

CHAPTER IV.

A GARDEN IN THE FAUBOURG ST. DENIS.

SIR GEORGE TREVELYAN has written a pregnant passage, reminding the world of the moral burden which radicals in England had to bear a hundred years ago.

“When to speak or write one’s mind on politics is to obtain the reputation, and render one’s self liable to the punishment of a criminal, social discredit, with all its attendant moral dangers, soon attaches itself to the more humble opponents of a ministry. To be outside the law as a publisher or a pamphleteer is only less trying to conscience and conduct than to be outside the law as a smuggler or a poacher ; and those who, ninety years ago, placed themselves within the grasp of the penal statutes as they were administered in England and barbarously perverted in Scotland were certain to be very bold men, and pretty sure to be unconventional up to the uttermost verge of respectability. As an Italian Liberal was sometimes half a bravo, and a Spanish patriot often more than half a brigand, so a British Radical under George the Third had generally, it must be confessed, a dash of the Bohemian. Such, in a more or less mitigated form, were Paine and Cobbett, Hunt, Hone, and Holcroft ; while the same causes in part account for the elfish vagaries of Shelley and the grim improprieties of Godwin. But when we recollect how these, and the like of these, gave up every hope of worldly prosperity, and set their life and liberty in continual hazard for the sake of that personal and political freedom which we now exercise as unconsciously as we breathe the air, it would be too exacting

to require that each and all of them should have lived as decorously as Perceval, and died as solvent as Bishop Tomline."¹

To this right verdict it may be added that, even at the earlier period when it was most applicable, the radicals could only produce one rival in profligacy (John Wilkes) to their aristocratic oppressors. It may also be noted as a species of homage that the slightest failings of eminent reformers become historic. The vices of Burke and Fox are forgotten. Who remembers that the younger Pitt was brought to an early grave by the bottle? But every fault of those who resisted his oppression is placed under a solar microscope. Although, as Sir George affirms, the oppressors largely caused the faults, this homage to the higher moral standard of the reformers may be accepted.²

It was, indeed, a hard time for reformers in England. Among them were many refined gentlemen who felt that it was no country for a thinker and scholar to live in. Among the pathetic pictures of the time was that of the twelve scholars, headed by Coleridge and Southey, and twelve ladies, who found the atmosphere of England too impure for

¹ "Early History of Charles James Fox," American ed., p. 440.

² The following document was found among the papers of Mr. John Hall, originally of Leicester, England, and has been forwarded to me by his descendant, J. Dutton Steele, Jr., of Philadelphia.

"A Copy of a Letter from the chairman of a meeting of the Gentry and Clergy at Atherstone, written in consequence of an envious schoolmaster and two or three others who informed the meeting that the Excise Officers of Polesworth were employed in distributing the Rights of Man; but which was very false.

"Sir: I should think it unnecessary to inform you, that the purport of his Majesty's proclamation in the Month of May last, and the numerous meetings which are daily taking place both in Town and Country, are for the avowed purpose of suppressing treasonable and seditious writings amongst which

any but slaves to breathe, and proposed to seek in America some retreat where their pastoral "pantisocracy" might be realized. Lack of funds prevented the fulfilment of this dream, but that it should have been an object of concert and endeavor, in that refined circle at Bristol, is a memorable sign of that dreadful time. In the absence of means to form such communities, preserving the culture and charm of a society evolved out of barbarism, apart from the walls of a remaining political barbarism threatening it with their ruins, some scholars were compelled, like Coleridge, to rejoin the feudalists, and help them to buttress the crumbling castle. They secured themselves from the social deterioration of living on wild "honey-dew" in a wilderness, at cost of wearing intellectual masks. Some fled to America, like Cobbett. But others fixed their abode in Paris, where radicalism was fashionable and invested with the charm of the *salon* and the theatre.

Before the declaration of war Paine had been on friendly terms with some eminent Englishmen in Paris: he dined every week with Lord Lauderdale.

Mr. Payne's Rights of Man ranks most conspicuous. Were I not informed you have taken some pains in spreading that publication, I write to say If you don't from this time adopt a different kind of conduct you will be taken notice of in such way as may prove very disagreeable.

"The Eyes of the Country are upon you and you will do well in future to shew yourself faithful to the Master who employs you.

"I remain,

"Your Hble servant,

"(Signed) Jos. Boulton.

"Baxterby, 15th Decr., '92.

"N. B. The letter was written the next morning after the Meeting where most of the Loyal souls got drunk to an uncommon degree. They drank his Majesty's health so often the reckoning amounted to 7s. 6d. each. One of the informers threw down a shilling and ran away."

dale, Dr. John Moore, an author, and others in some restaurant. After most of these had followed Lord Gower to England he had to be more guarded. A British agent, Major Semple, approached him under the name of Major Lisle. He professed to be an Irish patriot, wore the green cockade, and desired introduction to the Minister of War. Paine fortunately knew too many Irishmen to fall into this snare.¹ But General Miranda, as we have seen, fared better. Paine was, indeed, so overrun with visitors and adventurers that he appropriated two mornings of each week at the Philadelphia House for levees. These, however, became insufficient to stem the constant stream of visitors, including spies and lion-hunters, so that he had little time for consultation with the men and women whose co-operation he needed in public affairs. He therefore leased an out-of-the-way house, reserving knowledge of it for particular friends, while still retaining his address at the Philadelphia Hotel, where the levees were continued.

The irony of fate had brought an old mansion of Madame de Pompadour to become the residence of Thomas Paine and his half dozen English disciples. It was then, and still is, No. 63 Faubourg St. Denis. Here, where a King's mistress held her merry fêtes, and issued the decrees of her reign—sometimes of terror,—the little band of English humanitarians read and conversed, and sported in the garden. In a little essay on "Forgetfulness," addressed to his friend, Lady Smith, Paine described these lodgings.

¹ Rickman, p. 129.

“ They were the most agreeable, for situation, of any I ever had in Paris, except that they were too remote from the Convention, of which I was then a member. But this was recompensed by their being also remote from the alarms and confusion into which the interior of Paris was then often thrown. The news of those things used to arrive to us, as if we were in a state of tranquillity in the country. The house, which was enclosed by a wall and gateway from the street, was a good deal like an old mansion farm-house, and the court-yard was like a farm yard, stocked with fowls,—ducks, turkies, and geese ; which, for amusement, we used to feed out of the parlor window on the ground floor. There were some hutches for rabbits, and a sty with two pigs. Beyond was a garden of more than an acre of ground, well laid out, and stocked with excellent fruit trees. The orange, apricot, and greengage plum were the best I ever tasted ; and it is the only place where I saw the wild cucumber. The place had formerly been occupied by some curious person.

“ My apartments consisted of three rooms ; the first for wood, water, etc. ; the next was the bedroom ; and beyond it the sitting room, which looked into the garden through a glass door ; and on the outside there was a small landing place railed in, and a flight of narrow stairs almost hidden by the vines that grew over it, by which I could descend into the garden without going down stairs through the house. . . . I used to find some relief by walking alone in the garden, after dark, and cursing with hearty good will the authors of that terrible system that had turned the character of the Revolution I had been proud to defend. I went but little to the Convention, and then only to make my appearance, because I found it impossible to join in their tremendous decrees, and useless and dangerous to oppose them. My having voted and spoken extensively, more so than any other member, against the execution of the king, had already fixed a mark upon me ; neither dared any of my associates in the Convention to translate and speak in French for me anything I might have dared to have written. . . . Pen and ink were then of no use to me ; no good could be done by writing, and no printer dared to print ; and whatever I might have written, for my private amusement, as

anecdotes of the times, would have been continually exposed to be examined, and tortured into any meaning that the rage of party might fix upon it. And as to softer subjects, my heart was in distress at the fate of my friends, and my harp hung upon the weeping willows.

“As it was summer, we spent most of our time in the garden, and passed it away in those childish amusements that serve to keep reflection from the mind,—such as marbles, Scotch hops, battledores, etc., at which we were all pretty expert. In this retired manner we remained about six or seven weeks, and our landlord went every evening into the city to bring us the news of the day and the evening journal.”

The “we” included young Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Christie, Mr. Choppin, probably Mr. Shapworth, an American, and M. Laborde, a scientific friend of Paine. These appear to have entered with Paine into co-operative housekeeping, though taking their chief meals at the restaurants. In the evenings they were joined by others,—the Brissots (before the arrest), Nicholas Bonneville, Joel Barlow, Captain Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft, the Rolands. Mystical Madame Roland dreaded Paine’s power, which she considered more adapted to pull down than to build, but has left a vivid impression of “the boldness of his conceptions, the originality of his style, the striking truths he throws out bravely among those whom they offend.” The Mr. Shapworth alluded to is mentioned in a manuscript journal of Daniel Constable, sent me by his nephew, Clair J. Grece, LL.D. This English gentleman visited Baton Rouge and Shapworth’s plantation in 1822. “Mr. S.,” he says, “has a daughter married to the Governor [Robinson], has travelled in Europe, married a French

lady. He is a warm friend of Thomas Paine, as is his son-in-law. He lived with Paine many months at Paris. He [Paine] was then a sober, correct gentleman in appearance and manner." The English refugees, persecuted for selling the "Rights of Man," were, of course, always welcomed by Paine, and poor Rickman was his guest during this summer of 1793.¹ The following reminiscence of Paine, at a time when Gouverneur Morris was (for reasons that presently appear) reporting him to his American friends as generally drunk, was written by Rickman :

"He usually rose about seven. After breakfast he usually strayed an hour or two in the garden, where he one morning pointed out the kind of spider whose web furnished him with the first idea of constructing his iron bridge ; a fine model of which, in mahogany, is preserved in Paris. The little happy circle who lived with him will ever remember those days with delight: with these select friends he would talk of his boyish days, played at chess, whist, piquet, or cribbage, and enliven the moments by many interesting anecdotes : with these he would

¹ Rickman appears to have escaped from England in 1792, according to the following sonnet sent me by Dr. Grece. It is headed : "Sonnet to my Little Girl, 1792. Written at Calais, on being pursued by cruel prosecution and persecution."

"Farewell, sweet babe ! and mayst thou never know,
 Like me, the pressure of exceeding woe.
 Some griefs (for they are human nature's right)
 On life's eventful stage will be thy lot ;
 Some generous cares to clear thy mental sight,
 Some pains, in happiest hours, perhaps, begot ;
 But mayst thou ne'er be, like thy father, driven
 From a loved partner, family, and home,
 Snatched from each heart-felt bliss, domestic heaven !
 From native shores, and all that 's valued, roam.
 Oh, may bad governments, the source of human woe,
 Ere thou becom'st mature, receive their deadly blow ;
 Then mankind's greatest curse thou ne'er wilt know."

play at marbles, scotch hops, battledores, etc.: on the broad and fine gravel walk at the upper end of the garden, and then retire to his boudoir, where he was up to his knees in letters and papers of various descriptions. Here he remained till dinner time; and unless he visited Brissot's family, or some particular friend, in the evening, which was his frequent custom, he joined again the society of his favorites and fellow-boarders, with whom his conversation was often witty and cheerful, always acute and improving, but never frivolous. Incorrupt, straightforward, and sincere, he pursued his political course in France, as everywhere else, let the government or clamor or faction of the day be what it might, with firmness, with clearness, and without a shadow of turning."

In the spring of 1890 the present writer visited the spot. The lower front of the old mansion is divided into shops,—a Fruiterer being appropriately next the gateway, which now opens into a wide thoroughfare. Above the rooms once occupied by Paine was the sign "Ecrivain Publique,"—placed there by a Mademoiselle who wrote letters and advertisements for humble neighbors not expert in penmanship. At the end of what was once the garden is a Printer's office, in which was a large lithograph portrait of Victor Hugo. The printer, his wife, and little daughter were folding publications of the "Extreme Left." Near the door remains a veritable survival of the garden and its living tenants which amused Paine and his friends. There were two ancient fruit trees, of which one was dying, but the other budding in the spring sunshine. There were ancient coops with ducks, and pigeon-houses with pigeons, also rabbits, and some flowers. This little nook, of perhaps forty square feet, and its animals, had been there—so an old

inhabitant told me—time out of mind. They belonged to nobody in particular; the pigeons were fed by the people around; the fowls were probably kept there by some poultryman. There were eager groups attending every stage of the investigation. The exceptional antiquity of the mansion had been recognized by its occupants,—several families,—but without curiosity, and perhaps with regret. Comparatively few had heard of Paine.

Shortly before I had visited the garden near Florence which Boccaccio's immortal tales have kept in perennial beauty through five centuries. It may be that in the far future some brother of Boccaccio will bequeath to Paris as sweet a legend of the garden where beside the plague of blood the prophet of the universal Republic realized his dream in microcosm. Here gathered sympathetic spirits from America, England, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, freed from prejudices of race, rank, or nationality, striving to be mutually helpful, amusing themselves with Arcadian sports, studying nature, enriching each other by exchange of experiences. It is certain that in all the world there was no group of men and women more disinterestedly absorbed in the work of benefiting their fellow-beings. They could not, however, like Boccaccio's ladies and gentlemen "kill Death" by their witty tales; for presently beloved faces disappeared from their circle, and the cruel axe was gleaming over them.

And now the old hotel became the republican capitol of Europe. There sat an international Premier with his Cabinet, concentrated on the work

of saving the Girondins. He was indeed treated by the Executive government as a Minister. It was supposed by Paine and believed by his adherents that Robespierre had for him some dislike. Paine in later years wrote of Robespierre as a "hypocrite," and the epithet may have a significance not recognized by his readers. It is to me probable that Paine considered himself deceived by Robespierre with professions of respect, if not of friendliness before being cast into prison; a conclusion naturally based on requests from the Ministers for opinions on public affairs. The archives of the Revolution contain various evidences of this, and several papers by Paine evidently in reply to questions. We may feel certain that every subject propounded was carefully discussed in Paine's little cosmopolitan Cabinet before his opinion was transmitted to the revolutionary Cabinet of Committees. In reading the subjoined documents it must be borne in mind that Robespierre had not yet been suspected of the cruelty presently associated with his name. The Queen and the Girondist leaders were yet alive. Of these leaders Paine was known to be the friend, and it was of the utmost importance that he should be suavely loyal to the government that had inherited these prisoners from Marat's time.

The first of these papers is erroneously endorsed "January 1793. Thom. Payne. Copie," in the French State Archives.¹ Its reference to the defeat of the Duke of York at Dunkirk assigns its date to the late summer. It is headed, "Observa-

¹ États Unis. Vol. 37. Document 39.

tions on the situation of the Powers joined against France.”

“It is always useful to know the position and the designs of one’s enemies. It is much easier to do so by combining and comparing the events, and by examining the consequences which result from them, than by forming one’s judgment by letters found or intercepted. These letters could be fabricated with the intention of deceiving, but events or circumstances have a character which is proper to them. If in the course of our political operations we mistake the designs of our enemy, it leads us to do precisely that which he desired we should do, and it happens, by the fact, but against our intentions, that we work for him.

“It appears at first sight that the coalition against France is not of the nature of those which form themselves by a treaty. It has been the work of circumstances. It is a heterogeneous mass, the parts of which dash against each other, and often neutralise themselves. They have but one single point of reunion, the re-establishment of the monarchical government in France. Two means can conduct them to the execution of this plan. The first is, to re-establish the Bourbons, and with them the Monarchy; the second, to make a division similar to that which they have made in Poland, and to reign themselves in France. The political questions to be solved are, then, to know on which of these two plans it is most probable, the united Powers will act; and which are the points of these plans on which they will agree or disagree.

“Supposing their aim to be the re-establishment of the Bourbons, the difficulty which will present itself, will be, to know who will be their Allies?

“Will England consent to the re-establishment of the compact of family in the person of the Bourbons, against whom she has machinated and fought since her existence? Will Prussia consent to re-establish the alliance which subsisted between France and Austria, or will Austria wish to re-establish the ancient alliance between France and Prussia, which was directed against her? Will Spain, or any other maritime Power, allow France and her Marine to ally themselves to

England? In fine, will any of these Powers consent to furnish forces which could be directed against herself? However, all these cases present themselves in the hypothesis of the restoration of the Bourbons.

“If we suppose that their plan be the dismemberment of France, difficulties will present themselves under another form, but not of the same nature. It will no longer be question, in this case, of the Bourbons, as their position will be worse; for if their preservation is a part of their first plan, their destruction ought to enter in the second; because it is necessary for the success of the dismembering that not a single pretendant to the Crown of France should exist.

“As one must think of all the probabilities in political calculations, it is not unlikely that some of the united Powers, having in view the first of these plans, and others the second,—that this may be one of the causes of their disagreement. It is to be remembered that Russia recognised a Regency from the beginning of Spring; not one of the other Powers followed her example. The distance of Russia from France, and the different countries by which she is separated from her, leave no doubt as to her dispositions with regard to the plan of division; and as much as one can form an opinion on the circumstances, it is not her scheme.

“The coalition directed against France, is composed of two kinds of Powers. The Maritime Powers, not having the same interest as the others, will be divided, as to the execution of the project of division.

“I do not hesitate to believe that the politic of the English Government is to foment the scheme of dismembering, and the entire destruction of the Bourbon family.

“The difficulty which must arise, in this last hypothesis, between the united Maritime Powers proceeds from their views being entirely opposed.

“The trading vessels of the Northern Nations, from Holland to Russia, must pass through the narrow Channel, which lies between Dunkirk and the coasts of England; and consequently not one of them, will allow this latter Power to have forts on both sides of this Strait. The audacity with which she has seized the neutral vessels ought to demonstrate to all Nations how much her schemes increase their

danger, and menace the security of their present and future commerce.

“Supposing then that the other Nations oppose the plans of England, she will be forced to cease the war with us ; or, if she continues it, the Northern Nations will become interested in the safety of France.

“There are three distinct parties in England at this moment: the Government party, the Revolutionary party, and an intermedial party,—which is only opposed to the war on account of the expense it entails, and the harm it does commerce and manufacture. I am speaking of the People, and not of the Parliament. The latter is divided into two parties : the Ministerial, and the Anti-Ministerial. The Revolutionary party, the intermedial party and the Anti-Ministerial party will all rejoice, publicly or privately, at the defeat of the Duke of York’s army, at Dunkirk. The intermedial party, because they hope that this defeat will finish the war. The Antiministerial party, because they hope it will overthrow the Ministry. And all the three because they hate the Duke of York. Such is the state of the different parties in England.

“Signed : THOMAS PAINE.”

In the same volume of the State Archives (Paris) is the following note by Paine, with its translation :

“You mentioned to me that saltpetre was becoming scarce. I communicate to you a project of the late Captain Paul Jones, which, if successfully put in practice, will furnish you with that article.

“All the English East India ships put into St. Helena, off the coast of Africa, on their return from India to England. A great part of their ballast is saltpetre. Captain Jones, who had been at St. Helena, says that the place can be very easily taken. His proposal was to send off a small squadron for that purpose, to keep the English flag flying at port. The English vessels will continue coming in as usual. By this means it will be a long time before the Government of England can have any knowledge of what has happened. The success of this depends so much upon secrecy that I wish you would translate this yourself, and give it to Barrère.”

In the next volume (38) of the French Archives, marked "États Unis, 1793," is a remarkable document (No. 39), entitled "A Citizen of America to the Citizens of Europe." The name of Paine is only pencilled on it, and it was probably written by him ; but it purports to have been written in America, and is dated "Philadelphia, July 28, 1793 ; 18th Year of Independence." It is a clerk's copy, so that it cannot now be known whether the ruse of its origin in Philadelphia was due to Paine or to the government. It is an extended paper, and repeats to some extent, though not literally, what is said in the "Observations" quoted above. Possibly the government, on receiving that paper (Document 39 also), desired Paine to write it out as an address to the "Citizens of Europe." It does not appear to have been published. The first four paragraphs of this paper, combined with the "Observations," will suffice to show its character.

"Understanding that a proposal is intended to be made at the ensuing meeting of the Congress of the United States of America, to send Commissioners to Europe to confer with the Ministers of all the Neutral Powers, for the purpose of negotiating preliminaries of Peace, I address this letter to you on that subject, and on the several matters connected therewith.

"In order to discuss this subject through all its circumstances, it will be necessary to take a review of the state of Europe, prior to the French revolution. It will from thence appear, that the powers leagued against France are fighting to attain an object, which, were it possible to be attained, would be injurious to themselves.

"This is not an uncommon error in the history of wars and governments, of which the conduct of the English government in the war against America is a striking instance. She com-

menced that war for the avowed purpose of subjugating America ; and after wasting upwards of one hundred millions sterling, and then abandoning the object, she discovered in the course of three or four years, that the prosperity of England was increased, instead of being diminished, by the independence of America. In short, every circumstance is pregnant with some natural effect, upon which intentions and opinions have no influence ; and the political error lies in misjudging what the effect will be. England misjudged it in the American war, and the reasons I shall now offer will shew, that she misjudges it in the present war.—In discussing this subject, I leave out of the question every thing respecting forms and systems of government ; for as all the governments of Europe differ from each other, there is no reason that the government of France should not differ from the rest.

“The clamours continually raised in all the countries of Europe were, that the family of the Bourbons was become too powerful ; that the intrigues of the court of France endangered the peace of Europe. Austria saw with a jealous eye the connection of France with Prussia ; and Prussia, in her turn became jealous of the connection of France with Austria ; England had wasted millions unsuccessfully in attempting to prevent the family compact with Spain ; Russia disliked the alliance between France and Turkey ; and Turkey became apprehensive of the inclination of France towards an alliance with Russia. Sometimes the quadruple alliance alarmed some of the powers, and at other times a contrary system alarmed others, and in all those cases the charge was always made against the intrigues of the Bourbons.”

In each of these papers a plea for the imperilled Girondins is audible. Each is a reminder that he, Thomas Paine, friend of the Brissotins, is continuing their anxious and loyal vigilance for the Republic. And during all this summer Paine had good reason to believe that his friends were safe. Robespierre was eloquently deprecating useless effusion of blood. As for Paine himself, he was

not only consulted on public questions, but trusted in practical affairs. He was still able to help Americans and Englishmen who invoked his aid. Writing to Lady Smith concerning two applications of that kind, he says :

“I went into my chamber to write and sign a certificate for them, which I intended to take to the guard house to obtain their release. Just as I had finished it, a man came into my room, dressed in the Parisian uniform of a captain, and spoke to me in good English, and with a good address. He told me that two young men, Englishmen, were arrested and detained in the guard house, and that the section (meaning those who represented and acted for the section) had sent him to ask me if I knew them, in which case they would be liberated. This matter being soon settled between us, he talked to me about the Revolution, and something about the ‘Rights of Man,’ which he had read in English ; and at parting offered me, in a polite and civil manner, his services. And who do you think the man was who offered me his services? It was no other than the public executioner, Samson, who guillotined the King and all who were guillotined in Paris, and who lived in the same street with me.”

There appeared no reason to suppose this a domiciliary visit, or that it had any relation to anything except the two Englishmen. Samson was not a detective. It soon turned out, however, that there was a serpent creeping into Paine’s little garden in the Faubourg St. Denis. He and his guests knew it not, however, until all their hopes fell with the leaves and blossoms amid which they had passed a summer to which Paine, from his prison, looked back with fond recollection.