Everybody knows roughly by hearsay, film, or schoolwork what ensued in France from the events of 1789 and how liberal reforms turned into a new despotism. Some details to remember will find a place later (428–9>). The fragility of the reform temper in the first phase is plain from the mixture of the sentimental and the violent, the brotherhood of all citizens and the hatred toward the many types of "suspect."

One man's vicissitudes illustrate the feverish mood. The valiant friend of America, Beaumarchais, was asked by the mayor of Paris to supervise the dismantling of the now empty Bastille on the once more renamed Place de la Concorde. He went to work with his usual zest, but by 1790 unaccountably became one of these suspects. He was brought to trial and by good luck was spared prison: he would have been killed there with thousands of others two years later. During his trial he had the pleasure of seeing a revival of his opera *Tarare*, revised for the occasion. The hero had originally downed the bad king and taken his place with benevolent intent. Now, in an added scene, one sees the people as hero crowding an altar dedicated to liberty. The tenor and the chorus sing constitutional lyrics. Operas are easier to reform than nation-states.

Barzun, Jacques. From Dawn To Decadence.
Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2000.

The Forgotten Troop

THERE ARE MANY REASONS why the words *French Revolution*, all by themselves, evoke at once recognition and appropriate images. The exact date 1789 may not be remembered everywhere as it is in France, but the upheaval occurred "not so very long ago"; it was bloody in a dramatic, personal way. Then it merged with the epic story of Napoleon, still a celebrity.

Many of the issues raised in those 25 years remain a cause of partisan debate, being sources of our political and social system.° The proposition that simply by being born one has certain inherent rights was the Idea of that revolution. The germ of it, as we saw, lay in the Protestant Revolution, which asserted the "Christian liberty" of everyone's free and equal access to God (<6). The germ was developed indirectly by the Monarchical Revolution, which lowered the prestige and power of the nobility and tended, despite exceptions, toward making everybody alike subjects of the king within the nation-state. Next, the "Century of Light" launched doctrines, political, social, and economic, that should have caused France to transform its monarchy from so-called absolute to constitutional like England and even more thoroughly. This purpose was widely understood by the population (<423); it inspired the first moves of the Estates General convened at mid-year 1789, and it brought about the nobles' stripping themselves of their privileges. It missed happening by a narrow margin.

Instead of a rough time of steady change, there ensued a chaotic time of regimes and violence lasting a quarter century. The first span, five years long, may be divided into two parts. During the first three and a half, an attempt was made to liberalize the monarchy and modernize the country. In the next one and a half, dictatorship carried on terror at home and war abroad. Then came an interim of relative freedom—five years of successful war that brought Bonaparte to the fore, and then a return to dictation under him as consul and emperor for a decade and a half, war unabating.

The men and ideas that produced this cascade of outcomes are many and cannot be given individual notice here. But one condition of cultural import

can be suggested. The men who came to lead factions or who gained power for a time lacked mature political talent. To govern well requires two distinct kinds of ability: political skill and the administrative mind. Both are very rare, either in combination or separately. The former depends on sensing what can be done, at what moment, and how to move others to want it. Anyone who has served open-eyed on a committee knows how many "good ideas" are proposed by well-meaning members that could not possibly be carried out, because what is proposed consists only of results, with no means in sight for getting from here to there. After serving on a local government body, Bernard Shaw guessed that perhaps 5 percent of mankind possess political ability.

But one can be a true politico and be at the same time incapable of administration. To administer is to keep order in a situation that continually tends toward disorder. In running any organization, both people and things have to be kept straight from day to day. Otherwise, workable ideas will not work. More than talent, genius, is required to set up a national system of administration. Napoleon's success at home and abroad was due to this gift as much as to the art of command in battle.

It is sometimes said that the example of the Americans—a free people—influenced the French revolutionists. Some of their words about the blessings of liberty did at times include references to American independence, but unfortunately no wisdom radiated from the makers of the American Constitution to those making one in France. Only in the war that overtook the French did the American experience come into play in Europe. Lafayette, De Grasse, Rochambeau, Gneisenau, and others had fought in America and seen the inadequacy of the old-line tactics against the sharpshooting Americans and Indians. Europe adopted the flexible line of small columns protected by skirmishers. It needed much less drill, and with lighter artillery increased mobility and speed. [The book to read is *Understanding War* by Peter Paret.]

It is not surprising that the men who filled the three successive French assemblies were not well equipped for their demanding tasks. Many were small-town lawyers like Robespierre, or members of other learned professions; some were artisans, or again small landowners or local officials. A number may have been used to *politicking*, but not to fashioning a constitution or resolving great national issues under the pressure of emergencies. They were certainly articulate. They wrote and delivered endless speeches and debated ad infinitum. The one statesman in their midst, Mirabeau, vainly kept urging them to take action. What is left of French revolutionary eloquence is

his point don't ask for more time to con-
r. Grave trouble never grants time.

MIRABEAU, TO THE ASSEMBLY ON THE "PATRIOTIC INCOME TAX" PROPOSED BY NECKER (SEPT. 26, 1789)

enormous in bulk and a model of all future campaign oratory—abstract, diffuse strings of generalities aiming at applause for virtuous attitudes and vague on details except when attacking rivals or denouncing "traitors." Again, one exception to verbosity: the lucid and vigorous Danton.

During the first two years of the new order, Mirabeau might have led the way to lasting reforms and averted the series of legal and illegal changes that amounted to coups d'état. He meant to turn the government into a constitutional monarchy and be its leader. Unfortunately, his private financial dealings with the king made his arguments seem venal and his driving energy was an offense. He foresaw the impending rhythm of revolutionary politics: any measure toward stability could be construed as treason to the forward march of liberty and equality. And when the threat of counter-revolution came from foreign kings and princes, the sincerest revolutionists had to compete with the demagogues. This is an historical generality.

Hence the maxim that a revolution devours its children. But that is only a high probability. It is permissible to speculate that with Mirabeau alive and a king and queen endowed with an ounce of political sense, the monarchy could have survived. But again and again wrong choices were made. It was the king who declared war on Austria; it was the king's blunders, often at the queen's urging, that dethroned him; after which a new force came into play: the societies, clubs, and "sections."

The Jacobin Club is remembered for its name, which has come to be used, especially in English, to denote rabble-rousing radicalism. In the revolution the Jacobins were the best-organized party, with "cells" throughout the nation.° The "sections" were the 48 new divisions of Paris, each bearing a symbolic name (of heroes such as William Tell) and ruled by a local assembly, with committees and other members, everyone free to debate. The societies were independent groups promoting a self-appointed mission. An early one was called the Fraternal Society of Both Sexes; another, the Society of Equals; a third, founded by the actress Claire Lacombe, was the earliest to argue for a republic. These groups published newspapers, the most violent and popular being Dr. Marat's *Ami du Peuple*. This "friend of the people" called for a dictator and acted as such toward his worshippers in all groups, including Claire Lacombe.

What the textbooks call the Paris mob was thus an organized and articulate mass of people, not united on every issue, yet enough of one mind to act together at critical moments. The series of riots, revolts, and massacres that bedeviled the lawmakers was their work. They sent delegations again and again to the assembly, lobbying or threatening. They were patriots, defenders of truth and virtue, guardians—no, "saviors" of the revolution.

This political force acquired the nickname of *sans-culotterie* (434>). It was made up of workmen, shopkeepers, teachers, artists, writers, minor civil ser-

vants, with only a sprinkling of the well-to-do. "Lower middle class" does not sufficiently suggest their intellectual pastimes, their desire for education (they were not all literate), their pride of skill, their self-respect and earnestness. They gathered for readings of Rousseau, Volney, and other masters, as well as to make speeches, sing songs, and enjoy moral recitations by young girls—in short, to lead a life of the mind.

It was, besides, a fraternity of activists. When the tocsin sounded from the steeple and the drums beat the *générale,* they marched out to do what the leaders—regular ward politicians—had decided. Some sections were more fiery than others. Hence the lynchings and petty massacres that marked each turn of events and created the "Days" that history remembers. The principles upheld in this way were few and consistent: sovereignty of the people, equality, and what was termed *honorable mediocrity.* This last has no belittling implication; it means a middling station in life—Rousseau and Jefferson's ideal. (The former's *Social Contract* was reissued 32 times in the 10 years after 1789, not counting pocket editions.) This ideal easily lapses into anti-elitism: the *sans-culottes* regarded dogs as aristocratic (because of hunting); true democrats must be content with cats.

Out of this ferment came a vision with a future: the old idea of establishing the good society through communism (<15). It was to be engineered by a terrorist dictatorship. A couple of these theorists perished in the Terror (not theirs) that did take place. Another Communist, named Gracchus Babeuf, also went to the scaffold for attempting a coup based on his "Manifesto of the Plebeians." But his friend Buonarotti, a descendant of Michelangelo's, survived and wrote a tract entitled "Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality." Its teachings were echoed and re-echoed by leaders of small revolutionist groups throughout the 19C, notably the one led by Blanqui, from whom Lenin is said to have borrowed if not the goal the method.

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The direct legacy of the revolution was of course something quite other than communism. That legacy was Nationalism; and coupled with it, Liberalism in the sense of individual rights and representative government. The struggle to implant both of these throughout Europe, and the competition between the two, define the political history of the 19C. The liberal revolution had to forgo Liberalism because of war: the Terror was a by-product of seeing "the fatherland in danger." The foreign enemy was at Verdun, another was at home—the royalist peasants of the Vendée. And the food crisis was acute and permanent. The Committee of Public Safety had to take strong measures: fix prices and hunt down dissidents and black marketeers.

Robespierre, first among equals on that committee, had come a long way in a short time. As a local judge in his native Arras, he had felt so upset at having to condemn a man to death that he resigned his post. In the first of the Assemblies, he promoted a bill to abolish capital punishment. He changed his mind, but his concern for the poor and oppressed never lagged; price-fixing protected the common man, as well as helped to keep the troops supplied. He led the first efficient police state. His agents in the country directed the vicious purges, of "suspects" and "traitors" and their wives and children. At the front, other agents could remove field commanders, on suspicion or because they ordered a retreat. In Paris, the revolutionary tribunal was in permanent session and thanks to the diligent prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville, in 17 months (as he boasted) some 2,000 heads rolled in the sawdust.

But no tendency in culture, no sentiment—let it be said again—is ever unanimous, not even under extreme force. The word *totalitarian* is acceptable shorthand to mean what the 20C understands by it, but the reality is never total. In the late 1790s a stubborn minority opposed every step of the revolution, their hostility expressed or concealed. Some outwardly conformed; others lived in hiding, sheltered by people who were above suspicion, sincere revolutionists but willing to harbor friends or relatives. The prominent had to flee, in waves, as different opinions prevailed at the center or on the streets. *Emigrés* clustered east of the Rhine and plotted to return at the head of the armies they were trying to muster by pleading with Austria and Prussia. Of those at home some miraculously survived: when the Abbé Sieyès (<423) was asked in later years what he had done during the Terror, he replied: "I lived."' A few found refuge in the United States. Others gave themselves away, weary of being hunted, or were denounced and seized triumphantly, each one a prize for the catcher, who felt he had struck a blow for Liberty.

The roster of victims was distinguished. Lavoisier the chemist was guillotined because he was related to a former tax-gatherer; the learned and dedicated Charlotte Corday, because she had come from Normandy on purpose to stab the fanatical Marat. André Chénier the poet, because of a defiant editorial; Mme Roland, also an intellectual and known as the "Muse of the Girondists," because that entire party was accused and sent to its doom. On the scaffold, she cried, "Oh Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" Louis and Marie-Antoinette, of course, and, killed by neglect or otherwise, their two children, and with the queen, the beautiful Princess de Lamballe, who had refused to leave her mistress; before and after these, many titled men and women, because of their title. One marquise who could have saved herself said: "No. Life is not worth a lie"; by the end, the chief party leaders from Danton to Robespierre inclusive.

The executions were punctuated by striking incidents. The spectacle was better than a play, and the painter David was there, making pencil sketches. When Mme Du Barry, Louis XV's last mistress, found herself on the plat-

form, she screamed, she howled, she had to be dragged and pushed. The bloody-minded spectators were stunned. It dawned on them for the first time that a human being was about to be killed. All the others had been aristos, traitors, enemies of the people—abstract items in a category.

But fear and hatred had been mounting and spreading among the members of the assembly. They heard Robespierre preach the pure society that was to issue from a purified revolution, meaning one still further purged. In his policy of Public Safety they no longer saw their own. Two long days of stormy debate set off organized tumult in the streets. Robespierre and his team were seized and outlawed, and after a further scuffle during which he perhaps attempted suicide and fractured his jaw, another 22 patriots went the way of their predecessors—in a tumbril to the Place de la Revolution.

The relative ease and speed with which the coup d'état was accomplished shows the weakness of the strongest political leadership when it is fresh risen from rebellion: it took much longer to dethrone Louis XVI than to get rid of Robespierre. [For a reminder of the events and fates of the participants, read *The French Revolution* by Charles Downer Hazen. It is so vivid a narrative that its two volumes seem shorter than many a treatment in one. For a more modern view: *The French Revolution* by Albert Goodwin. Carlyle's, in his special idiom, is picturesque and also important as the first account in English that was sympathetic without being partisan. Finally, the monumental *Citizens*, by Simon Schama, is a chronicle rich in fresh and evocative details.]

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This summary recital should not leave the thought that the revolution did nothing that lasted. It did a great deal—in some ways too much beyond the original purpose of reforming an entire government. It was driven to this excess by its Idea, the faith of the *Encyclopédie* in universal reason, and by the unanimous enthusiasm with which the feelings embodied in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were applauded at home and abroad. Young and old in all occupations, and intellectuals especially, exulted in the news of French EMANCIPATION from what was taken to be centuries of servitude. In Wordsworth's recollection, it was a heavenly feeling (<8; 43). The German philosopher Kant viewed it as "the enthronement of reason in public affairs." Others sang and danced.

When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared
And with that oath which sounds air, earth, and sea
Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free,
Bear witness for me, how I hoped and feared.

—COLERIDGE'S MEMORY OF 1789 IN "FRANCE: AN ODE" (1798)

Goethe, who was by then 40, did not weep with joy but shared the general satisfaction that he says spread throughout Germany. In England the parliamentary leader Charles James Fox declared the fall of the Bastille the greatest event that had ever happened: the British ambassador in Paris judged the revolution "the greatest in history, achieved with the least bloodshed." Those in England who for a dozen years had wanted to reform Parliament counted on events in France to help their cause.

In addition, a movement that resembles the *sans-culotterie*, but more intellectual and better informed, developed in England, fed by the writings of Paine and members of the "Corresponding Societies" that Burke inveighed against. It explains the split among the poets and critics of that time; on one side, the "turncoats" Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who joined "the forces of reaction"; and on the other, the persecuted Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and their friends° (>506). They were reviled for wanting a "bloodbath" French style, though that was far from their intention. English popular sentiment was for recognition of political rights through parliamentary reform, not for a new type of government. Burns's poem on the theme "a man's a man for a' that" echoes the 17C moderate Puritans' demand for fair play and social respect; it does not aim at leveling or communism.

In France, the fervent oneness had not lasted many months; each logical or accidental change alienated individuals or groups. But the tributes received made the assemblies think that they were legislating for the universe, saving the whole world from ignorance and tyranny. The extraordinary thing is that in the long run the revolution did impose its Idea on the world—the Rights of Man, now expanded into "human rights." The doctrine did not spread by itself nor by French efforts alone, and it still has much territory to conquer; but everywhere today men and women cry out and die for it.

The contents of these rights of men always seem clear to those in the struggle; actually, they vary with the arrangements made for their application. The men of 1789 who wrote the first constitution found that they could not give the vote to all: ignorant and illiterate men without property could not be trusted, and only a few cranks thought that women should be. Still, the vote was given to all men who owned the equivalent of three days' wages—a far wider electoral base than the English; and when need arose for a new assembly, France had manhood suffrage. To work the new scheme, the 32 provinces were abolished to make French men and women out of Bretons, Provençals, or Dauphinois. For a new life as brothers their *pays natal* must wear other names and different shapes. At first the shapes were to be squares with other squares inside them. But "nature" prevailed and 83 departments were drawn and named in keeping with geographical features.

This will to make all things new, coupled with financial woes, inspired what would now be called nationalizing the church. Its vast holdings were declared state property and used as backing for paper money. Sold to the

land-hungry peasants (and speculators), they would produce the cash to redeem the notes. Bishops and priests, after taking a loyalty oath, were put on salary like civil servants, after being elected by a vote of the parish and diocese. Soon the too convenient issue of notes outran the proceeds of the land sales and inflation ensued, while the assault on the church alienated a large part of the people. SECULARISM progressed but at the cost of creating "Two Frances" (<297; 630>).

These drawbacks did not halt other reforms. A system of national education was set up—on paper only, for lack of funds. The old and variable measures of length, weight, and volume were unified "scientifically." The new system, now in global use, used as its central unit the meter, from the Greek for *measure*. It was the length of the earth's meridian or great circle divided by 40 million. Weight and volume were defined by corresponding measures of water or length. They increased or decreased in decimals instead of by thirds, quarters, or twelfths as formerly, and so did the unit of money, the franc. The names for all units were neo-classical.

The friendly figure 10 was used again in the "revolutionary calendar": months of 30 days, divided into three "decades" (the word means 10 days, not years), the last day of each being a day of rest. Five days more were needed at the end of the year to make 365 and these too were holidays. They were soon nicknamed "the *sans-culottides*." The new vocables for the 30-day months invoked nature (*Floréal, Prairial*) or suggested seasonal fact by their Greek roots: *Thermidor* = the "gift of heat" that comes from mid-July to mid-August.

The arts received no less attention than science. The existing academies for literature, for painting and sculpture, music (and separately, the opera), were recast into the five specialized units still extant. The royal library was reorganized as the Bibliothèque Nationale, and a new establishment, the Conservatoire, was founded to train musicians of all kinds at public expense. It has proved a model school, abundantly fruitful. This last concern of the revolutionists was linked to their use of festivals to create mass enthusiasm—or perhaps one should rather say to express it, because the pride, hope, and joy excited by the various "Days" when some coup took place aroused collective feelings never before experienced in the towns of France and needing an outlet.

These festivals were for speeches, pageantry, worship, and music. David or one of his studio designed the decor, including giant allegorical statues (made of temporary material), and he organized the event. Meanwhile, some member of the gifted "Paris school" (461>)—Grétry, Gossec, Méhul, Monsigny—composed songs, marches, and secular hymns. These were of equal importance. From the first outbreak, people had sung rebellious or jubilant words to popular tunes or had made up new ones. Later, something had to be done to fill an emotional void by offering occasions for religious

feeling in secular guise, a *sursum corda*—elevate your hearts to an accompaniment of lofty music and ritual. Bred on Deism (<360), the revolutionists tended toward godlessness and at one point thought of promoting a Cult of Reason, with a visible goddess in the shape of a personable actress scantily attired. But Reason did not last long. Under the austere Robespierre it was found that atheism is "the luxury of aristocrats," and a "Worship of the Supreme Being" was installed. It could have, of course, no human embodiment, but it kindled more feeling than the philosophes' nod to an abstract deity.

What part of this worship was inspired by Freemasonry it is hard to say. What is clear is that this fraternal society flourished during the Enlightenment and created a strong bond among thinkers and politicians alike. Freemasons were a particular kind of Deist, fond of ritual and of myths that they took for history. They revered the Great Architect of the cosmos and followed practices they believed inherited from builders—masons—as far back as Egypt. Haydn and Mozart were Masons who composed great music for their order. Many of the American Founding Fathers were Freemasons and as mentioned earlier, the current dollar bill still bears the symbol of the pyramid, earliest and hugest of masonic feats.

In truth, the guild of masons dates back only to the Middle Ages and its emergence as a fraternal order with a political cast and open to all Deists has been assigned to a lodge founded in England in the early 18C. From there it spread rapidly over Europe and made recruits of leaders in all fields of thought and action. On this account some historians have attributed the revolution in France and later upheavals to the Freemasons acting as a body of conspirators.° More likely, the connection works in reverse: men who broke away from the church and who fought for a republic would join the order. It offered a substitute religion that was secular and a politics that was liberal.

The curious blend of politics, nation worship, and music signaled the celebration of Bastille Day, on July 14, 1792. The provincial cities sent large delegations of National Guards to that festival, despite prohibition from the central government, and the capital was crowded with roistering characters at a moment when news from the front was bad. One such group, the 600 from Marseille, had marched 27 days, singing revolutionary songs to make the time pass more quickly. One of these songs, the newest, had come by the grapevine from Strasbourg, where a young lieutenant, Rouget de Lisle, had composed words and music to cheer "The Army of the Rhine." The rousing tune, roared again in Paris by the 600, made it a national anthem and gave it the name of "Marseillaise"—a lucky escape from "Strasbourgeoise."

Manners during revolutions change automatically, as we have seen. In 1789 the temper that produced the motto Liberty, Equality, Fraternity directed such changes, more and more emphatically as time went on. Titles

were abolished, *de* vanished from signatures and salutations; everybody was known or greeted as Citizen So-and-so (forerunner of Comrade in another revolution and century) and *tu* and *toi* instead of *vous* was politically correct. Louis XVI was tried as Citizen Capet, the name of the founder of the line 800 years earlier.

Men's clothes started on their democratic simplification. Though not altogether colorless, they became subdued and gradually dropped such frills as wigs, powder in the hair, ribbons, knee breeches (hence *sans culottes*), garters and silk stockings, silver buckles on shoes, and felt hats. Instead: the *carmagnole*, the blue smock, which gave its name to the revolutionary song and dance, and the red cap, neo-classically derived from the "Phrygian bonnet" of the emancipated slaves in antiquity. Robespierre, fond of neatness in all things, kept to a modest version of the former fashion, but it was safest to look as much as possible like a workman. That is how trousers made their entry as the garment for males, now almost a global uniform, adopted when so desired by women in the West. The show of legs that served the vanity of Louis XIV and his courtiers has been reassigned to the more frankly exhibitionist sex.

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Meanwhile, from late 1792 onward, war was being fought in two directions. For in addition to repelling the German force that had slowly got under way, the revolt in northwest France proved stubborn and menacing. The peasants of Brittany and the Vendée were devout Catholics and royalists and ably led by their noble lords and peasant tacticians. They were crushed at last, and the armies in the east won early victories. As in 17C England, the side animated by a faith triumphed over seasoned professionals. Nor did the French armies lack well-trained officers from the royal service—Bonaparte was one of those. In addition, youngsters in their early twenties, such as Hoche and Marceau, or their early thirties, such as Jourdan and Kléber (445>) rose quickly to command and showed brilliant generalship.

Behind them, close to Robespierre, was Carnot, the administrator par excellence, soon called "The Organizer of Victory." He raised 750,000 men, supplied them, kept up the production of all necessaries, used the visual telegraph to transmit his orders and balloons for reconnaissance, and by staying aloof from the murderous politics of the assembly and its committees, survived. His son, a physicist, and grandson, a president of the Third Republic, kept his name conspicuous in French minds, especially as the last was assassinated (695>). But the founder of the line deserves fame on a par with that of his political colleagues. The task facing him was heroic, because the 14 armies of the revolution were in fact the nation-in-arms, the first performance of the kind. Known as a levy *en masse*, it has been the model for the main wars of the 20C.

> **From now until the enemy has been harried out of the land, all young men will fight. Married men will forge arms and cart supplies, women will make tents and help in hospitals. Nobody will hire substitutes. Civil servants will remain at their posts. Male citizens aged 18 to 25 who are single and childless will march first.**
>
> —ACT OF AUGUST 23, 1793, DRAFTED BY CARNOT

Common usage makes *nation* and *people* synonymous, but they do not always point to the same entity. A further distinction may be made by calling the old regime a nation-state—a state that governs its people *as if it were* a nation centralized, ruling according to laws, striving for regularity and uniformity over a wide territory. Tocqueville in his study of the old regime shows how closely the structure of France after the revolution resembles that of the old monarchy. But as we saw, inherited divisions and poor communications crippled the old order. The very names of the provinces kept the people from being one nation. It takes a national war to weld the parts together by giving individuals and groups memories of a struggle in common. Needless to add, national*ism* can arise only when a nation in this full sense has come into being. The armies of the revolution and those of Napoleon Bonaparte carried the contagious germ of the nation and its *ism* to the rest of Europe, not solely by example but also by forcing the peoples to resist the invader and giving them a glimpse of that extraordinary conception, Equality.

In arithmetic equality is a simple idea; once grasped, never unsure. In society it is complex and elusive. Thinkers who argue from the state of nature find it easy to say that all are born free and equal (<362); but that is only because in that imagined state there are no standards to measure people by and at birth no talents to compare. The equality of souls in the sight of God also depends on a judgment to which we have no access. From these abstractions, the mind moves next to equality in rights, implying "equality before the law," that is, the same procedures for like cases. These can be made visible up to a point. Beyond it come human decisions—as by a jury and a sentencing judge, where equality is again untestable.

At the third level—equality in social life, business, and politics—the principle is both in force and missing. There are so many facets to the human will and the civilized world that as many good minds have argued for as against the truth, the worth, and the meaning of equality. It was for equality of opportunity that the French revolutionists decreed public instruction. But does schooling provide it? The answer at once shifts to the question of indi-

> **The idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other.**
>
> —DAVID RIESMAN, *THE LONELY CROWD* (1950)

vidual ability: "human beings are *not* equal: see the test scores." To which the rejoinder is that schoolwork is only one measure and a vague one. There follows a list of great figures who were dunces in class. Besides, consider the illiterate guide in the Canadian woods: is he not in his domain the superior of Churchill or Einstein? Finally, if merit is measured by ability and it gives unequal results, is it iniquitous? The *sans-culottes* discovered this and their radical wing demanded "equality of enjoyments" (*jouissances*). Today the complaint is that the meritocracy forms an elite; it is aristocracy under another name; social justice demands equality of conditions. Logically, this should mean equal wages for all, but these have been rarely argued for.

So difficult is it to define equality and nail down its conditions that in dictatorships where it is proclaimed and enforced in dozens of ways, the needs of government and daily life re-introduce distinctions; as Philip Guedalla observed early in the Soviet regime, "some are more equal than others."° The paradox reminds us that international law has no option but to assume, in the teeth of the evidence, that all sovereign nations are equal.

There is but one conclusion: human beings are unmeasurable. It follows that equality is a social assumption independent of fact. It is made for the sake of civil peace, of approximating justice, and of bolstering self-respect. It prevents servility, lessens arrogant oppression, and reduces envy—just a little. Equality begins at home, where members of the family enjoy the same privileges and guests receive equal hospitality without taking a test or showing credentials. Business, government, and the professions assume equality for identical reasons: all junior clerks, all second lieutenants, earn so much. In other situations, as in sports and the rearing of children, equivalence based on age, weight, handicap, or other standard, is computed so as to equalize chances. That is as far as the principle can stretch.

* * *

The chief actors in the first act of the great French drama are identified as soon as named. The same is true as one moves to the next decade and its prominent figures: Pitt, Nelson, Bonaparte, Wellington, Talleyrand, Metternich, have kept their names in the books and in common reference. But looking at the joint list one notices that it is almost entirely political and military. The men of action have used up the collective memory and deprived of renown a group of equally remarkable minds. This forgotten troop numbers writers, artists, philosophers, scholars, physicians, and men of science. It would take long and tireless efforts to inoculate the public mind with their names and deeds; the tight web of culture resists insertions and fame does not favor the squeezed-in look.

This is not to say that these noteworthy talents were hidden in their own

time or have been neglected by widely read biographers. What they have missed is not praise but its routine repetition, which is fame. Among the people, the glamour of the soldier or war minister outshines every other merit. Accordingly, no description of other specimens in a few pages can reverse the settled impression. All that can be done is to give hints to the inquisitive by a rapid who's who with its usual few details. Other books, not hard to find, will supply facts with which to satisfy curiosity and confirm the presence of a galaxy worth getting to know. It will also serve to date back certain cultural advances to their true beginnings.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery to be made is that of the men who in the quarter century 1790–1815 started medicine on its experimental career. Their main achievements were in physiology. Bichat, Magendie, Chaussier, Leclerc, Dupuytren, Legallois, and half a dozen others made rapid progress in both the normal and pathological workings of the human body. The new chemistry, the use of trial and error, and the new practice of taking notes throughout the course of a disease combined with a team spirit to produce lasting results. Dupuytren's name, linked today with the "contracture" of the palm of the hand, was for a long time associated with a salve for syphilis that enjoyed great popularity. But it is for his experimental work on the role of the brain and the nerves in the functioning of other organs that he deserves notice. He too was a teenager, beginning his studies at sixteen and becoming a prosector two years later. His second career as a brilliant army surgeon points to one of the impulsions that forwarded medical discoveries. [The book to read is *Science and Medicine in France 1790–1855* by John E. Lesch.°] Even before the revolution, hospitals in France and elsewhere were being turned from indiscriminate refuges for the poor and the sick to establishments run on system for the study and cure of diseases. Nursing had become a lay profession and the complexity of the new physiology encouraged physicians to specialize. In the same rational spirit, the insane asylum was transformed from a prison for the hopeless to a place for study and cure. In this reform Pinel was the leader who may be called the first psychiatrist.° One should also give his due to Laënnec, who invented the stethoscope and laid down the bases of chest medicine.

The English physician to note and remember is

Thomas Beddoes

He was the father of the poet Thomas Lovell Beddoes, also a physician, and both of them original minds and strong characters. The elder startled his colleagues and patients by his farsighted innovations. Among those he treated in Clifton near Bristol were Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. Dr. Beddoes was interested in scrofula, the swellings of the lymph glands that