citizens, before all things *we must think of the preservation of our body politic, and found the greatness of France.* Let the Republic settle herself firmly, and France, by her enlightenment and her energy, will attract all the other peoples." For a week past this man had been managing the foreign business of his country: the deputies realized he was asking to be allowed a free hand: the Assembly declared it would not "intermeddle in any fashion with the government of the other powers." The form of the expression was Danton's, it made the way clear before him.

He immediately caused it to be communicated to the smaller powers: the Swiss, Geneva, the King of Sardinia, were reassured. Sweden had already sent the Baron de Staël back to Paris; Danton showered allurements upon him: an alliance with the successors of Gustavus-Adolphus, with the traditional allies of the old Monarchy, would be an enormous advantage! A whole corps of diplomatists was collected and dispatched to the minor courts: Verninac was sent to Stockholm, Grouvelle to Copenhagen, Descorches to Dresden,

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Bourgoing to Munich, Desportes to Stuttgart, Maret to Naples, Chauvelin to Florence: Semonville went as far as Constantinople. Thanks either to their birth or their opinions, every one of these agents was an object of suspicion to the Clubs. What did Danton care? The negotiations would have to be carried on according to the old formulas, and these agents of the old diplomacy were acquainted with them. Secondarily, certain among them were to labour—Sorel has disentangled this complicated skein of diplomacy with wonderful accuracy—by means of the most incredible artifices, when necessary, to set Prussia and Austria by the ears. As far as England was concerned, the taking of Antwerp was the one point that had made her furious: and now France had lost Antwerp: Danton was too glad the doctrine of the natural boundaries should be allowed to slumber. Did all this effort produce any result? Full of confidence, Danton was heard to exclaim: "Before long you will know the dissolution of the league of Sovereigns is at hand!"

England did, in fact, hold out some hope. Liberals in that country wrote Danton that the wise decree of April 13 was "an act that precluded the re-establishment of peace." Prussia at once allowed herself to be tempted to negotiate. Certain interviews which stirred Austrian anxieties took place at Metz. And even at Vienna Marie-Antoinette's danger softened the uncompromising attitude of the Government. The captive Queen might well serve for a bait in the negotiations. She played an important part, in fact, in all these happenings: Naples, Stockholm, Florence, London, all made her deliverance an indispensable condition for any attempt at agreement. Anyhow, and everywhere, negotiations had begun by the beginning of July, and might very possibly have ended in a peace. The fall of Danton was to bring them all to nought.

Yet he had not desired peace at any price. It is in the course of this fresh period of his power that we see him develop that *nationalism* the accents of which reveal something better than an oratorical method. The "country" of which he had talked so much was becoming more to him

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than a mere philosophic entity, it was a concrete thing—it was *France*. He had a splendid confidence in France, and particularly in her soldiers. "There is not a man of them," he cried, "who does not believe he is worth more than 200 slaves!" With them there was no cause for fear: if France failed to induce the Coalition to give way by the self-evident proof of her return to reason denoted by the vote of April 13, she would break it down by sheer force of arms. To attain that end, the French warrior going forth to fight must not say, as in the old days, "Ah! if my lady saw me!" He must say, "Ah! if my country saw me!" His passionate asseverations were received with acclamations, they won him that continuance of his popularity which he believed indispensable, if he was to be moderate. He strengthened it by delivering orations more demagogic, unfortunately, than patriotic: on June 13 he congratulated the Parisians on their behaviour on May 31, and by this justification of the riot earned the applause of the Club, where, on the 14th, Bourdon (of the Oise) saluted him, in his excitement, with the words: "Danton! You saved the Republic yesterday!" To which he replied: "My revolutionary daring shall equal yours, and I will die a Jacobin!"

Meanwhile he was engaged, with his friend Héroult de Séchelles, in framing the Constitution, which, so he asserted on May 29, must "be on the most democratic basis." Was not the People "essentially good"? The Constitution conceived in this spirit was to be "the battery to shower grape-shot on the foes of liberty."

All this demagogue's talk hid, as Garat has told us, and as we ourselves have noted, attempts—somewhat clumsy attempts indeed—at clemency. Danton was anxious the defeated Girondins should not be treated as proscribed persons, and this attitude exposed him to the denunciations of the extreme members of the Cordeliers. Paré, one of his own men, who had become Minister of the Interior, showed great moderation: Desmoulins attacked Marat, who "will bring us into a bad business." The whole group looked on the extremists with an unfriendly eye. Danton affirmed, over

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and over again, that the object to be aimed at was not "*an impossible equality of wealth*, but an equality of rights." And while he thus reassured the owners of property, he likewise saved the priests, whose deportation he opposed, on April 19. Altogether he made a great show of tolerance. "If we had a Cardinal here, I should desire he might have a hearing!" And by three successive speeches, delivered in the course of these three months of comparative wisdom, he succeeded, thanks to his personal avowal of atheistic opinions, in putting a stop to persecution. Besides, he added, the best method of rendering the priest inoffensive is to increase education. "Public education is a social debt incumbent on you, since you have overthrown despotism, and the rule of the priesthood." By organization and education the Republic would gain strength and beauty. There must be no persecution.

All this, especially if we put aside certain oratorical efforts, more or less sincere, denotes the state of mind just described by Garat. This man, who, according to his own expression, had "set his name on every institution connected with the Revolution," was elsewhere engaged in driving back the Terror, on which the longings of a howling throng, clustered round Robespierre, were set. So far the guillotine had not begun its work; the knife, indeed, was hanging on the merest thread, but Danton's Committee would not sever it. This was not to be done till the morrow of the Tribune's fall. Neither the Girondins nor the Queen were to go to the scaffold so long as Danton remained in power.

The Queen! She was one object of his anxiety, and may have been the hidden reason of his fall. For every reason he was bound to save her—most of all, because he must prevent the renewal of the relentless struggle with the rulers of Europe. Many royalists, scant though their tenderness for Danton's memory must be, have yet admitted that he would fain have saved the Queen. At a slightly later period Mallet du Pan was to make a written assertion of the fact. Though we need not place too much confidence in the curious story told by his great confidant, Courtois, we may take it as certain that Danton did favour a regular intrigue for the

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purpose, should it prove impossible to procure the poor woman's official freedom, of enabling her to escape. It is even asserted that a letter from Danton to the Queen was seized by Robespierre and ultimately discovered by Courtois among Robespierre's own papers. This may have been the "secret document" mentioned at Danton's trial. One thing is certain: Danton was besieged with applications: Hardenberg, with the authority conferred by his intimate acquaintance with European affairs, asserts that Mercy-Argenteau offered Danton a large sum of money if he would save Marie-Antoinette: Danton, we are told, refused the money, but promised his assistance. A better established fact is Maret's declaration to the effect that "the most healthy-minded portion of the Government," far from objecting to any action by the smaller states, was anxious to incite them to an overture which should exact the release of Marie-Antoinette as the price of their own support. Maret is said to have been charged with this mission. The Spanish Ambassador at Venice must have had a hint of the secret negotiation, for on July 31 he was to write the Duque d'Alcudia a celebrated letter, likewise destined to figure at Danton's trial; it contains this peculiar sentence: "Danton and Delacroix, who belonged to the Mountain party, *have turned themselves into Girondins*" (he meant *Moderates*), "and have held conferences with Her Majesty (Marie-Antoinette)."

This letter leaves us in little doubt as to Danton's attitude and the genuineness of Maret's mission. And indeed the whole of this machination, to my thinking, coincides with Danton's state of mind in the summer of 1793. Desiring, for several reasons, to save the Queen, he was anxious to make it appear that his hand had been forced by the smaller European Courts whom it was necessary to win over. For weeks and weeks he had been fain to look hither and thither for pretexts for clemency and excuses for humanity.

Notably, since the earlier days of June, he had been passing under the influence, a too softening influence, it may be, of the woman, we may almost call her the child, he had just married.

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In dealing with a man so passionate, so easily swayed by his own feelings, we are perpetually forced to seek the explanation of certain of his political attitudes in his private life. Gabrielle Danton's death had cast her husband into a black frenzy, the effects of which the Girondins realized to their cost. And now, when happiness began to smile on him once more, his heart was softening. This double episode exemplifies the man's whole nature.

In February 1793 he was hanging in throes of despair over the exhumed body of his wife: in July the distracted widower married pretty Louise Gély, beneath whose little hand he was to bow his haughty head—so low, indeed, as to accept the benediction of a Roman priest.

Loneliness at his own fireside was the thing that tried him most. "I must have women!" he said on August 26, in reference to his second marriage. What he needed was "one woman," and she a house-wife: I have already spoken of his necessities—a comfortable existence, and love into the bargain.

This young Louise Gély was the daughter of Marc-Antoine Gély, "formerly employed with the fleet." An usher of the courts, in the old days, he had naturally been a frequenter of the Café Charpentier. The two families had lived in friendly intercourse. Gabrielle Danton had been much attached to the little Louise. Did Louise care for Danton? It has been asserted that she married him out of sheer terror: quite recently, one of her grand-nieces has reaffirmed the fact. Louise, we are told, only agreed out of "terror" to a union which she never regarded with anything but "horror." Nothing strikes me as more unlikely. That Louise, widowed at the age of seventeen, should have married Dupin (who rose to be a prefect and baron of the Empire) three years after her first husband's death, and that, after her second marriage (if I am to credit letters I have received from persons who knew her in extreme old age) she should have shrunk from talking about Danton, proves very little indeed. Two facts, at least, and facts more easily verified, prove that neither the Gély parents nor Louise herself felt any "horror" of the

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marriage. In the first place Gély himself agreed, after Danton's death—of this documentary evidence exists—to join the *conseil de famille* for the children of the first marriage: and in the second, Louise retired to Arcis, to her mother-in-law's house, where she was still living on 7th Thermidor of the Year III. Friendly intercourse existed and (as certain documents have convinced me) was kept up for a lengthy period, between the three families of Danton, Gély, and Charpentier. Long before 1793 both the man and the circle in which he lived had been familiar to Louise.

She was just sixteen, and charmingly pretty. Boilly has left us a canvas on which she is represented full length, showing engravings to little Antoine Danton. She does not offer us the full, healthy countenance of Gabrielle, as David has made her known to us. Louise is a pretty brunette with powdered hair, to whom the painter—he was no David—has imparted the mannered expression of his own particular style. But everything about the young creature is charming—the face, with its delicate features, the fresh colouring, the smiling eyes and mouth, the dainty figure in its light-coloured dress. A graceful portrait still preserved in her family (the work of one of Danton's sisters-in-law, Mms. Victor Charpentier) gives us another view of her, quite as attractive, with an expression of gentle melancholy about the eyes that heightens the charm of a captivating countenance. "The wife was young and beautiful," says the Duchesse d'Abrantes. Danton soon fell in love with her: he was inflammable by nature: he longed for her: she subjugated him. On the scaffold, the thought of her was to wring a sob of tenderness from his breast. She can never have spurned that love.

But she was pious. She was bent on being married by a priest, a "real" priest. Danton consented. This fact, which Michelet had from Mme. Gély, has been confirmed to me, in the most formal way, by the grandchildren of Louise Gély and by the great-nephews of the venerable Abbé de Kéravnant, who performed the ceremony. Nothing seems lacking to this strange story, when we realize that the Abbé had only escaped the hands of the September murderers with the

greatest difficulty. Yet the episode is not so improbable as it appeared in those days. We know that Danton, though he proclaimed himself an atheist, was no sectary. The scornful tolerance for priests in general he habitually affected at the rostrum would prepare his mind to humour this pretty child's "fancy," as he no doubt dubbed it. We are even assured he consented to make his confession to the Abbé de Kéravenant. This confession of Danton's certainly is a strange thing, and there is much less reason to believe in it than in the fact of the religious marriage. Still, for the reasons I have just cited, it does not appear so fabulously impossible as might have been believed. Danton was a proud man, but by nature he was hearty and unreserved. If the priest had been warned of his visit, and knew how to perform his own mission, the conversation need not have encountered any very great difficulties. All this is hypothesis. That matters little. If the fact be really true, the incidents of that hour must have dwelt long in the confessor's memory.

Be this as it may, the ceremony was preceded by the signature of a marriage contract which proves the extent to which Danton intended to benefit his young wife. According to the terms of this document—recently published by M. Bord—Sebastienne-Louise Gély only brought her husband a dowry of 10,000 *livres*: but one of Danton's aunts, Lenoir by name (who must have been a mere dummy, as I have already said), bestowed a donation of 30,000 *livres* on the young wife. This arrangement proves the most accommodating spirit on Danton's part. As a matter of fact the natural eagerness of his character carried him away in this case as in others. He had passionately desired this young girl for his wife. He was resolved to give her every satisfaction, in the notary's office as well as before the priest. And later he was seen, more enamoured than ever, carrying his conjugal happiness about with him from the town into the country, to Sèvres or to Choisy, where it was a delight to him to find that refuge for his love-making, always specially dear to the disciples of Rousseau, the bosom of Nature.

The interest of all these things would be quite secondary,

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if, as I now repeat, Danton had been one of those men who can break their lives up into two parts. But he was not. The delights of his marriage inspired him with leanings towards humanity, but also towards an optimism of the most perilous kind. And just at this moment he should have been upon the watch, for a whole campaign was in course of organization, and destined to work his overthrow with an astonishing rapidity.

Robespierre and his friends, thoroughly displeased by all the "consideration" shown by Danton to "the external foe" and the "internal enemy," suspected the civic virtue of the man. And further, this band of politicians thirsted to replace the other, that of Danton, in the famous green room at the Tuileries where the Committee held its sittings. On every side it gathered allies: numbers of Danton's old friends were dissatisfied with his political attitude, and even with certain items of his personal behaviour. On May 10, Desmoulins' former confidant, Roch Mercandier, made a most violent attack on the "*wheedling lawyer*" who had "*gorged himself with huge sums of money*," and called him "*an impudent thief*." Chabot confined himself to informing the Club, on May 31, that Danton had "*lost his energy*." But after June 2 the attacks redoubled in ferocity. Danton, they said on the 7th, never came to the Club now: was it that he looked with scorn on his old friends? He was forced to go down and explain: "he was devoting *the maximum of his strength* and thoughts to the Committee," he said, and was "worn out at that moment"; this must account for his absence. As to his "moderation," he had been forced into it, "*for the sake of winning back many weak but nevertheless excellent minds*."

Meanwhile the assault went on: on June 23 Vadier denounced the "drowsy members" of the Committee. Now the Committee was Danton, and more so than ever. For on June 29 his powers were increased: he was ordered to "follow the operations of the Minister of War," which simply meant that the National Defence was to be handed over to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

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This addition to his influence embittered every animosity, and jealousy, and spite. Marat, who by this time had broken, or very nearly, with Danton, made an attack on the Committee—the *Committee of the Public Ruin*, he called it—and on July 5 Gateau, a friend of Saint-Just's, echoed the pamphleteer's accusations at the Club.

The storm was growling, but Danton would not hearken to it. He was traversing a period of weariness, "worn out," so he declared—exhausted, it may be, by his private happiness more than by his anxieties for the State. Elsewhere than at the Club and the Convention his absence had been remarked: "For the last few days," Beaumarchais writes him on June 27, "you have hardly come to the Committee at all, and yet for two months past I have never noticed the taking of any decision there . . . without your having been consulted."

As early as on the 4th, Taillefer, criticizing the half-hearted way in which the Committee had put down the insurrection (now become general) in the provinces, had obtained a kind of vote of want of confidence from the Assembly. Another fierce attack was directed against the Committee on the 8th, and yet another on the 10th, but no attempt was made to repulse either. One is almost tempted to wonder whether Danton, genuinely "worn out," was not deliberately allowing himself to be overthrown.

On the 10th the news went round that Westermann (his own particular soldier) had allowed himself to be beaten in the Vendée. The responsibility for this lay on the Committee: a proposal for its reconstitution was put forward. This was forthwith done, and on such lines that Danton's own name was not suggested at all, and only two out of the nine newly elected or re-elected members were his adherents. On the other hand the supporters of Robespierre, led by Couthon and Saint-Just, invaded the remaining seats. A couple of weeks later Robespierre himself, now certain that the majority would be in his hands, procured his own election. Never was the supplanting of one band of men by another carried out in simpler fashion.

It was inevitable. Danton, in his turn, had been over-

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mastered by the Revolution. The only acceptable justification of his political plans was bound up with their immediate success. And time must elapse before they could possibly be worked out. Once he had set his mind, too, on a policy of moderation, he should have remained faithful to it. When he overthrew the Gironde, or permitted its overthrow, he destroyed the only possible chance of avoiding the Terror. His victory on June 6 had been a Pyrrhic triumph, and the 10th brought him proof of the fact.

On July 24, when Robespierre made his entry into the Committee over which he was to rule from that time forward, the defeat of Danton was accomplished. He had led up to it himself, by failing, apostle of daring as he was, to assert his real policy, and express himself in accordance with it. There is no policy so useless as that which dares not be outspoken.

His fall may have astonished, but it does not appear at first to have depressed him. The two lessons he drew from what had happened by no means resembled those I have just indicated. He had been wrong to allow himself to be attacked without offering any defence, in the first place, and in the second, to have let himself appear too much of an anti-revolutionist.

On July 12 he reappeared at the Jacobins' Club, brushed aside the slanders heaped on him while he had been "chained to the Committee," acknowledged, indeed, that things were going badly in the provinces, and blamed the Commissaries, who, in the event of their being found guilty, ought to be sent before the Tribunal. Conclusions of this nature were always welcome to the Club, which recognized its "own Danton" once more, and hailed him with applause. The Mountain seemed to grow less uneasy. On the 25th Danton was elected President of the Convention, by 161 votes out of 186. Was this a genuine success? No President had ever been elected by so small a number of members, and Robespierre, meanwhile, was entering the Committee of the Public Safety.

As to this, Danton simulated a complete absence of anxiety.

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To prove how genuinely disinterested he had been when he had pressed, some time previously, for the strengthening of the Committee, he suggested an immediate repetition of the process. If "nothing was done" it was because "the Government had no political means at its disposal" (this excused himself); the Committee ought to be turned into a "provisional government," and a considerable fund of money—fifty millions—should be placed at its disposal. "A hugely lavish expenditure in the cause of liberty was an investment that would bring in usurious interest." For a moment he was applauded.

But Robespierre and his friends had no intention of accepting this gift at their adversary's hand. They suspected him. "It was a trap," so Saint-Just was to declare. There was a report that on the evening he was turned out of the Committee, Danton had said, "I am not angry: I bear no malice: but I have a good memory!" Was he bent on having a dictatorship conferred on the Committee, with the object of destroying it thereby? Jeanbon and Barère feared the grant of this large sum of money might give rise to calumny at a later date. "*No real public man,*" replied Danton curtly, "*should dread calumny. Last year, in the Council, when, on my own sole responsibility, I took the necessary measures for imparting the great impulse, and making the Nation march to the frontiers, I said to myself, 'I foresee I shall be slandered—that matters not to me! Even though my name be tarnished, I will save Liberty.'*" And he stuck to his theory. Some people must have whispered that Danton's only object in strengthening the Committee was to get back into it himself, for he returned to the rostrum, and disclaimed any ulterior design whatever: "I declare . . . I will never accept any functions in this Committee: I swear it by the liberty of the country." The motion was lost, notwithstanding.

More and more open stress was laid on the want of confidence owing to which the proposal had met with so unfriendly a reception. At the Jacobins' Club, on August 5, Vincent, the friend of Hébert, declared he considered it "an

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attempt on the sovereignty of the Nation," and looked on its authors as "conspirators." This was going rather far. Robespierre, not prepared, as yet, to break with Danton for the sake of obliging the Hébertists, defended him vigorously.

This apparent diminution of the tension between them seemed very welcome to Danton. And indeed, face to face as he found himself with the extreme peril in which the Revolution stood, he was once more full of his old dream of complete union. Every one ought to stand shoulder to shoulder, for the danger affected every one alike. "Once more, wretch that you are!" wrote an anonymous correspondent on July 28, "you are presiding over that herd of villains!" and the unknown writer went on to express the joy with which he would see him, one of these days, "torn into quarters on the Place de Grève." He had been warned, indeed, that he would be assassinated as "a wretch" guilty of a desire "to establish the dictatorship of a Committee so as to obtain his share of the fifty millions." A report actually got about that he had been poisoned. The newspapers were obliged to intervene, to reassure his brother-patriots.

All this, combined with the danger in which the country stood, threw him into a fever, and fever, as so often happened, brought him evil counsels. The month of August was marked by a fresh outbreak of demagogic fury, mingled with the most passionate patriotism. He was evidently determined to reduce the Hébertists to silence by the expression of his own civic enthusiasm. He began operations on August 13, with a speech on the subject of Public Education: "Next to the glory of giving liberty to France, next to that of defeating her enemies, there is none greater than that of providing future generations with an education worthy of liberty. . . . *Next to bread, education is the People's most urgent need!*" The words were applauded, and the orator, now quite at his ease, continued in a joking tone, and then thundered forth, "My son does not belong to me! he belongs to the Republic!" Naturally he won back all his hearers. And on the 14th he achieved a similar triumph, when, in connection with the requisitions, he set forth a programme of fierce

resistance to invasion, coupled with taxation of the "selfish rich."

Revolutionary opinion was certainly veering round to his side. On August 21 he took advantage of a spurious letter, the authorship of which had been ascribed to him, to gain fresh applause. On the 25th Chabot was lauding him at the Jacobins' Club as the "man who has made the Revolution within the Convention." And when Hébert still continued his obstinate attacks, he went himself to the Jacobins, on the 26th, to retort, and clear himself of the "calumnies" put about as to his fortune and his marriage. On September 5, feeling he had recovered a decisive advantage, he struck out from the shoulder. The Danton of the old days lived again in his fiery speech on the formation of an Army of the Sections. And even before he had opened his lips "the shouts of applause accompanied him to the rostrum and for some time prevented him from speaking." So spontaneous a triumph must have had an intoxicating effect upon him. His speech was magnificent and terrifying at once. The whole of it is worth reading, for it swarms with expressions of a blazing patriotism: yet it seemed as though the speaker, in his desire to outflank Robespierre, were driven into a disavowal of his own special policy in the Committee. "It remains for you to punish," he exclaimed, more particularly, "both the internal foe within your grasp, and those on whom you have yet to lay your hands. The Tribunal must be divided into such a number of sections that *every day an aristocrat, a villain, may pay for his crimes with his own head!*" And after he had put this policy of violence into shape in various motions, the excitement of his language grew hotter yet: "All honour to you, sublime People! To your greatness you have added perseverance: you are obstinately determined to be free, you go fasting for liberty: you are certain of winning it! We will march along with you: your enemies shall be confounded!"

An ovation of the most unprecedented kind ensued, and was echoed by every newspaper; and when, on the following day (the 6th), he made a fresh speech on the "political

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powers" to be confided to the Committee, and went to the length of accusing that body of "cowardice," the triumph reached such proportions that Gaston, a deputy, exclaimed: "*Danton has the head of a true revolutionary!* He alone is capable of carrying out his idea! *I propose he shall be appointed to the Committee in spite of himself!*" and the proposal was "applauded and decreed." He took two days to think it over, and then solemnly declined: he had sworn he would not belong to the Committee. "If I were to join it, people would have the right to set forth in print—as they have said already—that in spite of all my vows I have contrived to slip back into it." As a matter of fact he did not choose to sit on the Committee, because he did not care to have to fight with Robespierre and his majority to maintain his influence there. But though he refused to serve on the Committee, there was considerable arrogance about his manner of treating it. "I will not belong to any Committee," he exclaimed on September 13, "but I will be the spur in the side of every one of them!"

And then, close upon this haughty declaration, there came a sort of sudden collapse. Let my readers consult M. Fribourg's collection: between September 13 and November 22 it would seem as though Danton had fallen through a trap-door.

He really had disappeared.

For the past month his plan—if this extraordinary man ever possessed a plan—had been to overwhelm the Committee by using every person who was at odds with Robespierre. With this object in view, Hébert's followers had been sounded. But Danton's former "moderating" policy had left them in an extremely suspicious frame of mind: they refused to help. Rumours of a dictatorship got about: the admiration of Danton's immediate followers was expressed without due discretion: in Desmoulins' salon he was never called anything but "Marius": Delacroix, it was asserted, had gone away saying, "It is absolutely necessary that some leader should put himself at the head of affairs, otherwise we shall all be destroyed." The Hébertists were on their guard. One

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of them, Vincent, made an attack on Danton at the Cordeliers' Club, on the 21st. "This man may take people in by his fine words, this man makes a perpetual boast of his patriotism—but we shall never be fooled by him." This was tantamount to a downright refusal to ally themselves with Danton against the Committee.

On the 25th, notwithstanding this, Danton's friends attempted an attack. For the past fortnight Robespierre, who scented the approach of some manœuvre, had been growing gruff and gloomy. Both he and his colleagues had bestowed a very sour reception on several attempts at intervention. This had roused a certain emotion in the Convention. Houchard, the victor of Hondschoote, had been dismissed from his functions, and a favourable opportunity seemed thus provided for the overthrow of the Robespierre Committee. The presence of Courtois, Danton's closest friend, and of Thuriot, one of his adherents, in the ranks of the attacking party sufficed to show whence the blow came. Billaud, one of the members of the Committee, gave offence to the Assembly by his arrogant demeanour, and when Briez, a deputy, criticized the Committee with great severity, the Assembly decided to associate him with the object of his attack. Robespierre felt the blow. He went to the rostrum, and according to his usual habit, endeavoured to strike terror. "Those who now denounce us will be denounced themselves! Instead of being accusers, as they are at this moment, they will be the accused!" The terrified Assembly applauded his words: Briez apologized. Jeanbon put the finishing touch to the rout: the persons who had brought these charges against the Committee, he said, were the remnants of the Girondin faction—the Moderates. A panic ensued: all the motions were withdrawn. But Robespierre was bent on having more than this: he wanted a vote of confidence. The whole Assembly rose to its feet and gave it to him: a terrible disaster, this, for the opponents of the Committee.

Danton had not appeared at the sitting: he was ill. Even before Robespierre's position had been strengthened by the

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sitting of the 25th, the Cordeliers' meeting on the evening of the 21st had warned him of the imminence of his defeat. The enemy had robbed him of his Cordeliers: Hébert was turning his old Club against him. And then, as so often before, he had given up the game, and let himself drop down suddenly. Coming after his triumphs at the rostrum on September 5, 6, 8, and 13, this disappointment was too bitter for him altogether. A line in the registers of the Committee of the General Safety officially reports him as "ill." The news of this illness spread abroad, sowing anxiety in the hearts of his distant friends. "I have been uneasy about Danton," writes Fréron to Desmoulins. "Let me know he is recovered." But his enemies only sneered. "Nothing but a feint," they said, "to account for his absence from the Assembly!"

It was no feint, nor a serious illness either: the truth was that he was horribly weary, "sick and tired of men," as he said himself. Since this last policy of his had brought him neither a return of power, nor a recrudescence of confidence in the most advanced Clubs, all it had left him was his own disgust at having allowed himself to be carried into it. Instead of "holding back the chariot" he had driven it forward, and before long a thousand victims were to be crushed beneath its wheels. On August 1 the Queen had been transferred to the Conciergerie, her trial was being prepared, he would never save her now. And other victims, too, the thought of whom was a nightmare to him—the Girondins—were marked down for sacrifice. The idiotic policy of proscriptio drove him to fury: "*Those who were leading Antoinette to the scaffold,*" he said, "*were destroying all hope of coming to terms with the Foreign Powers.*" Custine had just been condemned. "*Such conduct as this towards our best Generals would make victory impossible for us.*" But the fate of the Girondins was specially near his heart. He felt himself responsible for it: he had intended simply to drive them from their seats, but he had cast them into an abyss from which he was powerless, now, to rescue them. Garat saw he was ill, but "his illness," he says, was above

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all things "a deep sorrow . . . as to what was about to happen." "*I shall not be able to save them,*" he said, and the Minister, to his surprise, saw tears rise to "the Titan's" eyes.

This attitude indicates that his nerves, already near the breaking-point, were failing altogether. For a year past he had done too much, endured too much. Yet it was not the fatigue of his effort that caused his final collapse so much as its sterility: this Revolution, which he would fain have "steadied," was rushing on like a wild beast, and he, who had forged every instrument of its tyranny, from the Tribunal to the Revolutionary Committees, must e'en bear the guilt of all the blood Tribunal and Committees were about to shed.

So he took to his bed, and then, before he was really well again, cloistered himself with his private happiness. He hired a tiny house at Choisy, carried his pretty young wife there, shut himself up with her, and presently took her on to Sèvres, where, at Charpentier's house—the *Fontaine d'Amour*—he seemed to drop asleep. There Subervielle went to see him, one day. He deplored this state of things. "Ah," said he, "if I were Danton!" "Danton is asleep!" growled the tribune. "True! but he'll wake again!" When he did wake it was only to utter lamentations.

But Sèvres, like Choisy, was still too near Paris, where "they" were to die! Garat paid him a second visit: he "could talk of nothing but the country": he felt suffocated, he must "get away from mankind, so as to be able to breathe." And suddenly he decided to depart. On Vendémiaire 21 (October 13) the President of the Convention read the following letter to the Assembly: "Delivered from a serious illness, it is necessary for me, according to the faculty, to go and breathe my native air: I therefore request the permission of the Convention to proceed to Arcis sur l'Aube. I need hardly protest that I shall return eagerly to my post as soon as my strength permits of my sharing in its labours."

A few hours later he hurried, with his wife and children, into the post-chaise that was to convey him to Arcis.

A long white house, the flat front of which forms one end

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of a square, pushed back, as it were, to the far end of the sleepy little town—this is the “Maison Danton.” It is much the same now as it was when Danton lived in it. Thirty years ago his family still owned it. There his sons, who found their way back to his native province, died, far from the Paris which had consumed their father’s life. The quiet house seems full of shadowy figures: that of the boisterous tribune is more difficult to evoke, perhaps, than any other.

In the centre of the white façade, with its narrow windows, a roomy porch gives access to the interior of the dwelling. The series of rooms opening one into the other on both stories would have been dreary enough unless they had been peopled by a whole tribe of bustling denizens: and Danton, indeed, had installed his mother, his stepfather, and the whole of his sister’s family beneath his roof. For himself he had reserved one modest chamber, the only one that has remained unaltered. It is a low room, rather dark: with an alcove between two small closets facing a chimney-piece crowned by the invariable looking-glass: two small windows look on the courtyard and the pleasure-ground, and light up the grey panelled apartment. Danton had furnished it with a sort of middle-class luxury. Between the windows, hung with “cotton curtains with muslin embroideries,” there was a “pier-glass” above a console table resting on a gilt support. There was a *bergère* covered with flowered crimson velvet, and chairs and armchairs to match it; a table “that could be turned into a tric-trac table,” and in the alcove, twin beds, side by side. In this crowded chamber he must have confined his private existence during his visits to Arcis, leaving the remainder of the dwelling to his family.

Behind the house a tolerably large courtyard lay between it and the landed property he had put together with a true peasant’s perseverance—a wood now, a meadow then, a field here and there. The whole domain, nowadays, wears a somewhat untidy air; the trees Danton planted have shot up, tall grass has overgrown the old paths, the little stream in which the tribune was wont to cast his line has fallen asleep, and turned itself into a narrow pond, half choked with rotting

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leaves. There may never have been any great neatness about the place: Danton had been content to join up the various bits and scraps of which the collection had taken him to his notary's office some thirty times in the course of three years, after a very makeshift fashion. The list of his purchases is still in existence: it might be informing, but it would certainly make dull reading. Since the year 1791 the property had grown, bit by bit, to an area of eleven *hectares*. All round the courtyard there were outbuildings—stables, cattle-sheds, coach-houses, pigeon-lofts! when the inventory was taken, three mares and two young horses were found there, besides four cows, agricultural implements, a small carriage of the "gig" species, and, in the loft, two fishing wherries, and a "large net with leads and corks" thrown down by Danton after his last day's fishing, just before he left Arcis for his closing fight, and the scaffold that ended it all.

Perpetually, as we have said, Danton's thoughts had wandered back to this quiet country corner. When he withdrew himself, jaded and sick with his many anxieties, from all the busy haunts of men, he found it impossible to resist his longing. It had ceased to be a dream, by this time. To carry his young wife away with him to his own little domain, where the leaves would be falling before long from his own trees, seemed to him a matter of the most imperious necessity. He yielded to the call, and on October 15 he took up his existence far from the "whirlwind," in the white house set between the dull town square and its own shady garden: if his sick soul was to find a cure, he must have some weeks, at all events, of his dim alcove, his tric-trac table, the little gig in which he and his wife would drive about the valley of the Aube, and the wherry whence he would watch his float and try to forget that human race of which he was so weary.

Lamartine was to write, after a sojourn at Milly: "Six months of one's native air send one to sleep!" And at Arcis Danton really and truly went to sleep. He had taken his way there, with Galba's sentence on his lips: "My peace is undisturbed there, *because nobody asks me to account for my*

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idleness." The words are a clear indication that he craved peace from his friends' anxious pressure even more than peace from his enemies' assaults.

His old comrades, the friends of his Arcis days, gathered about him. Béon, the ex-parish priest, describes him as "breathing the pure air and enjoying the calm and restfulness." At first he stayed idly at home. Bercy-Sirault writes from Arcis, on Frimaire 18, that living close to the Citizen Danton, he had constantly seen him "at his window, or standing in his doorway, wearing a nightcap, and dressed in a way that left no possibility of a doubt as to his convalescence." He was growing careless of his appearance. Now and then, so Béon tells us, there was a "shooting or fishing party," characterized by "the simplicity" of his native province. But his chief occupation must have been *his* woods, *his* meadows, *his* kitchen-garden. Back on his own ground, the longing to increase his boundaries came upon him once more: on Brumaire 14, 17, 21, 27, 28 he was at the notary's again, buying fresh bits of ground, for which he paid 300, 2000, 400, 3000, 400 *livres*. Notary of the Revolution though he was, he never put on his dress-coat save when he had to go and sign purchase deeds at a lawyer's office.

Did he really succeed, by this burying of his past existence, in walling up his memory? Did these six strange weeks of country life pass by without his ever being assailed, in the low white house, or on his fishing wherry, by blood-stained memories and terrifying fears? We are told he never read the newspapers, and grew angry if anybody talked politics, especially on Terrorist lines. He was walking in his garden, one day, with Doulet, one of his neighbours (who was to tell the story later), when another of his friends appeared, newspaper in hand: "Good news!" he cried. "What news?" "Why, read it! The Girondins have been sentenced and executed." Danton turned white, tears rose in his eyes. "Good news! You call that good news! You villain!" "But they were factious fellows, surely?" "Factious fellows!" he echoed bitterly. "Are we not all factious

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fellows? We deserve to be killed, all of us, just as much as they! We shall share their fate, one after the other!"

Gloom was settling down upon him. The autumn wore on. Frimaire was about to follow on the heels of Brumaire. Danton did not seem to note the flight of time. Those weeks, so peaceful down in the country, had been like years in Paris. One morning Béon came to fetch him: there was to be a gathering at Charmont, some three leagues from Arcis. They started, a merry company: there was a regular feast. Danton opened his mind to his friends: he would turn his back on the "whirlwind," would come, for good and all, to settle in his "native air, with his dear family and his old comrades": he worked himself into a rapture of hope. Suddenly his nephew, Mergez, appeared on the scene, having hurried down from Paris. He held out a letter. "Your friends beg you will return to Paris as quickly as you can! Robespierre and his adherents are combining all their efforts against you." He shrugged his shoulders. "Do they aim at my life? They would never dare that!" Mergez pressed him. "You are too sanguine, come back. . . . Time presses." "Go you and tell Robespierre I shall be back in time to crush him and his followers too!" he cried.

But he had to depart. Every kind of slander was current: Danton was not at Arcis, it was said, he had emigrated "to Switzerland." His friends denied the stories, but they were losing heart. So at last he started; at two o'clock in the afternoon of November 18 we find him at Troyes, "with his wife, his two children, a manservant, and a maid." They slept at the inn called "La Petite Louve," and took the *diligence* to Paris on the following day. He went back steadfastly resolved to "crush Robespierre." Had he not left Arcis on August 8, 1792, resolved to overthrow the Bourbon throne? And had he not overthrown it?

CHAPTER XII

DANTON FACE TO FACE WITH ROBESPIERRE

Danton and the Terror—Danton and Robespierre—The Campaign against Hébert—Danton recovers his Ground—The *Vieux Cordelier*—Robespierre first isolates Danton, and then undermines his position—Danton's Friends discredited—His position shaken.

"YOU may win a difficult game, but nobody ever wins a game he has once abandoned." The words were written by a clever woman, some years before the period of which the present story treats. Danton had abandoned the game—abandoned it too long. And there was good reason to fear that having failed to stand his ground, he had lost his footing altogether.

During his absence Robespierre and his friends had advanced with giant strides. Between October 20 and November 17 the Committee had taken a series of measures which practically secured it a dictatorship. And in the Committee Robespierre reigned supreme. The Terror had begun forthwith: commencing in the month of July, when Danton had been driven from power, it had advanced with singular rapidity since his deliberate disappearance from the Assembly, in the first place, and from Paris, ultimately. Fouquier had set up his system of "batches": the Queen, the Girondins, Mme. Roland, Philippe d'Orléans, Bailly, Manuel, General Houchard, Kersaint and Osselin—both of them members of the Convention—had been guillotined, and with them old men, women, and children, too, had already fallen. It was a case of wading through blood, even now. And in Robespierre's own circle there was a talk of sending the members of the other "factions" to the executioner, even as the "Brissotins" had been already sent.

To these "factions" Danton belonged. His position was

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exceedingly dangerous. He appears to have been compromised, before he left Paris, in a curious business connected with some understanding with the rebels in Normandy, which, whether true or exaggerated, had been suppressed by Hérault de Séchelles, a member of the Committee, and which was to be stirred up again, ultimately, by Robespierre. And, indeed, where Danton was concerned, any and every report was willingly accepted: "He had slipped over into Switzerland, and his illness had been nothing but a pretence to screen his flight: his ambition was to be regent for Louis XVII: arrangements had been made to proclaim the boy King at a given date: Danton was at the head of the conspiracy: neither Pitt nor Coburg was the real enemy of France, but only Danton." It would have been a "civic action," in fact, to "cut his throat"! Before long, Robespierre, though he feigned a desire to repudiate these charges, was really to echo them. They were circulating all over Paris. And further, some people now boasted their ability to prove Danton had enriched himself; they even went so far as to declare he owned his father-in-law's property at Sèvres. All this boded ill for him in the struggle just about to open.

For a struggle was inevitable; and Danton, bent as he was on fighting Terrorism and stifling the Terror, was the first to desire it. "The stupidity of the Girondins," he told Garat, had forced him and his friends to "throw themselves into the *sans-culottism* which had devoured them, and would devour him." And thus the reign of bloodshed had come into being. But, he was shortly to tell Robespierre, "so violent a condition of things could not last, it was repugnant to the French nature." The sight of it drew tears from his eyes. If we are to believe the story according to which, crossing a bridge, one night, he saw the Seine all blood, it actually affected his brain. His contemporaries, whether friends or foes, are all agreed that his one object, when he returned from Arcis, was to bring this situation to an end. Dubois-Crancé writes: "He intended to open all the prison doors"; Robespierre was to tax him most bitterly with this intention: "*He desired an amnesty for the guilty persons. Therefore he really desired*

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a counter-revolution." Something not far removed from that he did desire, indeed.

And further, the anti-religious antics of Hébert and his followers sickened him. This party, while his back was turned, had taken a strong lead in the whole agitation, and forced its will on other politicians. On 17th Brumaire the Convention capitulated to the Commune, and accepted, in appearance, at all events, the idea of a Festival of Reason. This Festival, held on 20th Brumaire in the church of Notre-Dame, was the signal for a regular outbreak of *dechristianization*, attended by scenes of the most absurd and odious kind. Here, too, Danton was bent on reaction—and on reaction, likewise, against the communistic doctrines these same Hébertists were propagating all over the country.

But Hébert, being the man who led this double saraband (and even while he capered, cried out for more heads), was, in Danton's eyes, the man to be put down before all others. He would let Camille loose upon the wretch. "Take up thy pen," he told him, the moment he was back in Paris, "and plead for clemency." To carry out this wish, Desmoulins was to found the *Vieux Cordelier*, and in its columns, fly at Hébert's throat. Backed by the virulent journalist, Danton strove, from the rostrum, against extreme measures of every sort, and though the word "clemency" was not yet spoken, he clamoured aloud for "justice."

"The victorious Republic," he said, "ought to be just at all events, even if she be not merciful!" He would "destroy that vile guillotine, or go to it himself," he exclaimed to his intimate companions, for "*it were better a hundred times to be guillotined oneself than to guillotine others*"! But he would not be guillotined, for "in time," so he told Westermann, "he would contrive to tame these wild beasts." Once he had pushed Hébert and his band aside, "the Republic should be organized, and peace with Europe made." And that done, he would betake himself to Arcis, and "grow old in idleness, with his family about him."

"The idea of Danton's party," writes Levasseur, "was to check the fanaticism of the Revolution, and establish a legal

condition of things: but its dream was to found this state of things *for its own benefit*." Robespierre's henchman here betrays the real grudge of such men as his master against Danton's system. Robespierre, too, at the bottom of his heart, disapproved Hébert's saturnalia, and would gladly have established a "legal condition of things"; but he desired this should be done at a moment chosen by himself—in other words, when he himself, having crushed all his enemies, should reign unhindered over a purified Republic.

It is time the fact that, during the winter of the Year II, no genuine difference of principle divided the two men, should be made thoroughly clear. The disagreement between them was not a conflict of ideas, it was a conflict of temperaments—no quarrels are so difficult to settle.

Honest to the point of puritanism, upright in business matters, clean in his private life, careless of pleasure, rigid in his principles, though tortuous in his methods, correct in all his ways, pedantic as to his language, a man who studied everything he did, cold-hearted and narrow-brained, Robespierre must have evoked a smile from Danton, whenever he did not make him shudder with disgust. Danton, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, would talk of Robespierre's "nonsense." He took him to be half vulgar pedant, and half skulking coward. There was something lacking in Robespierre which Danton, in the coarse language to the use of which he was addicted, declared he regretted being unable to bequeath him at his own death. In his eyes, this bachelor—alike in public and in private life—was a mere "eunuch." On the other hand, Danton's conduct, cynical and disorderly, his loose morals, his Rabelaisian wit, his outrageous fancies, his alternate fits of violence and generosity, his brutal physiognomy, his fervid oratory, and above all, his suspected venality, must every one of them have contributed to offend the "Jansenist of Liberty," as his adversary had nicknamed Robespierre. And there were certain things about Danton, to conclude, that humiliated Robespierre even when he stood by him, for—taking him all in all—the Titan was cubits higher than his quondam ally.

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Finally, we realize that even in the days of their "friendship" the men could not "endure each other," in the truest acceptance of the word. The wonder was they had not fallen out sooner. But for a lengthened period Danton believed the other to be his true friend, and Robespierre had felt it more than wise to consider the feelings of the "Cyclops," of whom he was heartily afraid.

This was his opinion even in Frimaire of the Year II. For at that moment he was labouring, with more cunning than vigour, to destroy the two "factions" that were filling his civic soul with dread. One of these, Hébert's, actually sought to transform Liberty into a "Bacchante," and the other, Danton's, would fain make her "a prostitute." The Man of Virtue resolved to stifle both. But "the Bacchante" had lately won a triumph; so she must be the first to be destroyed, and this could only be attained with Danton's help. Thus it came about that Robespierre, though still bent on undermining Danton, decided to support him in the eyes of others. Was Danton momentarily deceived? We are tempted to believe it, for we see Desmoulins flattering Robespierre even while he is attacking Hébert. Or were Danton and his party hugging a plan identical with their adversary's, and did they hope, Hébert once overthrown, to ruin Robespierre likewise? When pressed to pronounce openly against "Billaud, Robespierre, and others," Danton is said to have replied, "Let us leave the tigers to devour each other!" If both men were animated by the same hidden intention, victory was certain to fall to the most cautious player; now Robespierre, infinitely more persevering than Danton, was far the better tactician of the two.

Danton was in a great hurry to speak out against the doings of the Hébert party. His reappearance at the rostrum on 2nd Frimaire (22nd November) was actuated solely by his desire to resist *dechristianization*, under one of its forms. A campaign for the separation of Church and State was taking shape: the payment of priests ought to be stopped. Danton contended that their salaries should still be paid. "The reign of the priests is a thing of the past," he said, "but the

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reign of politics is in your hands." This was a decided declaration of *opportunism*. The opponents of the Revolution had asserted that it would certainly end in persecution. "No, the People will never persecute!" This was his first "insinuation." But on the 6th he made an even stronger stand against *dechristianization*, and, though with greater caution, against the tyranny, of the Terror. Swept away by Hébertist pressure, a succession of priests had been coming to cast off their cassocks at the Bar of the Convention. These apostates filled Danton with loathing. Why did the Convention waste its time upon these "anti-religious masquerades"? And what merit could be claimed by men who had simply been "carried along on the resistless torrent of opinion"? They ought to abstain from "making any trophy" of that, and as for the Assembly, "*its mission was not that of welcoming processions, even those formed by the priests of unbelief.*" The People was sick of it all. And at this point, though with considerable circumspection, he approached the subject of general policy: "What the People wants of us is to enable it to enjoy the consequences of our Constitution." The Terror had served a certain useful purpose, no doubt, but it ought not to strike at any but "*the real enemies of the Republic. The People has no desire to see the individual born without revolutionary vigour treated, on that account only, as a guilty person.*" He went so far as to quote Henri IV, who had known how to abstain from vengeance. "The People," he said, would follow that example.

The Assembly must have grasped his meaning. The Terrorists, at any rate, felt the blow. One of their number, Fayau, uttered a protest: "*At the very moment when it was necessary that the People should be terrible, Danton urged it to be merciful.*" Danton defended himself, and an acrimonious debate ensued. Danton protested his "imperishable republicanism"; as in the days gone by, the Convention would see him propose the most sweeping revolutionary measures. He was applauded.

And he was applauded again, that very same day, when

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he made a great speech on the organization of Public Education; but he seized his opportunity to oppose the worship of Reason and support that of the Supreme Being. On 11th Frimaire (December 1), he went further yet. "Now that federalism has been crushed," he boldly cried, "the man who becomes *ultra-revolutionary* will bring about results as dangerous as any determined opponent of the Revolution can possibly produce!" And he demanded the recall of the extremist Commissaries, adding, in conclusion, "*We have put forth all our strength, let us now use a great deal of moderation.*"

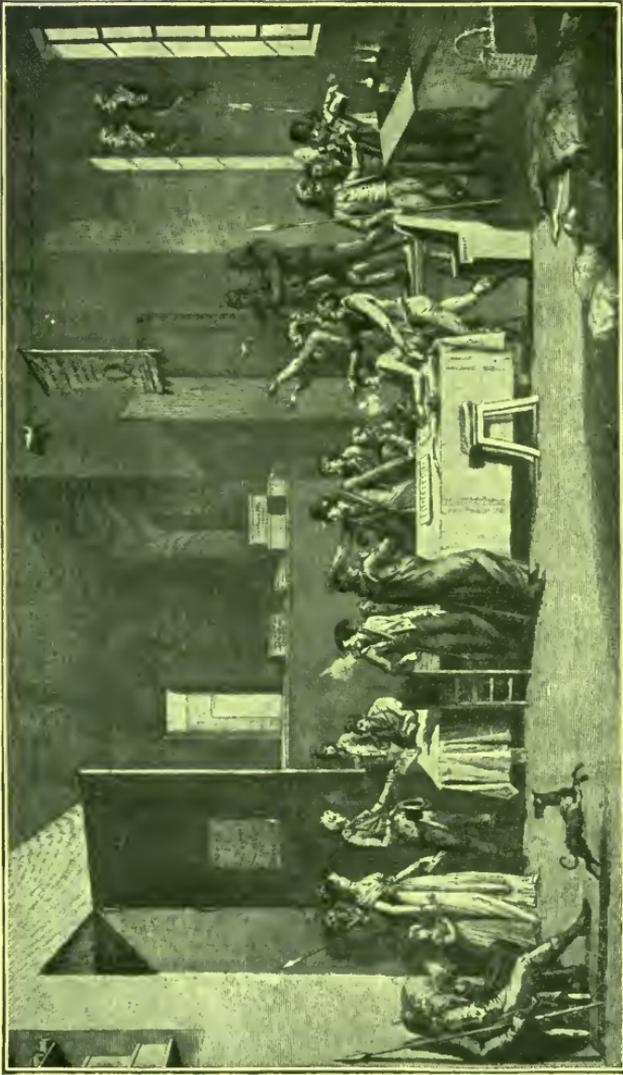
All this was avowedly aimed at Hébert's party, but many of his remarks were a covert warning to the Committee. Robespierre made as though he did not perceive them. This campaign against *dechristianization* suited his purpose. But to insure its fruits Danton must be cleared, for the moment, of certain suspicions that hung about him, hampering his action. Robespierre perceived the time had come for him condescendingly to grant his "old friend" absolution—on certain conditions—in the presence of the whole Club. This was solemnly done on 13th Frimaire (December 3).

Danton had returned to the Jacobins, and forthwith made a quite unimportant motion his pretext for suggesting the wisdom of regarding persons who "proposed ultra-revolutionary measures" with distrust. Hébert and his adherents, thus attacked, had replied by a regular assault, in beating off which Danton seemed to find some difficulty. "After several vehement passages," so runs the report, "spoken with such volubility that we have not found it possible to reproduce their features," Danton ended by demanding the appointment of a commission of twelve members, to examine the charges brought against him.

Then it was that Robespierre, struck, evidently, by the weakness of this reply, and the consequent "disfavour" it would entail on Danton, made up his mind to help the enemy he proposed to use, for a few weeks yet, against another foe, to recover his footing. His manner of doing it, indeed, throws a remarkable light on his own character: to sum up

all the accusations against Danton, and by thus enumerating them, give a still wider publicity to the charges of flight into a foreign country, and complicity with royalist plots, was simply to collect, for future use, all the elements of the accusation with which he was to furnish Saint-Just before four months had elapsed. And further, he took good care not to make any thorough retort on the accusers, and did not fail to underline, with equal care, all that had divided him from Danton, and still divided them. Thus, on pretext of proving the impartiality he desired to show, he really made a kind of speech for the prosecution. For, after recalling the somewhat extraordinary charges current during the past few weeks, he proceeded to bring others of a more genuine kind. While he, Robespierre, had discerned the infamous projects nursed by Dumouriez, he had been forced to complain that Danton "was not more irritated against the monster." He had taxed him with "not having been sufficiently swift in his pursuit of Brissot and his accomplices." These, for the moment, were the only complaints he had to bring against him. Then came a fresh touch of caution as to the future: "*I may possibly be mistaken about Danton, but as he appears in his own family circle, he deserves nothing but praise. As regards political matters I have watched him: a difference of opinion between myself and him led me to watch him carefully, sometimes angrily. And if he has not always shared my opinion, should I conclude that he was betraying the country? No! I have always seen him serve it zealously!*" And in vague language, he proceeded to exculpate Danton from the vilifying assertions current in "political groups and cafés."

Robespierre's friends must have realized that the hour was by no means ripe for the overthrow of the man he was to denominate, before four months were past, as "the rotten idol." Even Hébert's friends appeared dashed by the semi-justification bestowed by the Pontiff of Virtue. For while Merlin (of Thionville) reminded the Club that Danton, among other services, had "saved the Republic on the Tenth of August" by his cry of "Let us be bold!" Momoro, though



A REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE

From an etching after Fragonard the younger in the Bibliothèque Nationale

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he had gone over to the Hébert camp, exclaimed, "No other member comes forward to speak against Danton: we must conclude that nobody has anything to allege against him!" A proposal was then made that Fourcroy, President of the Club, should give Danton the fraternal embrace, and this was duly done "amidst the most flattering applause." On the following day the Cordeliers' Club, before which the Danton business was also laid, entered its enthusiastic adhesion to this act of absolution.

All this was really rather more than Robespierre had desired. In spite of the somewhat ambiguous nature of his speech, Danton's adherents affected to take him at his word: decidedly Robespierre approved and supported their leader's noble-hearted campaign against the extreme party. Desmoulins was full of exultation. The *Vieux Cordelier* appeared.

As happy as Danton in his domestic relations, the young journalist had reverted to his old idea of "a republic that would be dear to every one." Thus he had turned a willing ear to Danton's appeal: "Press for clemency: I will support thee!" Deterred, for a moment, by an idea that Robespierre would disapprove of the undertaking, he now honestly believed, or was determined to believe, that the man who had (so shabbily) defended his friend and leader was joining in that leader's campaign in favour of mercy. On 15th Frimaire, the first number of the *Vieux Cordelier* made its appearance. And forthwith Desmoulins placed his new paper under the protection of "his two friends." "Victory has been with us, because, amidst the ruins of so many colossal civic reputations, Robespierre's still stands erect, because he has stretched out his hand to his rival in patriotism, the perpetual president of the old Cordeliers." And again, "After that tremendous speech of Robespierre's . . . it was impossible for any man to raise his voice against Danton without giving a public receipt, as it were, for the guineas of Pitt."

The thought that he might possibly find himself compromised alarmed Robespierre; this dithyrambic outpouring tied his hands too much; he insisted that all the proofs of

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Desmoulins' newspaper should be submitted to him for the future. Yet in these issues the furious attacks on Hébert and his followers and on the methods of the Terror still went on: "*Open the doors of the prisons to the two hundred thousand citizens whom you call suspects; for according to the Declaration of Rights, there is no house of suspicion, there are only houses of detention.*" The rest of the article was in a similar tone. It was the note struck by the Danton party. Robespierre was shortly to affirm that Danton was the only person who corrected Desmoulins' proofs. This he permitted because the journalist had suddenly turned on the "Père Duchesne": "Hébert! I will be with you in a moment!" and when that moment came, his merciless pen rained lashes on the "wretch."

Paris, too, had guessed it was Danton, masked by Desmoulins, who was raising this tempest. A wave of hope surged over public opinion. The success of the *Vieux Cordelier* was something enormous: the fresh numbers were snatched up at once; the current had set in at last against the "exaggerated party," and so against the Terrorists. On the strength of this movement, Danton quite recovered his confidence, and was constantly to be seen at the rostrum in the Assembly. On 22nd Frimaire (12th December) he spoke with remarkable authority on the "common education," and won much applause.

But Robespierre was growing uneasy, now, at this sudden recovery of favour. On the 22nd he fancied he saw the hand of Danton in a proposal brought forward by Bourdon (of the Oise)—who certainly was one of the tribune's friends—to renew the membership of the Committee. The idea frightened Robespierre. These Dantonists were going too fast. Desmoulins had hardly been writing against Hébert for a full week, and already the attackers were passing on to the Committee. Yet Hébert must be overthrown. What was to be done? Robespierre was thoroughly puzzled.

He called back Saint-Just and Lebas, who, with Couthon, constituted his privy council, from their mission with the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. Saint-Just, whose convic-

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tions amounted to fanaticism, whose icy exterior concealed a soul of fire, who was more daring than his master, and more eloquent, in any case, than he, was generally employed by Robespierre, when he did not care to appear in person, to lay the firebrand to the skirts of the foe. In those early days of February, Robespierre certainly contemplated the idea of using him against "the factions." Did Saint-Just outstrip his master on the same lines? Amongst the papers seized in Robespierre's lodging, at a later date, was a note couched in the following terms: "*Danton, Lacroix . . . Have 2000 men sent secretly to Paris from the Army of the Rhine.*" Do these last words warrant us in the belief that Robespierre was prepared, if necessity arose, to use military force against Danton and his "faction"?

But even with this backing, any frontal attack on "Goliath" must have appeared distinctly dangerous. He seemed to have recovered all his strength, and with it his authority, once so sorely shaken. Desmoulins was winning back Paris to him. Would not an attack drive him into the arms of Hébert and his gang, who, threatened like him, would bring him back the Commune and the Cordeliers? As a matter of fact, several of Danton's supporters were pressing for an alliance of the two "factions" against Robespierre. Fréron was to write to Moyse Bayle, on 6th Pluviôse, that he was astonished to see Hébert's attacks on them, and those of Fabre and Desmoulins on Hébert; such a state of things quite "bewildered" him. Robespierre was justified in the fear that if the Titan felt himself seriously threatened he might pile Ossa on Pelion so as to destroy the Jupiter of the Committee—and he was by no means sure, as yet, that his own grasp on the thunderbolt was firm.

No! there must be no frontal attack upon this man! His undoubted friends, his possible allies, must be removed. Desmoulins must be allowed to complete Hébert's destruction, and be overwhelmed, when that was done, under the reproach of "clemencism." Meanwhile the giant's supports must be beaten down, one by one. Danton was a power in himself, no doubt, but a still greater power thanks to the

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cordial and unwavering friendship of such active and influential members of the revolutionary party as Fabre d'Eglantine, Héroult de Séchelles, Camille Desmoulins, Philippeaux, Delacroix. But all this strength would be transformed into weakness if Fabre could be convicted of "theft," Héroult of "intrigue," Desmoulins of "anti-revolutionary action," Philippeaux of "sedition," Delacroix of "peculation." Once Danton's friends had been implicated, one after the other, in such disgraceful affairs as these, the Tribune, undermined by their disgrace, would himself fall like "a rotten idol." And "that big stuffed turbot will be emptied!" quoth Vadier.

The plan was adopted; its execution was facilitated by the moral condition of the Convention. For two months it had been living in an atmosphere of indescribable suspicion. Certain of its members had allowed themselves to be corrupted by the agents of the India Company; the most compromised of all, Chabot, had been arrested, but it was hoped Fabre, too, might be brought into the business, though Chabot, a double-dyed rogue, had kept in his own pocket the 100,000 *livres* he was known to have received for the purpose of handing the money over to Danton's *alter ego*, and so securing an alteration in the Tribune's speech on that important subject. And further, before any charge was actually brought against Fabre, certain letters from Chabot now in the Archives lead us to suspect a (somewhat clumsy) attempt to compromise Danton with the corrupting party, to which Chabot—hoping, no doubt, for an acquittal—was lending his assistance. Danton vouchsafed no reply to the letters the wretch sent him from his prison, addressed to "the dearest of his friends." Thus the plot failed; but this did not prevent Robespierre's final success, for three months later Danton and Chabot were to stand, with Fabre, at the Bar of the Tribunal.

While the plotters waited their opportunity to compromise Fabre in this shady business, they tried another plan. One of Danton's friends, Philippeaux, returning from a mission in the Vendée, found himself the object of a violent attack on the part of some other commissaries in Western France,

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and more especially of Levasseur, the friend of Robespierre. Philippeaux, his accusers declared, had disobeyed orders issued by the Committee. He had returned to Paris on October 16. On December 6 he issued a sharp rejoinder embodied in a Memorandum in which he took the offensive, and enumerated all the disasters that had occurred in the Vendée after his own departure from that province. The conclusion he drew was that the Committee had failed, out of weakness, and on account of the credulity it had shown "towards a parcel of rascals." The "rascals" were the Hébertists; but these criticisms seemed to produce much more effect on the Committee than on the Hébertists themselves, for, coming as they did from one of Danton's friends, it believed them evidently connected with a regular plan of campaign.

And, indeed, Desmoulins had snatched at Philippeaux's "Memorandum" as a stick wherewith he might beat the Hébertists, and so vigorously was the ex-Commissary to the Vendée supported by Danton's adherents that the Committee, in spite of its bitter grudge against him, was fain, on 1st Nivôse (22nd December), to order the arrest of two of Hébert's men, Vincent and Ronsin, against whom Philippeaux's complaints had been more particularly levelled. But that very evening, at the Jacobins' Club, Hébert, in a fury, flew at Philippeaux and three of his Dantonist friends, Fabre, Bourdon, and Desmoulins. A more serious matter was that Collot d'Herbois, one of the members of the Committee, came down to the Club to support Hébert's attack on Philippeaux. His appearance must have disconcerted Danton's followers, for none of them attempted to reply. In this, the opening act of the great tragedy, it looked as though they would not face the onset.

But they were present, whatever M. Mautouchet, Philippeaux's most recent biographer, may think: a police note dated 2nd Nivôse states that Danton and his friends "went out of the Jacobins like cowards, without saying one word." The enemy proclaimed that Danton had refrained from speaking because, "not being over steady on his pins, he was

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afraid of raking up the past." This shows how every blow was aimed at Danton himself, even through his friends.

Personally, he was genuinely anxious to avoid any increase of bitterness. As yet he had not realized the real object Robespierre and his party were pursuing. When the debate at the Club reopened, on 3rd Nivôse, he affected an impartial attitude, and simply asked that Philippeaux should be allowed a hearing. Robespierre showed less discretion: he went to the rostrum and bitterly complained of Philippeaux's behaviour. Did Danton doubt the opportuneness of a simultaneous attack on Robespierre and Hébert, who had joined forces, for the nonce? He spoke again, making an appeal for unity, in the country's name: "The enemy is at our gates, and we are tearing each other to pieces. *Will all these altercations of ours kill a single Prussian?*"

This was the Danton of 1792 returned to life. He was applauded passionately, and on his motion, a commission of inquiry was appointed. But Hébert, furious at finding himself balked, vowed he would never loose his hold on Philippeaux, nor on those *philippotins*, "a new gang of moderates." On the 16th there was a fresh debate at the Jacobins', at which Collot at once fell foul of "that bad patriot" Philippeaux, who was threatened with exclusion, strove to defend himself, and was finally put to silence. Once more Danton intervened, and, as in the first instance, with great prudence. He merely claimed that before Philippeaux was condemned the documents in the case should be communicated to the Club; and further, he preached reconciliation between patriots in general: "Let us sacrifice our private dissensions, and look at nothing but the public weal!"

On the 18th, Philippeaux, who had retired from the Club, brought the quarrel before the Convention. But this time Danton made no sign. At the Club, Robespierre gave the offender his *coup de grâce*, and had him turned out. But not wishing to make the victory of Hébert's party appear too brilliant, he was content, for the moment, with this piece of vengeance. It sufficed him, for the present, that the Jacobins should have proclaimed the unworthiness of one of Danton's

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adherents, and that the poor protection Danton could ensure his followers should thus have been made apparent.

The real fact was that, whether his action had been dictated by prudence or by moderation, the incident had greatly weakened Danton's position. Though, like Philippeaux, he was not to take his place in the fatal tumbril till the following month of Germinal, he was already stricken, in a measure, by his follower's disgrace, and this had hardly become complete when that of Fabre, a far more serious matter, dealt him a blow full in the breast.

This man Fabre was his oldest political friend: in the District, in the Chancellor's Office, at the Club, at the Convention, he had always been Danton's right hand. And the dream of Danton's enemies was to compromise Fabre's reputation in some shameful business. If they could prove the hand was gangrened, who would believe the body to be healthy?

The man was open to attack. He had been Danton's evil genius, at once the closest and the worst of all his friends, encouraging him always to disorderly living, to violence and extravagance. At the Chancellor's Office he had indulged in more jobbery than any of Danton's other helpers; and much discredit had fallen upon him on account of a matter connected with shoes furnished to the army, widely suspected, but never thoroughly explained. In short, his reputation was extremely vile.

With all the sincerity of his patriotism, Robespierre hated this "thief," whom he had watched, indeed, for the past five years, never away from Danton's elbow, corrupting him even while he served him. From the first he had hoped to involve him in the business of the India Company. Though Chabot had pocketed the money intended for Fabre, it was enough, surely, that the bribe should have been made ready for the rascal. And by dint of seeking, proof had been unearthed at last. The necessary document had been discovered in the house of Delacroix (of Angers), a corrupt deputy;—a partial forgery, if the truth must be told, an arrangement in favour of the Company, proposed by Fabre, but so touched up by

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Chabot and the rest that it seemed to reveal the existence of an absolute agreement between the knaves they were, and Danton's chief lieutenant.

On 14th Nivôse (January 4), Robespierre, hoping to take Fabre by surprise, throw him out of countenance, and so, perhaps, force a confession, made a sudden attack upon him at the Jacobins' Club. And, indeed, Fabre, whose conscience was by no means clear, did seem confounded. Somebody shouted, "To the guillotine!" He turned pale. On 24th Nivôse (January 14) he was arrested and sent to prison. For Danton this was a very serious matter, all the more so as the possibility of Fabre's guilt appeared to find universal acceptance.

Was Danton himself convinced of the prisoner's innocence? I hesitate to believe it. On going to the rostrum that very day, he did not venture to "plead innocence." He simply asked the Convention to remove the case from the hands of its Committee of the General Security, and take it into its own. "When shameful actions, jobbery, corruption such as these are revealed to you," he cried, "when *an accusation of forgery is brought before you, which may be disavowed and attributed to another hand*, why should you not hear those who are accused?" Billaud, who was already pressing his colleagues on the Committee to have Danton arrested, was determined, since his enemy was not compromising himself more than this, to bind his case to Fabre's by sheer force. "*Woe*," he cried, "*to him who has sat at Fabre's side, and who is still his dupe!*" Either Danton must have felt the urgent necessity for prudence, or he must himself have been demoralized already to some extent, otherwise this threat would surely have goaded him to fury. All he did was to press for more light on the subject, without delay; but when Amar, a member of the Committee of General Security, began to defend his colleagues, Danton drew back. "It has never been my intention," he said, "to accuse the Committee: I do it justice." So Fabre remained under lock and key—a fresh and cruel shock to Danton's prestige. On the evening of 25th Nivôse, Couthon writes, "The Conven-

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tion has purged itself of another good-for-nothing fellow"; and hints at the approach of further evictions: the Assembly "*would vomit everything that was impure out of its bosom.*" Hérault was the man in question, now.

Hérault was the only one of Danton's friends who still belonged to the Committee. For a time, and as far as that had been possible, he had carried on his leader's policy, in diplomatic matters at all events. This was sufficient to set up constant friction between Robespierre and his friends, on one side, and this *sans-culotte* with his red-heeled shoes, this *ci-devant* whose impertinent manner and aristocratic smile would in themselves have been a sufficient source of exasperation, on the other. Hérault, a born intriguer, treated the Revolution as a drama in which he himself, being quite devoid of convictions, and as it were to amuse himself, was playing a bold and complicated part. When Danton confided the threads of his diplomatic negotiations to him, he summoned all the cosmopolitan agents to be found in Paris to his aid; Proly, said to be the natural son of Kaunitz, the Austrian Chancellor, had drawn him into various great intrigues, the chief of which (begun, indeed, by Danton himself) aimed at the rescue of the Queen.

Robespierre had always hated him. Because Hérault, in the interval between two sittings of the Committee, would hurry off to keep some gallant *rendezvous*, his view of the Revolution could not, in his enemy's opinion, be a serious view. And to make things worse, he had seemed, during the autumn of 1798, to lean, like all his friends, towards a policy of "clemency." In any case, he betrayed an open scorn for his surroundings. Asked to which party he belonged, "*To the party that laughs at the two others!*" he would reply.

To get rid of him, the Committee had dispatched him on a mission to the Upper Rhine; he had organized the defence in that part of the country; he had also scandalized respectable folk by his conduct, which was more than loose. Saint-Just, who succeeded him, and was all in favour of virtue, at that moment, wrote Robespierre indignant letters on the

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subject. On his return to Paris, on 8th Nivôse, Hérault, knowing the hostility felt towards him in the Committee, hurried to the Convention, made a report of his mission, and called on the Assembly to judge between him and the Committee. The Convention, not venturing to do this, took up the business set down for the day. But when Hérault reappeared at the Committee, Robespierre called on him either to resign or to explain the relations with suspected agents of which he was accused. He made no reply. But realizing that, as Mallet du Pan expresses it, he was walking "on a razor-blade," he retired from the Committee, and knowing his fate was sealed, cast himself into the refined form of debauchery he specially affected. Thus since December 29 his support had been lost to Danton, whose position, face to face with Robespierre, was growing more isolated every day. And Hérault, indeed, was to be arrested before long.

Desmoulins still remained. Against him no shameful accusation could be successfully brought. But, in a sense, his campaign in the *Vieux Cordelier* had injured him. Robespierre had allowed him to compromise himself, and then, once Hébert had been weakened, had abandoned the journalist to the vengeance of those he had so bitterly attacked. On 1st Nivôse (December 22), Nicolas, a member of the jury of the Tribunal and a friend of Robespierre's, dropped a sinister remark at the Club. "Camille," he said, "is very near the guillotine." On 17th Nivôse (January 7), when Camille's case was considered by the Jacobins, Robespierre undertook his defence, but after his own peculiar fashion: Camille, he said, was "a spoilt child" who had been "led away by bad companions" (he might as well have named Danton outright); all the numbers of the *Vieux Cordelier* had better be burnt, and that lesson having been given him, the journalist should be kept. But when Desmoulins made a spirited reply, Robespierre changed his tone: "The manner in which you claim to justify yourself proves to me that your intentions were bad!" And on the 19th he pronounced the final ban. "Camille and Hébert," he exclaimed, "are equally guilty in our eyes."

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Clearly, Desmoulins' fate was sealed. On the 21st, a cry of distress rises from his hearth. Lucile calls Fréron to her aid: "*Come back, Fréron, come back quickly!* There is no time to be lost, bring back all the old Cordeliers you can find with you, we have the greatest need of them. . . . *Robespierre has denounced Camille to the Jacobins!*" Fear was rising up on every side of them; when Desmoulins brought his sixth number to the printer he refused to print it. All round the suspected man the empty space was growing larger.

It was growing larger, too, about Danton. Terrified, Fréron wrote to Bayle from the south of France: "When Billaud said those words, 'Woe to them who sit beside Fabre!' did he mean to speak of Danton? Is he compromised?" We feel that, out of sheer terror, this friend is about to fail him. And seeing how other men avoid him, Danton must realize the effect of the disgrace of Philippeaux, Fabre, Hérault, and Desmoulins. This was the result Robespierre had hoped to gain from the plan now almost carried to its completion. Discredited, isolated, Danton was soon to be demoralized. And then nothing would be easier than to overthrow the "rotten idol."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FINAL EFFORT

“Marius' Courage is failing”—Billaud demands the Head of Danton—Danton threatens, but does not attack—The Fall of the Hébertists—The Closing Triumph—Danton betrayed by Robespierre—He disappears—Arrested—Forsaken—Danton at the Luxembourg.

“NOBODY listens to Marius now, his courage is failing him, and he is growing weak.” Thus Lucile writes to Fréron on 24th Nivôse, and the “Marius” of whom she speaks is Danton.

There can be no doubt that his friends' disgrace had produced a paralysing effect upon him. Hardly recovered from his breakdown of the previous September, he relapsed at once, “grew weak,” “lost heart.” Bitter words escaped him: “Attractive though power may be, can it be worth the efforts to attain it I see all about me?” In the face of the “horrors” that were being committed (“Heads are tumbling down like slates,” crowed Fouquier-Tinville joyously), he began to ask himself a terrible question: “*Can such a thing as liberty really exist?*” One day he said to Courtois: “They have given me such a hatred of the present that I sometimes regret the days when the whole of my weekly income depended on a bottle of ink!”

All witnesses agree in describing him as overwhelmed by a sort of “torpor.” Levasseur, his enemy, Thibaudeau, his friend, both speak of him as “tired out.” His enemies took advantage of his condition; every sort of slander was current: “He was buying huge properties, being now in possession of millions of money: he was paying the expenses of Mme. Montansier's theatre: he was leading a life of self-indulgence with his pretty wife.” The truth was that he was all at sea, feeling the game was lost. In spite of that, the members of

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the Convention—who groaned under the “yoke” of the Committee—and the denizens of the Paris prisons—“every one,” as Beugnot puts it, “still looked to him to save them.”

Did his disgust drive him so far as to make him dream of re-establishing the monarchy? Couthon was to declare this to be true; Boissy-d’Anglas was to put forth tale after tale upon the subject. One day, we are told, Danton was heard to exclaim, “Let Robespierre take care I do not throw the Dauphine across his path!” Saint-Just was to allude to the plan; but it was gravely asserted, on 10th Thermidor, that Robespierre himself had intended to marry the daughter of Louis XVI. Danton had no intentions of any kind; everything was failing him.

Between two fits of depression he went to the rostrum, and, still with the most remarkable caution, defended his new policy. This, not unfrequently, was dictated by the most excellent common sense: on 26th Nivôse, a petitioner came and chanted a hymn to liberty at the Bar of the Convention; and Danton complained of this behaviour in bitter and ironic terms; on 26th Ventôse, when a somewhat similar incident occurred, he broke in almost fiercely: “I propose,” he concluded, “that in future nothing but reasoning in prose shall be heard at the Bar!” His good sense won him approval and applause. He had spoken in the name of a terrified majority, which held its peace.

But the speech most worthy of our attention is that of 5th Pluviôse (January 24), 1794. This was his last attempt to “insinuate moderation” in the very name of the authority he had earned by his services to the Revolution. These services he recalled; there had been a necessity, indeed, for being “terrible” when the Republic was in danger: “But is not the Republic a terror, now, to all her enemies? Is she not victorious and triumphant?” The present moment “ought to be seized” to “*avoid mistakes, and repair them.*” This idea he was still pursuing when he suggested, on 8th Ventôse (February 27), that the Committee, now filled with “sham patriots in red caps,” should be “purged.”

In spite of a certain number of vigorous expressions and

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fierce or jocular tirades, the striking quality of these final speeches is a certain tameness: the spring seems weakened. We are even led to suspect the orator's voice was failing. "This hall," he exclaimed crossly, on 5th Ventôse, "is as bad as a violin-mute. *Nobody without the lungs of a stentor could make himself heard in it!*" There had been a time when he could make himself heard anywhere. The stentor's lungs were failing him.

His exhaustion had not escaped the notice of his enemies. They grew bolder. The Committee had hesitated, so far, to strike at the strongest head in the Republic; general opinion did not consider the man a traitor to the Revolution, and almost doubted the justice of any suspicion of the kind. Billaud alone, if we are to accept his own assertion, had been calling out, since the month of Frimaire, for Danton's execution. Having been his old and intimate friend, he was consequently his bitterest enemy, now. Holding "rectilinear" views himself, he did not admit any deviation on the part of others, and for a whole year, so he declared, Danton had ceased to follow the "straight line." The real truth is that Billaud, the most narrow-minded of Jacobins, was less fitted than any being on the face of the earth to comprehend the necessities of political existence: because Danton had resorted to *opportunism*, this man of narrow intelligence concluded he was practising treachery, and never ceased his denunciations of the traitor. Another of Danton's old friends, Collot, had joined forces with Billaud. No "rectilinear" politician, this—neither more nor less than a villain. At Lyons, quite lately, he had indulged in a debauch of blood-shedding rendered still more odious by debauchery of another kind. Returning from these shambles, he learnt that Danton and his adherents had openly expressed their horror of the Lyons massacres. He had every cause to dread a reaction. "Before long," he concluded, "we shall surely find means to send Danton and all who share his opinions to the scaffold." But for a considerable period Collot and Billaud stood alone.

In the Committee of the General Security, Danton's enemies were more numerous. Vadier, especially, loathed

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him : this aged man, in spite of his own addiction to senile debauchery, was a great prophet of the worship of Virtue then in vogue. He was always talking of "tearing the mask" from vice—so that nobody might think of laying their finger on his own. Amar and Vouland, both of them influential members of the Committee, followed Vadier's lead. According to Courtois, they had been carrying on a campaign against Danton for months past; they were his bitter enemies to the very end. Before long, David was to march in their train. This great artist was a most unreliable friend, and though he had lived in close intimacy with Danton, began to fail him even before Robespierre made his intentions clear.

All this hostility among his former friends increased Danton's bitterness; but instead of acting boldly, he poured forth volleys of reproaches. He threatened, but he did not strike. Meeting David, one day, he taxed him roundly with the change in his political attitude; all at once, Vadier passed by, and the tribune, greatly agitated, fiercely squeezed the painter's arm, exclaiming, "That fellow passing over there said of me, '*And we'll empty that big stuffed turbot, too!*' Tell the villain that if ever I have reason to fear for my life, I'll grow more cruel than any cannibal: I'll devour his brains and . . . dishonour his skull!" Courtois, who had happened to be in Danton's company, went back with him to his own door; but the tribune had shot his bolt, and from the Tuileries to the Cour du Commerce he shrouded himself in gloomy silence.

Coming out of the Convention, a few days later, with Barras, Fréron, Courtois, Panis, and Brune, Danton happened on certain members of the Committee. Greatly excited, he spoke to them about the war in the Vendée. "Read Philippeaux's *memoranda!*" he said; "they will show you how to put an end to this war in the Vendée, which you have perpetuated for the sake of making your own power indispensable!" His hearers took the reproach in very bad part. In their turn, Vadier, Amar, Vouland, and Barère accused him fiercely of having circulated the ex-Commissary's *memoranda*. "There is no reason why I should defend

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myself on that account!" cried Danton; and besides, it was time their malversations and tyranny should be denounced, and he would do it himself, from the rostrum. They left him without a word, but their feelings against him may be imagined. Barras (who tells the story) then said to Danton, "Let us go back to the Convention: if you will speak, we will stand by you: but do not let us wait till to-morrow: you may be arrested in the night!" "*They would not dare to do it!*" he replied. Then, turning to Barras, he added, "Come and eat the fat chicken with us!" Barras declined the invitation, but taking Brune aside, he whispered, "Watch over Danton; he has used threats instead of striking."

These outbreaks of violence, which died down before the morrow came, constituted the most ruinous attitude Danton could have assumed. They stirred up his enemies, who now beset Robespierre with their solicitations. One February evening they made him fairly angry; he disliked being urged forward, and was resolved to choose his own time.

As to this he felt some uncertainty; some ultimate scruple, it may be, held him back from doing this monstrous thing—to hand over the man of the Tenth of August to the executioner's knife. But among his followers the feeling against Danton was daily growing stronger. For a considerable time police notes had been reaching his hands, containing such words as these: "Danton and Lacroix, those two rascals who have grown so scandalously rich on the wealth of which we have been stripped, are the notorious accomplices of Dumouriez. Yet they are left in peace!" Mallet writes, on March 8, that Danton's position was very much threatened, "for he had to reproach himself with venality, with the sums he had received out of the Civil List, with his connivance with the Temple, and his opposition to the trial of the King [*sic*]." Morris writes to Washington, just about the same time, that Danton's conscience was burdened with "the purchase of Westermann by the King of Prussia." Evidently the whole of the man's stormy past, all his sins, real, exaggerated, or imaginary, were being piled up against him.

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A sort of vague alarm, on the other hand, was creeping over Robespierre. He was working the fall of Hébert, but he had no desire at all to bring the Terror to a close, and Danton, in every word he said, affirmed the necessity for ending it. Of this Robespierre was certain. In the hope that their understanding might be renewed, mutual friends had brought them together, but these meetings, far from filling up the abyss that parted them, had only served to deepen it. In January a conversation in Robespierre's own house had degenerated into an altercation: Danton had deplored the continuance of the Terror, in which "the innocent and the guilty were confounded together," and Robespierre had sourly replied, "*And who told you a single innocent person has perished?*" Astounded by this unconsciousness of the real facts, Danton turned to one of the persons present, exclaiming, with a sneer, "*What say you? Not one innocent person has perished!*" And brusquely he departed. He did return, indeed, having besought Robespierre to join him in the effort to moderate methods which must certainly end in the destruction of them both. Robespierre treated him with cold civility. Several times, again, Danton's former clerk, Desforgés, who was still in the Ministry, endeavoured to arrange a meeting between the two men at his own table, "so as to destroy," he wrote, "what he believed to be mere prejudices." But instead of coming to an agreement they bandied reproaches. Every word the hot-headed Danton spoke—they were sometimes rather blundering sayings—embittered Robespierre's mind against him.

On 8th Ventôse (February 27), Saint-Just, recalled by Robespierre for the second time, read his report against the "factions" to the Convention: "The very constitution of the Republic involves the destruction of everything that opposes it. *The men who are moved with pity for the prisoners are guilty against the Republic: guilty, because they do not long for virtue: guilty, because they do not desire the Terror.*" Every sentence was evidently aimed at Danton, and prefaced an impeachment in due form.

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Danton seemed to take it all very quietly. That very day he uttered his denunciation of the "sham patriots in red caps" whose removal would permit real patriots to feel "certain of liberty and peace." By his patriotic language, on the 13th, by his lively wit, on the following day, he threw the whole Assembly into paroxysms of enthusiasm, first of all, and then of laughter. A tremendous fellow he was, for ever recovering his grasp upon his hearers!

On the 10th came a thunder-clap, destined, apparently, to clear his sky. In the course of the previous night Hébert and all his gang had been arrested, by the Committee's orders.

This looked like triumph for Danton and Desmoulins.

While resolved to lay stress upon this point, Danton was intent, at the same time, on putting the Committee in the wrong. Without condescending to set his foot upon the neck of the foes now wallowing on the ground, he expressed his hope that the Government would steadily pursue the "difficult course on which it was proceeding." He regarded the Committee as "the vanguard of the body politic." All these agitations must be calmly faced: "Let not the effervescence of Liberty in its earliest age alarm you! It is like a strong new wine, that will send up bubbles until all its scum is cleared away."

This is certainly not the language of a hunted man. With a sort of haughty serenity, he conferred good conduct testimonials on the Committees and on the Convention, which "had never seemed to him so great." The time had come when all personal passion must be silenced: "If ever, when we have won the victory (and our victory is already assured), if ever personal passion were to override our love for our country, and strive to dig a fresh abyss for liberty, I would desire to be the first man to cast himself into it. But let us put all resentment far from us. The time has come when our actions only will be judged. The masks are falling—the masks will have no further charm." (Was this meant for Robespierre and his friends?) "There will be no confusion, henceforward, between the men who would fain cut the throats

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of patriots" (this was Billaud) "and the real magistrates of the People. . . . If amongst all those magistrates but one alone had done his duty, every suffering must be endured rather than that he should be forced to drink the cup of bitterness." The words were not only eloquent, they were crafty. Old Rühl, who was presiding that day, had given a rough reception, when the sitting had opened, to certain members of the Commune who bore the reputation of belonging to the Hébertist party, and had, indeed, put in a very tardy appearance, to express a halting disavowal of their former friends. These men Danton evidently desired to attract to his own side.

And his words brought about an episode which seemed to put the crowning touch to his triumph. Rühl wished to go to the rostrum and make an explanation. But the aged Alsatian was most devotedly attached to Danton. He made a movement as though he would have left his desk, and then he cried, "I am going to answer from the rostrum: come, my dear colleague, take the chair yourself!" There was a great buzz of exclamations. Danton, in the most feeling way, responded, "Do not ask me to sit in the chair; you fill it worthily!" And amidst "the most lively enthusiasm" he continued, "Look on me as a brother, who speaks his thought out frankly!" He ended his speech with an appeal for "*union, united action, concord.*" And as he went back to his seat, he met Rühl, who had just left the chair. The two men embraced, while, so the report informs us, "the hall rang with applause." One journal-writer asserts that the Convention, by an enthusiastic vote, ordered Danton's speech to be printed. The aged Rühl's emotion had completed his victory.

Too complete a victory! Once Hébert had been struck down, Danton, by a master-stroke, and amidst thunders of applause, had seemed, even while he praised the Committee, to recover possession of general opinion and the moral government of the Republic. That evening, we may be sure, the members of the two Committees must have issued from the Hall of the Assembly with hearts that overflowed with fear

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and jealousy and furious spite. This final ovation was to cost Danton a bitter price.

When Danton quitted the rostrum on that Nonidi, 29th Ventôse, of the Year II (Wednesday, March 19, 1794), he passed down its steps for the last time. Never again was he to climb them—but before three weeks were out he was to mount the scaffold.

On 5th Germinal (March 26) Hébert was guillotined. The general impression was that this event would strengthen Danton's position. To this height had his speech of 29th Ventôse carried him! Instantly, Robespierre's credit had fallen: Bourdon, one of Danton's adherents, actually ventured, on that very 29th Ventôse, to move for the arrest of Héron, Robespierre's own police agent, and the Convention had followed his lead. Robespierre had been obliged to demand his man's liberation, on the following day, and this, indeed, was granted. He had felt the blow severely. And then again, on 1st Germinal, Tallien, considered one of Danton's men, had been appointed to preside over the Convention, while Legendre, his acknowledged henchman, was chosen to preside over the Jacobins' Club. Robespierre felt he was being hemmed in: it was high time to break the ring that encircled him; Danton's destruction was now an urgent necessity.

On 1st Germinal (March 22) they met for the last time at the table of a mutual friend, Humbert, head of the Public Funds Office; Legendre, Panis, Desforges and a few others completed the party. According to one of these guests, Danton made a final appeal to Robespierre to turn a deaf ear to the intrigues being carried on against him, Danton, by various members of the Committee, and cease to listen to the "chatter of a handful of idiots." He grew excessively warm: "Let us forget our resentment and look at nothing but our country, her needs, her dangers. . . . The Republic, once she is triumphant and respected outside our borders, will be beloved, within them, even by those who now show their enmity against her." Robespierre, who had listened in chilly silence, testily replied, "With your principles and your

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system of morals *nobody would ever find any criminals to punish!*" "Would you regret it?" cried Danton. "Would you be sorry not to find any criminals to punish?" Courtois asserts the words to have been spoken in connection with the case of Comte Loménie de Brienne, whom Danton was bent on saving from the scaffold because "he had done a great deal of good in his own Department (the Aube)." He seems to have pleaded also for the release of the seventy-three imprisoned deputies of the Right. Robespierre grew angry. "*The only way to establish liberty,*" he said, "*is to cut off those rascals' heads.*" Then, so Courtois assures us, Danton fell into such a fury that the tears rained from his eyes. Yet a few moments later, as we learn from Vilain d'Aubigny, who was present, he was seen to embrace Robespierre, amidst the general emotion. Robespierre alone remained "as cold as marble."

The next evening, when Billaud, for the tenth time, demanded Danton's head, Robespierre granted it to him. But no step could be taken at that moment. The Hôtel de Ville, out of which Hébert's supporters had now been cleared, must first of all be in the hands of Robespierre's adherents. Their minds were shortly to be set at rest by the appointment of a Mayor and a National Agent, Fleuriot and Payen, both of them devoted to Robespierre; with such men as these at the head of the Commune no popular movement in favour of the dreaded Danton need be feared.

The two men saw each other once more, we are told, but from a distance, at the first performance of Legouvé's *Epicharis et Néron*, at the Théâtre Français. Danton was seated in the orchestra, with a friend; Robespierre was in a stage-box. Hardly had the words "*Death to the tyrant!*" left the actor's lips, when Danton and his companions, turning towards the box, broke into loud and pointed applause; some of them, says Legouvé, went so far as to shake their fists at the "dictator." And Robespierre, white with fury, "waved his small hand back," with a gesture that betrayed his terror and promised vengeance.

All through the week between March 23 and 30 that same

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"small hand" was laboriously setting up the scaffold for his enemy. Evening after evening, no doubt, Robespierre must have sat in that famous "blue chamber" of his, in Duplay's house, sorting his papers and making his notes, collecting the elements of the report the composition of which he was to confide, with his usual caution, to Saint-Just. One thing is clearly evidenced by these notes—the "friend" who had written to Danton, so lately as on February 13, 1793, "*I shall love thee till death,*" had for years past been carefully noting down everything that might serve, one day, to bring about his ruin; Robespierre was a man of much foresight.

These notes—Saint-Just was to do no more than follow, sometimes even to copy them—breathe a long-established hatred. They show us Robespierre putting the coarse jokes of Danton's conversation in the early days of their friendship—and proving thus how sorely these remarks had shocked his puritan soul—on a par with his most serious actions, well-nigh all of which are placed in a false light. Danton had been the friend of Mirabeau and of the Lameth brothers in 1790 and 1791, and had striven to carry Robespierre with him into this bad company. He had led Desmoulins astray, and yet had accused him, in conversation with Robespierre himself, of "a secret and shameful vice." During his ministry he had allowed various persons—Fabre more particularly—to tamper with the Public Funds. In September he had permitted the release of Duport and Lameth, both of them opponents of the Revolution. When Robespierre had offered to "crush the Girondin conspiracy, and prevent Brissot from laying fresh plots," he had "haughtily refused all these proposals on the pretext that the war was the only thing to be considered." By his intrigues he had "ensured the success of Prussia and her armies." He had shielded the Girondins, and when Robespierre had laid the calumnies uttered by the Roland couple before him, he had replied, "What does that matter to me? Opinion is a harlot, posterity a foolishness!" And now the puritan rises up in rebellion: "The very word virtue evoked a laugh from Danton: there was no virtue so solid, he would say, jokingly, as that he showed his wife,

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every night." And the Incorruptible continued: "*How could a man who was a stranger to any idea of morality be the defender of Liberty?*" He delighted in the society of "intriguers and impure livers." Nobody could fail to remember the tea-parties in Robert's house, at which, Danton being one of the party, "d'Orléans himself made the punch": this explained the election of 1792. Danton had had a finger in the plottings of *Égalité* and Dumouriez.

Then—in his fear lest any single fact, however small, that might tell against his former friend should have escaped him—he went over the whole story again. At the time of the business on the Champ de Mars, Danton had allowed 2000 patriots to go to their deaths, but had himself retired to Arcis, where he had enjoyed a safety of the most suspicious kind. And on the eve of the Tenth of August, again, he had betaken himself to Arcis, whence his friends had despaired of seeing him return, and on the night of the 9th he had wanted to go to his bed, and the Marseillais had been literally obliged to carry him off. In the Convention he had disavowed Marat, Robespierre, the Mountain, so as to appear a "tolerant conciliator" in the eyes of the conspirators; he had only taken an open part against the Right because the Right had demanded his accounts. He had not "desired the tyrant's death," but only his banishment, and had only voted for the death-sentence, at last, under the "pressure of public opinion." He had "regarded the revolution of May 31 with horror, and sought to ensure its failure"; he had tried to save the Girondins; he had been on friendly terms with the Norman insurgents. He had planned to "dissolve the Convention and *establish the Constitution.*" On March 8, 1793, he had stirred up a spurious insurrection so as to give Dumouriez a "pretext for marching upon Paris." And finally, he had recently endeavoured to secure "*an amnesty for all guilty persons.*"

The week was wearing on; and Robespierre, now pressed for time, was reduced to jotting down a succession of confused notes: these were aimed at all Danton's allies, who, like himself, had "been guilty of every crime at once." And

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finally, having brought his labours to a close, Danton's former friend carried his papers to Saint-Just, who would know how to transform their contents into the fierce charge indispensable for the occasion. Saint-Just made no additions, save a few facts supplied, most probably, by Billaud, another former "friend till death," who, from 1789 till 1792, had never taken his eye off his former benefactor. Except for these he contented himself with giving Robespierre's notes the literary form appropriate to a ministerial utterance.

He must have put the last touches to his work on 9th Germinal. And when it was quite ready, he took his way to the Tuileries, and laid the sheets that testified to the association, for the destruction of one man, of the treachery of a quondam friend and the hatred of a young fanatic, upon the green tablecloth of the Committee Room.

And what was the man thus threatened doing, all this while? On 29th Ventôse, when he left the rostrum amidst the plaudits of his hearers, it seemed as though he was to succeed in warding off every peril. But his victory had engendered too complete a confidence. This emergence, for a moment, from the "torpor" into which he was now so constantly relapsing had sufficed to convince him he need only raise his voice, for the whole Convention to be stirred and moved to follow his lead. Who, then, would dare to attack him there? Should his foes ever venture on it, he would put them to confusion with a word, and, victorious then, as in the past, would end by "devouring their entrails."

His friends were not so free from alarm. They all entreated him to take the offensive. But he, "the man of September," alleged scruples of the strangest sort. He had, indeed, desired the overthrow of Brissot, and, more lately, that of Hébert: but he had never wished to send them to the scaffold. Nor did he seek that fate for Robespierre, who might be a tyrant, if was true, but who was an old friend, too, and had often come, in the old days, to eat the soup prepared by poor Gabrielle's hands in the little dining-room of the Cour du Commerce. When the astonished Legendre pressed him still harder, he made a gesture of weariness, and replied, "Better

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be guillotined oneself than guillotine others!" He was tired out, his nerve quite broken.

The spring of the year 1794 promised delightful weather. "Never did I see such a lovely season," writes a lady of the period; "it was as though Nature would fain console the world for the crimes committed by Society." The chestnut trees in Paris were all in flower, the country was a sheet of blossom. Danton was seized with a sort of hunger for the beauties of Nature. Whenever he could do it, he would slip away, with his pretty Louise, to Sèvres, where the *Fontaine d'Amour* had put on its spring garb. Since 30th Ventôse he had not showed his face at the Club, and we can discover no sign of his presence at the Convention either. Periods of voluptuous languor, interspersed between relapses into gloom, drove him perpetually out of Paris, a place haunted, for him, by hideous memories.

In Paris, people were beginning to wonder. "Danton is doing all he can to keep out of sight," wrote Mallet, much astonished, on March 8. On 3rd Germinal, Thibaudeau, alarmed at the diminution in "his assiduity at the sittings," took it upon himself to go and look him up at Sèvres. He found him in the condition "of a sick man who has abjured the world because he feels he is about to leave it." "Your indifference astounds me," said the member for Vienne. "Do you not see that Robespierre is plotting your ruin? Are you not going to do anything to prevent it?" "If I thought the idea had even entered his head," replied Danton, "I would devour his entrails!" To other persons he answered: "*There would have to be more shedding of blood. There has been enough as it is. I shed it myself, when I believed it would serve a useful purpose.*" The phrase was characteristic of the man.

One of his boy nephews, Manuel, whom he often took down with him to Sèvres, was never to forget the last evening he spent there. It was on the eve of Danton's arrest. He would describe his uncle, "sitting on the right of the fireplace in the big drawing-room, with cardboard guards on his legs to protect them from the heat," Desmoulins "sat in the

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opposite corner," and Delacroix's huge person occupied the centre, while the child played about on the carpet. He heard them carry on a passionate discussion. If Danton would not take action, would he not take to flight? "A man cannot carry away the soil of his country on the soles of his shoes!" he cried. That day he had struck Courtois as being so weary as to be almost longing for death.

But at bottom he did not believe in his own danger. On 8th Germinal, Rousselin again hurried down to Sèvres, to warn him that everything was prepared for his ruin. He returned his old perpetual answer, "*They will not dare*"; and then, with a glance at the mirror, "Fear nothing, children that you are! *Look at my head! Is it not firmly fixed upon my shoulders?* And why should they want to destroy me? What good would it do them? On what account?"

That very day Saint-Just, bending over Robespierre's notes, was putting the final touches to the report that was treacherously to destroy him.

On the evening of 9th Germinal (March 30), according to the invariable custom when any important decision was to be taken, the two Committees were summoned to a full sitting. Lavicomterie, who belonged to the Committee of the General Security, assures us that a great many members were quite unaware of the subject to be brought forward: Saint-Just, he tells us, pulled his papers out of his pocket, and "what was our surprise when we heard him read his report against Danton and others! It was such a persuasive report! Saint-Just read it with so much feeling! When he had finished we were asked whether any of us desired to speak? No! No!"

On this point Lavicomterie's memory is at fault. Lindet, though he did not dispute the substance of the report, refused to put his name to the warrant for Danton's arrest. "I am here," he said, "for the purpose of feeding the citizens" (he was in charge of the Supplies), "and not for that of putting patriots to death." The aged Rühl, faithful to his friendship, took up a similar attitude. A year later Jeanbon was to write as follows: "If I had been there, I would have defended

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him with all my strength." But this is by no means certain, for several members who had begun with an apparent inclination to protest ended by signing. Among these was Carnot. "Think well," he is reported to have said; "such a head as Danton's will drag many others to their fall." But Billaud opposed any idea of delay. He even expostulated when Saint-Just suggested that Danton should not be arrested till the close of the sitting at which he had read his report. The report, indeed, would seem to have been written in the expectation that Danton would have been present when it was read. In his overweening pride, the younger man believed himself able to overthrow his senior in the arena of the Convention. Vadier, with greater prudence, leaned to delivering the stroke after the enemy had been safely pinioned. A lively scene ensued, in the course of which Saint-Just cast his hat into the fire, and made as though he would have thrown his report after it. But one of Danton's enemies called out to Robespierre, "You may risk being guillotined! If we do not guillotine him, we shall be guillotined ourselves!" That was the great truth, the truth that ruled the whole Terror. For ten months past, men had been slaying each other to escape being slain themselves. Robespierre was forced to adopt the theory of an immediate arrest. And he was right. When we see how Danton was shortly to shake the resolve of a tribunal and jury, both of them bitterly hostile to him, we shall find it hard to believe he would not have carried away the Convention, in which he still counted so many faithful friends.

They all signed except Lindet and Rühl.

The document still exists. It bears traces of a certain confusion. It is a rough draft, devoid of form. According to Robinet, Barère held the pen and wrote in a feigned hand (this was quite the sort of thing he would do), but he had to make corrections and additions. The whole thing produces the impression that the lines were written in the course of a discussion during which the proscribers were almost beside themselves with excitement. The very order of the signatures is interesting: Billaud seems to have literally

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thrown himself upon the paper; this former recipient of Danton's favours signed first of all, and with the firmest hand, as though at last he felt his victim in his iron grasp. Vadier came next; with a hearty stroke of his pen he "emptied the big stuffed turbot." Then the others: and in a corner, at the very bottom of the sheet, a little, mean-looking script—the name of Robespierre. To the very last, he seemed unwilling to reveal himself.

The order was dispatched to the Mayor; within an hour the gendarmes were on their way: Danton, Delacroix, Philippeaux, and Desmoulins were to be shut up safely under lock and key, with Fabre and Hérault.

Rühl had sent off Panis to warn Danton. He found him sitting over the fire. He betrayed no sign of interest at first, and went on stirring the embers on the hearth, without a word. There he sat, in his armchair, all the night long, not choosing to be arrested in his bed. At last he heard the gendarmes' footsteps in the Cour du Commerce, and told his wife, "They are coming to arrest me." She, in her distress, burst into tears, and he went on, mechanically, "Don't be frightened! They will not dare to do it!" And without an attempt at resistance, he allowed himself to be led away to the Prison of the Luxembourg, close by.

Just at that moment Desmoulins was tearing himself from his young wife's arms. He seemed calm enough.

It may be that neither he nor Danton believed themselves utterly lost. They hoped, in spite of the hostility of the Tribunal, to prove their innocence in the most conclusive fashion. A letter from Philippeaux to his wife demonstrates how completely unintelligible the charges brought against them appeared to all these men. In a postscript, he adds: "I have just heard that Danton, Camille, and Delacroix have likewise been arrested. *I do not know why.*"

When Paris woke from slumber, next morning, the astonishing news went round. Danton! Desmoulins! Both of them arrested! The Man of the Tenth of August and the Man of the Fourteenth of July! "A general stupor" reigned, so Vilain d'Aubigny informs us. In vain was a

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story put about that they had been plotting "the restoration of the Monarchy": it was received with universal incredulity; but there was universal consternation, too. Deputy after deputy hurried to the Cour du Commerce to find out whether the news was true or not, and then fled back to the Tuileries.

There the Convention met, at eleven o'clock, in a state of emotion easily imagined. We have every reason to believe the Assembly was really more in favour of Danton than of Robespierre. Tallien, the President, was an "old Cordelier." Friends of Danton's sat on every side—Legendre, Fréron, Courtois, Bourdon, Barras, and a score of others. But all the same, the front rank of the Dantonist battalion had been cut down: Hérault, Fabre, Philippeaux, Delacroix, Desmoulins, all the leaders, were in prison. Fréron was a man of caution, Courtois was no speaker, Tallien a poor one; Legendre, the honest butcher, was the only one of them all who dared to rush to the rostrum. "Citizens," he cried, "last night four members of this Assembly were arrested. Danton is one, the names of the others I do not know. I ask that the arrested members be brought before the Bar, to be accused or absolved by you! *I declare my conviction that Danton is as pure as I am myself!*" A murmur of approbation rose as Legendre proceeded to sing the praise of his friend, "pursued," so he asserted, "by private hatreds." He repeated his motion. Fayau opposed it, but the Assembly seemed prepared to pass it: shouts of "*Down with the dictatorship!*" were already making themselves heard. If Tallien had put Legendre's motion to the vote at once, says Courtois, "the business would have been settled forthwith." He dallied, and gave the Committee time to hurry in.

Then Robespierre appeared upon the scene, and that ended it all. I have already described the hypnotic power this man, so small in stature, and, to my own thinking, of so ordinary an intelligence, wielded over the Assembly. Even in Germinal of the Year II his power had its root in the inexplicable confusion into which his very appearance at the rostrum threw his opponents; on 9th Thermidor, when they were all bent upon his death, their one object was to prevent

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him from reaching it. Once there, he terrified and fascinated all who saw and heard him. This time he took a high tone: "The turmoil, unknown for so long a period, which now reigns in this Assembly, clearly proves some great interest to be involved. This is a question, indeed, of knowing whether or not certain men are to override the country, whether the interests of a few ambitious hypocrites are to be preferred to the interests of the People of France." Some applause was heard. A privilege, Robespierre continued, had been claimed in favour of Danton and his friends: "We will not have privileges! No! *We will have no idols!*" The applause grew warmer. Why should Danton receive better treatment than Brissot, Pétion, Chabot, or Cloutz? "We shall see this day," he concluded, "*whether the Convention will know how to break a false idol, rotten, this many a day, or whether that idol, in its fall, is to crush the Convention and the People of France!*" And fixing his eyes upon Legendre, he added, "*The man who trembles is guilty!*" Terrified, the butcher offered his apologies. Terror had struck at the very roots of his existence: within the space of a few months, the *Gazette* of 15th Brumaire was to announce that "Citizen Legendre has just died of the consequences of the alarm caused him by the threats of the members of the Committees, when that deputy undertook to defend Danton."

Barère, who always supported the successful side, stood by Robespierre. Danton must have no special privileges. So Legendre's motion was thrust aside, and Saint-Just was to read his accusation in the absence of the man he accused. The handsome, merciless youth made his way to the rostrum. Barras has described his delivery of that "monstrous" charge, his "phlegmatic" utterance, his manuscript held in one motionless hand, while the other made one solitary gesture, the right arm raised aloft, and falling down again, inexorable, merciless, like the very knife of the guillotine."

"The Revolution," he said, "resides in the People, and not in the reputation of certain individuals. This true idea is the source of the justice and equality of a free State: it

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is the guarantee of the People against those men who, by their own daring and impunity, raise themselves up to be a sort of patricians." And he then proceeded to denounce "these last partisans of royalism, these men who, for the past five years, have been serving factions, and have *followed liberty merely as a tiger tracks its prey.*" And he addressed the absent deputy, "*Danton! you have been the servant of tyranny.*" For the space of an hour he maltreated the absent man, his right hand ceaselessly raised in the same gesture—that of cutting off a guilty head. Why repeat his utterances—the gall of Robespierre conveyed in the phraseology, dear to Saint-Just?

In conclusion, he demanded the impeachment of Desmoulins, Hérault, Danton, Philippeaux, and Lacroix, "on the charge of being the accomplices of d'Orléans and Dumouriez, of Fabre d'Églantine, and the enemies of the Republic: of having dabbled in the conspiracy to restore the Monarchy, and destroy the national system of representation and the Republican Government;" and "their arraignment with Fabre d'Églantine." The decree was voted: not a single voice was raised in dissent. Fréron, on whose help Lucile had reckoned to save her husband, never said one word. Robespierre, when he went home, said to Duplay, "It must be acknowledged that Danton has very cowardly friends!" And when Garnier (of Saintes) cried out to Robespierre, at the sitting of the 9th Thermidor, "*It is the blood of Danton that is choking thee!*" Robespierre had a full right to reply, as he did, "*Danton, you say! Cowards! Why did you not defend him?*"

Lucile Desmoulins rushed distractedly about Paris; she made Louise Danton come with her to Robespierre. But they found his door inexorably closed. And, in any case, there never was a man so indifferent to women's tears.

Meanwhile, Robespierre's success was producing the usual effect of victory. The assurance with which Saint-Just had asserted the existence of the plot had impressed the public mind. Delbrel, a deputy, wrote his friends at Moissac that "for several days past, during which the National Conven-

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tion and the Committees have been pursuing various intriguers and rascals, these gentlemen, who felt the weight of their iniquities, and whose conscience was by no means clear . . . have been making a great stir in the Convention. . . . Danton said a very remarkable thing, the other day, he little thought he was saying it of himself: 'The Republic,' he declared, 'must boil without ceasing, till she has thrown up all her scum!'

It fell to Couthon's share to impress the minds of the "pure republicans" at the Jacobins' Club that night. For a week past the cripple had seemed possessed with a sort of gloomy mysticism (apparent in his letters), and he was now to sing a *Te Deum* of his own composition: "At last the horizon of politics is clearer! the sky is growing serene, and the friends of the Republic breathe afresh." He congratulated the People on the arrest of the "old Cordeliers," who were no more than "old conspirators"; the Jacobins, he was sure, would ally themselves with the Convention. The "ramifications of the conspiracy" would be sought out: "The Republic must be purged of the crimes that infect her. Her foundations are in justice and virtue. Without them she cannot continue to exist: with them she can never perish!" Frantic applause greeted his speech; Legendre, duly warned of the fate awaiting him if he offended again, was very weak: "he had always looked on Danton as a pure patriot. If he had been mistaken, his error had been involuntary." "And besides," he added, "I bow to the verdict of the Tribunal." The denials were beginning. And it is not difficult to understand that when Saint-Just, in his turn, proceeded to the rostrum, "repeated and unanimous applause" was showered upon him. Vilain d'Aubigny tells us that after that evening of the 10th, he met several "patriots" who said to him, with tears: "There are proofs that they are traitors and conspirators! *Who would have believed it? Yet, if it be true, no pity must be shown them, let them die!*" Even within the prisons, if we may rely on a certain prisoner's journal, "the Danton business stirred curiosity," but even there the report was that "all these gentlemen had stolen a

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prodigious amount of money." Public opinion did, indeed, prove itself what Danton had once somewhat coarsely called it, in Robespierre's presence.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 10th Germinal, Danton was in the Luxembourg Prison. It was full, at that moment, of arrested persons of every description. Some of these were standing about when this very unexpected fellow-captive arrived. "He made a good impression," writes one. "Gentlemen," he said, "I had hoped to have got you all out of this place, but unluckily I am shut up in it with you: I do not know what the end of all this will be." Delacroix was very silent, and Danton tried to cheer him up with his rough jokes. To some other prisoners he said: "When men commit follies, one must *know how to laugh at them*. But if reason does not soon return to this poor world, *you will have seen nothing but roses, so far!*" He was a true prophet: his own death was to be the signal for the Great Terror, which was to send 1376 victims to the scaffold within the space of nine-and-forty days.

He kept up this somewhat blustering attitude with remarkable steadiness. Before long, everybody was talking about the remarks he made to his friends from the window of his cell. He was resolved, writes Riouffe, "to be Danton to the end"; his "cynical wit," he adds, was exemplified in "sentences mingled with oaths and coarse expressions." "I am leaving everything in a terrible mess," he said; "there is not a man among them all who knows how to govern. Amidst all these mad doings, I am not sorry to have set my name on a few decrees which will prove I had no share in them." Sometimes he was haunted by memories of the Girondins; then he would do battle with his own conscience: "*They were Cains! Brissot, just as much as Robespierre, would have sent me to the guillotine!*" Bitter words fell from his lips, too, now and then: "In revolutions, the authority remains with the greatest rascals. Better be a poor sinner than a ruler of men!" "The ——— idiots, they'll shout 'Long live the Republic!' when they see me go by!" Then his love of the country would rise up in him again, and he

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would "talk endlessly about Nature's trees." To Thomas Payne he said, in English, "They are sending me to the scaffold! I'll go cheerfully!"

On the 12th the prisoners received the formal act of impeachment. Desmoulins wept over it, but Danton sneered: "Well, Lacroix, what have you to say about it?" "That I'll cut my hair so that Sanson may not touch it." But Danton himself must have felt some hope. "We must try to touch the feelings of the People!" he said.

Each man behaved according to his own nature. Danton strutted and jeered, Héroult ran after pretty women, Desmoulins wrote miserable tender letters to his Lucile; Fabre—true type of the man of letters—consoled himself with the thought of his immortal glory. "Fouquier may cut off my head," he said, with a conceit that was sublime, "but he can never do away with my *Philinte!*"

On the 13th they were all transferred to the Conciergerie; their trial was to begin that day. Tradition assures us that as Danton crossed the threshold he was heard to say: "Just this day a year ago I caused the Revolutionary Tribunal to be set up. *I pray God and men to forgive me for having done it!*" I have always doubted the authenticity of this last sentence; it is not at all in his usual style. One witness affirms that he added—and this seems far more likely, "I did it to prevent the renewal of the September massacres."

That very hour he was summoned to the Bar of the Tribunal.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION

The Trial—The Judges “appear” before Danton—The Second Day—Danton “crushes” the President—The Third Day—The Charge crumbles away—An Appeal to the Committees—The Discussion compulsorily closed—The Jury deliberates—The Sentence—Death.

MOST of my readers, probably, are familiar with the surroundings amidst which the closing scenes of the great drama were played out. The Tribunal had set up its abode in that “Grand’ Chambre” where the Paris Parliament, in all its splendour, had held its sittings in the days of old—Dürer’s *Christ* looking down upon the members, carpets besprinkled with fleur-de-lis spread beneath their feet. The tapestries had been torn from the walls now, the carpets taken away, the *Christ* had disappeared. The “bed of justice” on which the Sovereign had been wont to sit no longer stood in the “King’s corner.” Of all the splendour of a bygone time, nothing remained—save the beautiful blue-and-gold ceiling, and a marble pavement, black and white, which gave an air of gloom to the apartment—a gloom almost deepened by the dreary light falling through the windows from the narrow court of the Conciergerie on which they looked.

Common wooden tables had been brought in. At the far end of the room, behind the longest of these tables, sat the judges, in their sombre attire and black-plumed hats; in front of them, at a smaller table, the Public Prosecutor, in the same funereal garb; on the judges’ left, the chairs and table of the jury, and facing these, the benches into which the prisoners were crammed. Opposite the judges was the bar, at which the witnesses gave their testimony. A look of mortal sadness brooded over it all. Danton can hardly have

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recognized the gorgeous "Grand' Chambre" within the walls of which he had argued his first cases.

At ten o'clock on 13th Germinal (April 3), the judges and jury made their entry, and the benches prepared for the accused filled up with the most prodigious batch of prisoners seen there since the trial of the Girondins.

For hours and hours a huge crowd had been waiting in the space allotted to the public, while in the *salle des pas perdus*, on the landings, on the staircases, and even overflowing into the space that had once been the Place Dauphine, a far larger assemblage struggled to gain an entry, straining its ears when any voice was raised within, quivering with excitement when Danton's thundering accents fell on the air like the roar of some hunted beast.

The judges were "good men," on whom the authorities could rely—their hearts as black as the feathers in their hats. The President was Herman, for whom the trial was to earn a Minister's portfolio; the Prosecutor was Fouquier, of all too famous memory. These two men had already proved their mettle, and yet so dangerous a prisoner was Danton taken to be, that the Committee—we have a document that proves the fact—had thought it well to take special precautions regarding them. At the slightest sign of weakness, they were to be arrested where they sat. Neither of them can have been unaware that his own head would be forfeit if Danton's seemed likely to escape. Herman would have been instantly replaced by Dumas, the Vice-President, a born torturer, who would have carried out any order the Committee chose to give him quite unquestioningly, and had practically smothered Hébert's defence. On the 12th this Dumas had been called into the presence of the Committee, which evidently intended to retain his services in case of need. By these measures the Tribunal had provided against every eventuality. Fouquier, too, had been threatened with dire consequences if, to use his own vulgar phraseology, "the business blew up in his hand." He was ordered to employ all his "energy." He was even to employ it against Desmoulins, his own cousin, whom he had implored in the most

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servile language, on August 20, 1792, to "get him a place" from M. Danton. He actually owed his present office to his kinsman's intervention.

The jury—though the whole body consisted of tried men—had also, as the Clerk of the Court testifies, been chosen with the utmost care. Not one of them must allow his feelings to be touched. Topino-Lebrun, the painter, who had refused to "grind red paint" himself, was to be a mere spectator of the trial. His precious notes enable us to reconstitute most of its features. Seven jurymen only had been considered absolutely "safe," and the jury, as a consequence, was reduced to this number. Several of these worthies were known to be at open enmity with certain of the accused men.

The deposition of one of the witnesses at Fouquier's own trial informs us that these jurymen "used to go to Robespierre's house every day."

There were no lawyers, or, what was worse, Fouquier forced lawyers on some of the prisoners—men such as Pantin, who was to tell his *Society* at Gisors, a few days later, that he had gone to the trial as an onlooker and had been appointed to defend Chabot, of whose death he heartily approved. Hardly any witnesses: the accused were anxious to produce several, but the court, on various pretexts, refused to call them.

Features such as these forewarn us that the trial was to be a mere parody of justice—like all the trials held in that place, indeed, for the six previous months.

And in this connection the very sight of the accused men is instructive. They numbered fourteen, to be increased to sixteen, before the trial ended, by the addition of two more prisoners, Westermann and Luillier. Danton, Fabre, Desmoulins, Philippeaux, Delacroix, Hérault de Séchelles, were charged with having desired to "re-establish royalty," though nobody, it would seem, took one moment's trouble to prove their connivance: so slight was the evidence in each individual case that the prosecution endeavoured to convey the impression of a plot by arraigning all the prisoners in a body. The charge against the other group of accused men

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was one of jobbery and corruption of deputies. Here we recognize the Macchiavellian idea pursued by Robespierre for months and months, of compromising Danton and his adherents with all the rogues who had acted as the agents of the India Company—Chabot and his myrmidons, and a whole rabble of foreign rascals, Guzman, a Spaniard, Deisderichen, a Dane, two Austrian Jews of the name of Frey—all of them destined to make the accused men stink yet more vilely in the nostrils of the public. So varied were the accusations on which political men, doubtful financiers, and cosmopolitan agents stood in the same dock, that they were discussed, during the trial, quite separately, without any attempt, on Fouquier's part, to establish the smallest connection between them. But the general effect was successfully produced: taking them all together, the accused persons were "knaves," "men who had sold themselves." Had Danton been less generous hearted, he might well have ejaculated, like poor Anarcharsis Cloutz—who had spoken the words from the tumbril that was bearing him to his execution, only a week before this time: "My friends, do not confuse me, I entreat, with all these rogues!"

Thus from the first moment, lies and iniquity ruled the court—judges threatened with death if the men they were to judge escaped it, jurymen carefully chosen to condemn the accused, and incessantly worked on to that end, lawyers appointed to betray their clients, witnesses for the defence kept out, and the prisoners themselves jumbled together in the deliberate hope of sullyng the pure gold of a Desmoulins with the vile metal of a Chabot. A parody of justice, in good truth, within the very "house of justice!"

On the previous evening the accused men had undergone a most hasty examination, in their prison. This, in Danton's case, had only amounted to two questions and replies. Did he acknowledge he had "conspired against the French People, to re-establish the monarchy and destroy the national representation?" He answered that he "had been a Republican even under the tyranny, and should die one." To the question as to whether he had any counsel to defend him, he

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answered that "he would suffice to himself." Here was promise of some fine speaking! He seemed full of confidence, indeed. Speaking of the judges and jury, just before he entered the court, he said, "We shall see what those . . . will look like in my presence!" It was as though he, the accused man, were to call on his judges to appear before him.

When they did appear, at ten o'clock, every eye was turned on Danton. His face blazed with haughty fury; pride, rage, and scorn were all combined in that portentous sneer. An old friend of his, Suberbielle, who was on the jury, acknowledges that "he dared not look at him."

The oath of impartiality—five sentences of perjury in the lips of wretches such as these—was administered by Herman. That the jurors were perjured was demonstrated instantly, for when Desmoulins made an urgent objection to Renaudin, who had endeavoured to destroy him at the Jacobins', the Tribunal refused to admit his plea, and this open opponent of the accused man was retained upon the jury.

Herman then proceeded to call over the prisoners' names. When Danton's name was called he exclaimed: "Georges-Jacques Danton, lawyer, born at Arcis, thirty-four years old, Deputy to the Convention." Place of residence? "Before long, my dwelling will be in the Void, and my name, whatever you may say, will be in the Pantheon of History! *The People will respect my head. Yes! my guillotined head!*"

Even at this stage of the proceedings his exasperation appeared extreme: that was because he had just perceived, slipping in behind the judges, four members of the Committee of the General Security, who, bent on his destruction, had come to keep watch on both judges and jury—old Vadier, grinning his ironic smile at the sight of the accused men's haughty bearing, Amar and Vouland, close beside him, and most infamous of all, David, who, but a day before, had been an intimate frequenter of Danton's hearth. For three whole days they were to sit there, "bestirring themselves," so the Clerk of the Court tells us, "talking to the judges, the jury, and the witnesses, telling every one who came in that the accused men, and Danton particularly, were villains."

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Infuriated by the sight, the prisoners urgently demanded the calling of sixteen witnesses for the defence, and more especially certain deputies indicated by them, who would receive their "denunciations" against the Committees.

But the Clerk of the Court began to read the twofold charge against Danton's accomplices and Chabot's. One police-agent notes that while this was being done the accused men "pretended this report was the first intimation they had received of the huge crimes imputed to them."

And then, quite suddenly, the President closed the sitting. The impression produced on the public must clearly have been a bad one, from the prosecution's point of view. This conclusion may be drawn from Couthon's efforts to assert the contrary on the following day. "Though they affected an outward appearance of confidence," he writes, "the violent working of their muscles and the external movements of their eyes proved their minds to be anything but easy."

Danton had scarcely found an opportunity of speaking, but he reckoned on a chance of putting the judges to confusion" the next day: after that, it would be his turn to "ask mercy for them."

And his enemies, in fact, viewed the approach of his examination with considerable alarm. There is pretty clear evidence, indeed, of an attempt to put it off, in the hope of escaping it altogether. The second day of the trial (April 14) was to be largely taken up with the business of the India Company, in which Danton, of course, was not concerned. But he was eager to come to the front, and showed it clearly. An incident that cropped up at the very beginning of the sitting gave him his opportunity. Westermann had been arrested on the previous evening, and immediately brought before the Tribunal. He protested against this treatment, on the plea that the charge had not even been read aloud to him, and that no steps to verify his identity had been taken. Herman shrugged his shoulders: all such things were mere "useless formalities." Whereupon Danton cried out ironically, "*Yet we are all here as a matter of form!*" His words were greeted by a burst of laughter "of the most

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indecent sort," says Pantin, and when the President recalled the accused men to "their duty" Danton thundered out: "*And I, President, recall you to a sense of decency! We have a right to speak here!*" Herman tried to drown his voice by a furious ringing of the bell: "Do you not hear my bell?" he said. "*A man who is fighting for his life laughs at bells—he bellows!*" was the answer.

Westermann, however, continued to insist that he ought to be examined before the trial proceeded, and the President, very much annoyed, deputed one of the judges to perform this task in a room close by. The sitting was suspended for a moment. But Danton was resolved the judges should have no respite: "*If only we are allowed to speak, and speak fully,*" he cried, "*I am sure of bringing my enemies to confusion: and if the French People is what it should be, it is I who shall have to beg mercy for them!*" Desmoulins, too, called out, "Ah! We shall be allowed to speak! That is all we ask!" And Danton sneered again, "Barère's the patriot now, is he?" And to the jury, "I had the Tribunal set up, so I fancy I know it pretty well!" His eye fell on Cambon, who had been summoned as a witness for the prosecution: "Cambon!" he said to him, "do you believe us to be conspirators?" Cambon could not repress a smile: "*Look! he is laughing! he is laughing! He does not believe it! Clerk! write down that he was laughing!*" And just then, when the audience began to show evident symptoms of excitement, Westermann came back, in a raging fury too, and stirred it up afresh. "I will ask leave," he exclaimed, "to strip myself stark naked in the sight of the People. I have received seven wounds, every one of them in front! I have never been wounded behind but once—by this charge brought against me!"

Herman reopened the proceedings. He meant to spend a considerable time over the business of the India Company. On this subject Cambon was to make a deposition, but before he made it he felt it his duty to refer to the mission of Danton and Delacroix in Belgium, and that without imputing any blame to either prisoner in connection with it. "They had

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reported Dumouriez's treason the moment they had been in a position to suspect it," he declared, "and in the Committee, of which, like them, he was a member, he had heard them affirm that, after mighty convulsions, the Republic would certainly triumph." If all Fouquier's witnesses were to change their testimony like this, the moment they met Danton's eye, what was to be the end of the business? Cambon's deposition as to the traffic carried on with the India Company was overwhelming, but it affected Chabot only, and left Danton quite untouched. For this reason the President dragged the matter out longer than ever, so that the Tribune might have no excuse for opening his mouth.

But when this portion of the trial was ended, the prosecution had perforce to take up the charges against Danton. They were reached at last, and Danton, burning to defend himself, rose to his feet.

Unhappily, no record of his defence remains. Neither the *Bulletin du Tribunal*, deliberately dull and short—and touched up after the event, besides—nor the police-agent's report to the Committee, nor Pantin's speech, nor the depositions at Fouquier's trial, at a later date, nor Vilain d'Aubigny's pamphlet, nor even Topino-Lebrun's curious notes taken during the trial, enable us to reconstitute his address. Was it a speech in regular form? or did it take the shape of replies to a series of questions? Even this much it is not easy to determine. Lebrun's notes give us the impression of a man parrying, a little at random, not only the blows he sees his enemies deliver, but those they are making ready for him, in the shadow. The form of the charge was vague, and there were no papers in this strange Danton case. The accusation covered the whole of his public life, but no precise facts were specified. Thus he was forced into a groping defence against charges his accusers either could not or dared not formulate.

The truth is that when I strive to realize him, in these notes, I see a man who wanders to and fro, with outstretched hands, and feet that almost stagger, now and then, over his own past life. Once more, on that second day of his trial, the existence

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through which we have so lately followed him passes before our eyes, wrapped as it were, in a heavy cloud, lit here and there by dazzling lightning-flashes, shaken by deafening thunder peals. That life, out of the depths of which all things were rising now, had been over filled with happenings, confused, glorious, terrifying—too deep in mud, and gold, and blood, all intermingled, too many trials, too much violence. It would seem as though the man, bent though he is on justifying himself, had no more strength for the struggle: he drops down, and rises up again, excuses his past doings, falls into a frenzy, confesses a fault, and then glories in it, entreats and threatens, evokes all the glories and the sorrows of his past existence. But so irregular is his defence, so uncertain his footing on this ground on to which he has been forced, and which, as he knows, is sown with pitfalls, that here and there he stumbles, though but a moment later we may see him stand upright. And indeed I may be wrong. This nightmare of mine may be produced by the confused and broken notes taken by the spectator of his trial. Or again, it may well be that the accused man, foreseeing he would be forced into silence, poured forth all he had to say in one wild rush of hurried sentences.

So loudly did he speak that his voice resounded far beyond the doors of the court, as though its thunder would have broken them down.

“Danton,” said the President, “the Convention charges you with having favoured Dumouriez, with not having revealed his real character, with having shared his liberticidal plans, such as that of marching an armed force on Paris to destroy the Republican Government and re-establish royalty.”

Then Danton cried aloud: “My voice, so often raised in the People’s cause, to support and defend its interests, will have no difficulty in thrusting back this calumny. Will the cowards who slander me dare to attack me to my face? Let them reveal themselves! and very soon I shall have covered them with the shame and opprobrium of their own characters! I have said it, and now repeat it: my dwelling will soon be in the Void, my name will be in the Pantheon . . . Here is my

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head! It answers for everything . . ." Then with his accustomed sweeping gesture of angry weariness and proud disdain, he added: "*I have worked too long! Life is a burden to me!* I demand that the Convention shall appoint Commissioners to receive my denunciation of the system of dictatorship. Yes! I, Danton, will unmask the dictatorship that is now openly revealing its existence!"

This sudden adoption of offensive tactics alarmed the President.

"Danton," he said, "daring is the special attribute of crime, and calm is that of innocence. Self-defence is legitimate and right, no doubt, but it must be a defence that knows how to restrict itself within the bounds of decency and moderation, that respects all things, even its accusers . . ."

"Individual daring, no doubt, deserves to be put down," he replied, "and with that nobody has ever been able to reproach me. But the national daring with which I have so often served the public weal, that kind of daring is permitted: in times of revolution it is even necessary, and in this daring I glory! When I see myself so grievously, so unjustly accused, can I restrain the indignation against my detractors that stirs me to revolt? Is it from a revolutionary such as I am, as outspoken as myself, that you can expect a cool defence?"

"Sold myself! I! A man such as I am has no price! Proofs? . . . Let the man who brings these charges against me, as the Convention asserts, produce his proofs, his half-proofs, his symptoms of venality! I! I am accused of having crawled at the feet of vile despots, of having been the foe of liberty from the first, of having plotted with Mirabeau and Dumouriez! And I am called to the Bar of Justice, inevitable, inflexible! . . . And you, Saint-Just, you will answer to posterity for the slander you have cast upon the People's best friend, on its most fervent champion . . . When I look upon that list of horrors, I feel my very life-blood shudder in my veins!"

Once more the President broke in. Danton, he declared, was failing in respect for the representatives of the Nation,

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the Tribunal, the Sovereign People. It was at this point, probably, that he exclaimed: "Whatever may be said, our glory is secure: we shall go to the scaffold, but when we are no more, the People will tear our enemies to rags." To which remark, so Pantin tells us, Herman replied that "the accused insulted the Tribunal by declaring their death a certainty, that to say so argued a distrust of its justice." "Then," said Danton, "I will condescend to justify myself. I will follow the plan adopted by Saint-Just. I have sold myself, have I, to Mirabeau and d'Orléans? . . . Let the men who knew of this bargain stand forward. What price was paid for me? I am the partisan of royalists and royalty? Have you forgotten that I was appointed to the administration in the teeth of all the opponents of the Revolution, who hated me? You say there was an understanding between myself and Mirabeau? . . . But everybody knows I fought against Mirabeau, and stood in the way of all his plans, whenever I believed them to endanger liberty. . . ." And he added certain details: then again his fury seemed to sweep him suddenly away. "I am in full possession of all my faculties when I now call on my accusers to come forth, and demand the right to measure my strength against theirs. Let them be revealed, and I will cast them back into the void out of which they never should have issued. . . . Come forth, you vile impostors, and I will tear away the mask that shields you from public chastisement!"

Was it then that the audience broke into the applause of which the clerk, Fabricius Pâris, speaks? In any case, the President once more took fright. "It is not by indecent outbreaks against your accusers," he said, "that you will succeed in convincing the jury of your innocence. Address it in a language it may understand, but do not forget that the men who accuse you enjoy the public esteem, and have done nothing that can rob them of that precious testimony."

"A man accused as I am," Danton replied, "answers before the jury, but he does not address himself to it: I defend myself, I slander no man. Neither ambition nor greed have ever had a hold on me: they have never guided my actions:

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such passions have never led me to compromise the public welfare: I have been devoted to my country, and offered it my whole existence, a liberal sacrifice. In this spirit I have fought against La Fayette, Bailly, and all the plotters who would fain have slipped into the most important posts so as to murder liberty more easily and surely. I must now speak of three cowardly rascals who have been the ruin of Robespierre. I have most important matters to reveal. . . .”

In the utmost alarm, the President broke in sharply, and requested him to “confine himself to his own defence.” Then he went back over the whole of his past life, and his intercourse with Mirabeau especially. “A strange thing,” he said, “this blindness of the Convention concerning me, till now! A miraculous thing, its sudden enlightenment!”

“The irony to which you have recourse,” cried Herman, “does not destroy the reproach brought against you of having concealed your want of patriotism from the public so as to deceive your colleagues and secretly favour royalty.”

“I do indeed recollect,” sneered Danton, “having promoted the re-establishment of royalty, and protected the tyrant’s flight by objecting with all my might to his journey to Saint-Cloud, by setting a bristling row of pikes and bayonets along his road, and putting shackles, as it were, upon his fiery steeds. If this be to declare oneself the partisan of royalty, and prove one’s friendship for it, if such things mark out the man who favours tyranny, in that hypothesis, I acknowledge I am guilty of the crime!”

He then proceeded to explain his relations with the Lameth brothers, the business of the Champ de Mars, his journey to England, his struggle with the “Brissotins,” his trip to Arcis on the eve of the Tenth of August, his conduct on the historic night of 9th – 10th August. He had never “given his vote to d’Orléans:” nobody could prove he had secured his election. As for the funds committed to him in August 1792, he had received 400,000 *francs*, 200,000 of which were for Secret Service matters: he had “spent in the sight of Marat and Robespierre” for the “Commissaries to the Departments.” He dwelt on the matter of Adrien Duport. As to the Bris-

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soitins, whom he was said to have protected, "*they have attacked me sharply enough, upon my word!*" He also referred at length to his intercourse with Dumouriez: "He was a proud fellow," he said, who must not be provoked: he had humoured him; and, further, it was to Billaud that he had entrusted the negotiations. Billaud had never discovered, at that time, whether Dumouriez was a traitor or not.

He had been speaking for an hour, and it seemed as though nothing would stop him. According to Pâris, the general impression was that the charge could not possibly be sustained. "A great proportion of the audience applauded his justification." The report that Danton was putting his accusers to confusion spread from within the court and even reached the prisons, whose denizens it filled with anxious hopes. On the 15th one of these prisoners writes as follows in his journal: "A citizen who had been present at the discussion reported to us that *Danton makes both judges and jury tremble, his voice drowns the noise of the President's bell. . . .*" At one moment, when the public raised a murmur, Danton exclaimed: "*People! you shall judge me when I have told you everything; my voice must reach not you only, but the whole of France!*"

And everyone indeed, President, judges, jury, Public Prosecutor and all, seemed put to silence. The audience was swaying to and fro, now murmuring, now applauding. Anxiety reached its height. Herman, distraught, sent Fouquier a note: "Within half an hour, I shall stop the defence." And suddenly he cut it short. The *Bulletin du Tribunal* runs as follows: "As he (Danton) went through the series of charges affecting him personally, he found it difficult to restrain the impulse of fury that possessed him: *the faltering accents of his voice clearly indicated his need of rest. This painful state of things was realized by all the judges, who suggested that he should suspend his methods of justification, and take them up again presently, in greater calm and quietness. Danton accepted this proposal, and said no more.*" This strikes us as being more than probably a piece of hypocrisy. Amongst Topino-Lebrun's notes, which grow

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more and more curt as the trial proceeds, we come on the words: "*I am not to be allowed to call witnesses? Why, then, I give up my defence!*" And I make you a thousand excuses for whatever may be too vehement about it: that is my nature! The People will tear my enemies to pieces before three months are out!" This explosion of indignation was evidently evoked by the court's suppression of his defence. The President was obliged to promise he should resume it after the other prisoners had been cross-examined. To this he agreed, and the sitting concluded. The general feeling was increasingly favourable to Danton and his friends.

The proceedings on the 15th were to be devoted, in the first place, to Danton's fellow-prisoners. Their replies were less spirited and less full than his, but the impression they produced was that the charge must certainly fall to the ground. In Hérault's case, especially, letters from foreign countries had been produced, which, though falsified, cut up, and re-arranged, in no wise sufficed to implicate him in any serious misdoing. Desmoulins had no difficulty in proving his chief crime to have been that of denouncing Hébert, whom the Tribunal had sent to the scaffold only a week previously. And though Delacroix made a rather poor defence as to the pillage in Belgium, he utterly denied all the other charges. He claimed his right to produce witnesses, declaring he had handed in a list of them three days previously, and that not one of them had been summoned. An altercation on this point between Fouquier-Tinville and the prisoner turned out somewhat unfavourably for the Public Prosecutor: then Herman declared he perceived the accused man to be "plotting within the very confines of the Tribunal": and when Delacroix, backed by Danton, energetically insisted on the evident iniquitousness of this trial without witnesses for the defence, the Prosecutor, beside himself with vexation, exclaimed: "*It is time to make an end of this struggle, which is a scandal to the Tribunal and to those who hear you speak.*" I shall write to the Convention, to know what its wishes are: they shall be carried out to the letter."

The Tribunal was really in a most perilous position: Danton

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instantly raised his voice, and Delacroix held his ground, while Hérault, too, rushed to their assistance. Fouquier was beside himself with anxiety and rage: Philippeaux and Westermann were both questioned, and both put him to confusion, the first with a perfect ease of language, the second with the rough frankness of a soldier. But not for one instant were the accused men seen to rise in rebellion, as Fouquier was to affirm. "I testify," deposed a witness, four months later, "that there was no revolt nor insult on the part of any one of the accused men against any person whatsoever." But it is quite certain that Danton had broken down the accusation, and that his friends had thrown themselves into the breach and were engaged in widening it. "*The judges and jury were annihilated* in the presence of such men," says the Clerk of the Court, "and for a moment the writer believed they would not dare to sacrifice them." The public, now fully informed, shared this opinion: everyone believed the acquittal of the prisoners to be a foregone conclusion: the jurors themselves were beginning to give way. If Danton, supported by public opinion, was allowed to speak again, the rout would be complete. Once acquitted, the accused men would be borne back to the Convention on the shoulders of the populace; and the two Committees, crushed by their defeat, would crumble to pieces: the members who had been present at the trial changed colour at the very thought: "rage and terror were depicted on their pallid countenances," says Fabricius Pâris.

Though the law forbade it, Herman and Fouquier, in their vain and feverish endeavour to attain some concerted plan, kept up a constant interchange of anxious notes. Fouquier especially was terror-stricken. Here, in the very precincts of the Tribunal, the business was about to "blow up in his hand." Forthwith he drew up a letter to the Convention, and submitted it to Herman, who corrected it. It ran as follows: "A terrible storm has been grumbling ever since the beginning of the sitting: the accused, *like madmen*, demand the summons of their witnesses for the defence—the citizen-deputies Simon, Courtois, Laignelot, Fréron, Panis, etc.—and appeal to the People against the refusal they pretend they

have received. In spite of the firmness of the President and the whole Tribunal, their constantly recurring demands disturb the sitting, and they loudly declare they will not be silent till their witnesses are heard, and that *without a decree*. We invite you to trace us a clear line of conduct as to this claim, *as the judicial regulations furnish us with no means of finding grounds for a refusal.*"

And while the court awaited the Committee's reply the trial proceeded.

Since the previous evening, the Committee had been labouring to discover, or rather to invent, the "means" for which Fouquier asked. Within the last few hours, as though by a miracle, one "decisive" document had fallen into its hands. Laflotte, then in confinement at the Luxembourg, had denounced a conspiracy organized in the dungeons of that prison, which was on the point of taking active shape: two prisoners, the ex-General Dillon, and Simon, a deputy, were its fomenters: they had told Laflotte that the accused men, supported by popular feeling, were holding their own against the Tribunal, that Dillon was to receive a thousand crowns from Lucile Desmoulins for "sending a crowd to collect round the Tribunal," and that "they must gather themselves together" according to a plan Laflotte offered to go and reveal to the Committees.

Even granting this letter was not absolutely composed by certain members of the Committees on the previous night, we cannot fail to recognize some impostor's hand in every line of it. What likelihood was there that Lucile would have carried her thousand crowns to men shut up in prison for the purpose of procuring the presence of a crowd round about the Tuileries? And how was Dillon, who was under lock and key, to stir up any kind of riot? No member of the Committee asked himself these questions, and that for a very good reason. The report, if Saint-Just, to whom it was handed over, used it skilfully, was all that was needed to insure a vote that would end the trial.

This young man appeared at the rostrum of the Convention, boiling over with sham indignation, and waving a sheaf of

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papers, the "documents" in question. He took good care not to read out Fouquier's letter, with its clumsy reference to the injustice of which the accused men had complained: he put forward an impudent travesty of that communication. "The Public Prosecutor," he said, "has informed us that *the revolt of the guilty men* has necessitated the suspension of the judicial investigation until the Convention shall have taken fresh measures. You have escaped the greatest danger that has ever threatened liberty: all the accomplices have now been discovered, and *the revolt of the criminals* (terrified by the Law), *at the very feet of Justice*, explains the secret of their conscience: *their despair, their fury*, all betray that the good-heartedness of which they made a show was the most hypocritical snare ever laid for the Revolution. . . . *No further proofs are needful.*" Then he spoke, in his own peculiar style, of the "prison plot": Desmoulins' wife had found money to stir up a movement *for the assassination of the patriots and the Tribunal.*"

Everything proved the wretches' guilt: "*their resistance was an acknowledgment.*" And in conclusion, he demanded a decree whereby "every accused person who resisted or insulted the national justice *should be forthwith forbidden to plead.*" Laflotte's letter was read aloud, the decree voted and sent to Fouquier. The noose had been prepared by the hand of Saint-Just, while Robespierre, secretive as ever, stood in the background, impassive, implacable.

Overflowing with delight, Amar and Vouland hurried to the Palace. Meeting the Clerk of the Court, they cried: "We have them, the rascals! They were carrying on a plot in the Luxembourg!" They sent a message to Fouquier: he hurried out to them. Amar brandished the decree: "*This will make things easy for you!*" "*Upon my soul,*" replied Fouquier, with a smile, "*we needed it!*" He went back to the Court and read the decree and Laflotte's deposition aloud.

Then the accused men realized they were being gagged so as to make the cutting of their throats an easier matter. To Desmoulins one point was specially clear: Saint-Just would secure not only his execution, but Lucile's too. That was

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his first cry : "Ah, the villains ! They are not content with murdering me, they are bent on murdering my wife as well ! " and when the members of the Committee reappeared, smiling broadly, behind the judges' seats, "Look," cried Danton, "*look at the vile assassins ! They will hunt us to our deaths !*" We are told, too, that certain, as he now was, as to his fate, he guessed whose hand had tightened the loop, screened by Saint-Just : "*Vile Robespierre !*" was his cry. "*The scaffold claims thee ! Robespierre, thou wilt follow me !*" Nevertheless, he still insisted that the decree could not affect him and his fellow-prisoners : "I have never insulted the Tribunal : of that I take the People to witness. This decree is a devilish contrivance to bring about our destruction. *I shall be Danton to my last hour : to-morrow I shall fall asleep in glory, of that I am sure.*" Drunk with rage, they were haled back to the Conciergerie.

The sitting of the 16th was an inevitable mockery. In the eyes of all men the trial was over already. At the very opening of the sitting the Prosecutor caused the decree with which he had been armed to be read aloud. He then proceeded to inform Danton and Delacroix that he had "a crowd of witnesses against them, all of whom would have put them to confusion ; but that, in conformity with orders received from the Assembly, he should abstain from calling these witnesses, and that they, the accused, must not reckon on calling their own : they would be judged entirely *on written proofs*, and were not to defend themselves against any others." If we are to believe the *Bulletin*, the two accused men then "renewed their indecent conduct by demanding that witnesses should be called." 'And I am disposed to believe that Danton would hardly have accepted this invitation to allow himself to be gratuitously strangled without protesting fiercely.

Fouquier "despatched" the business of the remaining prisoners—the Frey brothers, whose examination had been forgotten by the court. Once these poor wretches were done with, Danton quite expected to be allowed to complete his defence, according to the promise made him on the 14th. But Herman had no such intention. Haste was indispensable.

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He asked the jury to declare itself sufficiently enlightened. The jurors retired for a few minutes, and returning, gave him the assurance he had demanded.

"The jury being satisfied, the debate will now end," said the President. "*End!*" cried Danton, "how can that be? *It has not begun yet! You have not read a single document! No witnesses have been called!*"

He was right. The sole and only document produced in this most extraordinary trial had been the accusation drawn up by Saint-Just: there had been a certain disorderly examination of a few witnesses, who had been interrupted before they had concluded their depositions: no document whatever had been produced, save one forgery: The witnesses for the defence not having been summoned, those for the prosecution had actually been discharged. And stranger yet, there had been no charge to the jury, and nobody seemed to give an instant's consideration to the fact that there had been no pleadings at all.

"*We are to be sentenced without a hearing!*" cried the accused men. Desmoulins had drawn up a memorandum refuting the lies put forward by Saint-Just: not being allowed to read it, he crumpled it up and cast it on the floor. Whereupon it was said he had rolled it into a ball and thrown it at the judges' heads. As a matter of fact we may readily conceive that none of these men were particularly calm. Then Fouquier called out that the indecent behaviour of the accused obliged him to demand their removal while the questions for the jury's decision were put, and sentence pronounced. Condemned beforehand though they were, their enemies were still afraid of them. The Tribunal acceded to the President's request. The accused men clung to their seats. Desmoulins screamed aloud. Three men had to drag him out of the room. Danton, probably did not make much less noise. He cried out: "*A conspirator! Me! My name is bound up with that of every revolutionary institution—the levies, the revolutionary armies, the revolutionary Committees, the Committee of the Public Safety, the revolutionary Tribunal: I have brought about my own death, and I am a Moderate!*"

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The jury had retired. Carefully as the jurymen had been chosen, worked on both before the trial and during it, strangled as all the prisoners' means of defence had been, these men, inconceivable as it may seem, hesitated still. They had been impressed by Danton's defence, cut short and unfinished as it had been, and also, let us say it frankly, by the difficulty of discovering any ground for their verdict. Several, if we may believe what Courtois tells us, went and spoke to David: they did not believe Danton to be guilty. "What!" cried the painter; "not guilty? *Has not public opinion passed judgment on him already?* What are you waiting for? Only cowards would behave after this fashion!"

"During this deliberation," writes the Clerk of the Court, "which lasted longer than had been expected, a report spread about the court that the jury was not agreed, and that a majority was in favour of acquittal." The members of the Committee who had been present at the trial were "in consternation." They went up with the President to the refreshment-room, next to that in which the jury was holding its consultation, and sent for all the "good jurymen." These were ordered to threaten the others with the rage of the Committees. To one juror, who had been moved to tears by the horrible position in which he found himself, Suberbielle is reported to have said, "*which is most useful to the Republic, Danton or Robespierre?*" "Robespierre!" "Very well! Then Danton must be guillotined!"

Herman and Fouquier then resorted to a final expedient. They entered the jury room, and appear, according to certain witnesses, to have produced a letter which, so they asserted "came from abroad, and was addressed to Danton." What was the nature of the *secret document* which was to end by removing every scruple? M. Joseph Reinach has asked the question, but he has failed, so far, in arriving at an answer. If it was not a forgery, it may have been some old letter connected with Marie-Antoinette. Be that as it may, Paris beheld the jurymen coming down the stairs, all of a sudden, "looking like madmen." Trinchar, catching sight of the Clerk of the Court, called out in a voice of fury, "*The wretches*

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are to perish!” And with his arm he made a horrid gesture to imitate the falling knife. A moment later, the jury brought in its verdict on the two questions—“*the existence of a plot to re-establish the monarchy, and the existence of a plot to defame and discredit the national representation*”; it affirmed both to be facts, and declared all the accused—save Luillier—guilty.

The Prosecutor then proceeded to lay his conclusions before the Court, and after due consultation with his colleagues, the President, in face of the prisoners’ empty benches, pronounced sentence of death upon the accused men and ordered that “the sentence should be notified to them between the two turnstiles of the prison.”

Early in the afternoon of that same day, 16th Germinal (April 6), Sanson, the executioner, came to the Conciergerie to “make the toilet of his men”; “Big game to-day!” a gendarme called out, as he passed him by.

The weather was magnificent. All Paris turned out to see the tremendous sight—Danton and Desmoulins going to the guillotine! But the blue sky and the blossom-laden trees notwithstanding, the mob betrayed no sign of the indecent joy that had so lately lavished insult on Hébert and his gang: “Frenchmen,” Dyannière was shortly to write, “remember *the mourning* that reigned in Paris when Danton was led to the scaffold!”

Danton greeted Sanson’s arrival with a tragic cheerfulness, which he preserved in the very tumbril: he was resolved “to be Danton to the hour of his death.” For a week past he had been keeping up a fire of jokes anent the grim visitor, and talking with a laugh of the hour in which “Sanson would dislocate their cervical vertebræ.” When Desmoulins broke down and sobbed, as he whispered Lucile’s name, the older man showered rough consolation on him, treating this “man-boy,” to the very end, with an elder brother’s tenderness. Fabre, who was cast in a quite different mould, had but one anxiety: that wretch Billaud, whose work had been hissed off the stage once, might be very capable of appropriating a manuscript, “l’Orange de Malte,” seized by the

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authorities in the desk of the "immortal author of *Philinte*." "*De si beaux vers!*" he cried. "Ha! *des vers!*" sneered Danton. "Before a week is out, *tu en feras!*" Thus to the very end, like some Shaksperian actor, he played his part. As an example of firmness to Desmoulins, it may be, he never mentioned his pretty Louise, nor his "little Dantons": he thought about them, of that we may be sure.

By four o'clock in the afternoon the tumbrils had rolled out of the Conciergerie. They took the usual road—by the Pont Neuf, the Quai du Louvre, and the long Rue de la Convention, formerly the Rue Saint-Honoré, and so to the Place de la Révolution by what had once been the Rue Royale. Slowly they moved along, and everyone had full time to look at the great men of the Revolution as they went to meet their doom.

Frénilly saw the procession pass. "Three red-painted tumbrils, each drawn by two horses, and escorted by five or six gendarmes, travelled at a foot's pace through a huge and silent crowd, that betrayed no sign of joy, and dared not show its horror. Each of these vehicles contained five or six condemned men." Danton's figure attracted every eye: "His huge round head stared proudly on the stupid crowd." Hérault seemed prostrate and dejected. Another witness describes Desmoulins as "having a scared look, and talking to his companions in a most agitated way."

What a road for Danton to travel!—from the Palace where he had been a humble apprentice of the law, in old Maître Vinot's day, to the Place de la Révolution, already reddened with floods of human blood—floods he himself, in spite of his own will, had sometimes set a-flowing! Past the Place de l'École, and the little Café du Parnasse where he had learnt to know his "belle Gabrielle," and had held converse with her, merry and tender. Further on, at the Café de la Régence, he caught sight of David, seated on the terrace, coolly "sketching" the friend he had sent to his death: at the sight of his impudence Danton started sharply: "Lackey!"—he spat the word at him. Now the tumbrils were rattling along the old Rue Saint-Honoré: they reached Duplay's house, in which

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Robespierre lived. Turning towards the dwelling, the condemned man cried out once more : "*Thou followest me! Thy house shall be razed to the ground! They will sow salt where it stood!*" Could he foresee the scene that was to be enacted on that spot on 10th Thermidor!—the tumbril bearing Robespierre to his death halted, so that the fallen Dictator might behold the populace, in its delirium, sprinkling his own door with the blood of an ox!

The place of execution was reached at last. In the centre of the square, over against the scaffold, a very high one, stood the statue of Liberty, that plaster goddess to which Manon Roland had addressed her tragic cry.

The poet Arnault watched the row of tumbrils pass into the square of the former Rue Royale : "The calm of Hérault," he writes, "was the calm of indifference : the calm of Danton was the calm of disdain." Hérault kept glancing about for somebody at one of the windows of the Garde-Meuble, a woman's hand appeared, waving a lace scarf ; a smile passed over his face : each of these men was to die as he had lived.

Just as the setting sun reddened the sky behind the blossom-laden trees of the Champs-Élysées, the condemned men descended from the tumbrils. For some minutes, the Abbé de Kéravenant, the priest who had married Danton to Louise, had been following them, pronouncing the words of the final absolution as he went. Even in the square he was still murmuring them. Of this Danton's mother-in-law, Mme. Gély, declared she had been assured by the priest himself. And indeed, this ecclesiastic, as other documents prove, was one of those "chaplains of the guillotine" who made it their mission to follow the tumbrils to the scaffold.

The executioner was in a hurry : he hustled his men. The fifteen heads must be off before the daylight fell. Hérault tried to embrace Danton. Sanson parted them. "*Idiot,*" said Danton, "*will you be able to prevent our heads from kissing each other in the basket?*"

"The light was failing," says Arnault. "At the foot of the modest statue, standing out in massive outline against the sky, I saw something rise up that was like a shadow of

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Danton : in the dying light of the sun, the Tribune seemed to be as much rising out of his tomb as making ready to descend into it. Never was anything more bold than that athlete's countenance, more formidable than the look of that profile, that seemed to defy the knife, and the expression of that head which, *even as it was about to fall, seemed as though it were in the act of dictating laws.*"

He came last of all, his feet treading in his friends' blood ! Then, alone on the scaffold, a sob rose in his throat, too. "*My beloved!*" he said. "*My beloved! Shall I never see thee again?*" Then, with an effort, he exclaimed, "*Come, Danton! let there be no weakness!*" And to the executioner, "*Show my head to the people; it is worth it!*"

A moment later, just as darkness fell, that mighty head rolled into the basket.

Thus died Georges-Jacques Danton, at the age of thirty-four years and six months. For five years he had played the stormy part of "an athlete of the Revolution" on the world's stage, and he ended his life as he had lived it—sentimental, brutal, grandiloquent, even on the boards of the scaffold, the last rostrum of them all.

He had worked a great deal of harm—not intentionally, always : he had wept bitter tears over the faults he had committed, and in some measure—though too late—he had endeavoured to repair them. His efforts to secure the triumph of "clemency" and overthrow the scaffold brought the Man of September to his death.

The impression he has left behind him is not that of a splendid, nor yet that of a sordid nature. In spite of certain melancholy failings, none of which we have attempted to conceal, he proved his possession, on occasions, of a certain natural nobility. Circumstances had made him a rebel, but he had the stuff in him for another part. When he died, he had already given proof of huge capacity, yet it is more than likely that the hour of his death struck before he had revealed the full measure of his powers.

Still, on a certain day, amidst great faults, and as some men would assert, amidst great crimes, he had saved France.

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And the terror-stricken silence, on that April evening, of a populace whose habit it had been, for months, to howl the vanquished down, was the voiceless expression of a legitimate gratitude.

Besides all this, the multitude always loves a strong man. Danton was no saint, certainly; but he was a man!



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