

“FESTIVALS” OF JULY

(30 July 1831)

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The “festivals” of July are finished; the capital that presented such a terrible scene one year ago and has since been disturbed many times by the remnants of the storm or by harbingers of other revolutions, has been calm for three days. This was due neither to pain, nor to joy, nor to the enthusiasm of a holiday, but to a need for respite and harmony, a suspension of arms on a field of victory and of mourning. Since, in fact, the people of Paris had behaved bravely, whether in battle, or whether in the frenzy caused by the fall of a monarchy under its bullets, with no prompting, they remembered this year with some level of dissatisfaction. The twelve months that had elapsed since its triumph disappeared from their thoughts and they found tranquility in a throne of their own establishing. In the place of blood, flags fluttered brilliantly; in place of barricades, streets were crowded with the curious; instead of armed troops at random, eighty thousand citizens were marching, decked out and disciplined; instead of the awful sounds of civil war, one could hear the distant and regular echo of the salvos of peace. One does not witness such a great contrast without forgetting many misfortunes. Perhaps the day will come, when a memory of July will make the blood of the people of Paris boil; but one does not celebrate with a revolt against what one has created on the first anniversary of its appearance.

For all that, there was much missing in the solemnities which we just witnessed: first of all, they were empty of all religious sentiment; what do you expect people to do atop tombs if they have no hope in them and find there only some ashes and a few bones? What are flags fluttering in the wind on so meager a plot of land? What is funeral music that does not convey to souls the sound of immortality? In vain did a royal hand attach on ice-cold walls an even colder bronze; in vain did celebrated artists, under the sky of the Pantheon, call upon the vitality that posterity offers; there was no altar to protect the dead eternally from the negligence of the living. Moreover, this inattention had already appeared during the very spectacle dedicated to their memory. The artists spoke of glory, and the crowd

replied with the same cry that it welcomes in theater songs that please it. It was the voice of God sounding the folly of this display by the mouth of the same people. It is not sufficient to remove a cross from a church and to call it a Pantheon, so that it be respected. You have to convince the people that the walls are sacred because they are very tall; that a name is holy because it speaks of Gods dead for nineteen hundred years; that inscriptions are holy because they are gilded; that bones are hallowed because they have become dust; and that a ceremony is sacred because it was performed before a throne, a singer, an actress, three hundred musicians and twenty thousand men clapping their hands. Men are quite free to separate themselves from God, but then, let them no longer count on Him, and if they have any self-respect, let them be careful to assemble together only at the Stock Exchange, the theater, or the public plaza. Beyond that, they are only superbly miserable, like a buffoon who with nothingness makes a show of eternity.

Besides this primary flaw of the “festivals” of July, it was impossible for a bit of sadness not to spoil popular emotions. A year does not pass after a revolution without bringing to those who brought it about some weighty lessons even though it had been provoked by defects in the administration. It is at the time when all the secret thoughts of the party’s chief are revealed. While Providence also draws some mysterious consequences from the events that took place, the multitude remains transfixed between these two enigmas, one of the earth, the other of heaven — both of them mordant, both unforeseen. Still as poor as before, and sometimes more so, the crowd eats a bread that is always hard although soaked in a bit of blood. At one moment, fallen society offered it a glimpse of I do not know what kind of new and ideal order, then, like a dungeon that can be closed, like broken ice that refreezes, society took over under its inflexible laws a race whose misfortunes God alone could alleviate. Other than that the people also suffer from their misunderstood hopes, the same society that has become immobilized for the poor, threatens the rich with instability. Society punishes one because it has something necessary, the other because it has something unstable. There follow the disappointed theories, the great men who have fallen, the princes of popularity dragged to the *scalae gemoniae*,¹ freedom abandoned by its favorites, despotism flowing from all the pores, and a kind of despair that overtakes generous souls when they see so little fidelity in men and so little constancy in events. Now, all of this discourages a festival, while noise and smoke do not impede hearing and sight, and thought is not extinguished because of a candle.

Thus, the three days that end tonight have displayed a character at once serene,

empty, and a bit sad, and yet this anniversary is that of a very fruitful period. If Belgium is free, if Poland at this very moment assures by a new victory its national independence, to whom is this owed? To whom do we owe the eternal honor that springs from the Catholic religion in the camps of Skrzynecki?² As for us, never will we allow the days that produced such children as the Belgian and the Polish peoples to be characterized as unfortunate. But even in our own country, have we not gained something? Is it nothing that the press was liberated from censorship? That two million national guardsmen defended the throne against anarchy, and the Charter against revolution? Let us not be ungrateful. We are often refused many things owed to us; freedom of religion has been unfairly violated; France has some very justified complaints to address to authority. But where would the recent ordinances signed by a deceived and unhappy King have taken us? Where would freedom be today? Where would even religion be? If the latter has lost its external influence, if its crosses have been broken, it has acquired a glory that it no longer knew; it survived a revolution that hated it and because of that, it obtained more influence than all the kings of Europe could have provided.

Finally, the lessons of these three days in July are a significant benefit: they revealed to the partisans of a noble family, the weakness of the administrative methods they used and the absolute impossibility of resisting the conditions of a society created by the times. What did the Bourbons lack to be able to reign in glory and in peace? They were descendants of a family that had governed the country for eight centuries, and only once fell from the throne during that length of time; that had recalled illustrious memories gathered from those of misfortune; a respite strongly desired and more freedom than the people had before its return. The Bourbons had been supported externally by the alliance of the kings of the continent, who had pledged to offer help against popular encroachments. Internally, by the love of a large portion of the nation; by the horror of the troubles that had preceded; by the increasing prosperity of industry; by three military expeditions, one of which delivered a crown to a prince of their blood, and the other two that gained for France, with no disturbance to its peace, poetic and adventuresome renown, again, by a certain gentleness of race to which one could not avoid rendering justice; and by religion whose calamities they had adopted as being among those they had suffered. Nothing seemed as solid; nor did they lack courtiers who believed that, to crown his success, the prince had only to hand over a whip as scepter to the Houses of his country, following the example of a famous king. Nonetheless, it took only three days to destroy everything; this monarchy went away like a child that a man holds by the hand. Some brave soldiers were killed for the monarchy,

some bourgeois were slaughtered in the streets. We have just celebrated the anniversary of a collapse that seemed impossible on the eve, but appeared to be but child's play on the following day.

How did this wonder come about? How did apparently very strong princes fall so quickly? Evidently they had not found the word which, in their century could give vitality and continuance to their dominion; they had made themselves shadows of the past, a past that had not been their own, but that of a soldier not long ago cast down from glory or rather from the throne — because Europe had nothing else to hold against him. Instead of going to Saint Denis to consult the damaged relics of ancient kings, their ancestors, they had preferred the traditions of a recent despotism. Instead of inscribing on their banner the names of God and of freedom, eternal names shared by the human race, as the glorious portion of the common heritage, whence arose all the durable empires, they invented a word unknown to their ancestors, formed from the remnants of all that had no more influence in the world, and they hoped that their race would not perish any more than their *legitimacy*. In fact, they had deceived themselves; we have to believe that, as of today, their most capable supporters are seeking help for their misfortune in those same ideas that the princes had misunderstood for sixteen years. That acquired knowledge is something, but to whom do we owe it? Why be ungrateful against calamity? Misfortune is not an ordinary courtier, but it would seem that it became one for the Bourbons, so well did it serve them. To repeat again, the days of July are beyond slander. Were twenty generations of ministers to block the consequences, one day they will be yearned for only by aged liberals. This is where their line ended and we buried it two days ago at the Pantheon.

A new year and a new session begin at the same time. We will see what the Ministers will mean to do to answer the complaints of France should they refuse provinces their liberation, if they grant freedom of instruction to fathers of families and to charity, if they offer help to Poland, finally, if they hope that next year's anniversary of July be more precious to France than the first one. We strongly desire it, even though it is of little concern to us, considering ourselves only. Sooner or later, freedom will emerge from a France enlightened by the last revolution. The only victims will be those who take useless ceremonies as a liberal "festival" and critical revues as glory. Sooner or later, freedom will offer its festival to the world and the world will indeed remember that one.

ENDNOTES [Trans.]

1. “Steps of groaning” [Latin]: in Imperial Rome, stairway beside the court and prison building on which bodies of those executed were exposed for public contempt before being thrown into the Tiber River. While the concept dates from antiquity, the expression came into use only in the 19th century.

2. Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki (1787-1860). Polish General, in charge during the Revolution of 1830.

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