

**HEATH'S MODERN  
LANGUAGE SERIES;  
DE TOCQUEVILLE'S  
VOYAGE EN AMÉRIQUE**

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**R. CLYDE FORD**

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*Alexis de Tocqueville*

**Heath's Modern Language Series**

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DE TOCQUEVILLE'S  
VOYAGE EN AMÉRIQUE

*EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND  
VOCABULARY*

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Alexis Charles Henri Clérel de Tocqueville was born in Paris July 29, 1805. His father was a man of some importance under the Bourbons, for he served as prefect in various departments, and in 1827 was made a peer of France. His mother was a granddaughter of Malesherbes, the famous scholar, statesman, and academician, who defended Louis XVI before the Convention.

De Tocqueville's early boyhood was spent in the château of Verneuil near Mantes, where the genial Abbé Lesueur directed his education. Later, while his father was prefect of the department of the Moselle, he continued his studies in the college at Metz, where he made a poor record in Greek and Latin, but a brilliant one in French composition and rhetoric. After a law course of three years in Paris, he was admitted to the bar in 1826. The same year he set out for a visit to Italy and Sicily with his brother Edouard, but was recalled to France by royal order in 1827 and appointed assistant magistrate to the tribunal of Versailles.

It was while attached to this court that he met Gustave de Beaumont, who was henceforth to be his most intimate friend. The two young men had many tastes in common, and together they undertook those studies of new questions and movements in society which were destined to lead to important results in the lives of both. De Tocqueville was philosopher enough to perceive clearly the causes of weakness in the Bourbon power, and he realized that it was doomed. Likewise he saw, although he had given his adherence to the new government, that the Revolution of July, 1830, could not bring any lasting tranquillity



to the country; France was caught in the grasp of an awakening democracy and was sweeping on to great changes.

Another thing, also, he saw plainly enough, namely, that no advancement was to be hoped for from the "Government of July," inasmuch as four years of service under the Restoration had been unable to secure it for him. Accordingly he began to ponder on a change of career. Among the various questions then attracting public attention was that of prison reform, and he and de Beaumont determined to apply for a mission to the United States to study the penitentiary system. This in itself would be creditable work, but more than that it would afford opportunity—and this was their real purpose—of observing the institutions and customs of American society and the workings of democracy in its only successful form. The Minister of the Interior, M. de Montalivet, granted the desired permission, and they sailed from France on the 2nd of April, 1831.

Upon their arrival in New York the two friends at once began a round of the prisons. A half dozen were visited and examined with painstaking zeal; officials and prisoners were interviewed; a vast amount of literature bearing on the subject was collected, and ample notes were made. In short, they took every care to do this part of their work well, and their report, *Du système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis et de son application en France*, published soon after their return in 1832, was an important document. It was crowned by the Academy, and certainly contributed much to improve existing penal conditions in France.

When this task was out of the way de Tocqueville felt himself free to begin those more ambitious studies which were the real occasion of his crossing the ocean. In order that his researches might be based on extensive travel and observation, he and de Beaumont journeyed in every direction to the very confines of our civilization. Their route took them up the Hudson to Albany, then westward across the state to Buffalo. From this point they continued their journey by steamer to

Detroit, where they disembarked for a two weeks' excursion into the interior of Michigan in order to get acquainted with the life of the pioneer and the Indian. It is this experience, written up under the title, *Quinze jours au désert*, which forms a large part of this volume.

Upon their return to Detroit they proceeded still further up the Great Lakes, visiting the remote settlements of Sault Ste. Marie at the outlet of Lake Superior, and Green Bay in Wisconsin. From this point they retraced their course to Buffalo, where they turned aside to explore the valley of the Saint Lawrence as far as Quebec. After their return to the United States they visited Boston and Philadelphia, and late in the year once more headed into the wilderness by way of Pittsburg and the Ohio River. After enduring fearful hardships they finally reached the Mississippi and sailed down to New Orleans. They returned overland through the Gulf states to Washington, and sailed for home from New York in February, 1832.

As soon as de Tocqueville was back in France and he and de Beaumont had made their report to the Ministry of the Interior, he began to plan for his great work in America. In order that he might devote himself entirely to it, he resigned his position under the Government and gave up his legal career. In 1835 the first two volumes\* of his *La démocratie en Amérique* appeared and met with instant success. Although his work was a forerunner in this field of political research, it has been pronounced the most luminous and capable study of democratic institutions ever made. However that may be, it was certainly the first publication which presented to Europe in an adequate way the developing civilization of America, and appearing as it did in the first half of the nineteenth century it exerted a tremendous influence on the trend of European politics.

The publication of *La démocratie* made de Tocqueville famous. In recognition of his work the French Academy

\* Volumes III and IV were published in 1840.

awarded him a special prize of 8000 francs, and in 1841 elected him a member. He married Miss Mary Mottley, an English woman, in 1835, and after the death of his mother which occurred in 1836 he established a very pleasant home life in the family château near Cherbourg, where he henceforth divided his time between property interests and politics.

From 1839 to 1848 he represented his home arrondissement of Valognes in the Chamber of Deputies, where he ranged himself with the party opposed to Louis Philippe. Although his voice was seldom heard in public debate, he took an active part in the legislative affairs of the Chamber. Reports which he presented concerning the abolition of slavery in the colonies (1839), and the organization and reform of prison administration (1840, 1846), attracted much attention. He also drew the report of the commission named by the Chamber to examine into the affairs of Algiers, and made two excursions to the colony in order to acquaint himself with actual conditions there.

After the Revolution of 1848 he was made Minister of Foreign Affairs, and though he served but a short time in this position he distinguished himself by his clear comprehension of international matters. His political life ceased with the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon in 1851 — "having ended with the end of liberty in France."

After the close of his public career he retired to his estates in Normandy where he devoted himself anew to another great literary task. In 1856 he published the first part of his *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, and its success was just as remarkable as that of *La démocratie en Amérique* twenty years before. In 1858 his health began to fail and he went to Cannes in the south of France to spend the winter, but the change resulted in no benefit. He died April 16, 1859, and was taken back to Normandy and buried in the ancestral parish of Tocqueville.

No man of his day was more respected than Alexis de Tocqueville, for his private life was as irreproachable as his public career was honest and transparent. He combined the