

# THE PROTEST OF MR. MONTBEL<sup>1</sup>

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When a revolution is fulfilled, it generally has abolished some of the thoughts that men imagine they need for safety. It is rare for those vanquished thoughts to find defenders who are strong enough believers to remain faithful to them, and daring enough to admit it. This thought originated with man; fate condemned it, *victrix diis causa placuit*,<sup>2</sup> there is no more to be said. Basically, what more can we do than to question Providence about our plans for a day, and to bow our head at the answer it gives us through events? Events are oracles from heaven, not only for the Muslim who believes in destiny, for the Christian, who sees everywhere the finger of God, but also for the entire human race, an audacious people, marching fearlessly until in its strife it meets something unnamed that wounds it, which it calls God, fate, chance: a power equally obeyed under all these multiple designations. Some men, however, resist it and do not hide the fact, either because the mediocrity of their mind makes them incapable of reading the warnings from Heaven in the most obvious events, courtesans unchanging in what they once believed, and addressing to their idea the words that used to be said of the condemned Balthazar: *Rex in æternum vive*, “Live forever, o King”; because an intractable pride renders them, like Ajax or Cato, stronger than destiny; or because they mistook a human thought for divine and that, relying on faith, they set in opposition to events the incredible patience of the Christian, *patiens quia æternus*.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. de Montbel, former minister of Charles X, is one of those men who did not recoil before our last revolution. He remained faithful to the coup d'état. Summoned to appear in France before a court of his peers, far from defending himself, he took pride in his actions following which the throne of his masters crumbled. He believed that his actions were justified, necessary, and bewailed only that *the absences of preparations required for such a situation led to a battle that would end in results so deadly*. Mr. de Montbel is an

honest man, a Christian; if, after so many misfortunes, he never entertained any doubt about the legitimacy of the royal attempts in which he participated, it is because he never believed that he was serving a human thought, but that he was subscribing, after God, to the welfare of the monarchy. In this, we believe him, we have to believe him lest we accuse of blindness and pride a man, who, along with others, dreamed of one social system or another, would not have been alerted by the suddenness of the catastrophes that perhaps he had been mistaken. Perhaps! Is it asking too much in these profound matters when it is a question not only of the monarchy, but of the general nature of the world, of the fate of the human mind, of religion? Perhaps! Is it asking too much, given so many accumulated ruins? Is there not, in all that we see, a mystery that demands of men, unable to provide us with security, that they entertain a modest doubt, a weaker confidence in what they had attempted? Exile protects Mr. de Montbel, and we respect his character. But, in the end, what did our former ministers do to assure themselves that they were not mistaken in a fundamentally religious matter: the issue of the press? Who told them whether this method of transmitting lies and truth was a social means by its nature, divine in its origin, destined to bring about an age as yet unknown, or whether it was an invention of backwardness whose deterrence could belong to a fallible authority? Who taught them that a few men had the right to set themselves as supreme judges of the true and of the false, to the detriment, first of all, of the Church, and to the shame of humanity, stopped in its tracks?

When the ancients began some great undertaking, even when it was foreign to religion, they consulted the gods. Today, our men of State, those very men who claim to be restorers of the altar, frown on consulting the living and infallible oracle that is *truth*, even when purely divine matters are concerned. In their offices, under the weight of their prejudices, they settle the interests of all men as a body; and what concerns! One day, posterity will realize that seven men with their friends had decided among themselves, with the best intentions in the world, to eliminate a certain work by which their associates communicated their ideas too rapidly — and this, by themselves, without consulting the *gods* from whom come the spoken word as well as the written word! We have no qualms in saying that these seven men, even if they had a reason for it, could not have succeeded: their work was irreverent. In a similar matter, all the earth would formerly have sent ambassadors to Delphi, so as to learn if it was a good genius or an evil one from whom the nations received the admirable power to transmit their word as quickly as light. The oracle would have answered what it willed; but even if the true God did not speak through its

mouth, at least, the honor of the human race would have been preserved, and it is even possible that man's rights might have been saved at the same time. Indeed, an idol is aware of them more than a minister.

We read with profound sorrow the *protest* of Mr. Montbel because, being the work of a conscientious individual, we found in it only the language of a minister who believed in his ideas, the firmness of a servant resolute in adversity, and nowhere the grandeur of a Christian meditating on a realm destroyed, and questioning Providence with distress. There was even an expression that provoked our tears: Mr. de Montbel, on speaking about religion, always says, as has been said for fifteen years, *morality and religion*. Sad words! What are morality and religion? Who in the world believes in them? If you are Catholic, take up his language; in your exile, do not trouble yourself to hide the religion of your fathers under disarming colors. There is no morality before religion, and there is no morality aside from religion. There is one Catholic religion, *the rest is an empty dream*. Alas! Should we speak of misfortune as is done at the lectern? Will Christians ever find their original innocence, even to lament for dismal sorrows?

Eventually, this time will fade away. We will again see Catholics at the lectern with the voice of faith; soldiers with a cross on their vesture, reciting their *Pater* and their *Ave* before dying; adventurous Christians throughout the world, seeking blows of the sword to give for liberty and for the very pious Virgin, their lady; poets, Christian artists, cathedrals that will cost more in centuries than in money; the pride of soul for which we have such great need, and many other holy matters that I hope to see and to which I will contribute to the best of my ability. At that time, we will not fear the press as much; the ministers will suspect that the safety of the world does not depend on them, and that some little prince will one day go to Rome to see what needs to be done there, remembering that Rome, mother and mistress of freedom, is also that of long-lived kingdoms as well.

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**ENDNOTES**

1. *Protestation de M. de Montbel, ex ministre du roi de France contre la procédure instruite et suivie contre lui devant les pairs, etc....* Paris, chez Dentu, rue du Colombier, n° 21.

2. The winning cause was pleasing to the gods. - [Trans.]

3. Patient because unending. [Trans.]

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