

*Catholic royalism in the
department of the Gard,
1814–1852*

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*The department of the Gard in the
nineteenth century*

The Gard was one of eight departments created almost entirely from the old province of Languedoc by the Constituent Assembly. As in the case of the eighty-two other departments which came into existence in February 1790, the Gard represented the wish of the Revolutionaries to rationalise the nation's administrative divisions, taking account of distance and population. Thus, the new department of the Gard replaced a number of ecclesiastical and civil jurisdictions: the former dioceses of Nîmes, Uzès and Alès; part of the *généralité* of Montpellier and all of the *sénéchaussée* of Nîmes. The new department covered an area of some 5800 square kilometres, extending roughly 120 kilometres from east to west and 108 kilometres from north to south. At the time of its creation, the Gard was estimated to embrace some 315 500 inhabitants.

Within its boundaries, the Gard includes a wide range of geographic features, extending from the Mediterranean to the south eastern edge of the Massif Central. Its coastline is short – barely 20 kilometres of sand-bars and salt marshes from the Vidourle river, just west of Aigues-Mortes, to the Petit Rhône, meandering through the Camargue, a monotonous expanse of marshland and lake which stretched, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some 25 kilometres inland, almost to the gates of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. From this narrow corridor to the sea, the Gard opens out to the Mediterranean plain which sweeps across the entire department from the Hérault in the west to the Rhône in the east, forming a fertile band 15 to 20 kilometres deep. North of the main road from Montpellier to Nîmes and Avignon, the plain merges gently into the chalky, undulating Mediterranean heathland known as the Garrigue, which forms the greater part of the Gard's territory. This rugged terrain, softened in places by the fertile valleys of the Gard and Alzon rivers and their small tributaries, extends north east to the Rhône valley, north to the Vivarais and north west to the Cévennes mountains behind the towns of Alès, Anduze and Saint-Hippolyte-du-Fort.

The Gard was not a remote department. Lyon was about 240 kilometres to the north, a straight journey from the inland port of Beaucaire by land or water following the Rhône which marked the entire eastern limit of the Gard.

To the south east lay Marseille, barely 100 kilometres by road from Nîmes via Beaucaire, Tarascon and Arles. Nîmes, the *chef-lieu* of the Gard, was, before the age of the motorway, on the main road from the Rhône valley to the south west, to Toulouse and Spain. In the course of the nineteenth century, the region experienced revolutionary improvements in transport and communications which exposed the population to change and mobility on an unprecedented scale. During the Bourbon Restoration, from 1814 to 1830, the main roads were improved and a canal was cut through the southern end of the department from Beaucaire to Sète, linking the Rhône and Louis XIV's Canal du Midi. Under the July Monarchy, from 1830 to 1848, the semaphore telegraph was extended, dramatically improving communications between the authorities in the Gard and those in Marseille, Avignon, Lyon and, ultimately, Paris; steam shipping became common on the Rhône, and the journey from Arles to Lyon was reduced in good weather to forty hours instead of the week required by the older horse-drawn barges; and the railway arrived, carrying coal and iron from Alès to Nîmes and Beaucaire, and transporting goods and passengers at speeds few people had believed possible between Beaucaire, Nîmes and Montpellier.

Because of its position at such an important crossroads in the Midi, the Gard was as sensitive politically as most frontier departments. The files of the *procureurs-généraux* and the *commissaires de police* reveal an abiding interest in transitory strangers who, according to the moment, could have been Spanish liberals, Piedmontese and Neapolitan *carbonari*, Spanish carlists or agents of the growing French republican movement. The departmental gendarmerie was constantly on the look-out for convicts who had escaped from the *chiourme*, proceeding painfully towards deportation from Toulon, and then, after 1830, for deserters from regiments marching to Marseille to take ship for Algeria. The department's coastline also merited the authorities' vigilance. Besides the ports of Aigues-Mortes and Le-Grau-du-Roi, there were dozens of places along the sand-bars and into the Camargue where practised smugglers and outlaws could be put ashore to make their way inland in relative security.¹ The absolute monarchy had always maintained at least one of the galleys from the Marseille squadron on patrol off the Camargue to discourage smugglers and fleeing Calvinists as much as marauding Barbary pirates.

The north and west of the department were, however, affected considerably less by improvements in communications than were the south and east. The Cévennes were, and still are, an obstacle to profound changes in the road network and to the extension of the railways. Only one main road crossed the mountains, from Nîmes to Mende in the Lozère, passing through Florac; another led due north from Alès to Le Puy. The remaining roads,

¹ See AN BB¹⁸ for the period 1815-39; and AD Gard 4U 5, particularly dossier 300, *affaires politiques*, an X-1857.

often inaccessible in winter and spring, served to link the countless hamlets of the Cévennes with the towns of Saint-Jean-du-Gard, Saint-André-de-Valborgne, Lasalle, Saint-Hippolyte-du-Fort and Valleraugue. Physical isolation combined with geographic, economic and cultural particularities which will be discussed below. Together these factors formed a society which differed significantly from that of the southern and eastern parts of the department.

The Gard inherited many of those activities which characterised the economy of Lower Languedoc in the eighteenth century: agriculture, textile production, commerce and coal mining.² In the nineteenth century industrial development and agricultural concentration played a part in expanding certain of these activities at the expense of others, as did other changes beyond the control of the inhabitants of the Gard – the expansion of the port of Marseille, and the unsuitability of the Gard for technical developments in the textile industry.

Agriculture remained the basis of the department's economy during the first half of the nineteenth century, with no more than 10 per cent of the working population involved in industry.³ The Languedoc tradition of poly-culture observed by Arthur Young on the eve of the Revolution remained widespread: 'Every man has an olive, a mulberry, an almond or a peach tree, and vines scattered among them.'⁴ Yet even before the Revolution there were signs of concentration on one crop in certain areas, a process which continued through the nineteenth century until almost the entire coastal plain from the Spanish frontier to the Rhône was given over to the production of wine.

In the early years of the nineteenth century wine was already the chief agricultural product of the Gard, and vines grew in all but the most mountainous districts of the department.⁵ Some wines, those of Tavel, Lirac, Chusclan and Roquemaure, along the Rhône, enjoyed a high reputation beyond the confines of the region.⁶ Most of the Gard's wine, however, was *vin ordinaire*, destined for everyday use or for distilling. In those years when there was a small harvest because of poor weather or blight, the wine available commanded relatively good prices and provided the peasants with additional income which could be looked upon as an unexpected bonus.⁷ Population growth, expanding markets in France and abroad, and the gra-

² Expilly, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique des Gaules et de la France*, iv, 45–54.

³ H. Rivoire, *Statistique du département du Gard*, II, 162, 258–61.

⁴ A. Young, *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, ed. C. Maxwell, p. 46; J. Vidalenc, *Le peuple des campagnes, 1815–48*, pp. 236–7.

⁵ S. Savey, 'Essai de reconstruction de la structure agraire des villages de Sardan et d'Aspères (Gard) sous l'ancien régime', *Annales du Midi*, 81 (1969), 41–54.

⁶ S. V. Grangent, *Description abrégée du département du Gard, rédigée en brumaire, an VIII*, pp. 12–13.

⁷ Expilly, iv, 45; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 258.

dual emergence of intensive cereal production in other parts of France – the Beauce, notably – induced more and more landowners to turn away from polyculture to specialise in wine, particularly south of Nîmes, around Bellegarde, Saint-Gilles, Vauvert, Aimargues and Aigues-Vives.⁸

In the period which concerns us, the mulberry was the other crop to which more and more peasants turned. Its resurgence was related directly to the expansion of the silk industry, not only in Lower Languedoc, but also in other parts of France. The tree had flourished in the countryside around Uzès and Alès and in the valleys of the Cévennes in the eighteenth century when the local silk industry was at its zenith. Like the vine, it provided a profitable alternative to cereals, and one which the peasants knew they could cultivate successfully.⁹ In 1835, the sub-prefect of the *arrondissement* of Alès commented that cultivation of the mulberry 's'est propagée en proportion des bénéfices qu'elle a présentés, et ces bénéfices sont tels que le Cévenol qui semerait aujourd'hui le blé dans un terrain propice à la végétation du mûrier passerait aux yeux de ses voisins pour un homme atteint de folie'.¹⁰ Even after the collapse of the silk industry in Nîmes in the 1840s, the demand from Paris, Lyon and Saint-Etienne for raw and spun silk ensured that sericulture continued in the countryside around Alès, Saint-Jean-du-Gard and Le Vigan, and that the mulberry remained a profitable and widespread part of the Gard's rural economy for many years.¹¹

The two other traditional crops of Lower Languedoc fared less well in the nineteenth century. Cereals, particularly wheat, suffered from serious failures in the years before the Revolution and in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹² Moreover, while prices in good years were relatively high for wheat, it was a less profitable crop for small and medium holdings than either the vine or the mulberry, and many producers turned to these crops, which appeared to be yielding more cash in the shorter term. This trend was already evident in 1817, when the prefect of the Gard reported with a note of urgency: 'Il n'arrive pas encore de graines de Toulouse, quoi que nous soyons à l'époque de l'année où les arrivages commencent. Votre Excellence sait que le Gard ne produit pas de graines en quantité suffisante pour le nourrir.'¹³ In

⁸ A. Jardin and A.-J. Tudesq, *La France des notables*, II, 49–50; Vidalenc, *Peuple des campagnes*, pp. 236–7; AN F¹^{ci} Gard 13, mayor of Nîmes to minister of interior, 18 February 1815; AN F⁷9051, prefect to minister of interior, 22 October and 6 November 1817.

⁹ Expilly, IV, 45–7; H. Reboul, *L'industrie nîmoise du tissage au dix-neuvième siècle*.

¹⁰ AD Gard 6M 115, sub-prefect of Alès to prefect, 29 November 1835.

¹¹ A. Milward and S. B. Saul, *The development of the economies of continental Europe, 1850–1914*, p. 81; Reboul, p. 29; AD Gard 6M 119, prefect to minister of interior, 31 August 1838.

¹² H. Bourderon, 'La lutte contre la vie chère dans la généralité de Languedoc au dix-huitième siècle', *Annales du Midi*, 66 (1954), 155–70; J. Vidalenc, 'La vie économique des départements méditerranéens pendant l'Empire', *Rev. d'Hist. mod. et contemp.*, I (1954), 165–96.

¹³ AN F⁷9051, prefect to minister of interior, 6 November 1817. According to Grangent, the Gard could only produce one third of its cereal requirements in the 1790s: *Description*, p. 11.

the 1830s, in spite of their ability to grow more than enough corn, barley and rye for their own needs, peasants around Alès chose instead to concentrate on mulberries, while those in the *arrondissement* of Uzès, once famous for its wheat, had abandoned cereals entirely to grow both *garance* and mulberries for the textile industry.¹⁴

The olive was the other traditional crop to decline in the nineteenth century, but less through the choice of the peasants than through circumstance. Unlike the vine or cereals, whose fortunes could rise and fall from year to year, the olive tree took fifteen or twenty years to mature, and harsh winters had, therefore, a very serious effect. The frost of 1788–9 caused damage that was not made good until 1812 in the eastern Gard, the centre of commercial olive growing. Similar damage was caused by frost in 1820 and 1830, blighting trees which had just reached maturity.

In the north west of the department, geography imposed different agricultural patterns. The olive and the vine stopped on the lower slopes of the mountains where rye, barley and mulberries grew instead. Higher still, chestnuts became one of the most important crops and served to feed man and beast. Animal husbandry was more important here than in other parts of the Gard, and flocks of sheep grazed on the lower slopes of the valleys in winter, moving up to the higher ground in spring and summer before being driven down to Saint-Jean, Sumène, Valleraugue, Trèves and Le Vigan where, after shearing fairs, their wool was sold to merchants from the Hérault. In most valleys, raw and even spun silk was produced by entire families who grew mulberries and harvested their leaves to feed the silkworms they hatched and raised to the cocoon stage in the vast upper floor, or *magnanerie*, of their houses.

Trade and commerce contributed significantly to the prosperity of Lower Languedoc from Roman times, when Nîmes was established on the main highway from Italy to Spain. These countries, accessible by land and sea, were the region's natural trading partners, and by the eleventh century there was a thriving Genoese community in Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, while Nîmes was a recognised *étape* on the route taken by Milanese and Venetian merchants and bankers to Toulouse and Bordeaux.¹⁵ In the nineteenth century, the Gard still felt the presence of Piedmontese and Spaniards, this time seeking work in the expanding coalfields and ironworks of Alès. The commercial life of the region increased significantly in the thirteenth century after Languedoc was joined to the territories of the French crown. Louis IX made Aigues-Mortes the principal French port on the Mediterranean, endowing it with municipal and fiscal privileges. It became the chief point of disembarka-

¹⁴ AD Gard 6M 115, sub-prefect of Uzès to prefect, 25 November 1835; sub-prefect of Alès to prefect, 29 November 1835.

¹⁵ M. and M. Lacave, *Bourgeois et marchands en Provence et Languedoc*.

tion for Spanish and Italian merchants travelling to Nîmes, Toulouse and Bordeaux or attending the fair at Montpellier. Nîmes flourished as a centre where wool, oil, leather, wine and spices were bought and sold, and a thriving community of artisans and tradesmen established itself around the Roman arenas and the cathedral. In 1151 the count of Toulouse granted the city the privilege of a tax-free fair once a year after Easter. Shortly after, Nîmes became a *ville de consulat*, boasting an elaborately elected municipal authority, a symbol of prestige and prosperity.¹⁶

Lower Languedoc enjoyed its greatest prosperity in the eighteenth century, from the 1730s to the 1770s. This boom was due in no small measure to the annual *foire de Beaucaire*. The small town of Beaucaire, sited on the Rhône only 24 kilometres east of Nîmes, had enjoyed the privilege of a tax-free fair since the thirteenth century. The merchants and municipal officers of the town had exploited Beaucaire's position on the frontier of the Holy Roman Empire and on the Rhône, still navigable at this point by sea-going ships, and the fair had gradually become one of the most important trade fairs in the Mediterranean world. It was authorised for the three working days after 22 July, the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, 'ce qui fait qu'elle dure toujours six à cause de la fête de la Magdaleine, de celle de Saint Jacques et de celle de Sainte Anne', wrote Expilly in the eighteenth century.¹⁷

The manufactures and products of every region of France and those from most parts of Europe and the Mediterranean were bought and sold in the spacious, vaulted basements of houses which gave on to the Rhône embankment and the principal thoroughfares and which were rented for the duration of the fair by merchants and bankers who used the occasion to engage in purely monetary transactions as well, speculating on the price of raw materials and setting prices for commodities at other, less prestigious fairs. In short, the *foire de Beaucaire* became the barometer of prosperity in the province of Languedoc, and its importance was duly recognised by the presence of the *intendant* or his representative.

Neighbouring towns benefited considerably from the fair, with its influx of merchants, officials, carters and seamen. Arthur Young was one of those visitors who lodged in Nîmes and travelled to the fair by road in 1788, when it was already entering a decline:

My quarters at Nismes were at the Louvre, a large, commodious and excellent inn. The house was as much a fair from morning to night as Beaucaire itself could be . . . We sat down, twenty to forty at every meal, mostly motley companies of French, Italians, Spaniards and Germans, with a Greek and an Armenian; and I was informed

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 59–64.

¹⁷ Expilly, 1, 507; H. Chobaut, 'La foire de Beaucaire de 1789 à 1796', *Annales hist. de la Rév. fr.* (1929), 359–71; P. Léon, 'Vie et mort d'un grand marché international. La foire de Beaucaire, 18ème–19ème siècles', *Rev. de Géographie de Lyon* (1953), 309–28.

that there is hardly a nation in Europe or Asia that have not merchants at this great fair, chiefly for raw silk, of which many millions in value are sold in four days. All the other commodities of the world are to be found there.¹⁸

That year, in spite of the slump which had been affecting France for a decade,¹⁹ two hundred cargo vessels from France, Spain and Italy put into Beaucaire for the fair.²⁰

During the Revolution and Empire, the fair, like the whole economy of Lower Languedoc, suffered from the internal political upheavals, the British blockade and the slump which attended the last years of the Empire: the value of goods sold at Beaucaire diminished from an estimated 31 900 000 francs in 1806 to 19 700 000 francs in 1811, and sank as low as 17 000 000 in 1814.²¹ This decline continued during the nineteenth century, so that the fair was no more than a regional market by the 1860s. The reasons were many. The fair no longer enjoyed fiscal exemption; the tonnage and draught of cargo ships increased beyond the capacity of the Rhône; railways eliminated the need for many such fairs by transporting merchandise across land frontiers to large waiting urban markets; and, perhaps most important, the whole centre of gravity of commerce and trade shifted north west to those parts of Europe which had industrialised heavily, making ports like Antwerp and Liverpool the main outlets for the industrial goods going to increasingly far-flung markets like Australia, America and colonised Africa, whose raw materials entered the manufacturing countries through the same ports.²² Nonetheless, as the prefects' reports demonstrated, the fair continued to have a regional importance as the annual measure of the Gard's prosperity or poverty, and the opening of the railway between the port and the Alès coalfields in the late 1830s helped to slow down Beaucaire's decline by transporting some two million metric tons of coal, iron and other commodities per year in the 1840s.²³

Silk, wine, coal and iron were exported from the Gard in the nineteenth century. These travelled mostly by road and river to the northern markets of Lyon and Paris, or along the canal from the Rhône to Sète, continuing thereafter on the Canal du Midi to Béziers, Carcassonne and Toulouse, or by sea from Aigues-Mortes or Agde.²⁴ Once again, these small ports suffered as a result of the expansion of the port of Marseille in the 1830s and 1840s, and

¹⁸ Young, p. 45.

¹⁹ E. Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'ancien régime et au début de la Révolution*, pp. xii–lii.

²⁰ Chobaut, p. 361.

²¹ Chobaut; Vidalenc, 'Vie économique', p. 196; Léon, pp. 324–5.

²² Léon, pp. 325–8; AN F¹²4476a, prefect's report on 1836 fair.

²³ Rivoire, *Statistique*, 1, 291–5.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 1, 305; AD Gard 6M 115, reports of the sub-prefects on the economic conditions in their *arrondissements*, November 1835.

their commerce was gradually reduced to fish and coastal trade with the east coast of Spain.

Although the Gard's economic base remained predominantly agricultural, the department inherited both a considerable textile industry which, like the *foire de Beaucaire*, failed to recover after the Revolution, and considerable coal deposits which enabled it to participate to some extent in France's industrial growth in the nineteenth century.

Lower Languedoc had been an established textile centre since the seventeenth century. Wool and silk were the principal cloths manufactured, and the latter was particularly concentrated in the dioceses of Nîmes, Uzès and Alès. The manufacture of silk cloth involved substantial proportions of the rural and urban populations in its various stages: cultivating the mulberry trees; hatching and rearing the silkworms; steaming the cocoons and throwing the strands; spinning, weaving and dyeing. In town and country, entire families might be employed in the different aspects of the process, although in the countryside weaving was more likely to be a part-time occupation supplementing farming. The manufacture of silk reached its zenith in the eighteenth century. The value of the silk cloth manufactured tripled in the first half of the century: the number of looms working in Nîmes rose from under 500 in 1749 to more than 2000 in 1754, and the city's weavers were producing more than 100 kinds of cloth.²⁵ Besides pure silks, stockings using lower-grade silk and cotton, and known as *bonneterie*, were manufactured widely in the eighteenth century.²⁶ The success of the textile industry, and particularly of silk, in this period led to tensions between the two major categories of producers, the *marchands faisant fabriquer* and the *marchands-fabricants* or *maîtres-ouvriers travaillant pour leur compte*. As the names imply, the former were entrepreneurs who bought the raw materials, took orders (or speculated on future demand) and had the orders made up by wage labour, while the latter were artisans who bought their own material, made up their pieces at home and then sold to merchants or clients. Each category was governed in principle by its own *règlement*, but in fact the *marchands faisant fabriquer* were much freer than were the *marchands-fabricants* who were bound by an elaborate guild system and fixed tariffs. The *marchands faisant fabriquer* were capitalists who sought to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest, a principle which they applied to wages as much as to materials. Thus, they increasingly put out their work to the rural weavers who were free from tariff controls and generally undercut the prevailing guild rates. Gradually the determined entrepreneurs extended their influence, buying and selling at times and in quantities which required capital not available to

²⁵ Expilly, iv, 51-4; Reboul, pp. 27-8; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 1-70; P. L. Baragnon, *Abrégé de l'histoire de Nîmes de Ménard continué jusqu'à nos jours*, III, 334-5.

²⁶ Reboul, p. 37; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 14-16; Bourderon, p. 156.

the artisans, and encouraging the growth in Nîmes of an immigrant working class which also operated outside the guild system. The very one-sided competition between entrepreneur and artisan was to seduce many artisans into the counter-revolutionary camp when they saw their oppressors assume power in 1789.²⁷

Competition between the two types of manufacturer was intensified in the deteriorating economic climate of the 1780s. Even before the general depression affected the region, a Spanish prohibition in 1778 considerably reduced the market for silk and cotton goods, and in the two years which preceded the Revolution, the number of looms working in Nîmes fell by two thirds.²⁸ The decline was intensified by the Revolutionary upheaval, and in 1799 the surveyor of the department of the Gard wrote:

Nîmes était l'entrepôt principal des soies qui se fabriquaient dans les divers cantons; elles s'y consumaient en partie pour les divers usages des fabriques de tout genre qui y étaient établies; mais, ce commerce étant suspendu depuis plusieurs années, les habitans des montagnes ont beaucoup négligé la culture des mûriers, et ceux de la plaine les ont presque tous arrachés parce que la soie n'a pas le prix qu'elle devrait avoir.²⁹

In 1811, towards the end of a slump which had nullified a slight improvement in the silk industry since 1803, the president of the Nîmes chamber of commerce calculated that the number of silk spinners had fallen since 1790 from 900 to 200 and that of weavers from 2500 to 900. Stocking knitters had declined from 4000 to 600, and *couturières* and *brodeuses* from 2300 to 300.³⁰ Only the fashion during the Directory and the Empire for handkerchiefs, *foulards* and other fancy goods made of cotton and silk mixtures, generally known as *Madras*, had kept roughly 1000 looms working.³¹

The return of peace to Europe in 1814 did not bring renewed prosperity to the textile industry in the Gard. Instead, after an initial burst of confidence, shattered by the Hundred Days, the history of employment in textiles was one of oscillation between peaks and troughs, but with the latter dominating. After recovery from the Hundred Days came the 1817–18 slump. By the summer of 1822, 16 000 people were employed in Nîmes, but a year later the number had fallen below 7000. The boom of 1824, when nearly 27 000 were employed, was followed by a sharp decline which left only 5000 employed at

²⁷ C. Durand, *Marseille, Nîmes et ses environs en 1815 par un témoin oculaire*, II, 47–8; C. Pouthas, *Une famille de bourgeoisie française de Louis XVI à Napoléon, étude sur la Révolution à Nîmes*, pp. 70–1; G. Lewis, *The Second Vendée. The continuity of counter-revolution in the department of the Gard, 1789–1815*, pp. 4–9; J. N. Hood, 'Patterns of popular protest in the French Revolution: the conceptual contribution of the Gard', *Journal of Mod. Hist.*, 48 (1976), 265–8.

²⁸ Reboul, p. 37; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 14–16; Bourderon, p. 156.

²⁹ Grangent, p. 13.

³⁰ AD Gard 6M 15, Nîmes chamber of commerce, June 1811.

³¹ Reboul, pp. 40–1.

the end of 1828. The political upheavals of 1830 in France aggravated the crisis already provoked by the 1827–9 slump and the dislocation of trade in the eastern Mediterranean, and after a brief and fragile revival in 1832 and 1833, the number of people employed in textiles in Nîmes declined steadily from 15 000 to some 9000 in the mid 1840s. Moreover, wages were low as manufacturers did all they could to keep their prices down in order to sell their products.³² This depressed state of affairs continued into the 1850s, largely as a result of the 1848 revolution and the unsettling mixture of hope, doubt, fear and agitation which pervaded French political and economic life until well after the coup d'état of December 1851. Commenting on the economic climate with particular reference to the Gard's traditional textile sector, Hector Rivoire observed in 1853:

La ville de Nîmes se ressent encore des événements qui ont profondément ému le commerce et arrêté le mouvement industriel . . .

Pour que la ville de Nîmes soit à présent une des plus florissantes cités industrielles de la France, que lui a-t-il manqué? Le génie de la fabrication, les bras, les capitaux – Non! – Elle possède ces éléments de prospérité, et elle sait en tirer un parti avantageux dans les temps de calme et de stabilité. C'est vers cette situation que tendent tous ses vœux.³³

In fact, that was not all that Nîmes required to become a major industrial city, particularly as far as textiles were concerned. The city's most important drawback was an acute shortage of water, as Rivoire had noted in 1842 and repeated in 1853.³⁴ This severely hampered the industry's capacity to keep up with the new dyeing and printing techniques developed in Switzerland, and employed in the 1830s and 1840s in other textile towns like Lyon, Mulhouse, Rouen and Paris. Nîmes, moreover, aimed at the lower end of the market, producing a range of fancy goods, or *nouveautés*: handkerchiefs, *foulards* and shawls of a cotton and silk mixture. In good years, these sold well at home and abroad, but they were vulnerable to the elasticity of popular demand and to protectionist measures introduced by governments to support their own textile industries. While Krefeld and Manchester could offer no alternatives to the first-class silks of Lyon, they most certainly could provide cheap substitutes for the goods on which the Nîmois concentrated. The Nîmes *conseil des prud'hommes* declared in 1843: 'Les produits manufacturés ne se sont vendus que difficilement, à vils prix. Ce fâcheux état des choses ne s'est pas seulement dû à la capricieuse mobilité des modes en France, mais aussi aux

³² AD Gard 6M 115, mayor of Nîmes to prefect, 28 November 1835; AN F¹²4476b, reports of *conseil des prud'hommes*, 1841, 1843; AN F¹²4476c, *idem*, 1845; Reboul, pp. 46–56 and table facing p. 120.

³³ H. Rivoire, 'Notice sur l'industrie de la ville de Nîmes, 1853', *Mémoires de l'Académie du Gard* (1852–3), 296–7.

³⁴ Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 24–5; and 'Notice', p. 281.

droits exagérés dont nos produits sont frappés par les tarifs de douanes étrangères, leur prohibition absolue sur certains marchés.³⁵

The decline of the textile industry was reflected most clearly by the dispersal of the once-profitable stocking manufacture to the villages and hamlets, where it was no longer an industrial but a rural occupation, and by the purchase of only one third of the department's raw silk by local weavers and merchants in 1835. In 1844, only 4 bleaching shops and 7 printing shops were operating, and in 1853, after the ravages of five years political unrest, only 2000 looms were working in Nîmes itself.³⁶

In marked contrast to the decline of textiles, the production of coal and iron expanded considerably in the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1840s, when the railways went into use in the Gard. Coal had been mined in the region for centuries, essentially for local use.³⁷ In the eighteenth century, however, noblemen anxious to increase their incomes attempted to mine the coal on a commercial basis. Thus, the chevalier de Solages exploited coal seams on his lands at Carmaux, near Albi; and the Conti, Castries, de Bernis and d'Antraigues mined in the *comté* of Alès and in the Vivarais. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, entrepreneurs from other parts of France sought mining concessions in the region. The most notable of these was Tubeuf, a Norman, who acquired the right to prospect and mine the considerable area between Viviers and Pont-Saint-Esprit on the Rhône, Aubenas, Anduze, Alès and Uzès. However, Tubeuf's ambitions brought him into conflict with the local gentry – the de Castries at La Grand' Combe and the comte de Provence at Portes, both keen to retain their privileged position in the area – and with the rural population who resented his encroachment on agricultural land and his efforts to prevent them taking the coal which they required and to which they claimed an historic right. In 1787, Tubeuf's concession was considerably reduced, but he still worked Rochebelle, one of the richest veins in the Alès coalfield.

Under the Revolution, the Gard's mines were nationalised, but in 1810 they were offered to their previous owners and to any other interested purchasers.³⁸ Tubeuf's heir claimed Rochebelle, but the other rich field, La Grand' Combe, was divided among several entrepreneurs of whom the most important were de Castries, Serre, Méjean and the partners Puech and Goirand.³⁹ Between 1815 and 1837, the smaller concessions were bought out until three giant companies controlled mining in the area: La Société civile de

³⁵ AN F¹²4476b, report of 1 March 1843.

³⁶ Reboul, p. 29; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 162; and 'Notice', pp. 285–7.

³⁷ G. Galy, 'L'exploitation des houillères du Languedoc au dix-huitième siècle', *Annales du Midi*, 81 (1969), 164–95; Fédération historique du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon, *Mines et mineurs en Languedoc-Roussillon et régions voisines de l'antiquité à nos jours*.

³⁸ F. Rouvière, *L'exploitation des mines nationales du Gard, 1792–1810*.

³⁹ AD Gard 25J 18, *Notice historique sur les mines de Rochebelle*.

La Grand' Combe, La Société des Forges et Fonderies d'Alais and La Société Deveau at Robiac. Shortly after its foundation in 1833, the Société civile de La Grand' Combe went into partnership with the Talabot brothers and won the concession to build a railway from Alès to Beaucaire. By 1838, the line linked the mines of La Grand' Combe to the port on the Rhône. When the Forges et Fonderies d'Alais came into being in 1830, its assets included a glassworks and an iron forge. Nearly all the coal extracted by this consortium was used to fuel these two adjuncts, and by the 1840s the forges of Alès were producing 6 million francs' worth of iron a year.

The complementary interests of the two companies enabled them to collaborate rather than compete. The railway from Le Grand' Combe to Beaucaire was built with a contribution of 800 metric tons of cast iron and 3000 metric tons of rail made by the Forges et Fonderies, in return for which the railway transported ore and finished goods from the forges at special rates.⁴⁰

In 1836, the Société civile de la Grand' Combe was obliged to issue shares to the public in order to finance the extension of the railway from Alès to the mines. The company issued 2200 shares at 500 francs, but the capital raised was not sufficient to meet the costs incurred, partly because of poor management. The directors' and shareholders' reaction to the crisis typified the economic and moral outlook of the Orleanist elite. Odillon Barrot and Marshall Soult, major shareholders in the company, arranged a bridging loan of six million at 4 per cent from the government. The company undertook to provide the government with a supply of coal for fourteen years at a discount of 20 per cent.⁴¹ Mining and metallurgy expanded steadily from the 1840s with the slump in the late 1840s marking a brief but painful interlude in a trend which placed the Gard among the top coal-mining and iron-producing regions of France in the early years of the Third Republic. Already in the mid 1840s there were more than 3000 workers employed in these industries, which had a fixed capital of over six thousand million francs and were producing 400 000 metric tons of coal and iron.⁴²

It is difficult to generalise about the Gard's economy in the period with which this study is concerned. Diversity remained the rule even though it is possible to detect the beginning of a gradual shift away from the traditional predominance of textiles. The vulnerability of the urban weavers had

⁴⁰ *ibid.*; E. Abric, 'Note statistique sur le bassin houiller d'Alais et les concessions de la compagnie de la Grand' Combe', *Mémoires de l'Académie du Gard* (1833-4), 123-53; Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 175-95; AD Gard 6M 130, sub-prefect of Alès to prefect, 1837; AN CC371 dossier 478; A. Pieyre, *Histoire de la ville de Nîmes*, I, 35-6, 49-50, 79-80; B. Gille, *Recherches sur la formation de la grande entreprise capitaliste, 1815-48*, pp. 101-5; and *Histoire de la Maison Rothschild*, I, 267.

⁴¹ AN CC377 dossier 1026; Gille, *Maison Rothschild*, I, 382-3.

⁴² Rivoire, *Statistique*, II, 179; R. Price, *The economic modernization of France, 1730-1880*, pp. 121, 124. National coal production was about 4½ million tonnes in 1845.