Augustin

The Younger Robespierre

Mary Young

with a Foreward by
Professor Marisa Linton, Professor Emerita in History,
Kingston University, London, England.

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Classification

Biography

Medallion of Augustin Robespierre, struck after the taking of Toulon in December 1793.

It is on a plate in the following book, and attributed as being from the author's own collection:

Buffenoir, Hippolyte: *Études sur le dix-huitième siècle. Les portraits de Robespierre. Étude iconographique et historique. Souvenirs – documents – témoignages*, Paris, 1910.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the late Deryck Dyne

with affection and gratitude.

Acknowledgements

The history of Augustin Robespierre has haunted me for many years. He was described by Phillip Gibbs in his *Men and Women of the Revolution* as 'an obscure and shadowy figure on the outskirts of the Revolution'[1], and there is no hint of how close he stood to its two greatest sons. Today scarcely anyone outside the circle of students of the French Revolution has heard his name.

When I completed this biography in the 1990s and looked back on the years of research, it seemed clear to me that those who write of the not generally famous need even more support than those who can expect a glow of recognition to salute their subject. Augustin Robespierre had increasingly dominated my thoughts and time and I am grateful for the interest, sympathy and generosity both he and I received from so many people.

Among those friends who endured my preoccupation patiently, and often gave most valuable help and advice, I must thank especially Warren Barney, Ann Carr, Guy Command, David Goodway, Margaret Hewer, Jane Lowenstein and Frances Payne.

For much hospitality and help during my travels in France, I remember gratefully André Command, Francine Fabre, Edward Hulton, Michael and Pauline Jackson and Jill Robertson.

My deepest gratitude goes to Norman Hampson for having patiently read the manuscript and for making so many invaluable comments. I would also like to thank the Abbé Berthe and M. Julipet of the Bibliothèque Municipale at Arras for help and advice in my researches there.

I must also thank Jane Thorp for sponsoring me at Cambridge University Library and Diana Bell for illuminating help in the problems of translation.

Among learned institutions I must most sincerely thank the Staff and Directors of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Archives Nationales, the Archives du Pas-de-Calais, the Archives Maritimes, and the Archives de Nice, and in England the Directors and staff of the British Library and the London Library.

My friend the poet Rogan Wolf noticed the draft of Augustin during my move to the Mary Feilding Guild in March 2009 and realised the draft's potential significance. It was then in the form of a set of floppy discs prepared by a friend of mine called Ricky Greaves. Soon afterwards, my original typescrypt came to light, which included footnotes and references which Rogan's son, Nikolas, added to the floppy disc version of the text. Rogan revealed what had become my secret about Augustin in a poem he wrote and read at an arts event he organised in Soho in December 2009. I am deeply

indebted to him for bringing Augustin out of hiding and for setting up its private publication, to Ricky and Nikolas, and to Graham Thorp who has encouraged and helped me to produce the published version of the book. This owes much also to the enthusiastic involvement in its editing by Isobel Brooks and Sarah Patey. And I must thank the poet Mevlut Ceylan as well, for arranging for this work to be printed and bound in Turkey.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge how much I owe to Marisa Linton for her generous and imaginative response, for her encouragement and for her championship of Augustin which I hope will help to lift him from his long neglect and obscurity.

Endnotes

[1] Gibbs, P., *Men and Women of the French Revolution* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1906)

Foreword

by Marisa Linton

It was in January 2011 that an email, sent by someone whose name I did not recognise, appeared in my mailbox. It sometimes happens that strangers, having found out that I am a specialist on the French Revolution, write to me out of the blue. Usually they ask me for favours: 'Can I review a book? Can I come and speak to an audience?' But this email was different. It intrigued me straight away, before I had even opened it, for the title in the subject line was: 'Augustin Robespierre'.

To many people this name would not have meant much. But it meant something to me. Other people might have thought: 'Robespierre? Wasn't that the man who led the Terror in the French Revolution? The leader of the Jacobins?' But that was Maximilien Robespierre. Augustin was his younger brother, and like many younger brothers he was always in the shadow of the elder. Yet Augustin, too, was one of the Jacobin leaders in the French Revolution, and an important figure in his own right. He stood shoulder to shoulder with his brother as the Jacobins set up a Republic, killed a king, fought off a succession of invading armies, and led France for one breathtaking, exhilarating and ultimately traumatic, shattering year. It was the year of the Jacobin Republic; the year of the Terror. It lasted from June 1793 to July 1794; and it ended abruptly in the new revolutionary month of Thermidor, Year II (July 1794), when Maximilien Robespierre was denounced in the Convention (the National Assembly) as a conspirator against the Revolution. Immediately Augustin leapt to his feet, and shouted, 'I am as guilty as my brother is; I share his virtues. I ask the decree of accusation against myself as well.' His desire was granted. He was arrested along with his brother, although Augustin had been accused of no crime. By nightfall of the following day, 10 Thermidor, both of them were dead.

In England the name, Robespierre, still evokes mingled fear and incomprehension. It conjures up popular images of wild, rampaging crowds, the tricolour flag, the Committee of Public Safety working long hours through the night to rule France at a time of war, civil war, and Terror; above all, the name invokes the image of the guillotine, its blade dripping with blood. Maximilien Robespierre himself is still the subject of intense interest. There are many biographies recounting his extraordinary life lived at the centre of revolutionary politics. Numerous historians have tried, with varying decrees of success, to explain how this mild-mannered lawyer, who was strongly opposed to the death penalty, transformed into the man whose name became synonymous with the Terror. By contrast, hardly anyone but

specialists knows about his younger brother. There are no biographies of Augustin in English; until very recently there were none in French either. People who read about the French Revolution might come across a brief reference to Augustin on 9 Thermidor, but that is all.

So who could be writing to me about him?

When I opened the email and read the contents, I was still more surprised; it unfolded the story of a person whose life has been, in its own very different way, quite as extraordinary as that of Augustin Robespierre. The email was from a man called Graham Thorp. He was writing to tell me about his friend, Mary Young. After a long and distinguished career as a psychotherapist, Mary had recently moved to a home for older people, the Mary Feilding Guild. In helping her to move, her friend, Rogan Wolf, had uncovered Mary's secret. Over long years she had written a biography of Augustin Robespierre. Rogan, Graham and others had read it; they thought it very good, but they wanted my expert opinion. I asked Graham to send it to me, which he promptly did.

The circumstances in which Mary came to write her biography of Augustin are well worth telling, not least because they show how important our passions and determination are in shaping our choices and our lives. Mary came from the kind of respectable middle-class English background that is at first sight as far removed from the world of Augustin Robespierre and the French Jacobins as it is possible to be. She was born on 12 December 1924 at Bishop Fonthill Rectory near Salisbury. Her father, formerly land-agent to Lord Londesborough in Yorkshire, had returned from the battlefields of the Somme suffering from shell-shock and unable to work. Thereafter, the family was reduced to genteel poverty. Mary never attended school: the children at the local school were considered too 'common' for her to be allowed to mix with them. She did not lack for education, but everything was done within the family circle. She was taught to read at the age of four by her grandmother. Her mother read her the whole of Dickens, including *A Tale of Two Cities*. From her father she learned about geology and astronomy. In this sheltered but perhaps rather isolated environment for a young girl, she sought amusement in reading every book she could lay her hands on. At the age of fourteen she came across Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, the book that served as the source for Dickens' dramatic portrayal of the Revolution. It was in the pages of Carlyle that she first read about the Jacobins, and heard the name Augustin Robespierre. It was here that she came across the extraordinary story of how he sacrificed his own life out of loyalty to his brother. This revelation sparked off in Mary herself a lifelong loyalty to the memory of Augustin, and a desire to 'do him justice'. She began to look out for any more

information about him. She soon discovered that very little had been written about him. Eventually she came to the conclusion that if she wanted to read his biography, she was going to have to research and write it for herself. Thus the lives of this quiet, thoughtful English girl, growing up in a rectory in Wiltshire, and the idealistic French revolutionary and proponent of terror became perpetually entwined.

As an adult she pursued many other interests. She wrote two published novels, and a biography of her great-grandfather, Richard Wilton, published by Cassell. She trained and subsequently practised over many years as a psychotherapist. She obtained a degree from the Open University, with courses in history, literature, theatre and sociology. But all this time she was also reading about Augustin and the French Revolution. She went many times to the British Museum to find out more. She taught herself French so as to be able to read the source documents. Then, in the 1980s she went four or five times to the National Archives in Paris, to read the documents relating to Augustin for herself. Much of his short career was spent as a deputy on mission, sent by the Convention to the south of France, and the Army of Italy. Finding out about this key period in his life necessitated visits to the archives of Nice and the archives of the Alpes-Maritimes. She followed in Augustin's footsteps, visiting locations in the south where he had been, including Vesoul where once Augustin used his authority to release 300 people imprisoned under the Terror. She worked on in isolation, having found no one who shared her interests. She finally completed the manuscript of her full-length biography in the 1990s. It was an extraordinary achievement. Not having formal academic credentials, and being largely self-taught, it was difficult for her to penetrate the arcane world of the professional historian, though the eminent historian, Norman Hampson, read parts of the manuscript and offered her advice and encouragement. But she was not able to find a publisher, and so she put the manuscript away. It lay hidden for many years until Rogan Wolf discovered it, and Graham Thorp wrote to me.

I read Mary's manuscript and was deeply impressed by the quality of her scholarship. She had found many new sources, particularly on the key period that Augustin spent as a deputy on mission in the south of France. She has handled those sources with scrupulous care. She demonstrates impartiality and a dispassionate search for the truth, essential attributes for the historian who seeks to understand the world of the Jacobins. Memories of the Jacobins evoke very strong feelings, especially in France. Even now most of the people who write about the Jacobins take sides in the old battles, and either write hagiographies of men depicted as almost saint-like in their devotion to the public good, or

rabid denunciations of them as terrorists and anarchists. Mary's book does neither. It seeks to explain both Augustin the man and Augustin the revolutionary politician. It seeks to 'do him justice'. Never does it attempt to whitewash away the Jacobin involvement in the Terror. She is clear-eyed in her portrayal of Augustin's weaknesses as well as his strengths. In that sense it is a very English book. It relates Augustin's life and actions in ways that would have made sense to him. Mary's understanding comes from her having been deeply immersed as a scholar in the original sources. Above all, with her vivid writing, Mary makes Augustin and his world come alive. The reader follows him through the labyrinthine political intrigues in Paris; on his journey deep into the hostile and alien world of the south with its wild and rugged landscape; with the armies at Toulon; and later with the Army of Italy in the mountainous border regions. We see all this as Augustin might have seen it.

It seemed to me extraordinary that a work of this standard had not previously found a publisher. The answer to this lies in the circumstances of Mary's life, the way in which her book came to be written and the fact that she was not part of the 'history establishment'. It seemed to me that this was an injustice both towards Augustin Robespierre and towards Mary herself that I determined to put right, if I could.

So, what does Mary's book tell us about Augustin Robespierre, and why should we read it? For too long the dominant personality of Maximilien has meant that people have overlooked the role of Augustin, as a person with ideas and reactions in his own right. Certainly, Maximilien was the brains of the family. Augustin lacked his brother's political eloquence and polemical skills in the Convention and the Jacobin Club; and without Maximilien's support it is unlikely that Augustin would have embarked on a political career. He had his flaws too, which Mary brings out clearly, giving us a rounded picture of a real human being: he had a hot temper, a taste for luxury, and a penchant for gambling and the company of beautiful women. In that sense he is very different to Maximilien and his virtuous austerity. But in studying Augustin's life there are many things that we can learn about the Jacobin leaders that we would not know from the older Robespierre alone. Maximilien remained in Paris throughout the period of Jacobin rule. Indeed there is no evidence that he went anywhere during his short life apart from Paris and the region round his native Arras. He never spoke of having witnessed any violence; nor of having been present at an execution to see for himself the consequences of the Terror. His world was a world of oratory, politics, paper and ideas. Augustin's experience of what Revolution and Terror actually meant was very different. He was physically courageous, enjoyed the

excitement of war and struggle and he was a fine administrator. These talents made him an extremely effective deputy on mission. These deputies were civilian representatives, sent out by the Convention to oversee and organise areas of unrest, to support the republican armies, and to watch over the military leaders. He was sent to the far south of France, so unlike his native north, where different views, culture and even ways of speaking prevailed. Here he had to struggle to promote Jacobin policies. At that time there was a climate of active opposition to Jacobinism in parts of the south. Politics there were volatile and dangerous: there was treachery and counter-revolution. Toulon itself was handed over by French opponents of the Jacobins to the British, and had to be retaken at considerable cost.

Augustin's experiences in the south changed him. He saw at first hand the consequences of trying to impose an ideology on a people by force. He witnessed the effect of revolutionary policies on ordinary people's lives, far removed from the closed world of Parisian politics. Above all, he saw the negative impact of terror, coercive rule and the violent repression of the Catholic Church, and how these things made people hostile to the Jacobins. He was no longer prepared to toe the line. He released prisoners, adopted more moderate policies, and wrote to his brother to open Maximilien's eyes to the damage that such terrorist acts were doing to the Jacobins' cause. His family relationship meant that he was not afraid to stand up to his older brother. Other deputies in the region who were happy to embrace terrorist tactics tried to oppose Augustin's change of heart, and even wrote themselves to Maximilien to warn him: 'Your brother is no longer the same.'

Augustin was not a theoretician like his brother; he was a much more straightforward man, but one in an extraordinary situation. His more practical outlook gives us some idea of the tensions between the theory and the practice of Jacobinism. He also shows us the possibilities for the Jacobins to show flexibility and to learn from their mistakes. Contrary to what historians have sometimes asserted, Jacobinism did not have to be an ideology inherently grounded on the use of terror. Had Thermidor gone another way and the Robespierre brothers had survived it, and had Augustin been able to persuade Maximilien of the possibility of doing things differently, the Jacobins might, just might, have turned away from terror to bring about their ideal world. But by the time Augustin returned to Paris in June 1794, the fear, mutual suspicion and bitter quarrels that were to overwhelm the Jacobin leadership were already well underway, and Augustin's efforts to avert disaster proved

futile. There remained only that last defiant act; to stand alongside his brother, as men, far more terrorist than either, pulled them down.

Another future of might-have-beens is opened up by Augustin's connection with Napoleon who, after his actions at the siege of Toulon, became a young and ambitious general of artillery with the Army of Italy. At this time Napoleon was an enthusiastic Jacobin. Augustin and Napoleon worked closely together to support the Army of Italy. They had common aims and understood one another well. Augustin was much impressed by Napoleon's talent and used his influence to promote Napoleon's career. In the last weeks of Augustin's mission these two men were planning a full scale invasion of northern Italy which, if successful, would have given the French republican armies a way through the Alps into Austria, France's chief opponent, and could have led to the capture of Vienna. Mary's book strikingly depicts this brief coming-together of two like-minded men. But fate had very different paths in store for them. Napoleon went on to military glory and political power. Augustin, within weeks of his return from the Army of Italy, was laid in his grave; his name vilified. Napoleon when he heard the news, hurried to disassociate himself from his friendship with Augustin and from his own former Jacobinism, now no longer politically expedient. Nevertheless, he spent some weeks under arrest for having been closely associated with the Robespierres.

Lastly, we return to that transcendent gesture of Augustin's – his voluntary self-sacrifice in Thermidor, and his defence of his brother as a 'virtuous man'. This gesture was an extraordinary thing. Augustin knew very well what the probable outcome would be. He had said long since that he was prepared to die for his brother and the cause of the republic of virtue. With his death he proved that the language of virtue did not consist of mere empty words. It meant a great deal to the Jacobins that they should prove their integrity, and demonstrate beyond doubt that they had acted as they had for the public good; not, as Napoleon would do, for power, wealth and glory. By dying in this way, Augustin showed that he meant it and ensured that this is how he would be remembered.

Augustin had a very brief political career, but it was at a critical and dramatic moment for revolutionary politics; a moment that marked the beginning of the modern world. And what a lot he packed into that time, and what amazing things he saw and took part in. And now, thanks to Mary Young, here is his story.

Professor Marisa Linton
Professor Emerita in History, Kingston University
Revised: August 2021

Introduction

Maximilien Robespierre, with his brother Augustin and their friends, was executed in Paris on 28th July 1794. This event brought to an end the Reign of Terror and, according to some, the French Revolution. The executions were first reported officially in England, after some days of rumour, in *The Times* of 16th August. On the 22nd, *The Times* commented on the event, 'It must give general satisfaction to find that among those massacred in Paris is that horrible cannibal Robespierre Junior, a monster, if possible, more degrading to human nature than his infamous brother.'[1]

No doubt the majority of *The Times*' readers concurred in this view. There was, however, a different reaction from Coleridge and Southey, then undergraduates at Jesus College, Cambridge. They had always supported the Revolution, even when it was shadowed by the Terror, and regarded Robespierre as a great, if misguided, patriot. On hearing the news from France, Coleridge wrote in a letter to friends, 'In ghastly horror lie the oppressors low and my heart akes though mercy struck the blow.' Southey wrote that Coleridge 'actually laid his head down on his arms and exclaimed, "I had rather have heard of the death of my own father".'

The two young men at once set about writing a verse drama in which newspaper reports, as the authors themselves admit, are somewhat crudely put into verse and yet, at the same time, are joined to an effort to question how far, in our sad human condition, violence is necessary to patriotism and change. They placed some of their doubting questions in the mouth of that 'horrible cannibal', Robespierre's brother.

In the first act, the Robespierrists are discussing ways of dealing with their enemies. Robespierre's response is almost mechanical:

'Robespierre: We'll denounce a hundred nor
Shall they behold tomorrow's sun roll westward.
Robespierre Junior: Nay – I am sick of blood; my aching heart
Reviews the long long trail of hideous horrors
That still have gloom'd the rise of the Republic.
I should have died before Toulon, when war
Became the patriot!
Robespierre: Most unworthy wish!
He, whose heart sickens at the blood of traitors,

Would be himself a traitor, were he not
A coward!. . . .
O thou art brave, my brother! and thine eye
Full firmly shines amid the groaning battle
Yet in thine heart the woman form of pity
Asserts too large a share, an ill timed guest!
There is unsoundness in the state – Tomorrow
Shall see it cleansed by wholesome massacre!

Robespierre Junior: Beware! Already do the sections murmur –
O the great glorious patriot, Robespierre –
The Tyrant guardian of the country's freedom.'[2]

In one of his last public utterances, which Coleridge had probably read, Augustin did denounce aspects of the Terror and called himself a moderate, but the psychological and political tensions between the brothers, which at this time did exist, could only have been perceived by Coleridge's imaginative insight. If we turn to the historians contemporary with his period, we shall be disappointed. Almost immediately after Thermidor, Augustin disappears from history and memory. Yet only a few months before, he had been hailed as conqueror of Toulon; he had been regarded by his enemies as the dictator of the Midi; he had, under the inspiration of an obscure officer of Corsican birth, attempted to launch a vastly ambitious, extremely perilous campaign against Austria and Italy; he had been accused of having Catholic and Royalist sympathies . . . Yet all was not silent. We possess, for what it is worth, some information supplied by Le Blond de Neuvéglise who published *La vie et les crimes de Robespierre* in 1795. He thus describes Augustin. 'He was without brains, without talent, without character and his brother knew how to appreciate him when he called him laconically "a fool". He had indeed only brutal, ferocious instinct.'[3] So the matter rested until Nodier published his *Souvenirs de la Revolution* in 1832.

Nodier's vigorous account of Augustin must be taken cautiously, since Nodier was only twelve when he heard Augustin speak to the Jacobin Club of Besançon in 1794. He filled out his narrative with legends about Augustin's mistress, Mme de La Saudraye, and he reprinted from Courtois's *Rapport du Thermidor* the letter that Augustin wrote to Maximilien from Lyon on 28th February 1794, attacking the Terror and the anti-religious programme.

Nodier's account of Augustin aroused an almost passionate response in the ex-*conventionnel* Baudot, who in his *Notes Historiques* was as dismissive of Augustin as it was possible to be:

> 'Nodier draws Augustin as a fine, caustic spirit; I believe this to be fantastic; whatever intelligence he had it was not the sort that played with words; that would have been beyond his narrow and ignorant brain. He passed in the Convention as an absolute fool and had no value but his brother's name. '

Michelet's great *Histoire de la Revolution* appeared in 1847. He was not influenced by Baudot or Nodier; he presented a new Augustin, the irresponsible playboy. This view was later adopted by J. M. Thompson in his *Robespierre*.

In 1865 Hamel produced his vast biography of Maximilien Robespierre. Here the prickly, caustic Augustin of Nodier and the village idiot of Baudot were both discarded in favour of the adoring, dedicated disciple of his brother, faithful and uncritical. It became the pro-Robespierrist view of Augustin for years and was hardly modified by Mathiez. This particular stream of adulation will not much concern us, since, in trying to give Augustin a voice in history, I do not intend to do him the disservice of an eulogy.

The 1880s brought a new approach. Aulard began publishing his *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public* and made it possible for us to see the Representatives *en mission* actually at work. Military historians, Fabry, Colin and Jung, deal sympathetically with Augustin's adventures with the Army of Italy. Michon's collected correspondence of the Robespierres appeared in 1926, containing nearly all Augustin's known letters. It might be supposed that these would have finished off Baudot's Augustin, but he reappears, alive and well, in Nabonne's *Vie Privée de Robespierre* in 1938.

Louis Jacob, writing in *Annales Historiques* in 1939 remarked that there was no biography of Augustin Robespierre: 'he remains always a follower in the wake of his brother.' The gap still remains, and this book, more than two centuries after Augustin's death, attempts to tell the story of his life.

No historian has seen it as a whole. The writers on the Army of Italy stay in the South, though Colin presents a masterly account of the difficulties that enmeshed Augustin on his final return to Paris. Events in the Haute-Saône crystallised another difficulty Augustin faced. He was sympathetic to the peasants, who were after all producing the food that kept the nation in good health. The peasants were by nature conservative and faithful to the Catholic Church, but many of the leading left-wing convention members, the Montagnards[4], had uncritically embraced the Enlightenment, which did not

include praying to the much-loved local saints or to the sound of the Angelus. Nodier does not even know what brought Augustin to the Jura in the first place. Mathiez's essay is marred by its immovable Robespierrist slant; it is not just that, as Thompson says, 'it is too favourable to Augustin', it simplifies the issues too much. Only Girardot's magnificent book L*e Département de la Haute-Saône pendant la Révolution* shows clearly how events there were involved with the whole religious policy of the government as well as the struggle with federalism.

But there remain chasms in the story. What part did Mme de La Saudraye really play in the mission to Vesoul? Did Augustin and Saliceti quarrel irrevocably at Ormea? What was actually in the letters to Augustin from Maximilien that Napoleon claimed to have seen at Nice? What were the events between Paris and Aix in the summer of 1793 that caused Augustin to shift his views so strongly? And what passed between him and Carnot on 1 Thermidor? For a really satisfactory life of Augustin, these questions would have to be answered and it is doubtful now that this can ever be done. Looking at the dispersed and inconclusive evidence, I recall Ezra Pound's lines:

'And all the rest of him a shifting change
A broken bundle of mirrors . . .'

I have tried to bring some of the fragments together.

Endnotes

[1] Anon., *The Times*, 22 August 1794

[2] Coleridge, S.T. and Southey, R., *The Fall of Robespierre: an Historic Drama* (Cambridge: W.H. Lunn and J. and J. Merrill, 1794)

[3] Le Blond de Neuvéglise, *La vie et les* crimes *de Robespierre* (Augsburg, Chez Tous les Libraires, 1795)

[4] The left wing, headed by the Parisian delegation, were known as the Montagnards, or 'mountaineers', because they occupied the highest seats in the Convention.

Chapter 1

Arras 1763–1789

Augustin was born in the rue des Jésuites, now the rue du Collège, in Arras, on 21 January 1763 at two in the afternoon[1]. The following day he was christened Augustin Bon Joseph, his first name being in compliment to his godfather, his mother's brother, Augustin Carraut. At this time his brother Maximilien was five years old and his two sisters, Charlotte and Hennette, three and two respectively. His father was a restless, impoverished lawyer; of his mother we know nothing except that Maximilien could never speak of her without tears. She died when Augustin was eighteen months old, shortly after giving birth to a child who lived only a few hours.

According to his sister Charlotte's memoirs, Augustin was still at this time with his wet nurse in the country, a widespread custom of the period. He returned to a confused, grief-stricken and angry family.

Soon afterwards, M. Robespierre left Arras and the family for a job he had obtained near Cambrai. He was, so all historians agree, overwhelmed with grief and also with debt. It seems possible that he suffered from some form of bipolar disorder which, in those days, would have been regarded simply as selfish irresponsibility. Relatives stepped in to take care of the children. The two little girls went to live with their father's sisters, pious and impoverished maiden ladies, and the boys were taken by their mother's parents to their house in the rue Ronville. M. Carraut the grandfather was a brewer – though not, unfortunately, a very wealthy one.

The splitting up of the young family must win the disapproval of modern childcare, and even hostile writers show a good deal of sympathy for Maximilien. A grandmother will hardly neglect a baby. However, she may resent the burden thrust upon her and it may be that in the new home, Augustin, or Bonbon as he was always called by his family and friends[2], received more attention than his brother.

The rue Ronville, a short walk from the modern railway station, has undergone changes since M. Carraut ran his brewery there. It is now a pedestrian shopping precinct, but the Carraut house still stands, though much altered, and you may see the *porte cochère* through which the dray horses must have trampled in and out – watched by the little boys.

Lenotre stresses that the Carraut home had nothing decorative about it, and he seems particularly troubled by the implements of brewing that must have cluttered up the place[3]. But it is not impossible that the children, particularly Augustin who was always more practical than Maximilien,

may have found these rather interesting. We can suppose that the principal room, where much time was spent by the whole family, may have resembled that depicted in Boilly's painting *La Lecture du Bulletin de la Grande Armée*; there is a bed in the corner, a square, serviceable table and rush-bottomed chairs. Although the painting is forty years on from the 1760s, it obviously represents people of much the same financial and social class as the Carrauts.

M. Robespierre came back to Arras after a time and not unexpectedly borrowed money. He then disappeared into the unknown. Once or twice more he came back and then when, Augustin was about eight, he went for good. It is said that he died in Munich in 1777[4].

Maximilien went to school at the Collège d'Arras where he worked hard and well, so well indeed that when he was eleven, he was given a scholarship to the Collège Louis le Grand in Paris. He was a serious little boy who toiled laboriously over his books.

There are no tales of patient industry to be told of Augustin. He preferred playing with his friends, who found him easier to get on with than Maximilien, but he was 'very giddy'[5]. Eventually he was sent off to school at Douai, but this did not make him more fond of his books.

His sister Charlotte tells us that he had 'more natural talent' than Maximilien, so it must have been exasperating for her and Maximilien to see him idling his time away. They lectured Augustin severely and he, overcome with remorse at making them unhappy, shut himself up to study furiously, but this would only last a very short while and off he would go to enjoy himself again[6]. It seems possible that he was not lazy but merely bored; many people never find the subject that makes learning worthwhile. If this is true of the wide modern curriculum, it would have been truer still of those days.

For some years, school terms and holidays, and relations in Arras, provided a steady if unexciting background for the orphans. Then in 1775 old Mme Carraut died, followed three years later by her husband. He left Augustin seven shirts trimmed with lace, but these were sold and Augustin does not seem to have received the money from them[7]. The brewery was inherited by their son, Augustin's godfather. He was a difficult man of uncertain temper; it is unlikely that he had much use for lazy nephews. Augustin's home life must have been exceedingly uneasy and perhaps unhappy. From this situation he was saved by Maximilien.

Maximilien concluded his studies at Louis le Grand and did so with great success; he was awarded many prizes, all gained by very hard work and application. As a favour he asked that his bursary might

descend to his brother, Augustin. His wish was granted. Gaillard, Augustin's school-friend, was surprised at this turn of events as Augustin's studies had been 'very mediocre'[8], and it may be agreed that his efforts had hardly deserved this advancement.

We know very little of Augustin's career at Louis le Grand. Few historians even refer to it. A. V. Arnault in the *Biographie nouvelle des contemporains* tells us that he, unlike his brother, did not 'wish to be first in the various classes', while Hamel, making the best of a bad job, says, 'he studied well, but not as well as his brother'[9]. This evidence makes me fear that gratitude to Maximilien did not cure him of idleness. One letter has survived from his college days, for a long time supposed to be by Maximilien and printed as such by Michon because of a mistaken date, January 1776 instead of 1786[10]. In this Augustin writes to Target, then President of the Académie Française, to ask for a copy of a paper given to the Académie on Louis XII. That Augustin should be contemplating an essay on this subject may suggest an interest in modern French history, but it is all we have to go on.

Augustin, like Maximilien, was to become a lawyer. We do not know whether, had he had money and influential friends, this would have been his choice. Charlotte tells us:

> '[I]f I am to contrast my brothers I would say that the elder had civil courage carried to a much higher degree than in the younger, and that Augustin had far more military courage than Maximilien. Augustin would have made an excellent soldier; nothing shook him; he would have been intrepid at the head of a regiment. He would have done wonders.'[11]

We must remember that this glowing account was written many years later with a great deal of hindsight, but I think we are safe in saying that Augustin was far better suited to a military than a legal life.

We may ask, while considering this passage, what Charlotte meant by the civic courage in which Augustin fell short, at least in comparison with his brother. I think she can only mean that he found the gaieties and pleasures of life far harder to withstand than Maximilien – and Charlotte was fated to have bitter experience of this.

In the spring of 1787, at the age of twenty-four, Augustin returned to Arras. Henriette had died in 1780 whilst still at school. Charlotte and Maximilien, joining forces on their tiny incomes including what Maximilien could earn, were now living in a house they had rented in the rue des Rapporteurs. Augustin, with very little to contribute to the family resources, joined them there.

The house, of red brick with white stone facings, has a gloomy look today, but it probably did not appear so to the young people, reunited at last after so many years at the mercy of their relatives, and although they were poor, they had good friends who shared their liberal and anti-clerical views.

Perhaps the closest and the kindest of these were M. and Mme Buissart, who lived in the rue du Coclipas, which sloped down to the old quay of the town. Here there still stand many ancient houses that must have been familiar to Augustin, one dating from the seventeenth century with a mermaid and a ship carved above the door. The rue du Coclipas is about ten minutes' walk from the rue des Rapporteurs and, in the early years of the Revolution, Augustin must have walked there almost every day, passing the vast expanse of the Abbey of St Vaast.

Buissart was a well-to-do lawyer, a man in his forties who had a deep admiration for Maximilien and helped forward his career as much as he could. Mme Buissart was a good-looking woman of a kind if managing nature. She tried to make the serious Maximilien a little more light-hearted; the account of his journey to Lens, one of his few essays at humour, is said to have been written for her.

Although at first the friends of Maximilien and Charlotte, the Buissarts also took to Augustin on his return from Paris, and it would seem that he became, in time, very much the favourite. They had children of whom Augustin was fond and he was often to mention 'the little *marmots'* in his letters[12].

Another great friendship that must date from this period was with his cousin by marriage, Régis Deshorties, whose father had married Augustin's aunt and godmother, Eulaie de Robespierre, as his second wife. Régis had a sister, Anais, with whom Maximilien is said to have been very much in love[13]. This came to nothing, but it did not interfere with the friendship between Augustin and Régis. From his one surviving letter to Augustin, he seems to have been a sensitive young man, with Rousseau and Fénélon among his favourite authors. He and Augustin shared jokes about the family, especially the Carrauts. They nicknamed the brewer, Augustin's uncle, 'Sheltonien' and were a bit scared of him.

But there can be no doubt that, in the two years between Augustin's return to Arras and the meeting of the States General, Maximilien was the person closest to him. 'Never,' says Hamel, 'were brothers closer in sentiment; it is rare to find such sharing of thoughts and opinions. Augustin made of Maximilien a real religion.'[14]

All historians have gone along with Hamel, and what he says cannot lightly be questioned. Augustin is therefore cast as the devoted follower whose task is not to criticise, only to accept. I think, however, that Augustin may have seen the relationship in a rather different light, perceiving himself

not so much as the disciple – though of course that element no doubt came into it – but as the protector. He was physically strong himself, quick to reach decisions and determined in holding to them, and his protectiveness was invoked by Maximilien's bodily weakness, his anxieties, even his absentmindedness. It is clear that Augustin often regarded him as someone whose purity of motive made him vulnerable to the wicked world. He may have seen it as his duty to look after Maximilien.

As to Augustin's own character and behaviour, we have Charlotte's enthusiastic comments: 'All injustice revolted him; he was kind and sensitive . . . (he) was tall and well-made with a face full of nobility and beauty.'[15]

This portrayal of him as a kind of hero of romance is almost too good to be true. Judging from his letters, he was a warm and friendly young man but, lacking Maximilien's reserve, he was frequently too outspoken and began to make enemies. As Jung says of him, 'He did not fear to speak the truth.'[16] The consequences were not always to be fortunate.

Arras itself was not a satisfactory place for ambitious young men without money and with liberal views. The town was already well supplied with lawyers; even Maximilien found it hard to get briefs and Augustin must have fared worse. They were not now practising Catholics and Arras was still a clerical stronghold. The huge Abbey of St Vaast, not five minutes' walk from the rue des Rapporteurs, dominated the town. Even now, with the monastery converted into an art gallery, the whole complex of buildings is deeply impressive.

The great eighteenth-century cloisters must been completed only a few years before the Revolution; they carry none of the religious feeling of the medieval cloisters; these are monuments to the pride and wealth of man. The poor were ignorant – knowing nothing of the outside world beyond the rumours of market day; the middle classes were restricted and narrow, especially in the older generations; the young were already kindled by hope of change. Ever since the King's quarrel with the *Parlements*, opposition had been growing in every class.

In August 1788 the King summoned the States General to confer with him on the disastrous financial state of the nation. Maximilien put himself forward as one of the candidates for the Third Estate. The election campaign lasted all the winter. Le Blond de Neuvéglise, Maximilien's first biographer, who knew Arras well, wrote:

> 'Robespierre crawled to the people who are always impressed by flattery. He had relations in the village whom he had till then disdained, but whom he now found useful. He sent his brother

> to them to assure them of his great fondness for them and to remind them of the great honour to the family, if by means of the peasant votes, he could be elected to the States General . . . Robespierre the Younger went from village to village gathering votes for his brother.'[17]

Hampson believes that Augustin's vigorous campaigning took place at a point when Maximilien was doing quite badly, running fourteenth out of the twenty-four candidates, only eight of whom could be finally elected. It can be supposed, then, that Augustin's industry had an effect.

In the final stages of the election, an anonymous pamphlet appeared – anonymous but clearly written by Maximilien. After an attack on his enemies he went on to offer a prayer – for, though no Catholic, he was a very religious man –

> 'that all citizens should be instilled with that heavenly love of humanity, that holy passion for the public good, on which depends the happiness of peoples and salvation of empires.' What citizen, if his enchanting aspirations for the relief of humanity and the triumph of the nation were disappointed, would complain of being destined to suffer with it, of being spared the misfortune of surviving its ruin? Ah, may the tears of friendship mingle on his tomb with those of the poor people he helped. May his memory be dear and precious to all men of goodwill, while his soul goes to the immortal home of order and justice, that the tyranny and injustice of men have banished from the earth.'[18]

We may smile at what seems posturing to us. Augustin, who loved his brother, was convinced by it. Without – it seems – any of Maximilien's belief in an Almighty God who will reward martyrs in heaven, (at least, his letters and speeches give no sign of it), he believed in Maximilien's goodness. Unfortunately he also believed in the wickedness of Maximilien's enemies. In the elections at Arras, however, virtue did triumph. Maximilien was elected last of the eight deputies of the Third Estate. That evening they processed through Arras.

> 'That eventide, when under windows bright
> With happy faces and with garlands hung
> And through a rainbow arch that spanned the street,
> Triumphal pomp for liberty confirmed,
> I paced, a dear companion at my side,
> The town of Arras, whence with promise high
> Issued, on delegation to sustain

Humanity and right, 'that' Robespierre . . .'[19]

So Wordsworth wrote when the dawn of joy and hope had long vanished. Shortly afterwards, Maximilien and the other deputies departed for Versailles where the States General were to meet. About this time, either just before or just after their leave-taking, Augustin and Maximilien had a quarrel.

Endnotes

[1] Barbier, V., Lettres Inédites de Augustin Robespierre à Antoine Buissart (Arras: Rohard-Courtin, 1891). The baptismal certificate is reprinted in Fleischmann, H., Robespierre et les Femmes (Paris: Albin Michel, 1909)

[2] Hamel, E., *Histoire de Robespierre*, Vol.2 (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven et Cie., 1865–1867), p.260.

[3] Lenotre, G., trans. Mrs R. Stawell, *Robespierre's Rise and Fall* (London: London, Hutchinson, 1910)

[4] Combet, J., "Les arrêtés de Robespierre Jeune dans les Alpes-Maritimes"*, Annales Révolutionnaires*, 9 (1917)

[5] Paris, A.-J., La jeunesse de Robespierre et la Convocation des États Généraux en Artois (Arras: Veuve Rousseau-Leroy, 1870). Appendix, p.4.

[6] Fleischmann, H., ed., *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1910), p.208.

[7] Lavoine, *Autour de Robespierre à Arras*. Unpublished manuscript in the Archives du Pas-de-Calais, p.20.

[8] Péronnet, M., and Gaillard L., La Révolution dans les Bouches-du-Rhône (Le Coteau : Horvath, 1988), p.261.

[9] Hamel, Histoire de Robespierre, Vol. 2, p. 260.

[10] Michon, G., ed., *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre* Vol. 1 (Paris: Alcan, 1926), p. 21. See also Vol. 2, p.173.

[11] Fleischmann, H., ed., *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires*, p.68.

[12] On Buissart see Barbier, *Lettres Inédites*, p.13.

[13] Régis's last letter to Augustin was in the latter's pocket at the time of his arrest. A.N.F 7–4433. It is reproduced with comments in "Une lettre de Régis Deshorties à Robespierre Jeune", in Mathiez, A., *Autour de Robespierre* (Paris: Payot 1926), pp.37–42.

[14] Hamel, Histoire de Robespierre , Vol. 2, p.440 et seq.

[15] Fleischmann, H., ed., *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires*, p.210.

[16] Jung, T., *Bonaparte et son Temps, 1769-1799*, Vol. 6 (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), , p.441.

[17] Le Blond de Neuvéglise, *La vie et les crimes de Robespierre* (Augsburg, Chez Tous les Libraires, 1795), p.69.

[18] Hampson N., *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre* (Oxford: Basil Balckwell,1974), p.40.

[19] Wordsworth, W., ed. John F. Danby, *The Prelude and Other Poems* (London: E. Arnold, 1963).

Chapter 2

Arras and Versailles, May 1789–June 1790

That they should quarrel so soon after the triumph of the elections is not perhaps surprising; they both must have been overstrained and at a high emotional pitch. The nature of their dispute is unknown. Possibly, in his electioneering zeal, Augustin did, or allowed others to do, something which caused criticism to be aimed at his brother. Or, after all Augustin's hard work for him in the election, had Maximilien reproached him for idleness in the common affairs of life? Had Augustin been needlessly extravagant at this time when Maximilien is recorded as being extremely badly off ? We cannot know, and that is just as well, perhaps, as neither of the participants would perhaps have wanted us to know.[1]

After a great excitement, it is difficult to resume ordinary life again. For someone of Augustin's vigorous temperament, it was particularly hard, especially as his own life contained little to challenge him and nothing to replace the relationship he had with Maximilien. He had only the final stages of the famous case of Dupond, a man imprisoned by *lettre de cachet* for twelve years by his greedy relations who wanted to keep his estates. Maximilien had written an eloquent brief and there was probably little left for Augustin to do. Arras had been severely divided over the elections; Augustin had made enemies and his chance of receiving briefs was therefore reduced.

Meanwhile, Maximilien led what his brother must have seen as a glamorous and dramatic life in the States General. His maiden speech was delivered on 16th May[2] and on 6th June, he delivered a powerful attack on the wealth of the clergy. When the King had the recalcitrant deputies locked out of their hall on a very wet day, they replied by taking an oath never to separate until France was given a constitution. Then, after the fall of the Bastille, Maximilien was among those deputies who escorted the King to Paris, surrounded all the way by rejoicing crowds.[3]

Those rejoicings spread all over France. In Arras on 20 July, a crowd of patriotic citizens arranged for the band of the regiment Vivarais, stationed in the town, to march round the streets and play before the house of each deputy. All the citizens, even priests, wore the tricolour cockade which had just come into use. At ten o'clock at night, while the merry-making was still going on, the town was swept by an alarming rumour – brigands, inspired by Royalists, were about to attack and neighbouring villages were on fire. The bells were rung and the citizens took arms.[4] The morning showed that all was rumour, yet no one could feel quite at ease. Liberty, just gained, remained fragile, the prey of traitors.

So whenever a fire broke out, it was seen as the work of conspirators. Augustin wrote to his brother the following April:

> 'We are in the midst of flames, the villages of Fampoux and Boiry-Ste-Rictrude are victims, Fampoux being burned the second time, and just as I wrote Avenue le Cérate is reduced to ashes. We haven't yet discovered the incendiaries but we are convinced that the traitors want to create armies of beggars.'[5]

Fires and beggars can hardly have been unknown before, but now they had acquired a meaning and a direction.

In September, Augustin went off to visit Maximilien at Versailles; the quarrel between them was still unresolved, but that was lost in the excitement of the journey. Augustin wrote to Buissart:

> 'I arrived in good shape, having had a great fright about a dozen leagues from Paris where I heard most alarming news – 15,000, so it was said, were marching on Versailles to force the National Assembly to surrender the decrees which would assure France liberty. My courage was shaken at this terrible news; yet I recalled the former courage of the communes and I travelled towards Paris well resolved to carry a musket in defence of the nation. The rumours proved false so I had no need to bear arms. There was, however, some truth in the matter, there being in the capital a great crowd, not tumultuous and only remarkable for its size, the shortage of bread being the whole cause of the gathering. You must understand that in Paris there are many profiteers of bread, greedy men who go to many bakers, buy as much bread as they can and then sell it very dear.'[6]

Arriving at Versailles, he went to the Assembly and heard a debate on the King's power of veto. In this first letter he did not mention Maximilien, but he reminded Mme Buissart of her promise to write often.

Five days later he wrote again. He was now helping his brother by writing accounts of the debates to send home to Maximilien's constituents in Arras; he tells more about the debates on the veto and the question of whether there should be two chambers. His anti-clericalism is fired by a debate on tithes: 'Nothing is rarer than a generous priest'. It must have been immensely exciting for him to hear Maximilien speak in the Assembly on 5 September in favour of denying the King the power of veto. And there were occasional light diversions, as when the Assembly received 'the offering of a

box of jewels'; eleven women artistes dressed in white presented their little holocaust. This offering was variably received, some seeing it as a farce, others as rational patriotism.

At the end of the letter Augustin spoke of 'a criminal affair' in which Buissart was interested. It was probably a legal matter which Augustin has promised to look into, but there is something in the playful way he wrote about it that makes me wonder if this was not a code for some secret between them:

> 'The punishment is too arbitrary to stand; we should be condemned to kiss their arses [*baiser la lune*] if these judges were able to follow their imaginations. This is between ourselves; I shouldn't make a joke like this to anyone but you, but I know your good nature too well not to allow myself this gaiety.'

Further reasons for the gaiety came out a few sentences later. 'My brother has made amends to me'. This must have been an infinite relief as well as a satisfaction to him. He mentioned also that he had not written to his *famille Robespierre* – Charlotte, who, one might imagine, would also have liked a trip to Versailles, was all by herself in Arras. Because of her lonely childhood, Charlotte fixed an obsessive devotion on Maximilien and Augustin. Maximilien having gone away, she clung more fiercely to Augustin. Clearly he had confided the problems of their relationship to the Buissarts, who, also fond of Charlotte, were sympathetic and tactful.

Augustin seems to have returned to Arras towards the end of September, just before the march of the Paris crowd brought the King and the Assembly to Paris. His next letter is dated about 4 October and it is not clear to whom it is addressed though the recipient would appear to be a member of the National Assembly. It concerns the *Congrégation des frères pénitents du tiers-ordre de St François* known commonly as Bons-Fils. If Augustin is to be believed, these people are no better than 'a congregation of scoundrels'. A Bon-Fils was being persecuted by his brethren for showing some humanity – sympathy for the Revolution I expect – and he had now revealed to the warm-hearted and, I fear, all-too-eager Augustin the ghastly crimes which went on in these 'infernal houses': 'The life of this unfortunate man is in peril because he is suspected of having revealed their monstrous mysteries.'

We are in the world of Maturin and Mrs Radcliffe. It must be confessed, however, that if Augustin was credulous, he was credulous with a large number of people, including most English Protestants. Everyone in France who considered themselves enlightened had a whole set of horror stories about the monastic life and was always adding to them. Thomas Merton, in his history of the

Carthusian movement, tells of a monk who, during the Revolution, went about spreading sensational stories on the cruelties practised by the order, all of which were readily believed by the patriots. 'All that we know of the Inquisition,' Augustin tells us, 'comes nowhere near the regime of the Bons-Fils. The Bastille was an enchanted palace compared with the prisons inhabited by their crime and villainy.'[7]

This is, of course, Augustin at his worst and silliest. We shall come across something like this again, though next time the villains will not be monks. But we must not forget that the nonsense sprang from a kind and generous heart. All his clients that we hear of were indigent and probably could not pay him a *sou*, but he remained devoted to them and went to endless trouble regarding their fate. Beside the Bons-Fils, who keep turning up in his letters, there was a soldier of the Vivarais – the same regiment which had lent their band for the Bastille rejoicing – and an escaped nun who might not get her dowry restored.[8] If he had lived today and had pursued a legal career, he would no doubt have been one of those patient and excellent solicitors at the law centres who dedicate their time to the poor, the dispossessed and the insane.

Augustin had a fresh interest in the spring of 1790: 'We have formed a Patriotic club, dear brother,' he wrote early in April, 'and have given it the sacred name of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution.' He asked Maximilien to facilitate its affiliation with the Friends of the Constitution in Paris – that club which the world knows better as the Jacobins, of which Maximilien was already a prominent member. 'We are already constituted,' Augustin told him, 'President, treasurer and secretary all are named, the rules of admission are fixed; it only remains to determine those of exclusion. The patriots are no longer isolated; it is certain we shall be stronger.'[9]

Clubs of this kind were starting up all over France; Augustin wanted affiliation with one at Béthune. It is difficult for us to imagine the isolation that the revolutionaries in country places must often have experienced; Augustin was to recall it much later in Vesoul. Soon, however, each patriot would have a centre he could reach, if only occasionally, and that centre would be linked by letters and news with Paris, the heart of the Revolution.

But almost immediately after the founding of the Club, an episode took place that absorbed Augustin's attention for the rest of the spring and perhaps was a landmark in his relations with Maximilien.

During the elections to the States General, certain property qualifications for electors had been strongly opposed by Robespierre, and owing to the imposition of various indirect taxes rather than

direct taxes, a large number of Robespierre's own constituents were disenfranchised. Naturally Robespierre bitterly opposed this, and to such an extreme extent that his enemies accused him of encouraging the people of Artois not to pay taxes.[10] He easily cleared himself of this. But Beaumetz, president of the *Conseil d'Artois*, who had never cared for Maximilien and who had been elected as a member of the *noblesse* to the States General, now twisted everything around and accused Maximilien of saying his constituents were not taxed heavily enough.

At first it seems that Augustin could not get hold of a copy of the libel. He was convinced that all such publications were printed on a secret press in the Abbey of St Vaast and then quietly distributed, but they were to be found in the country rather than the town. But the worst of it was Maximilien did not answer his letters. 'I do not doubt for an instant,' he wrote,

> 'that it is horribly exaggerated false and calumnious, but you cannot avoid answering. It will be all the worse if you keep silence . . . If they (his enemies) seize so avidly on a small slip you may have made, what will they do if you commit a serious error?'[11]

Augustin, it is easy to see, thought Maximilien was so unworldly that he could not grasp the danger he was in.

> 'I tremble, my friend, when I think of the dangers that surround you. I implore you to send us news; explain to the public the scandalous way in which you are shown as an enemy of the people; it must be that your virtue, your patriotism must triumph. But the ignorant must be convinced to make success certain. Adieu. I embrace you with tears in my eyes.'[12]

Maximilien was a politician; he was not swayed by Augustin's anxieties, not even when his brother's letters were reinforced by one from Augustin's godmother, Mme Deshorties. He was prepared to wait.[13]

Thompson believes that he held back so that his answer would coincide with the Departmental Elections in June. Beaumetz seems to have managed his campaign rather cleverly, keeping the pamphlet out of the hands of the more sophisticated town dwellers, concentrating on the peasantry. 'Our simple peasantry are frightfully credulous,' Augustin wrote, 'in vain they know all you have done for them.' It was even rumoured that Maximilien wrote against religion.[14]

The newly formed club gave every possible backing. They wrote a letter to assure Maximilien of the particular esteem of each one of the members. Augustin tactfully left the Assembly during these

proceedings so that everyone should feel free to say what they wanted, and he seized the chance to write to Maximilien on another potential danger.[15]

Maximilien had been speaking in the Assembly on the marriage of priests, and speaking in favour. 'You will lose the esteem of the peasants if you renew this motion,' Augustin wrote, 'it is well within my principles, but how few are as advanced as I! It would be a good thing, maybe, to have no more to do with this motion. I cannot believe the National Assembly would be so foolish as to adopt it.' So here we have the violent, anti-clerical Augustin drawing back from antagonising the peasants over religion. He could be a good deal more realistic than Maximilien.

It was June, and Maximilien published his answer to Beaumetz. In this he cleared himself of the accusations bought against him. Augustin was triumphant when he saw the good effects the reply had produced. Even people not directly involved were impressed, including a Dutchman visiting Arras, who burst into tears on reading a copy of Maximilien's reply. Augustin wrote:

> 'Yes, dear brother, indignation is mixed with sorrow to see virtue insulted and the people always deceived . . . I cannot hide my fears, dear brother, that you will seal the people's cause with your blood, perhaps they will be unhappy enough to strike you themselves, but I swear to avenge your death and to merit it as much as you.'

Having taken this oath, which on paper appears so melodramatic, but in which he was, as time was to prove, in deep earnest, he turned without any sense of anti-climax to other matters.

> 'I would like to come to Paris for 14 July. I haven't had a single patriotic celebration at Arras, and this would make me amends. Send me, I implore you, the means to come, that is if it would give you pleasure . . . I do not know what will happen. I have no resources.'[16]

Endnotes

[1] Michon, G., ed., *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre* Vol. 1 (Paris: Alcan, 1926), p.23. Thompson thinks the quarrel included other members of the family; see Thompson, J. M., *Robespierre*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1935), p.24.
[2] Thompson, *Robespierre,* Vol. 1, p.49.
[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p.31.
[4] For these incidents see *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, Vols. 30-31; Jacob , L., "La Grande Peur en Artois", *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, 14 ; and Lefèbvre, G., *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (Lille: O. Marquant, 1924), p.310.
[5] Michon, G., ed., *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre,* Vol. 1, p.73.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 50. The States General had now become the National Assembly.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 55.
[8] Merton ,T., *The Waters of Silence* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1950), p.75.
[9] Michon, *ibid.,* pp.74 and 79.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 258.
[11] Thompson, *Robespierre*, Vol. 1, pp.70 and 81.
[12] Michon, *ibid.*, p.74.

[13] *Ibid.*, p.75.
[14] Thompson*, ibid.,* p.82.
[15] Michon*, ibid*., p.81.
[16] *Ibid.*, p.82. Augustin was not, perhaps, quite truthful about his deprivation. According to Lecesne, two balls were held to celebrate the anniversary, one for 'the people on the promenade', the other for high society at the *hôtel de ville*. The ball on the promenade lasted till dawn. Lescesne, E., *Arras sous la Revolution*, Vol.1 (Arras: Sueur-Charruey, 1882), p.87.

Chapter 3

Arras and Paris, June 1790–August 1792

Maximilien also had few resources. He was struggling along on a deputy's salary, which might have been sufficient had he not felt bound to keep sending help to Arras. In April, Charlotte had written to him, suggesting that they join him in Paris, and pointing out that Augustin 'would never do anything in this country.'[1] This was probably true; Augustin was unlikely to become the kind of lawyer who would attract well-to-do clients in a provincial town. But there was no guarantee that he would do any better in the capital, and Augustin seems to have been thinking of Paris in terms of social events rather than work. Surprisingly, this may have been partly Maximilien's fault.

In June, when Augustin was awaiting Maximilien's reply to Beaumetz, he had written, obviously in reply to a letter from Maximilien, 'I should very gladly have begun my letter by speaking to you of these aforementioned [*ci-devant*] ladies of quality who love me already; you can assure them that I have no greater desire than to see them . . .'.[2]

No wonder he wanted to go! Due to the political strife, his circle in Arras was shrinking. 'You will be surprised at the scoundrelly behaviour of your enemies. They have been to see some ladies whom I visit, telling them that they dishonour themselves by receiving me. This monstrous conduct freezes my blood and these villains had better not come my way.'[3] Maximilien made no immediate response to Augustin's entreaties to be allowed to come to Paris. Instead he wrote a very courteous letter to the Jacobins of Arras, thanking them for their support in the Beaumetz affair.[4] It seems it was not until September that Maximilien found the resources to enable him to invite Augustin to join him. Or, as I suspect, Buissart supplied the money, since Augustin brought with him to Paris several commissions for his old friend. In the first week of September he wrote to Buissart,

> 'I've just found pens, ink and paper, no easy matter on my brother's desk, what's more I can address my letter under the seal of the Assembly; I shall not see my sad and aristocratic country for a long while.'

After giving news of the decrees before the assembly, he ends affectionately, 'Never a day passes, but we speak of you.'[5]

Was Maximilien pleased to have Augustin writing at his desk? Thompson has no doubt about it. 'It may be guessed,' he says, 'that one so wedded to his career as Robespierre did not easily reconcile himself to the company of a ne'er-do-well brother . . .'[6] In order to lessen the impact of this burden

Thompson suggests that Maximilien found Augustin rooms in the rue St Jacques across the river, two miles from his own lodgings in the rue Saintonge in the Marais. Probably a little too much can be made of this. Since the influx of the Assembly and Court into Paris, cheap lodgings must have been difficult to find, and it would be most surprising if an energetic young man like Augustin thought anything of walking two miles in the morning and two at night. But this is not to deny that there may have been aspects of Augustin's visit which were not so pleasing. He was determined to enjoy the social as well as the political aspects of the capital. Here we can only speculate. We once thought we knew a little more. A certain Villiers, who claimed to have been Robespierre's secretary that year, wrote memoirs in which he described Augustin in the following striking terms: 'His [Robespierre's] brother was a miserable attorney, moneyless, false, drunken and crapulous. He did me the honour to esteem me and to borrow money and linen from me which he never returned.'[7]

This judgement has prejudiced many historians against Augustin. Thompson suggests that Villiers's outburst was due to his disapproval of Augustin's sponging on Maximilien. But in recent years, Villiers has been discredited[8] and it is probable he never met the Robespierres at all. So here is another source on Maximilien's private life which has gone into the dark. At the best – or worst – we can say that Villiers's stories about Augustin derive from scraps of gossip he had heard about him. We know that Augustin was prepared to plunge into the enjoyments of the capital and that later on he was not distinguished for a strict adherence to morality. It would therefore not be surprising if, on this visit, he did from time to time spend too much, drink too much and find himself involved with girls of easy virtue. Judging from his letters to Buissart, he was constantly at the Assembly, helping his brother with his correspondence, promoting, so far as he could, Buissart's 'dear child', a scheme of weights and measures, and above all, trying to find himself a job. How he spent his evenings and nights, no one can know.

The visit to Paris was prolonged into the spring of 1791. Even Buissart got a little anxious for Augustin's return. Augustin wrote to him, 'I shall arrive, I shall embrace you, all will be forgiven.' But nothing happened. Poor Charlotte was also aggrieved. 'My sister is very cross with me,' Augustin wrote, 'but she soon forgets.'[9] One would think Charlotte had every reason to be cross.

Augustin returned to Arras in the spring without having improved his position in any way, and sad and anxious about Maximilien whose fame was increasing every day, so that he must more surely be the target for libel and assassination. Thompson makes the interesting point that Augustin was just

as worried about Maximilien when he had him under his eye in Paris, as when he was in Arras. Maximilien also did not let the subject alone. He was continually talking about his approaching doom; he had fallen under the spell of this idea during the elections to the States General, and now it might seem to the onlooker that he needed the constant stimulus of this threat.

He felt himself especially in danger on 19 July 1791. It was two days after the Massacre of the Champ de Mars, when the Parisian National Guard troops had fired on a crowd demanding the abdication of the King. (Louis had just been brought back from his abortive flight to Varennes.) Maximilien was faced with a walk of two miles home, late at night, from the Jacobin Club. An obscure member, the cabinet maker Duplay, who lived close by, saw his difficulty and offered hospitality. Maximilien gratefully went back to his house in the rue St Honoré and it became his home for the rest of his life. He was not treated as a lodger but as a member of the family and soon as an idol. He was content. It is greatly to Augustin's credit that he never showed the least jealousy over his brother's new friends, but rejoiced that he had met with the devotion he deserved.

It was in some ways a gloomy autumn for Augustin. Mme Deshorties, his aunt and godmother, died. Augustin and Buissart signed the burial certificate that September.[10] The National Assembly had now almost finished its task of giving a constitution to France and elections were held for the Legislative Assembly which was to succeed it. Augustin put himself forward for election, but without success.[11] He was, however, elected as an administrator of the department, getting a salary, and the very worst days of poverty were over.[12] There was also a visit from Maximilien to be looked forward to in November.

Gone were the days when Maximilien was an obscure lawyer from the provinces lost in the crowds at Versailles. He was now one of the most famous men in France, loved by the people, hated by the aristocracy. His speeches circulated round all the clubs in France. He was still poor, but that was because of his incorruptibility. He surely deserved a civic welcome from his native town.

Augustin determined that Maximilien should have the welcome he deserved, but there were obstacles to be considered. One was obviously Maximilien's modesty and retiring nature. A second was the great likelihood that his enemies would spoil everything. All was got ready by Augustin. Charlotte and Mme Buissart went off in a very quiet way to have a family reunion at Bapaume. Somehow there had been a mistake in the day, so the advance party had to return to Arras without the hero. Strange to say, a crowd had collected in the rue des Rapporteurs,[13] expecting Maximilien to be there. Next day

things went better; Maximilien was successfully captured at Bapaume and was presented with a civic crown. He was especially 'enchanted with the patriotism of the National Guards.' At Arras the streets were crowded and he received another crown. At night, all windows were illuminated; there was dancing in the public squares and cheering in the rue des Rapporteurs. Augustin must have been overjoyed at the success of his 'patriotic celebration'.

One of those who had helped most to get the celebrations going was a *curé* from a nearby parish named Joseph Lebon. He had a fund of unclerical language and critical people such as Augustin, might have found him to be vulgar, treacherous and pushy. He was a devoted admirer of Maximilien and had written to him the previous June, asking him to take up once again the controversial question of the marriage of priests. He was a prominent member of the Arras Jacobins.

During Maximilien's visit, Lebon invited Maximilien and Augustin to dinner at his presbytery at Neuville Vitasse. The meal was cooked by the clerk, called Morel, who seemed to combine his duties at the church with those of *chef* to the curé. Years later Morel, who never blamed Augustin for the Terror, told the historian Paris about the meal:

> 'Morel never included Robespierre the Younger in the same reprobation as his brother. He was a man of peace who only asked to dine quietly; when he saw [Maximilien] Robespierre and Lebon getting excited he tried to calm them and lead them to other thoughts.'[14]

In view of Augustin's extreme views at this period, the description of him as a man of peace is rather surprising. Perhaps the clerk's cooking was so good he wanted to give it his full attention. Another explanation might be that Augustin had already begun to dislike and distrust Lebon and was not pleased to see Maximilien talking openly to him.

While Lebon might be the model constitutional priest, the non-jurors – who refused to acknowledge the subordination of the Roman Catholic Church in France to the revolutionary government – continued to make trouble, not least in Arras where they had many supporters. Augustin and his friends suspected that they continued to say mass in the chapels of converts and in monasteries. In July of that year 1791, Augustin had signed a petition to the National Assembly asking that all non-jurors should be expelled from the country. It was during November that Maximilien, according to Thompson, began to share Augustin's views regarding the non-jurors, which until then he had regarded as exaggerated. He was also impressed by the sight of the inns near the frontiers, packed

with emigrés, leaving France in order to give comfort and support to her enemies. The rising possibility of war moved everyone into more extreme positions.

Later in November, Maximilien returned to Paris. Probably because of his new duties as an administrator of the department, Augustin seems to have made no attempts to join him there. It was important for him to make his name in the Pas-de-Calais in his own right and not to be totally dependent on his brother's fame. He found, so he told Maximilien, the Council General of the Department very inert, and he was not sparing of his criticisms. Presently the Procurer-General attacked him as a calumniator. Augustin responded with the 'firmness of an incensed Roman'.[15] This impressed the council so much that they agreed to burn the minutes that had libelled him.

> 'Since then honesty has reigned in our Assembly. I am listened to with attention and respect. If the sitting had been in public my reputation would have been made throughout the department; I could have conceived the greatest hopes; another occasion will perhaps present itself and my enemies will be vanquished.'

Though it is possible to smile at Augustin as an incensed Roman (*romain irrité*), the letter signals the beginning of a long struggle between the patriots in the Departmental Council and their moderately Royalist opponents, known as the *Feuillants*, who outnumbered them. The main issue was the admission of the public to the sessions, and this was to continue right up to the fall of the monarchy the following summer. It may seem a rather trivial object, with the country on the verge of war and emigrés daily crowding through the Pas-de-Calais, making for the frontier, but Augustin was certain that if the debates were held in public, not only would the Revolution be served – we must believe that he had convinced himself that this was his first object – but also that he would immediately become famous.

The patriots of Arras, whose focus was the Club of the Friends of the Constitution, now planned an elaborate ceremony to plant a Tree of Liberty in the Petite Place before the *hôtel de ville*. The ceremony was fixed for 29 March, but ten days beforehand, Augustin was again preoccupied by fears for Maximilien. He wrote to Duplay, 'I've heard indirectly that my brother is ill; I'm worried; let me know how he is as soon as possible . . . Don't lose a minute in answering. My anxiety is overwhelming. If necessary I'll steal to Paris . . . '[16]

Duplay must have replied reassuringly, and indeed on the very day Augustin wrote, Maximilien was speaking in the Jacobins; but the letter goes to show how hard it was going to be for Augustin to pursue his own career when faced with anxiety for his brother.

Soon after this, Augustin was elected President of the Friends of the Constitution. This ensured that he took a leading part in the ceremonies surrounding the Tree of Liberty.

Although this was a very modest affair compared with the pageants with which the artist David was later to glorify the Revolution, the Jacobins of Arras certainly made a good showing. First of all came the National Guard playing drums, then a troop of cavalry, preceded by four trumpets, 'sounding alternately to announce the approach of the Tree of Liberty'. Then came various groups enacting *tableaux*. The most popular of these was Fanaticism in a slouch hat, dressed in black and green and loaded with chains. Then came a group carrying a stone from the Bastille – 'more or less authentic' Lecesne says, deflatingly. Then came the tree itself, escorted by forty little girls in white dresses and tricolour sashes and forty little boys whose costumes are not indicated. Lastly, headed by a banner bearing the words 'Liberty or Death' came the Friends of the Constitution. In Lecesne's words:

> 'The President of the Society and his supporters wore the red bonnet. The procession passed through the Grand Place, made their way to the Petite Place and stopped before the *hôtel de ville*. The President invited the magistrates to show their allegiance to liberty.'

They took their places to the music of the band which played, rather surprisingly, a tune usually associated with the Royalists, 'Where can you be happier than in the bosom of your family'. The tree was advanced to its hole and Augustin made a speech.

Hamel, who quotes the speech with rapturous approval, calls it 'a faithful echo of Maximilien's thoughts'. Lecesne, who reports it at still greater length but with less approval, comments acidly, 'Augustin Robespierre's speeches were more declamatory than those of his brother but they were much less powerful'. He saw, however, a prophecy of the Terror when Augustin told his audience that 'a storm was sometimes necessary to dispel pestilential vapours.' Augustin was more probably thinking of the approaching war, which would come in a few weeks. His speech is so larded with metaphors of storms and trees that modern readers must find it very boring; however, when he finished, 'the acclamations lasted for some minutes'. Then four old men, aided by the children, planted the tree and fastened it to its stake.[17]

France declared war on Austria on 20 April. It was, as Thompson says, a war that no one particularly wanted except the court and government. Brissot's government of moderate revolutionaries saw it as a means of winning popularity and the court saw it as a swift deliverance from the Revolution. Had it happened at the natural moment, if one can use such a term, at the time of the King's flight, then it would have been different. 'It was a war of calculation, the work of a political party [the 'Brissotin*s*'] in league with discredited financiers and a discredited court.'[18] Maximilien had constantly opposed it, seeing its threat to the Revolution and realising that the country was totally unprepared.

On 10 April, Augustin wrote an irritable letter to his brother. Fanaticism is still dangerous, he wrote, the garrison of the town is constantly changing, strange troops might not support the patriots in an emergency. But there were consolations. 'The citizens', by which he means the patriots, wished to nominate him as justice of the peace, but he did not yet fulfil the age qualification. 'I resign myself this time; the esteem of my fellow citizens makes me forget my chagrin and lets me hope that the patriots will revenge me on my numerous enemies.'[19]

In the larger world, the war was going disastrously for the French. In Paris, strife between the parties increased and so did suspicion of the court. None of this made the people of Arras show any particular restraint in their internal strife.

On 4 July, Augustin headed a deputation of patriots to his fellow administrators. Here he addressed them at such length that when he called them 'the declared enemies of the country,' the president said, 'Gentlemen, let us sit, we can be insulted as well sitting as standing.' But this, we are told, 'did not in any way recall the orator to order.' When Augustin at length finished, there was 'profound silence'. Then 'Robespierre had the impudence to ask what he should say to the petitioners'. The President, maintaining absolute calm, replied, 'Nothing'. Augustin and his friends were not so easily got rid of. Once they got into the ante-chamber they made an excuse to come back to make sure that names had been entered correctly in the minutes.[20]

All this is, of course, very silly when one considers the danger in which the country stood, the throne tottering and effective government all but gone. An attack on the Tuileries was being prepared.

It is not surprising that Augustin, having delivered himself of his oration, set off for Paris to visit his brother. He was accompanied on this occasion by a friend of his, Daillet,[21] a young man of twenty-one who shared his extreme views. It was perhaps a prudent move because it was rumoured

that the Departmental Council was seeking his arrest and also that of Joseph Lebon.[22] He must have arrived in Paris about 8 or 9 July and had only been there a week when he got a letter from his friends recalling him to his post. Augustin, one suspects to his secret pleasure, was not able to get a seat on the diligence, and so remained in Paris a few days longer.[23] This meant he was in Paris when the Marseillaise volunteers, 'the six hundred men who knew how to die', marched into the city singing the song that has ever since carried their name. A few days later he must have returned, unwillingly, to Arras.

Endnotes

[1] Michon, vol. 1, p. 71.
[2] Michon, vol. 1, p. 76 'no greater desire' – Augustin's actual words are 'désir de nonne', the desire of a nun, which gives the passage a sexual connotation difficult to render in English.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[6] Thompson, vol. 1, p. 74.
[7] Villiers.
[8] Hampson, p. 51.
[9] Michon, vol. 1, p. 93. Augustin probably returned to Arras March/April 1791.
[10] Lavoine, pp. 8, 20.
[11] Lecesne.
[12] Charlotte, p. 231 *et seq.*
[13] Michon, vol. 1, pp. 107, 123.
[14] Paris, *La Terreur*, pp. 46–47.
[15] Michon, vol. 1, p. 32.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[17] Lecesne, vol. 1, p. 188. This was the first time Augustin was president. Paris, *La Terreur*, pp. 69–71.
[18] Thompson, vol. 1, p. 227.
[19] Michon, vol. 1, p. 143.
[20] Lecesne, vol. 1, p. 20.
[21] Michon, vol. 1, p. 311.
[22] Jacob, pp. 89–90.
[23] Michon, vol. 2, p. 36.

Chapter 4

Arras, August–September 1792

The fall of the monarchy brought revolutionary changes to the provinces as well as to Paris. Lebon found himself Mayor of Arras, Augustin became provisionally Procurer General, one of the most powerful posts in the department.[1] This was later confirmed by election. But obviously, Augustin's main concern must have been with the elections to the National Convention. His name went forward both in the Pas-de-Calais and in Paris. In the Pas-de-Calais, he was also on the Electoral Committee, where he scrutinised the lists of voters. There was a fairly complicated voting system, there being a manhood suffrage for the electoral assemblies, who then proceeded to choose the members of the Convention. The meetings in the Pas-de-Calais were not exactly edifying. Augustin at one point came to blows with another delegate, and perhaps because of this and his quickness to take offence – which later on was to cause awkwardness in the Convention – his candidature for the Pas-de-Calais never got off the ground.[2]

Joseph Lebon was, of course, around all the time, the helpful best friend. Soon he wrote to Maximilien, using the familiar second person singular – either in a spirit of republican equality or simply to show what friends they all were. He apparently wanted Maximilien to write a letter supporting Augustin's candidature. If this could be done, he wrote,

> 'your brother [*ton frère*] will be elected straight away; otherwise I fear the rage of our enemies will upset everything by their calumnies. We must work like the devil to outwit the thousands of manoeuvres of which it is unnecessary to tell you at present, but which will arouse your indignation when we have leisure to do so. The bloody National Assembly has cut out our work for us . . .' [3]

Augustin was apparently in the room while this letter was being written; it is perhaps a waste of time to speculate what he thought about it. In the circumstances he had given up hope of the Pas-de-Calais nomination and his thoughts were fixed on Paris. His name had gone forward to the Paris primary assemblies, no doubt at the instigation of Maximilien, who thereby attracted charges of nepotism which are certainly difficult to refute. Maximilien answered his critics, declaring that Augustin 'stood on his own merits and he was known to the patriots of Paris and the Jacobins who had witnessed his civic spirit.'[4]

Hampson not unnaturally asks 'how, when and where?'.[5] But we have to remember, while certainly not clearing Maximilien of undue influence, that Augustin had paid a very lengthy visit to Paris from the autumn to the spring of 1790 to 1791, during which period he must have got to know many members of the Jacobin Club very well, and that he had just been recalled to their attention by his July/August visit of that year. One must suspect that he was not shy about putting himself forward. During his last visit everyone must have recognised that there was a high probability that the monarchy would be swept away and that fresh elections would follow.

In any case, his name went forward on 15 September and he got 86 votes in the first ballot. After that, his fortunes were a bit more erratic and it took six ballots to get him safely home. If, as Hampson suggests, Maximilien organised most of the election, he was probably fairly cautious over Augustin's votes as he was very open to criticism on this front.[6] In the end, Augustin was the nineteenth candidate to be chosen, coming before an obscure citizen called Thomas and Philippe Egalité. In her account of the elections Alison Patrick comments,

> 'All successful candidates got forty percent of the total number of possible votes . . . as a rule at each election there was someone with enough minority support to suggest that he had a chance of being chosen next. Augustin Robespierre, Thomas and Philippe Egalité, among others, were not last-minute choices, but had been foreshadowed as possibilities for some little time.'[7]

Augustin was finally elected on 16 September and news of his success probably reached him on about the 19th.

Meanwhile, events in Paris continued to influence Augustin's career in Arras. On 2 September, a very large number of Royalist prisoners in the Paris jails, as well as many detained for ordinary offences, were massacred by the Paris mob. This by itself would have been disturbing enough, but no one was sure how the leaders of the Revolution, including Robespierre, Marat and Danton, were involved. It is almost certain that Danton and Marat were guilty of actually encouraging the massacres, and the best verdict Robespierre gets is 'not proven'. The one excuse they could all three make is that the military situation was desperate and they feared a Royalist rising. The Brissotin ministers did absolutely nothing to stop the massacres, and spent the rest of their political lives trying to pin the responsibility firmly on the Jacobins.[8]

The *Comité de Vigilance* meanwhile sent out a circular to all the departments, asking them to follow the example of Paris and kill Royalist prisoners. This suggestion took effect at Versailles, where fifty-three people were murdered on 9 September. On the 18th, commissioners Jason and Legray arrived in Arras.[9]

The new authorities in Arras were settling down. Augustin had been appointed *Procureur* on 14 September, and the day after had written to his colleagues on the Departmental Council telling them that his new duties prevented him attending their deliberations. Not all was concord. Augustin's friend, Guffroy, who was also a member of the new administration and soon to be a member of the Convention, was to speak of quarrels with the new Mayor and how Augustin in particular had to put up with his whims and sulks. One may legitimately suppose that Augustin gave as good as he got. Cause for a serious dispute was not long in coming. The two commissioners poked around for a day or two without giving much trouble and then one of them claimed to have discovered some financial irregularities in the finance department. Lebon stood up to them, they persisted and he, correctly seeing them as trouble makers, arrested them and put them in prison.

The commissioners wrote to Augustin complaining of their treatment. On 21 September, he took up their cause in the municipal Assembly, dwelling on the danger that might come to the Commune for having 'hindered by their arrest the progress of the legislative power.' That is to say, as Augustin saw it, the travellers came from Paris, the holy city, and were therefore sacrosanct. After some debate, they were released from prison, but confined at their hotel, until they could make arrangements to leave the town. Three days later, they quit Arras. Lebon had certainly won. He had rendered, says his biographer, Louis Jacob, 'an immense service, not only to the town, but to humanity.'[10]

Were the commissioners really dangerous? Was Augustin prepared to risk a September massacre in his native town? Of course it must be remembered that both he and Lebon would take the official Jacobin line on the massacres, that they were a regrettable but necessary example of the people's vengeance. If Jason and Legray were really plotting a massacre, they certainly went about it in a very sluggish way. What is more noteworthy, perhaps, is Augustin's readiness to impose Parisian instructions and Parisian criticism on a provincial town. It was to be on this issue that the political battles of the next months were to be fought. He had made his loyalties abundantly clear.

Lebon's position was different. He could not possibly foresee his days as blood drenched pro-consul, any more than Augustin could foresee the time when he would be accused of moderatism and

worse. Lebon was simply a rising young politician in a small provincial town. He had no world-famous brother to find him a seat in the Convention. He was only a suppliant to the Convention, an understudy who might never get a part. He needed all the popularity he could get in Arras. It is in these terms, I believe, that we have to view the episode of Jason and Legray.

The Convention officially opened on 21 September. Charlotte and Augustin had many preparations to make for, this time, Charlotte was not to be left behind. Since 5 October is the date when Augustin is first mentioned in the debates of the Jacobins in Paris, it is likely that he and his sister left Arras a few days earlier. His journey was still being talked about when the Englishman, Dr. John Moore, passed through the town a few days later. He recorded in his diary:

> '8 Oct: Robespierre is a native of Arras; this great luminary of the Revolution not only renders Arras more conspicuous, but has thrown a ray of light on his brother, who lived here in obscurity, but is his chosen deputy to the Convention.'[11]

Endnotes

[1] See Augustin's letter of acceptance: Michon, vol. 2, p. 38. It is mistakenly dated November 16 instead of September 16, and Augustin had exercised this function for some weeks previously.
[2] Lecesne vol. 1, p. 272.
[3] Michon, vol. 1, p. 153.
[4] Robespierre, *Lettres à ses commettans*, p.146.
[5] Hampson, p. 129.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Patrick, p. 182.
[8] Thompson gives detailed consideration to all the evidence: vol. 1, p. 273 *et seq*.
[9] For the visit of the commissioners: Jacob, pp. 132–4. Lecesne, vol. 1, pp. 268–71.
[10] Michon vol. 2, p. 38.
[11] Moore, p. 12.

Chapter 5

Paris, September–January 1792/3

In contrast to Maximilien on his first arrival in Paris, Augustin and Charlotte had no need to seek for cheap lodgings at the end of their journey to the capital. It seemed absolutely natural that they too should stay with the Duplays, who welcomed them hospitably, and Augustin is said to have occupied a small room overlooking the rue St Honoré.[1] He already knew and liked his brother's adopted family and had probably stayed with them the previous July. Charlotte, however, on meeting Mme Duplay and her daughters, very quickly began to have second thoughts about them.[2] Although she cannot always have been happy at the rue des Rapporteurs, with no money and Augustin seeking to run off to Paris, it had at least been her own house and no one had interfered with her management of it. Now she was subordinate to Mme Duplay. It was an arrangement that could not last.

Maximilien must have found Augustin's election into the Convention a great help to him. If he had not anticipated this, he would hardly have worked to secure it. He needed a deputy on whom he could rely, who could make proposals he need not necessarily endorse. That Augustin was unlikely to outshine him as a parliamentarian was doubtless an added advantage.

Augustin, as we have seen, was always anxious to succeed as an orator. This is understandable; oratory was one of the most prized accomplishments of the day. At Arras he had had little competition; now he had to vie with some of the most celebrated speakers of the time. Nodier, who heard what was probably one of his most successful speeches, tells us that he had an ugly voice and this cannot have helped him.[3] 'Easy and vulgar speaker', says Michelet rather unkindly, 'heard at the Jacobins'. The Convention was always a bit beyond his range. His speeches are comparatively rare compared to his numerous interventions at the Jacobins,[4] though we shall see him gaining some notoriety with his interrupting and heckling. His fellow *conventionnel* Baudot is very discouraging: 'He [Augustin] pronounced his most fiery discourses as if they were a lesson.' Later Baudot carries his low opinion still further, 'He was a jar that echoed whenever his brother rapped on it.'[5]

As mentioned before, Baudot seems to have been inspired by rage at the very different account of Augustin in Nodier's *Souvenirs*, which appeared not long before his own book. It remains true, however, that Augustin worked almost completely as Maximilien's mouthpiece for the next ten months. This does not mean that the jar was empty – it was filled to the brim with Maximilien. Not until the following August, in a distant southern town, was he to find his own voice.

Augustin is first mentioned at the Jacobin Club on 5 October[6] when he was elected to the Committee of Correspondence, which sent out news of the previous week's events to the provincial clubs. In his time in Arras, he had found this service particularly useful. But all information was now distorted in the violence of political feeling. The Revolution, with all the self-justifications and fears that had followed the September massacres, continued unabated.

Many provincial members of the Convention became deeply prejudiced against Paris and indignant at the ascendancy of the Parisian deputies, particularly Robespierre, Danton and Marat. Marat was particularly attacked, since he had clearly been involved in the massacres and made no attempt to hide his approval of them. His continual calls for further bloodshed made him an embarrassing person to have about. He dressed bizarrely, was adored by the crowd, and was an eloquent writer – people simply avoided sitting near him.

Marat's health was declining; he was becoming a totem rather than a political leader. The Montagnards did not dare disown him, and spent much time defending him from the attacks of moderate members of the Convention. Maximilien, who did not wish to be associated too closely with Marat, allowed Augustin to do a good deal of the defending.

The enemies of the Montagnards included Fédéralistes, Girondins, Brissotins and Rolandins. These provincial delegates did not form a coherent party, and were mainly united by their hatred of Marat, Robespierre and Danton – the last of whom still trying to reach an understanding with them – and also by a profound distrust of Paris. They rarely followed a concerted plan of action, but were more numerous than the Montagnards and could command sympathy in the provinces, especially in the South and South-West of France. Between the Montagnards and Girondins – we follow Hampson in using this generic name – lay the Plain, the uncommitted deputies, whose support was sought by both sides.

Augustin's first speech in the Jacobins was made on 7 October,[7] answering a fellow member who had asked that there should be no peace with the Austrians until the tyrant (the Emperor) was destroyed. Augustin said, in effect, that the Club should not interfere with the army but defend the Commune of Paris against the attacks made upon it in the Convention. On the 19th, he spoke again on the attempts the Girondins were making to move the Convention from Paris. 'The Convention', said Augustin, 'even if it moved to the smallest hamlet, will be persecuted by patriots if it does not work for the good of the country.'[8] Efforts to get the Convention away from Paris and the influence of the Paris

mob became one of the constant themes of the Girondins. Later, the establishment of a rival Convention was one of the haunting fears of the Montagnards.

On 25 October, Augustin defended Marat in the Jacobins against attacks made on him in the Convention by the Girondins[9] who were trying to have him sent for trial. Three days later he became involved in a crisis much closer to home.

Maximilien was speaking in the Convention on 29 October, rebutting various charges made against him based on rumours and anonymous letters. 'Who,' he asked rhetorically, 'dares accuse me to my face?' At which point the Girondin Louvet rose, walked across the hall and, using the familiar – or rude – second person singular, said 'I, Robespierre, I accuse you.' It was a scene that greatly impressed not only all Louvet's friends, but also Dr John Moore and William Wordsworth, who both happened to be in the public gallery.[10]

Robespierre was taken aback, stumbled over his words and left the tribune. Danton took over, and made a temporising speech, in the course of which he said what a difficult person he found Marat, but he did not prevent Louvet uttering a long and violent speech in which he presented Robespierre as the villain of the Revolution. There was a good deal of uproar against Maximilien, but in the end he was given a week to prepare his answer.

This was the first time Augustin had seen his brother seriously attacked, and it is safe to suppose that his emotions required no prompting from Maximilien. Then, either in the Convention after the sitting, or on the terraces outside, he believed he heard members of the Convention plotting to murder his brother. Challenged by Augustin, they replied that Maximilien had been the murderer of many others. Augustin, no doubt prevented by his friends from a physical attack on the suspected assassins, rushed off to the Jacobins to tell his story. Because of the scene in the Convention earlier, which everyone wanted to talk about, both the club and the galleries were packed. Augustin was greatly agitated as he spoke and some historians have thought that this was put on for effect. It is not likely; the emotion still comes through; the speech is confused, leaping from point to point, but there is one extraordinary sentence, 'I am ashamed to be speaking to you, because the brother of Robespierre should be calumniated and he is not.'[11]

It is an interesting statement because it forces us to face the possibility that, just below the surface of Augustin's devotion, there was an envy of which he was probably never once conscious. To be threatened, libelled and become, possibly, the target of murderers means fame; to be ignored

means oblivion. I do not for a moment think that Augustin would have accepted my interpretation of his words. He might well have said that he wanted to be seen to be as good a Republican as his brother, one equally ready to die for liberty. Not to be slandered by the wicked is to have failed. The Jacobins raised no such questions; the club and the people in the galleries were moved and excited and all agreed to protect Maximilien, whose enemies, according to Augustin, had crimes on their hands never dreamed of by Louis XVI.

There was then a week's suspense while Maximilien prepared his response to Louvet. The evening before, Augustin spoke at Jacobins again, but all he had to reveal this time was that Roland, the Minister of the Interior, had used public money to have five thousand copies of Louvet's speech printed and distributed to the provinces. Later on, someone tactlessly suggested that the members of the Convention should bury their differences, which horrified Augustin.

'All right,' he cried, 'citizens, be calm. Sacrifice Maximilien Robespierre!' 'No, no', cried all those in the galleries.[12] On the next day, Maximilien spoke in the Convention. His speech was a great success; it was printed and circulated to the departments and his hold on the Convention and the Jacobins was as strong as ever. The enmity between himself, his friends and the Girondins was intensified.

Augustin had spoken of the crimes of Louis XVI. It was these which now occupied the Convention, though here too it was still divided between Montagnards and Girondins. It is difficult for us today, disposed as most of us are to sympathise with the troubles of poor Louis, to understand the vigour with which the Montagnards pursued him to the scaffold. It has to be remembered that in their eyes, Louis was really guilty of treasonable correspondence with the enemy and that, having sworn his loyalty to the constitution, he had then sought to disrupt it in any way he could.

Louis would probably have replied that his oath had been sworn to a constitutional priest and was therefore not binding, but his opponents, men of the Enlightenment, could only perceive Louis' scruples as crass superstition or a pretence to destroy the Revolution. To them his kindly, domestic virtues, which sway our judgements a great deal, were the weaknesses of a man who could not control his wife and her favourites, all of them traitors. To send him into exile was, for the Montagnards, impossible, as they believed his presence would increase the power of the emigrés, though it is more likely that Louis would have continued to be his own worst enemy in exile as he was in France. To kill him would satisfy the Paris Jacobins and prevent a serious Royalist movement spreading over France. Saint-Just demanded that he should be executed without trial.

Croker, not much read now, but one of Maximilien Robespierre's most discerning critics, writes:

> 'The speeches of Robespierre on this melancholy occasion were considered his best oratorical exhibitions; and it must be confessed that he alone seems to have taken an intelligible view of the proceeding. While others were giving the process the hypocritical *forms* of a *trial*, and affecting to debate *legal* questions as before an ordinary tribunal, Robespierre had the sense to see that such pretexts were idle . . . confessing that 'the death of the King was not a question of law, but of *state policy*, which . . . *required his death*; the life of one man – if ever so innocent – must be sacrificed to preserve millions.' This detestable doctrine – less detestable, however, than the hypocrisy which pretended to legality – was announced in more naked atrocity, and even put into the form of a substantive motion by his brother, Augustine [*sic*], who, after complaining of the undue and scandalous scruples which the Convention seemed to entertain about doing justice on the most guilty . . . proposed to decree at once –
>
> "The National Convention, considering that Louis, late King of the French, has been condemned by the nation, that the representatives of the People would betray their duty and invade the rights of the People if it were to attempt to question its sovereignty, decrees: *That Louis Capet shall be brought to the bar of the house to declare his original accomplices; to hear sentence of death pronounced upon him, and to be forthwith conducted to execution!"*
>
> A considerable tumult occurred at this stage of the debate, but it does not appear whether this extravagant proposal was actually put or whether, as is more likely, it was smothered in the general confusion.'[13]

Augustin's speech was printed along with many other speeches by other deputies; Louis' fate was an occasion for almost everyone to rush into print.[14] In the end, the King was granted counsel and had some form of a trial, though a fair one was impossible. On 19/20 January, the members of the Convention sat up all night voting on the King's death. When it came round to Augustin's turn, he said, 'It is because I hate bloodthirsty men that I wish the most bloodthirsty to be put to death.'[15]

This still seems a horrifying speech. How could anyone see the weak and well-meaning Louis as the most sanguinary of men? But the Montagnards, including Augustin, were convinced that Louis's actions had, directly or indirectly, bought about the Massacre of the Champ de Mars, the fighting on 10 August and the September massacres.

The King was sentenced to death by a very small majority. On 21 January, Augustin's thirtieth birthday, Louis was guillotined in the Place de la Révolution.

Endnotes

[1] Lenotre, p. 107.
[2] *Charlotte*, p.226.
[3] Nodier, p. 80.
[4] Michelet on Augustin, in Dictionnaire Larousse, 1885.
[5] Baudot, p.6.
[6] Aulard, *Jacobins* vol. 4, p. 360.
[7] Ibid.
[8] *Ibid*., vol. 4, p. 420.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Moore, vol. 2, p. 295 *et seq*. Moore also heard Augustin's speech in the Jacobins: vol. 2, p. 339. Wordsworth describes Louvet's attack on Maximilien in 'The Prelude'.
[11] Buchez and Roux, pp. 20/30, 31.
[12] Aulard, *Jacobins*, vol. 4, p. 457.
[13] Croker, pp. 363–4. The 'surname' Capet was given to the royal family because titles had been abolished. The Capetian kings were not in fact ancestors of Louis's.
[14] Robespierre A., *Opinion*.
[15] *Moniteur*, 15, p. 200.

Chapter 6

Paris, January–June 1793

During the last months, we have seen Augustin flying kites for Maximilien, identifying with the defence of Marat, and taking at all times a more extreme stance than his brother felt it politic to do. So it continued into the spring, but at this point we may leave politics for a moment to examine Augustin's private life.

Residence at the Duplays was not proving successful. Charlotte frequently retreated to her room in tears, overcome by 'the indignities of Mme Duplay'. The second daughter, Elisabeth, who had a remarkably sweet nature, used to go after her, do her hair a new way and generally try to cheer her up. Charlotte was absolutely convinced, and she may have been right, that Maximilien, innocent as he was in the ways of the wicked world, would be lured into marriage with the eldest daughter, Eleanore. One day she cornered him about this, with Augustin also present. Maximilien, who had assured Charlotte over and over that he felt nothing for Eleanore, now tried to push everything on to Augustin 'You should marry Eleanore,' he said to him. 'In faith, no!' Augustin replied. This did not deceive Charlotte for long.[1]

Eleanore and her mother continued to regard Maximilien as their property. Charlotte persisted in her defiance and eventually bullied Maximilien into having a home of his own. The three Robespierres got a flat – one may imagine that Charlotte did the house-hunting – at 5 rue St Florentin. The rue St Florentin is practically opposite the Duplay house, too near for safety, but perhaps Maximilien would not be persuaded any further. They moved in. Maximilien soon showed signs of being perfectly miserable and homesick and presently he fell ill. Mme Duplay had been only waiting for her opportunity. She came to see Maximilien and declared that he ought to come back with her to be looked after properly. Encouraged by this reinforcement, Maximilien plucked up courage to say he would like to go – and off he went with Mme Duplay.[2]

Charlotte's defeat is important for Augustin's career, in that his sister now concentrated her devotion upon him. How difficult this was to become for them both, we shall presently see.

It must have been during this time, when all three were living together, in February 1793, that they accepted an invitation to dinner from Mme Jullian, whose husband was a member of the Convention and whose son later became a well-known agent for Maximilien during the Terror. Charlotte arrived early, so that she and Mme. Jullian could have a good talk before the men arrived

from the Convention. She described Maximilien as 'gentle as a lamb ' but she did not say anything about Augustin. Over the dinner of chicken and salad Mme. Jullian was able to make her own observations. 'The younger Robespierre,' she recorded in her diary, 'is more lively, more open, an excellent patriot, but of a mediocre intellect and known for a quickness of temper which has made an unfavourable impression on the Montagnards.'[3]

It was a pleasant evening, no doubt, but one that could easily have been enjoyed at Arras. It is not surprising that Augustin sometimes enjoyed entertainments of a different kind. Michelet, who got information from Mme Lebas, formerly Elisabeth Duplay, tells us that Augustin was a frequent visitor at a gaming house near the Palais-Royal, at the corner of the rue Vivienne, kept by a beautiful adventuress, Mme de Sainte-Amaranthe, and her still more attractive daughter, Mme de Sartine. 'The gaming house,' Michelet continues, 'was in the hands of the aristocrats, the centre of profiteers, speculators on the Bourse, dealers in gold and assignments and courtesans.'[4]

Hamel also mentions Augustin's connection with this establishment, quoting Elisabeth Lebas' son as his source. His story includes the details that Augustin was taken there by an actor from the *Théâtre Franç*ais, 'after the *Opéra'* and that he was accompanied by the son and nephew of Duplay. 'The escapade,' said Hamel, 'was severely condemned by Maximilien',[5] which was not unnatural, since his enemies were only too ready to attribute any moral slip made by his brother, to him. Hamel says that the culprits were careful not to trespass again. Michelet, also, we must remember, drawing on eye-witnesses, and less concerned than Hamel to show the Robespierres as perfect, tells a less moral tale:

> 'Augustin liked to discover there [at Mme de Sainte- Amaranthe's house] the old ways of the former society . . . [as a] man of society and pleasure, he did not feel that the high and terrible destiny of his brother required discretion on his part.'[6]

As the winter went on it became ever clearer that the bitter strife in the Convention between the Montagnards and the Girondins was preventing any adequate government of the country. France had now declared war on England and Spain and, as war had been going on with Austria, Prussia and Piedmont since the previous summer, France was presently, in effect, at war with the whole of Europe. The Girondins, having rejected the strong, generous but bloodstained hand of Danton who could have hauled them to safety, became more and more inclined to call on the provinces to help them against Paris. At the same time, we see Augustin increasingly identified with the extremists Fréron and Tallien in his interruptions of Girondin speeches. In 1814 a hostile commentator recalled this period:

‘[Augustin] was one of the ferocious *aboyeurs* [hecklers] who only spoke of killing the Royal Family, their old servants and even well dressed men and women.’[7]

This account is hardly borne out by his actual speeches. Augustin, who was in any case always well dressed himself, concentrated not on the Royalists but on the Girondins and their influence in the *départements*.

As early as 7 January, before the trial of the King, he made a speech on Girondin propaganda with a very personal note:

> ‘Yet there are parts of the Republic where Brissotism has not penetrated, where the schemes of Roland are useless and cannot corrupt. I mean the Pas-de-Calais, Maximilien Robespierre’s country and mine. Roland has taken all possible means to corrupt the public spirit of my fellow citizens, but he has had no success. My relatives in the department have unmasked Brissot’s plots.’

Indeed the Council General – composed of different members since Augustin’s quarrels with this body – had even sent a scathing reply to Roland, who had complained that the speeches and pamphlets he had sent were not being circulated: ‘We were hoping you had forgotten to send your pamphlets. We said to ourselves, “Roland despairs of deceiving us and has ceased to send them”.’[8]

Augustin continued to correspond with Buissart who had taken over the supervision of the Robespierre affairs in Arras. About this time, Augustin was due to receive some money owed to him. ‘Do not send it,’ Augustin wrote to him. ‘As to the moral debt, my family can never repay you; you will always be our creditor.’[9]

News from the war did not help the tense political situation at home. Dumouriez, checked in an attempt to invade Holland, was heavily defeated at Neerwinden on 18 March. On the 31st, Dumouriez, the victor of Valmy, defected to the invading armies. Since he had strong links with the Girondins, the suspicions of Paris were even further arouseder against them.

On 5 April Augustin spoke at the Jacobins on the necessity of ridding the Convention of the Girondins. ‘Good citizens should unite at their sections . . . come to the bar of the Convention and force us to arrest the unfaithful deputies.’ It was a dangerous precedent to propose, and this in fact is exactly what happened nearly two months later. ‘Citizens,’ Augustin continued, ‘don’t come offering your arms or your lives, ask that the blood of the traitors be shed.’[10] Sainte-Claire Deville, the historian of the

revolutionary Commune of Paris, comments on this passage in words with which it is difficult to disagree:

> 'Here is a man who was certainly neither wicked nor a coward, not fearing openly to provoke murder, who at a moment when the frontier is menaced, turns citizens from enrolling against their exterior enemies and directing their ardour against Frenchmen who did not think like him.'[11]

Augustin had no doubts. He wrote delightedly – and rather disarmingly – to Buissart:

> 'I'm almost a great man since Saturday; I have received congratulations from every side for the speech I've made in favour of the Commune of Paris. Don't be surprised if I give myself great airs, the incense is likely to stifle me if I don't disperse the smoke that has gone to my head. I wait for your next letter to cure me.'[12]

But he was to do something worse. A woman called Catherine Clere had got into trouble with the authorities for making a disturbance about food supplies, was tried and sentenced to death. Some Girondin deputies took up her case, spoke in the Convention on her behalf and asked for a reprieve, claiming that the woman was drunk at the time of her offence and that she knew nothing of politics. Augustin opposed the motion. 'We have passed a law against Royalism,' he said, 'and those who speak against the law are Royalists.'[13] Catherine Clere was put to death. Yet, not a year later, in Vesoul, we shall find him reasonable and just in his response to similar cases. A Catherine Clere in Versoul would, at worst, have got a very severe telling-off. Sainte-Claire Deville is right: the quarrel with the Girondins pulled Augustin out of character, and it is rather a pleasure to get a glimpse of his private life at this time, one of the few we have.

The Girondins had scored a short-lived triumph by getting Marat accused of treason. Marat was tried on 24 April, unanimously acquitted by a Jacobin court and jury and was carried shoulder-high by the people back to the Convention. That same day, Charlotte chaperoned Elisabeth Duplay to the Convention. The two young women sat in the gallery with a bag of oranges for refreshment. Augustin came up to talk to them. He was accompanied by a deputy from the Nord, Philippe Lebas, a reserved young man who idolised Maximilien and who had visited the Duplays several times. The oranges were shared out and Elisabeth and Lebas began a shy flirtation, one may suppose with Augustin and Charlotte talking together and looking the other way. The two young women managed to come quite often to the Convention at this time.

One day, while they chatted with Lebas and Augustin, the young men were called to vote and presently Augustin came back alone, saying that Lebas had been taken ill. The illness turned out to be a serious matter, keeping Lebas confined to his room for several weeks. He was popular among the Montagnards and had many visitors, but for him, in love with Elisabeth, the days dragged by. He told her later:

> 'Robespierre came one day; he was the only man from whom I could get news of you, but I was unlucky, I did not know how to ask him. Then he began to talk about his home and eulogised all your family and made me happy by saying how good they were, how devoted to liberty . . . but, my Elisabeth, he did not speak of you! My God, how unhappy I was! The time was long. Robespierre the Younger came to see me. What joy for me! I was more familiar with him. We were the same age. We spoke of his brother. Then I couldn't hold out. I spoke of your family, your sister, I spoke of you, my Elisabeth. He made you a eulogy. He said that he loved you like a brother; you were so gay and good it was you he loved you the most, that your good mother had brought you all up well, good housewives, your home life was like the age of gold, all breathed virtue and pure patriotism . . . his brother was so happy with you all and looked on you as his family.'[14]

In the end, true love conquered. Philippe recovered, proposed to Elisabeth and, his cause advocated by Maximilien, won her parents' consent.

The Duplays have been too often regarded by some writers as figures of fun, rather as Aldous Huxley regards the Charlist family who boasted of entertaining 'the London gentleman who lately lectured here'. He finds such people 'repulsive', by which I imagine he means dull and unimaginative. The Duplays were limited of course; they probably flattered Maximilien too much and spoiled him too much; they did not behave very well to Charlotte; but they did exemplify an upright integrity as far as they understood it, and Augustin was sincere in his expressions of love for them and the golden age, though the society he chose was often quite different. It was in the company of a Genoese noble and the runaway wife of a man of letters that he was to recognise with delight in the people of Vesoul the same virtues for which he had praised the Duplays. It was a world he knew he ought to enjoy, wanted to enjoy – as Maximilien did – and at times truly did enjoy.

But there was little room for domestic peace in April and May, and the repetitive quarrels on the state of the country grew worse and worse. Members came to the Convention armed and Lanjuinais, a

Girondin supporter, speaks in his memoirs of Augustin and others on both sides of the Convention waving pistols about.[15] Encouraged by the success of his speech at the Jacobins on 5 April, Augustin had still not lost hope of gaining fame as an orator and, on 20 April, he did at least get the attention of the Convention when he made a speech greatly applauded 'by the extreme left and the tribunes.'[16] This was, once again, a long defence of the actions of the Paris Commune:

> 'This great city has always shown the greatest respect for its National Representatives. It is precisely because it is rendering to the Convention the respect due to it that the Commune asks the Convention to purge itself of the traitors that have conspired against the country.'

Although the speech may not appear particularly remarkable to us, who may be getting tired of the Convention's fratricidal strife, it seems to have satisfied Augustin. We now find him pitting himself against Vergniaud, one of the greatest orators of the Revolution and one of the principal leaders of the Girondins. On 20 May, a speech by Vergniaud was so interrupted by members of the Montagnards, particularly Augustin, that the President had to intervene. Even when some order was restored, Augustin continued to stand chafing by the tribune until Vergniaud had finished. Then, once again, Augustin accused the Girondins of attacking the popular societies and for being responsible for the revolt against the Republic in the Vendée region. At the end, he was rewarded with cheers from a great part of the Assembly and the galleries.[17]

It may seem that, during these months, the Girondins and the Montagnards were so far apart that nowhere could they be in accord, but even at the height of their dissension they still remained children of the Enlightenment, convinced that just laws would bring happiness and prosperity to all. On 20 April the Convention, working on the proposed constitution, had reached the subject of poor relief. Augustin, while insisting that in a properly constituted society it would be 'cruel and despairing' to suppose that there should be paupers, moved an amendment that society should assure support to each of its members. Vergniaud agreed to this, but suggested the wording 'every man has a right to food, either by his work or by public assistance.' 'The ideas of Robespierre and Vergniaud' were finally united in a single amendment.[18]

There must have been moments in the late spring when it seemed unlikely that the Republic would survive to enjoy its constitution. On 1 June Augustin wrote a letter to Buissart with a depressing account of the country's fortunes.

> 'Treason multiplies everywhere; our armies are everywhere repulsed. On the Spanish frontier our soil is defiled by the enemy who have gained it by treason. On the Rhine Custine has had a repulse that was certainly planned. In the Vendée the Republican troops are in flight before the rebels. In the north Valenciennes is besieged . . . our army is in flight, reuniting itself in disorder . . . through the treason or inexperience of Chamorin. In the Convention the conspirators triumph, make arbitrary decrees, imprison the magistrates and the patriots. At Marseilles the victorious aristocracy have imprisoned the Republican . . .'[19]

However, in this catalogue of disaster, he does not mention that Maximilien was ill with a low fever, barely able to drag himself to the Convention.

But even while Augustin wrote his letter – he began it on the 31st – the sections marched on the Maison Commune, demanding revolutionary measures to save the country – including a tax on the rich of which Augustin had spoken favourably in his speech of 20 April. Later, in the Convention, Vergniaud rhetorically demanded to know who had sounded the tocsin. Augustin was ready with the answer,

> 'You want to know who is sounding the tocsin? I can tell you. The treason of our generals . . . the bombardment of Valenciennes, the discord in the Army of the North, the conspirators at home, many of whom are in the Convention . . .'

Vergniaud demanded that this be entered in the minutes. Augustin insisted, 'It is the traitors at home, some of whom are here, who sounded the tocsin.' There were cries of *'Yes, yes*.' from part of the Assembly. At home that evening, he re-dated his letter June the 1st: 'The tocsin sounded yesterday, all the citizens took arms. This moral insurrection was made with the majesty of a great people . . .'[20]

The following day, the Convention was surrounded. There was, however, more actual violence within than without. Lanjuinais declared that Paris was oppressed by tyrants who wanted power and blood. There was an outcry while Legendre, Augustin and others tried to drag him from the tribune.[21] At the end of the day, the Convention submitted to the will of the Paris mob and the Girondin leaders were arrested. Their disaster established once again the supremacy of Paris in the Revolution. The Montagnards and Robespierre were not yet in power, but their way there was becoming inevitable.

Endnotes

[1] *Charlotte* p. 230.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 230.
[3] *Charlotte*, p. 362; Thompson, vol. 2, p. 217.
[4] Michelet, *Histoire*, vol. 20.
[5] Hamel, *Saint-Just*, p. 208.

[6] Michelet, *Histoire*, vol. 20.
[7] Robert, p. 365.
[8] Aulard, *Jacobins*, vol. 4, p. 653.
[9] Michon, vol. 1, p. 161.
[10] Aulard, *Jacobins*, vol. 5, p. 125.
[11] St Claire Deville, p. 57.
[12] Michon, vol. 1, p. 166.
[13] *Moniteur* (20 April 1793), Speech of 18 April.
[14] Stephane-Pol, p. 104 *et seq*.
[15] Lanjuinais, vol. 3, p. 299.
[16] *Moniteur* (22 April 1793), Speech of 20 April.
[17] Laurent and Clavel, vol. 63, pp. 32–3.
[18] *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 110.
[19] Michon, vol. 1, p. 176.
[20] Laurent and Clavel, vol. 63, pp. 32–3.
[21] Lanjuinais, vol. 3, p. 299.

Chapter 7

Paris, June–July 1793

The purged Convention turned back to its original task, the making of the Constitution. There were also efforts to give the government a sense of force and direction, as the arrest of the leading Girondins had not done away with any of those perils listed by Augustin in his letter to Buissart. A Committee of Public Safety had been formed in March, through which the Convention hoped to have some direction over the ministries, but even the presence of Danton failed to give it bite. It was not until July, when more extreme members of the Montagnards took over, that it began to provide effective and ruthless government.

Throughout June, we have little news of Augustin. He does not seem to have spoken at the Jacobins or the Convention. It is as though the defeat of the Girondins had robbed him of his employment. He had doubts about the future, writing with some realism to Buissart:

> 'You know a Constitution will not alone render a nation happy and free. We must have a civil code and public education which will spare us for ever from the misfortunes with which the Republic is crushed in the Midi and before that in Brittany.'[1]

That summer, Augustin had a private source of irritation. Some members of the Convention, although not ardent supporters of the Girondins, had viewed the intimidation of the Convention on 2 June with much disapproval and returned home, letting their places be taken by their *suppléants* (substitutes). Among those who thus withdrew was the deputy for Arras, Mauriez, with whom we find Augustin maintaining quite friendly relations. He even entrusted the former deputy with a book to return to Buissart,[2] but he was dismayed to see Mauriez's *suppléant* arrive in the Convention. This was his old opponent, Joseph Lebon. Augustin unburdened himself to Buissart.

> 'You mention the new deputy; I've suspected him for a long time; he knows more about intrigue than delicacy or good faith; he will harm the Republic by his extravagances; he's too original for me. I wish you would tell me if it is true that he wishes to convoke the primary assemblies to elect a new Convention . . . We need to know what is behind the mask. Tell me, I beg you, about this fellow with all the confidence that you have in me and I in you.'[3]

To make matters worse for Augustin, Lebon seems to have insisted on treating him as a dear friend. When Lebon was received into the ranks of the Paris Jacobins, he made a speech claiming that

this was the happiest day of his life, the anniversary of the day when the reactionaries of Arras had sought to arrest Augustin and himself.[4] Lebon soon reached quite a degree of popularity among the Montagnards and the Jacobins; Maximilien and Philippe Lebas both liked him and thought him genuine, which indeed he probably was, but in no way did he become more acceptable to Augustin.

Augustin has attracted censure for his attitude. Louis Jacob, Lebon's biographer and ardent defender, claims that Augustin, seeing Lebon surpass him in the Convention, became a prey to 'base jealousy'.[5] It is certainly true that Augustin was hardly progressing to greater popularity with the Montagnards. When, at the beginning of July, he stood for the Colonial Committee, he only received one vote. Ironically, Lebon signed the results of the voting.[6]

Yet as Maximilien's brother, he did have a degree of influence. Suspects found that they could appeal to him. Faced with visible individual distress, Augustin ceased to be the violent *aboyeur* of the Convention, but, as Michelet tells us, 'had the courage to save many people.'[7]

An event which was to influence his career far more than his rivalry with Lebon, took place at the beginning of July. Grégoire, a deputy who had been on mission in the South of France, came back with disturbing reports on the events there. The previous September, the Army of the Var, later to be re-named the Army of Italy, that is the Army which operated on the Italian frontier, entered Nice, long disputed between France and Piedmont. The French troops under General Anselme were ill-disciplined and Nice and the surrounding villages were pillaged.

> '[The French soldiers] entered the houses. All food was stolen. They took from the unfortunate mountaineers the cow whose milk was for him a luxury when reduced to the coarsest bread; they killed his sheep and calves; they broke his furniture for the pleasure of destruction. Presuming he had money, they gave him a choice of giving it to them or being hanged . . .'[8]

These were what Barras, deputy to the Convention for the Var and now on a mission with the Army of the South, was later to call 'a few disturbances inescapable from a war which was almost a civil war since the French emigrés were stimulating it.' Grégoire, formerly a constitutional bishop, was a fair-minded and intelligent man, who had managed to keep himself above the party. His report on the growing hatred of the French and the disorders in the army was taken seriously by the Convention and heard with alarm; only one member, Bentabole, ventured to suggest that Grégoire might be exaggerating.

But on 13 July, the Convention and all Paris were sidetracked from other troubles by an unexpected shock. A young woman from Normandy, called Charlotte Corday, having gained entrance to Marat's house on the pretext of seeking his help, stabbed him to death with a knife she had purchased in one of the little shops in the Palais-Royal. It was a wasted action. By this time, Marat's power was illusionary, a kind of superstition, and he was already dying.

Augustin, aware that Marat's death had little political significance, wrote to Buissart, 'The death of Marat is probably useful to the Republic in the circumstances',[9] a comment worthy of Maximilien in one of his more chilling moments; but it is undeniable that the murder gave the Montagnards a wonderful opportunity to show their opponents as criminals, in spite of all the Girondin talk about law and order, for it never occurred to anyone that a well-brought-up young woman could have planned a murder on her own. Then, having echoed the sophisticated political view, Augustin allowed himself to become more human.

> '[A] remarkable thing is the way that this infernal creature (Corday) got access to our colleague's home. While Marat has been depicted as such a terrible monster that all France has to come to believe him next to a cannibal, this woman still implored his pity. She wrote, 'It is enough to be unfortunate for you to hear me.' That should help to 'demaratise' Marat and those who believe us in good faith to be sanguinary men. Perhaps you know that Marat lived like a Spartan, that he spent nothing on himself and gave all that he had to those who sought his help. He has said to me and my colleagues many times, 'I have no more to give the unfortunate crowd that follow me; I must borrow something from you.' And he has done so many times.'[10]

After this, Augustin moved into a reflection on calumny – the word appears four times in twenty lines.

> 'The worst enemy of liberty is calumny; it breeds from the ignorance and credulity of those who know no better. A calumny, however absurd it be, can never be got rid of and Paris, which sees the deaths of its most ardent defenders and contents itself with shedding tears on their tombs, will still have to defend itself for centuries against its detractors, while Evreux, Caen, Lyon and Marseille will enjoy unmerited glory because their cities will have for defenders the most cunning and scoundrelly of men.'

Paris was certainly determined to shed tears on Marat's tomb. At the Jacobins, hours were spent whilst every member in turn pronounced eulogies on the dead Marat. Augustin spoke on 15 July, repeating

the story of Marat's charities that he had already recounted to Buissart. Since it was known that Maximilien had frequently found Marat a political embarrassment, the Robespierres were watched keenly by their enemies for any reaction to Marat's death which was not one of gloom. A very spurious source, though coming from one who may have known Augustin slightly, speaks of him as having an expression of gloom at the funeral, though 'it could be seen that he played at despair'.[11] In reality Augustin could so easily have imagined Maximilien on Marat's bier that he had little need to feign seriousness.

After the mourning, the actual changes in the political scene were small and would have come about in any case. Marat had died poor; Robespierre was the only incorruptible figure remaining, the central repository of revolutionary thought. Marat, with his harsh, unlovely realism, had held in check the *enragés*, that group of which Augustin had written to Buissart as early as March, as being 'so-called patriots [who] play the extremist (*font les enragés*) in certain societies, push our principles to absurdity and discredit us by a system of disorganisation, pure and simple.'[12] Both the Robespierres came to believe the *enragés* were the tools and even the accomplices of conspirators.

On 17 July, the Convention, having seen Marat to his tomb in the Panthéon, was able to give its attention to other matters. Among these were the affairs of the South, and on 20 July, Augustin wrote to Buissart:

> 'I have just been appointed commissioner to the Army of Italy. It is a heavy mission; I have accepted it for the good of the country; I am convinced that I can serve usefully; it will destroy the calumnies with which my name has been blackened.'[13]

Thompson finds this statement egotistical.[14] It would be rather surprising if Augustin had taken any other attitude. He must have realised that his hopes of the Convention had not materialised. He was generally regarded as Maximilien's mouthpiece, a matter he could never allow himself to resent. Otherwise, he was seen as nothing more than a turbulent trouble-maker, with his private life a matter for gossip, exaggerated but having enough truth to ensure the talk went on.

As to the weight and importance of the Italy mission, he was most certainly right. The whole of the South was on the verge of civil war; from Marseille to the Italian frontier, there was nothing but chaos. Many people then, and most nineteenth-century historians, put this down to the indiscipline of the Republican troops, and their violence, as Grégoire had shown the Convention, had played a strong part. A modern American historian confirms this:

> ‘By July 1793 numerous acts of indiscipline and rowdiness had done much to make the volunteers (of which the French army was mainly composed) feared throughout the Midi as lawless criminals.’[15]

But the revolt, he tells us, was not entirely due to them. Long before the Revolution, the region had suffered from economic neglect and since the Revolution, it had been irritated by decrees and demands which showed no understanding of the South and its needs.

Representatives were usually sent out in pairs to the armies and on 21 July Ricord, another member of the Montagnards, was named to accompany Augustin.[16] It was a wise choice. Born in Grasse, one of the Representatives of the Var, he knew the South well. He was about Augustin’s age and they must already have known each other, not only because their political sympathies were the same – Ricord also sat with the Montagnards – but because he and his young wife, like Augustin and Charlotte, had a flat at 5 rue St Florentin. Ricord quickly announced that his wife would be accompanying him. As soon as Charlotte heard this, she declared that she would come too. ‘My brother,’ she tells us, ‘consented with joy to my request. Nothing had happened to alter the friendship which reigned between us. Never were family more united than we were, my brother and I.’[17]

This may have been a slight exaggeration on her part, but certainly her idea did solve a very difficult situation. In the rue St Florentin, Charlotte was continually reminded of Maximilien’s desertion and Mme Duplay was not the person to hide her triumph. For Charlotte to go to the South to a completely new place, surrounded by fresh faces and interests, must have seemed the obvious solution. What was forgotten was that characters do not change, however varied the landscapes to which they are exposed.

I cannot discover the exact date on which the Representatives left Paris. Those sent on missions were expected to be speedy in their departures and in this last week in July, the news from the front was universally bad. One of the generals of the Army of the Rhine was accused of treason and arrested as the French armies fell back; the Austrians captured Valenciennes; Paris was on the verge of panic, the food shops were surrounded by crowds. The Committee of Public Safety strengthened itself, taking in Carnot, an experienced military engineer, one of the few soldiers in the Convention. On 26 July, Maximilien Robespierre was elected to the Committee. About the same time, or perhaps a day or two earlier, Augustin and his companions set out for the South.[18]

Endnotes

[1] Michon, vol. 1, p. 172.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 173.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4.
[4] Aulard, *Jacobins* (9 July, No. 445).
[5] Jacob, vol. 1, p. 109.
[6] Laurent and Clavel, vol. 68, pp. 307–8.
[7] Michelet, *Histoire*, vol. 20, pp. 253 *et seq*. There is an entertaining account of an appeal to Augustin in Lamothe-Langon, p. 311 *et seq.*
[8] Barras, vol. 1, p. 101.
[9] Michon, vol. 1, p. 173.
[10] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 173.
[11] *Historique pittoresque du Comité National* vol. 2, p. 56. This is of dubious historical value, but contains some gossip of which it is supposed that it may come from contemporary sources.
[12] Michon, vol. 1, p. 162.
[13] *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 176.
[14] Thompson, vol. 2, p. 104.
[15] Johnson, pp. 222–3. Unhappily this excellent book stops in the summer of 1793 and contains no material on Nice.
[16] Laurent and Clavel, pp. 69, 270.
[17] *Charlotte*, p. 239.
[18] For the tension in Paris at this time see Palmer, p. 41.

Chapter 8

Paris to Aix, July–August 1793

The travellers had a long and dangerous journey before them, although their carriage was escorted by a number of soldiers. They took with them a large, leather bag filled with money for the Army of Italy, beside letters and plans for the generals.[1] Even at the best of times, it took about a week to travel between Paris and the Riviera in this period, a point that is difficult to remember today as we settle ourselves into our seats in the T.G.V. at ten in the morning, with every expectation of arriving at Marseille around five.

Ricord and Augustin seem to have got on well from the start, and Mme Ricord was a charming, pretty, very amusing woman. New scenes and pleasant companions must have roused Charlotte from her melancholy reflections on the machinations of Eleanore and her mother.

They reached Lyon without incident. The city was now on the verge of revolt from the Convention and the people were hostile to anyone from Paris. The Jacobin leader, Chalier, had only recently been overthrown, tried and executed. However, there was no way of by-passing the city and the Representatives' carriage drew up before the *hôtel de ville*. Augustin and Ricord went in to see the municipal officials, a courtesy visit which it would obviously have been a sign of great weakness to avoid. While the young men were absent, a crowd gathered around the carriage, booed the ladies, shouted insults and demanded what was being said about Lyon in Paris. At length Augustin and Ricord reappeared, having met with nothing but rudeness from the authorities who blamed them – perhaps with a degree of reason – for what had happened to the Girondin deputies. In the carriage they deliberated whether or not to break their journey at Lyon; prudence won and they continued on their way.[2]

As they went further south, just as the roads became rougher and dustier, so the political scene became more uncertain and confused. Certainly, the great trade fair at Beaucaire had taken place as usual, albeit in the midst of anxiety and rumour. Marseille was in open revolt against the Convention and Toulon was more than ill-affected. Fighting between Jacobin and Federalist sympathisers flared up at Nîmes, Manosque and other smaller towns. The news from the frontier was not much better. General Brunet, who had been defeated in a valiant attempt to capture the almost impregnable fortress of Saorge, had been obliged to fall back towards Nice with heavy losses[3] and was regarded as a

traitor by the Representatives already in the Midi. On 16 July, Barras and Fréron informed the Committee that Nice was now completely cut off from Paris. Then, a few days later, Fréron wrote again, forecasting that 'Robespierre Cadet [meaning Augustin] and Ricord' might be hindered on their journey.[4]

In the sporadic fighting that sprang up all over the South, many who took part were not much better than bands of brigands turning political events to their account. But some were more respectable, and were better led and organised. Inspired by real hatred – whether Royalist or Federalist in its origins – of the government in Paris, they now began to march on Avignon, where the Representatives had just arrived. On the night of 8 August, the rebels made a successful attack on the little town and fort of Cadenet, which made it possible for them to encircle Avignon. The Republican troops counter-attacked at dawn and there was a battle that lasted all day along the banks of the Durance. The two Representatives took part in the fight and set an example to the troops. 'They ran the greatest dangers,' says the official report, 'and owed their safety to some patriots who rallied round them.'[5] So it was at Cadenet, not at Toulon as is often supposed, that Augustin was first under fire. He had established himself, even in the eyes of his enemies, 'as a man of some courage.'[6]

At Avignon, several other Representatives in the southern departments met them to confer. Among them was the Corsican Saliceti. He too was destined for the Army of Italy and, because of the civil war that had afflicted Corsica for some while, was more experienced in military matters than either Augustin or Ricord.

It was at this time, perhaps about 10 August, that Saliceti received an unexpected visitor. This was a fellow Corsican, Captain Bonaparte, in command of a convoy of powder for the Army of Italy. The young man was tired and dispirited. Having arrived in France as a refugee from Paoli's revolt about two months before, he was regarded with suspicion; his mother and family of young brothers and sisters were near starvation at Bagnoles. In despair of making progress in the South, he had written off to the Minister of War, asking for a command in the Army of the Rhine.[7] However, during his recent journey with the powder wagons, he had stopped for a few days at Beaucaire trade fair. Here, in his spare time, he wrote a pamphlet called *Le Souper de Beaucaire,* in which he depicted merchants from the great southern cities – Nîmes, Marseille and Toulouse – talking with soldiers over supper at an inn during the fair. Today a plaque on the wall of a house in Beaucaire tells us where he began the work. Now at Avignon he showed it to Saliceti.

Some biographers of Napoleon have dismissed the work as a piece of crass propaganda, but it did place the views of the Montagnards clearly before the readers; it emphasised the madness of the civil war. It was clear, simple and could be understood by anyone. It is not surprising that Saliceti, who received his countryman with great kindness, read the pamphlet with interest and showed it to other Convention Representatives present in the town. According to Jung,[8] Augustin and another Representative, Gasparin, were particularly impressed by the pamphlet and by Bonaparte himself. They praised him, praise that must have been like wine to his despairing spirit. Money from public funds paid for the printing and distribution of the pamphlet.

The army assembled at Avignon now prepared to march on Marseille, but Augustin and Ricord decided to make their own way to Aix. Probably their intention was to rally the little towns caught between the rebels and the Jacobins and pillaged by both. They wished to show that, even in the midst of civil war, the government was strong enough to protect and punish. Charlotte tells us that they avoided the main road where the people were hostile and, travelling by side roads, which in those days must have been little more than tracks, they came to the market town of Manosque.

Today the stalls of Manosque are gone, but the main gateway stands. I walked beneath it and up the narrow main street until I stood in the little market place before the small town hall where Augustin and his friends must have alighted. It was quiet and pleasant as I sat all day, drinking coffee and writing. An old woman sold strawberries and children played ball against the wall of the *hôtel de ville*. 'We stayed two days in the little town', said Charlotte. 'That which we feared happened; we were badly received.'

The Representatives were now without significant military force (their military escort seems to have been a rather inconstant element in their journey) ; and their arguments did not allay the townspeople's fear of the rebels from Marseille. On 13 August, they set out, intending to cross the Durance and make their way to Aix. Unlike Charlotte, Augustin believed that their visit to Manosque had had some success.[9] They were accompanied by two dragoons who did appear to have stayed constant to them and who rode ahead to 'clear the country', as Charlotte put it.

The rebels, no doubt informed by spies from Manosque, knew of their plans. The rebels were led by a certain Bayne, formerly Public Prosecutor at Hyères, but now turned guerilla soldier. The river Durance near Manosque was crossed by means of two flat bottomed boats, apparently big enough to take carriages. The rebels hid themselves in the undergrowth that bordered the river on the other side

from Manosque. A man lay in the bushes with an axe in his hand ready to cut the cords that fastened the boats as soon as the carriage was on the second boat.[10] Profound silence was ordered. Unfortunately for the guerillas there were among them two or three young men who could not keep still in the rising tension. 'The *conventionnel* Robespierre and his colleague had already gone on the first boat, when the two dragoons ahead noticed a movement in the bushes and cried out a warning.' For a few moments the confusion must have been frenzied, the frightened horses plunging about, the carriages turning, the dragoons probably firing . . . how it was managed without accident it is impossible to say, but the carriage regained the Manosque side without anyone being hurt or killed. So as to prevent pursuit, Augustin had the cords of the first boat cut, but to no avail, because some men from Manosque who were supposed to be guarding the crossing 'immediately and in our presence re-tied the ropes.'[11]

There was nothing for it but to go back to Manosque. However, by this time, the inhabitants had become so unpleasant and unfriendly that it was useless asking any help from them. Augustin and Ricord continued to insist that the crossing be put out of service, though it was obvious that no one was going to take any notice of them. Indeed it soon became clear that it was better to leave at once, so with the two dragoons still going ahead, they took the road for Forcalquier.

They arrived late in the evening at the Hôtel de la Croix d'Or in the main square of the little town. Here they were soon joined by the Mayor and Municipality who in those troubled times were in permanent session.[12] 'We were very hungry,' Charlotte tells us, 'and above all longed to sleep. It was eleven at night and we had had no rest since morning. But while we were at table there came an express from the Mayor of Manosque, telling us that the [people of] Marseilles were in pursuit.'[13]

The Representatives were eager to put up a fight. They had the gates closed and the National Guard alerted, but it soon became clear that the inhabitants of Forcalquier had no intention of pitting themselves against the Marseillais, of whom they were absolutely terrified. As panic spread, the Representatives and their ladies abandoned the carriage and all their belongings and, accompanied by the local guide and the faithful dragoons, mounted horses provided by the Mayor and rode out into the darkness to climb the rough mountain tracks where the horses had difficulty in keeping their footing.[14] It was, says Sicard bracingly, a summer night under a beautiful Provencal sky. So we must hope that the travellers counted their blessings.

Almost as soon as they had gone, the advance guard of the rebels reached Forcalquier, announcing that their main body was close behind. The people rushed to the Mairie and implored that the invaders be given everything they wanted. Whoever could, fled or hid themselves. The Marseillais forced their way into every house and barn, bursting open cupboards, thrusting their bayonets into beds and of course the carriage and luggage of the Representatives was seized. Among these was the large leather bag, known in the local dialect as a *vache*,[15] filled with coins intended for the Army of Italy, a find that must have been some consolation for the loss of the Representatives. Bayne also opened their portfolios wherein he found

> 'a correspondence with the factions against the so-called rebels of Marseille, a letter to the Committee in which the Representatives give an account of their passage through Lyon, a list of the Jacobins of Toulon and another list of those who should be punished as traitors.'

Bayne went off with all these to Manosque, threatening to put everyone at Forcalquier to the sword should they give any more help to the fugitives.

Meanwhile the Representatives were high up on the mountains, the horses cautiously picking their way along the precipitous mule-tracks. Augustin in his account of the adventure passes rapidly over the journey and for any detail we have to rely on Charlotte. She tells us of their ride through the dark on the stumbling horses and how in the early morning they reached Banon, a small village in the mountains where the 'venerable pastor' – presumably the constitutional priest of the village – received them with kindness, and here they were able to rest and eat. After some time they continued their journey towards the little mountain town of Sault. On their way they were fortunate in meeting a young doctor who knew the country well and who joined their party.

One would like to know much more about this meeting, for their new friend turned out to have some federalist sympathies; he had even been invited to sit in the breakaway Convention which the Girondins had tried to establish at Bourges. None of this, however, seems to have proved any barrier to friendship. The doctor lived at Sault; he invited Augustin and Ricord to stay with him and arranged for friends of his to put up Charlotte and Mme Ricord. He also introduced the Representatives to the Popular Society where they were well received.[16]

The Representatives stayed four days at Sault. During this time the fortunes of the Montagnards in the South continued to improve. The rebels were pushed out of Aix-en-Provence and encamped between Aix and Marseille.[17] Augustin and Ricord, now supported by thirty armed patriots, returned to

Manosque. Their appearance filled the townsfolk with understandable dismay; they had every reason to expect fire and sword in their turn and they met the Representatives with abject apologies.[18] At first, Augustin and Ricord took a tough line, as can be seen by the letter they wrote to the Committee:

> 'We are a second time in Manosque, citizen colleagues. This rebel town, which disobeys the laws and insults the Republic in the persons of the Representatives of the People, needs the strong measures we are going to take . . . We understand with sorrow that the attack on Lyon has been postponed . . . We must not have any tenderness for the assassins of the Republic. Their astute acceptance of the constitution does not change their feelings, and to deceive those who do not recognise conspirators when those conspirators talk of unity, constitution and the indivisibility of the Republic . . .'

This suggests that the Municipality of Manosque had little to look forward to except immediate death. However, five days later there is quite a different tone:

> 'We have repaired, citizens, the outrages offered to the Republic . . . The Commune of Manosque was one of the most counter-revolutionary in the South because it was one of the blindest. It was difficult to do good, because it was difficult to obtain a hearing.'

Difficult for Augustin or difficult for the people of Manosque? I am not sure, perhaps it was both.

> 'Also we had been misunderstood the first time we came . . . when we returned a great number of citizens took flight . . . ignorance made them believe the stupidest things. Someone had told them that Manosque was to be razed to the ground, that an army of brigands was to devastate, burn and pillage the guilty city. We dispersed the panic by making known to them the principles of the National Convention of which they were perfectly ignorant in spite of our efforts to make them understood.'

Principles are of course fine, but I cannot help thinking that the fact that the federalist army was being steadily driven back on Marseille had something to do with it. In spite of the increasing and frightening rumours of disaffection in Toulon, Manosque had realised that the Montagnards would eventually win.

'We spent a long time [at Manosque]', Augustin concluded happily, 'to do away with all ill-feeling, and now everything is peaceful and enlightened. We hope the town is reconquered for reason and liberty.'[19]

After this, the Representatives moved on to Aix. I believe that they encountered more adventures on their way, of which all record is lost, but that I will speak of in a moment. However, 28

August saw Augustin and his companions safe in the town. He did some sight-seeing in this famous place which he was to describe to his brother as the most beautiful in the world. Having seen the glittering fountains and the magnificent houses of the Cours Mirabeau, he sat down to write to Maximilien.

> 'One has to be very skilful to do good in these southern departments. You do not well understand the situation of these unhappy countries. I have gained experience of them in a very short time. People are *exalté* [wildly excited], incapable of reason; some, having once decided, cannot listen to contrary opinions . . . these people are fiery but ignorant and are easily led into error. The people of the north are not more enlightened, but, since they are more phlegmatic, they take longer to stir up; one has time to warn and disabuse them. You'll realise at once the consequences of this diversity of temperaments and I assure you that a great number have been stupidly deceived.
>
> 'The crimes of some men calling themselves patriots have made it inevitable that other citizens should have united against disturbing vexations. Counter-revolutionaries find means of seizing on those groups of men. Patriots find themselves persecuted and provoked by the blind tools of some counter-revolutionaries who have led astray the masses of honest folk. I don't think I have got this wrong. Such people are often stupidity personified and it would be easy to mislead them with the greatest ease.
>
> 'It is obvious to me that if the patriots wish to punish all rebels indiscriminately, the civil war will be interminable. Passions are now exasperated to such an unbelievable degree that one has to take every precaution to prevent a patriot who has a complaint against another, not to become in his turn the victim of a malevolent denunciation. Answer my letter; correct me if I am unfair.'[20]

This letter is interesting from several points of view. It is Augustin's first impression of southern departments and though in forming it he must have benefited from his own conversations with Ricord and the doctor of Sault, it is greatly to his credit that he saw it with so little bias. Certainly it contains the germ of his obsession of which we shall hear so much later, that the extremists are controlled by the counter-revolutionaries, but no one can find much fault with his belief that atrocity will only beget atrocity. Yet in the north, as Jacob has remarked, his attitude often bordered on violence. Paradoxically the passionate South had calmed him.

It is true enough to say, I think, that this was because he was no longer with Maximilien, struggling to deflect every shadow of criticism or danger that might approach his brother, but this is only half the truth. It must be confessed by us, though he would never have done so himself, that his career in Paris, on which he had built so many hopes, had been a failure. He could not move on to any ground that Maximilien had not already mastered. Baudot's comments are spiteful of course, but it is sadly true that his speeches in the Convention and Jacobins are far from inspiring. Augustin always wanted to be a great orator and he never came near it.

Now, on his mission to the South, he was faced with a situation in which he could do extremely well. He had a real concern for, and sympathy with, the peasantry, and a strong recognition of their needs, virtues and limitations; he was an excellent administrator and the Army of Italy was soon to benefit from his gifts; he was physically fearless and enjoyed the excitements of war and danger.

To return to the situation of the Representatives in Aix: there was an important factor in it which we, today, find hard to remember but which can never have been far from their minds. They were almost without contact with Paris; the most shattering events could take place there and in the northern and central provinces and they would be unaware till perhaps weeks after the event. Although the rebel army of Marseilles had been vanquished, there were plenty of bands, brigands, patriots and Royalists, friends or enemies according to one's political affiliations, roaming about the countryside, disrupting communications. We have seen how the rebels captured the Representatives' account of their visit to Lyon, and I believe that another, probably very interesting letter, may have gone astray at this period also.

In his letter to his brother, Augustin mentions that he has 'embraced the prisoners, Ricord first of all.'[21] What prisoners? How did Ricord come to be among them? It seems to me most likely that, on their way to Aix, the Representatives had another skirmish with a group of rebels, and that for a few hours Ricord was captured. An official account of this must have gone off to the Committee but was never received. The history of the South during these months must be full of these small chasms.

Certainly, the rebels still had plenty of bite. The Representatives Albitte and Saliceti had entered Marseille at 8 o'clock on the morning of 25 August, but on the 27th came confirmation of the rumours that had been circulating regarding Toulon. The great sea port had invited the English and Spanish fleets into its harbour and hoisted the white Royalist flag. On the 30th, all the Representatives in the

area met to confer at Marseille, before proceeding on to Nice. They included Barras and Fréron who until then had been in control of the Army of Italy.

Endnotes

[1] Sicard, p. 1–7.
[2] *Charlotte*, p. 240–241.
[3] Wilkinson, p. 41.
[4] *Recueil* (26 July 1793).
[5] Jung, vol. 2, p. 351.
[6] Leblanc, p. 18.
[7] Holland Rose, vol. 1, p. 46.
[8] Jung.
[9] Michon, vol. 1, p. 178.
[10] Poupé, 'Robespierre Jeune', p. 348.
[11] Poupé, 'Robespierre Jeune', p. 348.
[12] Sicard, p.10.
[13] *Charlotte*, p. 244.
[14] Sicard, p. 10 *et seq*.
[15] Sicard, rather amazingly, seems to have assumed the *vache* to be a real cow which the Representatives were taking along as a precaution against famine!
[16] *Charlotte*, p. 245.
[17] Michon, vol. 1, p. 182.
[18] *Recueil*, 6/,576; *Charlotte*, p. 246.
[19] *Recueil*, 6/157.
[20] Michon, vol. 1, p. 183 *et seq*.
[21] Michon, vol. 1, p. 184.

Chapter 9

Nice, September–October 1793

It is difficult for us to imagine Nice as it appeared in 1793. Indeed, for the whole Baie des Anges, we have to do a mental archaeological excavation. Before we can begin, we must do away with the luxury hotel and flats, the Promenade des Anglais and Queen Victoria, the airport and the motorways of the present day. However, by contemporary and local standards, Nice at the end of the eighteenth century was a fairly large town, clustered in a kind of triangle at the foot of the castle hill. The castle had been demolished some time before and the town was expanding, for the square now called the Place Garibaldi had already been built and just beyond the Fontaine du Soleil, there were new streets round the Préfecture and the theatre. A guide book written in 1792 tells us:

> 'There is now a distinction made between the old and the new town. The last is regular, the houses well built and the streets wide. Its position is on the side of the sea and is terminated on one side by a terrace which serves as a promenade. From this spot the mountains of Corsica can be perceived at sunrise. At the bottom of the hill there is another public promenade, on one side bordered by a large alley of trees and on the other by the Paillon torrent. The old town is more populous; but the streets are narrow and the houses ill built; strangers scarcely ever think of lodging there.'[1]

When Smollett had arrived in Nice twenty years earlier, he had almost relented from his usual hatred of foreign lands.

> 'When I stand upon the rampart and look around me, I can scarce help thinking myself enchanted. The small extent of country that I see is all cultivated like a garden. Indeed the plain presents nothing but gardens full of trees, loaded with oranges, lemons, citrons which make a delightful appearance.'[2]

After a year of civil war, it is probable that the countryside did not present such a smiling picture to Augustin; furthermore, Nice itself was the centre for a starving, ill-disciplined and disappointed army.

Barras and Fréron appear to have accompanied Augustin and Ricord to do a kind of 'handover'. They stayed in Nice until 13 September. Then they went off to Grasse and did not finally leave for Toulon until 20 September.[3]

On 12 September, there was something of an excitement when English and Spanish ships appeared off Villefranche and an English officer, under a flag of truce, made for the shore in a rowing

boat. He carried a message for the Governor of Villefranche, Citizen Lalonde, calling on him to imitate the Governor of Toulon and receive the Allied men of war. The officers were conducted to the fort where they were met by the Representatives who replied to

> 'the insolent proposition of the enemies of the Republic in the presence of all the officers, the General of the Army of Italy, the municipal officers of the Alpes-Maritimes and Nice, all wearing their scarves, and a crowd of citizens who cried 'Vive la République!' Finally the proclamation was burned by the Representatives in the sight of the assembled multitude and cries of 'Vive la République!' followed the officers as they rode back to their ships.'[4]

Having assisted at this bloodless victory, Barras and Fréron left Nice and the newcomers were alone with a multitude of problems. First of all, they were faced by a hostile population. Grégorie, the first of the Representatives to the Alpes-Maritimes, had spoken in his report to the Convention of the pillage and violence of General Anselme's troops when they had first entered Nice.

> 'Infamous deeds are witnessed in the cottages, in several towns and especially in Sospel, six times lost and retaken, and now but a heap of ruins. These are the causes that have lowered our credit, chilled patriotism, embittered the population and stifled the revolutionary movement in this department. Besides the pillaging of private houses, the state has been rifled, the coffers of emigrés robbed . . . a pamphlet published at Nice values the loss to the department at fifteen million . . . these atrocities lead the mountaineers to leave their homes and . . . organise themselves into a company of militia . . . '[5]

These mountaineers, never as organised as Grégorie believed, formed a long continuing terror. Known as *barbets* they haunted the mountain paths, which they knew far better than any soldier. They could vanish in an instant into the rocks. Their activities threw a web over all the villages around Nice, Castellar, Peillon, Sainte-Agnès, Eze and Roquebrune, those places we visit now for the ancient houses, the views and the restaurants; we sit in sun-lit squares and write our postcards, 'I wish I could show you this beautiful, peaceful place . . .' But then, these villages were regarded with terror as the *barbets*, made safe from denunciation by village loyalties going back a thousand years, set forth from their cover to pounce on Republican outposts and teams of supplies. Such Republican soldiers as they caught they would strip and fling from precipices.[6]

The *barbets* are supposed by sentimental nineteenth-century commentators to have been solely actuated by Republican atrocities; in reality they showed a fine impartiality. Fleeing Royalists could also

be good prey, as they frequently carried gold and jewels. As a fighting force, the *barbets* were certainly effective; they wore down the supply lines of the army and the morale of the troops; one division lost 400 mules to the *barbets*. No wonder the soldiers became trigger happy at any unexpected figure moving among the rocks. In the Archives Nationales in Paris, there is a list of those compensated by the Representatives for damage done by the troops. It contains the name of a farmer who was fired on by the soldiers, who mistook him for a *barbet*; he lost his arm.[7]

Of course the *barbets* were all the more effective because there were so few roads and these were in such poor repair. The principal route was the old Aurelian way, the Roman road which, in its heyday, used to run from Rome to Spain, but now this was overgrown and ruinous.[8] In times of peace, most travellers, having been set down by the stage-coach in Nice, chose to continue their way to Monaco, Menton and Italy by sea. All food supplies came to Nice by sea, and here we reach one of the Representatives' major difficulties: not only were the small ships and boats which brought supplies harassed by the Allied navies of England and Spain, they were even more effectively tormented by the pirate boats that sailed from the port of Oneglia, a ramshackle little city, under the protection of Piedmont.

Oneglia seemed pretty safe from reprisal in the autumn of 1793; it was circled by the neutral land of the principality of Genoa, and the French were certainly in no position to attack by sea. Genoa itself was not wholly unfriendly, unsure of its future, its power in decline, its rulers playing off France and Piedmont against each other and hoping to survive. To this decaying state, the young and vigorous French Republic offered a strange attraction made up of fear, curiosity and a kind of admiration, which makes me think of the little puppet-like figure regarding Longhi's rhinoceros.

It was now 23 September and still no letters had come from Paris. Augustin and Ricord sent an appeal into the silence.

> 'The Army of the Var is suffering considerably in every way, little money, no clothing, needing guns, relying on foreign bread, living in mountains, surrounded by frightful precipices, in a country in which the inhabitants are our enemies, where the assignents [paper money] are discredited, where supplies are incredibly dear; such is the situation of our army, yet it is composed of brave soldiers who have made every possible sacrifice and who lack neither ardour or courage . . . If they suffer much longer without absolute necessities, their spirit will

> break and there will be no time to remedy it. There must be action, but real action, as the soldier is sickened with promises.'[9]

Supplies had been coming, bullocks, ammunition and money, but the Army of Italy was at the end of the line and on the way, the Army of the Pyrenees, the Army at Marseilles and that before Toulon had taken their share – there was nothing left.

> 'Our only resource is in Genoa. We beg a decree forbidding the Representatives and Generals of one army to misappropriate anything destined for another. The Army of Italy is in the midst of icy winter on the summit of mountains. It is to them that clothing should be sent.'[10]

A fortnight later Ricord sent a long and detailed report to the Committee.

The situation was still desperate but there were gleams of hope. A local huntsman, Citizen Rusca, had come forward. He knew the mountains as thoroughly as the *barbets* and was ready to train a troop of soldiers. 'A man of courage and active watchfulness, the terror of the *barbets*, he has a price put on his head by the Piedmontese tyrant.'

Even better, some days later, on the 8 October, they put Haller, a Swiss banker, in charge of supplies.[11]

> 'He seems an honest man whose zeal for his country [*civisme*] equals his probity and knowledge. He is of great use to us; his resources and credit assure us of the means of subsistence. It is essential for the good of the army that this man stays at the post we have confided to him.'

One of Haller's great advantages was that he had many connections with Genoa, especially with the banking house of Tue in that city, from whom the Representatives might be able to obtain credit to purchase supplies.

Ricord's tone about Haller is slightly defensive. The truth was that his *civisme* was not quite above question but the Representatives could not do without him. Haller was a tall man with a long thin face, blue eyes and – somewhat eccentrically for the period – had a red beard. He was the kind of man who 'gets things done', highly intelligent, a bit sharp. As Demougeot says, 'he performed the overwhelming task of feeding the town and army where honesty would not have sufficed.'[12] Haller was popular with the officers who referred to him as 'Papa Haller.'[13] The Committee did not interfere with the appointment but, as will be seen, they remained suspicious.

While they awaited the results of Haller's efforts, it became clear that the 'law of the maximum' which was supposed to keep prices at a minimum, would not operate in the Alpes-Maritimes. In any case, the outlying towns, all with their little markets, could not be supervised properly, and the suppliers of goods refused to put them on the market if they could not obtain a profit. On 14 October a Genoese *felucca* sailed into the port of Nice loaded with much-desired grain, but showed every sign of going away again when offered the price of the maximum.

'See,' Augustin wrote hastily to the municipal officers, 'if there isn't some way of making the Genoese sell their goods without damaging their interests.'[14]

Expediency and efficiency were becoming more pleasing to him than revolutionary fervour. On 20 October, he wrote in his own hand to the administrators of the town.

> 'You know without doubt the effect of the law of the maximum on supplies for the town. It makes us fear that there will soon be no provisions of any kind. This will happen if you don't regard the difficulty of procuring supplies in an unproductive countryside, where the price of transport is not fixed and the merchant cannot find the money to continue his commerce. We believe that you will heed these observations and that you, with all the constituted authorities, will take measures to assure abundance and tranquillity in the town.'[15]

The same difficulties happened with soap. Its disappearance from the market appeared to coincide with the application of the law of the maximum, so that it was impossible not to suspect greed and malevolence, but Augustin wrote,

> 'Soap is an absolute necessity, no means should be neglected by which all citizens can procure it . . . the authorities of the department are to augment the price of soap proportionately to the material of which it is made . . . charge the authorities to take all means that they judge good to put a brake on the greediness of buyers and sellers.'[16]

Leaving Nice for a while, let us look at military affairs. The supposed treachery of General Brunet had created a sense of distrust between officers and Representatives. The former were tempted by the example of Toulon, the latter were ready to see in every small dereliction or omission signs of latent treachery.

The Representatives had not been long in Nice when a plot was formed to deliver Monaco, or Fort Hercule as the Republicans called it, to the English. This was foiled, just in time, by Lieutenant Basset who showed 'courage worthy of eulogy' and was promoted Captain as a result. But Citizen

Giraud, a former justice of the peace, the leader of the conspiracy, was shot on 16 October at four in the afternoon.[17]

This plot seems to have been real enough; one can be less sure about Entrevaux. The Representatives visited this famous and important fort in the valley of the Var on 4 October, for they travelled about a good deal, determined to see for themselves what was going on at the outposts. They found the place weakly garrisoned and with few military supplies and both - but it would seem particularly Augustin - became highly suspicious of treason. They arrested General Létanduère and sent him to Paris where he was guillotined the following spring.[18] It is a sad story, for Létanduère may well have been innocent, but similar events were taking place on every front in France.

Command in the Army of Italy was poor and confused; the army itself was divided into two parts, the Revolutionary Army which was engaged in besieging Toulon, under the control of Barras and Fréron, and the Army of the Var with which Augustin and Ricord were concerned. General Carteux was supposedly the commander of both these armies, but to the relief of Augustin and Ricord, neither of whom could stand him, he remained before Toulon. An artist before the Revolution, he knew next to nothing of war. His wife went with him to his headquarters every day and organised him, a military Mrs Proudie. She had no illusions about his capacity. 'This young man knows what he is taking about and you don't,' she said to him one day, following some suggestion from Major Bonaparte.

Ricord and Augustin appointed General Dumerbion as Commander of their part of the Army of Italy. 'He has our confidence and deserves it,' Ricord wrote.[19] Dumerbion had been an officer in the army before the Revolution, but being of a malleable character had survived political changes. A good officer, possibly a little lazy and valetudinarian at times, he was perfectly happy to do the will of the Representatives and, as we shall presently see, of certain officers below him. Norwood Young speaks of him as 'trembling before the Representatives',[20] which is a considerable exaggeration. Their relationship was excellent, the more so as, very soon, little need be expected of him personally; he was to have under his command two of the most brilliant soldiers in France.

It was about this time, in the first half of October, when correspondence from Paris had been re-established, that Augustin picked a quarrel with Bouchotte, the Minister of War.[21] It was over what seems on the surface to have been a very trivial matter. A certain Lieutenant Delort had been sent with despatches to Paris and there had pulled a few strings, with the result that Bouchotte appointed him Adjutant-General. Augustin was furious and on 16 October wrote an indignant letter to Bouchotte,

from whom he received an unsatisfactory reply. This in its turn provoked an even angrier retort from Augustin. There is every reason to wonder why Augustin, faced as he now was with such intractable difficulties, should have chosen to waste his time on such a minor matter. For a possible answer, we have to take a wider view of the political scene.

Pleasant and reassuring as it was to get letters from Paris once more, less agreeable matters than communications from the Committee or from Maximilien were filtering through the mail bags. *Père Duchesne*, edited by Hébert, was becoming more and more widely read in the army. It aimed at being a paper to the people, for the people, and its admirers no doubt felt it was every bit as good as Marat's *Ami du Peuple*. It was extremely violent and public abuses were exposed in obscene language. Far more explicit than any tabloid would dare to be today, *Père Duchesne*'s main target was religion. Bouchotte was an associate and friend of Hébert's. If he were to get the idea he could appoint officers, the Army of Italy could be flooded by enthusiasts who would encourage anti-religious violence among the troops, as well as supporting a rigid and extremist economic policy, with attacks on the merchants who alone could feed the armies.

Bouchotte fed the flames of suspicion by saying in his reply: 'You think he does not have great military talents; that's as may be. But sans-culottes see as the first talent patriotism and republicanism.' Augustin, as we have seen, preferred to see efficiency added to these admirable qualities. What he feared was an upsurge of anti-christianisation in the army, which might violently prejudice the inhabitants of Nice against the French and wreck the chance of exploiting any favourable diplomatic moves from the Genoese. The Representatives themselves had refrained from any attacks on religion. Decrees confiscating gold, lead and iron from churches for the army[22] contained no assaults on anyone's religious beliefs. Nice kept its old street names; the districts of La Trinité and La Croix Marbre still retained their religious titles, which would have blistered Hébert's tongue.

So much for the political reasons behind the quarrel with Bouchotte; there were, of course, emotional reasons as well. Whether he was aware of it or not, Augustin's hand was closing over the Army of Italy. It was becoming his possession; its soldiers, 'courageous warriors . . . ignored by perfidy and malevolence',[23] were his children now, worthy of the same protective fervour he displayed towards Maximilien. Much later he was to be accused of treating the Army of Italy as his own property. It was an accusation that had more truth in it than many others which were made against him.

As we have seen, the coast of Genoa was the best route by which food could reach Nice and the army. The English were as much aware of this as the French, and besides encouraging the pirates of Oneglia, were capable of taking a hand themselves. On 16 October,[24] Augustin and Ricord wrote to the Committee: 'The port of Genoa is the tomb of France.' English ships had pursued the frigate *Modeste* into that neutral harbour and there had set her on fire with much loss of life. The Genoese had stood by and, perhaps wisely from their point of view, had done nothing to prevent this outrage. Yet it was impossible to quarrel openly with the Genoese and this was the very day Augustin had to suspend the law of the maximum so that the Genoese merchants could make a profit on their grain.[25]

Lyon fell on 10 October and the news must have reached Nice about the 14th. It was decided that Ricord should set out for Lyon to grab, if possible, men and supplies for the Army of Italy. His departure was a severe loss to Augustin, for not only was Ricord a very hard worker and good administrator, as indeed was Augustin himself, but he also had what Augustin lacked, a cheerful and un-anxious disposition.[26]

By the 16th he was gone, and that very day the Piedmontese Army launched a small-scale attack on the left wing of the Army of Italy, near the fort of Gilette in the valley of the Var.

Endnotes

[1] Historical and Picturesque Description of the County of Nice. P.4.
[2] Smollett.
[3] *Recueil*: 6/477 Hamel.
[4] Robespierre, *Papiers inedits.*
[5] Laurent and Clavel, 68/707–8.
[6] Michon, vol. 1, p. 220.
[7] Archives Nationales III 85.
[8] The roads occupied a good deal of the Representative attention. They also had to repair the bridge over the Paillion. Archives des Alpes-Maritimes (A.A.M.) L259.
[9] Michon vol. 2, p. 49.
[10] *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 51.
[11] *Recueil*, 7/241 for Rusca, *Recueil*, 7/317 for Haller.
[12] Demougeot, vol. 2, p. 467.
[13] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 277.
[14] A.A.M. L.59. As early as 15 September Augustin had informed the Committee that it was impossible to apply the maximum in Nice. 6/507.
[15] A.A.M., L. 59.
[16] *Ibid.*, L.59.
[17] Combet, *La Révolution dans le Comté de Nice*, p.241.
[18] On Entrevaux see 'Kellerman à Robespierre Jeune'. Kellerman and Augustin seem to have had an old feud. Augustin had opposed his entry to the Jacobin Club in Paris. Kellerman was imprisoned but survived the Terror.
[19] Michon, vol. 2, p. 53.
[20] Young, p. 30.
[21] Michon, vol. 2, p. 55, 56, 65, 68. See also Charavay, in which the anti-*enragé* aspect is perhaps not sufficiently stressed.
[22] A.A.M. L59.

[23] *Recueil*.
[24] *Ibid.*, 7/461.
[25] Combet, 'Les Arrêtés'.
[26] Michon, vol. 2, p. 57.

Chapter 10

Nice, October–November 1793

Augustin was alone, if we can use that phrase when we remember he had with him Charlotte, Mme Ricord, secretaries, military advisers, generals, clerks and servants. But in his command and his responsibility he was alone, and in surroundings very different from the rue des Rapporteurs or even the rue St Honoré.

When the Representatives had first arrived in Nice, they had lodged near the domicile of the *général-en-chef*,[1] not far from the citadel, but soon they moved to the Maison St Pierre, in the rue St Paul et St Pierre, the main street of the town, close to the theatre.[2] The back of the house overlooked the promenade by the sea. It is a large house of about three stories. From 1793 to 1797 it was to be occupied by the Representatives of the People. Formerly, it had belonged to Sieur de St Paul who had been Consul in Spain. When he came back to Nice in the Year V, he was not much concerned about the house, but claimed some of his furniture, a problem that occupied the municipal officers for several days. Many people had passed through the mansion during the revolutionary years, indeed two mattresses came to light that belonged to General Masséna, having been delivered there for his use in 1794.

An inventory taken in 1794 allows us to learn something about the furniture used by Augustin and the Ricords. We read of chairs embroidered with *petit point*, a bed with blue and white hangings, armchairs covered in red damask and a large gilded mirror. There were also a considerable number of gaming tables.[3]

The gaming tables point the way to a fresh and not wholly creditable chapter in the history of Augustin's mission to Nice. The large house with its big rooms and attractive furniture was all too obviously made for entertaining. Earlier in the mission things were different, when they were all living near the citadel. The ladies spent their days sewing for the armies and in the evening, when Ricord and Augustin returned from work, they went for country walks. It is probable that the move to the new grand house marked a change which Charlotte experienced with apprehension.

Mme Ricord began to get tiresome. Charlotte must, in any case, have been at her mercy, because Mme Ricord would obviously have known about marketing and housekeeping, which would have had many variations from the north. She would have had no problems with the local patois. We have already noticed Charlotte's reaction to another woman in domestic control. But Mme Ricord went

further. She was obviously great fun to be with, especially after a tiring day, and she 'overwhelmed Augustin with attention'. Just in fact what Mme Duplay had done to Maximilien. This Charlotte could not bear. She says that because Augustin had so many things on his mind she did not like to talk to him about Mme Ricord's compromising behaviour. Instead she sulked and talked to other people.

Augustin was not reclaimed; Mme Ricord's conduct grew worse. She had, earlier on when they were still on good terms, encouraged Charlotte to go riding with her. Then a letter from Maximilien arrived, saying that some patriots had complained that the Representatives and their ladies were enjoying themselves too much. As a step towards austerity, Augustin vetoed further carriage-riding excursions. Mme Ricord broke the rule at once and, rather surprisingly, managed to persuade Charlotte to do the same; Augustin was furious and Mme Ricord put all the blame on Charlotte. The house was full of Mme Ricord's friends, in whom virtue was distinctly lacking. Augustin made no objection to this; in arguments he always took Mme Ricord's side. It may well have seemed to Augustin and Mme Ricord that Ricord's absence was a promising time to consummate their liaison, but if they were to have a good time, they would have to get rid of Charlotte. Augustin, who was an even greater coward than Maximilien when it came to confronting Charlotte, was persuaded by Mme Ricord to write a letter to Charlotte telling her to return to Paris. Then he rushed off to the army outposts for a few days, leaving Mme Ricord to deliver the letter. Poor Charlotte had no choice but to find some respectable people with whom to travel and to go.[4]

Charlotte had of course behaved stupidly, but this does not excuse Augustin. He had taken on the responsibility of caring for her and had brought her hundreds of miles away from everyone she knew. Maximilien had only asked her to recognise the importance of the Duplays to him; Augustin pushed her out of his life indifferently. He worked hard; he could not stand the atmosphere she created and he was determined to have his pleasures. Charlotte returned to the rue St Florentin flat and immediately resumed warfare with Mme Duplay.

Just around this time, on 26 October, a certain member of the Convention, Goupilleau, arrived in Nice, charged with raising horses for the army. He found the country round Nice 'rich and charming' and on his arrival in the town, made his way to 'the house of his colleague, Robespierre the Younger.' Goupilleau was comfortably lodged in one of the rooms overlooking the sea. In the evening Augustin took him to the Jacobin Club which was guarded by small armed boys, an arrangement that Goupilleau found attractive. However, he had noticed something about Nice which was not quite so pleasing, and

he took it on himself to mention it in his speech to the club: 'How much better it would be if the streets named after saints could be changed to the names of those dear to the country.'

It is pleasant to know that Goupilleau slept well in Augustin's house under an excellent mosquito net. However, the next day it poured with rain. Goupilleau could not do much about sight-seeing or raising horses. The weather was bad again the following day: 'the roads were dangerous because of the quantities of *barbets* who murder travellers on the road between Monaco and Menton.' So he sent agents who, presumably, did not mind. Instead, he had another walk round Nice which he admired greatly in spite of the unhappy naming of its streets.[5]

Nice certainly lacked a revolutionary air. The city had changed so often in its ancient history that it no longer took anything seriously and pursued its pleasure-loving and mysterious existence really indifferent to King or Representative. It was crowded with strange and eccentric people, deeply involved in their own destinies, not the good of mankind. We glimpse some of them as we go through the Archives at Nice, appearing in decrees and reports only to vanish again, speaking in a single letter caught out of context. What for instance of Citizen Joseph Evendu who had a *lettre de cachet* out against him as long ago as 1768 and who now was a voluntary worker at a military hospital in Nice? He had secrets to reveal and would be charmed to have a conference with the Representatives at their convenience. Had he really secrets or was he just a lonely man who wanted to talk?[6] And who was Toussaint Maillou, who carried letters from Corsica on his ship, and who was permitted by the Representatives to arm a little corsair to harass the enemies of the Republic? He sounds like a character out of Conrad.[7] And who was the affable and corpulent sailor, with red face, blue coat and white hat, diligently sought by Ricord in the summer of 1794.[8] Then, who was the suspected returned émigré, carrying gold and letters, who was questioned by Augustin? And here is a letter from someone Genoese by birth but French by nature, wanting to destroy pirates. But Ricord, seized with a moral scruple, thought he was more inspired by desire for vengeance than love of the French Republic.[9]

It was not until November that the guillotine was erected in Nice, not far from Augustin's house, without any prompting from him but through considerable pressure from Barras and Fréron.[10] The seat of the Revolutionary Tribunal was at Grasse and the dark little doorway that led to it is still to be seen; thirty people were executed in the department during the Terror, compared with hundreds at Marseille and Toulon. Legend deals with the matter rather differently. Sixty years later, Augustus Hare, wintering at Menton, was told,

> 'The brother of the terrible Robespierre was sent thither 'to represent the people and guillotine the aristocrats.' But fortunately the frontier was not far off and all the doomed persons fled across it before M. Robespierre could arrive, so when he came . . . he found very little to do.'

He had, according to Hare's nameless informant, to fall back on cutting down and chopping up a very ancient tree at Cap Martin where the aristocrats used to dance and drink coffee in the evenings.[11]

The chopping down of the tree may be taken with a little scepticism if we recall Augustin's policy of conciliation, but certainly he frequently visited the outposts of the army. Hare tells us that during his mission he lived at the Maison d'Ademar in Menton.[12] The house still stands, painted yellow, close by the market and the Place d'Herbes, and a few steps from the quay. Although he did not, as Hare believed, live there on a permanent basis, it is possible that he did keep some rooms for himself at Menton and the story adds that Napoleon later stayed there with him.

'I am alone here,' Augustin wrote to the Committee a day or two after Ricord's departure, 'amid all the important developments that are taking place in this part of the Republic.'

> 'As I write the left wing of the Army of Italy is in action. The enemy forces outnumber ours; and it is not possible to reinforce them from the right wing which is already very below strength, and worse than all our enemies, we are menaced from the Genoese coast . . . You know . . . that our principles are not entirely the same. Yet I do not believe that we can be attacked by the National Convention. You must give us the means quickly so that we can profit from the criminal conduct of Genoa.'[13]

At the time he wrote this letter, Augustin had had no real communication with the Committee, though there is evidence from an imprecise source[14] that he had had a letter from Maximilien, who may have told him that his policies were not favourably regarded in Paris and may even have expressed anxiety about the views in Augustin's letter from Aix. Also, some rumour of Augustin's hostile feelings towards Genoa may have seeped through to the Committee. Augustin was to explore this more closely in a few days.

His position was certainly weak. Although he was Maximilien's brother, he had yet to prove himself; no great public interest was felt in the army he commanded. So far as the South was concerned, the heart of the Convention was beating for Toulon. But now something happened to strengthen his hand. On 19 October the Piedmontese were repulsed at Gilette. On the 23rd he wrote to Paris.

> ‘The Piedmontese redoubled their efforts to get a foothold in the department of the Var; our anxiety was extreme; the army of slaves was infinitely superior in numbers, but courage supplied the deficiency and five hundred defenders of the Republic put to flight four thousand men . . . We lost twenty or thirty heroes on this memorable day. The Army of Italy has deserved well of the Republic; declare it; it is a reward that is due and you cannot withhold justice . . .’

There is an echo of the Bouchotte quarrel: ‘The Minister of War should promote some of those who distinguished themselves in this brilliant affair and I shall recommend them.’

He also praises General Dugommier who had been in command at Gilette: ‘He is a true Republican who knows how to inspire enthusiasm for liberty in those he leads to victory’.[15]

All through his letter runs the theme that the Committee has, up until now, almost ignored the Army of Italy, giving its attention to the army before Toulon. Without a strong force on the Piedmont frontier, he argued, Toulon could not be recaptured. If the Piedmontese believed their frontiers safe, they would send men and supplies to reinforce Toulon. At the end he wrote,

> ‘We understand you want us to go to the Revolutionary Army (the Army before Toulon); it seems to us we effectively serve the Revolutionary Army through daily reports between the two armies; if you think otherwise, tell us, and we will rejoin our two colleagues Gasparin and Saliceti before Toulon.’[16]

Indeed, his mind was not on Toulon but on Genoa. When Goupilleau visited Augustin, there was another guest, a Genoese named Biche,[17] and he may have been one of the first Genoese defectors with whom Augustin had close relations. These defectors wished to bring the ideas of liberty and equality to their crumbling Republic. The information they brought was of great importance to Augustin, to whom the invasion of the Ligurian coastline increased in importance as the problem of supplies pressed more and more on him. We have seen Goupilleau evading the roads beyond Nice. The difficulties were not imaginary. The Aurelian Way was overgrown and ruinous. In 1720 the Prince of Monaco had attempted some repairs, but these were ineffectual. Among the hazards of travel, besides poor roads, were swollen rivers and landslides.[18] There was no way of moving large quantities of supplies except by sea, and the incursions of the pirates of Oneglia gave the Representatives concern from the beginning of their mission. The English fleet dominated the Mediterranean and the French could do little about that, but the little pirate vessels from Oneglia and Genoa were another matter. The subjugation of these states must be achieved.

On 2 November, Augustin wrote a lengthy report to the Committee on the subject of Genoa and Oneglia. Oneglia was openly used to transport enemy troops, but in some quarters in Genoa, there was strong support for the French: 'The English Ambassador has left Genoa, furious that he has not been able to influence this Republic to declare against the French.'

The Genoese had repatriated the French survivors of the *Modeste* and that with generosity and kindness. 'We await,' Augustin wrote,

> 'news from the Convention or the Committee of Public Safety over the conduct we should show to Genoa and the plan we should follow towards it. The territory of Genoa is open to us; we shall be received as friend. It offers us an easy passage to overturn the Sardinian tyrant. If we had a thousand more men to make this expedition, the coalition would be obliged to abandon Toulon to defend their frontiers. We would destroy on our way the port of Oneglia which harasses us and interrupts coasting trade. The Genoese themselves want to seize this territory which divides them from us. The Army of Italy will no longer be in the midst of sterile mountains. It will arrive in the promised land and repose after experiences so exhausting that only Republicans could bear them. These views are those of the friends of humanity and liberty whom we often consult; they are the fruits of a serious and profound examination of our situation at home and abroad; it is the advice of enlightened men with whom we do not cease to confer . . . The more we reflect, the more it is clear that we must profit from present circumstances to increase our resources and occupy Genoese territory . .'[19]

This is the first account of the plan which, with Bonaparte, he was to carry out the following spring. He also makes clear his belief that the siege of Toulon could be ended if the Army of Italy could go on the offensive, and he may have been right. The Allies must by now have lost hope of a sympathetic revolt throughout the South, but the siege had become a matter of prestige for both sides. The Allies clung to their foothold on French soil and the Committee wanted a spectacular victory. They dismissed Carteaux and appointed Dugommier, the victor of Gilette, in his place. Augustin was delighted. 'We count among the number of our victories the dismissal of General Carteaux.'[20]

Dugommier appealed to him greatly. 'He inspires love of liberty, rekindles weary spirits. One day someone asked him what he did to make himself so loved by the soldiers. His answer shows his nature. 'It is because I love them.'[21]

The Committee now pressed Augustin to leave Nice and go to Toulon. Michelet informs us that Barras and Fréron had become the victims of the Robespierres' ambition. Maximilien wished to see his brother the conqueror of Toulon. There may be some truth in this, but it is not quite the whole story. The Committee had grown increasingly disenchanted with Barras and Fréron following a report by Albitte, officially a Representative with the Army of the Alpes but who had recently visited the Army before Toulon. No Representative was quite above spying on another. Albitte's account of the poor organisation of the besieging army, reinforced by further information from Ricord who had proceeded to Paris from Lyon, made the Committee consider the recall of Barras and Fréron. They, however, getting wind of this, managed to organise what we would call a 'spontaneous demonstration' by the Jacobin clubs in the neighbourhood. Four hundred communes signed a petition entreating that they might remain. The Committee gave way, but joined Saliceti and Gasparin to them. 'Robespierre the Younger and Ricord will remain with the Army of Italy as Representatives of the People.'[22]

On 16 November, Augustin was still at Nice. He had apprehended a man spreading a rumour that Robespierre the Younger and Ricord had been arrested.[23] Though he does not mention Barras and Fréron, it is possible to wonder whether the rumour originated with their friends.

Early in December, Barras, returning to Toulon from a short journey, found at his headquarters 'Robespierre the Younger and others.'[24] To his fury, he also discovered that six thousand men were being held back by the Army of Italy.

> 'If they do not come to attack Toulon then everything is in doubt . . . charge Fréron and myself with the siege of Toulon by a decree and be convinced that we will not neglect to reduce this infamous town.'

All he got was a letter naming him 'Representative to the Army before Toulon', but giving him no pre-eminence.[25] Saliceti, the patron of Bonaparte, was also present at the siege, but he aligned himself with Augustin, and with Ricord who had returned from Paris at the end of November.

It was to Ricord and Augustin that the Committee wrote finally on 11 December:

> 'Toulon has been too long in the hands of tyrants. The Republic, citizen colleagues, demands signal vengeance.
>
> March immediately on the walls of this rebel town with all the troops that you can, with the greatest rigour, spare from the Army of Italy. You can remain on the defensive there. Your zeal promises action; your intelligence guarantees your prudence.'[26]

Augustin was, perhaps, not so excited by the Committee's confidence as they might have expected. He perceived quite clearly that the siege was a transitory matter and that the future lay with his army on the Piedmontese frontier.

Endnotes

[1] Demougeot, vol. 3, p. 389.
[2] *Ibid.*,: A.A.M L.333 7 A.A.M L.286 The house is now an hotel and the ground floor is occupied by a little craft shop. A marble plaque records the visit of Pope Pius IX.
[3] Combet, La *Révolution dans le Comté de Nice*, Appendix IX, p. 452.
[4] *Charlotte*, pp. 248–55.
[5] Goupilleau, pp. 51–56.
[6] A.A.M L89, L98.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] A.A.M. L250.
[10] Demougeot vol. 2, p. 447 *Recueil*, vol. 8, p. 115. 'Nice,' Barras wrote, 'since it was reunited with France, has not made the least effort to get one.'
[11] Hare, pp. 76, 96.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[13] Michon, vol. 2, p. 56 *et seq*.
[14] *Charlotte*: p. 248. Charlotte mentions Augustin receiving a letter from Maximilien complaining about the lifestyle of herself and Mme Ricord. It is possible that the letter also relayed to Augustin complaints about his attitude of reconciliation which had come to the ears of extremists in Paris.
[15] Michon, vol. 1, p. 200.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 201.
[17] Goupilleau, pp. 51–56.
[18] Chiavassa, pp. 31–37.
[19] Michon, vol. 1, p. 206 *et seq*.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Michelet, vol. 7, p. 15.
[23] *Recueil*, vol. 8, p. 480.
[24] *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 56.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
[26] *Recueil*, vol. 9, p. 328.

Chapter 11

Toulon, November–December 1793

When Augustin and Ricord finally arrived at the Army before Toulon at the end of November, it is hardly surprising that Barras and Fréron regarded them as hostile spies, and to a large extent they were right. They tolerated Saliceti, who had been with them some time, a little better but not very much. We cannot tell if they knew he suspected that the Marseille petition, which had prevented their recall in November, had been a put-up job. 'It is certain,' Saliceti had written to the Committee on 17 November, 'that this petition has made the generals uncertain and this will lead to stagnation, at least for a few days, which could be fatal to the public good.'[1]

It is clear that there was a good deal of acrimonious discussion among the Representatives. Shortly after the end of the siege, Barras and Fréron wrote to a friend:

> 'Robespierre the Younger possesses to a supreme degree the art of alienating everyone. He takes brusqueness for frankness and rudeness for virtue. He is a Republican, we are convinced, but he is in no way fit to fulfil the functions of a Representative of the People. His stubbornness makes him fall into frequent errors and by a spirit of contradiction, due to his excessive *amour-propre* [pride], everything is wrong except what he does himself. You knew him in the Montagnards and he is still the same only more so. Both Ricord and Robespierre lack foresight and talent; the latter by his unsociability causes trouble in every way and destroys confidence. It seems to us that Ricord does what he wishes with Robespierre, and Saliceti, without appearing to do anything, has found the means of managing them both.'[2]

Certainly Augustin must have thrown his weight about; in no circumstances could he be described as an easy colleague. Disliking the politics of Barras and Fréron as he did, he did not even try to moderate his criticisms. What is more interesting is the warmth and admiration he felt for Saliceti. 'I have rallied Saliceti,' he later wrote to Maximilien, meaning clearly that Saliceti had joined him in opposition to the savage tactics of Barras and Fréron. 'The Republic owes much to him. He is ardent, he understands warfare; he has foresight and can well calculate operations; he is excellent with an army; he has character and firmness.'[3]

Augustin was also eager to learn warfare; Saliceti was his first tutor. But a greater than Saliceti was close at hand. According to Barras, Augustin was the last of the Representatives to succumb to Napoleon's wiles. This end was achieved, so Barras tells us, by Bonaparte paying court to Mme Ricord

so that she would influence Augustin in his favour.[4] As there is no evidence that Mme Ricord was present at the siege of Toulon, this must have happened, if at all, the following March, when Augustin, the Ricords and Napoleon were all together at Nice. But it is more likely that Barras was repeating the endless tittle-tattle outside the Representatives' circle.

Sir Walter Scott, in his *Life of Bonaparte,*[5] tells a story of Napoleon preparing a masked battery to surprise the English in a planned attack. Robespierre the Younger and Fréron, coming along, could not see the point of these silent guns and insisted they be fired at once. I cannot trace the origins of Scott's story and it is probably one of many which were told to show the stupidity and ignorance of Representatives – not only with the Army of Italy – who came from civilian life to meddle with matters of war. Scott's comment is typical of many historians of the Revolution.

> 'The Representatives of the People, knowing that their commission gave them supreme powers over generals and armies, never seemed to have paused to consider whether nature or education had qualified them to exercise it with advantage to the public or credit to themselves.'[6]

Other legends circled round Augustin as soon as he arrived at Ollioules. At the beginning of their rebellion, two members of the Convention, Bayle and Beauvais, had been captured by the Royalists. In fear of torture, Beauvais hanged himself in prison. It was generally rumoured throughout the army that Augustin Robespierre had crossed the lines in disguise to try to negotiate the release of the prisoners.[7] Another more detailed story declared that, on 3 December, two unknown travellers had entered Toulon by the Pont d'Ollioules and were received at the *hôtel de ville* by General Dundas. Talks then went on for some hours, ending with a meal. A crowd collected and peered through the windows, and saw the plumed hats of the Representatives resting on a window seat. The two Representatives taking part in the talks were Robespierre and Albitte.[8] This story is obviously nonsense, yet it seems to have been widely believed. It is probably that the arrival of the great Robespierre's brother outside the walls raised all kinds of hopes and fears in the hearts of the besieged, who may also have feared treachery from the English and the Spaniards.

In actual fact, plans for the final assault on the city were going on fast. The besiegers' plan centred on the capture of the Fort de l'Eguillette, defended by the English redoubt. The Fort commanded the harbour which could then be shattered to pieces by the fire of Bonaparte's artillery. This method of capturing the city had long been obvious. It was not the brainchild of Napoleon as has

so often been claimed, but it was he who trained the artillery and set up the batteries that made success certain.

On the night before the assault, 18 December, the Representatives on an outing walked among the soldiers to encourage them before the battle. Rain was beating down and there was a high wind. It must be remembered that the French soldiers had not been paid for a long while. One of them approached Augustin; he wanted, he said, 'to eat before he died.' 'There is no money, my friend,' said Augustin. 'Well then,' said the soldier, 'in that case give it to the poor.' 'You will not die,' Augustin exclaimed, 'and your money will be doubled!' He took the man's name and the number of his regiment, but though he looked for him after the battle he did not find him.[9]

The attack on the city now began in the beating rain and the mud. Many people will remember the marvellous evocation of the battle in Gance's film *Napoleon,* but Gance took a poetic rather than a historical view and follows the account written by Napoleon years later when, swollen with vanity, he denied the Representatives any part in the victory. They all gave of their best that night.[10]

Augustin was among the troops who advanced on the English redoubt. He wrote next day to Maximilien,

> 'On the 26th Nivôse, in spite of very heavy rain, the Army of the Republic attacked the English redoubt, established on a height to defend the forts of Balaguier and Eguillette which overlook the harbour, as you will see by a glance at the map. The tyrants used all the resources of art, the appearance of this fortress was terrifying. The Republicans braved this seat of tyranny . . . This formidable redoubt was carried after a murderous battle. We took five hundred prisoners in the redoubt, killed or wounded the rest. The rout of the slaves is complete; we have pierced the heart of the coalition by capturing this fortress. Soon after, other important posts were abandoned and we occupied them one after the other. Republican blood has ceased to flow . . . National vengeance begins; the defenders of liberty are at the gates of the infamous Toulon. I am leaving tomorrow or the day after for Paris . . . I am astonished to find myself a hero; they assure me that I am and I don't doubt them. I was in the ranks, during the action, I didn't notice any bullets, cannons or bombs; I saw only the redoubt to be taken. 'To the redoubt! It is ours, come, courage, my friends!' I hardly knew when I reached the foot of the redoubt.'[11]

Now that the French had command of the heights above the inner harbour, it was possible for Bonaparte's gunners to pour their fire down on the fleet. Two frigates blew up, and the flames spread

to other vessels. The stormy night was brilliantly illuminated so that, as Augustin later told the Jacobins, all was as bright as day.[12] The French were still only on the outskirts of the town and fighting was still going on everywhere; the bullets passed over the heads of the Representatives as they watched the blaze. Augustin wished that he had David at his side 'to depict with his immortal brush this terrible sight!' The English were now struggling to get their ships out of the harbour away from the bombardment, and refugees struggled to get on the ships and escape from the threatened vengeance of the Republicans.

Soon after, Augustin withdrew from the battle, a bullet lodged in his scabbard,[13] and sat down to write the first draft of a letter to the Committee of Public Safety giving the first news of the victory, which was later to be copied and signed by Augustin, Ricord and Fréron.

Before dawn, the first French troops entered the town led, apparently, by Fréron. At nine in the morning, Barras joined him and later in the day came the other Representatives. In the town all was violence and confusion; rebel French officers were killed on sight; the galley slaves – who had Republican sympathies – strove to put out the fire in the harbour and saved many ships; the Republican soldiers pillaged and killed.

Augustin dictated his letter, exhausted and excited, having not slept for two nights. A curious error crept into the letter, perhaps from his dictation, which his secretary, probably in no better case, did not correct. Twice the Fort Eguillette is referred to as Fort Gilette, the scene of the Army of Italy's victory the previous autumn. It is an easy enough slip, but if the unconscious does rise to the surface in moments of exhaustion, it is not inconceivable that Augustin was still perceiving that small fight as having at least a potential importance as great as the victory that would soon be known through Europe.

The very day of the conquest, the execution of the rebels began; Republican vengeance was to continue for weeks. A fortnight after the end of the siege, Fréron was able to report that killings were still going on at the rate of two hundred a day. Augustin saw little of this. Two days after the fall of Toulon, he was on the road to Paris. That he should be the bearer of the good tidings was a political victory, though in the circumstances it was not surprising. Ricord had just been to Paris, and it had been to Ricord and Augustin that the Committee had confided their last exhortations before the battle.[14] But he will have been glad to go.

'As to Robespierre the Younger,' says the military historian Fabry, 'he had a heart too highly placed to waste his time in massacres.'[15]

Certainly he was concerned with the future rather than with a retrospective vengeance, and on his journey north he had the companionship of a young Genoese noble and patriot, Sauli, who laid his friendship and his services before him.[16]

Endnotes

[1] *Recueil*, 9/275. Augustin and Fréron signed a letter to the Committee dated 18 Frimaire (8 December). Barras, Ricord and Robespierre Jeune also signed a decree at Marseille dated 13 Frimaire (3 December) (Archives du Pas-de-Calais, or APC).
[2] Poupé, *Lettres*, p. 111.
[3] Michon, vol. 1, p. 230 The sentence 'I have rallied Saliceti etc…' is not in Michon. See A.P.C., B4049[22].
[4] Barras, vol. 1, p. 161.
[5] Scott, vol. 1, p. 178
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Chuquet, p. 85, has Augustin, in disguise, visiting Beauvais in prison.
[8] Havard, vol. 1, p. 231.
[9] *Moniteur*, 19, pp. 103–4.
[10] Michon quotes Dugommier on the subject in vol. 2, p. 78 n.
[11] Michon, vol. 1, p. 229.
[12] *Moniteur* 19, pp. 103–4.
[13] *Recueil*, vol. 9, p. 509.
[14] Michon, vol. 2, p. 76.
[15] Fabry.
[16] For Sauli, see Pellet, 'La Revolution de Gênes en 1797', in *Napoléon*, p. 217.

Chapter 12

Paris, December 1793–January 1794

The news of the fall of Toulon arrived in Paris on 24 December, when a deputy to the Convention, Thuriot, received a private letter from Saliceti.[1] He announced its contents to the Convention and the deputies threw their hats in the air. A spokesman of the Committee confirmed Thuriot's news, the first despatches having just come to their hands.

All along the road from Toulon to Paris the news had quickly spread, as the Representatives had written 'Toulon is taken' on the backs of their envelopes.[2] People said, on hearing Barère's report to the Convention, 'We shall triumph everywhere if our brave deputies of the Montagnards themselves give such courageous examples.'[3] But, alas, in the speech by Barère announcing the fall of the town, the only brave deputies of the Montagnards who were mentioned were Augustin and Saliceti, who were described as leading the assault. This produced, not unnaturally, the worst possible effect on Barras and Fréron when copies of Barère's report reached Toulon.

Meanwhile, Augustin was fast approaching Paris. On 29 December he stopped for breakfast at the little posting town of Melun only a few leagues from Paris. Here lived his old school friend Gaillard who, it may be remembered, had no high opinion of Augustin's attainments. However the Revolution at Melun had taken a turn which Gaillard found very disturbing and he had learned somehow that Augustin, when on mission, had behaved with moderation. He therefore decided to visit him before the authorities got in first. He went to the inn where Augustin was awaiting breakfast and was pleased to find his old school friend delighted to see him.

Augustin showed signs of wanting to settle down to a long talk about old times, but Gaillard cut in with present-day problems. He revealed how the authorities of the Seine-et-Marne were damaging the cause of liberty. Augustin was both attentive and indignant and when Gaillard went on to describe how religious objects had been insulted and busts of Marat placed on the altars, he became even more angry. 'These unfortunate patriots risk counter-revolution,' said Robespierre the Younger. 'They're coming to see me. Wait and see how I receive them.'

Gaillard prudently did not want to do that. He suggested instead that Augustin should see them alone and lead them to describe their exploits. At this moment the district and departmental authorities were announced. Augustin, who did not want to lose his friend so soon, begged him to stay

for breakfast. 'We'll chat about Arras. My family will be so glad to get your news. We often talk about you, my brother, my sister and I. Come and see us in Paris. Public affairs shouldn't interfere with old memories.' But Gaillard would not stay and Augustin showed him out with great politeness under the eyes of the waiting revolutionaries, who were to get nothing from Augustin but a sharp reprimand and a threat to denounce them to the Convention.[4]

Augustin reached Paris soon after the Jacobins had begun their evening session and he went straight to the club. A member announced that Robespierre the Younger had arrived from Toulon, 'and was waiting in the hall of the Assembly. Having been admitted, he gave an account of the taking of Toulon.'[5]

This speech tells us little that is new, but it gave the hearers what they wanted in terms of human interest and excitement, so we have the penniless soldier, the flames lighting the harbour, the heroic Republicans, all of which was no doubt wildly applauded. The only shadow on the event came the next day when a newspaper, *Correspondence Publique,* which was suspected of counter-revolutionary sympathies, reported that Augustin had said that he wished 'all tyrants were cut in little pieces and made into a pie. I would eat it with pleasure though I don't like human flesh.'

The police spy who commented on this story, added: 'This paper is the only one that cites this story which is more worthy of a cannibal than a Republican. "Robespierre," said many citizens yesterday, "never used such language. It is an infamous calumny. He has given proof of his valour under the walls of Toulon and a hero is not an *anthropophage*".'[6]

The London *Times*, however, seized on the story with delight and came up with a better version in which Augustin was made to say that an army could live on the bodies of the slain.[7] The *Times* did not rest there. It spent a considerable amount of trouble in concocting the menu of a banquet which Augustin might be supposed to enjoy, containing such item as 'kings' hearts hashed and roasted Austrians'.[8]

Paris continued to rejoice. Plays were put on about the fall of Toulon. A verse was added to the *Carmagnole*:

We have entered Toulon
With Robespierre and Fréron
And all our Montagnards
Who climbed up the ramparts

Singing the *Carmagnole*.[9]

A medal was struck showing the profile of 'Robespierre Jeune Representative of the People'. The reflections of Barras and Saliceti when they came to hear of all this can be imagined.

Augustin addressed the Convention three days after his arrival in Paris. This speech is much more sober than the one delivered to the Jacobins. He did not spend long on the capture of the city itself. He paid generous tribute to the heroism of the soldiers, but it was impossible to give an account of an event which had astonished the universe. After this he came quickly to the core of his speech.

> 'These facts give you a good idea of the Army of the Republic. That of Toulon is not alone in victory. I should like to speak to you of the army to which you sent me – the Army of Italy. Every day it has had redoubts to take and everywhere in the last six months it has been victorious.'

He then described the supposed treachery of Kellerman at Entrevaux and how Dugommier redeemed that disastrous situation. Then, moving to less controversial ground,

> 'The violent battle of Gilette has been too little spoken of. One thousand Frenchmen repulsed four thousand Piedmontese and made eight hundred prisoners. [Loud applause] In another important post a hundred Frenchmen were attacked by a thousand slaves. The valour of our soldiers decided victory in our favour . . . This is not all. The Army of Italy has not only vanquished the enemy that attacks it in the face; it has suffered something more terrible, murderers coming through the lines to strike in secret; assassins dressed as peasants have murdered the defenders of the country when they found them alone.'

Before he ended he reminded them that the Army of Italy was camped high in the Alps in the midst of snow, far from supplies, and asked that they decree that 'this glorious army' had deserved well of the country. He was determined that the Army of Italy should no longer be the forgotten Army of the Republic.

But fame is so transitory that even Toulon was becoming an old story. Paris was now absorbed by the drama surrounding Camille Desmoulins's publication, the *Vieux Cordelier*, of which the latest number was eagerly expected. The previous numbers had called for the end of the Terror and had therefore incurred the bitter enmity of Hébert's *Père Duchesne*. It may be thought that a plea for clemency would greatly appeal to Augustin, but though his opposition to the crude anti-clericalism of Hébert's newspaper continued unabated, he does not seem to have felt much interest in Hébert's journalistic rival. He may have mingled at times in the same circles as the Dantonists – Mme Sainte-

Amaranthe's gaming house was the kind of place where they all might have passed their spare time – but there is no sign that any friendships grew out of such chance encounters.

Barras and Fréron had many ties with Danton's friends; Fréron professed himself in love with Desmoulins's lovely young wife. The Dantonists, to whom popular legend credits warmth and generosity in contrast to the cold hypocrisy of the Robespierrists, were regrettably tangled up in financial corruption and some of them were not averse to bloodshed. On the other hand, the followers of the *enragés*, the readers of Hébert's paper, were often poor people, those who had formed part of the crowds on the great *journées* of 14 July, 10 October and 10 August, who as yet had reaped no particular benefit from the Revolution and who saw the members of the Convention leading fairly comfortable lives. Sadly, history remains grey, not black and white.

Up to this point Maximilien had shown some sympathy with Camille, going so far as to correct the proofs of the paper, probably seeing it as a possible support in a campaign against de-Christianisation. However, when Camille began to make jokes about Maximilien himself and about Saint-Just, that was not quite so satisfactory. As J. M. Thompson said, and regretfully one must agree with him, 'it was not humanity which inspired him [Camille], but mischievousness; his aim was not to moderate the government but to overthrow it.'

On 25 December, four days before Augustin embraced the moderate, Gaillard, in Melun, Robespierre made a speech to the Convention on internal foes of the country. Palmer quotes his speech with sympathy: 'We hear, speaking in the statesman, the voice of the provincial lawyer from Arras, the lonely and unworldly dreamer, who could not have loved the common man so much had he thought him capable of evil.'[10] 'Virtues,' said Maximilien

> 'are simple, sometimes gross; they are the appanage of misfortune and the patrimony of the people. Vices are surrounded with riches, adorned by the charms of pleasure and the snares of perfidy; they are escorted by all the dangerous talents; they are escorted by crime.'[11]

Collot d'Herbois, Representative with Fouché in Lyon, now returned to Paris to resume his seat on the Committee of Public Safety. He was strong in support of the Terror and on 5 January he spoke at the Jacobin Club, denouncing Philippeaux, a friend of Danton's, for having criticised the generals in the Vendée. Desmoulins replied, waving papers about, that Hébert had cheated while selling theatre tickets.

This was too much for Augustin. He rose to speak, though Hébert was already in the tribune shouting defiance at Desmoulins. After five months' absence from this society, Augustin said,

> 'I scarcely know it again; another mind inspires it; personal pique and private animosity have usurped the place of patriotism. I'm not entering into an examination of Hébert's conduct, whether he has stolen money or has plundered the nation. He may have cause to reproach himself . . .'

Hébert, still in the tribune, stamped, looked up to the heaven, and asked if people wanted to murder him. Someone cried out 'It's Tyranny,' though whether Augustin or Hébert were the tyrant was not made clear. Augustin continued,

> 'Yes, you may reproach yourself with justice. You are the cause of the disturbances in the departments regarding religion. *I have read your writings on religion with horror and indignation*. I ask that Hébert may be heard in his turn but only on the facts relative to the letter of Philippeaux, which is on the order of the day. If Hébert wants to reply to Camille, *Père Duchesne* can enter into combat with the *Vieux Cordelier*.'[12]

Maximilien who, until now, had taken no part in the debate, rose. 'The last speaker,' he said, 'has rendered great service at Toulon, but he is wrong to enter into the present discussion of a situation he does not understand. I, myself, am waiting for enlightenment.'

We do not know how Augustin received this patronising snub from one he had every reason to believe was warmly on his side. As to Maximilien, it is clear he was exasperated; he would not have minded, perhaps, a milder comment from his brother on the religious affairs of the departments, just to see how it went. But the kite had broken from his hand and was showing every sign of floating away over the horizon. It was not yet time for Maximilien to declare himself for either Camille or Hébert, and we need not suppose that the idea he could destroy them both was yet in his mind. Also it is possible that in his sharp retort he was influenced by the age-old distrust of the politician for the soldier who comes home from the war and makes embarrassing statements to the public press.

Augustin made no further speech either to the Jacobins or the Convention. It is useless to speculate on whether this was chance or anger. Common gossip enjoyed the day. It was said that 'the aristocrats smiled' at the struggle that had broken out in the Jacobins. Camille, Philippeaux, Hébert, Collot and Robespierre the Younger were among those blamed for the quarrel. On 10 January a citizen was heard to say, in muddled comment, 'Parbleu! Robespierre the Younger must be sure of what he

said to Hébert about public thefts – for that alone one could go to the guillotine.'[13] The argument was already twisted. That same day the rumour rang round that 'Robespierre the Younger was no longer of his brother's party.' But this was denied by most patriots who spoke again of the services he had rendered at Toulon.[14]

Meanwhile Augustin went a good deal into society; sometimes with rather questionable people, such as Monvoison, a rich man suspected of making money on the side and who was said to have had friends who had been guillotined. A police reports tells us, 'He had been educated with Robespierre the Younger (at Louis-le-Grand) and that is the cause of the intimacy between them.'[15]

Monvoison, the report continued, talked of returning to Nice with Augustin and making a great deal of money. Augustin probably had no intention of taking him, but the fact that he associated with such a doubtful character showed his usual carelessness over his acquaintances. The police did not, however, report the visits he must have paid about this time to the house of a former academician, M. de La Saudraye.

M. de La Saudraye was a bibliomaniac, married to a Creole heiress a good deal younger than himself. Born Guillodon Tillier, she is said not to have been beautiful, but she had remarkably expressive eyes. Augustin fell passionately in love with her.[16]

The time was close for Augustin's return to Nice, but just before he left, there was a sudden change of plan. An old college friend of Maximilien's, Humbert, and a friend of his, Viennot, a chemist, came from Vesoul, the capital of the Haute-Saône, seeking an audience with Maximilien to tell him of the melancholy state of the department.[17] The Haute-Saône had showed a patriotic spirit from the first; it had paid its taxes promptly and sent volunteers to the front, but, on hearing of the events of 2 June and the imprisonment of members of the Convention, the departmental authorities had despatched a letter of protest to Paris. Later, they accepted the rule of the Montagnards, but this was not enough for Bernard des Saintes, the Representative from the Convention in the Haute-Saône. He had the departmental authorities arrested and imprisoned as federalists.

This was not all. Bernard was pushing through a vigorous anti-Christianisation programme.[18] Peasants who refused to attend constitutional mass – Bernard would indeed have preferred them not to go to any sort of mass – women who wore crosses, men who bowed their heads at the time of the Angelus, which was, horrifyingly, still rung in some villages, all were thrust into prison in such numbers

that the fields remained untilled, the crops unsown. The whole department loathed the authorities; a revolt like that in the Vendée seemed a possibility.

Maximilien took the complaints seriously. He retailed them to the Committee. It was agreed that Augustin should make a brief detour to report on events. It was not anticipated that he would need to stay in Vesoul for more than twenty-four hours.[19] But Vesoul wasn't the only claimant on his time. He also received a letter from another deputy from the Pas-de-Calais, Guffroy, concerned about the way matters were going in Arras, where Lebon was now Representative. This was the first ambush in a long guerilla war involving Guffroy and the Robespierres and Lebon. Suspicious of Guffroy's intentions, Augustin seems to have ignored the letter, and continued his plans for journeying to Vesoul.[20] Almost to the day that the police report was made on his visits to the suspect Monvoison, he set out. He was accompanied by Viennot, Humbert having decided to remain in Paris. Also with them were the Genoese Sauli, and Augustin's mistress, Guillodon de La Saudraye.

Endnotes

[1] Laurent and Clavel, vol. 82, p.225 n.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Caron, vol. 1, p. 378.
[4] Despatys, pp. 261–3.
[5] *Jacobins* vol. 5, p. 557, *Moniteur*, 19, pp. 103–4.
[6] Caron, vol. 2, p. 116.
[7] *The Times* (28 July 1794).
[8] *Ibid.*; Hareau, Montagnards, p. 117 n.
[9] *Moniteur*, 19/112.
[10] Palmer, p. 265.
[11] Robespierre M. *Discours,* p.198.
[12] *Jacobins*, vol. 5, p. 594. The italics are mine. This sentence occurs in *The Times* but not in the official French version of the debate.
[13] Caron, vol. 2, p. 274.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 294.
[16] For all the certain information about Mme de La Saudraye, see Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté', and 'Robespierre Jeune et Gaspard Sauli de Genes' A.H.R.F 33, p. 509. For her appearance we have only Nodier, p. 80.
[17] Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté'.
[18] *Recueil*: Bernard Des Saintes to the Committee of Public Safety.
[19] Michon, vol. 1, p. 257.
[20] For Guffroy's letter see Michon, vol. 1.

Chapter 13

Vesoul, January–March 1794

Augustin and his companions arrived at Vesoul on 14 January. A heavy gloom rested on the town; food was in short supply; the women, in particular, were low-spirited, not only through the difficulty of feeding their families, but from the attacks on religion and fears of an increasing terror.[1]

Augustin, not wanting to increase the expenses of the town, put up at Humbert's house, apparently not realising, or choosing to ignore, Humbert's supposed Royalist sympathies. This 'humble abode' as Nodier calls it, was in the rue du Collège and was presumably big enough to accommodate Augustin, Sauli and Mme de La Saudraye.[2]

Today the little sixteenth-century town they saw is surrounded by an urban sprawl of high rise flats and factories extending over the broad valley of the Saône which is further disfigured by the motorway to Strasbourg and the railway between Paris and Basel. However, if one does not despair, much can be retrieved. The ancient houses round the church cannot have changed much since Augustin's time, and he and his friends would have seen the honey-coloured walls of the town with their small round towers and the medieval house with the tower where dragons and griffins leap towards the open sky. In the museum there is a charming naïve painting showing Vesoul in 1792. Here two smartly dressed ladies are chatting to a soldier on horseback. In the fields around them agricultural tasks are in full swing; horses career round one pasture, cows round another; country life presses into the streets of the little town.

Behind Vesoul rises a small cone shaped hill, La Motte; the winding path that leads to the summit is reached through an ancient gate of the town and twists through woodland, regularly marked with the stations of the Cross. At the summit is a statue of the Virgin; a fine view of the Vosges and the Jura stretches to the horizon; below, little boats move on the Lac de Vesoul. I saw this view in May, with wild flowers brilliant on the verges of the path; Augustin and his companions saw it in winter with snow on the hills. The Virgin in those times was absent, and there were preparations to build a monument to liberty.

As soon as he arrived Augustin was introduced to the Municipality and the leaders of the town and, with his friends, he spent the evening at the Popular Society. The next two days were passed in examining the course of the Revolution in the Haute-Saône, in talking to the members of the Popular

Society in the Municipality and the townsfolk. He described his findings later in a letter to the Committee of Public Safety.

> 'I started a rigorous and impartial inquiry into the political and revolutionary conduct of the prisoners [the supposedly federalist administrators]. I asked for the truth in the tone of one determined to get it. The results showed the prisoners to have deserved well of their country. This was important since it settled my opinion of public spirit in the department, therefore I believed it my duty to resist the first signs of light that appeared and I many times adjourned the discussion.
>
> 'I was told publicly and in detail the history of the Revolution in this countryside and at Vesoul. Here, as in other places, a handful of men, to whom nature has given a divine spark which the first glance of liberty set alight, electrified and guided all the rest and these are the men who are pursued today.
>
> 'In the first days of the Revolution they were a small band, joining in very small numbers, sometimes at a great distance from their homes, sometimes in hiding, devising the best means of defeating the Royalists . . . I have seen I say, the prisoners doing what we did elsewhere, winning the ground step by step when they could not win it league by league.
>
> 'I have followed each stage and always I have seen the same men appearing first in the breach. I have seen their children at the front before the age required by law; I have seen the produce of their soil requisitioned; their houses filled with volunteers on the way to the front and the wounded who could find no place in the hospitals, and I saw that they thought nothing of their sacrifice.'[3]

These patriots of Vesoul do indeed sound like the model citizens that one meets in the pages of the Erckmann-Chatrian novels about the Revolution, yet we who have abandoned to so great a degree the idea of public unselfishness have scarcely the right to judge. But in Augustin's mind Vesoul became part of the golden age of which he had once spoken to Philippe Lebas, and he himself was its special protector.

Vesoul was warm in its welcome of the newcomers, as exotic as they were proving kind-hearted. The mysterious Creole lady and the Genoese patriot were not neglected. On 18 January, the day after their arrival, Sauli was elected a member of the People's Society. The following evening, in the

presence of Augustin and Mme de La Saudraye, he thanked his new brothers in a highly emotional speech.

'Since 1789 my heart is Jacobin,' he declared, and after describing his travels in France and the deeds of courage and patriotism he had witnessed, including 'the miracle of Toulon', he turned to Augustin whom he thus apostrophised:

> 'And you, Robespierre! You who have so many titles to my esteem, my admiration, my friendship! You in whom the rarest talents are joined to a modesty that makes them the more precious! You at once legislator and soldier, by your example you give a model for a courageous man, by your justice that of a man of integrity, by your philanthropy that of a good man, You have made me realise what the universe owes to the Revolution which has made known to mankind virtues which, under the old regime, made happy those who possessed them, but which condemned those who were the victims of the vicissitudes of fortune to an obscurity unworthy of them and to unhappy powerlessness.'[4]

Augustin no doubt acknowledged these tributes with his well publicised modesty. But further oratory awaited the club. Mme de La Saudraye, it would seem had, on her arrival at Vesoul, got into discussion with some patriots on the significance of the red bonnet and the history of the emblem of liberty. No one seemed sure of its origins and Guillodon decided to do some research on the subject. She now presented her findings in flowery and rhetorical language which proved that she was not for nothing the wife of one of the *immortels*. The red bonnet, it seemed, was given by the Romans to liberated peoples as a sign of freedom and brotherhood. She did not fail to end her speech by tributes to the goodness of the Vesuliens and the beauty of their country side. The Society decreed that both her speech and Sauli's should be printed.[5]

It must be remembered that Augustin's mission was a fact-finding one; he had no power to take any action in the Haute-Saône; any positive step would need the assent of Bernard, so Augustin asked him for a meeting at Vesoul. On 22 January he came. He was, Nodier tells us, a tall thin man, who had changed his original Christian names for Pioche Fer (iron pick-axe). 'I don't know,' says Nodier, 'anything that better characterises the terrible Bernard. I add that he passed for having pure and sober morals and his inflexible and cruel republicanism was for him a kind of religion.'

This is probably fair enough. The thought of a peasant woman wearing a cross or an old man praying at the time of the former angelus was enough to arouse his extreme ire. But he was no

psychopathic mass murderer like Carrier, nor an hysterical neurotic like Lebon. He did not kill many people, but his policy of arrest aroused fears of killing especially in those places where every farmer who refused to hear the Voltairian word of liberation was flung into prison.

That evening the two Representatives met. There was, as Girardot says, 'an exchange of politeness which was no more sincere on one side than the other.'[6] In a private meeting, Augustin placed his findings before Bernard and asked him to examine them. 'Certain of their *civisme*, certain of their patriotism,' Augustin afterwards wrote to the Committee, 'I defended them (the imprisoned administrators) and I made my colleague enter into all the details as I had done myself.'[7]

Bernard appeared to agree with Augustin's findings. Together they went to the People's Society. Bernard spoke. He said that if he had consulted his heart he would have been in Vesoul before, but he had important matters to attend to. But whatever he said he was five days too late. Augustin was the hero of the hour, the brother of Maximilien, the conqueror of Toulon, invested with the power – hidden at the moment, but certainly there – of the Committee of Public Safety. Bernard was as aware of all this as anyone. Even when Augustin ceded him the chair he felt he was acting under duress. Nothing creates hatred sooner. He was afterwards to say that Augustin's reputation was a guarantee to him that proper terrorist attitudes would be preserved. But he must have known as well as anyone else that Augustin's record of persecution in the South had not been particularly striking. More probably, he saw Augustin as a messenger of the Committee and was afraid. Beneath the iron was a streak of weakness. Before the People's Society, he agreed to sign the decree which liberated the administrators. Augustin made a speech. 'Those of whom we have spoken are not guilty,' he said. 'I see with pleasure that my colleague agrees with me.'[8]

So Maréchal says. Nodier takes matters further. According to him, Augustin

> 'enlarged on the justice and good direction of the revolutionary government, which had no object but the good of all and which only wanted to be known by its benefits. He spoke of reconciliation, indulgence, universal amnesty and descended from the tribune amid a murmur of astonishment.'[9]

The audience might well have been astonished. Whether from his own unguarded pleasure in the occasion, or because he wanted his intentions made inescapable to Bernard, Augustin had gone further than they could have possibly expected. Nodier can hardly here be exaggerating; his account is confirmed by the tone of Augustin's letters to his brother and the Committee. Bernard did not protest;

instead he asked Augustin to dinner and on this social occasion, no difference seems to have arisen between the two Representatives. Outside the inn where they ate, a crowd was cheering and rejoicing. They waited, keeping up the celebration, until the Representatives appeared.

Nodier glowingly describes the masses of flowers – in the middle of January – the obligatory maidens in white dresses; Girardot, more soberly, quotes from the *procès verbal* [the minutes] of the People's Society.

> 'It is with tears of joy and the most lively enthusiasm that the Society showed to the worthy father of his country its gratitude for the act of justice he has done. The entire society accompanied the two Representatives to their dwelling, singing the hymn of liberty.'[10]

Bernard was not fooled into thinking that any of this was meant for him. Maréchal says he left Vesoul with rage in his heart, and this is probably right.[11] Augustin on his side would seem not to have had much confidence in Bernard. Instead of regarding his mission as concluded and hurrying on to Nice, he sent an express to Paris asking for equal powers with Bernard. His behaviour is understandable if we consider that the questions of de-Christianisation, the imprisoned farmers and the food supplies were still unresolved. Petitions were pouring from those who had been imprisoned by Bernard's supporters.

A week passed before the decree from the committee arrived, confirming Augustin's position. Meanwhile, as Mathiez says, 'he took his ease at Vesoul,' and 'explored the *carte de tendre*'.[12] But both Mathiez and Girardot agree that he continued to receive reports on the state of the countryside and prepared orders of release in expectancy of the powers that would enable him to sign them.

It may have been during this time or perhaps just after his powers arrived that the people of Vesoul, according to Monnier, held a banquet in his honour. At the conclusion of the feast, we are told, an old man named Doriot appeared before Augustin, to implore mercy for his son, a Benedictine of Favernay, denounced as a refractory priest and imprisoned at Vesoul.

> Robespierre, braving sarcasm and denunciation, made a magnificent gesture. Representing himself as 'subdued not by the wine of la Motte, but by the cordiality of the Vesuliens,' he agreed to free the prisoner.[13]

If he really did so, if the man really was a refractory priest, he was indeed braving his enemies and setting the law at defiance. Monnier gives no reference: 'nous sommes assurés!', he says, and the fact that in a footnote he refuses to give the name of the priest's accuser makes me even more hesitant about the story. Monnier goes on to tell us that the Vesuliens were 'so charmed by the kindness of

Robespierre,' that they organised an evening party. Here 'Robespierre had the gallantry to offer his arm to a Dame Ferrance of Vesoul and he danced with her! The lady was proud of the honour as she was the wife of a *vigneron* of La Motte.'[14]

Augustin received his powers about 12 Pluvoise (31 January) and in the next few days, at least three hundred people were released from prison. As Augustin put it, 'I have restored to agriculture the arms taken from it by masses and vespers.'[15]

He now began to visit as many as possible of the small villages and towns around Vesoul. 'I believe it my duty,' he later wrote,

> 'to go to every place where intolerance and fanaticism are uniting their torches for a general configuration. I made the most of this opportunity to show the benefits of the Revolution; everywhere I have seen it blessed and everywhere I believe I have created its zealous defenders.'[16]

The inhabitants did indeed receive him warmly. When he visited Menoux, a little town not far from Vesoul, and people as usual crowded round to stare and applaud, a little boy pointed to Augustin and cried, 'Look! The man who has come to give us justice!' Augustin was delighted with this perceptive infant and recorded the episode in one of his decrees.[17] In this cynical age it is impossible not to suspect the prompting of some politically conscious relative, yet it is possible to overdo even cynicism. Augustin's decrees, which were to the divided politicians the salvos of a theoretical battle, may have sounded to the peasants of Menoux like the trumpets of *Fidelio*.

The popular societies of the small market towns clamoured for his attention. The Society of Jussey asked both Bernard and Augustin to visit them. Bernard made no response but Augustin came on 13 Pluvoise (1 February). Here he addressed the Society and righted wrongs in his usual way. After he had gone, it was discovered that he had forgotten to sign the *procès-verbal*. Horrified at missing so prestigious an autograph, the Society despatched a member to Vesoul bearing the minute book. Augustin signed it, but he read the minutes first and insisted that throughout the frequent words 'the virtuous Robespierre, hero of Toulon,' should be crossed out and replaced by 'citizen Robespierre', 'since those words were not his due; they belonged to the brave volunteers who composed that army.'[18] This episode was to have a sequel later.

Augustin did not make his journeys through the villages alone. Ever at his side was Mme de La Saudraye, who was making a name for herself in local legend. In her speech to the Popular Society,

Mme de La Saudraye had expressed her admiration for the countryside around her. As she grew to know it better, she talked about buying a house there. She spoke of this to Viennot and the National Agent, Boizot. The latter was later to write to her about the project in glowingly Rousseauistic terms: 'A simple dwelling, solitary, smiling and peaceful will be to your taste; you will love the calm and innocence of country life, for tender and benevolent spirits love to be near nature which inspires them with gentle sentiments.'[19]

She showed her benevolence in other ways besides love of county life. 'She had,' says Lods, 'an irresistible power over her lover, he took no important measures without recourse to her advice and often she counselled mercy.'[20] Lods is writing more than ninety years after the events, and his account is sober compared to that of Charles Nodier, whose imagination was attracted to the bizarre and romantic, and who wrote in 1832, well within living memory of Augustin's past:

> 'In those times, when the idea of religion passed for prejudice, rumour repeated that this friend of Robespierre was a creature of a higher nature who had the privilege of reading spirits and whom he brought with him to help in a mystery of redemption wherein she was charged with the separation of the good and the bad. I attest this fact, having heard it repeated a hundred times.'[21]

It is not surprising that another romantic, Lamartine, seized on this story and copied it into his *Histoire des Girondins*. Going one better, presumably to make Augustin a more suitable mate for this exalted creature, he informs us that Augustin 'had something mysterious in his looks and words.' At this point belief becomes strained.[22]

Although the release of prisoners was the most dramatic part of Augustin's mission to the Haute-Saône, the calls upon him were as many and as varied as at Nice. The little town of Lure had been stricken with a severe outbreak of typhoid fever brought to the town by soldiers returning from the Army of the Rhine, and it spread rapidly in streets 'where the most elementary hygiene was totally unknown.'[23] Even though fires were lit at street corners to check infection, the fever increased. On 19 Pluviôse (7 February), Augustin, who had already despatched an extra doctor to Lure, himself arrived in the town. Augustin took what steps the medical knowledge of the time allowed him. He ordered the creation of a new cemetery further from the town, he sent for extra doctors, he ordered a rough road to be established to bypass the town and he forbade ostentatious funerals to pass through the streets

spreading depression and panic. He also, 'with the humanity of which he gave daily proofs', released many prisoners, especially the infirm and the sick.

Augustin also visited the town of Gray. This commune was afflicted by one Maillot, a member of the temporary commission for requisitions for the Commune Affranchie (Lyon). Maillot was supported in his efforts by members of the Revolutionary Army on which Augustin, as we know, looked with the deepest disapproval. Maillot and his friends did not stop at collecting grain; they began to meddle with religious matters. The people of Gray detained Maillot and appealed to Augustin to support them. Augustin, while cautioning them against taking the law into their own hands, did in fact banish Maillot and his friends from the department, by which means he freed the people of Gray from their attentions and avoided a confrontation with the Representatives at Lyon.[24]

As elsewhere in the provinces, requisition and the stiff application of the maximum caused the farmers to conceal their grain, and in the Haute-Saône, famine and severe shortages were always around the corner. The length and severity of the epidemic at Lure was in part to blame on insufficient food. Augustin saw the fear of famine as one of the main obstacles to the triumph of the Revolution. He inveighed against the 'stupid orators' always shouting famine so that the farmers, whose barns were full, were afraid to share their goods with their needy fellow citizens. On 25 Pluviôse (13 February) he published a decree checking requisitioning in the Haute-Saône.

> 'We have been informed that the inhabitants of several communes have been obliged to live on oaten bread since the soil of this district, which produces little wheat, has been rendered practically unproductive by drought; and whereas its resources in potatoes and other products which might take the place of wheat are almost non-existent, we give orders that the requisitioning which has taken place in the Department of the Vosges be provisionally suspended in consequence of which the communes responsible for the commodities requisitioned [for the armies] can supply the needs of other communes.'[25]

It seems probable that Augustin's efforts to balance the needs of the country people and the armies in the matters of supplies were not particularly effective; the complexities and rivalries could not be exorcised in a few days. Neither did Augustin attempt to deal with one of the most serious problems of provisioning the countryside, the manner in which grain and livestock were transported from place to place. The abuses were clear to him; he denounced them as 'criminal and stupid', but he did nothing himself about it. There was not enough time, and perhaps also too few responsible organisers.[26]

Carried along by the applause of the little towns and villages and – to us – the somewhat cloying raptures of the popular societies, it is not altogether surprising if Augustin began to feel himself above criticism in his handling of the problems of the Haute-Saône. He would, of course, have strenuously denied that he was capable of being influenced by flattery, but he had waited long, all those dreary years in Arras, all through the disappointments and frustrations of his career in Paris, for such applause, and I find it hard to blame him for being carried away by it. But troubles were creeping up on him, and as early as 21 Pluviôse (9 February) or thereabouts, came the first signs of trouble in an interview with Duroy, member of the Convention, convinced Jacobin and Representative on Mission, who happened to pass through Vesoul. A few days after seeing Augustin, Duroy thus expressed himself in a letter to Maximilien.

> 'I found, dear colleague, your brother at Vesoul. I am ignorant of the object of his mission in the Haute-Saône where our colleague Bernard has also recently been. It seems there is no agreement between them in principles or on the measures to be taken. I cannot judge between them but I know their altercation produces the worst effects in the department. I spent two days at Vesoul. I paid serious attention to all I saw and heard and I see with sorrow that your brother is much changed. Personally, I think he is surrounded by vile intriguers who deceive and corrupt him. I have told him my way of thinking with friendship, honesty and patriotism; I saw that he did not know what I meant. I am leaving for the Haute-Marne, because my principles do not accord with those he has at present.'[27]

This letter, apart from showing that Bernard's partisans had not been as completely silenced as Augustin liked to think, suggests that Augustin met Duroy's criticisms with an arrogance and impatience that allowed for no explanation. 'He appeared to me prejudiced against the Haute-Saône,' Augustin commented later,[28] and it must be agreed that Duroy was, on his side, a keen anti-Catholic.[29]

But Duroy's criticisms were as nothing compared to what was shortly to come from Besançon. Bernard reached that beautiful city several days after his meeting with Augustin. Here he met another Representative, Lejeune, who was not wholly sympathetic about Bernard's surrender to Augustin at Vesoul. Together they went to the People's Society at Besançon. Here one of the most prominent Jacobins in the town, Briot, a young, ambitious journalist, supported by his following, launched an attack on Bernard. Bernard faced with this hostility, put all the blame on Augustin and apologised abjectly for his own weakness. He admitted that the People's Society at Vesoul and – by implication,

Augustin – were counter-revolutionary.[30] The Club sent off a deputation to Augustin to report their discussion and find out what was going on. The fact-finding deputation arrived at Vesoul on 24 Pluviôse (12 February), just as Augustin returned from his visit to Lure. He learned from them that Bernard had yielded to him out of fear of Maximilien, and that he himself had been called a counter-revolutionary.[31]

From that moment, Augustin became Bernard's unrelenting enemy. Since he can never have expected much of Bernard by way of support, it can only be supposed that he had not expected so public a disavowal or that he would publicly be called a counter-revolutionary, though this had been rumoured for some time. But it was probably Bernard's attempt to inculpate Maximilien that struck him most.

To some observers it might well have seemed that there was a modicum of truth in Bernard's denunciation. When Michelet tells us that 'Augustin's letters from the provinces were dictated by the Royalists,'[32] he is only saying what many people thought at the time. He was staying in the house of a man rumoured to be of Royalist sympathies; his friends were tainted with federalism; he showed consideration to constitutional priests, who every good Republican hoped would soon become superfluous. Traitors openly declared they were protected by M. Robespierre. It was said that he would release everyone, whatever their crime.

The pity is that Augustin himself was largely to blame. We know that one of his worst failings was his inability to accept criticism. After his meeting with Bernard, he made no attempt to communicate with his critics. There are excuses for him. He was tired and overstretched, and it was natural that he should want to spend his few free hours with his mistress and his friends. He paid frequent visits to Viennot, in whose study he found to his delight copies of all Maximilien's speeches.[33] Viennot later commented that Augustin, alone among the various Representatives who visited Vesoul, listened to his opinions. Meanwhile Augustin ignored the administrators of the department who, surprisingly, he does not seem to have tried to get rid of. They had written to him as early as 2 Pluviôse (21 January): 'we believe we would lack in our duty to the citizens to the respect due to your character if we did not make known to you the character of certain people we grieve to see around you here.' Augustin did not bother to reply to this letter. After that, there was silence.[34]

Viennot at least was sincere in his liking for Augustin, and would seem to have been trustworthy. We cannot say as much for Augustin's other local prop during his mission. This was Boizot, the National Agent. Boizot's character has been examined and found unattractive by both Monnier and Girardot,

but he remains a puzzle. Perhaps he was a combination, probably as difficult to himself as to us, of coward and fanatic. He was extremely anti-Catholic and, during Augustin's mission, must have had to smile patiently through what he must have seen as pro-Catholic goings-on. He kept saying to everyone that he would die for his beliefs, but he was a hopeless toady and attached himself to Mme de La Saudraye as his most likely protector. Hard work and austere living are usually safe practices in revolutionary times and he practised both earnestly in three or four rooms of the old college, close to the Representative's lodging. He had somehow fallen foul of Bernard and was determined to stay in with Augustin.

Augustin and his friends finally left Vesoul on 26 Pluviôse (14 February), set to go to Besançon on their way to Lyon, so that Augustin could confront Bernard's followers in their stronghold. Bernard was no longer there; he had moved on to Dijon.

On the way, they stopped at Gray, the town being anxious to thank Augustin for having saved them from the persecutions of Maillot. Here Augustin addressed the Popular Society.

> 'I have come to appeal to your hearts, to speak to your virtues, to enquire what are your anxieties and needs. I shall have fulfilled my duty, I shall have satisfied my heart, if I succeed in relieving the unfortunate. Everywhere I have consulted the citizens I have always acted in accordance with their light and guidance. The people are never unjust.'[35]

Absorbed once again in his duties as protector and benefactor, he was once again in the golden age. He could not believe, one may be certain, that any of the simple and warm-hearted people could act the part of Bernard. In this, time was to prove him wrong.

As at Vesoul, there were questions of displaced and imprisoned administrators and of people imprisoned for minor offences. Next day, in the biggest church in the town, which was packed full of people, Augustin examined the list of those under arrest. Finally he gave judgement.

> 'There are some guilty of offences which have been expiated by several months' detention. There are others more criminal who must stay in prison till peace reigns both within and without the Republic and all Frenchmen form one nation of brothers. Inspired by these sentiments, yet showing myself sincere and firm towards these latter culprits, the only feeling I experience or express is a desire to make others happy . . . Kindly tell me which of these are now sufficiently punished to receive their freedom now.'

Finally, after a careful discussion of the list, half the prisoners were released and again there were rejoicings and processions and patriotic songs.[36]

Next day, the travellers set off for Besançon, a beautiful and imposing town, circled in a curve of the Doubs, the citadel towering above the town. Besançon, until 1640 part of the Holy Roman Empire when it was wrenched away by Louis XIV, had a gravity and dignity that characterise it to the present day. It is probable that Augustin and his companions put up at the Hôtel National in the rue Granges, the usual resting place for important people – Queen Hortense was to stay there ten years later.[37] Unhappily it has been pulled down and a hideous supermarket erected in its place, a sad disappointment, because otherwise Besançon has retained so many of its beautiful houses. All along the streets, archways lead into courtyards where magnificent outside staircases of carved wood lead up to every storey. No doubt, the Hôtel National possessed one, in itself an invitation to oratory.

The Popular Society had known of Augustin's approach for some days. Lejeune and the president of the Society, an honourable and distinguished ex-noble, Viennot-Vaublanc, were anxious for the sake of the Republic that the quarrel between Bernard and Augustin should be played down and that, when Augustin came to the Society, as he was bound to do, no mention whatever should be made of the quarrel.[38] Augustin met Lejeune and had what seems to have been a peaceful conversation with him. Then they set out for the Popular Society. According to the legend, Mme de La Saudraye was on Augustin's arm.

There are differences of opinion as to what happened as they entered the Society. Nodier, who was present as a boy of twelve, tells us that as Augustin and Guillodon de La Saudraye advanced towards the seats of honour, one of the members, a tinsmith, leapt up and shouted, 'No women!' He went on to complain that he had never brought his wife or daughter to the Society, yet Robespierre used his position to do so. The tinsmith, Nodier tells us, was a tremendous character, known for his outspokenness; people called him the Peasant of the Danube. Augustin, says Nodier, looked surprised, but he behaved well. He looked at Guillodon and she left his side. As she walked to the door she even managed to smile, but, says Nodier, there was something infernal in it. It remained with him all his life.[39]

Mathiez dismisses this story, Girardot does not mention it, but, though I may be suffering from an excess of romantic sentiment, I find it hard to dismiss completely. After all, the rest of Nodier's account runs extremely close to Augustin's own description of it and it may well be that some incident

involving Mme de La Saudraye did take place, though whether in the exact form Nodier describes we can never know. Let us leave it at that.

Augustin went up the steps of the tribune. He wore spectacles, says Nodier, and he looked tired, thin and worn, much older than his years. He began to speak in his ugly, rasping voice. His shirt collar showed under his cravat and Nodier noticed the elegance of his clothes and the fineness of his linen.

Augustin demanded first whether Bernard had denounced him and, on being told that this was true, he launched into a violent attack on Bernard, his character, his morals and his personal appearance. With schoolboy humour Augustin speculated on whether Bernard, being so thin, could get through keyholes. We cannot pretend that Nodier is inventing here. We get the same thing in Augustin's correspondence.[40] After this had gone on some time, the president, Viennot-Vaublanc, tried to intervene. 'He did not,' wrote Augustin afterwards, 'refute a word of my speech; he spoke in exalted terms of the high destiny to which I had a right to aspire so that accordingly I was bound to disdain accusations of any kind whatever.'[41]

This had Augustin flying back to the tribune in a renewed rage, taking the president to have meant that his high destiny was due to his name; if names had anything to do with it, then the president, as an ex-noble, might expect to be guillotined. After this, the debate drew to a close. Nodier tells us that Augustin, as he came down from the tribune, called to the tinsmith, 'Never fear, my friend! It is not with us Robespierres that equality will end. Bernard's empty head will not weigh more than mine in the scales of justice.' And there was laughter and applause.[42]

The matter did not end there, of course. Augustin stayed three days in Besançon and attended two more sessions of the Society. His presence can hardly have been welcome to Lejeune, who somehow managed to avoid a quarrel with him. Enemies of Bernard of course kept appearing, accusing Bernard of embezzlement and oppression. Briot, in his newspaper *Vedette*, described what happened at Augustin's second meeting with the Popular Society.

> 'Robespierre came surrounded by that faction of which he made his court, calumniating Bernard. He promised he would have his head. He struck terror into the members of the Society and insulted and threatened one of the three citizens who dared to defend Bernard. Lejeune intervened and had the courage to defend his colleague against the rabid declamation of Robespierre.'[43]

It was not an edifying scene; even Mathiez, for whom Augustin can do no wrong, does not seem to get much pleasure out of it. One thinks of Lods's words directed at this quarrel, 'Devoured by a limitless ambition, incapable of suffering any contradiction.'[44] Only too true sometimes. At Vesoul we saw Augustin at his best, warm, kind and sensitive. In these circumstances he was, as Nodier says, 'easy to love'.[45] This was certainly not the case as we follow his unreasonable rages, his rummaging around for evidence against Bernard, and perhaps the best way of understanding is to remember his childhood at Arras when at eighteen months he found himself surrounded by betrayals and mysterious doings he could not begin to comprehend. Yet the other part of him was not obliterated.

On 29 Pluviôse (17 February), his last day at Besançon, he received a petition from Vesoul which must have been forgotten or arrived after his departure. It was from a woman, Françoise Cardot, whose husband had been imprisoned for refusing to take the National Oath and for hiding at his house a non-juring priest. The detail in which Augustin responded to this petition shows that it must have moved him deeply. The offence was serious, but the priest was the man's brother. 'So,' he wrote, perhaps quoting from the woman's plea, 'is he guilty for listening to the voice of nature and holding out his hand to his brother whom he saw thus dying without means of support?' The petitioner, Augustin adds, then enters into other details which excite compassion for her unfortunate position. She is the sole support of a blind brother and five little children. A sixth who might have helped them was in the army. Augustin set the prisoner at liberty.[46]

And now the carriage was waiting in the inn yard; he, Mme de La Saudraye and Sauli,[47] who had been with them all this time, were about to start for Lyon. 'The courtyard,' says Nodier, 'was crowded with women who waited with impatience to present petitions to him.' Augustin, who had no powers to help them, since those given him by the Committee did not extend to Besançon, addressed the crowd, no doubt standing on the outside staircase as he did so. 'I will come back,' he said, 'with an olive branch or I will die.' And he warned them against oppressive representatives. Everyone, Nodier says, cried with sorrow as the carriage drove away.

They arrived at Lyon, 'all in one pull', as Augustin told the Committee, and there they stayed for about six days. The Terror at Lyon was at its height, and they cannot have gained much satisfaction from that, but it gave Augustin time to catch up with his correspondence. Augustin wrote long letters to his brother and to the Committee of Public Safety. In his letter to Maximilien, which he wrote first, he related Bernard's monstrous behaviour, which he averred was so stupid that it did not disturb him

in the least, and then went on more thoughtfully to examine his own position in words that were later to inspire Nodier to write something to enshrine his memory.

> 'Nothing is easier than to keep a revolutionary reputation at the expense of innocence. Mediocre men find by this means a veil to cover their crimes; but the honest man saves innocence at the expense of his reputation. Do not fear that I shall be weakened by personal consideration or by feelings foreign to the public good. The salvation of my country is my guide; public spirit is my means. It is this spirit I have nourished, warmed and brought to birth in every heart. They cry sincerely *'Vive la Montagne*!' [the *Montagnards*] in the countryside where I have passed.'

He also warned, more ominously, of the dangers of those who seek to annihilate everything; 'If we do not take care all will be disorganised.' He was thinking of the revolutionary armies and men like Maillot.[48]

It must have been about two days after this that news came from Vesoul which proved the reality of Bernard's enmity to him. Viennot had been arrested. Augustin wrote indignantly to the Committee of General Security in defence of his friend.

> 'Frank, energetic, disinterested, honest, such is the character of Viennot, apothecary of Vesoul . . . This is what things have come to. Calumny attaches to the best. Unless you throw over a piece of crossed wood you are denounced as a counter-revolutionary. I have seen men who have no other means of subsistence except a revolutionary reputation which respects neither the law nor principles. These men persecute the innocent and terrorise all who breathe . . . One of these men has denounced Viennot and will perhaps denounce me. Viennot is an ardent friend of liberty, an honest man who fights intrigue . . . If you think me in error write to me without delay and make me still more difficult concerning men.'[49]

Next day Augustin and Sauli were to leave for Nice and Mme de La Saudraye was to return to Paris. Augustin, on the eve of his departure, wrote once more to his brother, asking him to be sure to see her because she could tell him so much about the scoundrels who played so big a part in the Revolution. Augustin himself had met thousands of them who spoke of Maximilien as though he was their dearest friend. They were to be found in all administrations, on all committees.[50]

On the morning of 8 Ventôse (26 March) Augustin at last set out for Nice, where, as he told the Committee, he hoped to find a plan of campaign.[51] In this at least he was not to be disappointed.

Endnotes

[1] Girardot.
[2] *Ibid.*, p.116; Monnier, Histoire de la ville de Vesoul delete vol. 1, p. 365. Monnier speaks of the house of M. Boisolet, apparently a 19th-century owner. The Hôtel Boisolet, a very grand affair, is illustrated, but not in connection with Augustin. Humbert's house is described as 'humble' but it would have had to be big enough to accommodate Augustin's entourage. Nodier, p. 91.
[3] Michon, vol. 1, p. 257 *et seq.*
[4] The speeches were reprinted in Poupé, 'Robespierre Jeune et Gasparin Sauli'.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 78.
[7] Michon, vol. 1, p. 257 *et seq.* Maréchal
[8] Maréchal, p. 283.
[9] Nodier, p. 77.
[10] Nodier, p. 77; Girardot, vol. 3, p. 81.
[11] Maréchal, p. 283.
[12] Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté'.
[13] Monnier, vol. 1, p. 367.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 368. A *vigneron* named Ferrand had been released by Augustin. Dame Ferrance may have been the freed man's wife. Mathiez, 'Arrêtés de Robespierre Jeune'.
[15] Michon, vol. 1, p. 261.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 260.
[17] Mathiez, 'Arrêtés de Robespierre Jeune'.
[18] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 82.
[19] Lods, p. 183.
[20] Lods, p. 180.
[21] Nodier, p. 80.
[22] Lamartine, vol.5, p. 300.
[23] Girardot, 'Robespierre Jeune à Lure'.
[24] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 99 *et seq.*; Maréchal, p. 281 *et seq*.
[25] Maréchal, p. 201.
[26] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 108.
[27] Michon, vol. 1, p. 250.
[28] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260.
[29] Girardot, vol. 3, pp. 127–8; Girardot says, 'Bernard des Saintes showed no disposition to play the role of a missionary of atheism.' This is not quite borne out by his letters to the Committee. See Aulard, vol. 10, p. 328.
[30] Michon, vol. 1, p. 259.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Michelet, vol. 20, p. 353 n.
[33] Michon, vol. 1, p. 254.
[34] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 80.
[35] Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté'; Monnier, vol. 1, p. 358.
[36] Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté'.
[37] Estavoyer and Gavignet, p. 90.
[38] Girardot vol. 3, p. ,92. For a more hostile account of Augustin, see Dayet, pp.39–42. A Friend of Briot's described Augustin as 'basely flattering priest, Catholic and federalist.'
[39] Nodier, p.79 *et seq*.
[40] Nodier p. 81-82.
[41] Michon, vol. 1, p. 261.
[42] Nodier, p. 82.
[43] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 92.
[44] Lods, p. 167.
[45] Nodier, p. 83.
[46] Mathiez, 'Arrêtés de Robespierre Jeune', see n. 18.

[47] Nodier, p. 83.
[48] Michon, vol. 1, p. 253.
[49] Michon, vol. 2, p. 254.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[51] Michon, vol. 1, p. 256.

Chapter 14

Nice, March–April 1794

Augustin returned to the Army of Italy in a fine, mild spring. The snow had melted in the passes of the Alps as early as February so that in Piedmont and the Republic of Genoa it was expected that the French would soon be on the march. More than once it was rumoured that Augustin was back in Nice, a plan of campaign with him.[1]

Augustin, as a matter of fact, did not have a new plan of campaign and he did not get to Nice until 13 Ventôse (3 March). However, his mind was once more turning towards Genoa as he wrote his letters at Lyon. In his letter to Maximilien, he enclosed a letter to one of the Ministers of the Republic of Genoa, a distinguished advocate and talented man. Augustin had been assured that he was a partisan of the French Revolution. Maximilien was instructed to enter into correspondence with this hopeful character and discover more about the disposition of the Genoese government and the people of Genoa.[2] Three days later, at the end of his letter to the Committee of Public Safety on the iniquities of Bernard, he wrote:

> 'I return to the Army of Italy where I hope to find a plan of campaign dictated by the country's interest. The King of Sardinia can easily be overthrown by a surprise attack. You have in Paris a Genoese agent who should be sounded out on the dispositions of the Genoese people on giving passage to the French. It is through Genoese territory that we must throw ourselves on the Sardinian tyrant. It is very urgent to work on this plan if there is to be hope of realising it.'[3]

Reports from Genoa were cheering. During the carnival season the revolutionary party, which had the support of the young people, had danced the *Carmagnole*, and some brave spirits had even planted a tree of liberty for which they were imprisoned. The more conservative elements in Genoa sought an Austrian intervention which was not forthcoming.[4]

During Augustin's absence, Ricord and Saliceti had continued with preparations for the coming campaign, most of the work falling on Ricord who, throughout January and part of February, had been alone at Nice. Towards the end of January, a minor political storm had blown up. Lafond, a judge of the Revolutionary Tribunal at Nice, had written to Bouchotte. He gave a horrifying picture of the Army of Italy. Dumerbion did not care about the troops in the least; he divided his time between bed, table and

the theatre. General Seurrier had actually heard the soldiers singing a Royalist song and had made no protest. The whole of Haller's department was in a mess and Haller was making a fortune on the side.[5]

Lafond's letter put Bouchotte in a very awkward position. To take the accusations seriously was 'to condemn the Representatives of the People, among them Robespierre the Younger and Saliceti, who could hardly be considered moderates.'[6] Bouchotte himself was, as we know, hated by Augustin, who suspected him of supporting the revolutionary armies and longed for his downfall. The unfortunate Minister of War was aware of this. For the present, he sent off Lafond's accusations to the Committee of Public Safety, with a tactful note, suggesting that Lafond was probably exaggerating.[7] According to Augustin, who wrote of this episode to Maximilien later, Lafond was involved with Hébert's closest associates. Lafond was summoned to Paris where he was thrown into prison, and there he remained, apparently forgotten, until his accusations were put to a use that no one then expected.[8]

Augustin was quickly re-absorbed into preparations for the campaign. His first decree, on the day of his return, concerned the comforts of the soldiers stationed in the high Alps. 'The solicitude of the Representatives of the People does not lose sight for an instant of the hardships to which their brave brothers in arms, who camp and fight upon the sterile rocks, are exposed.' Soldiers in such circumstances were to have an extra ration of two pints of wine per *décade* [ten-day week]. This privilege was not to be extended to the troops in the more comfortable surroundings such as Nice, Entrevaux, Villefranche, Fort Hercule and Menton, but in these places the general-in-chief was to see that there were enough *vivandières* [camp cooks and victuallers] to supply their needs.[9] For the convenience of both soldiers and *vivandières* a store house was to be established in Nice where goods from bacon to candles could be supplied at a reasonable charge.[10] The army was desperately short of shoes. On 4 March, Ricord decreed that all shoemakers in three departments (the Var, the Bouches-du-Rhône and the Alpes-Maritimes) should be registered and their work assembled in a common workroom.[11] In expectation of the coming campaign, a hospital was to be established at Menton.[12]

Towards the end of March, the Army of Italy was in reasonably good shape, although the troops had more 'patriotic enthusiasm than military education.' Indeed the Representatives had to decree that only those who could read and write could become officers.[13] A certain number of the troops had seen service at Toulon so had some understanding of war. Many of the officers – Marmot, Junot, Arena to name just a few - were destined for greatness and only lacked experience. There were also the

non-commissioned officers of the old army, now enjoying high command, such as Masséna, and there were the soldiers of fortune among whom one can almost rank General Bonaparte. They all saw greatness opening before them.

The terrain on which they were fighting, 'the inaccessible mountains,' to which Augustin and the other Representatives so often refer, had been given careful consideration, and lessons had been learned from the activities of the *barbets*. Koch tells us that the hundred best shots in each *demi-brigade* and those men of quickest movement were formed into a company of scouts. 'Agile as the *barbets*,' says Koch, ' they became the terror of the enemy.' These brave scouts received, as a reward for their daring, an extra pair of shoes a month, which was all the army could afford.[14]

> The old headache of administration too seemed to be improving. Thanks to the solicitude of the General-in-chief, the intelligence of the Representatives, the foresight of the co-ordinator Eysautier and the devotion of Haller, in spite of the mountains, the shortages and profiteers, biscuits, meat and *eau-de-vie* were assured to the regiments.[15]

This hymn of thanksgiving was justified when the army was at a standstill; it still had to be tested when the whole army was on the march. 'The battalions,' says Spenser Wilkinson, 'were brought to the front. The troops were properly equipped and armed . . . the Army of Italy was thus better prepared for the friend and twice as strong as at any previous period.'[16]

The Piedmontese discounted any improvements in the Army of Italy. General Gherandini wrote to General Thuget on 22 March:

> 'All the news that we have from Nice agrees that this town is in a deplorable state. There is much sickness among the inhabitants and in the military hospitals there are nearly six thousand men. They await the brother of the Jacobin Robespierre with a plan of campaign.'[17]

As Augustin had, then, been back nearly three weeks, this information was hardly up to date; neither did it occur to Gherandini that the Army of Italy might be capable of producing its own plan without recourse to the government.

Certainly the Piedmontese Army offered little to a rising Bonaparte. The Piedmontese soldiers themselves were under the direct command of the King of Piedmont and the Austrian Army of Lombardy was commanded by Archduke Ferdinand. The Baron de Wins, an Austrian, had been appointed General in chief of the Piedmontese, but any decisions had to be referred to the King or Archduke as appropriate. Like Dumerbion, de Wins was elderly and infirm; unlike Dumerbion he had no

Bonaparte and no Masséna. He and his generals corresponded a good deal and kept each other informed about the various royal families with whom they were concerned. De Wins disliked action of any kind and kept his troops on the defensive throughout the time the Army of Italy was at its weakest. He was unpopular with his subordinates, but they were unable to get rid of him and the King was afraid of offending the Emperor.

This situation could give nothing but encouragement to the leaders of the Army of Italy. Their principal difficulty, apart from the never-ending problem of getting sufficient supplies, was the Committee of Public Safety. During Augustin's absence in the Haute-Saône the Committee had become increasingly disinclined to an invasion of Piedmont by land and more and more enamoured of the thought of an invasion of Oneglia by sea. As late as 30 January, Carnot had been in favour of invading Oneglia by the land route and going on to re-capture Saorge. Saorge was an almost impregnable fort, hanging in the rocks commanding the narrow valley of the Roya. Its loss had been a savage blow to French pride at the beginning of the war. General Brunet, the previous summer, had failed to re-capture it after days of desperate fighting. For this, among other supposed crimes, he had been guillotined.

During February, the idea of a sea operation gained ground. The Committee were even prepared to produce six thousand men from the Commune Affranchie to be led by General Hoche, who, having fallen foul of Saint-Just, had to be moved from the Army of the Rhine. This plan involved certain difficulties which were hardly mentioned, such as the extreme reluctance, even under the most dire threats, of getting the French Mediterranean fleet to emerge from Toulon, for fear of the English.[18]

The hesitations of the Committee were a severe blow to the Representatives and must have been particularly so to Augustin. From his first arrival in Nice he had pressed the plan of using Genoa as a jumping off ground for the invasion of Piedmont; Genoa had been the first matter to come to his mind as he awoke in Lyon from his long absorption with the Haute-Saône. The Representatives, having conferred on this matter, sent Saliceti to Paris to urge their case to the Committee. This tough action had its effect. The Committee fumbled about. They did not reject the possibility of naval action, for they were under considerable pressure from Lacombe St Michael, the Representative in Corsica, to send reinforcements to his aid. On the other hand they did not absolutely forbid the invasion of Genoese soil. On the way home, on 24 March, Saliceti wrote a skilful letter to the Committee.

> ‘All the news from Italy announces the ferment in Genoa. The movement of (Piedmontese) troops towards Piedmont and Milan show enemy projects clearly. They will forestall us in Oneglia and threaten the Alpes-Maritimes by Ventimiglia.
>
> ‘Without waiting for General Hoche and the 6000 men from the Commune Affranchie, we will march overland to Oneglia. By the 15th of the month the blow will be struck. Mastered by circumstance we are not able to risk following your decree regarding the embarkation of troops. It would take fifteen days for the ships to be ready and that is far too long. Our overland march will be troublesome, but it will be quicker and surer. I have charged the general of artillery, General Bonaparte, to go to Nice in order that on my arrival I shall find all the preparations made which will ensure the triumph of the Republic in the expedition confided to us.’[19]

The words were Saliceti’s; his will was that of all three Representatives. As Fabry says, ‘the energetic decision of the Representatives did them the greatest credit.’[20] Their unity was as complete as their determination. There was, however, despite this unity, a crack no wider than a hair in the mind of one.

During Augustin’s absence in his private kingdom in and around Vesoul – and how much that absence was resented by the other two Representatives we cannot know – Saliceti, on one of his frequent journeys, visited Representative Maignet at Orange. Maignet was not a person to attract Augustin’s approval. During his consulate he was reputed to have burned down a recalcitrant village and executed several of its inhabitants. On the occasion of Saliceti’s visit, however, he must have proved a sympathetic listener, capable of drawing out the secret thoughts of his companion. Later on he wrote to Couthon about the injustices Saliceti had suffered, calling him the true conqueror of Toulon. No names were mentioned but the implication was clear.[21]

We have seen that when Barras met Augustin, Ricord and Saliceti at Toulon, he had picked out Saliceti as leader in spite of Augustin’s pushing. Helped by Augustin’s prolonged absence, Saliceti maintained his position after the Battle of Toulon. It was he who had gone to Paris to face the Committee over the Piedmont campaign. Yet Augustin had gained ground; the dialogue with the Genoese was very much in his hands; perhaps because of his brother, the Piedmontese regarded him as the leader. Saliceti, however, was still the closest to Bonaparte and was, as it were, the guardian of his genius.

One of Augustin's first tasks on his return concerned General Bonaparte. The officer, now General of Artillery in the Army of Italy, had been inspecting the fortifications of the coast with almost too much zeal. He fell foul of some local authorities and was arrested. Augustin at once wrote a helpful letter. 'I hope all this will have a happy ending,' he said. It did. Bonaparte was released at once and resumed his duties. It may be that this marked an important stage in his relationship with Augustin. At least it seems that from this time, Bonaparte more and more influenced the counsels of the Representatives.[22]

The Piedmontese had their fantasies of 'the brother of Robespierre', a *deus ex machina* returning with a plan.[23] He had no need to do so since a plan was already being drawn up in Nice. Who was, if not the entire author, the principal progenitor? Fabry, to whose detailed care any writing about Augustin and the Army of Italy must owe so much, states firmly:

> 'The influence exercised by Bonaparte at the beginning of the campaign of 1794 cannot be accurately estimated. The documents do not allow us to check the parts he attributes to himself. One thing is certain. The base of the first plan was not his.'[24]

However Colin, a key writer on the rise of Napoleon, differs strongly, believing the plan to be entirely his, a view that is echoed by the English expert on Napoleon's beginnings, Spencer Wilkinson, who states categorically that 'the plan of campaign was drawn up by Bonaparte.'[25] He cites the influence of Bourcet, one of the great staff officers of the Army of Louis XV whose work was greatly admired by Napoleon. Bourcet had drawn up a plan for an imaginary campaign in the Alps and Napoleon now incorporated many of Bourcet's ideas into his own design.

In the last days of March, Augustin moved towards the depoliticising of the army. Many officers and non-commissioned officers were members of the committees of surveillance; on these committees the more extreme revolutionaries had friends and the soldiers made political pronouncements on their companions in arms and officers. Augustin and Ricord saw this as an impossible position in an army about to go into action. No longer were the soldiers to leave their posts to attend meetings.[26] The army was to be an instrument of victory, not a school for democracy.

Anything that smacked of the de-Christianisation programme must now be firmly put down. The Army of Italy was about to invade a Catholic country. In Genoese territory and later in Piedmont, any outrage against religion could carry the most disastrous consequences. Fabry emphasises Augustin's position:

> ‘On the eve of entering Italy it was important to have in the National representation a deputy endowed with the energy capable of respecting the religious convictions of the inhabitants whom it was desirable to attach (to the French cause). No one was more capable of fulfilling that role than Robespierre the Younger.’[27]

It was no doubt to discourage any possible dangers in the rear that the Representatives reorganised the local committees and municipalities, ridding them of those of doubtful loyalties. Curiously enough these purges were widely reported in the foreign press, *the Morning Post* commenting, ‘A letter from Nice mentions that the conspiracies lately discovered in Paris have influenced the Representatives to take rigorous moves against the public functionaries.’[28]

By now the Representatives, Dumerbion, Bonaparte and the other generals were gathered at Nice. At the very end of March or on 1 April the plan of campaign was put to all the generals. It was an elaborate one and if Bonaparte’s name was not attached to it, it was in the handwriting of his secretary, Junot. A decree issued to the army late on 15 April contains the essence of the plan.

> ‘A division of the Army of Italy, 18,000 to 20,000 strong, will go by land, passing through the territory of the Republic of Genoa, to take possession of Oneglia. The army destined for this expedition will be followed by artillery necessary to besiege Oneglia if resistance makes this necessary. To effect this the Commander of the artillery [Napoleon] is authorised to take by sea or land measures he judges suitable to transport the siege equipment.
>
> The General commanding the expedition [Masséna] will occupy the heights necessary to assure the taking Oneglia. He will exploit this opportunity by turning his attention also to Saorge, if this seems possible without doing anything prejudicial to the taking of Oneglia which forms the principal object of the expedition.
>
> The troops of the Republic, in occupying Genoese territory, will show them the sympathy and harmony that reigns between the two nations. All the officers and non-commissioned officers, from corporal to General-in-Chief, will be responsible for any disorders caused by ill-wishers who may be concealed in the army.’[29]

Obviously every sentence had been weighed by the Representatives. The reader will, I am sure, have already picked out the vital points.

Bonaparte had been given considerable freedom, since almost any action of his could be interpreted as ensuring the well-being of the siege equipment. Because the Committee were still

nervous about the advance on Piedmont, Saorge had to be played down, and Oneglia had to be presented as the principal object. The concealed ill-wishers are those anti-religious extremists whom Augustin regarded as counter-revolutionaries.

However muted, the reference to Saorge must have excited the army. The mauling received there by poor Brunet's troops was still painful to recall. Only the citadel's recapture could take away that failure. The Committee's obsession with Oneglia had been most cleverly exploited by Napoleon. Bourcet in his 'Imaginary Campaign' had pictured an important post being captured through an elaborate diversion far away. Oneglia served this purpose very well, but if Saorge was to be captured and the Roya Valley and its heights were to be seized by the French, speed was essential, not only because the Committee might interfere, but also because the Piedmontese must not have time to counter-attack.

The plan issued to the generals was of course a highly complex piece of work. Napoleon, not being in command himself, had worked out a most elaborate scheme in which every commander knew what he should be doing on every day of the campaign. This of course demanded that everything should go reasonably right from start to finish, which was no doubt what the Representatives optimistically presumed. There were variations for emergencies naturally, but then it is always the emergencies that we do not expect that happen. It is interesting to note, as Colin does, that there are no instructions for the column that is to march on Oneglia or for the Commander of the Artillery who was accompanying it, Napoleon himself.[30]

It fitted in well with the Representatives' views that Dumerbion did not feel up to going on campaign. Masséna was appointed Commander of the expedition on 2 April. 'In choosing Masséna to direct this operation and giving this great warrior the occasion to display his marvellous qualities and his indomitable firmness, the Representatives deserved well of their country.'[31]

On 3 April the Piedmontese were still unsure of French intentions. On 29 March Gherandini wrote to Thuget, 'The brother of Robespierre, who lives permanently at Nice, has printed an address to the *sans-culottes* for when they cross into the territory of the Republic (Genoa) to penetrate into Piedmont.'[32] A day or two before the Piedmontese General, Dellarara, had written to de Wins, 'I have little more than the same news. You asked about Nice. M. Robespierre wishes to enter the territory of the Republic (Genoa).'[33]

The proclamation of which the Gherandini agent told him was indeed dated 30 March, but was certainly printed some days before. It was not made public until nearly a week later and on 5 April, the consul of Genoa at Nice reported that the Representatives and Generals were still divided as to an invasion of Genoa.[34]

Sauli, Augustin's Genoese friend, must have returned home at the beginning of March. Augustin wrote to him on the 26th:

> 'You have promised me useful information. I count on it. You know our situation, you know how to judge your interests and ours. You have no other motives than to serve the cause of humanity effectively. I am certain you won't be angry if I don't reply to every one of your letters. One of your friends at Ventimiglia has written to me, he seems to me a very brave man. Invite him to continue his correspondence. I don't have his address so I can't write to him.
>
> Robespierre Jeune.'

He added a list of his requirements. These included 'detailed maps of the Kingdom of Sardinia', details of principal rivers with notes on their courses, and much information on the military preparedness of the Genoese Republic. He wrote the last sentence in Italian, '*Si a Oneglia se troaro dei salicie*.' It would be agreeable to imagine that during their travels through France, Sauli had been teaching him Italian and he wrote this to show he had not forgotten.[35]

Everything was now ready for the advance, but the Committee had not yet given up. They wrote to inform the Representatives that they had appointed General Hoche as commander of the naval expedition and that he was on his way to Nice. The prospect of a new, unknown general and the resurrection of the naval expedition must have struck a chill to the hearts of the commanders at Nice.[36] But matters changed again. A courier arrived, having passed Hoche on the road, bearing another letter ordering the General's arrest as soon as he arrived at Nice. The task devolved on Dumerbion. On 2 April, Hoche was on his way back to Paris and prison. It is an episode that reflects little credit on the Committee, but its end cannot but have brought relief to the Representatives.[37]

On 5 April, along with the order to march issued to the army, the Representatives issued the proclamation which Gherandini had written of a few days earlier, addressed to the people of Genoa. They announced that in self-defence they were forced to send troops through Genoese territory. They declared that the most strict laws of exact neutrality would be observed.

> ‘The Genoese will find in each defender of liberty a brother, a warm sincere friend . . . The French Republic respects the rights of all men, their laws, their customs. They have adopted a government of which the foundation is liberty and equality; at home virtue and talent are esteemed, old age honoured and succoured . . . France’s territory is the limit of its revolution and the execution of its laws.
>
> ‘Genoese Citizens! Ill-wishers seek to convert our friendship into enmity. If by chance some have intruded into the army make your complaints to the Representatives of the People. They will avenge your injuries.’[38]

I suppose that most modern readers will greet this decree with cynical laughter, considering the Terror was now approaching its height. But it was essential that things should be shown not as they were, but as they would be when France was purged of the machinations of *enragés* and émigrés alike. The harsh realities of life were very different. Since his return from Lyon, Augustin had suffered a private grief and sense of outrage in the arrest of Viennot, and there was no news yet of his release. In Vesoul, on 21 March, Boizot had taken up his pen to address himself to Mme de La Saudraye: ‘Every day they try to frighten us by talking of Bernard’s return. They say he has been given a fresh mission here . . . revenge will know no bounds.’ Boizot had also written to Augustin, so he informed Mme de La Saudraye, calling him ‘our father, our friend, our guide. His great spirit can never see injustice and oppression without anger.’[39]

On 26 March Augustin wrote another furious letter to the Committee of General Security, denouncing the men ‘of huge moustaches and long sabres,’ who favoured the enemies of the Revolution. He had by now heard of the arrest of Hébert and his friends and this did give him some hope, but the danger remained:

> ‘Understand, citizen colleagues, the tyrants only recruit their armies from the extravagances committed against religion . . . I have observed these immoral and perverse men . . . who break a cross so that no one should notice their thefts and crimes.’[40]

Sometime in the beginning of April he received a letter from Maximilien, and he sat down to answer it during the last hurried hours before his departure for the front. In his letter Maximilien would seem to have expressed a desire to see his brother; he also gave news of the arrest of Danton and his friends – Danton indeed was guillotined on the very day that Augustin wrote his answer.

'I received your letter at the instance of the expedition to Oneglia. My presence there is useful, perhaps even necessary.' Only he, he implies, was capable of tracking down the agents of the counter-revolution who might be concealed in the army. He no doubt believed this, but it was also an excellent excuse for remaining with the army at this critical juncture.

He broke off his main theme here to congratulate Maximilien on Danton's arrest. Actually he had always known Danton was a traitor – an astounding insight, one must admit! However, he was soon back on a more congenial topic, how to purify the army of conspirators who might have infiltrated the ranks. Sooner or later the whole thing must be done thoroughly, but not at the moment 'for fear of disorganising the army, it should wait for a favourable moment or be left to the discretion of the Representative of the People.'

He returned to more lively and personal enemies – Bouchotte for instance. Considering what scoundrels filled the Ministry of War, it was astounding that the Minister himself had not been denounced as a traitor. Which naturally led to thoughts of Bernard, 'who threatens the department of the Haute-Saône with his presence.' Meanwhile the excess of some men encouraged by the Representatives to the Commune Affranchie terrified the hearts of the innocent.

Maximilien had asked for the names of faithful patriots. Augustin regretted that on his travels he had really encountered very few. 'Perhaps they were discouraged by oppression'. However he mentioned

> 'Viennot, one of the most pure and ardent men I have ever met, Boizot, Galmiche, Morin, prosecutor of the military tribunal, and finally Bonaparte, General-in-Chief of the Artillery of transcendent merit, and he only offers me the guarantee of one who has resisted the caresses of Paoli and whose property has been ravaged by the traitor.'

Historians have spent much time arguing that this sentence meant that Augustin was still half-hearted about Napoleon. Norwood Young[41] and Holland Rose, while denying that Augustin had any capacity to recognise military merit, say that Augustin simply means that Napoleon was representing himself as a Jacobin, but should still be suspected. Colin takes a very different view.

> 'He is a *transcendent* man. None of his contemporaries is described in words comparable to these, not even Hoche or Masséna. It not to be supposed that he is to direct simply under the supreme directions of the Representatives . . . This subaltern work is not worthy of a man described as transcendent.'[42]

Jung, while stressing the close relationship between Augustin and Napoleon, does find the reference to Corsica strange.[43] In my own mind I find it impossible to believe that Augustin would have introduced to Maximilien anyone he did not trust himself. He would be aware that Maximilien would bring up the matter of Corsica and he was making clear that he himself was aware of the problem.[44] He ended his letter, 'Write me when you get my letter, telling me the news, so that I shall find out on my return from the Oneglia expedition what you have decided to do about my return to Paris.'[45] How much did he wish to go? Was his long dissertation on conspiracy something of a prolonged apology and explanation for his preoccupation with the Army of Italy? But this consideration must wait, for we must not delay any longer taking the road to Menton.

For the last two or three days, troops had been gathering at Sospel, Castillon, Castellar, Gorbio, Roquebrune, Monaco and Menton. According to Koch, the troops at Menton came to their positions last and moved the first, since they were the most exposed to enemy observation.[46] They must have bivouacked outside the walls on the Italian side, where the memorial to Queen Victoria now stands. In those days the Italian frontier was nearer than it is now, by the little chapel just before the steps leading up to the olive grove that has seen armies passing for a thousand years.

Augustin and Saliceti – for Ricord was to stay at Nice[47] – moved up to Menton probably during the afternoon of 5 April, and Augustin may have rested for a while in the Maison d'Ademar.[48] Dumerbion bestirred himself to see them off at Nice. He wrote the following morning to the Committee of Public Safety:

> 'The division of the army destined for the expedition to Oneglia marched last night. The Representatives of the People marched with them, guiding them on the road to victory. The ardour of combat which already animates the soldiers of liberty is a happy presage of our success.'[49]

Endnotes

[1] *Journal Historique*, 309.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccv.
[4] For the light at Agathe, see *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 430. For Augustin's course, see Lamothe-Langon.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccv.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 481.
[9] Koch.
[10] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 197.

[11] *Ibid*. p. 198.
[12] *Ibid*. p. 200.
[13] *Ibid.* p. 207.
[14] *Ibid*. p. 2, Koch.
[15] Wilkinson, pp. 49–50; Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccxi: Fabry sometimes finds it hard to accept that Napoleon had anything to learn.
[16] Koch, p. 52.
[17] Michon, vol. 1, p. 280.
[18] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccxx.
[19] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 252.
[20] Koch, p. 55.
[21] *Recueil*, *Supplément*.
[22] This is an obscure episode, confused at times with Napoleon's later imprisonment at Fort Carré near Antibes.See Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 186; Jung, vol. 2, pp. 402–3; Chaptal, pp. 193–4.
[23] Fabry, vol. 1, p. lxxi.
[24] Fabry, vol. 1, p. cli.
[25] Wilkinson, p. 48.
[26] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 153.
[27] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. cxv.
[28] Morning Post (3 May 1794), 'The conspirators in Paris' refers to the overthrow of Hébert and his friends by Robespierre during March. Hébert was executed on 23 March.
[29] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 151.
[30] Colin, p. 405.
[31] Fabry, vol. 1, p. cliii.
[32] *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 46.
[33] Fabry, vol. 1, p. cxxx.
[34] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. cxxxix.
[35] Poupé, 'Robespierre Jeune et Gasparin Sauli'.
[36] [deleted].
[37] *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 434.
[38] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 151.
[39] Lods, p. 179 *et seq*.
[40] *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 210.
[41] Young, p. 336; Holland Rose, vol. 1, p. 58–59.
[42] Colin, p. 229.
[43] Jung, p. 431.
[44] Corsica was for many years tyrannised by Genoa, but was ceded to France at the end of the Seven Years War. The Corsicans under Paoli wanted independence. Many hated France and spurned the benefits, such as they experienced, of the Revolution. Their national hero Paoli led them in a civil war, and while Augustin wrote his letter, they had Lacombe St Michel, the Representative of the People, holed up in a corner of the island and on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Bonaparte and his family had supported the French. See Carrington, and Lacombe's correspondence with the committee in *Recueil des Actes*. Augustin, Maximilien and Napoleon all had little time for people who wanted freedom without France.
[45] Michon, vol. 1, p. 271 *et seq*.
[46] Koch, p. 76.
[47] Ricord had been ill for several weeks, see his letter to the Committee. *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 745.
[48] Hare, p. 79.
[49] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 183.

Chapter 15

The Road to Saorge, April–May 1794

In the night between the 5 and 6 April, the French General Arena arrived at Ventimiglia and asked for an audience with the Governor, the Commander-in-Chief of the garrison. Once in his presence, Arena produced a copy of the Representatives' proclamation and announced that the French were already on the march. The Commander, whether dismayed or not, used many arguments against the invasion, urging that the Genoese had always regarded the French as true and faithful friends. Arena replied as he had been schooled. The operation would prevent the Piedmontese from entering Genoese territory and the French army would shed its blood in defence of its friends. He again repeated that the order was already given.

By this time it was daybreak and, from the high citadel of Ventimiglia, the advance guard of the French could be seen on the hills to the west. They had started from their camps around Menton at two in the morning. An hour after the vanguard had been sighted from Ventimiglia, a corps of sixteen hundred men appeared marching, in two columns. The Commander of Ventimiglia must have been too near the frontier to have believed the stories of French disarray, but even he was deeply impressed by the equipment that came after the army, 'I only mention,' he later wrote, 'sixteen cannon, large rather than small, 1500 landed with supplies.'[1]

The columns moved apart. One went towards Dolceacqua (which opened its gates immediately); the second advanced on Ventimiglia. By this time General Arena had made it clear that his role of negotiator had changed to that of conqueror. He wanted to put his own troops into the citadel, to which the Governor objected strongly. However Arena overruled this and the French soldiers entered the citadel.

Ventimiglia stands on a steep hill. To call its thoroughfares 'street' is a misnomer. Far more often they are precipitous alleys with hidden corners and dark, arched steps. A whole army could be eaten up there by determined resistance. Not one of the commanders advancing upon the town, had he been in the Governor's place, but would have tried to defend it; but Genoa had long lost the wish to fight for survival. It could now only exist by bargaining. 'At the end of the second column came the Representatives of the People, Saliceti and Robespierre the Younger.'[2]

The Representatives entered the citadel. Here they took pains to be courteous and conciliatory. They listened with sympathy to the Governor's complaints. Finally, Arena's soldiers were moved out of the garrison and the Governor promised to defend the town against surprise attack. Afterwards the Representatives had a quick meal before leaving the citadel – which today is only recognisable by a few ruined walls surrounding a farmyard – and continued their march. As they rode down the steep path to the road they must have looked down on the Roya flowing into the Mediterranean. They would have had a clear view, for in those days the modern town in the valley barely existed. The control of the Valley of the Roya was the unspoken aim of the French and to possess it they must hold the heights on both sides of the river, and the fort of Scozia. This they were still a long way from doing.

By the end of the morning, it was reported to the Governor that the French were in possession of Corneo and Forcari. Troops continued to pour past and the Governor began to suspect that not only was the crushing of Oneglia intended, but that Saorge might be the true objective. At least thirty thousand men had crossed the frontier. 'Artillery and supplies never ceased to pass by land or sea with frequent convoys of little ships.' He added,

> 'I should be disguising the truth if I did not say that the French army passed with the greatest discipline and the most edifying and wise conduct. Were they thirty thousand religious novices they could not have behaved more respectfully and honestly, which proves how absolutely they obey the strict commands of their leaders.'

Even as he wrote, there came news of the fall of Oneglia.

After the French left Ventimiglia the country grew, for a while, less hostile; the mountains declined and the way led over lower hills bright with spring flowers. There was an abundance of lemon and orange trees covered in fruit, but these remained unplucked by the thirty thousand 'religious novices' under arms.[3]

Oneglia lies low on the coast, its nearest neighbour, Porto Maurizio, crowding up a little hill to the east, jutting into the sea. The river flows between the two towns which today are united under the name of Imperia. It is a modern town with a few old streets by the harbour. If you walk right through the old town you can find, to the east, the remains of the old walls that were crumbling even in Augustin's time. We are told by a suspect source that, before the town surrendered, Robespierre the Younger walked in the range of the enemy guns like any common soldier.[4] If this story is true, it could

equally have taken place at the heights of St Agathe, captured after a brief resistance.[5] The Representatives thus describe the end of the Oneglia expedition:

> 'The enemy took flight after losing several men. The blood of the soldiers of liberty was spared. No one was killed; some have been slightly wounded. The quick capture of St Agathe terrified the slaves . . . They abandoned the place after several cannon shots. The Republican artillery had no time to fire on the walls of Oneglia, but they performed prodigies of courage and skill in dragging their cannon over inaccessible mountains.'[6]

At six in the morning on 8 April, the Chevalier Leplace, the Commandant at Oneglia, decided it was hopeless to try to defend the town. In any case the walls were of such a poor quality and in such a bad state of repair that they could not possibly withstand an enemy attack. He decided to retreat up the valley and make what resistance he could there.

A large number of French emigrés had taken refuge in the town; they panicked at the approach of the French and quickly bought up all the available mules at exorbitant prices. The garrison, being slower in their reactions, found themselves without mules to carry supplies to the mountains. While the émigrés made their getaway, the Commandant was reduced to throwing into the sea all the weapons that could not be carried to prevent them falling into the hands of the French. Almost the entire population of Oneglia, believing that the French would massacre everyone they could find, followed the émigrés and the garrison up the valleys to the mountains. The French troops entered a deserted town. As the refugees struggled up the tracks towards safety, it began to snow.[7]

The change from the mild spring weather did not affect the coast. The Representatives settled themselves in a commandeered house in the town and wrote lyrically to the Convention:

> 'The Genoese know the sublime conduct of the French Republicans, the French army has aroused its admiration and enthusiasm. They tell you that the defenders of the country, tired and in need of repose, do not crush the grass that invites them to rest. Bivouacking in orange groves, seeking to quench their thirst, they respect every leaf of the trees. They will tell you that some resting by error on some foliage they believed useless they offered to pay on the simple complaint of the owner. We have felicitated these generous citizens. We have promised that the Republic would remember they are worthy of esteem. We have told them that they have taken from the tyrants the power to calumniate the French people. Thousands of lips will

repeat their virtuous acts and awake the people to the baseness of the tyrants who have them under their yoke.'[8]

Unfortunately, even while this message was being composed by Augustin and Saliceti, the French troops were looting the empty houses. According to Masséna's biographer, Koch, this would not have happened if they (the inhabitants) had remained in their homes. Probably he means that the French commanders would have exerted themselves to save people who might be converted to republicanism as in the other towns they passed through, but unguarded goods were too tempting, even though Oneglia did not then boast the wealth it had enjoyed before the French bombardment in 1792. Those Genoese who were present, Koch tells us, 'showed little benevolence towards their neighbours; they encouraged the French pillage.' The only houses that were safe from this treatment were those where the Representatives were spending the night. Koch is probably right in saying that they did not intervene in the belief that it would make the soldiers easier to restrain in Genoese territory.[9]

Meanwhile, the French troops, high in the Roya Valley, were in difficulties. The snow grew heavier. Masséna and his soldiers pushed on courageously. The tracks became impassable and as the weather worsened even the poor stoical mules fell and perished. At last, Masséna decided to bivouac at Pigne high up in the Alps north of Dolceacqua. He was now cut off from communication with the other columns and, worse still, there was no *eau-de-vie* for his men. The supply system in which everyone had trusted had failed. '*Eau-de-vie*,' he wrote, 'Comrades, *eau-de-vie*! We have marched for sixteen hours. Assure us of *eau-de-vie* in the morning.'[10] Next day he struggled on with the march, but no *eau-de-vie* or any other supplies caught up with him. 'It is frightful,' he wrote to General Morrier, 'that anyone could forget that we have marched without a single drop of *eau-de-vie* for the poor unfortunates who have only bread to eat and some lack that.'[11]

He wrote to the Representatives that the weariness of the troops had caused him to halt and that General Hammel for the same reason was camping above the Roya. 'We are very discontent with the different administrations . . . I hope to tell you those who have done their duty . . . I hope the day after tomorrow to be with you.'[12]

There was naturally much discontent among the troops. The 118th *demi-brigade* (no doubt breaking Augustin's instructions about meetings) sent a deputation to Masséna saying they could no longer hold their post because of a 'great quantity of snow.'[13] Masséna sent them smartly back, but he

could well understand their feelings. At least a few supplies had come through and Masséna was able to distribute bacon and rice.

Masséna, perhaps thinking too much of his own glory as Koch implies, may have pushed too far even with the snow. On 10 April he became worried about the Representatives and the Oneglia column and went off to meet them at Oneglia the following day. The Representatives on their side were more furious with Masséna than worried about him. They had expected him to be well on the way to capturing Saorge. Almost as bad, they learned that the escaping Oneglia garrison had slipped away up the valley apparently unperceived by Masséna. Augustin must have been particularly infuriated for, as we know, he never took well to frustration of any kind.

They wrote Masséna a scathing letter on about 10 April, accusing him of neglect and practically of laziness. They told him that he had ignored the carefully laid plans of the general-in-chief, in actual fact Napoleon.[14] Spencer Wilkinson believed that this despatch must have been drafted by Napoleon himself, as it contains phrases that he constantly used. But Fabry argues that this could not possibly have been the case, since he was at Antibes on 7 April. The Representatives' dispatch was written on the 10th; it could not possibly have taken Napoleon three days to travel from Antibes or Nice. Fabry is sometimes too eager to keep him out of the campaign, untarnished by any mistakes.[15]

Fabry clearly feels that the Representatives were being totally unreasonable and in the light of Masséna's despatches they certainly were. I can only urge in their defence that, because of the poor communications and the snow they were completely unaware, being themselves on the coast, of the extent of the bad weather in the hills and the failure of the supplies. They were exceedingly worried that the second part of their campaign plan, the capture of the heights of the Roya and of Saorge would be delayed or come to nought. The hesitations of the Committee would be justified and they would look like fools. The capture of Oneglia was something, but the letter to Masséna proves that it was a small thing beside Saorge.

The next day Masséna turned up at Oneglia. There was of course a most unpleasant scene. Everyone lost their tempers, Masséna, who could look after himself on these occasions, no doubt giving as good as he got. Koch claims that the Representatives threatened him with dismissal, which would have meant the military tribunal, but whether they did so or not, after a while they began to calm down and listen to reason, so that for the time being all was well between them.[16] The weather

had also improved and Masséna and the Representatives were able to continue towards the next objective, the town and fort of Ormea.

As they moved up into the hills, Augustin grew aware of circumstances which distressed him, but justified his policies. He wrote to Maximilien,

> 'The more we advance into the enemy country, the more we are convinced that the greatest means of counter-revolution employed by perfidious men has been outrage and violence against religion. Everywhere we have been preceded by terror. The émigrés have persuaded everyone that we are murderers, rapists, child eaters and that we persecute religion.
>
> 'Calumny has produced the saddest effects, a population of 40,000 in the valley of Oneglia has taken flight. You see neither women, children nor old people. The defenders of the country are perfect. They have not touched a single image in the field or any of the pictures of superstition that cover the walls.'[17]

Although the columns were moving forwards again, and although the weather had somewhat improved, there was a certain sense of depression and uncertainty during the next four or five days. On 14 April, the Representatives wrote a mysterious letter to Haller which cannot now be fully explained.[18] They asked him to prepare a maritime expedition of 4000 men to last for four months. Since Oneglia was now theirs, there was no need for an invasion of the coast; they may have been thinking of invading Corsica should their advance into Piedmont be halted. On 15 April, we find Dumerbion writing to Masséna,

> 'According to what is said to me by Citizen Robespierre you are going to renounce the plan of the expedition which you have not been able to execute. I don't know the reasons, but it is necessary to know your plan of attack and the hour at which it will take place.'[19]

On 17 April, everyone's spirits were lifted. Masséna reached Ormea, a little dark town situated in a valley between steep mountains by the banks of the Tanaro. In those days, it was dominated by a fort of which today only a few ramshackle walls remain. Here was enacted a little tragi-comedy, the end of the era of formal warfare where rules of etiquette were as strict as in a ball at court. Masséna rode up to the fort and called on the Piedmontese governor to surrender. This old gentleman had few means of defence, but he would have liked a capitulation which ranked higher in the military code of honour than mere surrender. 'Retire, General,' he said to Masséna. 'Let me fire four or five shots into the air, and we can then write that I surrendered after honourable defence.' Masséna replied that he was in a

hurry and did not care for children's games. One wishes he had given way. The Governor did not press his point and the French entered the fort.[20] Masséna then pressed on to Garessio which surrendered without difficulty.

The Republican army was now in a position to attack Saorge from the rear. The Representatives, when they met Masséna at Ormea on 18 April, were delighted at the progress made. They wrote to the Committee, 'The town opens the way to Piedmont for us; it is twenty-five leagues from Turin. Here begins one of the main roads to the capital of Piedmontese tyranny.'

They had also captured a cloth manufactory and quantities of excellent wheat. In the battle for the Tarnoro heights the enemy had lost five hundred men against three men killed and ten wounded. Some emigrés from Toulon had been captured and shot.[21] The soldiers were happy, so Masséna told the Committee that although they were barefoot, they would sing the *Ça ira* in the streets of Turin. 'The Representatives Robespierre and Saliceti have followed the troops everywhere and their presence in the battles has contributed not a little to our success.'[22] The Representatives dwelt rather more on the moral victories:

> 'It seems that at this moment all the soldiers of this country have become philosophers. They use their reason to respect the customs that reason proscribes . . . The habit and guimpe so ridiculous in France and now annihilated, show themselves with security before our victorious brothers. We have been painted as monsters; we win the admiration of the inhabitants. The mother who fled with her nursling and traversed the rocks to escape the child eaters now returns to the bosom of her family to proclaim the virtues of the French. Light pours in like a torrent; the crimes of despotism are unveiled, truth succeeds falsehood . . . enlightened deeds of reason, magnanimity and virtue deny in a day the calumny of four years.'[23]

Soon, one cannot help reflecting, Piedmont might become another little kingdom for Augustin! Today, the visitor who has come up to Ormea on the local bus from Oneglia, and walked down the long narrow main street of the little town, will still see on the walls many religious paintings resembling those that were respected by the philosophers of reason.

The Representatives, Masséna and possibly Bonaparte now sat down in the fort to make plans for the final stages of their campaign. As we have seen, Augustin had already told Dumerbion that the original plan could not be completely adhered to, owing to the difficulties of the first few days. Now the plan they agreed on seems to some historians such as Fabry to err very much on the side of

caution. The emphasis was on the possible need for reinforcements in 'unexpected developments'.[24] Troops were to be withdrawn from Ormea in order that the valley of Oneglia should be properly protected.

The caution was to make the speedy capture of Saorge an absolute certainty, even if it meant the delay of a few days while the troops reorganised. But there was opposition at the council table. It would seem, so Fabry suggests, that someone wanted to march straight into Piedmont, leaving the frontier fortresses in the rear. To my unmilitary mind, this seems foolish because of the unreformed supply lines, which would be placed under greater strain than ever. How the debate went we do not know, but at the end, Masséna wrote to Dumerbion, 'Representative Robespierre and I have in no way renounced the expedition to Saorge. You will receive the plan in plenty of time.'[25]

The words 'Citizen Robespierre and I' certainly suggest that Augustin and Masséna might be opposing other people who wished for a different plan. Not inconceivably, this was the moment when open differences began to arise between Augustin and Saliceti, with Augustin determined to stick to Napoleon's plan or at least its main aim. It is strange, perhaps, to find him thus on the side of caution, but it must be remembered that people who act with rashness when bored and frustrated, act with caution and commonsense when their energies are fully engaged. Jung, the military historian and biographer of Bonaparte, and a great admirer of Augustin, speaks of him as calm and political in the hour of victory. He appears to have been so on this occasion. At the end of the long debate, the Representatives wrote to the Committee:

> 'If we make ourselves masters of Saorge we shall have two outlets into Piedmont . . . The first leads us to Nice by the highway to Coni and passes Saorge . . . The second leads us to the valley of Tanaro. It should let us reach Turin without great obstacles. To carry out this great campaign we must have increased forces, above all cavalry which we are entirely without. Our present operation is preparing to open this campaign.'[26]

The next day, Augustin and Saliceti returned to Nice. Saliceti went off to Toulon. Augustin remained at Nice four days. This was probably because Ricord was ill, and there must have been many pressing matters at hand. On 25 April, Augustin and Dumerbion went up to Breil. Bonaparte, who had joined them at Nice, accompanied them. On the morning of the 27th Augustin and his transcendent general went together to the advance posts of the army high in the Alps. 'It was Bonaparte,' says Colin, 'who,

with Robespierre, directed operations and went round the various columns to assure themselves that all had instructions and would carry out the orders given.'[27]

All was now ready for the final attack. To General Lebrun, looking down the gorge towards Saorge, the hours seemed interminably long. He wrote to Masséna, 'I languish before the country of Saorge; I devour it with my eyes, and it is forbidden me to attack it.'[28] The days seemed endless; the day before, news had come that the plan had again been modified . . . nothing was to be done until Masséna was on the heights of Brigue. Snow fell again that evening in the high Alps.

But that very night, Masséna stormed the Barricades of Marta in the heaviest fighting of the campaign. The heights were captured and Saorge was surrounded. The loss to the enemy in the fighting was put by the Representatives, possibly with some exaggeration, at over two thousand men. The Republican losses were extremely small compared to this: 'sixty Republicans heroically dead,' among them General Brule, who had fought at Toulon, and Adjutant-General Langlois.

> 'The attack at different posts has been so managed as to do the most harm to the enemy and to spare Republican blood. The principal position of the enemy was attacked and carried first. By this his system of defence was destroyed; his forces found themselves isolated; terror spread…. and was followed by flight.
>
> 'A republican General who knows that costly victories destroy the Republic makes the most of the ardour of his troops without abusing them; his *coup d'oeil*, if he is intelligent, strikes at the heart of the enemy and .... keeps alive for the country defenders who might perish uselessly in attacking secondary posts or those not necessary for defence.'[29]

The words *coup d'oeil* seem to refer to a general superintending a whole campaign. If the Representatives had been meaning Dumerbion they would surely have named him. The praise can only be intended for Napoleon.

At dawn the following morning, 29 April, General Lebrun came to his look-out on Mount Jove and turned his eyes once more towards his promised land. In the dim light, he could perceive no sentinels on the walls of Saorge. Calling to his scouts, he sent them at all speed into the gorge so that they could approach more nearly. They went on and on in the growing light until they were close to the wall that still gave no sign. They ventured up to the deserted citadel and found that it was abandoned. The Piedmontese Commandant, General Armour, had been ordered to defend the fort until the last. However, hearing that the heights of Briga had been turned and that he was practically surrounded, he

decided, against the advice of his staff, to evacuate the fort. Night covered his retreat. For this act he was shot the following July.[30]

The scouts returned with their report; Lebrun moved forward and entered the town. He found only a few canons and some supplies. By now, the column led by Dumerbion, Napoleon and the Representatives could be seen advancing up the gorge. But the bridge over the Roya had been destroyed and they had to wait four hours before they could enter the citadel.

Endnotes

[1] *Journal Historique*, 309.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccv.
[4] For the light at Agathe, see *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 430. For Augustin's course, see Lamothe-Langon.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccv.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 481.
[9] Koch.
[10] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 197.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 198.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 200.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 207.
[14] *Ibid*., p. .2, Koch.
[15] Wilkinson, pp. 49–50; Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccxi: Fabry sometimes finds it hard to accept that Napoleon had anything to learn.
[16] Koch, p. 52.
[17] Michon, vol. 1, p. 280.
[18] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccxx.
[19] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 252.
[20] Koch, p. 55.
[21] *Recueil*, vol. 12, pp. 676–7.
[22] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 279.
[23] *Recueil*, vol. 12, pp. 676–7.
[24] Fabry, vol. 1, p. cclxxxvi; vol. 2, p. 295.
[25] *Ibid.*; *Recueil*, vol. 12, p. 678; Fabry, vol. 2, p. 272.
[26] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 335.
[27] Colin, p. 254.
[28] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccclii.
[29] *Recueil*, vol. 13, p. 147.
[30] *The Times* (9 July 1794); Koch, pp. 71, 72: Dumerbion wrote to Masséna 'Sur les bords de la Roya', Fabry, vol. 2, p. 386.

Chapter 16

Nice, May–June 1794

The Republican colours shone on the walls of Saorge. Within the citadel, Augustin and Ricord composed a letter to the Committee of Public Safety. After announcing the victory they wrote:

> 'Now is the time to bring the Army of the Alps into concert with the Army of Italy, and to so reorganise them that they are moved by only one will. It is necessary that the Representatives of one or other of these armies should have the authority if commands are not to be contradictory. The campaign in Piedmont is to be supervised by the independent command of the Representatives who are with the armies.
>
> 'The general charged with the expedition should be independent of the general who commands the other army (of the Alps) for the orders relative to this campaign, so that the general will be able to draw on all the troops that he thinks necessary.
>
> 'The Army of the Alps should attack the Col d'Argentière, trouble the enemy and divide his forces. We shall have no trouble in throwing down the Sardinian throne . . .
>
> 'We must have cavalry. Three or four thousand will suffice. The é*quipage de siège* for the fortresses of Piedmont is nearly ready. There is not a moment to lose . . . do not put off till tomorrow deliberations on a matter that will bring the spectacle of a tyrant dethroned by a nation of philosophers.'[1]

These were powerful demands. They meant, if carried out, that the Representatives of the Army of Italy would virtually control two armies. Earlier, on 20 April, Ricord had written to the Committee mentioning the possibility of the union of the two armies and declaring that if it could be accomplished, 'the invasion of Italy would become a party of pleasure.' Koch says that when Bonaparte visited Masséna at Ormea he had proposed a similar plan to the general. More importantly, the Representatives were fervently on his side.

On 1 May, the headquarters of the Army of Italy moved back to Nice.[2] Augustin, Ricord, Dumerbion and Bonaparte were all there. Saliceti remained with the troops who, under Masséna, continued to push up the Tende valley. As soon as he was home Dumerbion retired to bed with an onslaught of gout. He asked to be relieved of his command, but the Representatives insisted that he stay. To lighten his workload 'it appears possible that Robespierre the Younger, Ricord and Saliceti formed a work-party with Bonaparte.'[3]

The Committee of Public Safety was not opposed in principle to the invasion of Piedmont. Indeed it issued in early May a booklet[4] to be given to the officers of the Armies of the Alps and Italy. It gave in immense detail all the geographical information which would have to be understood in such an invasion and the officers were commanded to study it. But in spite of this educational effort, in spite of Ricord's attempt to make the invasion of Piedmont appear as a military scheme to Box Hill, Carnot was not satisfied. 'Carnot,' says Colin,

> 'feared the sudden extension of France. With a clairvoyance unique in our history, he perceived the difficulties we should encounter in successfully assimilating territory, the disquiet we should arouse in Europe, the deviation from the revolutionary movement which would transform the national spirit into a spirit of conquest. He wanted, for the moment at least, to halt the expansion of France . . . These ideas, admirable for wisdom and depth, were those of a diplomat, but unhappily Carnot carried them into all military dispositions everywhere and, in renouncing conquest, concluded he must renounce the offensive.'[5]

Unfortunately, prudence in war was made unrewarding because the French had by now ruptured every diplomatic connection. There was no way in which they could move towards a negotiated peace. Even Maximilien Robespierre, once so opposed to war, supported an offensive in Piedmont and wanted one in the Pyrenees as well, a thing which Napoleon and Augustin regarded as a dangerous strategic error. Maximilien was, however, strongly pressing the demands of the Army of Italy for soldiers and cavalry.[6]

On 8 May, the Committee wrote a letter to the Representatives which showed their divided opinions.

> 'After mature deliberations, dear colleagues, we cannot make any decree other than the enclosed. The bad spirit which dominates the Mont Blanc region does not permit us to take troops from that part of the country . . . We will give you what cavalry we can find. As for foot soldiers, there are plenty of them not far from you and we have given them orders to go to the Port de la Montage (Toulon).'

The enclosed decree announced:

> '1. The Army of the Alps and the Army of Italy should be in concert wherever possible in their measures against Piedmont.

2. If this concert is not possible because of communication difficulties, the decisions and orders on the operations will be given by the Representatives of the Army of Italy, nevertheless they should not divert any force from the Army of the Alps without agreement from the Representatives of that army.

3. The General of the Army of the Alps will at once hand over all his troops of horse to the Army of Italy.' [7]

This, as Colin says, came nowhere near Augustin's desires. He would hardly have been comforted to know that the Committee had, the same day, sent an apologetic note to the Representatives of the Army of the Alps.

'The necessity, dear colleagues, of having the Army of the Alps cooperate with the Army of Italy forces us to make the decree of which we send you a copy. We invite you, in the name of public good, to put it into operation. We will endeavour to replace your cavalry by other corps from the Army of the Rhine. Dumerbion is ready to advance . . . but to obtain his deserved success he must have reinforcements of twenty thousand men and six thousand horses.'[8]

Disappointed as Augustin must have been by the Committee's response he may well, at the same time, have received private letters from Maximilien, Charlotte and Mme de La Saudraye that irritated him just as much.

Augustin had managed to avoid Charlotte when he was in Paris but she was still there, constantly visiting the Duplays or sending her maid. This caused Mme Duplay to be 'in a bad humour'.[9] Charlotte appears also to have complained to everyone of Augustin's private life and it is impossible not to think she had found out about Mme de La Saudraye. Augustin, after all, had hardly tried to keep his affair a secret. Sometime in the first half of May, he wrote what Thompson calls an 'unedifying' letter to Maximilien. It is undated.

'My sister has not a single drop of blood that resembles ours. I have heard and have seen such things of her that I look on her as our greatest enemy. She abuses our stainless reputation, to make us go to law and menaces us with a compromising scandal.

'We must act decidedly against her. She has got to go back to Arras so that there is a distance between us and the woman who is our common despair. She wishes to give us the reputation of bad brothers. Her calumnies poured out against us will achieve this goal.

> ‘I wish that you would see Citizeness La Saudraie; she will give you true information on all the plots which it is interesting to know in these circumstances. A certain St Felix appears to belong to this clique.[10]

Maximilien, in Paris, hesitating and worrying, no doubt found a degree of comfort in Augustin’s decisiveness. He told Charlotte she must go back to Arras and, as Lebon happened to be in Paris at the same time justifying his conduct on Mission to the Committee of Public Safety, he asked him to escort her safely home. Later on, the Thermidorians seized on Lebon’s sanguinary reputation to prove that the Robespierres meant him to execute their sister. Nothing could have been further from anyone’s thoughts and Charlotte, as we shall see, was not so easily vanquished. But, though Charlotte and her ‘calumnies’ were now comfortably removed from the vicinity of the rue St Honoré, we have no indication that Maximilien showed any more inclination to make a friend of Guillodon de La Saudraye.

From the time of the fall of Saorge, Bonaparte, with the full support of Augustin, had been working on a plan for the invasion of Piedmont and the capture of Turin. On 19 May, this plan was sent to Dumerbion; Augustin sent a covering letter,

> ‘You will receive the attached plan for the second operation preliminary to opening the Piedmont campaign. You will take all measures for its prompt execution.
>
> ‘The Army of Italy has had great successes; it has overcome the greatest obstacles that nature can oppose to arms, that of fortresses sustained by formidable rivers and frozen, almost inaccessible mountains. That, to us, is a sure guarantee that we shall succeed again. Yet you cannot hide from yourself that this success could have been even more brilliant with an organised administration.
>
> ‘The administrative part of the army needs to be directed and supervised. You must guide it; you must organise it. The task of a general is only half-done on the day of battle. The *coup d’oeil* that oversees success, the character that commands confidence and inspires courage still needs foresight and a spirit of order to enable him to simplify the most complicated administration and adapt it to his plans.’

He wrote this on 19 May on the ‘road to Turbia and Roquebrune’. The mass of Roquebrune towered behind him, bright with spring flowers, and not far off lay the ruins of Triumph of the Alps. It was a symbolic setting for his thoughts, shared perhaps only with that friend who commanded ‘confidence

and inspired courage', which now ranged as far as any Caesar's.[11] He added a memoir giving instructions for the organisation of supplies, equipment, food and hospitals.[12]

The following day, Ricord and Napoleon met at Colmars with the Representatives of the Army of the Alps, Laporte and Albitte, who brought their military advisers with them. This meeting, though limited in its achievements because of the hesitations of the Committee, was a success. Laporte, a man of some military insight, was particularly impressed by Napoleon. Laporte also possessed a book by the eighteenth-century military expert St Simon, of which Augustin and Bonaparte had been trying to get a copy for some time. The military papers that the Committee had sent earlier in the year were less easy to read and less useful.[13] 'The Representatives of the Army of the Alps,' says Colin, 'entered fully into the ideas of their colleagues of the Army of Italy . . . they saw themselves reduced to an immobility without glory and without profit if they did not adopt a common action.'[14]

The General of the Army of the Alps, a General Dumas, did not view the situation in quite the same way. He saw that he would very soon have to accept the orders of a jumped-up Corsican adventurer. He set about intriguing against Augustin and Napoleon.

Augustin continued his pressure to obtain the supplies that the army needed and his own endeavours to pull everyone up to his own standards of efficiency. Supplies of wheat were to be reported to him every ten days. He worried about the distribution of powder: 'The powder you mention in your last report is far from satisfactory to our needs and the way you propose to assemble it does not make us hopeful for the future.'[15]

There was continual pressure on the cloth manufacturers to provide sufficient clothing for the army.[16] In the plan of campaign itself several passages show the anxiety that Augustin and Bonaparte felt for the smooth workings of the military and administrative machine: 'The Generals and the Adjutant-Generals are accustomed to mountain warfare; they are not equipped for that of the plain.' The officers must observe their orders exactly: 'It is only by this means that an immense machine such as an army is kept simple and always ready to move.' Augustin sought information from every part of the army regarding its special needs. He required this to 'be sent within ten days when I will send (to the Committee of Public Safety) all our needs *en bloc*.'[17]

Augustin's office in Nice was also the centre of a wide network of spies and secret correspondents in Piedmont, who were working for the Revolution. Occasionally, a near lunatic or common criminal got entangled in the system and caused trouble, but many of Augustin's

correspondents were dedicated and courageous men. Sauli unfortunately had been arrested very soon after his return to Genoa; perhaps he was too ingenuous to make a really good spy. But there were many others, particularly in Turin. On 28 May a letter addressed to Augustin from a lawyer, Chantel, was seized by the Piedmontese police. Chantel's letter told Augustin to hasten the French advance and informed him that the town of Coni could be taken by a *coup de main*. Chantel himself, arrested while trying to escape, had planned to stage a revolt in Turin.[18]

It was melancholy news for the King of Piedmont that he had not only the enemy to contend with but that his own servants were conspiring against him. The threads of the conspiracy woven by Augustin's agents 'appear more extended than . . . expected.' The King's own doctor planned to lead the conspirators to the royal bedchamber, there 'to commit the most horrible crimes.' If doctors could behave like this it is not surprising to find that in 'the rooms of the head chimney-sweep on the ground floor of the palace,' were red bonnets and stilettos, while cockades and tricolour ribbons were found at the boutique of the modiste Jounet, his wife.[19]

The King might have been a little comforted had he known he was not alone in facing insubordinate inferiors. The very day that the treacheries of the chimney-sweep were exposed in Turin, General La Harpe wrote to Masséna to complain that the scouts refused to perform ordinary camp duties. He had had a good deal of trouble with them and wanted Masséna's advice.[20]

Indeed, inaction was causing problems for the Army of Philosophers and their leaders. On 25 May, Masséna had been forced to issue a stern directive: 'Many of our brothers-in-arms have no respect . . . contrary to the desires of the Convention and the instructions of the Representatives of the People.'

On 7 June, after a skirmish, when the enemy was pursued to Scagnella, he told Dumerbion,

> 'the mist was so great that we were unable to rally or oversee the soldiers. The result was that the soldiers entered the church and committed various thefts. The inhabitants have addressed their complaints to me. Two light infantry men have been caught with church goods and have been arrested for theft.'

He was so concerned that he wrote to the Representatives as well, to ask for a special tribunal to try the culprits.

> 'It is of the greatest consequence because the inhabitants of the country are on the look-out for such things. They were disposed in our favour and we shall lose them by such misdeeds.'

The Representatives were both absent from Nice on 10 June when the letter arrived, but Dumerbion ordered the tribunal and presumably the soldiers were shot. General La Harpe blamed disorders of this kind on the Genoese who kept up the pattern, noticed at Oneglia, of profiting from the misfortunes of others. They received stolen goods with joy.[21]

It seems to have been harder to keep a restless army in order than to control the Alpes-Maritimes. Terror in that department still showed a light hand. Though Augustin had been pressed by Barras into having a guillotine erected in the centre of the town it was very rarely in use. Orders of release were frequent and the more impractical decrees of the Convention were not applied. A letter from the Committee of Public Instruction urged the use of the French language among the peasants of the Midi, most of whom could only speak the local patois: 'Only the lawyers (who are devoted to chicanery) and the ministers of the Catholic religion can speak French.'

This meant that in many of the mountain villages, administration was in the hands of those who might be suspected of having Royalist sympathies. However, Augustin saw this as better than no administration at all and when the Convention passed the Law of 27 Germinal (16 April), which debarred ex-nobles from any office whatever, he and Ricord refused to implement it, asking the Convention to trust in their own vigilance against traitors.[22]

The future Maréchal Marmont, then a young officer with the Army of Italy, found Augustin 'simple and even reasonable in his opinions, at least by comparison with the follies of his time, and was highly critical of all the atrocious acts' (of the Terror in the South).[23]

Marmont believed that Napoleon had influenced Augustin against the Terror, being of course ignorant of Augustin's letters from Aix and Vesoul written long before Bonaparte became his close friend. It is true that in the last week of his life, back in Paris, Augustin expressed himself to Jean Bon St André in favour of strong tribunals.[24] This is no contradiction, since to him tribunals, such as those at Lyons and Arras, were acting through weakness, seeing universal punishment as the only response to rebellion and discontent.

But if Bonaparte had no influence on his views on the Terror, this was certainly not the case regarding the hopes for the campaign. The conferences between Augustin, Ricord and Napoleon were frequent. Since the end of the campaign to Saorge, Saliceti had gone off to Toulon, from where Barras and Fréron had recently been recalled. Relations once so warm between Saliceti and Augustin had considerably cooled since the Saorge campaign and whatever disagreements may have taken place

over that, they cannot have been helped by the fact that Bonaparte had shifted his allegiance from Saliceti to Augustin. Indeed that spring the friendship between Augustin and Napoleon was so marked that Tilly, the French consul in Genoa, writing to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, referred to Bonaparte as the favourite and counsellor of Robespierre the Younger.[25] Bonaparte tells us, and he may only be a little exaggerating, 'He loved me much,' and relates how, when Haller asked Augustin for supplies, 'Robespierre would never sign anything to do with the army or the supplies without consulting me. He would say to Haller who was then administrator; "That's good, but I must speak to Bonaparte".'[26]

No doubt as they rode down from Saorge, there was talk of the next stage of the campaign and it may be that their imaginations raced beyond anything that had been proposed before. In short, the Army of Italy, heavily reinforced by troops from the Army of the Pyrenees, having mastered Northern Italy, was to strike swiftly through the Alps into Austria and capture Vienna. Such were the plans made, no doubt with irrepressible excitement, by Augustin and Napoleon. For a few weeks they must have seen themselves as masters and arbiters of Europe. For the moment they confided in no one but Ricord. Koch believed that even Dumerbion knew nothing of the plans they had. He and the other General were only aware of a campaign that was to carry them as far as Turin.

Robespierre the Younger, Bonaparte was to say much later, was not a follower of his brother's 'système'. But he was aware now, if he had not been before, of the great advantages of being Maximilien's brother. When he had ridden along the Ligurian coast as a conqueror, he had been received with 'demonstrations of interest, curiosity and applause'. This may in many respects have been due to himself, for he was a merciful victor, and already known throughout the South as 'The Just'.[27] Yet it was also due to his position as the brother of the man whom many now regarded as dictator of France. 'He was a Prince of the Blood!' He was, as Napoleon perceived, unhappy about Maximilien's behaviour, though he was certain that he would come to moderate his views and end the Terror. Maximilien's name was now necessary to Augustin that he might end the Terror in the South, and occupy Italy and Austria. He heard the acclamations of the people without reproof. He had become politically wiser than when he had screamed at the president of the Jacobin Club at Besançon.[28]

On 27 May, Augustin signed Dumerbion's official appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Italy. It may be wondered why Augustin did not promote Napoleon to a position at least

comparable with that of Masséna – did Napoleon still see himself as an é*minence grise*? Koch says, 'They [the Representatives] would have proposed him to the Committee as Commander-in-Chief had they not feared the discontent of the troops, to whom as a General of Artillery he was little known.'[29] But surely the troops would have been very quickly won over by Napoleon's charisma? Koch's theory is further shaken by Napoleon's words to his friend General Bertrand, many years later: 'I believe that Robespierre the Younger asked his brother to make me Commander of the Army of Italy, but Carnot opposed it.'[30] If this is true, it was another advance in Augustin's bitter feud with Carnot.

Life in Nice was brilliant that spring. Mme Ricord, Mme Dumerbion, Mme Masséna all gave parties. The gaieties spread as far as Oneglia where there were almost too many balls, at least in Masséna's opinion. 'They forget their duties while they amuse themselves,' he said.[31]

Things were not so cheerful in Paris. The executions of the Dantonists and the Hébertists had brought no lessening of the Terror. On the evening of 22 May a man fired at Collot d'Herbois as he entered his flat. Collot was unhurt and the man was arrested. Next day, a young woman arrived at the Duplays' house and asked Eleonore if she could see Robespierre. When refused, the girl persisted, Eleonore screamed, people rushed up. The girl had a basket containing knives. She said – it seems to have been almost her only pronouncement – that she wanted 'to see what a tyrant looked like.' These two episodes were unconnected, but no one doubted at the time that there was a vast plot of Pitt's to murder the whole Committee of Public Safety.

The two aspiring murderers were executed. Other victims at the same time included Mme St Amaranthe and her family, who had survived so long, legend tells us, because Augustin had protected them.[32] 'In Italy,' Napoleon told Bertrand – Augustin and his friend must have been visiting the troops on the frontier line – 'Robespierre the Younger received a long letter from his brother recalling him and explaining the crisis in which he found himself.'[33]

No doubt the attempt on Maximilien's life lost nothing in the telling. More realistically, he was becoming more and more isolated on the Committee, which was weary of his arrogance and self-righteousness and which hated his promotion of the cult of the Supreme Being. Maximilien could now forget Augustin's shortcomings; he wanted, as Napoleon saw, to surround himself with those he could trust. Perhaps because at that moment he believed it himself, perhaps because he wanted to control Augustin, he said, if Napoleon can be believed, that he wished to end the Terror.

The two friends returned to Nice. Throughout their journey they must have discussed Maximilien's letter. It would seem that the following day, or very soon after, Napoleon visited his family at Antibes. According to Lucien Bonaparte, Napoleon was 'preoccupied.' Then he told Lucien that he could start for Paris next day:

> 'They offer me the place of Hanriot [the Commander of the National Guard in Paris]. I am to give an answer this evening. It is worth careful consideration. It is not something to be enthusiastic about. It is not so easy to save one's head in Paris as at St Maxim's. The young Robespierre is an honest man, but his brother is not to be trifled with. He will be obeyed. Can I support that man? No, never. I know how useful I should be to him in replacing his simpleton of a commander in Paris; but that is what I will not be. There is no honourable place for me at present but in the army. We must have patience. I shall command Paris hereafter!'

One may however doubt that this is exactly what Napoleon said. The speech is too much like the soliloquy of the hero at the end of the second act of an early nineteenth-century melodrama. We can however believe that he was full of doubt and that he

> continued to express his indignation against the Reign of Terror. He repeated several times, half gloomy, half smiling, 'What would I do in that galley?' Young Robespierre solicited him in vain.[34]

Napoleon himself, talking to Bertrand one February day in 1818, told how he spent the evening thinking hard, fearing to plunge into the high politics of the Revolution. In the end he went to Ricord, talked the problem over with him and explained that he could not be spared from the army. Ricord undertook the task of dissuading Augustin who gave way, how unwillingly we can guess.[35]

Some historians have suggested that the offer originated with Maximilien himself, but there is no evidence that he was dissatisfied with Hanriot, who, from Maximilien's point of view, had done very well on 2 June when the Girondins were arrested. If he had wanted to get rid of him, he was not dependent on Napoleon. Saint-Just could certainly have found him someone else. 'The younger Robespierre', says the *Memorial de St Hélène*, 'did everything he could to persuade Napoleon to follow him. "If I had not inflexibly refused," he said, "who knows where this first step would have led me and what other destinies might have awaited me."'[36]

Augustin himself was eager to return. Besides defending Maximilien, he would be able to promote the secret plan for the conquest of Austria of which the Committee had not yet any idea. He

no doubt reasoned that their hesitation and fears would be subjugated by the dazzling brilliance he would lay before them.

Toward the end of May, the Army of the Alps asserted itself by making some important and unexpected advances, capturing a very difficult post, known as the Barricades. This made changes necessary in Napoleon's plan for the preliminary campaign – which, of course, was known to all the Representatives and generals – and Laporte wrote to Augustin and Ricord, 'Consult your General (Bonaparte), show him my letter, study the map well.'[37] Laporte added many intelligent amendments and criticisms of Napoleon's plan for the first advance, which Napoleon welcomed and incorporated into his scheme.

Genoa was restless and nervous as the spring drew into summer, with the French army straddled across its territory and capable of strangling it at any moment. There were many complaints and since Genoa was essential to the schemes of Augustin and Napoleon, every effort was made for pacification. On 17 June, on Haller's advice, all available silks were to be sold to the house of Andrea Neva in Genoa.[38] Grain was to be purchased in return. The Committee of Public Safety, who were becoming increasingly suspicious of Augustin and Haller, refused to ratify the agreement, though Augustin was not to learn this until he arrived in Paris. He himself was very doubtful of Genoese intentions. 'One must show character with this government,' he wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs,

> '[t]hey will only be favourable to us through fear. Far from bribing and flattering them, demand from them respect for the [French] Republic and its arms. If we hold this conduct towards them they will no longer persecute the friends of humanity but . . . be forced to desire the triumph of our army over our enemies.'[39]

It was decided between Augustin and Ricord that Bonaparte should go on a special mission to Genoa, in order to ensure the cooperation of that Republic in the next campaign of the French. According to Bonaparte, in conversation with General Bertrand, the idea of the mission came from Bonaparte himself, so that he could see 'the fortifications and observe the town.' 'Very good,' said Robespierre, 'that will be useful.' Napoleon adds he was always very popular with the Genoese. Augustin wanted to know the cause of this, but Napoleon did not enlighten him, for it had its roots in the old connections between Genoa and Corsica, a matter now best forgotten.[40]

Just about this time, on 15 June, Saliceti came up from Toulon to Grasse. Augustin and he had last seen each other at Monaco some weeks earlier and both meetings were cold. Augustin confided nothing to his former friend. They were not to meet again.[41]

We know little of Augustin's last days in the South. It is said by Demougeot that he was ill, but Demougeot gives no reference for this statement, and it could be dismissed, except that an obscure historian of the *Montagnards*, Hareau, informs us, 'For a long time a slow and nervous illness seemed to consume him inwardly. He was frightfully thin; the long watches of the army and his republican enthusiasm had worn out his body.'[42]

Hareau seems to have got most of his information about Augustin from Nodier's *Souvenirs,* which had been published shortly before his own book, and Augustin's paleness and thinness came straight from Nodier's account of Augustin at Besançon. Perhaps Hareau, like Lamartine,[43] wanted to improve on the dramatic effect and so added the slow and consuming illness. On the other hand, Hareau – a Robespierrist before whom even Hamel and Mathiez pale – may have talked to people who remembered Augustin and got the idea of the nervous illness from them. As we shall see, some of Augustin's actions when he arrived in Paris will give a degree of support to this.

During their last weeks together, Napoleon revealed the whole of his plan for the conquest of Italy and Austria. Augustin's response, according to Napoleon, was to ask Maximilien to appoint Napoleon as head of the Army of Italy. Augustin, no doubt, had every intention of accompanying him as Representative of the Convention and of the French government. For the time being, Napoleon should replace Hanriot and could put the forces of Paris in a much better state to defend Maximilien. On 17 June he signed a decree allowing night fishing to be resumed off the coast 'since from all reports it is necessary for the livelihood of the fishermen.'[44] The last decree with his signature is dated the 2nd Messidor (20th of June), fixing the wages of those employed on the Revolutionary Tribunals. That day he left Nice. He had almost exactly six weeks to live.

Endnotes

[1] Michon, vol. 2, p. 103.
[2] Fabry, vol. 1, p. ccclxvi.
[3] Koch, p. 83.
[4] Fabry, vol. 1, p. cdxv.
[5] Colin, p. 286.
[6] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 438.
[7] Colin, pp. 262–63.
[8] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 438.

[9] *Charlotte*, p. 228.
[10] Michon, vol. 1, p. 293. Everything that is known about St Felix has been collected by Pioro and Labracherie: 'Charlotte Robespierre et ses amis', pp. 327, 469. He was – and this should be no surprise – a friend of Bouchotte and was described as 'friend St Felix' by Hébert, but there is no indication of how Mme de La Saudraye got to know about him.
[11] A.A.M. L18.
[12] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 556.
[13] Jung, vol. 3, p. 280.
[14] It is often said that Augustin, Ricord and Napoleon attended that conference, but Fabry shows us Augustin writing letters in Nice while the conference was going on. Fabry, vol. 2, pp. 544, 553, 556.
[15] Michon, vol. 2, p. 117.
[16] It was claimed that Mme Ricord had made more than a thousand shirts, 'which have been of great help to our brothers in the hospitals. She continues her work with the same zeal and activity until supplies are absolutely assured.' *Moniteur*: 9 Floréal (8 April). We may doubt if even Mme Ricord's zeal could have done quite so much. Probably she organised a number of ladies in Nice who helped her.
[17] Fabry, vol. 2, pp. 520, 536.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 599.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 658.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 662.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 655, 663.
[22] A.A.M L.59, Higgonet.
[23] Marmont, vol. 1, p. 54.
[24] *Recueil*.
[25] Colin, p. 229.
[26] Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 272.
[27] *Recueil*.
[28] The contents of this paragraph are drawn from Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 272.
[29] Koch, vol. 1, p. 90.
[30] Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 273.
[31] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 618. A fête for the fall of Saorge was celebrated on 29 April with 'delirious joy' and 'grand illuminations': Combet, *Comté de Nice*, p. 407.
[32] Michelet, vol. 20, p. 353.
[33] Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 273.
[34] Lucien Bonaparte: *Memoirs* vol. 1, p. 42, 43. The quote refers to Molière's comedy *Les Fourberies de Scapin*: Géronte, tricked into believing his son has been kidnapped by pirates and taken away to ply oars on a galley, asks 'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?' before handing over the 'ransom'. The question quickly became part of French idiom.
[35] Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 273.
[36] Las Cases, vol. 1, p. 167.
[37] Colin, p. 281 *et seq.*
[38] Fabry, vol. 2, p. 704.
[39] Jung, vol. 2, p. 433.
[40] Bertrand, vol. 2, p. 356.
[41] *Recueil*.
[42] Hareau, *Montagnards*, p.174 (A.P.C.).
[43] Hareau attributes to Augustin 'a naïve and poetical imagination', an idea that would certainly have appealed to Lamartine! See p. 161.
[44] Combet, 'Arrêtés de Robespierre Jeune'.

Chapter 17

Paris, 20 June–27 July 1794

Augustin left Nice for Paris alone. Krebs and Moris suggested that he be accompanied by Laporte, and had this happened, it might have been helpful, since Laporte had a good knowledge of military affairs and was an admirer of Bonaparte. But Laporte, though absent from the Army of the Alps at this time, did not go to Paris; he may, however, have gone as far as Marseille with Augustin before returning to Grenoble.[1]

Krebs and Moris speculate on the duration of Augustin's journey. His course can be traced with some accuracy. On 7 Messidor (25 June), he was in Lyon, where he was appealed to on behalf of a Citizen Alberc who had been put on a list of émigrés. Augustin wrote to the National Agent Fontelle to help him.[2]

Three days later he was in Paris and went straight to the Jacobin Club as he had done on his return from Toulon. Collot d'Herbois, the former terrorist of Lyon and the enemy of the Robespierres, was in the chair and even in the Robespierrist stronghold of the club, Augustin's appearance was overshadowed by that of André Dumont, just returned from his mission to the navy on the Atlantic coast. 'We see also Robespierre,' said Collot rather vaguely, and no one expanded on the victories of the Army of Italy.[3] There was no excitement, no invitation to address the club or the Convention on Saorge. Even when, a little later, he was appointed one of the secretaries of the Convention for a while, Augustin must have been deeply disappointed. Indeed, as Colin says, on arriving in Paris, 'Augustin Robespierre found himself in the presence of an opposition more energetic and complicated than he could have believed.'[4] The opposition to the advance into Piedmont had hardened. Carnot, for reasons we have noticed, had finally come down against a full-scale invasion of Italy. As Colin says, 'Carnot specialised in military affairs . . . the interference of the Robespierres in these matters alienated the organiser of victory and decided their fall.'[5] Colin also believed that it was this that finally swung two other Committee members, Barère and Prieur, against the Robespierrists.

There are no records of Augustin's meeting with the Committee of Public Safety. Since he arrived in Paris on 11 Messidor (29 June), it seems strange that they did not see him before 1 Thermidor (19 July), the day which we know marks the final breakdown of his relations with them. However, this may be because Carnot was utterly opposed to anything going further than the siege of Demonte. 'Even

those,' says Colin, 'who wished for an offensive in Piedmont wished also for one in the Pyrenees.'[6] The Pyrenees were regarded by Augustin and Napoleon as a dead end. Augustin had not only to convince Carnot of the necessity of the invasion of Piedmont, a thing Carnot had been prepared to accept six months before, he had also to obtain for the Army of Italy the reinforcements necessary to push the offensive to an end.[7] We know where Augustin and Napoleon believed that should be, and the reinforcements could only come from the Army of the Pyrenees. This is where the negotiations must have stuck fast.

Some indication of how things were going came on 15 Messidor (3 July). The Committee issued a decree for the Army of Italy which negated everything for which Augustin had been asking. It can be summarised thus:

1. Coni was to be captured as quickly as possible, perhaps with the aid of armed insurrection within the walls.
2. If this succeeded, Demonte and Ceva were to be besieged.
3. The Army of the Alps and the Army of Italy were to communicate with each other on their movements.
4. The next moves in Piedmont must not impair the defences of the coast, particularly Toulon.[8]

The decree was signed by Carnot and two anti-Robespierrists, Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois. It was also signed by Couthon, Robespierre's friend, but Couthon was a man of independent mind. It must be remembered that all this time Maximilien was absent from the Committee, sulking at home, his persecution mania rising to fresh heights, since he believed the Committee to be deriding his religious beliefs and the Supreme Being. Before he went, in some discussion on the Army of Italy he had exclaimed, 'You hate the Army of Italy because my brother is there.' This may have been true, but it helped to reduce argument to personalities.

Augustin was without a powerful friend on the Committee to push his views. The Committee, too, were anxious. With Maximilien away, they had no idea what he might be plotting against them. A member of the Committee, Hérault de Séchelles, had been guillotined with Danton; his place had never been filled. Supposing Maximilien persuaded the Convention to elect Augustin? This idea did not make them warmer to the Army of Italy.[9] Yet on 20 Messidor (8 July) they despatched fresh instructions to the Army of the Alps, giving them *carte blanche* concerning their negotiations with the Army of Italy, but this was only a small concession.[10]

Aware that Maximilien might be plotting while he was in solitude and seeing only his most intimate friends, some members of the Committee seem to have thought that his plans might be revealed to them by Augustin, especially vulnerable through the anxiety in which he was now living. They knew his hatred of unlimited terror, they were aware of his ambition, though they could not yet have guessed its scope. We know little positive about these intrigues, except that Augustin revealed, as he lay dying, that an obscure member of the Committee of Public Security had sought to win his confidence by abuse of Collot d'Herbois.[11] It would also seem that others spoke to him of his great services to the country and the fame that lay before him. On the 23 Messidor (11 July), Augustin spoke at the Jacobins. His speech was reported thus:

> 'Robespierre the Younger expressed himself vigorously on the silence and torpor in which the Society was sunk, and asked it to follow the example of courage which he would give it. The patriots are tormented and the Jacobins do not come to their defence! This evil is doubled when energy is lacking at the Jacobins. He complained that some have used the barest flatteries to divide the patriots; someone had gone as far as to say to him that he was worth more than his brother. 'But in vain,' he cried, 'would they try to separate me from him; while he proclaims morality and is the Terror of scoundrels, I have no ambitions of other glory than that of sharing his grave.'[12]

On 21 Messidor (9 July), he had resigned his position as secretary of the Convention, apparently about to return to Nice. However, by 23 Messidor (11 July) he had clearly made up his mind to stay in Paris and prepare for another attempt to have his way with the Committee. He saw also, clearly, the possibility of his death.

There is no indication that the Committee had yet seen Napoleon's plan for the invasion of Austria. Why had Augustin withheld it, if indeed he had? Did he hope to be elected to the Committee himself and to produce it with all the power that would be then his? Was he looking for a reconciliation between his brother and the other members, with all the obvious advantages to him that this would bring? He knew the prejudices that the Committee had had against him; he knew that once they had rejected anything he proposed, it might be difficult to get them to change their minds; he would remember also their vacillations over the invasion of Oneglia. We only know for sure that the date which Napoleon's plan bears is 1 Thermidor (19 July).

On 1 Thermidor Augustin went to the Committee and laid before them the 'magisterial plan'.[13] The cards were all on the table now and the Committee could see the extent of Bonaparte's dangerous genius and also that of his patron's ambition. 'The views of Augustin Robespierre were so vast as to reach nothing less than the destruction of the Emperor [of Austria] with his Italian possessions and oblige him to accept a peace.'[14] The discussion was bitter and violent. At one point one of the key passages relating to the invasion of Austria was crossed out. We have some account of how the meeting ended from Barère who was present, and Baudot who claimed to have heard about it from eye-witnesses. Augustin, says Barère, was supposed to be speaking about the Army of Italy, but instead began to reproach them for their conduct to Maximilien, and presently, losing all control, began to shout and rave at them in a way that made them think he had gone mad. Then he walked over to Barère, who was not, apparently taking part in the discussion, but working in another part of the room, and threatened him with the guillotine. This was an unfortunate action, since Barère, realising that a major crisis was coming, had not yet decided whether to take part with the Robespierrists or not. Augustin then rushed out of the room and that was the end of Bonaparte's plan.

From then on, Augustin was determined that Carnot was a traitor. He behaved as he had behaved over Bernard at Besançon and began to thrash about looking for evidence in murky corners which he would far better have left alone. Unhappily, there were many people about who were only too ready to exploit his anxiety and rage. These new intrigues centred round Arras, and its deputy, Lebon. Lebon had been sent back there on a mission where at first he had given satisfaction to everyone and had not proved too violent. Arras not being far from the front, he had fallen under the tyranny – or friendship, depending on how one looks at it – of Saint-Just and Lebas. He made enormous efforts to establish himself in their good graces as the one person who could make the rear of the armies secure. To achieve this, he established a reign of terror in Arras, in which a large number of people were guillotined to the strains of martial music, some for comic opera crimes, such as having a parrot that cried, 'God save the King!' The parrot was spared.

Lebon boasted, as indeed did many of his associates, who included Augustin's old friends Daillet, of his close relationship with Robespierre. The Committee did get a little worried about Lebon's behaviour and recalled him for questioning in Floréal (April/May), but he managed to justify himself, and went back to Arras, escorting Charlotte home. Lebas had written to Maximilien, 'Hurry Lebon's

return; he has done much good and is worth a garrison in Cambria.'[15] Guffroy also wrote to Maximilien, '[Lebon] . . . has killed patriotism in Arras . . . Hébert has not done more harm than he.'[16]

Buissart was under threat. He wrote bitterly to Maximilien and in the end Mme Buissart herself came to see Maximilien. She stayed at the Duplays and was there when Augustin returned from Nice. About the same time Buissart wrote again to Maximilien:

> 'Accord nothing to friendship, all to justice. Don't think of me, but only of the public good and perhaps yourself, and then you will defend it well . . . This letter to you I have addressed to my wife as I have no great confidence in your secretary and others by whom you are surrounded. It is friendship that makes me speak thus.
>
> 'We are so longing to see Bonbon [Augustin]. When is he coming? Only he can calm the ills that are making your country desolate.'[17]

A few days later he wrote to his wife:

> 'The arrival of Bonbon would no doubt hinder [Lebon]; it is the hope of true patriots and the terror of those who dare to persecute them. He knows the people of Arras too well not to do them justice. His place can't be taken by anyone else; he must come to Arras to give peace and calm to true patriots . . . embrace him from me until I am able to do the same myself.'[18]

The opposition to Lebon in Paris centred round the deputy Guffroy who had been a close friend of the Robespierres, and we have seen that he continued to be on good terms with Augustin up to the latter's departure for Vesoul. Guffroy had, he believed, been pushed out of Maximilien's inner circle by the machinations of the Duplays and Lebas. He felt particularly bitter about the behaviour of Lebas. Guffroy had many times kept Lebas company when he was ill, and had 'warned him against the daughter of Duplay whom he married in spite of my warnings.' Even this failed to attach Lebas's friendship and one day he passed Guffroy in the Tuileries Gardens, holding his head high with a scornful look. Guffroy returned this look with pity and simply said, 'Ah, young man, pride will have a fall one day.'[19]

Guffroy had written to Maximilien on the subject of Lebon's tyranny in Arras, but without success. He was more hopeful of Augustin because of his attitude to the Terror in Lyon, which Guffroy believed he had helped to end, and 'because of his conduct in Italy.' Guffroy tried to approach Augustin as soon as the latter returned to Paris, but at first Augustin tried to avoid a meeting. 'I saw,' Guffroy wrote later, 'that he hid himself and fled from me.'[20] Guffroy in the end had to write Augustin a

letter – 'This is long but read it all' – which was mainly concerned with three oppressed patriots from Arras who had come to Paris to seek protection.

The situation was very difficult for Augustin. He must have had many conversations with Mme Buissart about Arras and part of his heart must have wished to return there. But Maximilien remained adamant in his support of Lebon and this cast a shadow on relations between the two brothers – something the machinations of other intriguers had not managed to achieve – and according to legend, their relationship was affected almost to the end.[21] Meanwhile, rumour made Augustin a moderate or worse. On 3 Thermidor (21 July) he spoke for the last time at the Jacobins where grievances about authorities in the provinces were being aired. He told the Society that what they had heard were only a few examples.

> 'There is a universal system of oppression, especially in the departments that resisted the crimes of the federalists, and they are more tormented than those that were the centre of counter-revolution . . . I am convinced that the truth must be spoken about this oppression. All is confounded by the calumny that makes suspects of all the friends of liberty. Someone in the Pas-de-Calais, which deserves to be more tranquil, has had the impudence to say that I have been arrested as a moderate.
>
> 'All right! I am a moderate if that means a citizen who is not content with proclaiming morality and justice whilst avoiding their application, if one means a man who saves oppressed innocence at the cost of his own reputation. Yes, I'm a moderate in this sense; I was, when I called revolutionary justice a thunderbolt which could destroy all conspirators, but which can become counter-revolutionary when so abused that all citizens feel menaced, an extreme cruelty that silences the friends of liberty and hides the plots and crimes of the conspirators.'[22]

It must have been very soon after this speech that Augustin agreed to meet the three patriots from Arras. He listened to their complaints attentively, but it soon became clear that he was looking for evidence against Carnot.[23] He had decided that there must be much to rake up about Carnot in the northern departments from which Carnot, like himself, had come. Carnot had been on mission to the Army of the North where he might have had opportunity for treachery.

Guffroy came in by chance while Augustin was talking to the patriots. Augustin immediately turned to him and abused him for slandering Maximilien. However, on 7 Thermidor (25 July), Augustin escorted the patriots to meet Maximilien at the Duplays. Once in Maximilien's room, Augustin said to

one of the patriots, an officer named Leblond, 'You know a lot about the army and the deputations that have been there [Augustin is, of course, talking about the Army of the North, not the Army of Italy]. You tell my brother what you know against Carnot. Duquesnoy [another deputy] says he has papers and proofs of fifteen facts capable of guillotining Carnot.'

Leblond took no notice of Augustin, and spoke to Maximilien with 'republican frankness,' calling Duquesnoy ignorant and brutal. Maximilien responded by walking up and down and biting his nails. Suddenly he said, 'Leave us.' The three visitors went. Augustin followed them onto the stairs. '*Foutue bête* [Bloody animal]!' he shouted at Leblond. 'There was only need to speak of Carnot. Why speak of Duquesnoy? My brother and the Committee have the greatest confidence in him. You're lucky to be free.'[24] It cannot be said that Augustin behaved well. Again one is reminded of Besançon, with Augustin grasping at any scrap of gossip to get something on Bernard. He was now out to destroy Carnot, for he was convinced that Carnot was seeking to destroy the Army of Italy.

There are some oddities in the story. Why had Maximilien to be convinced about Carnot's villainies? Were they not enemies by now? Yet Couthon and Saint-Just were still working for a reconciliation between Robespierre and the Committee and Augustin may have feared that his brother might be talked into some sort of compromise.

It is said that at the beginning of July, Augustin had planned to return to the Army of Italy but the growing crisis made him cancel his plans.[25] Paris again was destructive to him. The hopes that had grown so vast in Nice as to encompass half Europe were strangled now in a tangle of intrigue and accusation.

Charlotte was back in Paris, in spite of efforts to keep her away. We only know her movements from herself and the ill-informed gossip of hostile writers. For a time, she stayed in the rue St Florentin flat where she had lived with Augustin until they went to Nice. It is generally stated, but on what original authority is unknown, that Augustin stayed in the Ricords' flat in the same building.[26] It seems she had one acrimonious meeting with Augustin in which they continued the quarrel about those who did not deserve his confidence. Later Charlotte wrote Augustin a furious and heartbroken letter. It is impossible not to feel compassion for her. She had lost both her brothers and now, in her grief, was doing everything possible to alienate them further. She saw Augustin as a thoughtless young man, easily led into bad company; she never saw him as anxiety-ridden and neurotic. She played over and

over again the same tune, the persistent quarrel about what-I-did-for-you, ingratitude, evil influences. It was a nursery dispute, 'you did, I didn't . . .'

Augustin, not having Mme Ricord to come to his rescue, went into hiding in the Ricords' flat or elsewhere, and then Charlotte moved in with friends and he was able to go home.[27]

Augustin did, however, receive another letter which, alone of all those delivered to him in these midsummer weeks, may have given him pleasure. It was from his cousin, Régis Deshorties, to whom, in his military preoccupations, he had not written for a long while. The letter breathes the air that Augustin had recaptured briefly in Vesoul, that of a small French country town, preoccupied with gossip, with love affairs, difficult relations, wayward girls, a set of characters waiting to be picked up by Balzac. A world stifling and ignorant no doubt, but safe, playing its games by its own known rules.[28]

There was no mention of Lebon or the Terror, but Régis had heard rumours that Augustin was coming to Arras. No doubt this was a much-talked-of matter, since a petition, it was said, had been despatched from Arras to the Committee, signed even by some friends of Lebon's, asking that Augustin should go on mission to the town. This petition, it is said, brought by a special messenger, arrived on 10 Thermidor (28 July), the day Augustin died.

Meanwhile, the long suspense regarding the Italian campaign was wearing down the Representatives with the Army of the Alps. On 1 Thermidor (19 July), they wrote to Augustin, under cover to the Committee of Public Safety.

> 'We are impatient, dear colleague, to hear the result of your mission to Paris. The campaign season is passing and uncertainty is killing us . . . Our colleague Ricord has in his turn written to say that 2 Thermidor is the day planned to begin the offensive. Consider our perplexity. We have either got to displease the Committee or lose the campaign season.
>
> 'We have told Ricord that we cannot take the offensive without being authorised by the Committee and we told him of our astonishment that we had no news, direct or indirect, of the result of your mission. We have just received a letter from the Committee which seems to agree to an offensive to besiege Demonte and Conti.
>
> 'You will not leave Paris without having impressed on the Committee the necessity of assuring the supplies of power and munitions of war. It is well aware we cannot undertake a siege without these.

> ‘The Committee of Public Safety has just sent for General-in-chief Dumas. We have suspected that the plan of campaign concerted by us at Colmars and Nice was never to his liking. Firstly because the plan was made without his assistance and secondly because he knew that, when the two armies met on the plains of Piedmont, there would be but one army and one army does not need two commanders. He fears to find a rival in the General of the Army of Italy. So perhaps, if our conjectures are well founded, the Committee had better employ General Dumas somewhere else and leave the provisional command with Petitguillaume who does not feel these little jealousies and who conducts operations with the best will in the world. We ask you to explain this to the Committee.’[29]

But Augustin was never to have the opportunity of explaining to the Committee the disinterested and high-minded character of General Petitguillaume, and it is possible that he never read the letter at all. During these weeks, efforts were made by Saint-Just and Couthon to achieve a reconciliation between the Committees and Robespierre. On 23 July Robespierre was cajoled by Saint-Just into attending a joint meeting of the Committees. Maximilien, aggrieved by an attack on his religious policy by Vadier some days earlier, came but was uncooperative. In the end, Saint-Just was empowered to draw up a report on government policy from which references to religion were to be strictly excluded. Maximilien went home, furious, to prepare a speech himself to deliver to the Convention.[30]

It is said that on the evening of 25 July, Robespierre dined with Augustin, Saint-Just, Lebas and David in a restaurant in the Champs-Elysées. Barras and some friends were at another table. Later, crossing the Place de la Révolution, the two parties met again. Augustin returned Barras’s greeting, but Maximilien did not speak.[31]

The next day, Maximilien addressed the Convention. His speech was eloquent and moving, threatening and evasive, an oration that left most of its hearers afraid and confused. Afterwards, Maximilien repeated it at the Jacobins, adding more vague menaces against the Convention and hinting at another 31 May. The Jacobins swore to defend him.

The only thing we know of Augustin’s life during these last dangerous days is of a domestic rather than a political nature. A friend of his, Delehelle, a bookseller, who was in financial difficulties, wrote to him, proposing that Augustin should buy his clock, ‘You have often seemed to want it.’ Probably Augustin liked the idea, since he kept the letter in his pocket. It was found on him when he was arrested.[32]

Endnotes

[1] Krebs & Moris, p. 144 n.
[2] Catalogue Charavay 1844.
[3] *Jacobins*.
[4] Colin.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.* p.195.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] Lecointre, p. 57; *Réponse des Membres* p. 63.
[10] Aulard.
[11] Buchez and Roux p.34.
[12] *Jacobins*.
[13] For the discussion with the Committee see Colin, who reproduces the plan in full in an appendix. For Augustin's rage see Barère, vol. 1, p. 168 and Baudot, p.26.
[14] Colin.
[15] Robespierre, *Papiers inédits*, vol. 1, p. 212.
[16] Guffroy.
[17] Robespierre, *Papiers inedits*, vol. 1, p. 249.
[18] *Ibid.* vol. 1, p. 251.
[19] Guffroy, p. 116 n.
[20] *Ibid.* pp. 129, 131.
[21] Rabbe.
[22] *Jacobins*; Buchez and Roux.
[23] Guffroy: 'He appeared to hear them with interest; but that appeared to be know whether they would say anything against me or against Carnot', p. 130.
[24] *Ibid.* pp. 337–8.
[25] Thompson, vol. 2, p. 241.
[26] Hamel, *Robespierre*, p. ii. Augustin seems to have been opening any mail that came for Ricord. An opened letter to Ricord was found in Augustin's pocket at the time of his arrest: A.N.F. 7 4333.
[27] Charlotte's letter to Augustin is reprinted in Hamel, vol. 3, p. 660 *et seq*.
[28] A.N.F. 7 4333. See also Mathiez, *Fall of Robespierre* p.37–42.
[29] Guffroy, p. 182; Aulard.
[30] Thompson, p.242–6.
[31] Barras, *Memoirs.*
[32] Michon, vol. 2, p. 150.

Chapter 18

Paris, 27–28 July 1794

The morning of 9 Thermidor (27 July) was cloudy and heavy. Augustin arrived at the Duplays by ten o'clock, and, accompanied by the two Jacobins who had appointed themselves as Maximilien's unofficial body-guard, they walked to the Convention.[1] Augustin seems to have collected his letters as usual. There was one from Vesoul from a soldier named Dubuisson, asking Augustin's help to restore him to his regiment from which he seems to have been dismissed by the Representatives of the Army of the Rhine. He may also at this time have picked up copies of two reports which appear to have interested him, one by Barère on the fall of Brussels and one by David on the proposed fete in honour of the two child martyrs of the Revolution – Bara and Viala.[2] He sat down eventually with the Montagnards between his brother and Lebas. We may assume that any differences with Lebas over Arras were put aside in this crisis.

At noon, Saint-Just went to the tribune and began his report, but he had only read a few words before Tallien pushed him aside[3] and stood there, dramatically waving the dagger his imprisoned mistress had sent him, shouting about the tyranny of Robespierre. From that moment, the whole Convention was in uproar. In the confusion, it is hard to disentangle who spoke, who made themselves heard for a few moments above the tumult. One thing immediately striking was the very small number of active Robespierrists left in the Convention; apart from Maximilien himself there was only Saint-Just, Couthon, Augustin and Lebas. David was ill and absent. The object of the conspirators was to prevent Robespierre being heard and perhaps exerting his old influence over the Plain. They were successful. Lebas got into a fight with the deputies near him; Augustin went to his aid. It is said that a little later Augustin tried to address the Convention[4] and pull it back to a more orderly debate in order to gain a hearing, but what he said is lost. Montjoie merely tells us that 'he made a tumult'. Meanwhile the arrests of Hanriot and the President of the Tribunal, Dumas, were decreed. Then the attack really turned on Robespierre. Vadier, of the Committee of Public Security, who had always hated Maximilien's religious views, now began a slapstick attack on the cult of the Supreme Being. Everyone quieted down a bit and many deputies began to laugh. This was not at all what Tallien, Fouche and their friends wanted and one of them cried, 'Let's get back to the point, to Robespierre.' Maximilien thought he saw his chance. 'I can do that,' he said, and the deafening shouting began all over again. Maximilien left his seat and walked about the hall, trying to make himself heard, believing that if he

could do this, he could re-assert his old authority. Quite unused to this kind of debate, without Danton's physical strength and powerful voice, his speech stumbled, and someone cried, 'The blood of Danton chokes you!' For the last time Maximilien's voice was heard in the Convention. 'So it's Danton you're avenging?' he asked. This reminded them all of their cowardice when Danton was arrested and this doubled their rage. A deputy cried, 'I demand the arrest of Robespierre'.

There was a second's hesitation and then immense applause. Augustin struggled down to the floor of the Convention where his brother stood alone looking up at the tiers. He took Maximilien's arm and shouted out, 'I am as guilty as my brother; I share his virtues, I will share his fate. I demand a decree of accusation against me'.[5] Maximilien tried to speak for his brother and force him back, but he still could not make himself heard. An anti-Robespierrist writer, probably an eye-witness, tells us, of Maximilien and Augustin, 'Their eyes are burning with rage – they now abandoned all hope of imposing on the people – and with affected calm they exhibit the real ferocity of their hearts. They abuse, they insult the National Convention.'[6]

Maximilien continued to try to speak against Augustin's arrest, but a deputy cried out, 'Is this man still master of the Convention?' Fréron shouted, 'The tyrant is hard to strike down.' He had not openly complained when the woman he loved went to the guillotine. It may have been at this point Augustin is said to have cried, 'Before the day is over I shall have struck a villain to the heart!'. Another Deputy, Elie Lacoste, called out, 'I demand the arrest of Robespierre the Younger,' accusing him of having called the Committees corrupt in his speeches at the Jacobins.[7] There was again loud applause.

Lebas freed himself from the restraining hands of friends and ran down to join the Robespierres where they still stood arm in arm; the decree of accusation against him was followed by others against Couthon and Saint-Just. So Augustin kept his promise made long ago at Arras at the time of the Beaumetz affair. In a way, it may seem that no one who has not made a similar sacrifice has any right to comment or examine, but history cannot leave matters quite like that. Thompson thinks Augustin was trying simply to turn the debate to his brother's advantage by arousing sympathy.[8] I doubt very much that with Maximilien in such danger, Augustin would have been able to work out any calculating scheme. Baudot, in *Notes Historiques*, stresses that no one had planned to attack Augustin. He was, says Bautot, regarded as

> 'such a nullity that he could have stayed unnoticed on 9 Thermidor. His sacrifice showed an honourable spirit, no doubt, but says nothing in favour of his intelligence . . . no one dreamed of involving him . . . no one dreamed of attacking us.'[9]

Baudot's attitude has been picked up by several historians since. Augustin is described as 'a man without enemies' or a luckless victim of his brother's influence. Croker, more hard-headed and less romantic than most, believed that Augustin could not have escaped anyway. To say that he was without enemies is, of course, nonsense. Fréron, Barras and Bernard des Saintes all loathed him and we do not know how many nameless Montagnards had suffered from his quarrelsome temper. In any case the Convention was in a killing mood. 'Will it be believed,' asks Baudot, 'that the accusations against Robespierre the Younger and Lebas were received in . . . the Assembly with ferocious joy?'[10] It certainly can.

The arrested deputies were taken to a room where they had dinner and, most surprisingly, were allowed to talk to one another without restriction. This seems to show how greatly the speed of events – it was only about half past two in the afternoon – had overtaken the victorious Convention. The prisoners seem to have entered into an agreement that they should show every readiness to stand their trial; they could use it as Danton had done to declare their case to the people. And Danton, after all, had come within an ace of acquittal.[11] They were not aware that the Paris Commune, dominated by close followers of Robespierre, Payan the National Agent, Fleuriot-Lescot the Mayor, had already revolted against the Convention and sent out orders to the prisons saying that the captive Robespierrists were not to be received.

Their first intimation of an attempt to rescue them was a scuffle at the door when Hanriot, General of the National Guard, in whose place Napoleon should have been, accompanied by some of his men, tried to break in. Hanriot, who was somewhat the worse for drink, was easily overcome. Any hope that the imprisoned deputies might have felt was for the time being quenched. Soon afterwards, they were all despatched to different prisons, Augustin being sent off to that of St Lazare under the guard of a certain Citizen Sérier.[12] The officials at St Lazare obeyed the orders of the Commune and refused to accept the prisoner.

Citizen Sérier, persevering, took his prisoner to La Force. Augustin tells us that during this time he 'awaited death with the calm of a free man' and that he expected to be condemned in two days' time.[13] Perhaps this sense of resignation came as a relief after the turmoil that had racked him for the

past few weeks. The officials of La Force proved amenable to Citizen Sérier. They were just registering the prisoner when officials of the Commune appeared and demanded that Augustin should be released. After a while the authorities at La Force gave way and Augustin went off with his deliverers to the Maison Commune.[14] It was now nearly nine o'clock.

By this action, Augustin, who, after all, could have insisted on staying at La Force, broke the dinner table agreement about waiting for a trial. He seems to have made no difficulty at all about this and soon he was to appear publicly with the insurrectionists. There is no reason to think that his calm was not real, but faced with the opportunity of action it was intolerable to him not to take it.

At the Maison Commune Augustin got a hero's welcome. He addressed the assembled Commune.[15] There is no complete account of the speech, indeed in all the hurried comings and goings, some people were not sure which Robespierre they were hanging. Fragments of his speech were recalled later and Mathiez was able to put some of it together. Augustin appealed to the Commune to reunite him to 'his incomparable brother', he strove to separate the Convention from the villainous Committees and the traitors who composed them, who had been conspiring for five years. It is an interesting, though not often noted, point that Augustin sought to free his friend David from the association of treachery. He insisted that David's absence from the Convention and from the Commune was due to illness.[16]

The Commune were delighted with Augustin's oratory, which was brought to an end by the sudden entrance of a Citizen Lerebours of *Secours Public*, carrying a large black portfolio. He embraced Augustin fervently and announced that he was bringing papers that exposed all those who had been conspiring since 10 August.[17] In the midst of all this, Lebas arrived, having also been rescued, and the Commune settled down to appoint a Committee of Insurrection.

Many of the sections of Paris seemed on the verge of declaring for the Commune. They were visited by the delegates from the Maison Commune. Thus the Section Contract Social was informed, probably about 9.30 p.m., that 'already Robespierre the Younger is with the Commune which has sworn to defend that patriot to the last drop of its blood.'[18]

But where was Robespierre the Elder? Rejected by the prison to which he had been sent, he had insisted on being taken to the police headquarters. Here he stayed, safe in the hands of the law. 'Robespierre,' says Sainte-Claire Deville, 'great plan maker, great giver of directives, does not like sudden actions and the insurrection was one of these.'[19]

By this time, Hanriot had been rescued by Coffinhal, a gigantic and energetic judge of the tribunal, and about the same time, Maximilien Robespierre – after great pressure – agreed to come to the Commune. He would counsel the Committee of Insurrection, but would not appear in the Grande Salle of the General Council, which at this time was immediately next to the room where the Committee of Insurrection were sitting. It was here, coming in at about a quarter past ten and by a back staircase, that Robespierre joined his brother and Lebas. Saint-Just followed him soon after. Only Couthon remained where he was, in prison.

There was not much movement now in the sections of Paris. The Commune had asked for the tocsin to be rung. But the bells of Paris remained silent for the first time in a great crisis since the fall of the Bastille. The Committee of Insurrection called to a drained and weary city. Silence answered them.

They did have news of the Convention. It had passed a decree of outlawry against the deputies who had taken refuge at the Maison Commune and anyone supporting them. This meant death without trial. They had also put Barras and Leonard Bourdon at the head of the National Guard supporting them.

The Committee of Insurrection saw that it was important that all the threatened deputies should be seen to act in concert. Augustin wrote in his own hand a note to Couthon: 'Couthon, all the patriots are proscribed, all the people have risen; you will be betraying them if you do not come and join us at the Commune where we are at present.' It was signed by Augustin, Robespierre and Saint-Just.[20] Disastrously for himself, Couthon came.

The phrase 'all the people have risen' shows how deluded Augustin and the rest of the Committee of Insurrection were regarding the support in the sections, but there were enough people still in the *Salle Générale* to cheer wildly when Maximilien Robespierre, accompanied by his friends, did finally appear for a short while. A few prudent people had begun to slip away, but not enough to alarm the Committee of Insurrection.

In the *Salle Egalité,* someone laid before Robespierre a call to the French nation. Maximilien hesitated and asked, 'In whose name do we write?' 'In the name of the Convention,' replied Couthon. 'The Convention is where we are.'

Robespierre still paused and then whispered with Augustin. [21] These may have been the last words they ever exchanged. Then he took up his pen to write. In the *Salle Générale* they were debating whether to send a deputation to the Jacobin Club. It was nearly two in the morning.

At this point history breaks down into a series of staccato exclamations, cries of confusion. Someone realised that the troops of the Commune had left the square; some one knew the Convention men were marching on the Maison Commune. Some one called out 'All is lost'. Coffinhal flung himself on Hanriot calling him coward and fool. Lebas drew a pistol and shot himself dead. Then everyone saw Maximilien staggering, blood streaming from his throat. The room was full of jostling people trying to escape. Maximilien's remaining friends caught hold of him. Augustin saw him collapse and believed him dying. His self-control, which had cracked so often in the past weeks, now broke altogether. He shouted frantically at the people in the emptying room, he called on Maximilien, dead or alive; he raved at a few well-meaning souls who sought to calm him and wanted to save him. 'It would have taken ten men to hold him,' said one of them later, and then they had to leave him to save themselves, going by the back stair by which Maximilien had entered not four hours before. Augustin went on raving and calling on someone to kill him to reunite him with his brother.[22]

Left to himself, he must have become a little calmer. At least he opened one of the great windows that overlooked the square and took off his shoes and stepped out onto the narrow ledge that ran along the Maison Commune. He was holding his shoes in his hand. Below him lay the empty square and the sound of moving cannon, so familiar to him, could be heard in the nearby streets. Some have suggested he sought a way of escape, instead of taking the easy and obvious one of the back stairs. But he walked up and down, looking at the square. He had been on the ledge at the longest three minutes when the troops of the Convention entered the square. They were led by Leonard Bourdon, who paused and read a proclamation of outlawry for everyone found in the Maison Commune. Bourdon had scarcely finished reading and the troops were already on the steps leading up to the main door when Augustin threw himself down, head first. 'He . . . fell on a bayonet and sabre and knocked down the two citizens who carried them.'[23]

Augustin was unconscious, bleeding profusely from wounds to his head where he had struck the step and from a bayonet wound in his thigh. They lifted him onto a chair and carried him across the square to the little rue des Barres that runs behind the church of St Gervais and where, at no. 4, the Committee of the Section of the Maison Commune was sitting. Here some unnamed person recognised Robespierre the Younger.

Seeing how badly hurt he was, they sent for help in the neighbouring streets and soon two doctors, a surgeon dentist and an apothecary were gathered round him. They examined the wound in

his thigh and the terrible injuries to his head, but they dared proceed no further. 'The situation of the wounded man did not allow of further examination.' He must have been conscious now because the report tells us that 'he was in such a state of weakness and anxiety that it was not possible for them to make a complete prognosis.'

The member of the Committee of the section questioned him. 'The wounded man,' they recorded,

> 'told us that his name was Robespierre; that he had voluntarily thrown himself from the window to escape inevitable death from the conspirators who had come to seize him. Being decreed accused he believed his death inevitable, that neither he nor his brother had ever ceased to do their duty in the Convention and that no one could reproach him with anything. That he regarded Panis as a traitor because he came to his house one day to tell him to deceive Collot d'Herbois did not desire the good of the country . . .'

In interpreting Augustin's words we have to remember the confused thoughts of a man in appalling agony of body and mind. Why in his last conscious moments should he worry about an obscure member of the Committee of General Security? My own solution, as I mentioned earlier, is that Panis may have been trying to find out his secrets, through abuse of Collot, not long after Augustin's return from Nice.

Carnot, poor Augustin continued, appeared to him as a traitor who wanted to betray his country. No explanation is needed for this. Augustin now either fainted or was in such pain that he could not continue, so the examination was adjourned for a while. The officials searched his pockets and found, 'many documents which we have not read, also his carté de deputé, a little key and 16 livres, 5 sous in small assignments.'

Augustin was now recovered enough for the examination to be resumed. They asked how he had come to be delivered from La Force. He pretended he did not know the identity of the man who 'had done him a bad service' in taking him from prison,

> 'that he was pure as nature itself and so was his brother, and when they came to rescue him they said they would take him to the Commune to the bosom of the people and when he was there he spoke for the Convention and said that it wished to save the country but had been deceived by conspirators . . . '

Here the cross-examination seems to have petered out again and presently three messengers arrived from the triumphant forces of the Convention with a verbal message ordering Augustin to be moved at once to the Committee of General Security.

The officials of the Maison Commune section protested vigorously, saying that the prisoner was in no fit state to be moved anywhere and that he might not survive it. The messengers went off but soon returned with a written order signed by Barras. After this, the section could do no more to protect Augustin.

'How', says Croker, 'he was so moved afterwards to the Conciergerie and thence to the tribunal and finally to the scaffold, we are not told – we are only told he was executed with his brother. If he was still alive his sufferings must have been terrible.'[24]

Not all writers have been so concerned as Disraeli's 'Mr Tadpole', so often censured for his malice towards his literary and political opponents. Le Blond de Neuvéglise says,

> 'The only remarkable thing that Robespierre the Younger did in his life was to condemn himself to the punishment that the ancient regime inflicted on its greatest scoundrels, to break his arms and legs in the Place de Grève.'

This joke will be better appreciated if we remember that criminals were formerly broken on the wheel there.

It was now seven in the morning. Eleven hours were yet to pass before the executions. To emphasise the importance of the occasion, the scaffold was re-erected in the Place de la Révolution where the King, the Queen and Danton had died. Recently, executions had taken place in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine because shopkeepers in the Rue Saint-Honoré had complained that the processions of the condemned discouraged trade.

Once during the day, there was a rumour that Augustin had died,[25] but he was still living when the prisoners appeared before the tribunal. At first there was no sign of Augustin. He was still at the Committee of General Security, whether held back by those who felt sorry for him such as the officials at the Maison Commune section or from sheer indifference we do not know. However a note was despatched for him – in which he was referred to as 'Robespierre Jeune' – and he was brought on a stretcher to the tribunal. He was identified by the concierge of the house where he lived; that was all that was necessary as the prisoners were already outlawed.[26]

About five o'clock the carts left the prison. So crowded were the streets that the journey took over an hour. If Augustin was capable of being aware of those around him he would have known now that Maximilien was still alive and suffering. According to Le Blanc, who may have been an eye-witness, there were three carts. In the second lay Hanriot, also injured – ironically enough, near Augustin. 'Robespierre the Younger,' says Le Blanc, 'was severely wounded in the head and covered with blood.'[27]

Arnault, now an eye-witness to the death of Robespierre as he had been to that of Danton some months earlier, confirms the grim picture.

> 'Before the head of Robespierre many heads fell, the proud Saint-Just, the ignoble Hanriot and also that of Robespierre the Younger, the accomplice of his brother's revolt but not of his tyranny. The public exasperation was so great in the day of vengeance and so odious had been the object that this generous devotion did not obtain pity.'[28]

When the carts reached the Place de la Révolution, the condemned who could not walk were laid on the ground. Couthon, who was badly injured by a fall down a staircase at the Maison Commune, was in great pain. He was executed first. Augustin followed him. We do not know if he was conscious when he died.[29]

Endnotes

[1] A.N.F. 7 4433 Plaq. 4: Hericault, 'La Revolution de Thermidor', p. 403.
[2] A.N.F. 7 4433 Plaq. 3: The envelope is carelessly torn, the seal unbroken. The letter is separate from the envelope.
[3] Unless otherwise stated, I have overall followed the account of Thermidor, particularly the timing of events, given by Sainte-Claire Deville.
[4] Montjoie, p. 24. Augustin then endeavoured to pull back the Convention to a more orderly debate in order to gain a hearing.
[5] Buchez and Roux, p. 33.
[6] Charles Duval, quoted in Croker, p. 419.
[7] Buchez and Roux, p. 33.
[8] Thompson, vol. 2, p. 259.
[9] Baudot, pp. 2, 81, 244.
[10] Baudot, p. 8.
[11] Mathiez, 'Robespierre at the Commune', in the *Fall of Robespierre*.
[12] Courtois, pp. 112, 113.
[13] Buchez and Roux pp. 34, 87 *et seq.*
[14] 'Robespierre the Younger was the only one (of the accused deputies) who went straight to the session of the Commune without requiring any persuasion', Mathiez, 'Robespierre at the Commune' in *The Fall of Robespierre*.
[15] 'Robespierre at the Commune'. S.F.D. p. 259.
[16] *Ibid.* David, on the previous night, at the Jacobins, carried away by Maximilien's eloquence, had cried, 'I will drink the hemlock with you, Robespierre.' A thing, Carlyle cuttingly remarked, 'not essential to do . . . but which can be said'. David claimed he was really ill next day of a bilious fever. The fact that, at such a moment, Augustin could believe he was ill, seems to go some way to acquit David of treachery to Robespierre.
[17] Lerebours. [or in the Sainte-Claire Deville account]

[18] A.N. [or in the Sainte-Claire Deville account]
[19] Sainte-Claire Deville, p. 266.
[20] Courtois, p. 209.
[21] *Ibid*. p. 210.
[22] *Ibid*. p.143.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Buchez and Roux give the verbatim account of Augustin's fall. Croker also published long extracts. Croker, p. 242 *et seq*.
[25] *Recueil*.
[26] Le Blond de Neuvéglise, p. 96.
[27] Sainte-Claire Deville, p. 323.
[28] Le Blanc, pp. 6–7.
[29] Arnault, vol. 2, p. 91. Curiously enough, several historians, notably Esquiros, vol. 2, p. 469, speak of Augustin walking heroically to the scaffold and there is in the Bibliothèque Nationale a print of Augustin, very smartly dressed, walking up to the steps to the guillotine.

Chapter 19

Paris, July 1794–October 1795

It is possible that when the turmoil of the debate of 9 Thermidor (27 July) was over, the victors may have had to face the problems of bringing to trial the conqueror of Toulon. Happily someone recalled Lafond, still in prison, who had come from Nice in January to denounce the royalism and corruption rampant in the Army of Italy. So Lafont's accusations were brought out anew and proved so satisfactory that André Dumont was briefed to address the Convention on the subject the following afternoon.

So the Convention learned of the thefts and profiteering of Robespierre the Younger and decreed that Lafont should be heard by the Committee of General Security. Neither did Dumount fail to remind his audience that Charlotte, when at Nice, had been addressed as 'Madame'. All Augustin's friends had been aristocrats and Haller had been the principal agent in his crimes.[1]

By 15 Thermidor (2 August) more could be revealed. Haller had tried to obtain ten million francs a month in coin for the Army of Italy, obviously to subvert it. Augustin had tried to requisition all the silks of the Midi and ship them to Genoa; the Committee of Public Safety had become suspicious and annulled the order in spite of Augustin's displeasure. Haller's arrest was demanded.[2]

At Nice, news of Augustin was still awaited. Bonaparte had returned from his mission to Genoa. On 18 Thermidor (5 August), Ricord went up to Grasse. Here he was brought a letter from Paris. As soon as he had read it, he hastened back to Nice. Once in his office, he wrote a proclamation to the people the Alpes Maritimes.

> 'Monsters that the Republic still has in its bosom have plotted new assassinations. An unbelievable conspiracy has found place in the hearts of traitors . . . But their authors have received the just punishment that they merited. It is that you should be aware of this that I publish the proclamation of the National Convention to the people of France . . . This event will only augment your zeal and make you more vigilant in seeking out the guilty. The Constitution needs all your zeal in unmasking and pursuing the enemies of liberty and equality.'[3]

Ricord managed not to mention names himself, but the Convention's proclamation announced the execution of Robespierre, Augustin and their friends.

It is a vain speculation to ask what Ricord really thought of Augustin. But Augustin had probably cuckolded him. He had also made his colleague's life difficult by prolonged absences in Vesoul and

Paris; he had always been a law unto himself. Certainly, Ricord may finally have concluded, he owed nothing to the memory of his friend, now become a dangerous embarrassment. At any rate he wrote the next day to the Committee.

> 'I blush to have been the friend of Robespierre the Younger. It is true that I thought him honest; but from the moment of his treason he had no more implacable enemy than me . . . I am sorry I was not in the Convention to vote for the deaths of the criminal scoundrels who had the audacity to conspire against liberty.'[4]

Meanwhile, Saliceti was travelling towards Barcelonette. Upon his way he was set upon by brigands but escaped unhurt. Knowing the state of the country, one might regard this as an unpleasant but not wholly surprising episode. But Saliceti believed that Augustin, Napoleon and Ricord wanted him out of the way and saw this as an assassination attempt. At Barcelonette he learned from Laporte and Albitte, who were both there, that the Robespierres were dead. He promptly wrote to the Committee,

> 'You know that, since the expedition to Oneglia, I have not been with the Army of Italy and even asked you to recall me. But I can explain, now that we are free, that I did not wish to participate in the enormous abuses which in this part of the world were authorised with an impudence which made all republicans mourn.'[5]

All three Representatives then joined in another letter to the Committee full of abuse of Augustin, Ricord and Haller, accusing them of betraying military plans to the enemy with the aid of Bonaparte. The following day Laporte wrote again: 'Lyon was ruled by the creatures of Robespierre. You can easily imagine how the brother of Robespierre, to whom the Army of Italy was entrusted, had his creatures everywhere and intended to raise the South in revolt.'[6]

It was discovered that Ricord had suppressed a decree issued by the Committee for Haller's arrest and had given him a passport for Genoa, where he now was in safety, declaring that Robespierre the Younger had always praised him. It was now clear to Saliceti, Laport and Albitte that Augustin, Ricord and Bonaparte had intended to deliver the French armies to Piedmont. What else lay behind Napoleon's mysterious journey to Genoa? There could be only one purpose for Augustin and Ricord to keep Saliceti 'so far from their counsels. Bonaparte was their man, their maker of plans whom we all had to obey.'[7] On 29 Thermidor (16 August), a writ was issued for Bonaparte's arrest.[8]

Nineteenth-century legend tells us that he was arrested on the seashore, where the modern resort of Beausoleil stands, talking with a fisherman of the weather and the sea.[9] However this may be,

he was taken to Fort Carre at Antibes. From here he wrote letters protesting his innocence. In one to Tilly, the French *chargé d'affaires* at Genoa, he wrote, 'I was somewhat affected by the catastrophe of Robespierre (the Younger), since I loved him and believed him pure, but had he been my father I would have stabbed him had he aspired to tyranny.'[10] Madelin describes this statement as 'courageous'. Perhaps it is, compared to Ricord's letter and others that we shall read presently. But Napoleon was too useful an officer to be kept in prison long. On 24 August he was released.

Augustin's plot to seize power in the South continued to be discussed for some time. Jean Bon St André, on mission at Toulon, discovered 'proof that Augustin meant to keep in his control both the Army of Italy and the fortresses that commanded the entrance to Toulon.'[11]

Ricord was sent back to Paris and had to defend his actions before the Convention, though in the end no action was taken against him. Haller made his way to Switzerland, and in after years was employed by Napoleon.

The news of Augustin's death reached Vesoul on about 19 Thermidor (6 August). Since Augustin had 'broken the Terror in the Haute-Saône, the Revolutionary Committee slept.'[12] Only Boizot, in his own way, had held aloft the flag of the Revolution. As soon as Augustin had gone safely back to Nice, Boizot had begun to hanker once more after de-Christianisation. Girardot says he neglected all other duties to perform this. One day he even removed a statue of the Virgin much revered by local village women. However the women rioted to such good effect that the statue had to be restored.[13]

On hearing of Augustin's death, Boizot immediately sent off a congratulatory letter to the Convention; he was even more delighted when shortly after 'there was a celebration in which the effigies of the Robespierres were burned to the sound of drums and dancing of the people.'[14] Viennot behaved with more dignity. He always maintained that Augustin was worthy of a better fate, an attitude that hardly satisfied Boizot, who composed a letter as coming from Viennot and himself to be sent to the Committee stating that they had never merited the horrible favour of the tyrant, Robespierre. Boizot himself had 'resisted them when they had power; I have written proofs of my enmity against them.' He must surely have hoped when he wrote this that no one would produce his letter to Guillodon. But he could not get Viennot to sign his letter and had to send it with only his own signature.[15]

Parmenter, the National Agent at Lure, who at the time of the fever had appealed to Augustin's humanity, now referred to him as an infamous perjurer. The village of Jussey, not content with

expunging Augustin's name from the minutes, also removed all mention of Sauli, because he had been 'close to odious conspirators', and burned mannequins of the Robespierres, thus purging themselves with fire. Gray simply 'replaced the name of Robespierre with that of the Representative.'[16]

Bernard was still racked by the thought of his weakness with Robespierre the Younger and wrote a long statement on the way Augustin had behaved to him – how Augustin had sworn at Besançon that he would destroy him and how Bernard himself had, after Thermidor, received a host of letters 'congratulating me on my escape from this tyrant, who would not have hesitated to denounce me had he not been executed himself.' Once again he described how Augustin had hit Briot. 'The bravery of Robespierre consisted in striking in the back. This ambitious and vindictive man would do anything to destroy me.' He accused the people of Vesoul of going so far as to plan to put up a column in Augustin's memory and to 'encase his speeches in a leaden coffer.'[17]

Vesoul had by now – it was June 1795 – plucked up enough courage to answer back. They denied the column and the leaden coffer, but continued, 'Robespierre the Younger never flattered us and we flattered him still less. He treated us as good citizens; he simply gave us justice. We judged him by the civil and moral qualities he showed among us.'[18]

After Thermidor, Arras was restored to the tranquillity Augustin had hoped for it. Lebon was recalled and guillotined. Buissart underwent some unpleasant attacks because of his close friendship with the Robespierres, but in the end it had to be recognised that he had done everything in his power to help Arras during the Terror. He took no further part in public life but lived to a respected old age. His sons, Augustin's 'little marmots', grew up to be well-known lawyers in the town.[19]

Poor Charlotte did not return to Arras. She remained in Paris, in great poverty, until she was rescued by Napoleon, who seems to have been most kind to her and granted her a pension. But, being Charlotte, she could not let well alone, she could not imagine she might be a political embarrassment to the First Consul. She pestered Napoleon and his wife so much that they closed their doors to her.[20]

M. de La Saudraye died in the spring of 1795. The widowed Guillodon was very badly off. She sold part of his library and bought herself a little house near Sens.[21]

Sauli, as we have seen, was arrested on his return to Genoa. He was imprisoned for six months. We are told that 'he bore his captivity gaily,' writing to his family and reading history books. Later on he became editor of a liberal newspaper in Genoa and died in 1841, 'faithful to the noble principles of his life.'[22]

In October 1795, when Augustin had lain for fifteen months in a mass grave somewhere near what is now the Parc Monceau, Bonaparte returned to Paris. Since his release, he had fought in a small campaign or two and won the attention of other Representatives, but none that were interested, as Augustin had been, in great schemes to change the face of Europe. His career was at an end and he was almost as much in need as when he had met the Representatives at Avignon with the *Souper de Beaucaire* in his pocket.

Barras was now one of the most powerful men in France; he was faced with a Royalist revolt and was seeking good commanders to contain it. Barras tells how Bonaparte sought him out; Bonaparte tells us he was sent for by Barras. However this may be, the two men met for the first time since Toulon.

Barras told Bonaparte that before he could give him any appointment he must clear himself of his Robespierrist past. According to Barras, Bonaparte began by saying 'that Robespierre the Younger had not always held the same opinions as his brother,' and used the phrase we considered earlier, that 'Robespierre the Younger looked on himself as in exile' when with the Army of Italy.

'He informed me,' Barras goes on, 'that a woman of the lower classes, who had been assisted by Robespierre the Younger, had been arraigned before the Revolutionary Tribunal and sentenced to death during his absence from Paris, and that on his return he had expressed disapproval of the sentence. He sent for the twelve-year-old son of the woman, clothed him and admitted him to his table. As the boy was feeling sad, Ricord commanded him to drink the health of the Republic, but the lad refused; thereupon Robespierre the Younger, addressing Ricord, said to him, "Respect such a character. You would not do as much in similar circumstances".'[23]

How far can this story be accepted and why did Bonaparte choose this means of clearing himself? The story is suspect on several grounds. Neither Barras nor Napoleon were famous for their devotion to truth. Augustin and Ricord were never in Paris at the same time after they left it together in July 1793. But it is conceivable that Barras genuinely forgot the name of the friend and put down that of the first person he could think of connected with Augustin. We know that Augustin did assist the poor – he was one of those to whom Marat used to appeal when Marat's own money ran out.

Why did Napoleon tell the story at all? Why did he not stick to his original story of being deceived by Augustin? Perhaps Barras knew too much for this to be convincing. It is just possible they were both,

Napoleon in telling and Barras in recording, touched by their consciences. Perhaps Augustin's reproach to his friend struck home,

'Respect such a character. You would not do as much.'

Endnotes

[1] *Moniteur*, 21, p. 345.
[2] *Ibid.*, 21, pp. 354, 359.
[3] A.A.M. L95.
[4] *Recueil*, vol. 15, p. 721.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 515.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 783.
[7] *Ibid.* p. 718.
[8] *Recueil*, vol. 16, p. 65.
[9] Muller, an anecdotal historian of Nice and Menton, tells this story which he got from local legend.
[10] Madelin, p. 1307.
[11] *Recueil*, vol. 16, p. 326.
[12] Girardot, vol. 3, p. 153.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 130.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[17] Lods, p. 258.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 298.
[19] Barbier, p. 18.
[20] Fleischmann, *Robespierre et les femmes*, p. 269.
[21] Mathiez, 'Robespierre Jeune en Franche-Comté.'
[22] Pellet, p. 225.
[23] Barras, vol. 1, p. 310.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for works frequently quoted:

Charlotte	Fleischmann, H., ed., *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1910).
Recueil	Aulard, F.A., ed., *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public avec la Correspondance Officielle des Représentants en Mission et le Registre du Conseil Exécutif Provisoire*, 12 vols., (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1889-1951).
Jacobins	Aulard, F.A., *La Société des Jacobins*, 6 vols., (Paris: Librarie Jouaust, 1889-1897).
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Bibliography of Further Reading

Revised August 2021

by Marisa Linton

Mary Young wrote this book many years ago. It has stood the test of time amazingly well. Her scholarship on the primary sources is impeccable. Her book retains its relevance partly due to the fact that no notable primary sources on Augustin have come to light since she wrote it. There is one small exception to this. In May 2011 a fund of documents appeared that had been kept in the Lebas family for many generations. Philippe Lebas was a fellow Robespierrist and a friend of both Maximilien and Augustin, who died with them in Thermidor. The documents have been acquired by the Archives Nationales and at some point will be made accessible to researchers. These documents contain several letters by Augustin Robespierre. Whilst these are interesting in themselves, it is unlikely that anything in them will change significantly what we already know about him and what is contained in Mary's book.

But inevitably in the years since she wrote it there have been more recent works by historians that address aspects of some of the subjects discussed in her book. On Augustin Robespierre himself there has never been a biography in English. Until very recently there was none in French either. Recently two biographies have appeared in French. These are: Sergio Luzzatto, *Bonbon Robespierre: La Terreur à visage humain* (Paris: Arléa, 2010) which was translated into French by Simone Carpentari Messina from the original Italian edition of 2009; and Alexandre Cousin, *Philippe Lebas et Augustin Robespierre: deux météores dans la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions Bérénice, 2010). The latter is only partly about Augustin Robespierre, being a joint biography of Augustin and of Philippe Lebas. The appearance of these two new biographies attests to the growing interest in the subject of Augustin Robespierre and the timeliness of the publication of Mary Young's book. Nonetheless, neither book is as comprehensive as Mary Young's biography and both of them are much more partisan.

There have been several studies of Maximilien Robespierre in the last few years. Works in English include: Colin Haydon and William Doyle (eds), *Robespierre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John Hardman, *Robespierre* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1999); Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006); and Peter McPhee,

Robespierre – a Revolutionary Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). None of these adds to what Mary has uncovered about Augustin.

Several works have been published on the Jacobins which tell us more about the political world in which Augustin operated but, again, nothing more about the man himself. These include: Marc Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic, 1792-1794 (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins During the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). On the politics of Jacobin friendship there is: Marisa Linton, 'Fatal Friendships: The Politics of Jacobin Friendship', *French Historical Studies*, 31, 1 (Winter 2008): 51-76. Jacobin politics and the Terror have been the subject of a number of books in recent years, amongst which are: Michel Biard and Marisa Linton, *Terror: The French Revolution and its Demons* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021); Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); Hugh Gough, *The Terror in the French Revolution* (Houndmills: Palgrave Press, 2010); Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton (eds), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); and Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et révolution: essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006). For a specific and detailed study of the work of the deputies on mission, see Michel Biard, *Missionaires de la République: Les représentants du people en mission, 1793-1795* (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2002). On the politics of Thermidor the best study is by Françoise Brunel, *Thermidor: La chute de Robespierre* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1989). Interested readers can also consult Richard T. Bienvenu (ed.), *The Ninth of Thermidor: the Fall of Robespierre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) which provides a lot of the sources on Thermidor in English translation.