

**THE FRENCH REVOLUTION:
A HISTORY. IN
THREE VOLUMES, VOL.
II: THE CONSTITUTION**

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The French Revolution: A History. In Three Volumes, Vol. II: The Constitution by Thomas Carlyle

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THOMAS CARLYLE

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THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION:

A HISTORY.

BY

THOMAS CARLYLE.

*Μέγα ὁ ἀγὼν ἐστὶ, θεῖον γὰρ ἔργον ὑπὲρ βασιλείας, ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας,
ὑπὲρ εὐροίας, ὑπὲρ ἀταραξίας. ARRIANUS.*

*Δόγμα γὰρ αὐτῶν τίς μεταβάλλει; χωρὶς δὲ δογμάτων μεταβολῆς, τί
ἄλλο ἢ δουλεία στυνόντων καὶ πείθεσθαι προσποιουμένων; ANTONINUS.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE CONSTITUTION.

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1891.

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044 * 219

Mauern seh' ich gestürzt, und Mauern seh' ich errichtet,
Hier Gefangene, dort auch der Gefangenen viel.
Ist vielleicht nur die Welt ein grosser Kerker? Und frei ist
Wohl der Tolle, der sich Ketten zu Kränzen erküest?

GOETHE

REPRINTED FROM STEREOTYPE PLATES,
APRIL, 1891.

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THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION.

THE CONSTITUTION.
BOOK FIRST.
THE FEAST OF PIKES.

CHAPTER I.
IN THE TUILERIES.

THE victim having once got his stroke-of-grace, the catastrophe can be considered as almost come. There is small interest now in watching his long low moans: notable only are his sharper agonies, what convulsive struggles he may make to cast the torture off from him; and then finally the last departure of life itself, and how he lies extinct and ended, either wrapt like Cæsar in decorous mantle-folds, or unseemly sunk together, like one that had not the force even to die.

Was French Royalty, when wrenched forth from its tapestries in that fashion, on that Sixth of October 1789, such a victim? Universal France, and Royal Proclamation to all the Provinces, answers anxiously, *No*. Nevertheless one may fear the worst. Royalty was beforehand so decrepit, moribund, there is little life in it to heal an injury. How much of its strength, which was of the imagination merely, has fled; *Ras-*

cality having looked plainly in the King's face, and not died ! When the assembled crows can pluck up their scarecrow, and say to it, 'Here shalt thou stand and not there ; and can treat with it, and make it, from an infinite, a quite finite Constitutional scarecrow,—what is to be looked for ? Not in the finite Constitutional scarecrow, but in what still unmeasured, infinite-seeming force may rally round it, is there thenceforth any hope. For it is most true that all available Authority is *mystic* in its conditions, and comes 'by the grace of God.'

Cheerfuller than watching the death-struggles of Royalism will it be to watch the growth and gambollings of Sansculottism ; for, in human things, especially in human society, all death is but a death-birth : thus if the sceptre is departing from Louis, it is only that, in other forms, other sceptres, were it even pike-sceptres, may bear sway. In a prurient element, rich with nutritive influences, we shall find that Sansculottism grows lustily, and even frisks in not ungraceful sport : as indeed most young creatures are sportful ; nay, may it not be noted further, that as the grown cat, and cat species generally, is the cruelest thing known, so the merriest is precisely the kitten, or growing cat ?

But fancy the Royal Family risen from its truckle-beds on the morrow of that mad day : fancy the Municipal inquiry, "How would your Majesty please to lodge ?"—and then that the King's rough answer, "Each may lodge as he can, I am well enough," is congeed and bowed away, in expressive grins, by the Townhall Functionaries, with obsequious upholsterers at their back ; and how the Château of the Tuilleries is repainted, regarnished into a golden Royal Residence ; and Lafayette with his blue National Guards lies encompassing it, as blue Neptune (in the language of poets) does an island, woingly. Thither may the wrecks of rehabilitated Loyalty gather, if it will become Constitutional ; for Constitutionalism thinks no evil ; Sansculottism itself rejoices in the King's countenance. The rubbish of a Menadic Insurrection, as in this ever-kindly world all rubbish can and must be, is swept aside ; and so again, on clear arena, under new conditions, with something even of a new stateliness, we begin a new course of action.

Arthur Young has witnessed the strangest scene : Majesty walking unattended in the Tuilleries Gardens ; and miscellaneous

tricolor crowds, who cheer it, and reverently make way for it : the very Queen commands at lowest respectful silence, regretful avoidance.¹ Simple ducks, in those royal waters, quackle for crumbs from young royal fingers : the little Dauphin has a little railed garden, where he is seen delving, with ruddy cheeks and flaxen curled hair ; also a little hutch to put his tools in, and screen himself against showers. What peaceable simplicity ! Is it peace of a Father restored to his children ? Or of a Taskmaster who has lost his whip ? Lafayette and the Municipality and universal Constitutionalism assert the former, and do what is in them to realise it. Such Patriotism as snarls dangerously and shows teeth, Patrollotism shall suppress ; or far better, Royalty shall soothe down the angry hair of it, by gentle pattings ; and, most effectual of all, by fuller diet. Yes, not only shall Paris be fed, but the King's hand be seen in that work. The household goods of the Poor shall, up to a certain amount, by royal bounty, be disengaged from pawn, and that insatiable *Mont de Piété* shall disgorge ; rides in the city with their *Vive-le-Roi* need not fail : and so, by substance and show, shall Royalty, if man's art can popularise it, be popularised.²

Or, alas, is it neither restored Father nor diswhipped Taskmaster that walks there ; but an anomalous complex of both these, and of innumerable other heterogeneities : reducible to no rubric, if not to this newly-devised one : *King Louis Restorer of French Liberty* ? Man indeed, and King Louis like other men, lives in this world to make rule out of the ruleless ; by his living energy, he shall force the absurd itself to become less absurd. But then if there *be* no living energy ; living passivity only ? King Serpent, hurled into its unexpected watery dominion, did at least bite, and assert credibly that he was there : but as for the poor King Log, tumbled hither and thither as thousand-fold chance and other will than his might direct, how happy for him that he was indeed wooden ; and, doing nothing, could also see and suffer nothing ! It is a distracted business.

For his French Majesty, meanwhile, one of the worst things is, that he can get no hunting. Alas, no hunting henceforth ; only a fatal being-hunted ! Scarcely, in the next June weeks, shall he taste again the joys of the game-destroyer ; in next June, and never more. He sends for his smith-tools ; gives, in the course of the day, official or ceremonial business being ended,

¹ Arthur Young's *Travels*, I. 264-280.

² *Deux Amis*, iii. c. 19.