

CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Two great parties are forming in all nations. . . . For one, there is a right of government, to be exercised by one or several persons over the mass of the people, of divine origin and to be supported by the church, which is protected by it. These principles are expressed in the formula, Church and State.

To this is opposed the new system, which admits no right of government except that arising from the free consent of those who submit to it, and which maintains that all persons who take part in government are accountable for their actions. These principles go under the formula, Sovereignty of the People, or Democracy.

—G. K. VAN HOGENDORP, ROTTERDAM, 1791

A young Philadelphian of good family, Thomas Shippen, in the course of a visit to Europe, where he cultivated the acquaintance of “titled men and ladies of birth,” bore a letter of introduction to Thomas Jefferson, the American Minister to France, who presented him at the court of Versailles. They arrived, one day in February 1788, “at 1/2 past 10 and were not done bowing until near 2.” Young Shippen chatted with the Papal Nuncio and the Russian Ambassador, who “was very polite,” and on meeting a woman and her two daughters who were all countesses he was introduced with all his “titles,” which he thought most people believed to be hereditary. He was then paired with a German princeling for presentation to the King, who mumbled a few words while hitching on his sword. It all made the young man very conscious of his American nationality. He was “revolted” at the King’s arrogance, but even more “mortified at the suppleness and base complaisance of his attendants.” Such oriental splendor he thought worth seeing—once. It set him to thinking, for, as he wrote to his father, he detected ennui and uneasiness on the faces at court, and was more convinced than ever that “a *certain degree of equality* is essential to human bliss.”

The underlining was Shippen’s own. He added that America was peculiarly fortunate, since it provided the degree of equality that made for happiness, “without

destroying the necessary subordination.” No doubt his taste for equality had its limits. Descended on his mother’s side from the Lees of Virginia, and on his father’s from one of the founders of Pennsylvania, Thomas Shippen belonged socially to the groups that had provided many officers of government in America, and it was in fact on this ground, according to the etiquette at Versailles, that he was thought, as a mere republican, to have sufficient rank for presentation at court. On the other hand, Shippen’s own father, a prominent doctor, had been a revolutionary of sorts, having acted as chief medical officer in the Continental Army. More generally, the point is that even Americans of aristocratic standing or pretensions looked on the Europe of 1788 with a certain disapproval.

This little scene at Versailles, revealed in the new edition of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*,¹ may serve to introduce some of the themes of the following pages, bringing together, as it does, Europe and America, monarchy and republicanism, aristocracy and an emerging democracy, and reflecting certain predilections or biases which the author at the outset confesses to sharing, without, he hastens to add, writing from any such point of view in the social scale as that of the Shippens of Philadelphia.

Let us pass from the concrete image to the broadest of historical generalizations. The present work attempts to deal with Western Civilization as a whole, at a critical moment in its history, or with what has sometimes recently been called the Atlantic Civilization, a term probably closer to reality in the eighteenth century than in the twentieth.² It is argued that this whole civilization was swept in the last four decades of the eighteenth century by a single revolutionary movement, which manifested itself in different ways and with varying success in different countries, yet in all of them showed similar objectives and principles. It is held that this forty-year movement was essentially “democratic,” and that these years are in fact the Age of the Democratic Revolution. “Democratic” is here to be understood in a general but clear enough sense. It was not primarily the sense of a later day in which universality of the suffrage became a chief criterion of democracy, nor yet that other and uncertain sense, also of a later day, in which both Soviet and Western-type states could call themselves democratic. In one way, it signified a new feeling for a kind of equality, or at least a discomfort with older forms of social stratification and formal rank, such as Thomas Shippen felt at Versailles, and which indeed had come to affect a good many of the habitues of Versailles also. Politically, the eighteenth-century movement was against the possession of government, or any public power, by any established, privileged, closed, or self-recruiting groups of men. It denied that any person could exercise coercive authority simply by his own right, or by right of his status, or by right of “history,” either in the old-fashioned sense of custom and inheritance, or in any newer dialectical sense, unknown to the eighteenth century, in which “history” might be supposed to give some special elite or revolutionary vanguard a right to rule. The “democratic revolution” emphasized the delegation of authority and the removability of officials,

1 Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, 1950–), XII, 502–4.

2 See the paper prepared by Professor J. Godechot and myself for the international historical meeting at Rome in 1955: “Le problème de l’Atlantique du XVIII^e au XX^e siècle,” in *Relazioni del X Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche (Roma 4–11 Settembre 1955)* (Florence, 1955), V, 175–239.

precisely because, as we shall see, neither delegation nor removability were much recognized in actual institutions.

It is a corollary of these ideas that the American and the French Revolutions, the two chief actual revolutions of the period, with all due allowance for the great differences between them, nevertheless shared a good deal in common, and that what they shared was shared also at the same time by various people and movements in other countries, notably in England, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy, but also in Germany, Hungary, and Poland, and by scattered individuals in places like Spain and Russia.

THE REVOLUTION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

To obtain the right perspective on the whole era it is necessary to begin by looking at its climax at the end. This came with the Wars of the French Revolution from 1792 to 1800 or 1801. To these years I hope some day to devote a sequel, and this volume takes the story only to about 1791; but the whole period can best be understood by remembering the unprecedented struggle in which it ended. This struggle had in it something universal; as Burke said, there had been nothing like it since the Protestant Reformation had thrown all Europe into a commotion that overran all political boundaries.³

Burke himself, when he died in 1797, was so afraid of invasion and revolution in England that he gave orders for his remains to be secretly buried, lest triumphant democrats dig them up for desecration. Revolution broke out in Ireland in 1798. Dutch historians speak of revolution in the Netherlands in 1795, when the Batavian Republic was founded, and of a more radical movement of 1798. The Swiss feel that they were revolutionized in the Helvetic Republic of 1798. Italian writers speak of revolution at Milan in 1796, at Rome in 1797, at Naples in 1798. The Cisalpine, Roman, and Parthenopean republics were the outcome. In the German Rhineland there were some who demanded annexation to France, or, that failing, the establishment of a revolutionary "Cisrhenane," or Rhineland Republic. Elsewhere in Germany the disturbance was largely ideological. The philosopher Fichte, an ardent revolutionary thinker, found it "evident" in 1799 that "only the French Republic can be considered by the just man as his true country." The city of Berlin was notably pro-French. In Poland, revolution reached a climax in 1794 with Kosciusko. In Hungary in the same year seventy-five members of a republican conspiracy were arrested. In Greece, in 1797, delegates from Athens, Crete, Macedonia, and other parts of the Greek world met at a secret conclave in Morea; they planned an uprising of all Greeks against the Ottoman Empire, if only the French would send weapons, ammunition, and a few units of the French army. A Russian found that the "charm of revolution" had penetrated "deep into Siberia."

³ The present section draws heavily on my two articles, "Reflections on the French Revolution," in *Political Science Quarterly*, LXVII (1952), 64–80, and "The World Revolution of the West, 1763–1801," *Ibid.*, LXIX (1954), 1–14. See also, for bibliography, my "Recent Interpretations of the Influence of the French Revolution," in *Journal of World History*, II (1954), 173–95.

And at the other extremity of Western Civilization, in the thinly settled American West, long after the Terror in France is supposed to have brought Americans to their senses, there was still so much lingering pro-French feeling, so much democratic and republican sentiment, so much inclination to break away from the allegedly aristocratic East, that the outgoing president, George Washington, in his Farewell Address, earnestly begged his Western countrymen to put their trust in the United States. In 1798 the popular hero, George Rogers Clark, holding a commission as brigadier-general in the army of the French Republic, attempted a secret recruiting of Kentuckians to invade and “revolutionize” Louisiana, which was then Spanish, and meant the whole territory west of the Mississippi. Blocked by an unsympathetic United States government, he fled to St. Louis, where, on the uttermost fringes of the civilized world, there was a society of French *sans-culottes* to receive him.

At Quebec in 1797 a man was hanged, drawn, and quartered as a dangerous revolutionary. At Quito, in what is now Ecuador, the first librarian of the public library was tortured and imprisoned for political agitation. A republican conspiracy was discovered at Bahia, in Brazil, in 1798. A Negro at Buenos Aires testified that Frenchmen in the city were plotting to liberate slaves in an uprising against the Spanish crown. In the High Andes, at the old silver town of Potosi, far from foreign influences on the coasts, the governor was horrified to discover men who toasted liberty and drank to France. The British government, in 1794, a year before occupying Cape Town, feared that there were too many “democrats,” eager to welcome the French, among the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope.⁴

All of these agitations, upheavals, intrigues, and conspiracies were part of one great movement. It was not simply a question of the “spread” or “impact” or “influence” of the French Revolution. Not all revolutionary agitation since 1918 has been produced by the Kremlin, and not all such agitation in the 1790’s was due to the machinations of revolutionary Paris. It is true, and not without contemporary significance, that persons of revolutionary persuasion were able to install revolutionary regimes only where they could receive help from the French republican army. But revolutionary aims and sympathies existed throughout Europe and America. They arose everywhere out of local, genuine, and specific causes; or, contrariwise, they reflected conditions that were universal throughout the Western

4 For the incident about Burke in the preceding paragraphs see T. W. Copeland, *Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke: Six Essays* (New Haven, 1949), 90; for the quotation from Fichte, J. Droz, *L'Allemagne et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1949), 279; for other countries mentioned, P. F. Sugar, “The Influence of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in Eighteenth Century Hungary,” in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XVII (1958), 348–52; A. Dascalakis, *Rhigas Velestinlis: La Révolution française et les préludes de l'indépendance hellénique* (Pans, 1937), 15; M. M. Shtrange, *Russkoye Obschestvo i Frantsuzskaya Revolyutsiya* (Russian Society and the French Revolution, 1789–1794) (Moscow, 1956), 61 (I am indebted to Mr. W. L. Blackwell for reading this work in Russian for me); A. P. Whitaker, *The Mississippi Question 1795–1803* (New York, 1934), 155; W. Kingsford, *History of Canada* (10 vols., London 1887–1898), VII, 440–51; E. Clavery, *Trois précurseurs de l'indépendance des démocraties sud-américaines: Miranda, Nariño, Espejo* (Pans, 1932); A. Ruy, *A primeira revolução social brasileira, 1798* (Rio de Janeiro, 1942); R. Caillet-Bois, *Ensayo sobre el Río de la Plata y la Revolución francesa* (Buenos Aires, 1929), 76–77, 106–7; and for the Cape of Good Hope, Great Britain, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue preserved at Dropmore* (London, 1892–1927), II, 645.

world. They were not imported from one country to another. They were not imitated from the French, or at least not imitated blindly. There was one big revolutionary agitation, not simply a French revolution due to purely French causes, and foolishly favored by irresponsible people in other countries.

This universal agitation was clear enough to contemporaries, but has not been well presented by the historians. The old classic, Sorel's *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, of which the first volume appeared in 1885, is in the older tradition of diplomatic history and international relations. It can by its very title convey a false impression, if it suggests a struggle between the French Revolution and "Europe," since the struggle was primarily between a revolutionary French government and the conservative governments and governing classes of Europe, with many Frenchmen opposed to the revolution, and many other Europeans and Americans in favor of it. At a more specialized level, there has been much research and writing in many countries. There are, for example, excellent studies of the Jacobin clubs in France, of the democratic-republican societies in the United States and of the radical societies in Great Britain, and we know that there were similar political clubs, at the same time, in Amsterdam, Mainz, Milan, and elsewhere. But only very recently has Professor Godechot undertaken to study such clubs as a whole, comparing their membership, their methods, and their stated aims. In all countries it has been the national history that has mainly occupied attention. The literature on the French Revolution is enormous, but most of it is focused on France. Italians have published abundantly on their *triennio*, the three revolutionary years in Italy from 1796 to 1799. Swiss, Belgians, Dutch, Irish, and many others have provided a wealth of materials on their respective histories at the time. The years from 1763 to 1800 have always been a staple of American historiography. But the work has been carried on in national isolation, compartmentalized by barriers of language or the particular histories of governments and states. All acknowledge a wider reality, but few know much about it. This book, in a way, is simply a putting together of hundreds of excellent studies already in existence.

Recently, probably because we live in a period of world revolution ourselves, there has been more tendency to see an analogous phenomenon at the close of the eighteenth century. Alfred Cobban and David Thomson in England have spoken of a kind of Democratic International at that time, and Louis Gottschalk of Chicago has stressed the idea of a world revolution of which the American and French Revolutions were a part. Only certain French scholars in the last decade, Lefebvre, Fugier, Godechot, have undertaken to develop the idea in detail.⁵

Godechot's recently published two volumes are a remarkable work, built upon extensive and difficult researches, and analyzing the revolutionary social classes, organizations, clubs, methods, propaganda devices, ideas, objectives, and achievements with great care. They are largely confined, however, to the parts of Europe actually occupied by French armies during the Revolutionary Wars, and are limited in time to the decade from 1789 to 1799; and they seem to represent a com-

5 G. Lefebvre, *La Révolution française* (Paris, 1951) in the series *Peuples et civilisations*, XIII; A. Fugier, *La Révolution française et l'Empire napoléonien* (Paris, 1954) in the series edited by P. Renouvin, *Histoire des relations internationales*, IV; and especially J. Godechot, *La Grande nation: Expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799* (Paris, 1956), 2 vols.

promise, in the author's mind, between the idea of expansion of a primarily French Revolution and the idea of a more widespread upheaval in which the French Revolution was the greatest single eruption. Planned as they are, they give proportionately little attention to the English-speaking world and to Germany and Eastern Europe; and the American Revolution, its effects in Europe, and the political problems and disturbances of various European countries before the war of 1792 appear only allusively as a background.

It may be said, and it is of course true, that even if there is a world revolution in the twentieth century, its existence is of not the slightest relevancy, one way or the other, as evidence of any comparable movement at the close of the eighteenth. There is in America, and always has been, a strong body of opinion holding that the American and French revolutions were phenomena of altogether different kinds. There have always been British and European observers who have maintained that the agitation for parliamentary reform in England or Ireland, or the political overturns of the Dutch, Swiss, or Italians, were not truly revolutionary in any meaningful or modern sense. It is admittedly the purpose of this book to persuade to a contrary opinion. It is not necessary, however, to reject such ideas as simply mistaken, or to insist upon similarities where none exist. All that is necessary, or even desirable, is to set up a larger framework, or conceptual structure, in which phenomena that are admittedly different, and even different in very significant ways, may yet be seen as related products of a common impulse, or different ways of achieving, under different circumstances and against different degrees of opposition, certain recognizably common goals.

Revolution, it must be admitted, has become a distasteful word in many quarters. Americans may feel a troubled sympathy for anticolonialist movements in Asia or Africa, and a more unanimous enthusiasm for such abortive revolutions as those attempted in Hungary or Poland in 1956; but the successful and threatening revolution of our own time, "the revolution" *par excellence*, is the one represented by communist parties, soviet republics, and, at least allegedly, the social doctrines of Karl Marx. To this revolution most readers of this book, as well as the author, feel a certain lack of cordiality. Some would dismiss all revolutions as dangerous and delusive, or even make of conservatism a kind of basic philosophy. In this case it becomes necessary—for Americans—to argue that the American Revolution was not really a revolution, but a conservative movement; I shall return to this problem. My own belief is that opposition to one revolution is no reason for rejecting all revolutions, that the value of conservatism depends on the value of what is to be conserved, that revolution must be appraised according to the ethical content and feasibility of its aims, and in terms of probable alternatives and real choices at the moment; and that the true matter for moral judgment, or for political decision, is not between the old and the new, or the conservative and the revolutionary, but the actual welfare of human beings as estimated by a reasonable calculation of possibilities in particular situations.

The parallels between the Russian and the French Revolutions, or between the twentieth-century and the eighteenth-century upheavals, are plainly apparent and cannot be honestly denied. In both there is the same story of collapse of the old system, seizure of power by new and unauthorized groups, extermination of the

old institutions; confiscation, emigration, terror; attack upon the church; consolidation of the new regime in a powerful country, with the setting up of dependent states in adjacent regions; agitation threatening all established governments, frontiers, interests, classes, and views of life; cleavage of opinion, and formation of loyalties and aversions, that overrun all political borders and divide all states within. We do not like this today, and we are embarrassed to find it happening in the name of Liberty and Equality in the decade of the 1790's. We are further embarrassed by taunts from the Left, of Marxists who say that the proletariat today is only trying to do what the bourgeois once did; or that the bourgeois today, for obvious reasons, is trying to deny his own revolutionary background and suppress even the memory of it, lest it set a bad example.

It is the weakest of all replies to hold that revolution under any conditions is a sad mistake. Perhaps we should not be too squeamish; perhaps we should admit that we "bourgeois" entered upon a revolutionary era some two centuries ago. We should admit that it resembles the revolutionary era of the twentieth century. We should then add that the resemblances are largely formal, more of pattern than of substance, and involving abstractions. All wars are alike in being wars, and there is even such a thing as military science; but not all wars, or all combatants, are alike in their effects upon mankind. All revolutions resemble one another as revolutions, and there is probably even a science or technique of revolution as such; but it does not follow that all revolutions have the same effects. It is permitted to believe that a better society, more humane, more open, more flexible, more susceptible to improvement, more favorable to physical welfare and to the pursuit of higher concerns, issued from the democratic revolution of the eighteenth century than from the communist revolution of the twentieth. It is not necessary to idealize either. It is enough to say that revolution is like war, occurring when all compromise breaks down, and representing a violent clash between two or more groups over the structure of the whole society to which each belongs. We may indeed write the history of a war, or a revolution, in which we constantly deprecate the resort to violence, regret the loss of individual liberties, comment on the bad feeling between the participants, and note how all other pursuits become subordinated to one single overwhelming end. We would not thereby much elucidate the war, or the revolution; we would only be saying that we preferred peace, or that in a better world neither war nor revolution would ever be necessary.

The exact relationship of the Russian to the French Revolution has in recent decades been the subject of much careful examination. Two tendencies may be perceived: the one to associate, the other to dissociate, the two revolutions. By an "associationist" view I would not mean such an attempt as Crane Brinton's in his *Anatomy of Revolution*, in which the author looks for a pattern of revolutionary process as such, by comparative study of the English, American, French, Russian, and other revolutions. I would mean rather a view in which the French Revolution is seen as a kind of origin, partial cause, or distant prefigurement of the Russian Revolution, which insists upon "Jacobinism" as the "communism" of the eighteenth century, or sees a kind of continuing linear process in which the Russian Revolution is in some way a consequence of the French, or presents a more highly developed stage of the same process. This was of course the view of Marx, Lenin, and

Trotsky, as it is of modern Soviet scholars; it is also the view of many warmly anti-Soviet and anticommunist writers, notably of Professor Talmon of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, who traces the “origins of totalitarian democracy,” or Soviet communism, back to Robespierre and Rousseau.⁶ There are nowadays many others for whom Robespierre and Rousseau figure more as ancestors of totalitarianism than of democracy.

It is true that Marx and his followers were close students of the French Revolution, and learned a good deal from it; this is, if anything, a good reason for the rest of us to make an independent study of the subject. It is also true that the communist movement would never have taken form as it did except for the prior occurrence of the French Revolution—as of much else in the preceding history of Russia and of Europe. It is even true that the Jacobins were in some ways something like the communists; but, not to dwell on the difference in their actual principles, the fact that the Jacobin clubs were the products of the French Revolution rather than the producers of it, never had any international organization, lasted only five years, and were closed down by revolutionaries themselves, should give pause to those wishing to pursue this parallel beyond a certain point.

“Dissociation” of the French and Russian Revolutions, at a serious level, rests upon observations of the following kind: First, the subsequent cult of the Revolution was a different thing from the French Revolution itself. This was emphasized, for example, by the late Professor Griewank of Jena. Strongly inclined to Western democratic and humane values, Griewank believed that the French of the Revolution thought in relatively practical terms of rational politics and the needs of war; and that the ballooning up of the Revolution into a vast, fearsome, perpetual, gigantic, and all-consuming force was the work in part of counterrevolutionaries who wished to discredit the real aims of the French Revolution, in part of romantic philosophers, and in part of rebellious spirits in those countries, like Germany, where real revolution had had the least effect.⁷ It is apparently a fact that the modern or communist revolutions have been, so far, least successful precisely in those countries where the eighteenth-century or democratic revolution produced the most significant changes. Related to this is the thought of the American scholar T. H. von Laue, who has suggested a significant difference of kind between the Russian, Asian, and twentieth-century revolutions on the one hand, and the French, Western, and eighteenth-century revolutions on the other. Where the latter, he holds, arose as indigenous developments of their own culture, reflecting the growth of values, knowledge, and aspirations having deep native roots, the twentieth-century revolutions, whether in Russia or China, or formerly colonial areas, are alike in having been precipitated by contacts with an outside or foreign civilization, and by the stresses, maladjustments, feelings of backwardness, and other ambivalences ensuing thereupon.⁸ The French of 1789 might feel that in respect to government or personal rights they were less favored than the British or

6 J. L. Talmon, *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy* (Boston, 1952).

7 K. Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff: Entstehung und Entwicklung* (Weimar, 1955).

8 T. H. von Laue, “Die Revolution von aussen als erste Phase der russischen Revolution,” in *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas*, IV (1956), 138–58. Mr. von Laue is an American scholar writing in German.

the Americans. Like all peoples, they had been exposed to influences from outside. But the French Revolution grew directly out of earlier French history. The French were untroubled by any feeling of backwardness; they did not have to strain to keep up in a march of progress. The same is generally true of the Western world at the time. The eighteenth century saw the Revolution of the Western world; the twentieth century, the Revolution of the non-Western.

None of these ideas need command unqualified adherence. No more will be said explicitly of the twentieth century in the present book, which is a history of the eighteenth, and in which the French Revolution is associated not with modern communism but with other movements of its own time within the area of Western Civilization.

A "DEMOCRATIC" REVOLUTION: "DEMOCRAT" AND "ARISTOCRAT" IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Even if there was a general revolutionary disturbance between about 1760 and about 1800, it does not follow, without further explanation, that "democratic" is the best word to describe it. It is well known that Thomas Jefferson did not much favor the use of the word; and we often read, at least in American books, that the term in the 1790's became an epithet or smear-word, by which persons were designated against their will, and usually falsely, like persons falsely called communists at a later day. The belief that the word had no willing acceptance in the eighteenth century actually plays into the hands of the modern Left; thus a Dutch scholar has argued, partly on the mistaken ground that "democracy" was little heard in Holland before 1800, that the modern "Eastern" use of the word, implying an economic rather than a political equality, and dating from the rise of social democracy in the 1880's, is historically more legitimate than the modern "Western" use.⁹ The fact seems to be that "democracy" and "democrat" enjoyed more currency before 1800 than is commonly supposed. It must be remembered that the words "liberal," "radical," and "progressive" did not exist. When moderates or conservatives wished to indicate the dangerous drift of the times, or when the more advanced spirits spoke of themselves, they might very well use the words "democrat" or "democracy." The reader may bear with a little evidence on this point, especially since, as the word occurs in many European languages, nothing else so vividly illustrates the international character of the movement.¹⁰

The word "democracy," like "aristocracy" and "monarchy," was of course as old as the Greeks or their translators, and the three terms had been in the common vocabulary of political thinkers continuously since the Middle Ages. There is some evidence that the most rural and innermost of the Swiss cantons, and some of the German free cities, thought of themselves as democratic in the eighteenth century.

9 J. van de Giessen, *De opkomst van het woord democratie als leuze in Nederland* (The Hague, 1948).

10 The present section reproduces parts of my article, "Notes on the Use of the Word 'Democracy,' 1789-1799," in *Political Science Quarterly*, LXVIII (1953), 203-26, to which the reader desiring documentation may refer, except for the quotations from Helvetius, Kollontay, and Wordsworth, for which references are given below.

Except for “monarchy,” however, none of the three terms seems yet to have entered the common speech. They were political scientists’ words, tools of analysis, closely defined, dry in connotation, and without emotional impact. It was generally agreed that “pure democracy” could not exist, except possibly in very small states with simple habits. This was Rousseau’s view as expressed in the *Social Contract*. At the most, democracy was a principle, or element, which might profitably enter into a “mixed constitution,” balanced by principles of monarchy and aristocracy, as was believed to be the case in England or the Venetian Republic. It is rare, even among the *philosophes* of France before the Revolution, to find anyone using the word “democracy” in a favorable sense in any practical connection.

Some, however, can be found. There was Helvetius, who, in his private notes in refutation of Montesquieu, observed: “When the governed cannot rid themselves of the oppression of those who govern badly, it is despotism. When they can, it is democracy.”¹¹ There was the Marquis d’Argenson, who in the 1730’s allowed to circulate secretly, in manuscript, his *Considerations on the Government of France*. D’Argenson here reviews French history. He finds that the growing power of the kings has favored equality and democracy as against nobility and aristocracy. He repeatedly uses the term “democracy.” He emphatically does not want it mixed with aristocracy. He speaks of “that fortunate progress of Democracy which we admire in the reigns free from civil war.” He expects and hopes that this progress of democracy will continue. He is surprisingly like Tocqueville a century later in his view of French history—except that he is more unreservedly in favor of democracy than Tocqueville. We may note, too, in d’Argenson, the tendency to think of democracy as equality rather than as self-government, opposing it to “aristocracy,” rather than to “monarchy.” Both Helvetius and d’Argenson have left behind the traditional idea that only small and virtuous societies could be democratic.

The two nouns, “democrat” and “aristocrat,” were coinages of the period, unknown before the 1780’s. No “democrats” fought in the American Revolution; and the Age of Aristocracy, as long as it was unchallenged, heard nothing of “aristocrats.” Neither word was current in English before 1789; in France, *aristocrate* crops up in the reign of Louis XVI, *democrate* not until 1789. It may be that the words were first coined by the Dutch. It seems certain, in any case, that their first currency was in the Low Countries, in the Dutch revolution of 1784–1787 and the Belgian revolution of 1789–1791. We find *aristocraten* used by Dutch burghers as early as 1784. The Rotterdam patrician, van Hogendorp, writing in the French language in 1786, declares that his country is troubled by a cabal. “People say,” he adds, “that this cabal is divided into aristocrats and democrats.” “Aristocrat” entered into popular parlance among the Dutch in these years; but “democrat” remained rare, the popular party calling itself Patriot. In Belgium, however, that is, the Austrian Netherlands, in the revolt of 1789 against the emperor, the advanced party came to call itself Democrat. By January 1791 its leaders were speaking of *les braves Democratés* and *les bons Democratés*. One even wrote, “*Vive la Democratie!*” The extreme frequency of “aristocrat” in France during the Revolution is well known, and it seems to us to have been applied indiscriminately, and in fact falsely,

11 See the note by Helvetius in Montesquieu, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1826), II, 137.

to a great many people. To us the word means a member of an aristocratic class; it does not mean one who is an adherent of, or believer in, an aristocratic society. There is no reason, however, why it should not have had these meanings when it was coined. The word “democrat,” conversely to “aristocrat,” does not mean a member of a democratic class; it does mean an adherent of, or believer in, a democratic society. It is possible, therefore, that “aristocrat” was used less loosely and irrationally than is supposed, since there were undoubtedly millions of “aristocrats” in France in the extended and now obsolete sense of the word.

“Democrat” was rarely used in France, despite its currency in Belgium in 1790 and 1791. It was probably coined, in France as in Holland or Belgium, in contradistinction to “aristocrat.” Ferdinand Brunot, in his tremendous history of the French language, lists two hundred and six nouns and phrases designating political alignments during the Revolution. “Democrat” is in the list, but there are many more familiar terms, such as “patriots,” “Jacobins,” or “sansculottes.” Dubois-Crance, the future regicide, used it in 1790 in speaking on the military policy suitable to the new France. He describes the citizen soldier—“a patriot, an honest democrat.” In 1791 Brissot claimed to advocate “a popular monarchy, tending to the popular side. Such is my democracy.” In 1793, when Louis XVI was executed, the drums rolled to smother the last sounds and the crowds shouted “*Vive la République!*” One young man heard, or at least reported, “Long live Democracy!” He was, however, a Greek, writing to a fellow countryman in the Greek language. It may be that “democracy” to him, not being a foreign word, could convey a feeling that it lacked for western Europeans; that he used it naturally as a translation for the Latin “republic,” to express the ideals and passions that he sensed in revolutionary Paris.

With the advent of the Jacobins and the Terror, “democracy” became more frequent, though never common. It was occasionally used at the Jacobin Club, where Camille Desmoulins cried that “the English people must be exterminated from Europe, unless they democratize themselves!” Herault-Sechelles, submitting what is called the Jacobin constitution to the Convention for adoption, praised it as “representative and democratic.” The constitution itself, though in fact democratic, allowing universal male suffrage and providing measures of initiative and referendum, does not use the word.

The *locus classicus* for the word “democracy” during the French Revolution is the speech of Robespierre in the Convention on February 5, 1794. This speech is often quoted. It is the one in which he defines Virtue and Terror. What is usually quoted is Robespierre’s moral exhortations rather than his remarks on democracy, although one might suppose the latter to have at least equal historical significance. Not counting sporadic occurrences, he uses the word “democracy,” while specifically on the subject, eleven times in the space of seven hundred words, or in about five minutes of speaking time. “Democracy,” he said, “is a state in which the people, as sovereign, guided by laws of its own making, does for itself all that it can do well, and by its delegates what it cannot. . . . Democracy is the only form of state which all the individuals composing it can truly call their country. . . . The French are the first people in the world to establish a true democracy, by calling all men to enjoy equality and the fulness of civic rights; and that, in my opinion, is the real reason why all the tyrants allied against the Republic will be defeated.”

Soon after this speech the really internecine phase of the Terror began, culminating in Robespierre's own death six months later. Thereupon there was general agreement, even by revolutionaries far to the left, to regard Robespierre's ambition, or his fanaticism, as the cause of the late troubles. The association of "democracy" with Robespierre, and hence with terror, naturally tended to discredit democracy itself.

There remained in France, under the Directory, amorphous democratic groups which looked back with favor on the Constitution of the Year I (1793) and the Committee of Public Safety. They were often quite respectable people, and represented no single social class. At Toulouse, for example, they included a few of the wealthiest citizens, and many businessmen and lawyers, as well as artisans, tradesmen, and mechanics. They even won a national election in 1798, to no avail, since they were put down by a *coup d'état*. How often they employed the word "democracy" is not clear. They were called "anarchists" by the dominant republicans of the Directory, as by the royalists.

In Holland after 1795 there was an important newspaper at Amsterdam called *De Democraten*. The Amsterdam political club said it wanted the *democratisch systeem*. Even the French Directory, which used the word sparingly, declared in instructions for its agent in Holland, in December 1797, that the Dutch people desired a "free and democratic constitution." About a third of the members of the Dutch constituent assembly signed a petition, in January 1798, in favor of "a democratic representative constitution." A constitutional committee, in February, affirmed to the French agent, Delacroix, that the Dutch were "capable of a greater measure of democracy than would be suitable for the French."

In parts of Germany, notably the Rhenish states, there were people whose ideas were in effect democratic, but they seem to have used the word less often than the Dutch. One clubroom, in 1792, is reported to have had a sign on its wall reading *Vive la Democratie. Au diable les aristocrats!*—in French! The journalist Lange, in an article comparing aristocracy and democracy, boldly declared for the latter, which, he said, offered more freedom to the real inequalities of human talent. Fichte defiantly accepted the word—or, at least, refrained from explicitly repudiating it—when he got into trouble, on the charge of atheism and radicalism, at the University of Jena. In Prussia, the minister Struensee remarked to a French diplomat in 1799: "The king is a democrat in his way. . . . In a few years there will be no more privileged classes in Prussia."

In Switzerland, the constitution of the Helvetic Republic, which was proclaimed by the French in 1798, declared in its Article II that "the form of government, whatever modifications it may undergo, shall at all times be a representative democracy." Of all the written constitutions promulgated in Europe and America, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, this is apparently the only one to call itself explicitly democratic. Its author was the Basel revolutionary, Peter Ochs, who spent a good deal of time in Paris. For the most part, in Switzerland in 1798, the favorable use of "democracy" in a modern sense appears to have been confined to the invading French. The Swiss, when they used the word favorably, generally referred to the small historic democracies of the rural cantons, which were in fact oligarchic in the eighteenth century.

It was in Italy that the word “democracy,” in a favorable sense, was most commonly used in the years from 1796 to 1799. The most striking example comes from no less a person than Pius VII, two years before his elevation to the papacy. From 1785 to 1800 he was Bishop of Imola, a town in the northern part of the Papal States. Revolutionary disturbances broke out on every side when the French army, under Bonaparte, conquered Lombardy in 1796. Imola was absorbed into the Cisalpine Republic. On Christmas Eve 1797 the Bishop of Imola issued a Christmas homily to his diocese. It contains the word “democracy” eleven times within the space of a few hundred words. “The form of democratic government adopted among us, most beloved brethren,” he said, “is not inconsistent with the Gospel.”

The Milan popular club announces: *facciamo uno governo democratico*.” People shout: “*La Democrazia o la Morte!*” Others wish to “democratize the People,” to create “a democratic base.” A newspaper declares that any republic in Italy must be “a democracy, one and indivisible.” Pamphlets are entitled “Resurgence of oppressed democracy” and “Democratic education for the Italian people.” At Venice there is talk of creating a democracy, and Democratic Fecundity is exhibited by an engaged couple marching in a procession. At Rome a man named Martelli speaks casually of what will happen after the “democratization” of Naples and Tuscany. A proclamation reads, “Form yourselves into a democracy, People of the Roman Republic.” There is a theatrical production called “The Democratization of Heaven.” There is a grand ball in honor of Bonaparte: no “ladies” and very few *seigneurs romains* were present, but this is not surprising, because “the party was democratic.” And with republican Rome facing attack in 1799 by the King of Naples, the leaders try, though in vain, to make it a war for “democracy.”

Use of the words in the Scandinavian and East European languages is harder to trace. Newspapers as far north as Trondheim admonished “aristocrats” in 1794. Whether republicans in Hungary used the term “democrat” I do not know. The Polish revolutionary, Kollontay, in a book written after the failure of Kosciusko’s uprising, declared that the whole period since 1750 was like an “earthquake,” which had given “a new aspect and a new importance to democracy.”¹²

In England and Scotland the antidemocrats seem to have monopolized the word. Wordsworth did indeed say in a private letter in 1794: “I am of that odious class of men called democrats.”¹³ But he said it with a note of defiance which eloquently suggests the disrepute of the word. Even Thomas Paine rarely employs it, but in the third chapter of *The Rights of Man*, Part Two, he does address himself to the meaning of “republic,” “aristocracy,” and “democracy.” “Democracy” occurs eleven times within about five hundred words. He distinguishes it from direct or “simple” democracy. “Retaining, then, Democracy as the ground, and rejecting the corrupt systems of Monarchy and Aristocracy, the representative system naturally presents itself. . . . It is on this system that the American Government is founded. It is representation ingrafted upon Democracy.” There are only three texts of the period, to my knowledge, where the author uses “democracy” in a favorable sense,

12 Quoted by B. Lesnodorski, “Le siècle des lumières en Pologne,” in Académie polonaise des sciences, *La Pologne au X^e Congrès international des sciences historiques à Rome* (Warsaw, 1955), 180.

13 W. Knight, ed., *Letters of the Wordsworth Family from 1787 to 1855* (London, 1907), I, 66.

as often as eleven times within a few hundred words; and these three texts are those of Paine, Robespierre, and the man who became Pius VII.

In the United States, where the people were still in large measure culturally British, and in particular among those of the educated classes, there was undoubtedly some hesitation by democrats to adopt the word "democratic." The foreign origin of democracy was a favorite theme of Federalist polemic, and the justification for the Alien Act of 1798; and it seems to be true that democracy, as a word, though not the reality behind it, was brought into America by the European revolution. James Monroe, after reading the Anglo-Franco-American Paine's *Rights of Man*, remarks in a letter to Jefferson, in 1791, that he agrees with the author, and that "the bulk of the [American] people are for democracy." In the following years a great many political clubs, not unlike the radical societies of Britain and Continental Europe, began to appear in various parts of the United States. Forty-two can now be identified. The first was established by Pennsylvania Germans in March 1793. It called itself the German Republican Society. The third to be organized, and the first to adopt the name "democratic," was the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania. Its members at first planned to use the name Sons of Liberty; it was the French minister, Genet, who suggested the word "democratic" for this purpose. Sixteen others soon thereafter put "democratic" in their titles. In 1793 we find Aedanus Burke, of South Carolina, impatiently calling Jefferson a "half-way democrat" because of his stand, as Secretary of State, in favor of neutrality in the European war. The implication was that a whole-way democrat would be better. And among the countless toasts then offered at political banquets was one at Boston in 1795, which proposed for the contemplation of all lovers of liberty "one great democratic society comprehending the human race."

It is, therefore, no anachronism to apply the word "democratic" to the eighteenth-century revolution. It was the last decade of the century that brought the word out of the study and into actual politics.

A PREVIEW OF WHAT FOLLOWS

In Western Civilization, in the middle of the eighteenth century, there was no novelty in discussions of liberty, or human equality, or law, or limited government, or constitutional rights, or the sovereignty of the people. Greek and medieval philosophy, Roman law, Christian theology, and baronial rebellions had all made contributions to one such idea or another. A marked democratic movement had expressed itself in the English revolution during the 1640's, and the history of many European towns was full of clashes between populace and patricians. Such popular movements, however, had been local, sporadic, and unsuccessful; and of general ideas, such as ultimate human equality, or government with the consent of the governed, it is well known that the more general such ideas are the more variegated and contradictory may be the actual practices with which men learn to live. Actual practice, about 1750, was such that certain old ideas, or old words and phrases, took on a new application and a wider and more urgent meaning.

If we say that a revolutionary era began about 1760, it is not because any persons or any organizations intended or worked in advance for a revolution. The modern conception of a revolutionary movement is the result, not the cause, of the revolutionary era that we are discussing. "Revolution" was a familiar word, but it usually meant no more than the revolving fortunes of governments, without great impersonal causes or any long-run direction; one might speak of Chancellor Maupeou's "revolution" in France in 1770, or the King of Sweden's "revolution" of 1772. The situation that began to develop about 1760 was revolutionary in a deeper way.

By a revolutionary situation is here meant one in which confidence in the justice or reasonableness of existing authority is undermined; where old loyalties fade, obligations are felt as impositions, law seems arbitrary, and respect for superiors is felt as a form of humiliation; where existing sources of prestige seem undeserved, hitherto accepted forms of wealth and income seem ill-gained, and government is sensed as distant, apart from the governed and not really "representing" them. In such a situation the sense of community is lost, and the bond between social classes turns to jealousy and frustration. People of a kind formerly integrated begin to feel as outsiders, or those who have never been integrated begin to feel left out. As a group of Sheffield workmen demanded in 1794: "What is the constitution to us if we are nothing to it?"¹⁴ No community can flourish if such negative attitudes are widespread or long-lasting. The crisis is a crisis of community itself, political, economic, sociological, personal, psychological, and moral at the same time. Actual revolution need not follow, but it is in such situations that actual revolution does arise. Something must happen, if continuing deterioration is to be avoided; some new kind or basis of community must be formed.

What we shall see in the following chapters is a groping toward a new kind of community. With it went the struggles of opposed ideas and interests. It has often been said, on the authority of no less a person than Alexis de Tocqueville, that the French Revolution was over before it began, that it was the work of men's minds before they made it the work of their hands. This idea can be misleading, for with it one may miss the whole reality of struggle. The Revolution was not merely the attempt to realize in practice ideas which had already conquered in the realm of thought. No ideas had "conquered"; there was no "climate of opinion" of any specific social or political content. The Revolution was a conflict between incompatible conceptions of what the community ought to be, and it carried out with violence a conflict that had already come into being. There is no reason to suppose (if we put aside historical metaphysics) that one side in this conflict was moribund, the other abounding with vigor; one, old and doomed in any case to extinction, the other, new and already riding upon the wave of the future. It is sufficiently enlightening to see it simply as a conflict, in which either antagonist would prevail at the expense of the other. It is hoped that readers of this book, whichever way their own sympathies may lie, may at least agree, upon finishing it, on the reality of the conflict.

¹⁴ An address to the British Nation, printed with *Proceedings of a Public Meeting at Sheffield . . . 7 April 1794* (Sheffield, 1794), 41.

In the absence of better words, and not wishing to invent more colorless sociological terms, we think of the parties to this essential conflict, so far as they may be reduced simply to two sides, as the proponents of “aristocratic” and “democratic” forms of the community, emotionally overcharged or semantically ambiguous though these words may be. It is held that both democratic and aristocratic forces were gaining strength after about 1760, that revolution came because both were rising, and that they took the form of revolution and counterrevolution at the close of the century, and of democratically and conservatively oriented philosophies thereafter. It follows that conservatism and counterrevolution were no mere “reactions” against revolution, but eighteenth-century forces against which revolution was itself a reaction. This idea is not the invention of the present author: recent works on the American Revolution emphasize the growing conservatism in British Parliamentary circles before 1775; Professor Valjavec insists that conservatism in Germany antedated the agitation of the 1790’s; French historians stress the “aristocratic resurgence” preceding the eruption of 1789.¹⁵

The next chapter sets up one of the guiding conceptions of the book, that of certain “constituted bodies,” in Europe and America, most of them predominantly aristocratic in 1760, and including parliaments, councils, assemblies, and magistracies of various kinds. A continuing and universal theme of the period is the attempts of these constituted bodies to defend their corporate liberties and their independence, against either superior authorities on the one hand or popular pressures on the other. Resisting superior authorities, these bodies could be liberal and even revolutionary. The democratic revolutionary movement, however, came into play when persons systematically excluded from these bodies, and not content merely with the independence of these bodies as already constituted, attempted to open up their membership, change the basis of authority and representation, reconstitute the constituted bodies, or obtain a wholly new constitution of the state itself. The third chapter deals further with the philosophy and the problems which institutionalized aristocracy brought into existence. Chapter IV traces the conflicts of the aristocratic constituted bodies with kings in the 1760’s and 1770’s in France, Sweden, and the Hapsburg empire. Chapter V explores the clash of a similar body at the town of Geneva with its own citizens.

With Chapter VI begins the treatment of the English-speaking world, involving the structure of Parliament, the British constitution, and the American Revolution. Chapters VII and VIII consider the American Revolution, and the sense in which I believe it to have been truly revolutionary. It is shown in Chapter IX that the American Revolution, whatever its true nature, greatly added to the democratic and revolutionary spirit in Europe, to the desire, that is, for a reconstitution of government and society.

But while this spirit was rising, actual events followed the course of an aristocratic resurgence, traced in Chapters X to XIV. The parliamentary class in the 1780’s in Britain and Ireland stopped the moves for democratization. Dutch, Bel-

15 Cf. C. R. Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (Norman, 1954); F. Valjavec, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen in Deutschland, 1770–1815*; (Munich, 1951); and the writings of Mathiez, Lefebvre, J. Egret, and others on the French Revolution.

gian, and Swiss patricians put down the democrats in their respective countries. Whether an American upper class blocked the growth of democracy in the new United States federal constitution of 1787 is also considered. The privileged classes of the Hapsburg empire obstructed the equalizing reforms of the Hapsburg rulers. The Polish revolution failed. For a time it even seemed that the French Revolution might reinforce the privileged classes. But in the events of 1789, as explained in Chapter XV, the French revolutionaries laid down the principles of a more democratic form of state. The book closes with further comments on the relationship of the French and American revolutions. The story is brought, for all countries, to about the year 1791, to the eve of the great war in which all these national and social developments were to be gathered together into one tremendous struggle.