LISSAGARAY

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNE OF 1871


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Table of Contents

PROLOGUE.

Table of Contents

"Osons, ce mot renferme toute la politique de cette heure."—*Rapport de St. Just à la Convention*.

HOW THE PRUSSIANS GOT PARIS AND THE RURALS FRANCE.

August 9, 1870.—In six days the Empire has lost three battles. Douai, Frossart, MacMahon have allowed themselves to be isolated, surprised, crashed. Alsace is lost, the Moselle laid bare. The dumbfoundered Ministry has convoked the Chamber. Ollivier, in dread of a demonstration, denounces if beforehand as "Prussian." But since eleven in the morning an immense agitated crowd occupies the Place de la Concorde, the quays, and surrounds the Corps Législatif.

Paris is waiting for the *mot d'ordre* of the deputies of the Left. Since the announcement of the defeats they have become the only moral authority. Bourgeoisie, workingmen, all rally round them. The workshops have turned their army into the streets, and at the head of the different groups one sees men of tried energy.

The Empire totters—it has now only to fall. The troops drawn up before the Corps Législatif are greatly excited, ready to turn tail in spite of the decorated and grumbling

Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers. The people cry, "To the frontier." Officers answer aloud, "Our place is not here."

In the Salle des Pas Perdus well-known Republicans, the men of the clubs, who have forced their way in, roughly apostrophise the Imperialist deputies, speak loudly of proclaiming the Republic. The pale-faced Mamelukes steal behind the groups. M. Thiers arrives and exclaims, "Well, then, make your republic!" When the President, Schneider, passes to the chair, he is received with cries of "Abdication!"

The deputies of the Left are surrounded by delegates from without. "What are you waiting for? We are ready. Only show yourselves under the colonnades at the gates." The honourables seem confounded, stupefied. "Are you numerous enough? Were it not better to put it off till to-morrow?" There are indeed only 100,000 men ready. Some one arrives and tells Gambetta, "There are several thousands of us at the Place Bourbon." Another, the writer of this history, says, "Make sure of the situation to-day, when it may still be saved. To-morrow, having become desperate, it will be forced upon you." But these brains seem paralysed; no word escapes these gaping mouths.

The sitting opens. Jules Favre proposes to this base Chamber, the abettor of our disasters, the humus of the Empire, to seize upon the government. The Mamelukes rise up in dudgeon, and Jules Simon, hair on end, returns to us in the Salle des Pas Perdus. "They threaten to shoot us," he shrieks; "I descended into the midst of the hall and said, 'Well, shoot us.'" We exclaim, "Put an end to this." "Yes," says he, "we must make an end of it,"—and he returns to the Chamber.

And thus ended their "damnable faces." The Mamelukes, who know their Left, recover their self-assurance, throw Ollivier overboard and form a *coup-d'état* Ministry. Schneider precipitately breaks up the sitting in order to get rid of the crowd. The people, feebly repulsed by the soldiers, repair in masses to the bridges, follow those who leave the Chamber, expecting every moment to hear the Republic proclaimed. M. Jules Simon, out of reach of the bayonets, makes a heroic discourse, and convokes the people to meet the next day at the Place de la Concorde. The next day the police occupy all the approaches.

Thus the Left abandoned to Napoleon III. our two last armies. One effort would have sufficed to overthrow this pasteboard Empire.[1] The people instinctively offered their help to render the nation unto herself. The Left repulsed them, refused to save the country by a riot, and, confining their efforts to a ridiculous motion, left to the Mamelukes the care of saving France. The Turks in 1876 showed more intelligence and elasticity.

During three weeks it was the story of the Bas-Empire all over again,—the fettered nation sinking into the abyss in the face of its motionless governing classes. All Europe cried, "Beware!" They alone heard not. The masses, deceived by a braggart and corrupt press, might ignore the danger, lull themselves with vain hopes; but the deputies have, must have, their hands full of crushing truths. They conceal them. The Left exhausts itself in exclamations. On the 12th M. Gambetta cries, "We must wage Republican war"—and sits down again. On the 13th Jules Favre demands the creation of a Committee of Defence. It is

refused. He utters no syllable. On the 20th the Ministry announces that Bazaine has forced three army corps into the quarries of Jaumont; the next day the whole European press related, on the contrary, that Bazaine, three times beaten, had been thrown back upon Metz by 200,000 Germans. And no deputy rises to interpellate the liars! Since the 26th they have known MacMahon's insane march upon Metz, exposing the last army of France, a mob of 80,000 conscripts, and vanquished, to 200,000 victorious Germans. M. Thiers, again restored to favour since the disasters, demonstrates in the committees and in the lobbies that this march is the way to utter ruin. The extreme Left says and bruits about that all is lost and of all these responsible persons seeing the state ship tempest-tossed, not one raises his hand to seize the helm.

Since 1813 France had seen no such collapse of the governing classes. The ineffable dastardliness of the Cent-jours pales before this superior cowardice; for here Tartuffe is grafted upon Trimalcion. Thirteen months later, at Versailles, I hear, amidst enthusiastic applause, the Empire apostrophised, "Varus, give us back our legions." Who speaks, who applauds thus? The same great bourgeoisie, which, for eighteen years mute and bowed to the dust, offered their legions to Varus. The bourgeoisie accepted the Second Empire from fear of Socialism, even as their fathers had submitted to the first to make an end of the Revolution. Napoleon I. rendered the bourgeoisie two services not overpaid by his apotheosis. He gave them an iron centralisation and sent to their graves 15,000 wretches still kindled by the flame of the Revolution, who at any moment

might have claimed the public lands granted to them. But he left the same bourgeoisie saddled for all masters. When they possessed themselves of the parliamentary government, to which Mirabeau wished to raise them at one bound, they were incapable of governing. Their mutiny of 1830, turned into a revolution by the people, made the belly master. The great bourgeois of 1830, like him of 1790, had but one thought—to gorge himself with privileges, to arm the bulwarks in defence of his domains, to perpetuate the proletariat. The fortune of his country is nothing to him, so that he fatten. To lead, to compromise France, the parliamentary king has as free license as Bonaparte. When by a new outburst of the people the bourgeoisie are compelled to seize the helm after three years, spite of massacre and proscription, it slips out of their palsied hands into those of the first comer.

From 1851 to 1869 they relapse into the same state as after the 18th Brumaire. Their privileges safe, they allow Napoleon III. to plunder France, make her the vassal of Rome, dishonour her in Mexico, ruin her finances, vulgarise debauchery. All-powerful by their retainers and their wealth, they do not risk a man, a dollar, for the sake of protesting. In 1869 the pressure from without raises them to the verge of power; a little strength of will and the government is theirs. They have but the velleity of the eunuch. At the first sign of the impotent master they kiss the rod that smote them on the 2nd December, making room for the plebiscite which rebaptizes the Empire.

Bismarck prepared the war, Napoleon III. wanted it, the great bourgeoisie looked on. They might have stopped it by

an earnest gesture. M. Thiers contented himself with a grimace. He saw in this war our certain ruin; he knew our terrible inferiority in everything; he could have united the Left, the *tiers-parti*, the journalists, have made palpable to them the folly of the attack, and, supported by this strength of opinion, have said to the Tuileries, to Paris if needs be, "War is impossible; we shall combat it as treason." He, anxious only to clear himself, simply demanded the despatches instead of speaking the true word, "You have no chance of success."[2] And these great bourgeois, who would not have risked the least part of their fortunes without the most serious guarantees, staked 100,000 lives and the milliards of France on the word of a Lebœuf and the equivocations of a Grammont.[3]

And what then is the small middle-class doing meanwhile? This lean class, which penetrates everything—industry, commerce, the administration—mighty by encompassing the people, so vigorous, so ready in the first days of our Hegira, will it not, as in 1792, rise for the common weal? Alas! it has been spoilt under the hot corruption of the Empire. For many years it has lived at random, isolating itself from the proletariat, whence it issued but yesterday, and whither the great barons of Capital will hurl it back again to-morrow. No more of that fraternity with the people, of that zeal for reform, which manifested themselves from 1830 to 1848. With its bold initiative, its revolutionary instinct, it loses also the consciousness of its force. Instead of representing itself, as it might so well do, it goes about in quest of representatives among the Liberals.

The friend of the people who will write the history of Liberalism in France will save us many a convulsion. Sincere Liberalism would be folly in a country where the governing classes, refusing to concede anything, constrain every honest man to become a revolutionist. But it was never anything else than the Jesuitism of liberty, a trick of the bourgeoisie to isolate the workmen. From Bailly to Jules Favre, the moderantists have masked the manœuvres of despotism, buried our revolutions, conducted the great massacres of proletarians. The old clear-sighted Parisian sections hated them more than the down right reactionists. Twice Imperial despotism rehabilitated them, and the small middle-class, soon forgetting their true part, accepted as defenders those who pretended to be vanquished like themselves. The men who had made abortive the movement of 1848 and paved the way for the 2nd December thus became during the darkness which followed it the acclaimed vindicators of ravished liberty. At the first dawn they appeared what they had ever been—— the enemies of the working-class. Under the Empire the Left never condescended to concern itself with the interests of the workmen. These Liberals never found for them a word, a protestation, even such as the Chambers of 1830-1848 sometimes witnessed. The young lawyers whom they had affiliated to themselves soon revealed their designs, rallying to the Liberal Empire, some openly, like Ollivier and Darimon, others with prudence, like Picard. For the timid or ambitious they founded the "open Left," a bench of candidates for public office; and in 1870 a number of Liberals indeed solicited official functions. For the

"intransigeants" there was the "closed Left," where the irreconcilable dragons Gambetta, Crémieux, Arago, Pelletan guarded the pure principles. The chiefs towered in the centre. These two groups of augurs thus held every fraction of bourgeois opposition—the timorous and the intrepid. After the plebiscite they became the holy synod, the uncontested chiefs of the small middle-class, more and more incapable of governing itself, and alarmed at the Socialist movement, behind which they showed it the hand of the Emperor. It gave them full powers, shut its eyes, and allowed itself to drift gradually towards the parliamentary Empire, big with portfolios for its patrons. The thunderbolt of the defeats galvanised it into life, but only for a moment. At the bidding of the deputies to keep quiet, the small middle-class, the mother of the 10th August, docilely bent its head and let the foreigner plunge his sword into the very bosom of France.

Poor France! Who will save thee? The humble, the poor, those who for six years contended for thee with the Empire.

While the upper classes sell the nation for a few hours of rest, and the Liberals seek to feather their nests under the Empire, a handful of men, without arms, unprotected, rise up against the still all-powerful despot. On the one hand, young men who form the bourgeoisie have gone over to the people, faithful children of 1789, resolved to continue the work of the Revolution; on the other hand, working-men unite for the study and the conquest of the rights of labor. In vain the Empire attempts to split their forces, to seduce the working-men. These see the snare, hiss the professors of Cæsarian socialism, and from 1863, without journals, without a tribune, affirm themselves as a class, to the great

scandal of the Liberal sycophants, maintaining that 1789 has equalized all classes. In 1867 they descend into the streets, make a manifestation at the tomb of Manin, and, despite the bludgeons of the sbirri, protest against Mentana. At this appearance of a revolutionary socialist party the Left gnashes its teeth. When some working-men, ignorant of their own history, ask Jules Favre if the Liberal bourgeoisie will support them on the day of their rising for the Republic, the leader of the Left impudently answers, "Gentlemen workmen, you have made the Empire; it is your business to unmake it." And Picard says, "Socialism does not exist, or at any rate we will not treat with it."

Thus set right for the future, the working-men continue the struggle single-handed. Since the re-opening of the public meetings they fill the halls, and, in spite of persecution and imprisonment, harass, undermine the Empire, taking advantage of every accident to inflict a blow. On the 26th October 1869 they threaten to march on the Corps Législatif; in November they insult the Tuileries by the election of Rochefort; in December they goad the Government by the *Marseillaise*; in January, 1870, they go 200,000 strong to the funeral of Victor Noir, and, well directed, would have swept away the throne.

The Left, terrified at this multitude, which threatens to overwhelm them, brands their leaders as desperadoes or as police agents. They, however, keep to the fore, unmasking the Left, defying them to discussion, keeping up at the same time a running fire on the Empire. They form the vanguard against the plebiscite. At the war rumors they are the first to make a stand. The old dregs of Chauvinism, stirred by the

Bonapartists, discharge their muddy waters. The Liberals remain impassible or applaud; the workingmen stop the way. On the 15th July, at the very same hour when Ollivier from the tribune invokes war with a light heart, the revolutionary socialists crowd the boulevards crying, "Vive la paix!" and singing the pacific refrain—

"Les peuples sont pour nous des frères
Et les tyrans des ennemis."

From the Château d'Eau to the Boulevard St. Denis they are applauded, but are hissed in the Boulevards Bonne Nouvelle and Montmartre, and come to blows with certain bands shouting for war.

The next day they meet again at the Bastille, and parade the streets, Ranvier, a painter on porcelain, well known in Belleville, marching at their head with a banner. In the Faubourg Montmartre the sergents-de-ville charge them with drawn swords.

Unable to influence the bourgeoisie, they turn to the working-men of Germany, as they had done in 1869: —"Brothers, we protest against the war, we who wish for peace, labour, and liberty. Brothers, do not listen to the hirelings who seek to deceive you as to the real wishes of France." Their noble appeal received its reward. In 1869 the students of Berlin had answered the pacific address of the French students with insults. The working-men of Berlin in 1870 spoke thus to the working-men of France: "We too wish for peace, labour, and liberty. We know that on both sides of the Rhine there are brothers with whom we are ready to die for the Universal Republic." Great prophetic words! Let them

be inscribed on the first page of the Golden Book just opened by the workmen.

Thus towards the end of the Empire there was no life, no activity, save in the ranks of the proletariat and the young men of the middle-class who had joined them. They alone showed some political courage, and in the midst of the general paralysis of the month of July 1870, they alone found the energy to attempt at least the salvation of France.

They lacked authority; they failed to carry with them the small middle-class, for which they also combat, because of their utter want of political experience. How could they have acquired it during eighty years, when the ruling class not only withheld light from them, but even the right to enlighten themselves? By an infernal Machiavelism they forced them to grope their way in the dark, so that they might hand them over the more easily to dreamers and sectarians. Under the Empire, when the public meetings and journals reappeared, the political education of the workmen had still to be effected. Many, abused by morbid minds, in the belief that their affranchisement depended on a *coup-de-main*, gave themselves up to whoever spoke of overthrowing the Empire. Others, convinced that even the most thorough-going bourgeois were hostile to Socialism, and only courted the people in furtherance of their ambitious plans, wanted the workmen to constitute themselves into groups independent of all tutelage. These different currents crossed each other. The chaotic state of the party of action was laid bare in its journal, the *Marseillaise*, a hot mish-mash of doctrinaires and desperate writers united by hatred of the Empire, but without definite

views, and above all, without discipline. Much time was wanted to cool down the first effervescence and get rid of the romantic rubbish which twenty years of oppression and want of study had made fashionable. However, the influence of the Socialists began to prevail, and no doubt with time they would have classified their ideas, drawn up their programme, eliminated the mere spouters, entered upon serious action. Already, in 1869, working-men's societies, founded for mutual credit, resistance and study, had united in a Federation, whose headquarters were the Place de la Corderie du Temple. The International, setting forth the most adequate idea of the revolutionary movement of our century, under the guidance of Varlin, a bookbinder of rare intelligence, of Duval, Theisz, Frankel, and a few devoted men, was beginning to gain power in France. It also met at the Corderie, and urged on the more slow and reserved workmen's societies. The public meetings of 1870 no longer resembled the earlier ones; the people wanted useful discussions. Men like Millière, Lefrançais, Vermorel, Longuet, etc., seriously competed with the mere declaimers. But many years would have been required for the development of the party of labour, hampered by young bourgeois adventurers in search of a reputation, encumbered with conspiracy-mongers and romantic visionaries, still ignorant of the administrative and political mechanism of the bourgeois régime which they attacked.

Just before the war some discipline was attempted. Some tried to move the deputies of the Left, and met them at Crémieux'. They found them stupefied, more afraid of a *coup-d'état* than of the Prussian victories. Crémieux,

pressed to act, answered naïvely, "Let us wait for a new disaster, as, for instance, the fall of Strasbourg."

It was indeed necessary to wait, for without these shadows nothing could be done. The small Parisian middle-class believed in the extreme Left, as it had believed in our armies. Those who wished to do without them failed. On the 14th the friends of Blanqui attempted to raise the outlying districts, attacked the quarters of the firemen of La Villette, and put the sergents-de-ville to flight. Masters of the field, they traversed the boulevard up to Belleville, crying, "Vive la République! Death to the Prussians!" No one joined them. The crowd looked on from afar, astonished, motionless, rendered suspicious by the police agents, who thus drew them off from the real enemy—the Empire. The Left pretended to believe in the Prussian agent, to reassure the bourgeoisie, and Gambetta demanded the immediate trial of the prisoners of La Villette. The Minister Palikao had to remind him that certain forms must be observed, even by military justice. The court-martial condemned ten to death, although almost all the accused had had nothing to do with the affray. Some true-hearted men, wishing to prevent these executions, went to Michelet, who wrote a touching letter on their behalf. The Empire had no time to carry out the sentences.

Since the 25th MacMahon was leading his army into the snares laid by Moltke. On the 29th, surprised and beaten at Beaumont l'Argonne, he knew himself overreached, and yet pushed forward. Palikao had written to him on the 27th: "If you abandon Bazaine we shall have the Revolution in Paris." And to ward off the Revolution he exposed France. On the

30th he threw his troops into the pit of Sedan; on the 1st September the army was surrounded by 200,000 enemies, and 700 cannons crowned the heights. The next day Napoleon III. delivered up his sword to the King of Prussia. The telegraph announced it; all Europe knew it that same night. The deputies, however, were silent; they remained so on the 3rd. On the 4th only, at midnight, after Paris had passed through a day of feverish excitement, they made up their minds to speak. Jules Favre demanded the abolition of the Empire and a Commission charged with the defence, but took care not to touch the Chamber. During the day some men of tried energy had attempted to raise the boulevards, and in the evening an anxious crowd pressed against the railings of the Corps Législatif, crying: "Vive la République." Gambetta met them and said, "You are wrong; we must remain united; make no revolution." Jules Favre, surrounded on his leaving the Chamber, strove to calm the people.

If Paris had been guided by the Left, France would have capitulated that very hour more shamefully than Napoleon III. But on the morning of the 4th of September the people assemble, and amongst them National Guards armed with their muskets. The astonished gendarmes give way to them. Little by little the Corps Législatif is invaded. At ten o'clock notwithstanding the desperate efforts of the Left, the crowd fills the galleries. It is time. The Chamber, on the point of forming a Ministry, try to seize the government. The Left support this combination with all its might, waxing indignant at the mere mention of a Republic. When that cry bursts forth from the galleries, Gambetta makes unheard-of efforts and conjures the people to await the result of the

deliberations of the Chamber,—a result known beforehand. It is the project of M. Thiers: a Government Commission named by the Assembly; peace demanded and accepted at any price; after that disgrace, the parliamentary monarchy. Happily a new crowd of invaders bursts its way through the doors, while the occupants of the galleries glide into the hall. The people expel the deputies. Gambetta, forced to the tribune, is obliged to announce the abolition of the Empire. The crowd, wanting more than this, asks for the Republic, and carries off the deputies to proclaim it at the Hôtel-de-Ville.

This was already in the hands of the people. In the Salle du Trône were some of those who for a month had attempted to rouse public opinion. First on the ground, they might, with a little discipline, have influenced the constitution of the government. The Left surprised them haranguing, and, incited by an acclaiming multitude, Jules Favre took the chair, which Millière gave up to him, saying, "At the present moment there is but one matter at stake—the expulsion of the Prussians."[4] Jules Favre, Jules Simon, Jules Ferry, Gambetta, Crémieux, Emmanuel Arago, Glais-Bizoin, Pelletan, Garnier-Pages, Picard, uniting, proclaimed themselves the Government, and read their own names to the crowd, which answered by adding those of men like Delescluze, Ledru-Rollin, Blanqui. They, however, declared they would accept no colleagues but the deputies of Paris. The crowd applauded. This frenzy of just-emancipated serfs made the Left masters. They were clever enough to admit Rochefort.

They next applied to General Trochu, named governor of Paris by Napoleon. This general had become the idol of the Liberals because he had sulked a little with the Empire.[5] His whole military glory consisted in a few pamphlets. The Left had seen much of him during the last crisis. Having attained to power, it begged him to direct the defence. He asked, firstly, a place for God in the new régime; secondly, for himself the presidency of the council. He obtained everything. The future will show what secret bond so quickly united the men of the Left to the loyal Breton who had promised "to die on the steps of the Tuileries in defence of the dynasty."[6]

Twelve individuals thus took possession of France. They invoked no other title than their mandate as representatives of Paris, and declared themselves legitimate by popular acclamation.

In the evening the International and syndicates of the workmen sent delegates to the Hôtel-de-Ville. They had on the same day sent a new address to the German workingmen. Their fraternal duty fulfilled, the French workmen gave themselves up to the defence. Let the Government organize it and they would stay by it. The most suspicious were taken in. On the 7th, in the first number of his paper *La Patrie en Danger*, Blanqui and his friends offered the Government their most energetic, their absolute co-operation.

All Paris abandoned itself to the men of the Hôtel-de-Ville, forgetting their late defections, investing them with the grandeur of the danger. To seize, to monopolize the government at such a moment, seemed a stroke of audacity

of which genius alone is capable. Paris, deprived for eighty years of her municipal liberties, accepted as mayor the lachrymose Etienne Arago. In the twenty arrondissements he named the mayors he liked, and they again named the adjuncts agreeable to themselves. But Arago announced early elections and spoke of reviving the great days of 1792. At this moment Jules Favre, proud as Danton, cried to Prussia, to Europe, "We will cede neither an inch of our territories nor a stone of our fortresses," and Paris rapturously applauded this dictatorship announcing itself with words so heroic. On the 14th, when Trochu held the review of the National Guard, 250,000 men stationed in the boulevards, the Place de la Concorde, and the Champs-Elysées cheered enthusiastically, and renewed a vow like that of their fathers on the morning of Valmy.

Yes, Paris gave herself up without reserve—incurable confidence—to that same Left to which she had been forced to do violence in order to make her revolution. Her outburst of will lasted but for an hour. The Empire once overthrown, she re-abdicated. In vain did far-seeing patriots try to keep her on the alert; in vain did Blanqui write, "Paris is no more impregnable than we were invincible. Paris, mystified by a braggart press, ignores the greatness of the peril; Paris abuses confidence." Paris abandoned herself to her new masters, obstinately shutting her eyes. And yet each day brought with it new ill omens. The shadow of the siege approached, and the Government of Defence, far from removing the superfluous mouths, crowded the 200,000 inhabitants of the suburbs into the town. The exterior works did not advance. Instead of throwing all Paris into the work,

and taking these descendants of the levellers of the Champ-de-Mars out of the enceinte in troops of 100,000, drums beating, banners flying, Trochu abandoned the earthworks to the ordinary contractors. The heights of Châtillon, the key to our forts of the south, had hardly been surveyed, when on the 19th the enemy presented himself, sweeping from the plateau an affrighted troop of zouaves and soldiers who did not wish to fight. The following day, that Paris which the press had declared could not be invested, was surrounded and cut off from France.

This gross ignorance very soon alarmed the Revolutionists. They had promised their support, but not blind faith. Since the 4th September, wishing to centralise the forces of the party of action for the defence and the maintenance of the Republic, they had invited the public meetings in each arrondissement to name a Committee of Vigilance charged to control the mayors and to delegate four members to a Central Committee of the twenty arrondissements. This tumultuous mode of election had resulted in a committee composed of working-men, employés, authors, known in the revolutionary movements of the last years. This committee had established itself in the hall of the Rue de la Corderie, lent by the International and the Federation of the syndicates.

These had almost suspended their work, the service of the National Guard absorbing all their activity. Some of their members again met in the Committee of Vigilance and in the Central Committee, which caused the latter to be erroneously attributed to the International. On the 4th it demanded by a manifesto the election of the municipalities,

the police to be placed in their hands, the election and control of all the magistrates, absolute freedom of the press, public meeting and association, the expropriation of all articles of primary necessity, their distribution by allowance, the arming of all citizens, the sending of commissioners to rouse the provinces. But Paris was then infected with a fit of confidence. The bourgeois journals denounced the committee as Prussian. The names of some of the signers were, however, well known in the meetings and to the press: Ranvier, Millière, Longuet, Vallès, Lefrançais, Mallon, etc. Their placards were torn down.

On the 20th, after Jules Favre's application to Bismarck, the Committee held a large meeting in the Alcazar and sent a deputation to the Hôtel-de-Ville to demand war *à outrance* and the early election of the Commune of Paris. Jules Ferry gave his word of honour that the government would not treat at any price, and announced the municipal elections for the end of the month. Two days after a decree postponed them indefinitely.

Thus this Government, which in seventeen days had prepared nothing, which had allowed itself to be blocked up without even a struggle, refused the advice of Paris, and more than ever arrogated to itself the right of directing the defence. Did it then possess the secret of victory? Trochu had just said, "The resistance is a heroic madness;" Picard, "We shall defend ourselves for honour's sake, but all hope is chimerical;" the elegant Crémieux, "The Prussians will enter Paris like a knife goes into butter;"[7] the chief of Trochu's staff, "We cannot defend ourselves; we have decided not to defend ourselves;"[8] and, instead of honestly warning

Paris, saying, "Capitulate at once or conduct the combat yourselves," these men, who declared defence impossible, claimed its undivided direction.

What then is their aim? To negotiate. Since the first defeats they have no other. The reverses which exalted our fathers only made the Left more cowardly than the Imperialist deputies. On the 7th of August Jules Favre, Jules Simon, and Pelletan had said to Schneider, "We cannot hold out; we must come to terms as soon as possible."[9] All the following days the left had only one plan of policy—to urge the Chamber to possess itself of the government in order to negotiate, hoping to get into office afterwards. Hardly established, these defenders sent M. Thiers all over Europe to beg for peace, and Jules Favre to run after Bismarck to ask his conditions,[10]—a step that revealed to the Prussian with what tremblers he had to deal.

When all Paris cried to them, "Defend us; drive back the enemy," they applauded, accepted, but said to themselves, "You shall capitulate." There is no more crying treason in history. The asinine confidence of the immense majority no more diminishes the crime than the foolishness of the dupe excuses the cheater. Did the men of the 4th September, yes or no, betray the mandate they received? "Yes," will be the verdict of the future.

A tacit mandate, it is true, but so clear, so formal, that all Paris started at the news of the proceedings at Ferrières. If the Defenders had gone a step farther, they would have been swept away. They were obliged to adjourn, to give way to what they termed the "madness of the siege," to simulate a defence. In point of fact, they did not abandon their idea

for an hour, esteeming themselves the only men in Paris who had not lost their heads.

"There shall be fighting since those Parisians will have it so, but only with the view to soften Bismarck." On his return from the review, this scene of hopeful enthusiasm manifested by 250,000 armed men is said to have affected Trochu, who announced that it would perhaps be possible to hold the ramparts.[11] Such was the maximum of his enthusiasm: to hold out—not to open the gates. As to drilling or organising these 250,000 men, uniting them with the 240,000 mobiles, soldiers and marines gathered together in Paris, and with all these forces forming a powerful scourge to drive the enemy back to the Rhine, of this he never dreamt. His colleagues thought of it as little, and only discussed with him the more or less cavilling they might venture upon with the Prussian invader.

He was all for mild proceedings. His devoutness forbade him to shed useless blood. Since, according to all military manuals, the great town was to fall, he would make that fall as little sanguinary as possible. Besides, the return of M. Thiers, who might at any moment bring back the treaty, was waited for. Leaving the enemy to establish himself tranquilly round Paris, Trochu organised a few skirmishes for the lookers-on. One single serious engagement took place on the 30th at Chevilly, when, after a success, we retreated, abandoning a battery for want of reinforcements and teams. Public opinion still hoaxed by the same men that had cried, "A Berlin," believed in a success. The Revolutionists only were not taken in. The capitulation of Toul and of Strasbourg was to them a solemn warning. Flourens, chief of the 63d

battalion, but who was the real commander of Belleville, could no longer restrain himself. With the head and heart of a child, an ardent imagination, guided only by his own impulse, Flourens conducted his battalions to the Hôtel-de-Ville, demanded the *levée en masse*, sorties, municipal elections, and the putting the town on short rations. Trochu, who, to amuse him, had given him the title of major of the rampart, made an elaborate discourse; the twelve apostles argued with him, and wound up by showing him out. As delegates came from all sides to demand that Paris should have a voice in her own defence, should name a council, her Commune, the Government declared on the 7th that their dignity forbade them to concede these behests. This insolence caused the movement of the 8th October. The committee of the twenty arrondissements protested in an energetic placard. Seven or eight hundred persons cried "Vive la Commune" under the windows of the Hôtel-de-Ville. But the multitude had not yet lost faith. A great number of battalions hastened to the rescue; the Government passed them in review. Jules Favre opened the flood-gates of his rhetoric and declared the election impossible because—unanswerable reason!—everybody ought to be at the ramparts.

The majority greedily swallowed the bait. On the 16th Trochu having written to his crony Etienne Arago, "I shall pursue the plan I have traced for myself to the end," the loungers announced a victory, and took up the burden of their August song on Bazaine, "Let him alone; he has his plan." The agitators looked like Prussians, for Trochu, as a good Jesuit, had not failed to speak of "a small number of

men whose culpable views serve the projects of the enemy." Then Paris allowed herself during the whole month of October to be rocked asleep to the sound of expeditions commencing with success and always terminated by retreats. On the 13th we took Bagneux, and a spirited attack would have repossessed us of Châtillon: Trochu had no reserves. On the 21st a march on the Malmaison revealed the weakness of the investment and spread panic even to Versailles. Instead of pressing forward, General Ducrot engaged only six thousand men, and the enemy repulsed him, taking two cannons. The Government transformed these repulses into successful reconnoitres, and coined money out of the despatches of Gambetta, who, sent to the provinces on the 8th, announced imaginary armies, and intoxicated Paris with the account of the brilliant defence of Châteaudun.

The mayors encouraged this pleasant confidence. They sat at the Hôtel-de-Ville with their adjuncts, and this Assembly of sixty-four members could have seen clearly what the Defence was if they had had the least courage. But it was composed of those Liberals and Republicans of whom the Left is the last expression. They knocked at the door of the Government now and then, timidly interrogated it, and received only vague assurances, in which they did not believe,[12] but made every effort to make Paris believe.

But at the Corderie, in the clubs, in the paper of Blanqui, in the *Réveil* of Delescluze, in the *Combat* of Félix Pyat, the plan of the men of the Hôtel-de-Ville is exposed. What mean these partial sorties which are never sustained? Why is the National Guard hardly armed, unorganized, withheld from

every military action? Why is the casting of cannon not proceeded with? Six weeks of idle talk and inactivity cannot leave the least doubt as to the incapacity or ill-will of the Government. This same thought occupies all minds. Let the sceptics make room for those that believe in the Defence; let Paris regain possession of herself; let the Commune of 1792 be revived to again save the city and France. Every day this resolution sinks more deeply into virile minds. On the 27th the *Combat*, which preached the Commune in high-flown phraseology whose musical rhythm struck the masses more than the nervous dialectics of Blanqui, hurls a terrific thunderbolt. "Bazaine is about to surrender Metz, to treat for peace in the name of Napoleon III.; his aide-de-camp is at Versailles." The Hôtel-de-Ville immediately contradicted this news, "as infamous as it is false. The glorious soldier Bazaine has not ceased harassing the besieging army with brilliant sorties." The Government called down upon the journalist "the chastisement of public opinion." At this appeal the drones of Paris buzzed, burnt the journal, and would have torn the journalist to pieces if he had not decamped. The next day the *Combat* declared that they had the statement from Rochefort, to whom Flourens had communicated it. Other complications followed. On the 20th a surprise made us masters of Bourget, a village in the northeast of Paris, and on the 29th the general staff announced this success as a triumph. The whole day it left our soldiers without food, without reinforcements, under the fire of the Prussians, who, returning on the 30th 15,000 strong, recovered the village from its 1,600 defenders. On the 31st of October, Paris on awaking received the news of

three disasters: the loss of Bourget, the capitulation of Metz, together with the whole army of the "glorious Bazaine," and the arrival of M. Thiers for the purpose of negotiating an armistice.

The men of the 4th September believed they were saved, that their goal was reached. They had placarded the armistice side by side with the capitulation, "good and bad news,"[13] convinced that Paris, despairing of victory, would accept peace with open arms. Paris started up as with an electric shock, at the same time rousing Marseilles, Toulouse, and Saint-Etienne. There was such spontaneity of indignation, that from eleven o'clock, in pouring rain, the masses came to the Hôtel-de-Ville crying "No armistice." Notwithstanding the resistance of the mobiles who defended the entrance, they invaded the vestibule. Arago and his adjuncts hastened thither, swore that the Government was exhausting itself in efforts to save us. The first crowd retired; a second followed hard upon. At twelve o'clock Trochu appeared at the foot of the staircase, thinking to extricate himself by a harangue; cries of "Down with Trochu" answered him. Jules Simon relieved him, and, confident in his rhetoric, even went to the square in front of the Hôtel-de-Ville and expatiated upon the comforts of the armistice. The people cried "No armistice." He only succeeded in backing out by asking the crowd to name six delegates to accompany him to the Hôtel-de-Ville. Trochu, Jules Favre, Jules Ferry, and Picard received them. Trochu in Ciceronic periods demonstrated the uselessness of Bourget, and pretended that he had only just learnt the capitulation of Metz. A voice cried, "You are a liar." A deputation from the