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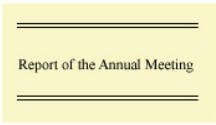

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A TEMPERATE CRUSADE: THE PHILOSOPHE CAMPAIGN FOR PROTESTANT TOLERATION

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The Edict of Nantes, granting full civil rights to the French Calvinists, was issued by Henry IV in 1598 to ensure the rallying of his former co-religionists to the *panache blanc* of the new Bourbon dynasty. With modifications by Richelieu, it remained the bill of rights of the Calvinists for more than three quarters of a century.

Louis XIV had two purposes in mind when he came to his fateful decision to revoke the Edict of Nantes on October 15, 1685. His primary aim was to eliminate the Calvinist church as a possible focal point of opposition to royal authority. A secondary consideration was Louis' desire, encouraged by zealous Jesuit counsellors, to effect the conversion of his Calvinist subjects. The Jesuits had persuaded the king that all but a tiny minority of the heretics had already been won to the Roman communion, partly as a result of a government-sponsored *caisse des conversions*. Thus the generous protection extended the Calvinists by Henry IV was no longer necessary. Its annulment would expedite the rapid conversion of France's few remaining dissenters.

The coupling of political and spiritual purpose in the royal decision of 1685 left the Calvinists with an ambiguous status. Their pastors were ordered to quit the kingdom, making public workship and the administration of the sacraments illegal and so destroying the national organization of the Calvinist church as a possible centre of resistance to the monarchy. On the other hand, to further the king's second aim, the laity, the intended object of an intensive campaign of proselytizing, were forbidden to follow their pastors into exile. Specific provision was made in the edict of 1685 for the marriage and burial of the adult non-Catholic population. However, to help ensure the long-term conversion of all the king's Calvinist subjects, children of non-Catholic parents were henceforth to be baptized in the Catholic rite.

Gradually this slim margin of civil rights left the Calvinists in 1685 narrowed. In 1697 the presence of a Catholic priest was made the prerequisite of legal marriage. Calvinists were now obliged to choose between hypocritical acceptance of a Catholic sacrament their conscience told them they must abhor or marital life on the margin of respectability in the grim knowledge that their children designated illegitimate by the courts might not legally inherit. In 1715 a government *ordonnance* proclaimed that the campaign of proselytization having now been success-

fully concluded there were only Catholics and "New Converts" in the kingdom. Thus all Frenchmen, Catholic or not, were subject to canon as well as to civil law. This in effect deprived the Calvinists of all civil rights and left them with dramatic and terrible options : an illegal and dangerous exodus to join earlier refugee streams, a hazardous underground existence in France, or a hypocrite conformity to a state religion not their own.

For those Calvinists who chose to remain in France, the most burdensome aspects of the laws passed since 1685 were the denial of public worship and a Protestant form of marriage. In general, the Calvinists of northern France, however frustrated by these disabilities, tended to conform to the law, while their cousins in the south, in Languedoc and the Cévennes hills, resisted, at first by armed insurrection during the Camisard revolt (1702-1710) later by forming a "church of the desert" whose outdoor Sunday asemblies continued throughout the eighteenth century. The penalties for such fervour were considerable : attendance at the "church of the desert" could mean for men a life sentence as galley-slaves in the king's Mediterranean fleet, for women imprisonment in the medieval fortress of Aigues-Mortes. For the pastors, at least until after the case of François Rochette arrested in 1761 for whom Voltaire appealed in vain, the penalty was death.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century when they numbered perhaps 700,000 the plight of the Calvinists attracted scarcely any attention. This was in large measure thanks to a general ignorance of their situation. Once their condition was made known the Calvinists were an obvious object of concern in an age in which the leading intellectuals were crusading against persecution and intolerance and in which mundane society prided itself on its *sensibilité*. As the Calvinists themselves, abandoning the hotheaded counsels of their Camisard chieftains, gave convincing evidence of their patriotism during wartime crises they appeared to an increasingly enlightened age as the innocent but deserving victims of a perverse and bigoted authority.

As it developed after 1760 and until its success in 1788 the *philosophe* campaign on behalf of Protestant toleration was a sporadic series of acts of disinterested civic virtue rather than an impassioned crusade. Intimate collaboration between *philosophes* and Protestants was difficult. Skeptics or deists for the most part, the *philosophes* found among the Huguenots whose rights they championed much of that same dogmatic spirit they were at such pains to condemn in the Roman communion. Pierre Bayle, the father of French *philosophie* whose Calvinist background forced him out of France after 1685 had passed devastating judgment on his fellow-exile the Calvinist theologian Pierre Jurieu, attacking him for intellectual intransigence and narrowness of view. This mental and moral gulf separating the *philosophes* and their protégés narrowed toward the end

of the eighteenth century but did not disappear. It was clearly apparent in the cases of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau's Calvinist origins led many French Protestants to suppose that he would make himself their champion. And indeed in an open letter to Christophe de Beaumont, the archbishop of Paris, published in 1763 Rousseau urged that all religions respecting the national morality, devoted to peace and professing the basic dogmas of Christianity ought to be accorded state protection. Such a guarantee could be safely extended to include the French Calvinists who had been excited to rebellion by discontented grandees back in the seventeenth century. But "what intrigues or cabals can merchants and peasants form ? " [1] When pressed by the Calvinists to commit himself to more concrete interventions, Rousseau replied brusquely that his letter to the archbishop constituted a generous but definitive step. Smarting from the cool reception given his deistic *Emile* in Calvinist circles, Rousseau went on to remark rather gratuitously that "the Protestants, gentle perhaps when they are feeble, are very violent as soon as they become the stronger party." [2] They ought to be content with the "tacit toleration" the government already allowed them.

Like Rousseau's *Emile,* Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance* published in 1763 evoked a mixed response from Calvinist readers. The *Traité* was a propaganda piece in favour of religious freedom: "We have Jews in Bordeaux, Metz and Alsace; we have Lutherans, Molinists and Jansenists; can we not suffer and contain Calvinists on roughly the same terms under which Catholics are tolerated in London ? " [3] However, Voltaire made it abundantly clear that he opposed all religious fanatics, whether Catholic or Calvinist, and argued that in France the Huguenots should remain without public worship and without access to certain high public offices. Two Swiss Calvinists who read the manuscript made a vain appeal to Voltaire to modify its "philosophic" tone. One pastor feared lest the pious reader be confused and misled by Voltaire's mixture of good and "poisonous" reasoning. [4] With all this, the Calvinists were lucid enough to recognize the contribution of Voltaire to their increasing freedom as the century wore on. Paul Rabaut, the dean of southern pastors, observed in 1768: "If we are enjoying relative tranquillity in our part of the world, it is to that man that we should give thanks." [5]

Some of the *philosophes* such as Montesqieu threatened to widen the gulf of misunderstanding on spiritual issues by their argument that

[1] *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, citoyen de Genève, à Christophe de Beaumont, archevêque de Paris, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1763), 85.
[2] Rousseau to Pastor Petitpierre, May 26, 1764, *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme français,* III (1854), 329.
[3] VOLTAIRE, *Traité sur la tolérance, à l'occasion de la mort de Jean Calas* (n.p., 1763), 42.
[4] Pierre Encontre to Paul Rabaut, Feb. 3, 1763, Papiers Rabaut, XII, 158.
[5] Paul Rabaut to Paul Moultou, Feb. 29, 1768, *ibid.,* I, E, fol. 198.

Protestantism was by its very nature more suited to a republican than to a monarchical constitution. This argument coincided distressingly with that of many clerical pamphlets written against Protestant toleration in the late eighteenth century. How often reactionery pamphleteers were to conjure up fear and prejudice by recalling the Huguenot rebels against royal authority at La Rochelle in the 1620's ! Fortunately, it was the very vehemence of this ecclesiastical reaction to toleration which united Calvinist and *philosophe.*

Philisophe support for the Calvinists in the years 1760-1788 ranged from the penning of pamphlets putting the Lockian case for toleration to concrete interventions on behalf of *galériens,* prisoners of Aigues-Mortes, pastors and laymen arrested at "desert" assemblies, alleged parricides and a host of men and women whose social status was jeopardized by their inability to marry legally.

The case of the Languedoc hosier Jean Fabre was typical. Fabre had served on the galleys since 1756 as a voluntary substitute for his aged father who had been arrested at a "desert" assembly. When two Frankfort businessmen learned of Fabre's plight, they used the influence of their brother-in-law, a banker in the army of the Duke de Broglie, to pen a memorandum to Broglie's secretary. The missive came to the attention of Madame de Pompadour who secured Fabre's release through an appeal to the "philosophic" minister of the navy, the Duke de Choiseul, in May, 1762.

Fabre's story attracted the attention of the liberal writer Fenouillot de Falbaire who thought that it justified dramatization. The result was the play *L'Honnête Criminel, ou l'amour filial* written in the rather sentimental style of the contemporary *drame bourgeois* and climaxed by the surprise revelation scenes which delighted the public of the day. The locale of the action was Toulon, where the hero, the pastor's son André, was serving a galley sentence, his only consolation the kind words of a "philosophic" ship-captain. A change in André's fortune came when his father arrived aboard the galley determined to end his son's vicarious sacrifice : [6]

> Je viens avec transport reprendre en ces moments
> Des fers qu'il n'a pour moi portés que trop longtemps

The captain, deeply moved, pays tribute to André's sacrifice : [7]

> Ah que vos cœurs sont grands, sont au-dessus des nôtres
> Vous étiez à mes pieds, c'est à moi d'être aux vôtres !

Louis XV, through the agency of the captain, extended a protective hand over his erring but faithful subjects. Father and son, pledging their

[6] Fenouillot de FALBAIRE, *L'honnête criminel, ou l'amour filial* cited in J.-F. Marmontel, *Poétique française* (Paris, 1763), 70.

[7] *Ibid.*, 83.

eternal loyalty to king and country, were released, and the curtain fell on an idyllic scene of reconciliation.

Voltaire was delighted with the play and planned to have it produced at Ferney. Fenouillot, in true *philosophe* fashion, observed : "It is of little import to me that I have or have not written a good play, provided that, on the occasion of its production, good acts in favour of my hero are performed." [8] Good acts did in fact ensue. Fabre was encouraged by Fenouillot and others to petition the king for the full restitution of his name and property. Louis XV obliged by granting Fabre a full rehabilitation on April 24, 1768.

The liberation of Fabre was followed by similar acts of grace from Choiseul and others in the ministry open to "philosophic" argument. The freeing of the cobbler Claude Chaumont condemned for attending a "desert" rally in 1751 was the work of Voltaire, who wrote Choiseul in the hope that someone might act at court "where people do not even know that there are Huguenots on the galleys." [9] The last *galérien* was not to be freed until September, 1775, during the first liberal ministry of Louis XVI.

Even less well known than the plight of the *galériens* was the anguishing situation of the women prisoners at Aigues-Mortes. When the Languedoc commandant the "philosophic" Prince de Beauvau learned of their confinement in 1768 he appealed at once to the minister in charge of "New Convert" affairs, the Comte de St. Florentin, securing as a result the release of three of four of the most aged prisoners. His solicitude for the fourteen remaining brought him to visit the scene of their captivity. The Chevalier de Boufflers, who accompanied him, described his impressions of :[10]

> A picture at once hideous and moving. We saw a large round room without air or daylight; fourteen women languished there in misery and tears; the commandant had difficulty in restraining his emotion.... I can still see them, upon his sudden appearance, fall at once at his feet... then, emboldened by our consolations, recounting all together to us their common sorrows... The youngest of these martyrs was more than fifty years old; she had been eight when they arrested her.

Beauvau wrote to the ministry at once, asking for the immediate release of the women. By December 15, 1768, there remained only five, two of whom were shortly to die, while the others left the prison, on Beauvau's intervention, before December 28 when the tower was shut forever to its terrible purpose.

8 *Ibid.*, 10.

9 Voltaire to Necker, January 2, 1764, C. DARDIER, *Paul Rabaut. Ses lettres à divers* (Paris, 1898), I, 369, note.

10 Report of the Chevalier de Boufflers, cited in C.-A. COQUEREL, *Histoire des églises du désert* (Paris, 1841), I, 524.

Execution of their pastors and terrible sentences handed down against the laity faithful to the "desert" church had afflicted the Calvinists intermittently since 1685. In the 1760's an excitable Catholic populace (especially *le petit peuple* who resented the solid prosperity of their middle-class Huguenot neighbours) and an overzealous local bureaucracy threatened the Calvinist community of the south with a very lively new terror. On two occasions Calvinist parents were charged with resorting to murder to prevent their childrens' conversion to Catholicism. So what had seemed the dawn of a new age of tolerance was suddenly darkened.

The first of these dramas began on October 13, 1761, when Marc-Antoine, son of the well-to-do Toulouse merchant Jean Calas was found dead of apparent strangulation in his home. Rumour among the neighbours immediately had it that, to forestall his intended conversion to Catholicism, Marc-Antoine had been murdered by his father with the complicity of his mother, a brother, and, to climax the atrocity, a young Catholic visitor to the family. The officer of justice on the spot drew up an immediate indictment and ordered the imprisonment of the family pending trial.

The Toulouse parlement came to its terrible decision on March 9, 1762 : Jean Calas, guilty of murder, was to be broken on the wheel. Voltaire, informed of the judgment, cried out against the "murder of Calas, committed in Toulouse with the sword of justice", [11] adding "I am interested in the case as a man, even, a little, as a *philosophe*." [12]

Encouraged in his desire to intervene by a committee of Geneva Calvinists, Voltaire felt from the start that the fight to redeem Calas' name depended on an appeal to the enlightened members of the ministry at Versailles and on the "public voice (by which I mean the voice of all honest men who reflect and, in time, carry an infallible judgment)." [13] The full story of the *affaire Calas* was incorporated in the *Traité sur la tolérance* which Voltaire was currently writing and circulated among liberals at court as soon as it was completed in May, 1762. Persuading eminent lawyers to join him, Voltaire organized an appeal to the ministry at Versailles for a revision. The ministry reached its verdict on March 9, 1765: the memory of Jean Calas was cleansed of the dread stain of parricide, and his widow, son and Catholic neighbour discharged of all guilt. Voltaire jubilantly acclaimed the revision as "the greatest fifth act in any theatre." [14]

11 Voltaire, *Traité sur la tolérance*, 1.

12 Voltaire to Pyot de LaMarche, March 25, 1762, *Œuvres* (Paris, 1879), XLII, 71.

13 Voltaire, *La méprise d'Arras*, 1771, *ibid.*, XXVIII, 425-6.

14 Voltaire to De Cideville, March 20, 1765, *op. cit.*, XLIII, 497.

Paralleling the *affaire Calas* was the case of Pierre-Paul Sirven of Mazamet, whose daughter Elizabeth, a convert to Catholicism, had been found drowned in a well-pit on January 4, 1762. Influenced by rumours spread by local Catholic zealots that Elizabeth was, like the young Calas, the victim of parents outraged by her conversion, and persuaded by a preliminary medical report that her body had been tossed into the well probably after death through strangulation, the local judge concluded that death was the result of murder. In anticipation of the verdict which condemned him and his wife to death, Sirven took his family to Switzerland where they received moral comfort and financial aid from Voltaire.

A direct petition to the ministry at Versailles proving ineffectual, Voltaire urged upon his protégé Sirven the only course left open : an appeal to the original court at Mazamet. Feeling that Sirven's presence would be invaluable in gaining a revision, Voltaire wrote to his friend the liberal historian the Abbé Audra of Toulouse asking him to guarantee Sirven protection should he undertake the trip. The Mazamet court proved unavailing. Sirven, undaunted, now turned to the Toulouse parlement seeking full rehabilitation plus damages. The parlement handed down its verdict in June, 1771 — rehabilitation for Sirven and his wife, since deceased, and restitution of their goods and properties.

When the Sirven family fêted this triumph over dinner with their liberator Voltaire at Ferney, a special sauce was given their banquet with the news that the Toulouse parlement had ordered Sirven's judges to pay the expenses of the original trial. Voltaire, justifiably rejoicing in this *amende honorable* secured after such long and patient effort flattered himself that the settling of some one hundred Calvinist families on his estates might help to guarantee against the recurrence of such *affaires.* [15]

The reversal of judgment in the Calas and Sirven cases ended a grim stanza in the Calvinist *plainte* on a relatively serene note. The accession of Louis XVI to the throne in May, 1774 was hailed by the Calvinists and their *philosophe* protectors as the dawn of a real age of enlightenment. Voltaire encouraged his Calvinist friends to believe that "at the first opportunity there will be a regulation concerning marriages which will assure the status of children and the tranquillity of families." [16]

Real hope for change lay primarily in the personalities of the new king's first ministry. The Calvinists urged Voltaire to use his influence with the most liberal of these. [17] One concrete result was the decision of the ministry not to renew a customary ban on the free disposal of their goods and properties by Calvinists. This met with a delighted response. [18] Later in the reign, in 1779, the *philosophe*-adventurer Pierre Caron de

15 Voltaire to Paul Ribotte, October 25, 1771, *Bulletin*, IV (1855), 248.
16 Voltaire to Gal-Pomaret, Sept. 24, 1774, Arch. Cons. Nîmes, LG, fol. 20.
17 Abbé de Véri, *Journal*, I, 253.
18 Rabaut to Etienne Chiron, Apr. 5, 1775, Dardier, *Lettres à divers*, II, 184.

Beaumarchais, asked by the ministry to draw up a report on the worsening economic situation, proposed that the Calvinists be admitted to the chambers of commerce of the principle French cities. [19] The proposal was shelved, although it made eminently good sense in cities such as Bordeaux where Protestant interest in ship-building concerns was considerable.

The most active on behalf of toleration in the ministry was the new controller-general of finance, Jacques Turgot. Some years before, as a young seminary student, Turgot had defended toleration and attacked the revocation : [20]

> We have tolerant hearts; habit has made our minds fanatical. This way of thinking, which is too common in France, is perhaps the effect of the praise lavished upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Religion has been dishonoured in order to flatter Louis XIV.

When a severe shortage of grain threatened to develop into a crisis of national proportions in the spring of 1775, provoking riots in many parts of France, Turgot made bold to address letters asking the aid of the episcopate in calming an excited population to the pastors of Languedoc as well. This constituted the first direct official contact between the administration and the Calvinist community since 1685 and amounted to a kind of *de facto* recognition. Although Languedoc remained calm during the crisis, the pastors resolved to preach a sermon on the obedience due the civil authority. In a letter to Turgot they remarked that the limitless submission of the Calvinists would be ample guarantee against local brigandage. They would wait patiently for the king's grace in granting them toleration. [21]

As the day of Louis XVI's coronation drew near, Turgot, backed by two ministers of state, Lamoignon de Malesherbes and a rather reluctant Comte de Maurepas, ventured to propose to his sovereign a change in the coronation oath. Might not the king replace the current vow to extirpate heresy with an older formula which Louis XIV himself had employed and which pledged that "all the churches of my kingdom should depend on my protection and justice ? [22] In the end Maurepas' jealousy of the growing influence of Turgot at court and the strenuous protests of the clergy persuaded the king not to accept the proposed modification. But the king's reply to Turgot praised the minister for acting as an *honnête homme* and for using forthright language. [23]

19 P. Caron de Beaumarchais, *Observation d'un citoyen*, *Œuvres* (Paris, 1809), IV, 481.

20 Turgot, *Deuxième lettre à un grand vicaire*, 1754. *Œuvres* (Paris, 1913-23), I, 425.

21 Gal-Pomaret, *Discours qui a été adressé par le pasteur protestant de Ganges*, juin, 1775, Papiers Gébelin, VI, fol. 83.

22 Turgot, *Formules de serment à substituer aux formules en usage*, *Œuvres* (Paris, 1809-11), VII, 314.

23 Louis XVI to Turgot, June 10, 1775, Turgot, *Œuvres*, IV, 554.

Encouraged by the polite tenor of this response, Turgot returned to the assault with a second *mémoire,* this time urging a frank policy of religious toleration. [24] The king again demurred.

Turgot now went before the ministry with a proposal to bring back to France by a generous award of toleration the descendants of those who had fled since 1685. Such toleration, as the "philosophic" Frederick of Prussia was currently proving, would pay off in economic terms. The liberal Abbé de Véri joined Turgot in speculating about "the considerable capital which French refugees abroad would bring the state." [25] A few years later, in 1782, the "philosophic" historian Abbé Raynal, with the same object in mind, contemplated writing a monumental history of the revocation, and went so far as to gather statistics from descendants of the refugees living abroad. [26] Lack of enthusiasm for his undertaking among the Calvinists and the difficulty of finding a publisher decided the well-intentioned abbé to abandon the project. Turgot concluded his brief with the argument that the entry of the refugees' descendants would help check the inroads made by irreligion. [27] Despite these arguments, the ministry did not act.

Turgot's liberal colleague Lamoignon de Malesherbes lent a friendly ear meanwhile to the briefs submitted him by a representative of the moderate northern Calvinists, Louis Dutens, asking for a civil form of marriage. Malesherbes sounded out the ministry as to the possibility of having the priest officiate at Calvinist weddings purely as a civil officer. The suggestion was turned down by the ministry; but Malesherbes, acting on his own, wrote a letter to all intendants and bishops on May 11, 1776 denouncing the zeal of priests who registered children as "naturels" in the parish book. The priest should in future enter the child's name and status in strict accord with the statements made by his parents. Although Malesherbes' directive became formal law only in 1782, it constitued a great moral gain. Calvinist children now enjoyed a secure status.

The fall of the ministry which had included Turgot and Malesherbes in May, 1776 dashed rather abruptly newly aroused hopes for full toleration. Voltaire warned concerning reform that "all that has been put very much aside and one must wait." [28] The appointment of the Swiss Calvinist Jacques Necker to high office in June, 1777 did little in the end to revive these hopes. Necker had resisted efforts by the Archbishop of Paris to convert him : but in the face of the continuing hostility

[24] TURGOT, *Projet de mémoire au roi, ibid.,* 558-567.

[25] Abbé de VÉRI, *Journal, ed. Jehan de Witte* (Paris, 1928), I, 383.

[26] Abbé RAYNAL, *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes* (Geneva, 1780), I, viii.

[27] TURGOT, *Discours sur le rappel des Protestants prononcé en Conseil de France en 1775, Bulletin,* XXXVI (1887), 379-84.

[28] Voltaire to Gal-Pomaret, April 18, 1776, *Bulletin,* VIII (1869), 486.

of the clergy to his appointment he did his utmost to placate conservative opinion. [29]

It was again from the *philosophe* camp that the Calvinists were to receive bolder support. The Marquis de Condorcet now entered the combat with a work "composed under the auspices of the parlement and distributed by enthusiasts who hope thus to enlighten the government." [30] Emphasizing that "we do not ask that the Protestants may have public worship; we ask merely that they may have children," [31] Condorcet urged that universities and public positions be opened to Protestants as well. He concluded with the warning that should the Calvinists not soon obtain relief, America, that "vast land... where freedom of conscience and political liberty reign, where all men are equal," [32] might lure them into exile.

A welcome fillip was given the campaign for toleration when the young Marquis de Lafayette, fresh from exploits in the name of liberty in America, leagued himself with Malesherbes, now a private citizen, in March, 1785 to work on the campaign for toleration. Having received encouragement from Malesherbes, Lafayette made a tour of the Calvinist citadels in the south, meeting many of the "desert" pastors. Meanwhile, Malesherbes wrote a *mémoire* in the spring of 1785 in which he submitted that the best solution to the Calvinist question was to repeal all the laws on the statute-books concerning so-called "New Converts" and revive those parts of the original 1685 edict designed to secure the Calvinists in their civil status.[33] An unsigned memorandum, possibly also written by Malesherbes, containing this same suggestion, was then circulated among members of the Paris parlement known to be sympathetic to the cause of toleration.[34]

In December, 1785, with the blessing of Lafayette and Malesherbes, the son of the dean of southern Calvinist pastors, Rabaut-Saint-Etienne, came to Paris with the intention of acting as liaison between the Protestants and their defenders.[35] Rabaut-Saint-Etienne was, like his father, a pastor, but unlike the elder Rabaut, a half-convert to *philosophie*. He came to respect and admire Malesherbes deeply : "He is a clever man who deflects the prejudices which he cannot destroy; a lawmaker who speaks in the phlegmatic and impassive tone of the law where a flood of rhetoric

29 Baronne de STAEL, *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française* (Paris, 1818), I, 82.

30 Bachaumont, Louis, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la républiblique des lettres en France* (London, 1777-89). XII, 235.

32 CONDORCET, *Réflexions d'un citoyen catholique sur les lois de France relatives aux Protestants* (n.p. 1778), p. 187.

33 C.-G. de LAMOIGNON de MALESHERBES, *Mémoire sur le mariage des Protestants, en 1785* (n.p., 1787).

34 ANON, «*Projet d'édit concernant les Protestants*». *n.d.* (May, 1785) A.N. 01 605, fol. 18.

35 Lafayette, *Mémoires*, II, 182.

would destroy everything." [36] The gulf of misunderstanding which in an earlier generation made relations between the *philosophes* and their protégés rather strained narrowed considerably in the meeting of these two minds. An era of entente and mutual comprehension had begun and concrete toleration became a more realisable goal as a result.

By July, 1786, Malesherbes, Lafayette, Rabaut-Saint-Etienne and two new recruits to the campaign, the liberal writer Pierre-Louis de Lacretelle and a Paris *parlementaire*, M. de Bretignères were pondering the next step in the pleasant surroundings of Malesherbes' country estate. The cheery optimism of the group was more than slightly dampened when the Baron de Breteuil, whose province in the ministry included Protestant affairs, wrote urging that Rabaut-Saint-Etienne be excluded from the current talks "because the policy of the ministry willed it thus." [37]

A rather important obstacle in the path of toleration was overcome when Breteuil became himself a convert to the cause. His conversion resulted from his concern for the touching plight of the Marquis d'Anglure, daughter of a marriage betwen a rich Calvinist and a Catholic widow. The Bordeaux parlement had declared the marquise an illegitimate child in 1783 and thereby disinherited her. Her appeal against this cruel verdict reached the Conseil des Depêches in 1786. Moved by her tragic situation, Breteuil gathered evidence from all over the country concerning the chaos and injustice of contemporary laws dealing with Calvinist and mixed marriages. The end result of Breteuil's investigation was the production of a brief in which, echoing Malesherbes, he suggested the simplest of remedies to the whole question : the reissuing of Louis XIV's 1685 legislation concerning the marriage of Calvinists : "It is in the very laws of Louis XIV... that we find the wisest means of restoring a civil status to the Protestants." [38] A prominent ecclesiastic, the Bishop of Alais, consulted by Breteuil, agreed with the wisdom of this proposal. [39]

A promising occasion to present the views which Breteuil now shared with the Malesherbes group came with the convocation of the Assembly of Notables in February, 1787, to help cope with the government's growing economic problems. Lafayette, a member of the Assembly's Second Bureau, rose before his colleagues on May 23 to move that the king be petitioned to grant civil rights to the Calvinists. [40] Malesherbes'

[36] Rabaut-Saint-Etienne, Letter-report to Bordeaux committee, February 12, 1788, Arch. Cons. Nîmes, Reg. B 33, fol. 4.

[37] *Ibid.*, fol. 5.

[38] Bishop of ALAIS, « Mémoire sur les mariages de Protestants », A.N., H 1639, manuscript note.

[39] Baron de BRETEUIL, *Mémoire ou rapport général sur la situation des Calvinistes en France*, October, 1786, incl. in C.C. de Rulhières *Eclaircissements historiques* etc., (n.p., 1788), II, 60.

[40] The account which follows of Lafayette's action in the Second Bureau is taken from L. Gottschalk, *Lafayette between the American and the French Revolution*, (Chicago, 1950).

nephew, the Bishop of Langres, seconded the motion, paying tribute to its initiator : "He [Lafayette] spoke as a *philosophe.* I will speak as a bishop; and I may say that I prefer temples to simple houses of prayer and regular pastors to itinerant preachers." [41] The following evening, the Second Bureau voted to forward the king a petition in favour of toleration by which a large body of loyal Frenchmen "could be relieved from the oppression of a proscription contrary alike to the general purpose of religion, to good order, to the increase of population, to national industry and to all principles of morality and politics." The petition elicited no response at court.

Yet again it took the injection of new energy to revitalize the campaign. The needed stimulant came this time with the publication in the early summer of 1787 of the *Consultation* in defense of the Marquise d'Anglure written by the liberal lawyer C.-J.-B. Target. This turned out to be a masterful and persuasive treatise ranging over all aspects of the Protestant question. Mixed marriages like the one at issue, Target argued, ought to be tolerated because "when it comes to separating the couple, to disturbing the public peace, to destroying social status and to throwing children into the nether world of illegitimacy, the conscience of the sovereign appears troubled." [42] The style of Target's brief was described as "less that of an advocate than of a philosophe." [43] Malesherbes urged its publication "because I foresee that it will be on the occasion of [the publication of] this brief that a motion will be made on behalf of the [Protestant] affair in general." [44] Malesherbes appealed to Target on July 25 to "work on the drawing up of the law concerning the Protestants." [45] Target in turn got in touch with Rabaut-Saint-Etienne who, frustrated at the lengthy delay in the campaign, had just published a pamphlet summing up Calvinist aspirations and arguing boldly for public worship. [46]

Events abroad now conspired to aid those fighting for toleration within France. On the pretext that his sister Princess Wilhelmina, married to Prince William V of Orange, had been insulted by the Patriot party in the United Netherlands, King Frederick William II of Prussia invaded the Netherlands in September, 1787, capture Amsterdam and overwhelmed the resistance of the Patriots, France's traditional allies. Most of the Patriot party were Calvinist. France's ambassador at The Hague, the Comte de Saint-Priest, urged his government to open its doors to these beleaguered allies and allow them freedom of conscience should they seek

41 *Ibid.*

42 G.-J.-B. TARGET, *Consultation sur l'affaire de la dame Marquise d'Anglure, etc.* (Paris, 1787), 67.

43 BACHAUMONT, *Mémoires secrets,* July 18, 1787, XXXV, 336.

44 TARGET, *Journal,* cited in *Bulletin,* XLIII, (1894), 607.

45 *Ibid.,* 605.

46 Rabaut-Saint-Etienne, *Réflexions impartiales d'un philanthrope sur la situation présente des Protestants, et sur les moyens de la changer* (n.p., 1787).

asylum in France. [47] Such a step might serve as "rather a fitting avenue of approach to the law which it is hoped will be obtained in this matter from the wisdom of the king and his council." [48]

The Target brief and the developments in the United Provinces had brought the Protestant question once more to the government's attention. Feeling that the moment was propitious, Malesherbes rejoined the ministry, this time without portfolio, in June, 1787. In hectic twice-a-week sessions, he and Rabaut-Saint-Etienne "pleaded, argued, wrote and often groaned" [49] their way through the final preparation of an edict to be placed before the Paris parlement for approval.

The ministry, in complicity with Malesherbes, now pushed its chances. Confident that the *parlementaires* would now approve the edict granting toleration, the ministry, extremely anxious to get some measure of economic relief, coupled Malesherbes' draft proposal with a second edict launching a subscription to a loan of 450,000,000 livres. Louis XVI appeared before a special royal session of his parlement on November 19, 1787 to request the registration of "a project which I resolved upon a long time ago", the provision of "natural rights and what the state of society permits" [50] to France's non-Catholics. The chancellor, Malesherbes' cousin Lamoignon, added that it was a "wise tolerance" and not a culpable indifference to all forms of worship" [51] which the government espoused. But the *parlementaires* were offended by the attempt to exploit their enthusiasm for toleration by railroading the loan subscription through their assembly at the same time, and balked. Fortunately, a more serene atmosphere prevailed when the parlement reconvened on December 7. After preliminary discussion on that date, the *parlementaires* submitted their *rémontrances* to the king on January 27, 1788. Louis XVI and Malesherbes agreed to minor modifications and the edict was registered on January 29 by a majority of 96 to 17.

The preamble of the edict sums up succintly the extent of the victory gained for Protestant civil rights while at the same time indicating those areas of toleration which would not be attained until the legislation of the revolutionary decade : [52]

> The Catholic religion... will alone enjoy in our realm the rights and honours of public worship; while our other, non-Catholic, subjects, deprived of all influence upon the order established in our states, declared in advance and forever incapable of forming a single body within our realm... will obtain from the law only what natural justice

47 Mémoire of Comte de Saint-Priest to Comte de Montmorin, Autumn 1787, A.N., H 1639, fol. 19.

48 *Ibid.*

49 Rabaut-Saint-Etienne, Letter to Bordeaux committee, *loc. cit.*, fol. 13.

50 S.-N.-H. LINGUET, *Annales politiques etc.* (London, 1777-92), XIII, 100.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Edit du roi concernant ceux qui ne font pas profession de la religion catholique, etc.* (Paris, 1788).

does not permit us to deny them, namely the authentication of their births, marriages and deaths.

The main battle for Protestant toleration had been won. For, although the edict of 1788 feel far short of granting perfect toleration, it marked an irrevocable step in that direction. Civil marriage was granted the Calvinist community. Public worship was denied in law; but in practise it was now resumed with the winking complicity of the authorities in all but a few areas. The elder Rabaut expressed a view typical of Huguenots who had graduated from the frenzy and violence of the Camisard revolt to the sober realism of the late eighteenth century when he remarked : "Now that we have a civil existence, our respectful moderation will win for us all that this first benefit leaves us without."[53] Much of the credit for educating the Calvinists in this spirit of realism and compromise must be awarded the *philosophes* who had laboured long if not always lovingly in the cause of Protestant emancipation.

[53] Rabaut to Ch. de Végobre, April 11, 1788, Dardier, *Lettres*, II, 368.