

BOOK V

PARLIAMENTARISM

I

1789

One day, more than sixty-three years ago, the French people, who had been the property of one family for upwards of eight hundred years, who had been oppressed by the barons down to Louis XI, and since Louis XI by the parliaments, that is to say, to employ the frank remark of a great nobleman of the eighteenth century, "who had been half eaten up by wolves and finished by vermin;" who had been parcelled into provinces, into châtelanies, into bailiwicks, and into seneschalries; who had been exploited, squeezed, taxed, fleeced, peeled, shaven, shorn, clipped and abused without mercy, fined incessantly at the good pleasure of their masters; governed, led, misled, overdriven, tortured; beaten with sticks, and branded with red-hot irons for an oath; sent to the galleys for killing a rabbit upon the king's grounds; hung for a matter of five sous; contributing their millions to Versailles and their skeletons to Montfauçon; laden with prohibitions, with

ordinances, with patents, with royal letters, with edicts pecuniary and rural, with laws, with codes, with customs; ground to the earth with imposts, with fines, with quit-rents, with mortmains, import and export duties, rents, tithes, tolls, statute-labour, and bankruptcies; cudgelled with a cudgel called a sceptre; gasping, sweating, groaning, always marching, crowned, but on their knees, rather a beast of burthen than a nation,--the French people suddenly stood upright, determined to be men, and resolved to demand an account of Providence, and to liquidate those eight centuries of misery. It was a noble effort!

II

MIRABEAU

A large hall was chosen which was surrounded with benches, then they took boards, and with these boards constructed, in the middle of the hall, a kind of platform. When this platform was finished, what in those days was called the nation, that is to say, the clergy, in their red and violet robes, the nobility in spotless white, with their swords at their sides, and the bourgeoisie dressed in black, took their seats upon the benches. Scarcely were they seated when there was seen to ascend the platform and there take its stand an extraordinary figure. "Who is this monster?" said some; "Who is this giant?" said others. It was a singular being, unforeseen, unknown, emerging abruptly from the obscurity, who terrified, and who fascinated. A dreadful disease had given him a kind of tiger's head; every degree of ugliness seemed to have been imprinted upon that mask by every possible vice. Like the bourgeoisie, he was dressed in black, that is to say, in mourning. His bloodshot eye cast upon the assembly a dazzling glance; it resembled menace and reproach--all looked upon him with a degree of curiosity in which was mingled horror. He raised his hand, and there was silence.

Then were heard to issue from this hideous face sublime words. It was the voice of the new world speaking through the mouth of the old world; it was '89 that had risen, and was questioning, and accusing and

denouncing to God and man all the fatal dates of the monarchy; it was the past,--an august spectacle,--the past, bruised with chains, branded on the shoulder, ex-slave, ex-convict,--the unfortunate past, calling aloud upon the future, the emancipating future! that is what that stranger was, that is what he did on that platform! At his word, which at certain moments was as the thunder, prejudices, fictions, abuses, superstitions, fallacies, intolerance, ignorance, fiscal infamies, barbarous punishments, outworn authorities, worm-eaten magistracy, discrepant codes, rotten laws, everything that was doomed to perish, trembled, and the downfall of those things began. That formidable apparition has left a name in the memory of men; he should be called Revolution,--his name is Mirabeau!

III

THE TRIBUNE

From the moment that that man put his foot upon that platform, that platform was transformed. The French tribune was founded.

The French tribune! A volume would be necessary to tell all that that word contains. The French tribune has been, these sixty years, the open mouth of human intelligence. Of human intelligence, saying everything, combining everything, blending everything, fertilizing everything: the good, the bad, the true, the false, the just, the unjust, the high, the low, the horrible, the beautiful, dreams, facts, passion, reason, love, hate, the material, the ideal; but, in a word--for that is the essence of its sublime and eternal mission--making darkness in order to draw from it light, making chaos to draw from it life, making the revolution to draw from it the republic.

What has taken place upon that tribune, what it has seen, what it has done, what tempests have raged around it, to what events it has given birth, what men have shaken it with their clamour, what men have made it sacred with their truths--how recount this? After Mirabeau,--Vergniaud, Camille Desmoulins, Saint-Just, that stern young man, Danton, that tremendous tribune, Robespierre, that incarnation of the great and terrible year! From it were heard those ferocious

interruptions. "Aha!" cries an orator of the Convention, "do you propose to cut short my speech?" "Yes," answers a voice, "and your neck to-morrow." And those superb apostrophes. "Minister of Justice," said General Foy to an iniquitous Keeper of the Seals, "I condemn you, on leaving this room, to contemplate the statue of L'Hôpital."--There, every cause has been pleaded, as we have said before, bad causes as well as good; the good only have been finally won; there, in the presence of resistance, of denials, of obstacles, those who long for the future, like those who long for the past, have lost all patience; there, it has happened to truth to become violent, and to falsehood to rage; there, all extremes have appeared. On that tribune the guillotine had its orator, Marat; and the Inquisition its Montalembert. Terrorism in the name of public safety, terrorism in the name of Rome; gall in the mouths of both, agony in the audience. When one was speaking, you fancied you saw the gleam of the knife; when the other was speaking, you fancied you heard the crackling of the stake. There factions have fought, all with determination, a few with glory. There, the royal power violated the right of the people in the person of Manuel, become illustrious in history by this very violation; there appeared, disdainful the past, whose servants they were, two melancholy old men: Royer-Collard, disdainful probity, Chateaubriand, the satirical genius; there, Thiers, skill, wrestled with Guizot, strength; there men have mingled, have grappled, have fought, have brandished evidence like a sword. There, for more than a quarter of a century, hatred, rage, superstition, egotism, imposture, shrieking, hissing, barking, writhing, screaming always the same calumnies, shaking always the same

clenched fist, spitting, since Christ, the same saliva, have whirled
like a cloud-storm about thy serene face, O Truth!

IV

THE ORATORS

All this was alive, ardent, fruitful, tumultuous, grand. And when everything had been pleaded, argued, investigated, searched, gone to the bottom of, said and gainsaid, what came forth from the chaos? always the spark! What came forth from the cloud? always light! All that the tempest could do was to agitate the ray of light, and change it into lightning. There, in that tribune, has been propounded, analyzed, clarified, and almost always determined, every question of the day: questions of finance, questions of credit, questions of labour, questions of circulation, questions of salary, questions of state, questions of the land, questions of peace, questions of war. There, for the first time, was pronounced that phrase which contained a whole new alignment of society,--the Rights of Man. There, for fifty years, has been heard the ringing of the anvil upon which supernatural smiths were forging pure ideas,--ideas, those swords of the people, those lances of justice, that armour of law. There, suddenly impregnated with sympathetic currents, like embers which redden in the wind, all those who had flame in their hearts, great advocates like Ledru-Rollin and Berryer, great historians like Guizot, great poets like Lamartine, rose at once, and naturally, into great orators.

That tribune was a place of strength and of virtue. It saw, it inspired (for it is easy to believe that these emanations sprang from it), all those acts of devotion, of abnegation, of energy, of intrepidity. As for us, we honour every display of courage, even in the ranks of those who are opposed to us. One day the tribune was surrounded with darkness; it seemed as if an abyss had opened around it; and in this darkness one heard a noise like the roaring of the sea; and suddenly, in that impenetrable night, above that ledge of marble to which clung the strong hand of Danton, one saw arise a pike bearing a bleeding head! Boissy d'Anglas saluted it.

That was a day of menace. But the people do not overthrow tribunes. The tribunes belong to the people, and the people know it. Place a tribune in the centre of the world, and in a few days, in the four corners of the earth, the Republic will arise. The tribune shines for the people, and they are not unaware of it. Sometimes the tribune irritates the people, and makes them foam with rage; sometimes they beat it with their waves, they overflow it even, as on the 15th of May, but then they retire majestically like the ocean, and leave it standing upright like a beacon. To overthrow the tribune is, on the part of the people, rank folly; it is the proper work of tyrants only.

The people were rising, full of anger, of irritation. Some generous error had seized them, some illusion was leading them astray; they had misunderstood some act, some measure, some law; they were beginning to

be wroth, they were laying aside that superb tranquillity wherein their strength consists, they were invading all the public squares with dull murmurings and formidable gestures; it was an émeute, an insurrection, civil war, a revolution, perhaps. The tribune was there. A beloved voice arose and said to the people: "Pause, look, listen, judge!" Si forte virum quem conspexere, silent. This was true at Rome, and true at Paris. The people paused. O Tribune! pedestal of men of might! from thee have sprung eloquence, law, authority, patriotism, devotion, and great thoughts,--the curb of the people, the muzzles of lions.

In sixty years, every sort of mind, every sort of intelligence, every description of genius, has successively spoken in that spot, the most resonant in the world. From the first Constituent Assembly to the last, from the first Legislative Assembly to the last, through the Convention, the Councils, and the Chambers, count the men if you can. It is a catalogue worthy of Homer. Follow the series! How many contrasting figures are there from Danton to Thiers? How many figures that resemble one another, from Barère to Baroche, from Lafayette to Cavaignac? To the names we have already mentioned,--Mirabeau, Vergniaud, Danton, Saint-Just, Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins, Manuel, Foy, Royer-Collard, Chateaubriand, Guizot, Thiers, Ledru-Rollin, Berryer, Lamartine,--add these other names, so different, sometimes hostile,--scholars, artists, men of science, men of the law, statesmen, warriors, democrats, monarchists, liberals, socialists, republicans, all famous, a few illustrious, each having the halo which befits him: Barnave, Cazalès, Maury, Mounier, Thouret, Chapelier, Pétion, Buzot,

Brissot, Sieyès, Condorcet, Chénier, Carnot, Lanjuinais, Pontécoulant, Cambacérès, Talleyrand, Fontanes, Benjamin Constant, Casimir Perier, Chauvelin, Voyer d'Argenson, Laffitte, Dupont (de l'Eure), Fitz-James, Cuvier, Villemain, Camille Jordan, Lainé, Bonald, Villèle, Martignac, the two Lameths, the two Davids (the painter in '93, the sculptor in '48), Lamarque, Mauguin, Odilon Barrot, Arago, Garnier-Pagès, Louis Blanc, Marc Dufraisse, Lamennais, Émile de Girardin, Lamoricière, Dufaure, Crémieux, Michel (de Bourges), Jules Favre. What a constellation of talents! what a variety of aptitudes! what services rendered! what a battling of all the realities against all the errors! what brains at work! what an outlay, for the benefit of progress, of learning, of philosophy, of passion, of conviction, of experience, of sympathy, of eloquence! what a fertilising heat spread abroad! what a shining firmament of light!

And we do not name them all. To make use of an expression which is sometimes borrowed from the author of this book, "Nous en passons et des meilleurs." We have not even alluded to that valiant legion of young orators who arose on the Left during these last years,--Arnauld (de l'Ariège), Bancel, Chauffour, Pascal Duprat, Esquiros, de Flotte, Farcounet, Victor Hennequin, Madier de Montjau, Morellet, Noël Parfait, Pelletier, Sain, Versigny.

Let us insist upon this point: starting from Mirabeau, there was in the world, in human society, in civilization, a culminating point, a central spot, a common altar, a summit. This summit was the tribune of

France; admirable landmark for coming generations, a glittering height in time of peace, a lighthouse in the darkness of catastrophes. From the extremities of the intelligent world, the peoples fixed their eyes upon this peak, from which has shone the human mind. When dark night suddenly enveloped them, they heard issuing from that height a mighty voice, which spoke to them in the darkness. *Admonet et magna testatur voce per umbras.* A voice which all at once, when the hour had come, like the cockcrow announcing the dawn, like the cry of the eagle hailing the sun, resounded like a clarion of war, or like the trumpet of judgment, and brought to their feet once more, awe-inspiring, waving their winding-sheets, seeking swords in their tombs, all those heroic dead nations,--Poland, Hungary, Italy! Then, at that voice of France, the glorious sky of the future opened; old despotisms, blinded and in fear, hid their heads in the nether darkness, and there, her feet upon the clouds, her forehead among the stars, a sword flashing in her hand, her mighty wings outspread in the azure depths, one saw Liberty appear, the archangel of the nations.

INFLUENCE OF ORATORY

This tribune was the terror of every tyranny and fanaticism, it was the hope of every one who was oppressed under Heaven. Whoever placed his foot upon that height, felt distinctly the pulsations of the great heart of mankind. There, providing he was a man of earnest purpose, his soul swelled within him, and shone without. A breath of universal philanthropy seized him, and filled his mind as the breeze fills the sail; so long as his feet rested upon those four planks, he was a stronger and a better man; he felt at that consecrated minute as if he were living the life of all the nations; words of charity for all men came to his lips; beyond the Assembly, grouped at his feet, and frequently in a tumult, he beheld the people, attentive, serious, with ears strained, and fingers on lips; and beyond the people, the human race, plunged in thought, seated in circles, and listening. Such was this grand tribune, from which a man addressed the world.

From this tribune, incessantly vibrating, gushed forth perpetually a sort of sonorous flood, a mighty oscillation of sentiments and ideas, which, from billow to billow, and from people to people, flowed to the utmost confines of the earth, to set in motion those intelligent waves which are called souls. Frequently one knew not why such and such a law, such and such an institution, was tottering, beyond the frontiers,

beyond the most distant seas: the Papacy beyond the Alps, the throne of the Czar at the extremity of Europe, slavery in America, the death penalty all over the world. The reason was that the tribune of France had quivered. At certain hours the quiver of that tribune was an earthquake. The tribune of France spoke, and every sentient being on this earth betook itself to reflection; the words sped into the obscurity, through space, at hazard, no matter where,--"It is only the wind, it is only a little noise," said the barren minds that live upon irony; but the next day, or three months, or a year later, something fell on the surface of the earth, or something rose. What had been the cause of that? The noise that had vanished, the wind that had passed away. This noise, this wind, was "the Word." A sacred force! From the Word of God came the creation of human beings;--from the Word of Man will spring the union of the peoples.

WHAT AN ORATOR IS

Once mounted upon this tribune, the man who was there was no longer a man: he was that mysterious workman whom we see, at twilight, walking with long strides across the furrows, and flinging into space, with an imperial gesture, the germs, the seeds, the future harvests, the wealth of the approaching summer, bread, life.

He goes to and fro, he returns; his hand opens and empties itself, fills itself and empties itself again and again; the sombre plain is stirred, the deeps of nature open, the unknown abyss of creation begins its work; the waiting dews fall, the spear of wild grain quivers and reflects that the sheaf of wheat will succeed it; the sun, hidden behind the horizon, loves what that workman is doing, and knows that his rays will not be wasted. Sacred and mysterious work!

The orator is the sower. He takes from his heart his instincts, his passions, his beliefs, his sufferings, his dreams, his ideas, and throws them, by handfuls, into the midst of men. Every brain is to him an open furrow. One word dropped from the tribune always takes root somewhere, and becomes a thing. You say, "Oh! it is nothing--it is a man talking," and you shrug your shoulders. Shortsighted creatures! it is a future which is germinating, it is a new world bursting into

bloom.

VII

WHAT THE TRIBUNE ACCOMPLISHED

Two great problems hang over the world. War must disappear, and conquest must continue. These two necessities of a growing civilization seemed to exclude each other. How satisfy the one without failing the other? Who could solve the two problems at the same time? Who did solve them? The tribune! The tribune is peace, and the tribune is conquest. Conquest by the sword,--who wants it? Nobody. The peoples are fatherlands. Conquest by ideas,--who wants it? Everybody. The peoples are mankind. Now two preëminent tribunes dominated the nations--the English tribune doing business, and the French tribune creating ideas. The French tribune had elaborated after '89 all the principles which form the political philosopher's stone, and it had begun to elaborate since 1848 all the principles which form the social philosopher's stone. When once a principle had been released from confinement and brought into the light, the French tribune threw it upon the world, armed from head to foot, saying: "Go!" The victorious principle took the field, met the custom-house officers on the frontier, and passed in spite of their watch-dogs; met the sentinels at the gates of cities, and passed despite their pass-words; travelled by railway, by packet-boat, scoured continents, crossed the seas, accosted wayfarers on the highway, sat at the firesides of families, glided between friend

and friend, between brother and brother, between man and wife, between master and slave, between people and king; and to those who asked: "Who art thou?" it replied: "I am the truth;" and to those who asked: "Whence comest thou?" it replied, "I come from France." Then he who had questioned the principle offered it his hand, and it was better than the annexation of a province, it was the annexation of a human mind. Thenceforth, between Paris, the metropolis, and that man in his solitude, and that town buried in the heart of the woods or of the steppes, and that people groaning under the yoke, a current of thought and of love was established. Under the influence of these currents certain nationalities grew weak, whilst others waxed strong and rose again. The savage felt himself less savage, the Turk less Turk, the Russian less Russian, the Hungarian more Hungarian, the Italian more Italian. Slowly, and by degrees, the French spirit assimilated the other nations, for universal progress. Thanks to this admirable French language, composed by Providence, with wonderful equilibrium, of enough consonants to be pronounced by the nations of the North, and of enough vowels to be pronounced by the peoples of the South; thanks to this language, which is a power of civilization and of humanity, little by little, and by its radiation alone, this lofty central tribune of Paris conquered the nations and made them France. The material boundary of France was such as she could make it; but there were no treaties of 1815 to determine her moral frontier. The moral frontier constantly receded and broadened from day to day; and before a quarter of a century, perhaps, one would have said the French world, as one said the Roman world.

That is what the tribune was, that is what it was accomplishing for France, a prodigious engine of ideas, a gigantic factory ever elevating the level of intelligence all over the world, and infusing into the heart of humanity a vast flood of light.

And this is what M. Bonaparte has suppressed!

VIII

PARLIAMENTARISM

Yes, that tribune M. Bonaparte has overthrown. That power, created by our revolutionary parturition, he has broken, shattered, crushed, torn with his bayonets, thrown under the feet of horses. His uncle uttered an aphorism: "The throne is a board covered with velvet." He, also, has uttered his: "The tribune is a board covered with cloth, on which we read, Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité." He has thrown board and cloth, and Liberty and Equality and Fraternity, into the fire of a bivouac. A burst of laughter from the soldiers, a little smoke, and all was over.

Is it true? Is it possible? Did it happen so? Has such a thing been seen in these days? Mon Dieu, yes; it is, in fact, extremely simple. To cut off the head of Cicero and nail his two hands upon the rostrum, it sufficed to have a brute who has a knife, and another brute who has nails and a hammer.

The tribune was for France three things: a means of exterior initiative, a method of interior government, a source of glory. Louis Bonaparte has suppressed the initiative. France was the teacher of the peoples, and conquered them by love; to what end? He has suppressed the method of government,--his own is better. He has breathed upon the glory of France, and blown it out. Certain breaths have this property.

But to make an assault upon the tribune is a family crime. The first Bonaparte had already committed it, but at least what he brought into France to replace that glory, was glory, not ignominy.

Louis Bonaparte did not content himself with overthrowing the tribune; he determined to make it ridiculous. As well try that as anything else. The least one can do, when one cannot utter two words consecutively, when one harangues only with written notes in hand, when one is short both of speech and of intelligence, is to make a little fun of Mirabeau. General Ratapoil said to General Foy, "Hold your tongue, chatterbox!"--"What is it you call the tribune?" cries M. Bonaparte Louis; "it is parliamentarism!" What have you to say to "parliamentarism"? Parliamentarism pleases me. Parliamentarism is a pearl. Behold the dictionary enriched. This academician of coups d'état makes new words. In truth one is not a barbarian to refrain from dropping a barbarism now and then. He too is a sower; barbarisms fructify in the brains of idiots. The uncle had "ideologists"--the nephew has "parliamentarisms." Parliamentarism, gentlemen; parliamentarism, ladies. This is answerable for everything. You venture timidly to observe: "It is perhaps a pity so many families have been ruined, so many people transported, so many citizens proscribed, so many coffins filled, so many graves dug, so much blood spilt" "Aha!" replies a coarse voice with a Dutch accent; "so you mistrust parliamentarism, do you?" Get out of the dilemma if you can. Parliamentarism is a great find. I give my vote to M. Louis Bonaparte

for the next vacant seat at the Institute. What's that? why, we must encourage neology! This man comes from the dung-heap, this man comes from the Morgue, this man's hands steam like a butcher's, he scratches his ear, smiles, and invents words like Julie d'Angennes. He marries the wit of the Hôtel de Rambouillet to the odour of Montfauçon. We will both vote for him, won't we, M. de Montalembert?

IX

THE TRIBUNE DESTROYED

So "parliamentarism"--that is to say, protection of the citizen, freedom of discussion, liberty of the press, liberty of the subject, supervision of the taxes, inspection of the receipts and expenses, the safety-lock upon the public money-box, the right of knowing what is being done with your money, the solidity of credit, liberty of conscience, liberty of worship, protection of property, the guarantee against confiscation and spoliation, the safeguard of the individual, the counterpoise to arbitrary power, the dignity of the nation, the glory of France, the steadfast morals of free nations, movement, life,--all these exist no longer. Wiped out, annihilated, vanished! And this "deliverance" has cost France only the trifle of twenty-five millions, divided amongst twelve or fifteen saviours, and forty thousand francs in eau-de-vie, per brigade! Verily, this is not dear! these gentlemen, of the coup d'état did the thing at a discount.

Now the deed is done, it is complete. The grass is growing at the Palais-Bourbon. A virgin forest is beginning to spring up between Pont de la Concorde and Place Bourgogne. Amid the underbrush one distinguishes the box of a sentry. The Corps Législatif empties its urn among the reeds, and the water flows around the foot of the sentry-box with a gentle murmur.

Now it is all over. The great work is accomplished. And the results of the work! Do you know that Messieurs So-and-So won town houses and country houses in the Circuit Railway alone? Get all you can, gorge yourselves, grow a fat paunch; it is no longer a question of being a great people, of being a powerful people, of being a free nation, of casting a bright light; France no longer sees its way to that. And this is success! France votes for Louis-Napoleon, carries Louis-Napoleon, fattens Louis-Napoleon, contemplates Louis-Napoleon, admires Louis-Napoleon, and is stupefied. The end of civilization is attained!

Now there is no more noise, no more confusion, no more talking, no more parliament, or parliamentarism. The Corps Législatif, the Senate, the Council of State, have all had their mouths sewn up. There is no more fear of reading a fine speech when you wake up in the morning. It is all over with everything that thought, that meditated, that created, that spoke, that sparkled, that shone among this great people. Be proud, Frenchmen! Lift high your heads, Frenchmen! You are no longer anything, and this man is everything! He holds in his hand your intelligence, as a child holds a bird. Any day he pleases, he can strangle the genius of France. That will be one less source of tumult! In the meantime, let us repeat in chorus: "No more Parliamentarism, no more tribune!" In lieu of all those great voices which debated for the improvement of mankind, which were, one the idea, another the fact, another the right, another justice, another glory, another faith, another hope, another learning, another genius; which instructed, which

charmed, which comforted, which encouraged, which brought forth fruit;
in lieu of all those sublime voices, what is it that one hears amid the
dark night that hangs like a pall over France? The jingle of a spur, of
a sword dragged along the pavement!

"Hallelujah!" says M. Sibour. "Hosannah!" replies M. Parisis.