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## On the Conflict of Parties in the Jacobin Club (November, 1789-July 17, 1791)

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II.—*On the Conflict of Parties in the Jacobin Club (November, 1789–July 17, 1791)*

BY CHARLES KUHLMANN

The Breton Club having ceased its activity after the discussion of the veto in August, 1789, the popular party in the assembly found itself without a rallying point. Although differences of opinion had shattered the loosely organized club at Versailles, the memory of its usefulness soon induced the same members to attempt the formation of a new and more regularly organized association in the capital.<sup>1</sup> The exact date of the formation of the Jacobin Club it is impossible to determine from the evidence so far discovered, but everything points to the close of November or the first days of December, 1789, as the period during which the first meetings were held. From a letter of Boullé, deputy of Pontivy, dated December 18,<sup>2</sup> we learn that the society had recently been formed but had existed long enough to have received numerous requests for correspondence from provincial societies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For the fate of the Breton Club, see my article in the *University Studies* for October, 1902, pp. 77–87. For the condition of the popular party at the time when the Jacobin Club was formed, see the letter of Boullé cited below. This letter also practically disposes of the controversy as to the origin of the new club. Some of the members later denied that the Breton deputies were the founders, and while Boullé's letter does not prove that his colleagues from Bretagne were alone concerned, it shows that the Jacobin Club was looked upon at the time of its formation as a continuation of the Breton Club. For the controversy see Aulard, *La société des Jacobins*, I, xvii–xxi, cited as "Aulard" in the following pages.

<sup>2</sup>Kerviler, *Recherches et notices*, art. Boullé. The letters of Boullé are now in the archives of Morbihan.

<sup>3</sup>That the club had not yet been formed on November 18, we may conclude as practically certain, for in the *Observateur* of that date a certain Imbert, who had been asked by the editor, Feydel, to urge the formation of a *Society of the Revolution*, expresses surprise that no one had as yet thought of such a thing. Imbert sent three louis to Desenne as a subscription for the formation of such a society and invited others to do the same. As Imbert seemed well informed and as Desenne's was a place where the

This new organization adopted the name of "Society of the Revolution" which it soon changed to "The Society of the Friends of the Constitution."<sup>1</sup> The name "Jacobin" was unofficial before September 21, 1792, and was given it by the public who knew it as the society which met in the Jacobin convent.<sup>2</sup> A formal constitution or *réglement* was voted on February 8, 1790, entrance cards and initiation fees required, and persons not members of the National Assembly freely admitted.<sup>3</sup> Preparation for the debates in the National Assembly, which had been practically the sole object of the Breton Club, was only one of the objects of the new society. Its aim was nothing less than the conversion of the whole of France to the support of the revolution. It was the center of an enormous propaganda, with secondary centers in all the principal cities of the kingdom, and soon spreading into the villages and even the country districts.<sup>4</sup> Three large standing committees were appointed, meeting on fixed dates as deliberating bodies. These were the committees on membership, correspondence, and administration.<sup>5</sup>

The Jacobin Club is not to be regarded as a party in the usual sense of the term, for it was not composed of men holding the same views upon the questions of the hour. Its members were not required to subscribe to any specific political faith. They promised merely to uphold the revolution as it had been or was

deputies frequently gathered for consultation, it is not likely that this movement would have been undertaken had the *Society of the Revolution* already existed. On the other hand, for the Jacobin Club to have become known in the provinces and have received requests for correspondence from there by the 18th of December argues that it had already existed for several weeks. Barnave, author of the Jacobin constitution, in a letter of June 25, 1790, gives the close of November as the time when the society was founded.

<sup>1</sup>This name is given in the constitution of February 8, 1790, Aulard, I, xxviii-xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup>Aulard, I, xxii.

<sup>3</sup>See constitution of the club, and Aulard, I, note 1, p. xxx.

<sup>4</sup>See preamble to the constitution and Aulard, I, lxxxii-lxxxix, where a list of the affiliated societies down to June 19, 1791, is given, a list which is probably very incomplete.

<sup>5</sup>For the membership of these committees on May 1, 1791, see Aulard, I, lxxvii-lxxix. How extensive the work of administration became in 1791, and the formal manner in which these committees proceeded may be learned from the *Procès-verbaux des séances du comité d'administration de la société des amis de la constitution*, etc., *Archives Nationales*, F.<sup>7</sup>, 4430 M.SS.

still to be expressed in the work of the National Assembly.<sup>1</sup> This by no means implied that all its members were necessarily satisfied with the solution of every question so far treated by the assembly, but that as a matter of policy they acquiesced. Difference of opinion was often as violently expressed in the club as in the assembly. It is equally misleading to use the terms "Jacobin" and "revolutionary" as synonymous, as Ferrières so frequently does,<sup>2</sup> for the society never contained all the deputies in sympathy with the revolution and it certainly was not responsible for the whole revolution. It was by such loose terminology that the enemies of the club attempted to render it responsible for every radical measure or popular disturbance.<sup>3</sup>

At the close of November, 1789, when the society was organized, the grouping into parties in the assembly had hardly passed beyond a loose division into left and right. As the work proceeded, the men of various temperaments were attracted about their respective centers of affinity, a process which very soon made itself apparent among the Jacobins. That discontent existed in the right wing of the club as early as January, 1790, is to be inferred from the negotiations of Malouet with Liancourt-Larochfoucauld, Lafayette, and others for the formation of a more moderate society, the "Impartials."<sup>4</sup> Malouet did not succeed, but some of the men he sought to detach from the Jacobins soon discovered their tendency in entering the "Club of '89." Throughout the whole duration of the assembly there was a constant loss of members from the right of the club and a corresponding gain on the left, a tendency which largely explains its passage from a moderate to a radical organization.

This process was, from its positive side, largely the result of necessity. Calumniated by its enemies, the society was forced to take the public to some extent into its confidence. As it was the

<sup>1</sup> See the constitution of the club, Aulard, I, xxviii-xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires, passim.*

<sup>3</sup> This was the usual practice of the pamphleteers. See pamphlets published by Aulard in volumes one and two.

<sup>4</sup> For these negotiations see *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, No. 8, 1790, *Journal des impartiaux*, No. 1, and *Mémoires* of Malouet, I, 374-81.

intention of the deputies to prepare themselves for the discussions in the National Assembly they could not well admit friends and enemies alike, even as mere spectators. So, to allay the suspicions of the people of Paris, they received into membership an ever-increasing number of citizens who by their character and reputation would discredit all evil reports.<sup>1</sup> But this policy, very fatal to the society in the end, contributed in March, 1790, to bring about the revolt of some one hundred and twenty deputies who were offended at the influence non-deputies were thus enabled to exercise upon the decisions of the National Assembly. These secessionists established themselves in a rival club at the house of the Comte de Crillon, holding its meetings upon the same days and hours as those of the Jacobins, and admitting all members of the latter society who were at the same time deputies to the National Assembly. This greatly alarmed the Jacobins, who began at once to make overtures of peace. On March 15, 1790, Charles Lameth, then president of the society, followed by a large number of members, appeared at the Crillon assembly and besought its members earnestly to return in the interest of unity among the patriots. They promised that thereafter two or three sessions a week should be held from which non-deputies would be excluded. What agreement was finally reached—certainly not the one here proposed—we do not know, but the efforts of the Jacobins were successful in bringing the schism to an end.<sup>2</sup>

But the presence of non-deputies was not the only cause that had driven some of the members of the National Assembly from the society. The Lameths and their friends had already begun to exercise more influence than some were able to endure. So severe was the personal strife, that Charles Lameth declared the Comte de Crillon and Laroche-foucauld to be "vile courtisans."<sup>3</sup> It was supposed, too, by some that the society was directed by a secret committee composed of Barnave, the Lameths, D'Aiguillon, Dupont, Labord, and Baron Menou, who assembled at a place in the Rue Saint-Nicaise or Basse-du-Rempart. This con-

<sup>1</sup>Dubois-Crancé, *Analyse de la révolution française*, p. 51, cited by Aulard, I, xix.

<sup>2</sup>Duquesnoy, *Journal*, I, bulletin of March 16, 1790.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

jecture, entered by Duquesnoy under date of March 16, 1790, is frequently repeated by the enemies of the Jacobins as a fact, but our trustworthy sources give no evidence of the existence of a formally organized committee of this nature.<sup>1</sup>

Hardly had the Crillon difficulty been disposed of before the long debate in the National Assembly upon the judicial system began, creating a new division in the popular party. Adrien Duport, rejecting the report of the committee on the constitution, toward the close of March, read a plan of his own which the society officially approved by printing it. On March 30, it was attacked in the society itself, after Loyseau had on the 24th read a long and favorable commentary on it.<sup>2</sup> The point of greatest difficulty was whether or not juries should be introduced in civil cases as Duport had proposed. Barnave, the Lameths, and Robespierre warily seconded Duport against the advocates and procurers who almost to a unit opposed it. In spite of the violence of Charles Lameth, who declared that he would oppose the aristocracy of the advocates as he had opposed the other aristocrats, and the talk of despotism and counter-revolution, the party of Duport was defeated.<sup>3</sup> But the debate had beyond question driven a number of deputies from the club.

It was at this time that the "Triumvirate," composed of Barnave, Alexander Lameth, and Adrien Duport, established their supremacy in the society. The formation of the "Club of '89" about this time contributed to this result by removing a large number of deputies who would have opposed them had they remained. Their power in the club and in the assembly was attested by the fury with which their enemies attacked them. From May or June, 1790, to March, 1791, innumerable pamphlets and articles in the newspapers were directed against them

<sup>1</sup> Duquesnoy, *Journal*, I, bulletin for March 16, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Aulard, I, 42-58, speech of Loyseau.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion on the jury system is somewhat fully reported in the *Correspondance de MM. les députés des communes de la province d'Anjou*, IV, Nos. 22 and 23. Ferrières says that the *avocats* were a disturbing element among the "revolutionists" at this time. Robespierre claims that the *avocats* acted as a unit against the jury in criminal cases. *Mémoires authentiques de M. de Robespierre*, Paris, 1830, II, 66. See also *Chronique de Paris*, No. 98, 1790.

with no apparent effect other than to increase their popularity.<sup>1</sup> Duport, former member of the *Chambre des Enquêtes* of the Parliament of Paris, came to the National Assembly with his reputation as an opponent of the government already made.<sup>2</sup> Possessed of considerable organizing talent, he supplemented the work of the intriguer Lameth and the oratorical powers of the proud but incisive advocate of Grenoble, Barnave, who, although very soon remarked, made his reputation upon the committee on colonies and in his famous debate with Mirabeau.

As another group in the society, the friends of the Duc d'Orleans are sometimes cited. Not infrequently the enemies of the club charged it with being in the pay of this notorious character or with working in his interests.<sup>3</sup> As the duke was a popular character, it is certain that many members of the club were favorably disposed toward him, but nothing worthy the name of evidence has been found showing that the club, during this early period of its existence, ever contemplated putting him forward as against the ruling branch of the family. His son was a popular member of the society,<sup>4</sup> and Desmoulins early in 1790, speaking of the imminent return of the Duc d'Orleans from England, addressed him in one of the numbers of his "Révolutions de France et de Brabant," in his half-bantering tone, urging him to go to the Jacobins where he would be gladly received.<sup>5</sup> Laclos, the editor of the Jacobin journal of correspondence, was held to be an agent of the duke secretly working for his interests at the

<sup>1</sup> *Chronique de Paris*, No. 174. Pamphlets published by Aulard, in volumes one and two.

<sup>2</sup> He was one of the principal opponents of the government during the parliamentary revolution of 1787-1789, and gave his name to a revolutionary club of this period, the *Comité Duport*.

<sup>3</sup> Pamphlet, *Le carnaval Jacobite*, Aulard, II, 154-65; *Les chefs des Jacobites*, I, 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> Aulard, I, 325.

<sup>5</sup> No. 8. "Dans un moment où Malouet et les ministres veulent mener le roi aux Augustins, c'est pour nous une affaire capitale d'entraîner son frère aux Jacobins. En conséquence, le procureur général de la lanterne ne se souvient plus que de ces paroles du prophète: *Quand vous seriez rouges comme l'écarlate, et us vos péchés seront lavés, et vous serez blancs comme neige si vous venez aux Jacobins.* Mais il faut renvoyer madame Balbi d'où elle est venue. Alors *nosster eris*, et nous vous ferons président des Jacobins: honneur qui vaut bien celui d'être frère du roi."

club.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Mirabeau, who was probably in position to know, declared in his seventh note to the king that the Duc d' Orleans had never been anything to the Jacobins.<sup>2</sup>

Although the society was, almost from the moment of its birth, accused of violence and agitation for selfish motives,<sup>3</sup> it was not until November, 1790, that such charges could be made with entire justice. Until that time the reports of the meetings of the society indicate that the discussions were orderly in outward form and sane in content. Formal papers, dissertations by scholars or educated men, predominated during the first period of its existence. Questions confronting the National Assembly were discussed in an exhaustive way, by considering them in their fundamental elements. This mode of debate, which, it must be understood, was never the exclusive practice, gave place gradually to more impromptu efforts by less intelligent disputants.<sup>4</sup> The society naturally became more irresponsible as the more moderate deputies and scholars withdrew, a process which has been described above.

Alexander Lameth, no doubt with a desire of shielding himself and his friends, ascribes the violence of the Jacobins to the policy of "pessimism" adopted by the court in filling the society with hotheads for the purpose of discrediting it.<sup>5</sup> How much truth there is in this, it is difficult to determine, but it seems that the plan was at least seriously considered. It is only a part of Mirabeau's greater scheme for destroying the National Assembly by driving it to extremes.<sup>6</sup> It is certain that the Jacobins at the beginning of 1791 believed that traitors had been introduced among them so that for a long time they considered the advisa-

<sup>1</sup> Michelet claims that Laclos as editor of the *Journal des amis de la constitution* used this newspaper in the interest of the duke. I confess I can not see the slightest evidence of this, especially since Laclos did little beyond publishing extracts from the correspondence of the affiliated societies.

<sup>2</sup> Bacourt, *Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck*, II, 70. Cited in the following pages as "Bacourt."

<sup>3</sup> Aulard, I, 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> This tendency is very noticeable in the sources published by Aulard, volumes one and two.

<sup>5</sup> *Histoire de l'assemblée constituante*, I, 424-25.

<sup>6</sup> Bacourt, II, note 43.



bility of taking a vote of purification (*scrutin épuratoire*)<sup>1</sup> and that Desmoulins defended the moderation of Barnave in the address he had drawn up for the affiliated societies in March, 1791, on the grounds that its enemies were trying to destroy the society by means of its own excesses.<sup>2</sup>

But aside from these causes at work in destroying the moderation of the Jacobins, there were others more positive in their character and better established by evidence than is the assertion of Lameth. In the first place, toward the close of 1790 the atmosphere became overcharged with rumors of counter revolution which poured into the club from the affiliated societies and were spread in endless profusion by the papers of Desmoulins, Fréron, Carra, Prud'homme, and others. What more natural than that the Jacobins also should take fire? In the second place, Barnave has made an extremely important and instructive confession, one fatal to Lameth's statement, so far as its defensive character is concerned. He and his friends having for some time been occupied with committee work, Barnave found, upon his return to the general discussions, that the confidence the National Assembly had had in him and his popularity at large had been greatly weakened. To regain his lost ground he began his career of denunciation, so evident in December, 1790, and January, 1791, and which drew upon him and his friends the most venomous attacks of the pamphleteers and the opposing press.<sup>3</sup>

Until about April, 1791, Barnave and his friends succeeded in maintaining their ascendancy over the Jacobins, carrying the mass of the members with them in their fury of denunciation. Whether any members actually abandoned the society because of these excesses, as was claimed at the time, is difficult to determine, but it can not be doubted that many of its friends were disappointed and that it was ultimately injurious to the reputation of the society. Before the leaders became convinced of the pernicious influence they exercised, their enemies fell upon them with a fury even greater than their own. While some attacked

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des amis de la constitution*, III, No. 35, note p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, VI, No. 68, 166.

<sup>3</sup> See pamphlets published by Aulard in volume two.

the society as a whole, others absolved the majority of its members, while fixing the blame upon the "Triumvirate."<sup>1</sup> These latter, like Mirabeau and Montmorin, set themselves the task of destroying the power of the leaders in the club, after which the other members might perhaps be directed to better objects.<sup>2</sup> As long as this attempt was evident as the work of the reactionary party, it could not fail to have an effect exactly the contrary to the one intended, for to be the object of attack from this quarter was to be designated as a good patriot. Much more dangerous were the maneuvers led by Mirabeau, aided by Montmorin and La Marck. Duport and Alexander Lameth, in their violent attack upon Mirabeau on February 28, 1791, had intended to drive him from the club, but failed completely. A burst of applause greeted Mirabeau's reply to his opponents, and his correspondence shows that he did not consider himself defeated.<sup>3</sup> He knew that the position of the Lameths and their friends was not at all secure and that their very violence evidenced their embarrassment. But on March 2, an extremely clumsy act of Duquesnoy spoiled everything. Like Mirabeau and many others, Duquesnoy had been denounced by Lameth on the 28th of February and he had the evil inspiration of replying in a letter to the Jacobins, which seemed to them to divulge the plan they had so long suspected, namely, that an attempt was being made to divide the society. Duquesnoy openly praised the majority of the members but severely took to task the Lameths and their friends. "I will tell you, then," he wrote, "with the frankness appropriate for all, that the most dangerous enemies of liberty are those who, like M. Lameth, concealing a profound ambition under the mask of patriotism, regard the people only as a ladder upon which to mount to power. . . . The insupportable despotism of the MM. Lameths and of several of their friends has driven from

<sup>1</sup>See pamphlets published by Aulard in volume two.

<sup>2</sup>Bacourt, II, 384, note 45, December 4, 1790, and III, Mirabeau to La Marck, March 4, 1791, 78.

<sup>3</sup>See the debate on the 28th of February, 1791, in Aulard, II, 95-113.

<sup>4</sup>Bacourt, III, note 49, January 17, 1791. La Marck thought the Jacobin leaders on the verge of overthrow even in December, 1790. Letter to Mercy-Argenteau, December 30, 1790, Bacourt, II, 530.

your society some very ardent friends of liberty; the more one loves it [liberty], gentlemen, the more one hates every kind of domination; I call your own proud souls to witness. . . . Public opinion seems to-day to judge the men of whom I speak; when it shall be more strongly expressed, when those who dishonor your society shall be more universally judged, you will see all the friends of liberty reunite themselves to you, and the party spirit which now divides us and causes the misfortune of France will cede to the irresistible force of public spirit. . . . I have not in my whole life advanced a single principle, a single fact, which I ought to disavow. I place before you the most formal defiance for M. Lameth to cite a single one. I shall reply categorically to each one of them. I know my crime towards him: I have disdained to incline my head before his pride; I have loved for itself a revolution which gives me my rights and my happiness; I have refused to believe that it was the work of M. Lameth, and I have dared to say so. I know at what price I might have pleased him: I might have consented that the system of liberty should receive a few exceptions in his favor."<sup>1</sup>

When Mirabeau learned of this he was in despair. "What I foresaw," he wrote to La Marck, "has happened; the letter Duquesnoy received at the Jacobins, I absent, raised them to a diapason of fury, and furnished M. Barnave the occasion for making a long enumeration of the services the MM. Lameth have rendered to the revolution, and to declare that they will perish together. Hence an ecstatic choir of applause, hence an insolent reply, hence especially the detestable consequence of uniting the Jacobins to their leaders instead of separating the leaders from the Jacobins as my measures were doing. I am indeed very discouraged, very embarrassed, very disappointed to have put myself forward so entirely alone."<sup>2</sup>

The reply of the Jacobins to the letter of Duquesnoy, to which Mirabeau referred, was a resolution of confidence in the Lameths and their friends in which they showed at the same time that they were aware of the attempts made to disunite them. "The

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, II, 152-54.

<sup>2</sup> Bacourt, III, letter of March 4.

Society of the Friends of the Constitution," they declared, "knows all the measures which are being employed to mislead public opinion and divide good citizens. It knows the libels with which the capital and the departments are inundated, and it was not surprised to rediscover the language of them in the letter signed 'Duquesnoy.' As the only answer it declares that the declamations of the intriguers are in its eyes honorable titles for the friends of liberty; that the letter it has just heard read adds to its esteem and attachment for M. Alexander Lameth and for those who, like him, have begun the revolution and have sustained it without vacillating. It declares that all attacks upon individuals will serve only to bind closer the ties by which they are united in all parts of the kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

This was the last triumph of the "Triumvirate."

It seems that Mirabeau and Montmorin intended to ask deputies of the center, such as D'André and Beaumetz, to return to the Jacobins, presumably to aid in overturning the leaders, but the Duquesnoy incident caused them to abandon this design.<sup>2</sup> Yet neither La Marck nor Montmorin shared Mirabeau's extreme discouragement, being convinced that the rule of the Jacobin leaders was near its end.<sup>3</sup> "Moreover," wrote La Marck, "these [the Jacobin leaders] no longer sustain themselves except by the use of cordials, and such remedies have never cured those in their death agonies."<sup>4</sup>

Events soon justified this belief. Barnave and the Lameths with their friends had begun to fear the results of their own excesses and the "cordials" they had used were to prove a factor in their undoing, for the suspicions and passions they had helped to arouse overpowered them when they wished to allay them. Below them a group of radicals had formed in the society, ready to attack them at the first sign of weakness or the first opportunity that offered success. The character of the men in the society in the spring of 1791 was not that of the spring of 1790.

<sup>1</sup>Aulard, II, 153-54.

<sup>2</sup>Bacourt, III, Montmorin to Mirabeau, March 3, 1791.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Bacourt, III 79, La Marck to Mirabeau.

The deputies were now greatly in the minority and ignorance had taken the place of enlightenment. The group of men who were to attack and displace the Jacobin leaders was largely composed of republicans, Brissot, Pétion, Robespierre, Robert, and a number of others who adhered to them. Camille Desmoulins, who was a special friend of Robespierre, belonged to the same group, but for a long time defended the Lameths because of their services to the revolution.<sup>1</sup> Of these, Brissot was the most dangerous opponent. He was the founder of the *Société des amis des noirs*,<sup>2</sup> and as editor of the *Patriote française* represented it in the press. To this society belonged such men as Mirabeau, Pétion, Condorcet, Sieyès, Lafayette, Abbé Grégoire, and Larochefoucauld. It was a combination of the *Amis des noirs* with the radicals and the right of the assembly which struck the decisive blow against the Jacobin leaders, enabled to do so through the long campaign of enlightenment waged by Brissot and the *Amis des noirs*. Brissot, whose enmity dated from the decree of March 8, 1790, relative to the colonies, allowed no opportunity of annoying them to pass.<sup>3</sup>

Through the agitation of the abolitionists and the principles announced in the declaration of the rights of man, grave troubles had arisen in the colonies between the planters, their slaves, and the free mulattos not possessed of political rights. It was a subject which called for delicate treatment by the National Assembly and which furnished its enemies a good occasion for embarrassing it. A great deal of hidden maneuvering seems to have been indulged in by both parties, the *Amis des noirs* and their supporters and the colonial deputies, the deputies of commerce, aided by a strong group in the Jacobin Club.<sup>4</sup> Mosneron de l'Aunay read a paper at the society on February 26, 1790, in which he strove to answer the *Amis des noirs* upon the question of the abolition of the slave trade by admitting that it was wrong

<sup>1</sup> *Patriote française*, No. 656, May 26, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1787, a kind of French abolition society.

<sup>3</sup> *Patriote française*, Nos. 515, 543, 545, 546, 553, 566, 582, 598, 609, and many others in 1790 and 1791. All those cited are in the first three months of 1791.

<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the Jacobins, especially Barnave and the Lameths.

from the standpoint of principle, but argued that expediency was the guide for statesmen, and that expediency in this instance called loudly for a continuation of the trade; for, were it to be abolished, France, through the intrigues of England, favored by the resulting disorders, would lose her colonies. He therefore asked the society to declare, among other things, that it did not intend to extend its decrees to the colonies, in order to reassure the colonists by allowing them the initiative in legislation.<sup>1</sup> Mirabeau answered De l'Aunay the same evening, opposing the slave trade, but with what success is not known, nor do we know what action, if any, was taken by the society.<sup>2</sup>

That slavery and the slave trade were inconsistent with the principles of the National Assembly announced in the declaration of the rights of man was immediately apparent to everyone, and was freely admitted by De l'Aunay, and it was the constant fear of the colonists and of those in France directly interested in the colonies that the assembly would prove consistent. But many deputies preferred being inconsistent to being the cause of immediate disaster to France. Tallyrand, as president of the assembly, replied to a deputation which had asked for a continuation of the slave trade, slavery, and the prohibitive régime in force with regard to the colonies, that the assembly would know how to "conciliate the rules of prudence and justice with the principles of liberty."<sup>3</sup> The subject came up in the assembly on March 2 when Grégoire, one of the most ardent *Amis des noirs*, read some papers from Martinique in his capacity as member of the com-

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, I, 9-17.

<sup>2</sup> This subject had long been agitated in the press, and many pamphlets and letters had been published upon it. De l'Aunay was a "député extraordinaire du commerce de Nantes," to the National Assembly, and he and his five colleagues applied to Le Roulx, deputy of Lorient, to present them to the Jacobins in order to read their address. Lorient being greatly interested commercially, Le Roulx readily gave his aid. This attempt was made toward the close of January, but for some unexplained reason, the reading of the address was postponed after permission had been received from the club. Even here "philanthropic ideas" were advanced against the granting of permission to read the address. Letter of Le Roulx January 23, 1790. MS. *Archives de Lorient*.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de Bretagne* (of the deputies of Rennes), No. 1, February 25, 1790.

mittee on reports.<sup>1</sup> It was imperative for the opponents of the *Amis des noirs* that the subject of slavery and the slave trade should never be discussed in the assembly as an independent question, for in that case there could be but one issue, the *Amis des noirs* would have had the best of the argument, and all France would soon have learned that the assembly had either sacrificed the colonies and many home interests connected with them or that it had formally contradicted one of its own most fundamental principles. The right foresaw this dilemma and was eager to drive the assembly upon one or the other of its horns. Maury said triumphantly, "I shall force you to decree the freedom of the negroes; it is a necessary consequence of your principles. Commerce will be ruined, bankruptcy will follow, and you will all be lost."<sup>2</sup> The right of the assembly and the *Amis des noirs* thus found themselves fighting for the same object, namely, to bring about a thorough discussion of these questions. But they were in the minority and outmaneuvered at the same time. Alexander Lameth interrupted Grégoire in his reading and moved that the matter be referred to a special committee on colonies. In the debate which followed upon this motion his party was victorious. Lameth, Barnave, and a number of the colonial deputies, who of course favored the plan, were appointed on the committee.<sup>3</sup> On March 8, Barnave, as chairman of the committee, reported a plan which left the colonies under the existing régime until they themselves should undertake to change it, thus adopting the essential point in the proposition De l'Aunay had made at the Jacobins.<sup>4</sup> No sooner had he concluded than came reiterated calls of "question! question!" Mirabeau, Pétion, Grégoire, who rushed to the tribune, failed to obtain the floor; the discussion was "closed" before it had been opened, and Barnave's decree passed.<sup>5</sup> It was a typical Jacobin maneuver, later

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance des députés du département d'Angers*, IV, 225-28, also *Correspondance de Bretagne*, supplement to no. III, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Duquesnoy, *Journal*, II, bulletin of March 8, 1790.

<sup>3</sup> See *Correspondance des députés du département d'Angers*, IV, 225-28. Also *Correspondance de Bretagne*, supplement to no. III, 1790.

<sup>4</sup> Barnave's report with his introductory speech is given in the *Correspondance des députés . . . d'Anjou*, IV, 263-64.

<sup>5</sup> *Bulletin de Brest*, volume for 1790, no. 29.

credited to Barnave alone, and one which his enemies never pardoned.

Barnave says in his *Mémoires* that his decrees upon the colonies gave him his popularity as well as robbed him of it.<sup>1</sup> With the more sane men, still dominant in the Jacobin Club, and at large his practical measures may well have won him support. Certain it is that he and the Lameths from this time on gained greatly in popularity and prominence and became the recognized leaders of the Jacobins from whom the formerly influential members were beginning to withdraw. A fresh discussion of the colonial difficulties found the Jacobin "Triumvirate" approaching the crisis of their career. If at the close of 1790 they had found it necessary to inaugurate a campaign of denunciation in order to sustain themselves, how much more was this necessary now when all appeals to moderation and prudence were regarded as evidence of perfidy or reaction. It was therefore extremely unfortunate for them that, at the very moment when they were attempting to retrace their steps, they should have been confronted with the necessity of defending a colonial policy which had now become unpopular. Thanks to Brissot, to Mirabeau, to the *Amis des noirs*, the affiliated societies and France generally had been enlightened upon the maneuvers that had resulted in the decree of March 8, and upon the inconsistencies of which the assembly had been guilty in passing it.<sup>2</sup> Some of the affiliated societies protested in addresses which Brissot printed with the intention of destroying his enemies.<sup>3</sup> Then the society on March 11 adopted an address to the affiliated societies urging moderation, Brissot attacked Barnave, who had drawn up the address, ridiculing his language and condemning the advice it

<sup>1</sup> *Oeuvres de Barnave, mises en ordre et précédées d'une notice historique sur Barnave par M. Berenger de la Drome* (Paris, 1843), II, 366.

<sup>2</sup> After the decree of March 8, a part of no. CCXLVII of the *Courrier de Provence* was devoted to enlightening its readers upon this subject and the manner in which it had been disposed of. The *Amis des noirs* even addressed some of their literature to the societies affiliated to the Jacobins (*Patriote française*, nos. 607, 617).

<sup>3</sup> See *Patriote française*, nos. 598, 602, 604.



contained as dangerous to the revolution.<sup>1</sup> Gorsas seconded Brissot and asked, "When will M. Barnave have done with these attempts to carry measures by storm?" referring to the manner in which the address was carried in the society and the decree of March 8 in the assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the reassuring character of the decrees of the assembly the colonists had remained discontented, and Barnave and his supporters now urged that the declaration of non-interference be incorporated in the constitution in order that the status of the individual, the all-important question, might no longer be subject to regulation by mere legislative decree.<sup>3</sup> The debate, extremely violent, was carried on simultaneously in the National Assembly and the Jacobin Club. Brissot, aided by Pétion, on May 11 found the courage to attack Barnave in the club but sustained a defeat.<sup>4</sup> Two days later Robespierre and a certain mulatto continued the attack, this time with success.<sup>5</sup> Charles Lameth, who tried to defend his party, was driven from the tribune with shouts of hostility.<sup>6</sup> The next day they were defeated in the National Assembly also.<sup>7</sup> On May 29, the conservative committee on correspondence, of which Barnave and the two Lameths were the most prominent members, was changed.<sup>8</sup>

With the fall of the "Triumvirate," the Jacobin Club lost the only element which could still have directed it along moderate lines and preserved it from the excesses which were later to give

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, II, 189-92. Address given on pp. 185-89. Aulard does not assign any definite date to the address, but the *Feuille du jour*, no. 76, states that it was adopted on March 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Courrier de Paris*, XXII, no. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Moniteur*, VII, no. 128.

<sup>4</sup> This fact is given in the *Lendemain*, May 13, 1791, and *Feuille du jour*, May 14, 1791, both opposition papers, but there seems no good reason for rejecting the evidence in this case, especially since both journals seem never to have invented the bare facts although they frequently distorted them. It should be added that from the similarity of their accounts it is clear that these two journals used a common source in nearly everything they published relative to the Jacobin meetings.

<sup>5</sup> Aulard, II, 412-15. Accounts taken from *Journal de la révolution*, May 15, 1791, and *Le Lendemain* of the same date.

<sup>6</sup> *Le Lendemain*, May 15, 1791.

<sup>7</sup> *Point du jour*, XXII, no. 673.

<sup>8</sup> *Courrier de Paris*, by Gorsas, XXIV, no. 31.

it such an odious reputation. Although no deputies at this time formally severed their connection with the society, few continued to attend its meetings. This was the moment of the real secession of the deputies, although the formal declaration of separation was not made until the 17th of July following.<sup>1</sup> There was no change of constitution, but the society from now on no longer remained true to its original aims, namely, to sustain and popularize the work of the National Assembly.

Of the character of the debates and the composition of the society about this time several witnesses have left us contemporary or almost contemporary accounts. The deputies of Maine et Loire, writing to the Friends of the Constitution of Angers, July 20, 1791, give such a vivid picture of conditions in the society that I quote them at length. "The undersigned, deputies of Maine et Loire," they wrote, "all founders or members of the Club of the Friends of the Constitution at the Jacobins of Paris, believed that it was their duty to separate themselves from it last Saturday with almost all their colleagues; [of the National Assembly] only four or five remained. They thought that it was no longer appropriate for them to remain in an association of which they were believed to have the direction and the majority, when that same association, formerly so useful for the destruction of tyranny and the reedification of a regular government based upon reason, has come to be guided by a crowd of foreigners who have obtained admittance, who have nothing to lose, and of whom the major portion is paid by these same foreigners who desire absolutely to cause our revolution to fail like that of Brabant. From that time, this assembly presented only the image of an assembly of furies who believed they could be useful to the country only in preaching disorder and anarchy and in degrading all authority by causing the people to destroy them and who not only for six weeks or two months suffered the expression of but one opinion, reasonable or not unless it were incendiary, but even drove out with violence members who expressed an opinion contrary to the one our most cruel enemies could most desire because it evidently led us to civil war. Never-

<sup>1</sup>Aulard, III, 30.

theless, we do not pretend that the club is composed entirely of men such as we have described; indeed, a very large portion of the members not deputies to the National Assembly have withdrawn from the club, and among those who show themselves the most fanatic there are unquestionably many honest and estimable citizens who, not having studied mankind sufficiently and estimated the elements which ought to compose a government, although these elements are everywhere the same, because reason is indivisible, ought nevertheless to be differently combined according to the country, the population, the customs, language, civilization, wealth, commerce, etc., and, allowing themselves to be drawn on by a just indignation, think only of a vengeance which is without doubt very legitimate, but not thinking that long years of frightful misfortunes and the loss of liberty will be the necessary consequences of their action. These persons, misled by detestable men who profit by the inconsiderate ardor of noble and generous souls, make of them the instruments of their ambitious projects and seek by their aid to open the door to the most unbridled factions."<sup>1</sup>

One might suspect from the tone of this letter that the writers exaggerated the faults of the society in order to better justify their own action in withdrawing from it, but, unfortunately, their testimony is only too well borne out by that of the intelligent Prussian, Conrad Oelsner, who was a member of the club and reasonably free from partisanship.<sup>2</sup> Most convincing, however, is the official record of the club itself giving the outline of the debates beginning with June 1, 1791.<sup>3</sup> In reading this, one is tempted to believe the accounts of their meetings given in the

<sup>1</sup>*Journal du département de Maine et Loire*, published by the *Amis de la constitution* of Angers. Bib. Nat. Lc. 0/229.

<sup>2</sup>Luzifer oder Gereinigte Beiträge zur Geschichte der französischen Revolution. Erster Theil (1797), 160. Among other things he wrote in the spring of 1791: Es hat sich eine Menge rollelustiger Glücksritter und Ehrgeiziger angedrängt, die, um zu Kredit zu gelangen, einen schreienden Patriotismus affichirt und zu jedem ausschweifenden Projectte die Hand bietet. Tumult und Bitterkeiten ersticken die Stimme der aufgeklärten Mässigung, und haben viele scharfsehende, aber furchtsame oder zu un-rechten Zeit empfindliche Leute verscheucht, etc.

<sup>3</sup>*Journal des débats de la société des amis de la constitution, séant aux Jacobins, à Paris*. Republished by Aulard, II.

hostile journals, *Le Lendemain* and *Le Feuille du jour*, often the only record we possess before the official journal just mentioned was published.

The Jacobin leaders were driven from the club because they were no longer in sympathy with it. They had been true, in outward form at least, to the published principles of the society, whereas the radicals who had succeeded them in the favor of its members had come to regard the assembly as reactionary and not to be trusted. But it was not until the flight of the king that the society assumed an attitude that forced the deputies to withdraw from it in order not to appear in a false light. The constitution was monarchical and almost all the deputies were monarchists. The Jacobins also were avowed monarchists, although they had long ceased to show monarchical sentiments in their discussions. Many had expressed their bitterness against the ministers and all the other servants of the king, but either through policy or an irrational sentiment excused the king himself. The king was eternally the dupe of his counsellors. The flight of the king to Varennes was more, however, than most of the Jacobins were able to excuse upon this theory, and the question as to what should be done with the king was openly brought to discussion.

But the deputies who had informally withdrawn made one more effort to regain control of the society, making the flight of the king the occasion for the attempt. This attempt was foreseen by the man, perhaps, most interested, Robespierre, who successfully defeated it. The Jacobins had met at noon on the 21st of June, 1791, in extraordinary session, with all excitement studiously suppressed, as it was in the whole of Paris. For once the agitators now in possession intended to aid in preventing disturbances, and sent out some of its members to preach peace and calm in the public places.<sup>1</sup> The entrance of Robespierre, fresh from the National Assembly, changed the entire tone of the meeting, which now became intensely dramatic. Robespierre represented France as in the greatest danger, not because the king had fled to return at the head of a foreign army, but be-

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, II, 532.

cause of the friends he had left behind, many of whom it was impossible to distinguish from the patriots. "What frightens me most," he exclaimed, "is that which seems to reassure everyone else. . . . It is that this morning all our enemies speak the same language as ourselves. All are reunited, all wear the same countenance." The minority long since and the entire National Assembly with its committees had shown by its action that morning that it was in the plot with the king for the destruction of liberty. "And as if this coalition were not enough, I know that presently it will be proposed that you unite with all your most notorious enemies; in a moment, all of '89, the mayor, the general, the ministers, it is said, will arrive! How can we escape?" He concluded by saying that he knew that in the denunciations he had just made he had drawn a thousand assassins upon himself, but he would receive death almost as a blessing because it would spare him the sight of the evils he saw were inevitable. Upon this, the eight hundred or more members present arose and swore that they would sacrifice their lives in protecting him.<sup>1</sup>

As Robespierre concluded, the arrival of the deputies was announced, whereupon Danton sprang to his feet and exclaimed: "Gentlemen, if the traitors present themselves here I take the formal engagement with you to leave my head upon the scaffold or prove that theirs ought to fall at the feet of the nation they have betrayed." Seeing Lafayette among those who had entered, he violently apostrophised him, going over the entire list of grievances the radical members of the club had long held against him. "And you, M. Lafayette, who only recently responded for the person of the king with your head, do you pay your debt in appearing in this assembly? You have sworn that the king would not depart. Either you have betrayed your country or you are stupid in having answered for a person for whom you could not answer. In the more favorable case, you are declared incapable of commanding us. . . . France can be free without you. Your power weighs upon the eighty-four departments. Your reputation has passed from pole to pole. Do

<sup>1</sup> *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, no. 82. Aulard, II, 553.

you wish to be really great? Become a simple citizen again, and no longer nourish the just distrust of a large portion of the people."<sup>1</sup>

A strange spectacle followed this attack of Danton. Alexander Lameth, whose thundering anathema had on the 28th of February preceding fallen on Mirabeau and Lafayette alike, now stepped forward in the latter's defense. "I have always regarded M. Lafayette as one of the firmest supports of the constitution," he said, "and although I have often blamed his conduct and under some circumstances spoken of him perhaps with bitterness, I have told M. Danton himself that if the constitution were in danger Lafayette would die for it sword in hand. . . . It is necessary to abjure all hate, cause every division to cease, in order to disconcert all the maneuvers of the enemies of liberty and march with a sure and firm step to the completion of the constitution."<sup>2</sup>

After Lameth, the proud Lafayette, whom neither prayers nor denunciations had moved to return to the Jacobins, humiliated himself in attempting a defense before those whom he despised. He spoke but a few very unsatisfactory words. Sieyès was more successful in explaining away a certain address of his, very obnoxious to the Jacobins, and Barnave succeeded in another "Triomphe d'assaut" in causing an address to the affiliated societies, drawn up by himself, to be adopted, in which it was said that "All divisions are forgotten, all patriots are reunited. The National Assembly is our guide, the constitution our rallying cry."<sup>3</sup>

This address, the official attitude of the club only in form, must not be allowed to mislead us. The debates in the club show us that this attempted reunion was a complete failure. The deputies, if they evèr returned in any considerable number, remained silent and without influence.<sup>4</sup> Lafayette, whose answer

<sup>1</sup> *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, no. 82. Aulard, II, 553.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 536.

<sup>3</sup> Aulard, II, 538.

<sup>4</sup> See the debates during the latter part of June and the beginning of July as given in the official journal republished by Aulard, II. A few of the

to Danton was considered very unsatisfactory, refused the invitation to come to the club and make another.<sup>1</sup> The society continued its tumultuous sessions as before, inclining more and more to the view that the king had forfeited his right to the throne—that is, taking a position more and more in opposition to the National Assembly—until, on the 17th of July, 1791, the deputies who were still nominally members of it formally withdrew and formed the new society of the Feuillants.

more radical deputies had always remained with the club, and on June 29 Charles Lameth is mentioned in the debates as objecting to some remarks of Anthoine against certain persons whom he did not name, but received little applause and a great many "*murmures*" ("*murmures excessifs*").

<sup>1</sup>Aulard, II, 547.