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Emile Bourgeois

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

THE RESTORATION OF THE BOURBONS

On July 8, 1815, Louis XVIII returned to the Tuileries. The monarchical system which he was bringing back, for the second time since his brother's execution, was not the system that France would have adopted if left to herself. The great majority of Frenchmen, the army, the proletariat, and some even of the representatives of the Liberal bourgeoisie who along with Benjamin Constant, Lanjuinais and Carnot had accepted Napoleon's Charter of 1815, would have remained loyal to the Empire, the heir of the Revolution, through fear of the Ancien Régime, had not Europe willed otherwise. It was the doing of the Allies who had declared war against Napoleon on April 20, 1815, had won the victory of June 18 and invaded France, had brought Louis XVIII from Ghent to Cambrai on June 28, and finally on July 7 had dissolved the Chambers and occupied Paris. France had to submit to the restoration of the Monarchy, as it had to submit to the invasion of its territory by over a million of foreign soldiers, and to its reduction by the treaty of November 20, 1815. Nations which, after welcoming the Revolution, and accepting its benefits, had risen against the domination of a Napoleon, now looked on with approval while their rulers disposed of the French nation as arbitrarily as Napoleon had once disposed of themselves. The violence thus done to France by the foreigner was the enduring cause of the unpopularity and weakness of the Bourbons, who were privy to the act and reaped its fruits.

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No doubt Louis XVIII, warned by the catastrophe of the “Hundred Days,” and very unwilling to take the road of exile again, was fully alive to the dangerous conditions attending his restoration. He was a prince to whom increasing age and infirmities forbade further adventure, epicurean enough to appreciate and enjoy the advantages of power, and intelligent enough to devise the best means of maintaining it. For this purpose he found his principal resource in the highly centralised administrative system bequeathed to him by the vanquished Napoleon, with which marvellous instrument of authority, altogether superior to the organisation of the old Monarchy, he did not dream of interfering. Nearly all his Ministers had once been intimate co-workers with the Emperor. The first of these was Prince Talleyrand, and next Fouché, in Foreign Affairs and Police; then Baron Louis at Finance, Gouvion St Cyr at the War Office; and in the Home Department lastly, as Minister of Justice, Baron Pasquier, who had been Prefect of Police in 1810. By these selections Louis XVIII indicated his wish to base his executive authority on the men and measures of the previous dynasty. He retained the departmental system with its prefects and sub-prefects, to whom the Communes were administratively subordinate, the judiciary and its courts and jurisdictions under irremovable judges, and a very powerful staff of public officers; the old civil procedure as settled by the Code Napoléon; a secret criminal procedure, and the transfer of the office of Notary or Solicitor by purchase. He maintained the executive authority of the *Conseils de Préfecture* and of the Council of State, the educational monopoly of the State as existing in the Imperial University, and the Legion of Honour; finally he took over the whole system of direct and indirect taxation, of excise, of state monopolies, and of local excise-duties, with all the members of its old staff in their various departments; also the protective duties enacted for the benefit of

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The “White Terror”

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the great land-owners and manufacturers. Court ceremonial, and even the style of official Art, were left untouched, as if in very truth the Bourbon King had succeeded to the crown of the Empire.

But around the person of Louis XVIII, and even more markedly round the members of his family, his brother, the Comte d’Artois, and the sons of the latter, the Ducs d’Angoulême and de Berry, groups of intriguing Royalists were forming, displeased by this apparent adhesion of the King to the principles, to the men, and to the works of the French Revolution, and burning to restore the privileges of the nobility and the Clergy, in fact the Ancien Régime in its entirety. Already indeed, before the Hundred Days, these Ultras, as they were called, had forced Louis XVIII into excesses which later on he had to repudiate; for in his proclamation of Cambrai he once more promised to observe the Charter of 1814, to forget the past, and to maintain the principles of liberty and equality laid down in 1789. But now they were returning from Ghent, all the more furious after their late reverse, for the presence and encouragement of foreign arms. They had feasted the Prussian troops who occupied Paris, and reckoned for their work of vengeance upon the zealous aid of Fouché. They opened the flood-gates—to use an expression of one of their number, La Bourdonnaye—“to a torrent of deaths, of fetters, of executions,” in fact, to a “White Terror.” Immediately after July 24, 1815, Fouché had drawn up a list of proscriptions, by which nineteen persons were sent to Courts Martial and others were placed under observation. The number of victims was increased by the savagery in the south of France, especially at Toulouse, where General Ramel was killed, and at Avignon and Nîmes, by the murders of Generals Brune and Lagarde. It was not long before the Jacobin Ministers whom the maddened Royalists had taken into their service became the objects of their

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suspicion. And when the general elections of July 1815 gave the Ultras a majority of 350 votes out of 420, when a hundred new peers had been nominated in the Upper House, the party of reaction thought itself strong enough to do without Fouché and Talleyrand, known as “vice and crime,” who accordingly resigned in Sept 1815. With a Lower House such as it could not have dared to hope for, a “Chambre introuvable,” that party believed itself to be the mistress of France, and on the point of realising the Counter-Revolution of its dreams, without the King’s consent, and even against his interests.

No less compromising were the friends that Louis XVIII found among the sovereigns and foreign ministers who had restored him to his throne. True, the Tsar Alexander and the English statesmen had begun by recommending to the King of France the honest as well as prudent application of her Constitutional Charter. But the way adopted by the Congress of Vienna of disposing of nations against their will, forcibly uniting Belgium and Holland, Norwegians and Swedes, restoring Italians to the yoke of Austria, Poles to that of Russia, was not of a nature to inspire confidence in their Liberalism. The proclamation of the Holy Alliance was understood by the French as a threat and reminded them of the Declaration of Pillnitz and the League of Sovereigns against Peoples. This alliance, as conceived by its author, Tsar Alexander, a sovereign who was alike a mystic and a politician, was more or less directed against the Austrian and English statesmen who, at the Congress of Vienna and ever since, had combined to check the ambition of Russia in Poland and in the East. By this Holy Alliance the Tsar hoped to manipulate Europe to his own ends, just as he was now preparing to deal with France; on her he hoped to impose his will through his ambassador, the Corsican Pozzo di Borgo, and the Duc de Richelieu, who had been governor of Odessa, and on the fall of Talleyrand took

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office (Sept. 26) as Premier. But it was not long before the influence of Metternich, the sworn foe of the Revolution and of the principle of popular liberty which he deemed hostile to Austria, made itself felt. On Nov. 28, 1815, the sovereigns renewed the Treaty of Chaumont, and the Alliance acquired a totally different complexion. Though France had, under compulsion, disbanded her armies, restored the conquered fortresses, paid heavy contributions for the troops of occupation, and submitted to their demands, those for instance of the Prussians, who wanted to blow up the bridge of Jena, or those of Wellington, who had agreed with Blücher as to the restitution of the pictures unclaimed under the treaty of 1814, she still could not endure the thought that her King should countersign the decrees of the Holy Alliance. For all his desire for reconciliation, Louis XVIII found himself by the end of 1815 seriously compromised by the demands of the Royalists and the Allies. "Pillnitz and Coblenz have appeared once more at our gates," said Lafayette.

Luckily for the King, the Opposition was weak and unorganised. The rural population, weary of revolution, and exhausted by war, submitted in silence to the yoke of the great proprietors and the bureaucracy. The inhabitants of the towns and the students, though probably less docile, had great difficulty in finding exponents of their opinions in the Press or in Parliament. Paul-Louis Courier had not begun to issue his pamphlets; Lafayette had sought the seclusion of his country-house at Lagrange. Benjamin Constant was in England, Manuel in Brussels. Beneath the watchful eye of a very active secret police, and under the fear of punishment, the democrats who would have been willing enough to join the disbanded Bonapartists did not venture to demonstrate or to combine.

The impotence to which the nation was thus reduced may have relieved the apprehensions of Louis XVIII, and

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it naturally emboldened the royalist Ultras. It seemed to warrant them in hoping and daring anything and everything. The majority which they commanded in the “incredible” Chamber enabled them to curtail even the precarious liberty given by the Charter. A Law of Dec. 4, 1815, inspired by memories of the Revolutionary tribunals and of the special courts of the Empire, set up in every department military courts or commissions, with exceptional jurisdiction. The evidence was taken by a Colonel as Provost-Marshal and one civilian judge; and their judgments after having been put into legal form by the President and four judges of the ordinary courts, were to be carried out in 24 hours without appeal on law or fact. Not long before, the Chamber had made use of its first meetings to confer on the King the power of suspending the liberty of the individual (on Oct. 27) and of the Press (on Nov. 3, 1815), by a series of measures as to seditious writings and acts, which constituted a positive Statute of High Treason, with penalties of death, banishment, and confiscation of goods for the very slightest infraction.

After passing these laws, the Royalists proceeded to acts. The one act which gives the most accurate measure of their revengefulness was the condemnation of Marshal Ney by the Chamber of Peers and his execution in Paris on Dec. 7, 1815. Not long after this, a savage law of proscription sent into exile Carnot, Cambon, David Cambacérès, Maret, Savary, Sault, Clauzel, Drouet d’Erlon, Count Lobau, men whose services had been the glory of the Convention and the Empire. Generals of less fame, but innocent of any crime, though Republicans, were summoned before the Courts Martial, or the Mixed Military Courts. The Institute was purged by the expulsion of Lakanal, Garat, Monge, Grégoire, and Cardinal Maury: the Polytechnic School was broken up. The universities and schools were placed under the dominion of the Clergy.

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The heads of the Church ruled both the State and the Chambers through the medium of the "Congregation," a body affiliated to the Jesuits, whose clerical members, grouped into "Missions," inflamed the religious passions of the people. "In that year"—Royer-Collard used to say—"one had to be a Royalist to have the right to think and even to live."

Excesses of this sort were bound in the long run to imperil the stability of a shaky and hardly-restored throne. Unpopular already on account of his alliance with foreigners, the King now ran the risk of becoming an object of hatred. This bloodthirsty reaction, this violent return to the Ancien Régime, was not only unwelcome to the King, but might well provoke another revolution. Had not Napoleon been safe in St Helena, the Hundred Days might have been repeated. At Grenoble a conspiracy was started by certain retired soldiers, headed by a lawyer of Dauphiny named Didier, in favour of the King of Rome; but the ill-concerted attempt was easily put down by bloody executions at Grenoble in May and June 1816, at Lyons, and in Paris, where the Generals Mouton-Duvernet, Charton, and Bonnaire were sacrificed to the fury of the Royalists. None the less were these movements of revolt a warning to Louis XVIII. The challenges of the Ultras were met by the pamphlets of Paul-Louis Courier, an ex-officer under the Empire, and the lyrics of Béranger, the poet-laureate of Imperial glories. Warned by Decazes, his Minister of Police, the King was beginning to dread the zeal of his lieges more than the plots of his foes.

Nothing was more curious than the tactics of the Royalists when faced by the resistance of the King: Chateaubriand invented a formula for them in his "Essay on Monarchy." In order to force the King and his Ministers to lend themselves to the royalist attempts to return to the Ancien Régime, they claimed in the name

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of constitutional liberty the right to make violent attacks in the Chambers and in the Press. They charged with despotism an administration more moderate than themselves in order to browbeat them into passing a Finance Act restoring to the Clergy the property given up by the Pope at the Concordat. In Parliament a serious quarrel occurred on the introduction by the Minister, Vaublanc, of a Franchise Bill which was intended to cut down the influence of the rabid Royalists by means of partial elections and indirect representation. The result was not to the advantage of the King, who was obliged to dismiss M. de Vaublanc (May 1816). The royalist journals, the *Drapeau Blanc*, *Quotidienne*, *Gazette de France*, *Conservateur*, taking their cue from de Bonald, La Bourdonnaye, Villèle, Corbière, and the *Débats*, which had adopted the views of Chateaubriand, demanded in the name of liberty the submission of the Crown to the exigences of a royalist and religious reaction. A little more, and Louis XVIII would have been charged with tyranny for trying to protect his subjects against it.

All Royalists however did not agree with the Ultras; there were some Liberals amongst them, who thought it both right and possible to combine a regard for the nation with monarchic convictions, and deemed that they might well serve the King, without upsetting the whole of France. And it was fortunate for Louis XVIII, at that critical moment, that these Liberals were men endowed alike with character and with talent, whose eloquence was the glory of the parliamentary debates of the day. The chief and centre of their group was Royer-Collard, a mighty orator, who very soon made good his position through his eminence as a philosopher, his political past under the Directory, and his influence on the students of the Sorbonne. The vigorous intellectual and moral training which Royer-Collard had received from the “Pères de la Doctrine Chrétienne,” and

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which gave the name of "Doctrinaires" to himself and his followers, had armed him for his approaching struggle. To his disciples, a small but resolute band composed of Villemain, Guizot, de Barante, Victor de Broglie, Camille Jordan, he indicated two enemies for attack, the anarchy of the masses and the ignominy of a dictatorship, and one citadel to be held at all costs, the authority of the King. While Royalists of this stamp desired to see the Crown governing for the benefit of its subjects, and making all necessary concessions to their needs, their aspirations and their freedom, they would not allow its authority, based upon and recognised by law, to be curtailed by Parliamentary votes, or by the demands of courtiers. Among Royer-Collard's followers there was no more brilliant and eloquent supporter of these opinions in the Ultra-Royalist Chamber than the Comte de Serre, a native of Lorraine, a former *émigré* who had accepted Napoleon, but had always remained attached to the Bourbons at heart, and who invented in 1816 the formula, "Eschew everything that can impair the authority of the Crown."

On the advice of Decazes, on the warnings of the foreign representatives in Paris, and supported by the "Doctrinaires," Louis XVIII determined on an act of prerogative. On August 14, 1816, he requested his Ministers to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies, and to appeal in his name to the nation, wearied by the excesses of the Royalists. The order for dissolution, which was drawn up with the greatest secrecy and without the knowledge of the Comte d'Artois and his advisers, was published on Sept. 5, 1816. Fresh elections followed closely after; and, in spite of the appeals and imprecations of the Ultras, and especially of Chateaubriand, their verdict was in favour of the King, Richelieu, and Decazes. The majority, composed of moderate Royalists, elected as their president Baron Pasquier, the type of man best fitted to reconcile ancient and modern

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France about the person of the King. Royer-Collard undertook the preparation of a Franchise Bill, and drew up a sketch of its general plan which was adopted by the Cabinet; Guizot, who was then a Councillor of State, drew up the detailed explanatory memorandum. Thus Decazes won with the help of his auxiliaries of the Left Centre. His new programme was expressed by the formula: "royalise the nation, nationalise the Crown."

The Franchise Bill, which passed the two Chambers after violent debates on Jan. 8, 1817, deprived the small rural nobility, the "squireens," of the right which they had claimed of nominating on the District Committees the members charged with the election of deputies. The Bill granted the franchise to every man of French birth in the department who paid 300 francs in direct taxation, while 1000 francs similarly paid were the qualification for a candidate. It directed the electors to assemble in the capital of the district, as a place in which a wealthy bourgeoisie would have a preponderating influence, and were in a position to hold their own against the nobility in the elections. With this bourgeoisie, which had borne its share in the Revolution, any relapse to the Ancien Régime became impossible. Having satisfactorily secured its own well-being, it did not challenge the authority of the Crown, which was its present guarantee for order, even as the officialdom of the Empire had been in the past. During the whole year 1817 the bourgeoisie interested itself solely in conjunction with the Ministry in restoring the equilibrium of the finances of the State by means of regular budgets, regularly audited.

With her future once more secured, France breathed again. She awaited from the Monarchy, which had given these pledges of tranquillity, the liberation of her territory and the recall of the army of occupation. On these points the Ministry of the Duc de Richelieu was engaged during