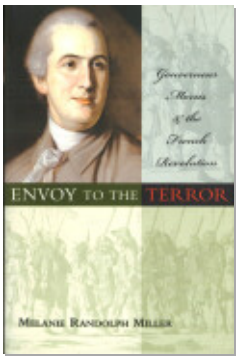
Envoy to the Terror

Melanie R. Miller



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Chapter Six

Once More unto the Breach

It would be a year after the effective conclusion of Morris's mission to London before Washington submitted nominations for ministers to England, France, and Holland in the fall of 1791. In the meantime, Morris returned to private concerns—romance and business—and to increasing involvement in matters in France. While the assignment from Washington had, as Madison predicted, raised Morris's hopes for an appointment, his expectations evaporated as he learned of objections to his performance, and William Short seemed to dominate the field through his connection with Jefferson. Morris's friendship with Jefferson was on the wane as their views of the Revolution diverged and as Jefferson received increasingly venomous reports about Morris from Short. Lafayette and Morris also became increasingly estranged.

It was not a very satisfying year for Gouverneur. Business, in the main, went badly, as did love. The situation in France was increasingly unstable, with no prospect that Lafayette and the other men in power could bring matters under control, or that the new constitution could do so. Morris's forebodings of 1789 were beginning to take shape, and he felt compelled to try to stop the disintegration of the government, a decision that led him into the innermost councils of those trying to preserve the monarchy. He felt free to do so because he was once again a private citizen, and many other foreigners were doing the same thing. It was a fateful road for Morris to take, however, for by the time he learned of his appointment as minister in early 1792 he was so deeply enmeshed in the king's affairs that he could not extricate himself.

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Morris left London on September 24, 1790, accompanied by a Newfoundland dog intended as a present for the duchesse d'Orléans.[1] From Calais, he embarked on a six-week tour through Belgium and Prussia, in the

hopes of selling some of Robert's St. Lawrence lands. It was not a successful nor always enjoyable trip. He shared Jefferson's aversion for the political state of the countries he visited and wrote of his hopes that France might yet obtain a good constitution and thereby influence and benefit all of Europe.[2]

He returned to Paris on November 6. Taking time only to change his travel-worn clothes, he hopped in a fiacre to go to Adèle's. Although she seemed glad to see him, Morris quickly realized that his long absence had opened the way for others. Adèle was now interested in young Lord Henry Wycombe, the handsome and rich eldest son of the Marquess of Lansdowne. When Morris arrived at Adèle's apartment, he found Wycombe "*un peu enniché*," and Adèle, despite "Assurances of Fidelity," professed a "Determination to be *sage* [chaste]." Morris was disconcerted, and his fears were confirmed when he called again the next day and was denied, a blow that he underlined in his diary.[3]

The wound was deep. When Adèle received him later in the day they quarreled, and quarreled again the next day. On the tenth he received a note from her and hurried over in the hope of making love, only to learn that she wanted him "to be meerly her friend." After another scene, ending with lovemaking, she admitted that she had been close to committing an "infidelity" with Talleyrand (she had probably done so repeatedly) and agreed that she would keep Morris's ring until "she is *in Fact* unfaithful."[4]

Morris was not reassured, and her equivocal conduct did not help. He began flirting with other women, preferably in locations where she would see him, and gave serious consideration to having an affair with his friend Mme Foucault or Adèle's niece Mlle Duplessis, "but that is detestable."[5] He was wretched. "My Bosom is torn with Anxiety and I find in my left Arm as well as in my left Breast a phisical Sense of Grief," he confessed to his diary after once again finding Wycombe at the Louvre. The next morning, he wrote an unhappy letter to Short in Amsterdam:

> In answer to your Question of how I go on in Paris I must say badly. Objects of business are suspended by Circumstances and this is disagreable because I wish to close all private affairs so that I may go hence whenever it may be proper. Pleasurable Affairs also go badly. My Circle is too much narrowed and I am loath to extend it just now because twenty years Converse with Mankind have not yet given me the needful Insensibility. I attach myself easily and leave always with Regret those to whom I am attached.[6]

Adèle "has just now much the Advantage of me," he recorded in frustration.[7]

On December 7, 1790, he received an urgent message from London. The news was bad. "Mr. Rogers [an associate of Daniel Parker] has failed leaving unpaid 15,000 pounds," he wrote to Robert. "It appears that the monies he has drawn from the disposal of stock have been applied to the private use of himself and Mr. Parker," he told Constable. According to Howard Swiggett, Parker and Rogers had committed a "great fraud," with Constable as the principal victim, and Morris was somewhat to blame for inattention to Constable's affairs. It is apparent that Morris also feared ruin. It was a delicate moment to be leaving Adèle, although he was pleased when she burst into tears at his news and offered him "all the Money she has."[8] Buoyed by the renewed hope that she was pregnant, he left Paris on the ninth and arrived in London on the twelfth, a very fast trip. For the next few weeks, Morris worked furiously to pull the fat from the fire, saving not only himself and his American associates, but the "devilish slippry fellow" Parker from debtors' prison, something he could justifiably have refused to do. At one of his meetings with Parker (he had constant difficulties in locating him, for Parker was in terror of arrest), Morris saw with his usual acuity that Parker was forming "a Design to take some Advantage of me in the very Moment that I am trying to serve him. I do not blame him, for it is his Nature," he wrote, "and certainly I should see his Situation more composedly if my own Interest were not at Stake."[9]

Using every ounce of his persuasiveness and reputation for integrity, Morris brought the creditors to a settlement and, on January 16, left for Paris in the same great haste. He arrived in Paris at 6:30 in the morning on the nineteenth, jumped into bed for three hours of sleep, and rushed over to the Louvre.

This breakneck return demonstrates the degree of his devotion to Adèle, but Morris must have sensed it was not mutual. This was the start of a phase in their relationship that does not make pleasant reading: after a brief period during which Morris's hopes were raised by M. de Flahaut's serious illness ("He is a Wretch and the best Thing he could do would be to die" Morris wrote in exasperation as the poor man began to recover), he began to pursue other women. His seductions were skillful, and on May 15 torn pages indicate he succeeded with another of Adèle's nieces, Mme de Nadaillac, after which "I kiss her with more Emotion and with less Respect."[10]

Despite their difficulties, Morris was concerned about Adèle's financial situation. For a while she hoped to be appointed "first Woman of the Queen" but this did not materialize, so Morris offered her a share of one of his business ventures, and gave her money. Talleyrand, by contrast,

seems to have been indifferent to her straits. Fortunately, Morris's financial balance apparently began to improve, for William Constable & Co. was steadily crediting a share of numerous profitable cargoes of furs, tea, and spices to his account.[11]

After another trip to London in the late spring, he had so far detached himself that for the first time he did not immediately go to the Louvre upon his return. His resolution did not hold up; when she asked him again for marriage in September he gave her hopes. They were still together by the beginning of 1792, when, unaware of his appointment to France, he began to plan to return to America and Adèle agreed to go with him.[12]

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Morris always had several irons in the fire with respect to commercial ventures, but his greatest hopes in 1790–91 stemmed from a new effort to purchase the American debt to France, and a project described as the "Affair of the Rations," a proposal whose details are somewhat murky. Neither project succeeded.

The "Rations" proposal was intended to provide the German princes in the "proprietary courts" with compensation in the form of provisions for the National Assembly's abolition of feudal privileges and associated income. (The Assembly had agreed that compensation should be made.) Morris and his associates hoped to be the middlemen and earn sizable commissions. There were many competitors for the potential contract—one group included Talleyrand, the royalist comte de la Marck, Rayneval (who headed the foreign office until 1792), and Delessart, minister of finance.[13]

Morris's plan required approval from the Constituent Assembly, or from the king, who presumably would have used his own funds. The king initially agreed, but changed his mind. "I am perswaded that there is some under Work in that business," Morris wrote, and he was right; the king was apparently secretly urging the princes to refuse to make an agreement with the Assembly, and his June escape was being planned.[14] Morris next tried to go through the Assembly, which was, according to Swan, extremely corrupt, requiring judicious application of "the golden Tincture" of bribes.[15] They used Jean-Baptiste Brémond, a speculator from Provence who was James Swan's "man" in the Assembly. He would become Morris's chief source of information about the Assembly and the doings of the Jacobin Club. Those bribed included Armand Camus (Camus's is one of the identifiable faces in David's famous painting of the Tennis Court Oath; he is

depicted trying to "persuade the lone dissenter").[16] By mid-August, although Camus apparently earned his bribe by raising the matter with the Assembly committee, the project lapsed when the Assembly declared itself free to ignore contracts made by the monarchy.[17]

Just how these efforts to bribe another country's legislative body should be viewed is debatable. Morris believed the German princes should be compensated in order to undermine the activities of the émigrés in their domains. It is characteristic of him that he was therefore willing to deal with the Assembly on what he knew was its own terms: bribery. By the same token, his offers of shares to Montmorin (who declined) and others are not admirable, but probably were considered essential. "I do not approve of intriguing with the Committees of the Assembly," Morris wrote to Robert, "and yet that seems to be the way of succeeding at the present."[18]

Land sales were also on Morris's mind, but these efforts were hampered in many different respects. One of the most irksome was the effect produced by the Scioto Company debacle, which has been called "a plot to defraud the nation."[19] The company was a group of investors—not including the Morrises, who had their own lands to sell—who planned to sell preemption rights to purchase American public lands, rather than title to the land itself. The targeted purchasers were Europeans, preferably banks holding blocks of depreciated American securities, which could then be used at face value to buy the land from Congress. In this lay the seeds of its failure, for when the Constitution was adopted American securities began to rise and the land was no longer a bargain.

The company was the brainchild of William Duer, and it was made up of many of the Morrises' business associates, including (unknown to Gouverneur) William Constable; Brissot de Warville probably was associated with it for a while. The American poet Joel Barlow was the unlikely, and as events proved, unfortunate choice to represent the company in France. The first group of settlers departed France in 1790 with high hopes, but soon found themselves without title to the land they believed they had bought, and facing physical hardships they were unprepared to overcome. Soon their unhappy reports were pouring back into Europe.[20]

Barlow and Morris did not care for each other, and Morris's frank skepticism about the Scioto scheme cannot have helped their relationship. Barlow was busy writing enthusiastic—and baseless—reports back to the United States about his success, but as Morris wrote later to Constable, "the highly colored Pictures drawn by Mr. Barlow were not taken from the Life."[21]

The French delusions did not last. In June 1790, Morris learned that Duer had issued a bill for 100,000 pounds drawn on Barlow. That November,

Barlow visited Morris, and "in a lame stammering Conversation I find that he has no Means at Command to retire the Bill upon him. . . . I fear this Scioto Business will turn out very badly."[22] Sales ceased, and Barlow was threatened with assassination by angry relatives of the unhappy emigrants. The scandal did "great Mischief" to Morris's bona fide efforts at land sales, as did the king's failed escape attempt in June. In July 1791, Morris wrote to Constable that the flight to Varennes

> produced a decree against Emigration which damps the Sale of Lands & the Accounts from the Scioto each one worse than the other have a similar Effect. Indeed they have brought the Scioto upon the Stage and these frenchmen who once supposed that all the people of America lived in Boston seem now to imagine that all the Land of America is on the Scioto.[23]

The company sent a new agent to take over from Barlow, who arrived in late 1790, and met several times with Morris to ask his advice.[24]

Barlow was a zealous admirer of the French Revolution, and was close to Thomas Paine and other Americans who for reasons sincere or venal chose to support the radicalizing of the Revolution. He demonstrated considerable elasticity in welcoming each progressively radical shift of power, but also managed to remain friends with Lafayette. He published tracts endorsing the Revolution, which he sent to Jefferson, who welcomed them.[25] Given these associations, and a general dislike for Morris, it is no surprise that Barlow would strongly object to Morris's appointment as minister. "It is really unfortunate for our interest as well as for the cause of liberty in general, that he does not accord better with the principles which do and ought to govern the people of France," he wrote to Jefferson in early October 1792.[26] Barlow's post-Scioto activities created other motives, for Morris was considered an obstacle to the projects he was pursuing with the French government, including "liberation" of South America, with distribution of spoils to the participants. Although these schemes did not prosper, Barlow was lucky in later business ventures with James Swan, who recommended to Knox in December 1793 that Barlow should replace Morris as minister. However, Barlow, taking heed of Paine's imprisonment that same month, prudently left Paris for Hamburg in January 1794.[27]

Barlow and Morris were not quite finished, however. Barlow wrote to Jefferson in 1798—a time when American-French relations were at an all-

time low—that the deterioration could be traced directly to Morris's appointment. "For three years," Barlow asserted, Morris had "misled the president with respect to the principles and events of the Revolution, insulted the French nation and as far as possible betrayed it."[28]

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Despite consuming personal and business concerns, Morris reentered the thick of French politics on his return to Paris. William Short had kept Morris informed of the significant changes, and neither American found them encouraging. At the beginning of the summer of 1790, at the behest of Lafayette, the Assembly had abolished noble titles. In July, it decreed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which Talleyrand called the Assembly's "greatest political blunder." Louis reluctantly sanctioned the decree, which set salaries and residence requirements, and provided for election of clerics by the laity. On November 27, 1790, reacting to the protests of clerics throughout the country, the Constituent Assembly went further and imposed the Oath of the Civil Constitution; a cleric's refusal to take the oath ("nonjuring") meant dismissal. Talleyrand, the perennial survivor and a man of dubious piety, was one of only two bishops in the Constituent Assembly who took the oath. In early 1791 he resigned his bishopric to become an administrator of Paris.[29]

Louis could not convince the Pope to endorse the Civil Constitution, setting the stage for schism and civil war. Necker had resigned in September 1790, protesting the second issue of *assignats*. There was increasing concern that an alliance including Austria and Prussia, led by the king's brothers, would attempt to invade France.

In a long letter to Washington, written in late November 1790, Morris laid out a bleak picture. It is one of Morris's most eloquent soliloquies; the following summer Washington would show it to Jefferson, noting that Morris's predictions had been borne out.[30]

"This unhappy Country, bewildered in the Pursuit of metaphysical whimsies, presents to our moral View a mighty Ruin," he began. "Like the Remnants of ancient Magnificence we admire the architecture of the Temple while we detest the false God to whom it was dedicated." With a dirgelike rhythm, he continued:

> Daws and Ravens and the Birds of Night now build their Nests in its Niches. The Sovereign humbled to the Level of a Beggar's Pity, without

> Resources, without Authority, without a Friend. The Assembly at once a Master and a Slave. New in Power, wild in Theory, raw in Practice, it engrosses all Functions tho incapable of exercising any, and has taken from this fierce ferocious People every Restraint of Religion and of Respect. Sole Executors of the Law and therefore supreme Judges of its Propriety each District measures out its Obedience by its Wishes, and the great Interests of the whole split up into fractional Morsels depend on momentary Impulse and ignorant Caprice.

"Such a State of Things cannot last," he predicted.

> But how will it end? Here Conjecture may wander thro unbounded space. What Sum of Misery may be requisite to change popular Will, Calculation cannot determine. . . . One Thing only seems to be tolerably ascertained: that the glorious Opportunity is lost, and (for this Time at least) the Revolution has failed.

Morris did not entirely despair, however, for in the effects of the Revolution he found "some Foundations of future Prosperity," including the abolition of inconsistent methods of taxation and collection, which had impeded commerce among the provinces and destroyed "that Unity in the System of distributive Justice, which is one Requisite to social Happiness." He also praised the abolition of the feudal system, allowing proper valuation and use of land. He endorsed the nationalization of church property and the end of the aristocratic power exercised by the *parlements*, which he said had "established the Pride and the Privileges of the few on the Misery and Degradation of the general Mass."

Last, and "[a]bove all," Morris pointed to

> the Promulgation and Extension of those Principles of Liberty which will I hope remain to chear the Heart and cherish a Nobleness of Soul, when the metaphysic Froth and Vapor shall have been blown away. The Awe of that Spirit which has thus been raised, will I trust excite in those who may hereafter possess Authority a proper Moderation in its Exercise, and induce them to give to this People a real Constitution of Government, fitted to the natural, moral, social, and political State of their Country.

"How and when these events may be brought about, I know not," he added.

It was in most respects a gloomy letter, written in the depths of his personal despair over Adèle. Yet it also identified potent positive results of the Revolution and, while correctly anticipating the terrible trials the country would undergo, expressed hope that the end result would still prove happy for France. His clear recognition of the long-term benefits of the "failed" revolution is important, for Morris has not been given credit for such insight by even those historians who like him best, including Theodore Roosevelt. Morris never denied those benefits; but he strongly believed that what he called the "hideous Convulsions" were avoidable.[31]

His letter deserves contrast with the less critical—indeed almost determinedly unaware—comments of Jefferson over the same period, whose view of the Revolution seemed to grow ever more complacent and unreal, at the same time that he increasingly connected its "success" (however he defined it) with the success of the new American republic. For the next few years, as France was wracked by violence, and those in charge of the government changed, along with policy, with head-snapping suddenness, Jefferson would write repeatedly, calmly, and with assurance, that "the French Revolution goes on steadily."[32] In so doing, the secretary of state preferred correspondents such as Barlow and Paine, whose unalloyed enthusiasm might have been suspect to someone of his discernment, and rejected not only the reports of Morris but also of William Short, whose letters were occasionally as eloquent as Morris's, and by this time, just as pessimistic.

Morris resumed giving advice to the French. He was encouraged to learn from the comte de Moustier (now returned to France) that the king and queen mentioned Morris, and "that I stand well in their Opinion."[33] He had been back in Paris for three weeks before he saw Lafayette, whose power was in decline. Although Short was careful to hide it from the marquis, he had come to share Morris's estimation of Lafayette. "The Marquis de la fayette has sworn enemies in all the parties, owing to his having endeavoured to conciliate them all," Short told Jefferson.[34]

An army mutiny at Nancy in August 1790 had been put down with Lafayette's approval, with a ruthlessness intended to set an example, but which was to backfire. Once again, Morris was brutally frank to his old friend, telling him that "he nominally but not really commands his Troops" and unless Lafayette established discipline, "he must be ruined sooner or later." Lafayette was outraged. "While I speak he turns pale," Morris noted, but forged ahead. "[T]he Thing they call a constitution which the Assemblée have framed is good for Nothing," he continued, suggesting that Lafayette should seize an appropriate pretext and resign, "by which means he would preserve a Reputation in France which would be precious and

hereafter useful." He was profoundly disillusioned by Lafayette's response: "He says that he is only raised by Circumstances and Events, so that when they cease he sinks, and the Difficulty now is how to excite them."[35]

Morris reiterated his theme of "the Necessity of restoring the Nobility, at which of Course he flinches and says that he should like two Chambers as in America. I tell him that an American constitution will not do for this Country & that two such Chambers would not answer where there is an hereditary Executive. That every Country must have a constitution suited to its Circumstances." This was an issue the two men were not to resolve; they were still arguing about it nearly two years later, in the last summer of the monarchy.[36]

Lafayette's wife was also angry with Morris, and the next time he visited she received him "*à la Glace.*" Morris was not surprised, telling Mme de Montmorin he had told Lafayette "some Truths which differed so much from the Style of Flattery he has been accustomed to that he is not well pleased with it." For the first time, Morris wrote candidly to Washington that the president's protégé had "not the Talents which his Situation requires."[37]

When Washington showed these letters to Jefferson the following July, it is quite possible that Jefferson took offense, for he thereafter wrote a remarkably emotional letter to Lafayette:

> God bless you my dear friend, and prosper those endeavors about which I never write to you because it would interrupt them, but for the success of which, and for your own happiness no body prays more sincerely than Your affectionate friend & servt . . .

The following summer, two months before Lafayette's fall, Jefferson wrote again:

> Behold you then, my dear friend, at the head of a great army, establishing the liberties of your country against a foreign enemy. May heaven favor your cause, and make you the channel thro' which it may pour it's favors . . . [Y]ou are exterminating the monster aristocracy, and pulling out the teeth and fangs of it's [*sic*] associate monarchy."[38]

Jefferson wrote this letter shortly after hearing from a French friend in Paris that liberty in France was now "nothing more than the ability to resist laws with impunity," and "[t]here has already been as much blood

shed as in a war; the difference is that this is by premeditated assassinations, executed with inconceivable cruelty."[39]

It is difficult to read these materials without pausing to consider who was the better advisor to Lafayette, Morris or Jefferson. Though Morris's predictions made unpleasant listening, they were largely accurate. Whether a second chamber made up of a restored nobility would have been effective or not, Morris was dead right that a unicameral and unfettered legislature would not work. He foresaw Lafayette's downfall early on, and in spite of Lafayette's increasing resentment, continued to recommend decisive steps to avoid it. Jefferson, after his return to America, offered only uncritical though impassioned support, and would be silent when faced with the dreadful contradiction that Lafayette had been declared a traitor to the cause Jefferson believed he personified. It was no surprise to Morris; for Jefferson, it must have been devastating.

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While Lafayette distanced himself from Morris, Montmorin—though there is little indication that he followed his suggestions—welcomed the American's counsel. Morris continued to advocate war through the spring of 1791, certain that France could beat England, and he even described to Montmorin how Europe should be repartitioned. This plan was "too great for his Mind," Morris noted in disappointment.[40]

Morris was very concerned that the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly required by the new constitution would be dangerous, for their successors "would be chosen by the Jacobins," who were at this time the "old" Jacobins (pre-July 1791). The Jacobin Club was by this time experiencing considerable tension between the heretofore dominant "triumvirate" of Barnave, Alexandre Lameth, and Duport, and its radical members, many from the Cordeliers Club. The "triumvirs" (also called the Lameth faction) had been ardent reformers at the Estates General, but considered the reforms already enacted and the provisions of the proposed constitution, once implemented, to be revolution enough. Lafayette had originally been a member of the Jacobins as well, and essentially concurred with these views, but personal antagonism between Lafayette and the triumvirs had led the marquis and his followers, including Sièyes, Talleyrand, and Mirabeau, to secede in early 1790 and form the Society of 1789.

The Lameth group had endorsed the concepts of national sovereignty and equal rights, but consistently insisted on a property ownership

requirement for political participation, and by the spring of 1791 this determination to exclude a major percentage of the French population from a voice in the government had led to a "democratic" movement in the Paris clubs and increasing influence at the Jacobin Club from radical members. As the democratic elements grew more strident, and were increasingly successful in calling the integrity of the Constituent Assembly into question, the triumvirs and the members of the Society of 1789 (or Fayettists) were increasingly concerned that matters might get out of hand.[41]

Morris had thought this all along, and his fears were particularly aroused by passage of a four-year exclusionary decree disqualifying the current Assembly deputies from government posts or reelection, for it promised a legislature of "Jacobin" (he was referring to the radical element) members of inexperienced and more radical bent. He unabashedly told Montmorin that "he knows the Character and Talents of the present Set [of deputies] and can buy such as, after Reflection, may suit his Purpose."[42] In line with this argument, sometime in April or May of 1791, he prepared a memorandum for the king, which he asked Montmorin to forward. He advised the king that the Assembly could not last much longer, and if the king persevered he would be able to institute a good constitution and a moderate government. "[I]t is no longer a question of liberty," he said baldly. "Only of who shall be the master." He suggested that if Montmorin would promise the triumvirate leaders posts in the administration, they would in turn ensure repeal of the exclusionary rule. While the promise should be kept, and the Jacobins placed in posts, "[y]ou must displace them likewise *at a favorable moment.*"[43]

Morris's ideas seem both audacious and a little cockeyed, at least from the distance of two centuries. It is hard to perceive the practicability of bribing members of a faction with government posts, and then taking them away again. He apparently concocted the scheme with Brémond, and it may reflect more of Brémond than of Morris; Morris would later describe Brémond as "courageous, zealous and faithful," but "impetuous" and "imprudent."[44] Montmorin probably thought the same of this plan, for there is no indication that he showed the note to the king.

On the other hand, Montmorin's disinterest may have had other causes. On May 9, 1791, he resigned as foreign minister, although he served *par interim* until the following October. His resignation was probably linked to the king's plan to escape and reassert control outside of Paris.[45] The capture of the royal family at Varennes on June 21 threw the political game pieces to the floor: the king was suspended, and Lafayette, whose National Guards-

men guarded the Tuileries, was suspected of having connived in the attempt. Morris disapproved. If Louis had remained "quiet," he suggested, he

> would have soon been Master because the Anarchy which prevails would have shewn the Necessity of conferring more Authority. . . . His Departure changed every Thing and now the general Wish seems to be for a Republic, which is quite in the natural order of Things.[46]

The "general Wish" for a republic was not shared by the triumvirs or the Fayettists. The debacle at Varennes quickly produced a rapprochement between the two groups, who now saw themselves as the party of "order," which would retain the reforms of the Assembly and keep the king, if he agreed to accept the new constitution. At the same time, the breach within the Jacobin Club between the radicals and triumvirs was almost complete. It became final a few weeks later, when the Champ-de-Mars massacre took place.[47]

Paris had been in what Morris described as an "Uproar" for days, incensed by an Assembly decree declaring the king's inviolability (immunity from punishment) after his escape attempt. On July 15, members of the radical Cordeliers Club and the Cercle Social (the future Girondins) disrupted a meeting at the Jacobin Club, demanding the club support a petition to establish a republic. The next day, nearly all of the moderate members seceded from the club and, along with the Fayettists, established the *Feuillants* (Constitutionalists) Club.

On July 17, a very hot day, with "[n]ot a Breath of Air stirring," the clash occurred. Members of the Cordeliers Club took their petition to the Champ-de-Mars to gather signatures. Realizing that something dramatic was afoot, Morris and Adèle took his carriage and, stopping to pick up his telescope from his rooms, drove to the heights of Passy to watch. They were too late. The municipality, which had declared martial law, had sent Lafayette and the National Guard to the scene. In response to a shot from the crowd, the militia opened fire, killing about fifty people. Morris's sympathies were with the militia, for to be

> paraded thro the Streets under a scorching Sun and then stand like Holiday Turkeys to be knocked down by Brick-Bats was a little more than they had Patience to Bear. . . . If the Militia had waited for Orders they might I fancy have been all knowcked down before they received any.[48]

The show of force had a curbing effect. Popular radical leaders such as Danton went into hiding, and the democratic movement was, for the moment, in retreat. Morris, encouraged, again toyed with the notion of taking a position in the ministry. On July 21, Mme de Ségur asked him on behalf of her husband if Morris would accept if one was offered. He told her he would "if they would give me Authority," and if the "King and Queen would promise to act according to my Advice." He heard no more of the matter. Several months later, when Bertrand de Moleville told Morris he had proposed him to Montmorin as minister of foreign affairs, Morris simply laughed.[49]

Yet he took his role as advisor more seriously than ever. He promised Montmorin to produce a plan for French finances on the condition that sufficient authority could be established to administer it.[50] He also wrote a proposed speech for the king to give in accepting the constitution, an action with serious repercussions for Morris. He had never been coy about his opinion, telling Short he considered the constitution "ridiculous." This was an opinion shared by many, including Étienne Dumont, who said it needed a bicameral legislature and a stronger executive and that it contained "too much republicanism for a monarchy, and too much of monarchy for a republic." Modern historians concur, and endorse Marie-Antoinette's assessment that the constitution was a "tissue of absurdities," noting that many of its clauses were "too general to be applicable or too topical to endure."[51]

As September 3, the day for the presentation of the constitution to the king, approached, Morris worked on the speech with Brémond and others, including a man named Jaubert, whose identity is uncertain; Pellinc, formerly a secretary to Mirabeau (who had died suddenly in early April); and Nicholas Bergasse, an attorney from Lyons. Bergasse had been a friend of Brissot de Warville, and, before the Revolution, a member of the mesmerist "Kornmann" group (the group believed the "corrupt society of the *ancien régime* prevented 'natural man' from achieving the mesmerist goal of harmony of nature";[52] it included Lafayette, Clavière, and Brissot.) Bergasse was by now disillusioned with the Revolution and worked as a counterrevolutionary pamphleteer.[53]

Morris wanted to make the king's acceptance of the constitution into an instrument for its revision—inviting correction of the constitution's faults without seeming to reject it. He began with the attention-getting statement "It is no longer your King who addresses you. Louis the Sixteenth is only a private individual. You have just offered him the crown, and informed him

on what conditions he must accept it." He then analyzed the constitution and its defects, noting that the declaration of rights was inconsistent with many of the provisions of the constitution itself, and pinpointing the lack of checks and balances needed to keep the Assembly from arrogating absolute power to itself. In truth, he argued, the constitution *gave* the Assembly absolute power and, should a faction achieve dominance in the Assembly (as successive factions were to do) there was no means of correction. This judgment has been echoed by George Lefebvre, among others, who has concluded that because the king was unable to effectively exercise his constitutional powers, the constitution established a "republic with no real government."[54]

Morris read the speech to Mme de Staël at her request. She was "very averse to so bold a Tone," but promptly told all of her acquaintances about it, infuriating Morris ("she is a devilish Woman," he fumed in his diary). Perhaps it is no coincidence that on September 3 Robespierre warned against incorporating proposed modifications to the constitution into the king's speech.[55]

Montmorin, who also found the speech "too forcible," told Morris that the king" found it difficult to swallow because it acknowleges the loss of the Crown." Morris, unabashed, gave him a memo for the king. The memo, like the proposed speech, did not mince words. It discussed the pernicious effects of the depreciation of *assignats* on France's commerce and manufactures, the destruction of private credit, and most particularly the harm to the poor, due to the hoarding and food shortages that would result. He predicted that these actions would lead to price-fixing, correctly anticipating the price controls of 1792 and the brutal "Law of the Maximum" of 1793. From painful experience, he also predicted that the army's discipline would suffer as the government's ability to pay diminished.

The king, Morris advised, should accept the constitution, but predict the specific problems it would produce, so that when those difficulties arose his insight would be acknowledged. Morris recommended that when the new Assembly violated the constitution, which he considered inevitable, the king should use his veto on the basis that *he* could not "violate his oath." Eventually, Morris predicted, the Assembly would be forced to confer power on the king; or the king might choose to "proclaim a new constitution."[56]

On September 12, Morris heard from both Brémond and Short that the king had "objected to the Speech prepared for him by Pelling [*sic*] in Consequence of a Memoire he had received in English." Short "felicitated"

Morris (who tried to deny any involvement), and then excoriated him in a letter to Jefferson.[57] However, the king accepted the constitution on September 14, and Montmorin told Morris he had not delivered the memo until *afterward*. Morris was disappointed and utterly disapproving of the king's unconditional and thus "*unmanly*" acceptance of the constitution. (Perhaps this was unjust to Louis, who had written a "Declaration" before the escape to Varennes, criticizing the constitution.) The king's advisors had "neither the Sense nor the Spirit the Occasion calls for," Morris wrote to Washington on the last day of September. "It is a general and almost universal Conviction that this Constitution is inexecutable. The Makers to a Man condemn it."[58]

Yet Morris may have had more influence than he realized. Louis wrote to his brothers on September 15 that "[b]y my adopting [the constitution's] principles and executing them in good faith, [my people] will come to know the cause of their misfortunes," and Moleville recorded that Louis told him, "My opinion is that the literal execution of the constitution is the best way of making the Nation see the alterations to which it is susceptible."[59]

Regardless of the reception by the monarchs, however, Morris's memos became the subject of considerable resentment even among those who acknowledged the constitution's defects, such as Brissot, who conceded that it had created an executive power "without energy and without confidence."[60] On October 4, the *Gazette Universelle*, a moderate paper, chastised Morris severely. The *Gazette* declared:

> [W]e know that there is in Paris an American who participated in the famous Philadelphia Convention . . . and that this American's name is Monsieur Morris. He has outlined reflections on our constitution in secret, and if they resemble those he has stated in private society, they must exude the most intolerable aristocracy: perhaps he does have the vain insolence to place his work under the eyes of the king, but it would be absurd to think it received any more attention than a hundred others of the same nature which other individuals have published in secret.[61]

The episode would dog Morris for the remainder of his stay in France, even when the constitution of 1791 was vilified by those in power. Less than a year after the king's acceptance, when the constitution lay in shreds and the king had fallen, Morris's "counsels against the principles of the Constitution" would be cited as a basis for demanding his recall. Yet Morris made no mention of the *Gazette* article in his diary, and its rebuke

had no restraining effect. Adèle had introduced him to de Laporte, the keeper of the Civil List (the king's personal funds), and Morris began giving him advice, which was well received.[62] The following summer, they would work together to plan the king's escape.

On October 1, 1791, the new Legislative Assembly, which Morris described as "deeply imbued with republican or rather democratical Principles," convened.[63] Although many more of the new deputies joined the *Feuillants* than the Jacobin Club, the new Jacobins were more talented politicians, particularly the deputies who came from the Gironde—the future Girondins.

The new Assembly's first diplomatic concerns involved the émigrés and the German princes who were aiding them. In August Leopold II of Austria (Marie-Antoinette's brother) and King Frederick-William II of Prussia had issued the Declaration of Pillnitz, which vaguely demanded restoration of Louis XVI and called on other European powers to take steps. The declaration was toothless, but provocative, and raised the level of anxiety in France. Louis had written angrily and accurately to his brothers,

> [H]ow can I persuade them that this Declaration is not based on your request? Will anyone ever believe that my own brothers are not carrying out my orders? For thus you portray me to the Nation as accepting [the constitution] with one hand and soliciting [intervention] from the Foreign Powers with the other. What virtuous man could respect such conduct? And you think you are serving me by depriving me of the respect of decent folk.[64]

The Girondins (or "Brissotins" after their best-known spokesman, Brissot de Warville), who steadily increased their power over the Assembly, were now pursuing a strategy of confrontation with the king in a number of areas. In November 1791, at Brissot's urging, the Assembly passed a decree against the émigré leaders, directing them to return to France within two months or have their lands confiscated and face possible punishment of death. The king vetoed the decree on November 11, and for the time being, his veto stood, raising his hopes that his constitutional authority would be effective. "Poor King," commented Morris, who had discussed the decree with Vicq d'Azyr. The queen had asked to see Morris's opinion in writing, and d'Azyr believed it had influenced the veto.[65]

In November, Pétion, a Girondin who had accompanied the royal family in its pitiful return from Varennes, defeated Lafayette in an election for mayor of Paris. Lafayette had resigned his commission as head of the

National Guard in October and returned to his home, Chavaniac, professing disinterest in being mayor and asserting that the Revolution was now complete. "The King and Queen detest him," Morris wrote to Robert.

> [T]he Princes and Nobles hold him in Contempt and abhorrence so that his Sun seems to be totally set unless he should put himself at the Head of the republican Party who at present are much opposed to him. All this results from Feebleness of Character and the Spirit of Intrigue, which bring forward the Courtier but ruin the Statesman. I am very sorry for him because I believe he meant well.[66]

The harvest of 1791 was poor, and the rapid depreciation of *assignats* made many farmers withhold their grain from market. The shortages led to price increases, fanning age-old French fears of hoarding and monopoly, contributing to the tension on the streets and the first stirrings of the radical *sans-culottes* throughout France. Morris worried that there would be famine the following spring, and pressed Montmorin to make plans for provisioning Paris with American flour, using the king's funds from the Civil List to give bread to the poor.[67] The public relations benefit of such a move seems clear, but the proposal was not taken up and Morris noted with frustration that Montmorin had "grown cold on this Scent. His Difficulties may be real but I grow tired of a Man who has always Difficulties."[68]

Nonetheless, Morris's connection with the hapless minister grew closer. In mid-October, Morris visited Montmorin and found him "much agitated." The minister's "Heart is full and he must unburthen it. That La Marck [a royalist friend] being gone he has Nobody but me whom he can trust." Montmorin was anguished to find that he was increasingly being left out of the king's deliberations, and confessed to Morris that he did not have "Force enough of Character to pursue the Measures which he knows to be right." ("This," said Morris to himself, "I well knew.")[69]

At the end of their discussion, Montmorin asked for "the greatest Secrecy in a Style which seems to beg my Pity for so much of human Weakness." He could not have found a more effective means of snaring Morris, whose compassion was the driving force for some of his most censured actions. Notwithstanding the American's lack of respect for Montmorin's fatalism and his admittedly declining influence—a decline confirmed by Malouet, another confidante of the king—Morris would not abandon Montmorin.[70]

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During the late fall of 1791, calls for war began to grow louder in Paris. This made unlikely bedfellows of the Girondins, who hoped to preempt strikes by Austria and Prussia as well as to spread revolution throughout Europe, and the court, which hoped the revolutionary armies would be defeated and the monarchy restored to authority or, alternatively, that having the armies under the command of the constitutionalists would secure royal authority. The court's hopes fed the Girondins' fears of invasion and treachery, and condemnation of "the Austrian Committee" (a group believed to be conniving with the queen and émigrés, described by Dumont as a "sort of invisible power against which they might bring whatever charges they pleased")[71] began to appear regularly in Girondin speeches and journals.

Morris no longer advocated war, given the changes in the political situation. "The king's true interest," he wrote to Washington, "seems to consist in preserving the Peace, and leaving the Assembly to act as they may think proper, which will demonstrate the Necessity of restoring in a great Degree the royal Authority." He did not support those at the court who considered "War as the Means of obtaining for the Government the eventual command of disciplined military Force, which may be used to restore Order, in other words to bring back Despotism."[72]

In early December, Louis appointed Narbonne, Mme de Staël's longtime lover and Talleyrand's friend, minister of war. Morris disapproved, to Mme de Staël's irritation, telling her that whoever took the job would be dropped after a few months, as indeed, Narbonne was.[73] The king also appointed Delessart minister of foreign affairs. Although all were of moderate *Feuillant* bent, the *Feuillants* were by now experiencing renewed tension between the former Lameth followers—who included Delessart—and those who had been associated with the Society of 1789, including Narbonne and Moleville. As a result, these appointments resulted in a ministry "extremely disjointed in itself, and strongly opposed by the Assembly" and possessing only a "moderate share of talents."[74]

Pursuant to Louis's intention, Narbonne pushed for war, and on Christmas Day 1791, Lafayette was sent to take command of the Army of the Center. This disconcerted Brissot, who had been publicly suggesting that Louis wanted peace, and that this was all the more reason to go to war.[75] The plans required a neutral England, and Talleyrand was sent to London in January 1792 to try to obtain a promise of neutrality or an alliance. The object was to "counterballance Austria and the offer to England is the Isle of France and Tobago," Morris learned from Brémond. "This is a most wretched Policy," he concluded, and advised Moleville to oppose the mission.[76]

Morris believed Pitt would use the approach to help break the French Family Compact with Spain for good, and as leverage in negotiating with Spain and Austria. However, although Morris thought the British could exploit the French offer, the British ambassador, Lord Gower, also opposed the mission—perhaps because he distrusted Talleyrand, for whom he expressed "a profound Contempt mixed with abhorrence."[77] (Morris was by now a frequent guest at the British legation, where he and his hosts conversed "very freely.") Morris's own opinion of Talleyrand had not improved, for he saw that Talleyrand "constantly places himself between two Stools, [and] will never have a secure Seat."[78]

A few days after Talleyrand departed, on January 22, 1792, Morris also left for London on business. Before he left, Vicq d'Azyr called again, to tell him that the queen would like to be apprised of "any Thing in England Interesting to them."[79] He would not return until early May, by which time he would be the new minister plenipotentiary from America to France.

As he had watched the Revolution light new fuses and pull free of the grasp of its creators, Morris had steadily diversified and strengthened his ties in France into a complex tangle of love, business, and politics. His pessimism about the Revolution remained unchanged and his predictions continued to be borne out, but Morris's sensibilities led him to try to help what he more than once acknowledged was doomed to be the losing side—and a side whose principles he did not entirely agree with—and to spell out a line of conduct he believed would be both effective and best for France. He gave advice none of them would adopt: not Lafayette, not Montmorin, not Louis.

Now, with the end of 1791, Morris's days as a private citizen were numbered. Unknown to him, Washington had finally found the time was ripe to appoint official American representatives to three courts in Europe. The choice that generated the most controversy was that for France.