Envoy to the Terror

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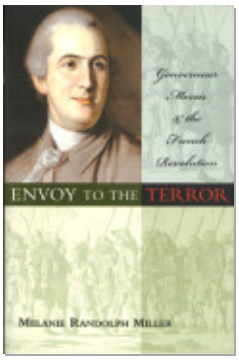

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Chapter Eleven

Morris Confronts the New Republic

The fall of the king not only metamorphosed France but also the role of its American minister. His primary assignment before August 10 had been to keep a weather eye for opportunities to promote trade; thereafter, he was virtually alone at the center of a whirlwind of cries for help from those swept up in the chaos.

Some historians consider that he acquitted himself brilliantly. Theodore Roosevelt wrote in 1898 that Morris's service "stands by itself in diplomatic history."[1] Other historians believe he worsened French-American relations: Alexander DeConde even claims that Morris "destroyed" the French-American alliance.[2] These are very serious charges, and make examination of his conduct and experience not simply intriguing but important.

The French rulers after August 10, 1792 bore no resemblance to the government Jefferson had worked with. Contrary to William Short's lament, Morris had not been placed in a bed of roses. "People abroad can form no Idea of what passes here nor do I think any force of Description would convey it," Morris wrote to Pinckney during the Terror. Jefferson had not been faced with even one of the same desperate issues that cornered Morris.[3] Even in our day, while there have been American diplomats who have had to cope in countries in violent paroxysm, Morris's experience remains unique. He dealt with seven different heads of foreign affairs representing five significant (usually violent) shifts in power, with virtually no input from his own government. "[I]f I get through this mission honorably, it will be a Master Piece," he wrote to Robert in June 1793; "and yet nine out of ten will say it was the easiest Thing in Nature."[4]

Over and over again, he had to make painful choices he knew could leave people to the misery of the prisons or the stairs of the scaffold. As a lawyer, he was keenly aware of the requirements of international law and the constraints on his authority and stayed strictly within those limits in his official acts, though it pained him terribly to deny anyone's plea for

help.[5] He himself was in danger, for those who patrolled the streets and sent people to prison for merely appearing "suspect" were ignorant of the concept of diplomatic immunity. He was arrested more than once, and his house was entered several times. His letters were opened regularly, and sometimes seized.

His role as a conspirator for the king may not have ended with August 10 but the evidence remains to be found. Morris, unlike Lord Gower, refused to burn his papers in the wake of August 10, but the subsequent violation of the Venetian ambassador's papers and the entry of Morris's house on August 29 may have convinced him that a certain amount of discretion would be wise. In any event, the Morris papers currently known—other than a 1796 memorandum and his diaries—do not address the summer escape efforts or any post-August 10 activities on behalf of the royal family. The diaries themselves, after August 10, say virtually nothing, until the tantalizing statement in the last entry of volume 4, dated January 5, 1793: "The Situation of Things is such that to continue this Journal would compromise many People, unless I go on in the Way I have done since the End of August, in which Case it must be insipid and useless," Morris wrote. "I prefer therefore the more simple Measure of putting an End to it."[6] We do not know whether this implies *involvement* with "People" who could be compromised, or simply that he was receiving intelligence of their activities.

He kept up a steady flow of dispatches to Jefferson and letters to Washington, which even those historians who dislike him the most do not describe as inaccurate or unjust. They contained detailed descriptions of the military campaigns and of the political situation, including many accurate predictions, both in the short and long term. They were countered, however, by the rhapsodic letters of men such as Paine and Barlow, who accused Morris of presenting a deliberately negative view of France. Those attacks had an effect that would have grieved Morris: in August 1793 Washington told his cabinet that there were such "contradictory accounts" of the political situation in France "that no one could tell what to believe."[7]

The difficulties Morris faced included arrests of Americans, Frenchmen, and British citizens; the imprisonment of Lafayette; seizures of American ships despite America's declared neutrality, and the issuance of decrees detrimental to American commerce; his relationship with the successive parties in power; and the knowledge that his actions, frequently in vain because of the government's chaos, were most likely misjudged in the

United States and unappreciated by those he toiled for. Moreover, these two years were in the context of an utterly changed Paris, where his dearest friends were gone—dead or in exile—and the capital's famous entertainments and intellectual life, the pleasures that had seduced Jefferson and Short and Morris in the first place, were snuffed out. On Christmas Eve 1792, he ended a letter to Robert with his good wishes for what "is with you a festive Season. I write from a Place deserted by its former Inhabitants where in almost every Countenance you can mark the Traces of present Woe and of dismal Forebodings." He told his friend Mme de Corny "all that I love has abandoned Paris." Much as he wanted to leave, however, he remained. On December 30, 1793, he wrote sympathetically to the consul at Bordeaux that "Your Situation in the Midst of this Turmoil cannot but be disagreable. You must console yourself as I do with the Reflection that an honest Man's highest Enjoyment lies in the Consciousness of having done his duty."[8]

RECOGNITION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

The deposition of the king and suspension of the constitution placed the United States in a novel and uncertain position regarding diplomatic relations with France. The government of France—the *court* of France—to which America's minister had been accredited, no longer existed, and "[t]he present Executive is just born and may perhaps be stifled in the Cradle," Morris wrote to Jefferson on August 16. Immediate issues presented themselves: Would the United States recognize the new government? Would Morris need new credentials? If so, what would be his relationship with the provisional Executive Council in the meantime? Would the treaties remain in force? Could the American debt to France be paid to the new government? The situation required America to break new ground in its foreign policy, and Morris's first step, as the remainder of the diplomatic corps prepared for departure, was an anxious request for instructions:

> Before I conclude this Letter permit me my dear Sir to request the orders of the President respecting my Line of Conduct in the Circumstances about to arise. Perhaps these orders may not reach me until the Circumstances are past but even then they may serve as a Ground to Reason on in the Circumstances which succeed. If they arrive in Season they will relieve my mind from a great Weight. At

> present I feel myself in a State of contingent Responsibility of the most delicate Kind. I am far from wishing to avoid any fair and reasonable Risque, and I rely on the Justice of Government at the same Time to mark out as exactly as possible the Conduct to be pursued as well as on its Goodness to judge favorably of Cases unforeseen.[9]

A week later, after meditating on the matter, he wrote Jefferson his own thoughts. He agreed with Short that staying in Paris would be taken as an acknowledgment of the new order; contrary to Short, he thought such recognition appropriate:

> Going hence however would look like taking Part against the late Revolution and I am not only unauthoriz'd in this Respect but I am bound to suppose that if the great Majority of the Nation adhere to the new Form the United States will approve thereof because in the first Place we have no Right to prescribe to this Country the Government they shall adopt and next because the Basis of our own Constitution is the indefeasible Right of the People to establish it.[10]

Jefferson did not receive this letter until December, but it conformed to his own view, which he sent to Morris on November 7, that America's principles required acknowledging as rightful any government "formed by the will of the nation substantially declared."[11] However, Jefferson did not consider such a government to currently exist in France, for the Convention's declaration of a republic had not yet arrived in America. In the meantime, Jefferson directed that Morris could transact only limited business with the interim government, including appealing against duties on American tobacco and promoting commerce with the French West Indies. He ordered debt payments suspended, which lasted until the end of the year, when he and Washington agreed that the assembling of the National Convention was a sufficient establishment of the new government.[12] Jefferson never did address the issue of new credentials.

RECOGNITION AND THE DEBT PAYMENTS

In ordering suspension of the debt payments, Jefferson was in the unlikely company of Hamilton and Short, and against the more accommodating position taken by Morris, at least regarding the debt payment agreed to before the tenth of August. While none of the historians of the episode censure his decision to proceed, and the feared consequences—that

France would under a successive regime deny credit for the payment—never materialized, Morris got no acknowledgment for the decision from either the French or his own government.[13] This episode is rife with irony.

In the fall of 1790, Hamilton assigned Short to handle the American debt payments. Short was buoyed by the thought that the assignment made his appointment to France far more likely, but he did not relish bearing such a responsibility alone, and tried unsuccessfully to get Hamilton to appoint additional agents.[14] It is therefore no surprise that as soon as news of Morris's appointment arrived in 1792, Short tried, as Morris later put it, to "get his Neck out of the Collar," claiming, disingenuously, that the government's decision marked a "want of confidence" in him and must mean that the debt assignment was transferred to Morris.[15] Neither he nor Morris received any instructions indicating such a transfer, however. Indeed, by late June 1792 Short had received numerous letters from Hamilton, postdating Morris's appointment, which effectively put him on notice to the contrary, while Morris heard nothing.[16]

Morris was at first convinced by Short, and agreed to take over the matter at hand, which was to set a mutually agreeable depreciation compensation with the French treasury. He also continued trying to obtain a decree to use debt payments for provisions in America for the relief of the French colonists of Santo Domingo, laid waste by a slave revolt. He had little luck: he wrote repeatedly that summer to the minister of the navy and the commissaries of the treasury and either received no response or was left waiting at rendezvous they were unable to keep.[17] Short, growing anxious about the dead interest on Dutch loans raised for the purpose, hounded Morris from The Hague. "You urge me much upon the Subject of the Monies lying in our Bankers Hands, but what can I do?" Morris answered in frustration on July 23. (Short later told Jefferson that if it hadn't been for Morris the payment would not have been delayed.)[18] At last, on August 6, Morris and the commissaries reached agreement on the exchange rate to be used, and Morris immediately wrote to Short directing him to make the next payment in Amsterdam.

Short received Morris's instructions *after* August 10, possibly as late as August 17, the same day he received a letter from Hamilton unequivocally indicating what he had undoubtedly known all along, that he, not Morris, was still in charge of the debt payments.[19] Although he wrote Morris on that date and mentioned Hamilton's letter, he did *not* tell Morris about this part of the letter. This was a deliberate omission; but Morris, in the meantime, had become increasingly certain that Hamilton had not intended him to handle the matter, and said so to Short, who accused him

of trying to get out of the affair, still without saying a word of Hamilton's directive.[20]

Nonetheless, Short agreed on August 17 to proceed with the payment. As the news that he had never ceased being in charge of the debt sank in, however, he grew uneasy about paying what he called "the usurpers in France," worrying that America would be in a bad position if they should fall.[21] The notion of being held accountable drove Short to distraction. He therefore attempted to enforce his reservations by insisting that the receipt for the money be given in the name of the fallen king, to the consternation of the French bankers in Holland. Morris, the eternal realist and experienced lawyer, strongly disagreed with him, and the two exchanged increasingly testy letters while the money languished in Holland and the bankers grew restive and the Girondin ministers grew incensed. "Now I will not enter into any Question respecting the Competency of the present Government," Morris wrote Short sharply at one point. "The Corner Stone of our own Constitution is the Right of the People to establish such Government as they think proper. In this Country Reason may perhaps say one Thing and Force another; but putting all that aside, I think it proper to adhere to the original Nature and Form of the present Payment." Finally, in September, Short capitulated and had the money paid.[22]

As he later explained to Hamilton, Morris's strategy was deliberate: he knew that the new government would "urge us for Money in the double View of obtaining an Acknowlegement of *them* as well as of supplying *their* Wants."[23] By making the payment arranged for with the *previous* government, Morris reasoned, nothing more was immediately due, and the issue of recognition could be postponed while he waited for instructions. The subtlety was lost on Clavière, now restored as finance minister, who argued that the payment constituted recognition.[24] Short's delay until September, which Morris had not anticipated, strengthened this position. So, just as Morris dourly predicted, rather than getting credit for having pushed through the payment, the French instead blamed him for being unwilling to make additional payments.[25]

Of course, it was to be expected that the American minister's relations with the new Girondin ministry were not cordial. The Girondins were dominated by Brissot, who detested Morris, and they were quite aware of his association with their predecessors, if not the full extent of his activities. On August 29, Morris was summoned to meet with Étienne Clavière; Lebrun, the new minister of foreign affairs; and Monge, the new minister of the navy. Lebrun, a former cleric, had also been a journalist who was

known as a "democrat." His friendship with Brissot gained him the ministry; a year or so later it would lead to his execution.[26]

The ministers wished Morris "to enter into a Contract to furnish $400,000 [of debt payments] in America for the Use of Santo Domingo," he recorded in his diary.

> I shew them many Reasons why I cannot and among others tell them that I am not authoriz'd to treat with them. This touches them unpleasantly. I add that I will write and recommend the Matter strongly to the Ministers of the United States but that is not what they want. Clavière is much vexed.[27]

Morris elaborated on the conversation to Jefferson: "The great object," he told the secretary, "was to get the Money." Morris told them

> (which is very true) that I felt a very sincere desire to furnish Aid to that unhappy Colony, and had done everything in my Power to comply with the wish of the Legislature in that Respect, but in vain.

He explained to them that any agreement he might make would be void, "because I had no Powers to treat with the present Government."

> [Clavière said] [t]hat it was impossible I should have any Difficulty if I inclin'd to do what they ask'd, and then concluded by asking me peremptorily whether I would or would not.[28]

Clavière's insulting tone offended Morris. "[A]ltho I would pardon much to a Man whose Stockjobbing Life had not much qualified him for a Station in which Delicacy of Manner and Expression are almost essential, yet I could not submit to an Indignity in my Person towards the Country I represent," he told Jefferson. "I told him therefore that I did not understand what he meant to say. My Countenance I believe spoke the Rest of my Statement." Morris suspected that the demand was motivated by what he called a "private speculation," a suspicion he confirmed later:

> T]his Speculation would have been a good one to the Parties who would have gain'd (and the french Nation of Course have lost) about fifty Thousand Pounds Sterling in less than Eighty thousand. I was inform'd at that Time that the disappointed Parties would attempt to

> have me recall'd, and some more tractable Character sent, who would have had the Good Sense to take Care of his own Interest.[29]

Whether this "speculation" related to the joint projects of the Girondins and William Smith and Stephen Sayre, discussed in chapter 9, is uncertain. Regardless, Clavière's corruption is established, and it calls the bona fides of his denunciation of Morris into serious question, for he was at this time desperate for money—six months later, in Philadelphia, paintings belonging to Clavière were put on sale.[30]

The day after their meeting, Morris received a curt note from Lebrun. Talleyrand told him it had been drafted by Brissot "and that their Intention is to force me into an Acknowlegement of the present Governmt." The gist of it was that the king was only suspended, and that therefore Morris could not refuse their request unless ordered by his government (his "Court or his constituents"). Morris wrote back with barely concealed anger that he could do no more than he had already offered, and that without instructions any agreement not authorized by "my Court" could be invalidated.[31] Talleyrand urged Morris to leave Paris and Morris appears to have been swayed, for he closed his letter with an observation that Lebrun's tone obliged him to request a passport to leave France.

This threat unsettled Lebrun and perhaps Brissot, for on September 8 Morris recorded that the minister had sent "an indirect Apology for his impertinent Letter and therefore I shall stay." The apology probably came through James Swan, for Morris had told him "his friend Brissot, instead of promoting, had spoilt his Business and would drive me out of the Country." It was made more formal in a letter of September 16, which Morris accepted, again telling Lebrun that "I have never questioned the right of every People to be governed as they please," and expressing his hope that France should "enjoy all possible liberty and happiness."[32]

On September 10, after Lebrun's "indirect Apology" but before his formal apology of September 16, Clavière complained bitterly to Lebrun, calling Morris a "dangerous man," and accusing him of repugnance for the new government. "I ask you, my dear colleague, to reflect carefully on this minister whose ill will has been proved. . . . I think therefore that it is necessary not only to inform the United States of his conduct, but to ask them to recall him."[33]

Apparently in response, Lebrun sent a letter of complaint to the French minister to America, Ternant (Morris's friend since Valley Forge), concerning Morris's insistence on waiting for instructions.[34] On September 19, he

started another letter, noting Morris's request for a passport, but instructing Ternant not to raise the subject until negotiations regarding provisions shipments were complete. Before he finished the letter, however, he received Morris's cordial reply to his overture of September 16, indicating that he would stay on and await instructions from America. Lebrun added a postscript directing Ternant that, in view of Morris's declared intention to stay, he should "abstain from all remarks and all approaches" to Jefferson on the matter.[35]

Oddly, Ternant, despite his friendship with Morris, disobeyed this last injunction; on receiving the letters in mid-February 1793, he presented extracts to Jefferson.[36] The complaint—though it arose from conduct that conformed to the line laid out by Jefferson—along with the reports of William Smith described earlier, led Washington to determine on February 20 that Morris must be recalled. He told Jefferson that he

> saw that G. Morris could no longer be continued there consistent with the public good, that the moment was critical in our favor and ought not to be lost . . . I asked him whether G. Morris and Pinckney might not change places. He said that would be a sort of remedy, but not a radical one. That if the French ministry conceived G.M. to be hostile to them, if they had been jealous merely on his proposing to visit London, they would never be satisfied with us placing him at London permanently.

Washington tried to persuade Jefferson, who had already given notice of his intention to resign as secretary of state, to take the position. Jefferson was adamant that he "could never again cross the Atlantic" and argued that the best place to improve relations with France was in the United States since the new minister from France, Genet, was due to arrive. Washington enlisted Edmund Randolph, the attorney general, to ask Jefferson again or, failing that, Madison, but when both refused, Washington agreed to take no action until Genet's arrival.[37]

There the matter remained throughout the duration of Jefferson's tenure as secretary. Washington never told Morris about this episode. What is most interesting, however, is the fact that Jefferson's objections to Morris did *not* rise to the level of taking what might have seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to get rid of him. This point is reinforced by the fact that Genet, Ternant's a successor, hinted to Jefferson in April 1793 that the French wanted Morris recalled—but Jefferson did not take the

hint; he did not pursue it and he did not pass it on to Washington until the following December.[38]

Morris knew that the French had complained. On November 12, he wrote Short that as a result of the debt disagreement, "the whole Council are personally my Enemies," no small inconvenience "under the Circumstances in which I have liv'd for the last three months and which has I know excited Representations in America to my Disadvantage."[39] He sent Hamilton copies of his correspondence with Short and Lebrun, to establish the record against the French complaint. Hamilton would use them in his own defense when, thanks to Jefferson, his actions regarding the French debt were investigated by Congress in early 1793.[40]

The French also attacked Short for delaying the August payment and for socializing with France's enemies in The Hague.[41] Morris defended Short to Lebrun, but Lebrun also complained through Ternant to Jefferson. Short was outraged and blamed Morris.[42] His anger was exacerbated by Jefferson's allegation that Hamilton was trying to make Short a scapegoat. (Jefferson was mistaken about this; Hamilton's account of Short's actions was accurate.)[43] Morris anticipated that Short would try to shift responsibility, and his patience was exhausted when he wrote to Hamilton in December 1792:

> You will see that there is on one Side either a real Want of Comprehension or else a desire to place all Blame on the Shoulders of your Friend. If I may judge by what I have seen from Scipio [Jefferson] this latter View is seconded. Now you know that I hate little Things as much as you do and more I cannot. Therefore my good Friend keep me clear of little People. If ever I am destin'd to act in that Business let me have a clear Line drawn and I will go strait forward but do not put me to the Draught with a Horse who looks behind him and tries to get his Neck out of the Collar.

Referring to Short's chagrin at not being appointed to France, he added:

> You must observe too that Men sometimes decline thro an apparent modesty to do their Duty when they mean thereby only to shew a resentful Sense of Disappointment . . . Read mark learn and inwardly digest these Hints.

In the end, Hamilton was absolved by Congress, and neither Short nor Morris was censured for their conduct in the matter.[44]

RECOGNITION AND PREEXISTING TREATIES

Morris and Jefferson found themselves on the same side, and opposed to Hamilton, regarding the continued validity of America's 1778 treaties with France. While there were plausible contrary arguments, Morris told Jefferson, he urged "that all our Treaties (however onerous) may be strictly fulfilled according to their true Intent and meaning. The honest Nation," he wrote, "is that which like the honest Man 'hath to its plighted Faith and vow forever firmly stood, and tho it promise to its Loss yet makes that Promise good.' I feel nevertheless," he added tactfully, "the full Force" of Jefferson's observation that until France had a regular form of government, America would not know "in what matter or to what Persons our Obligations are to be acquitted."[45] Jefferson received this letter in April 1793, a time when the issue was of great concern because of the war between France and England; many feared that the treaty would require the United States to go to war against Britain. A week later, Jefferson recommended to Washington that the treaty continue to be considered valid and obtained his concurrence. Although the opinion relied on the writings of jurists, its purport was identical to Morris's comments.[46]

Negotiation of a new commercial treaty had been on Jefferson's mind for a long time, and he had instructed Morris to try to have the negotiations transferred to America. The turmoil in the summer of 1792 had made it impossible to get a commitment, but after August 10 a new opportunity seemed to present itself. Morris knew that war between France and England would lead France to neglect its colonies, with the result, as he told Jefferson, that their "whole Commerce falls naturally into the Lap of America." Accordingly, on November 22, he went to Lebrun. The ostensible motive was to request an exception to the "Decree against Emigrants in Favor of those who were in the United States," but Morris also expressed the hope that the French-American alliance would be preserved, and that he thought an Anglo-American alliance would not happen. He pointed out, however, that the British would probably attempt to "inculcate the Opinion that our Treaty having been made with the king was void by the Revolution. [Lebrun] said that such an Opinion was absurd." Encouraged, Morris went on:

> I told him (premising in this Place, that the whole Conversation was unofficial and unauthoriz'd on my Part from Circumstances he was well acquainted with) that my private Sentiments were similar to his but I

> thought it would be well to evince a Degree of Good Will to America which might prevent disagreable Impressions and had therefore taken the Liberty to suggest the Exception in Favor of Emigrants &ca.

Here, the adroit Morris changed the subject, leaving it to percolate. "Now I knew well that some of the Leaders here who are in the diplomatic Committee hate me cordially tho it would puzzle them to say why, and I was determin'd rather to turn that Disposition to account than to change it," he wrote Jefferson. He hoped France would pursue a new commercial treaty, thereby deflecting American interest in a treaty with Britain, and that "both Parties might be brought to bid at your Auction." It seems to have worked, for Genet went to America with powers to negotiate a new treaty.[47]

MORRIS AND THE NEW MINISTRY

Morris's approach to Lebrun was also timed to take advantage of a frankly remarkable strategy of using his contacts to repair relations with the new ministry. His agent was a man named Piquet, whom he had met through the banker Le Couteulx, and who was in the business of providing information to diplomats. Piquet apparently knew General Westermann, leader of the uprising of August 10, and traveled to his camp at Valenciennes—Westermann was on the eve of attacking Brussels—to renew their acquaintance and to convince Westermann (surely by bribery) to write a letter commending Morris. Westermann obliged. It is hard to imagine a more unlikely source of a reference for Morris, but it may have helped. "Citizen Piquet . . . being the intimate friend of the U.S. representative, has informed me of all that has taken place between the executive council and that representative, who was a little angry about the manner in which he was treated," the letter began. Piquet had assured Westermann, the general told Lebrun, that he would smooth things over, and that Morris would arrange to have rice and other necessary provisions sent from America. Lebrun replied politely that he often saw Piquet and would "profit" from the information from Westermann. Piquet would later head the Committee of Commerce and Provisions, a very useful position from Morris's standpoint.[48]

Morris was naturally distressed by continuing ignorance of the views of his government. He wrote to Washington at the end of October 1792 that he had told Jefferson "repeatedly my Wish to have positive Instructions."

At the same time, he was willing to be sacrificed if necessary. "The United States may wish to temporize and see how Things are like to end, and in such Case leaving me at large with the Right reserv'd to avow or disavow me . . . is for the Government an eligible Position."[49]

He also asked Hamilton about American public opinion. "Will it be taken for granted that Louis the sixteenth was guilty of all possible Crimes and particularly of the enormous one of not suffering his throat to be cut which was certainly a nefarious Plot against the People and a manifest Violation of the Bill of Rights"? he asked with stinging irony. He went on to give a vivid sketch, unsoftened by official dispatch niceties, of the tension between the Girondins and the radical Montagnards:

> The one consists of about half a dozen and the other of fifteen or twenty who are at Dagger's Drawing. Each Claims the Merit of having begotten the young Republic upon the Body of the Jacobine Club and notwithstanding the Dispute is very loud and open the People is as fond of the Child as if it were its Own. But this has a Relation to antient Manners for there has been a Practice here from Time whereof there is no Memory of Man to the contrary viz that one Sett of Men were employ'd in getting children for another Sett.[50]

"It is not worth while," he added, "to detail the Characters of those now on the Stage because they must soon give Place to others."

Yet, although Morris expressed his misgivings frankly, the Girondins erred in assuming that he would try to turn the American government against the new regime. He accepted the advent of the Republic with his usual mixture of mildly hopeful idealism tempered with hardheaded skepticism. "[T]he great decided effective Majority is now for the Republic," he told Jefferson in late October 1792, but whether it would endure for even six months "must depend on the Form of Government which shall be presented by the Convention" and whether it could

> strike out that happy Mean which secures all the Liberty which Circumstances will admit of combin'd with all the Energy which the same Circumstances require; Whether they can establish an Authority which does not exist, as a Substitute (and always a dangerous Substitute) for that Respect which cannot be restor'd after so much has been to destroy it; Whether in crying down and even ridiculing Religion they will be able on the tottering and uncertain Base of

> metaphisic Philosophy to establish a solid Edifice of Morals, these are Questions which Time must solve.[51]

At the same time he predicted to Rufus King that "we shall have I think some sharp struggles which will make many men repent of what they have done when they find with Macbeth that they have but taught bloody Instructions which return to plague the Inventor."[52]

THE AFTERMATH OF AUGUST 10

While Morris was sparring with the new ministry, the society he had known was disintegrating. Lafayette, who deserted his army on August 19, fled toward Holland hoping to escape to America. He was captured by the Austrians, found guilty of lèse-majesté (committing a crime against a sovereign power), and imprisoned in the Prussian fortress of Wesel. "He has spent his Fortune on a Revolution and is now crush'd by the wheel which he put in Motion," Morris wrote somberly to Jefferson, adding, "He lasted longer than I expected."[53]

From Prussia Lafayette importuned the three American ministers in Europe to claim him as an American citizen, a desperate appeal that embarrassed and agonized them with its impropriety. On September 10, Mme de Lafayette was detained at their country home of Chavaniac. Morris would help them both to survive their ordeals of the next several years.

In the last days of August, at Danton's instigation, there was a general search of Parisian residences for "hidden arms and suspects." Three thousand people were arrested and thrown into the already overcrowded prisons. Morris's house was also searched "in Consequence of a Denunciation made by some Blockhead," he reported to Jefferson. "I made them sensible of the Impropriety of their Conduct, told them that I had no Arms and that if I had they should not touch one of them." He did not tell Jefferson that as soon as the *commissaires de section* had left, Bigot de Sainte-Croix (the last royal foreign minister) came to take refuge with him.[54]

The fear that the enemy was hurtling toward Paris reached a peak in the first week of September 1792. Longwy had fallen to the Prussians on August 23 and on August 30 Morris wrote to Pinckney of a plan to fortify Paris. "But this is a Revolution indeed," he remarked in an afterthought. "Every thing is new and I fear that few of these new things will ever be old."[55]

On September 2 Morris and Adèle heard that "the Enemy are at the Gates of Paris, which cannot be true. . . . I observe that this Proclamation

produces Terror and Despair among the People."[56] The immediate result was the dreadful massacres of September, a "Week of uncheck'd Murders" in the city's prisons, where all "those who were confin'd, either on the accusation or Suspicion of Crimes"—many of them nonjuring priests—were slaughtered. Morris later commented that "[t]he reason for that massacre will be found, perhaps, in the old adage, *dead men tell no tales*," a reference to rumors that Danton and others allegedly behind the massacres had been involved with efforts to avert the events of August 10; efforts that would, if revealed, expose them to the fatal charge of treason.[57]

"The Kennels of all Streets in Paris were tinged with Blood," wrote James Mountflorence, an American acquaintance,[58] and Morris told Jefferson:

> Madame de Lamballe was I believe the only Woman kill'd, and she was beheaded and embowelled, the Head and Entrails were paraded on Pikes thro the Street and the body dragged after them. . . . Yesterday the Prisoners from Orleans were put to Death at Versailles. . . . A Guard had been sent a few Days since to make the Duke de la Rochefoucault Prisoner. He was on his way to Paris, under their Escort, with his wife and Mother when he was taken out of his Carriage and killed. . . . Monsieur de Montmorin was among those slain at the Abbaye.[59]

Whether or not Morris himself saw the pitiful remains of the princesse de Lamballe, he certainly saw things equally terrible. "What will be your Feelings at the Scenes which have lately passed," he wrote to Robert at the end of September. "I will not pretend to describe what I wish to forget, and I fear also that a just Picture would be attributed rather to the Glow of Imagination than the lively coloring of Nature."[60] He had warned Jefferson of likely famine in France the following spring, and suggested Robert confer with him on shipping flour.

Meanwhile, Morris's circle was disappearing. Lord Gower had received orders to leave on August 20 and was instructed to threaten the new government "if they injure the King." They could not get their passports immediately, putting Gower into "in a tearing Passion. . . . They give me broad Hints that Honor requires of me to quit the Country," Morris noted. His response to the ambassador's display of temper was absolutely characteristic: "The Weather is pleasant and I am very gay, which he can hardly

bear." When Morris went back to the embassy later in the week, nerves were still raw:

> [A] fter Dinner the Venetian Embassador comes with Mr. Tronchin. This last says the Assembly have permitted the Corps diplomatique to depart, but not other Strangers. I laugh a little too much at the Distresses of the Baron Grand Cour and Ld. Gower gets a little too much in a Passion with Ld. Stair.[61]

The next day, preparing for a dinner party, Morris learned that his coconspirator of the past few months, de Laporte, was on his way to be executed. "The Weather is very pleasant," he added inconsequentially, as though numb, giving no hint of the distress the news must have caused him. The situation must have seemed unreal.

Others were escaping, most of them to England. Malouet and Monciel saw each other in Boulogne, waiting to cross the Channel.[62] Monciel had bribed the flexible Westermann (probably using some of the king's funds) for fake papers, and traveled in disguise. He would write Morris a largely illegible but cheerful note from London on September 16, and later worked in Switzerland with British agents sending propaganda into France.[63] Talleyrand, who submerged his scruples sufficiently to draft a defense of August 10 for Danton's signature, received a passport in return and left for London in early September. His continuing contacts with the Girondins (perhaps related to an attempt to obtain a separate peace with England, mentioned in a January 1794 dispatch in the British archives)[64] may have contributed to the British decision to order him to leave in January 1794. He went to America, and while there arranged an enormous purchase of lands in Pennsylvania from the by then desperate Robert Morris, but never came through on the payments.[65]

Adèle and her son went to England as well, using two of four forged passports she had obtained by bribing the assistant secretary of the Paris Commune.[66] A third went to her husband, who was never able to use it, and the last to Moleville, which very likely saved his life. Madame de Staël left for Switzerland. By October, all of the diplomatic corps in Paris, with the possible exception of two chargés, had departed, urging Morris to do the same.[67]

Under these circumstances—especially parting with Adèle—Morris must have wanted to leave too. In October, the months of strain got the better of him, and he fell ill. For several weeks, he wrote one-line remarks in the diary concerning the weather, and few letters.[68]

"The Path of Life in Paris is no longer strew'd with Roses as you may well imagine, indeed it is extremely painful," he wrote to Jefferson. Paris was not safe, even for someone entitled to diplomatic immunity, and Morris decided to look for quarters outside the flashpoint of the city. The search led him to the riverside village of Seine-Port, about twenty miles from his Paris legation, and to the purchase of what he would fondly call his "little Country Box." He was not able to take up residence until April 1793 due to the difficulty in obtaining a passport to cross the city barriers.[69] Morris was uneasy about how his decision would be received, but Jefferson had already sent a letter giving him permission to move.[70]

He left his secretary, twenty-four-year old Henry W. Livingston, (son of Morris's old friend Walter Livingston), whom he had hired the summer before, to man the desk in Paris. He continued to perform his ministerial duties, and came to Paris regularly, but clearly took comfort in the asylum of the countryside, tending to his small gardens and reading; his account book (Morris called it his "Waste Book") shows substantial acquisitions of books during this period. "If Peace were restor'd," he wrote his brother Staats, "I would press you to enjoy a french Air on the Banks of the Seine in my Hermitage where you would be in the Neighborhood of many Objects worth riding to look at if it were only to gain Appetite for a Bottle of good Claret and a Slice of small Mutton."[71]

During the fall of 1792, the tide turned for the French military. On September 22, the day after the National Convention declared France a republic, Dumouriez triumphed over the Prussians at the battle of Valmy. The Duchy of Savoy was taken, and Nice. "Fortune has hitherto smil'd on the french Arms in a Manner unexpected to themselves and it may perhaps continue to do so," Morris wrote to Jefferson in late October, two weeks before Dumouriez clinched the invasion of Belgium with a victory over the Austrians at the battle of Jemappes.[72]

Military success did not restore stability to France, however, for the Girondins and Montagnards were in constant conflict. "You will see by the Gazettes," Morris commented to Jefferson,

> that there is the same Enmity between the present Chiefs which prevailed heretofore against those whom they considered as their common Enemies, and if either of the present Parties should get the better, they would probably again divide; for Party like Matter is divisible ad infinitum, because things which depend on human Opinion can never be tried by any common Standard.[73]

In early December, he wrote perhaps his most eloquent appraisal of the tragic turn of the Revolution, to Thomas Pinckney. "Success as you will see, continues to crown the French Arms, but it is not our Trade to judge from Success," he began.

> You will soon learn that the Patriots hitherto adored were but little worthy of the Incense they received. The Enemies of those who now reign treat them as they did their Predecessors and as their Successors will be treated. Since I have been in this Country, I have seen the Worship of many Idols and but little [illegible] of the true God. I have seen many of those Idols broken, and some of them beaten to Dust. I have seen the late Constitution in one short Year admired as a stupendous Monument of human Wisdom and ridiculed as an egregious Production of Folly and Vice. I wish much, very much, the Happiness of this inconstant People. I love them. I feel grateful for their Efforts in our Cause and I consider the Establishment of a good Constitution here as the principal Means, under divine Providence, of extending the blessings of Freedom to the many millions of my fellow Men who groan in Bondage on the Continent of Europe. But I do not greatly indulge the flattering Illusions of Hope, because I do not yet perceive that Reformation of Morals without which Liberty is but an empty Sound.[74]

As for Louis—"History informs us that the Passage of dethroned Monarchs is short from Prison to the grave," Morris observed to Washington in late October.[75] The royal family remained in confinement, and in the wake of the discovery of the incriminating documents in Louis's *armoire de fer* (the infamous iron chest), the Convention determined in early December to try Louis for treason; with the military victories in hand, he had lost his value as a hostage. "To a Person less intimately acquainted than you are with the History of human Affairs," Morris wrote to Jefferson,

> it would seem strange that the mildest monarch who ever fill'd the French Throne, One who is precipitated from it precisely because he would not adopt the harsh measures of his Predecessors . . . should be prosecuted as one of the most nefarious Tyrants that ever disgraced the Annals of human nature. . . . I think it highly probable that he may suffer.[76]

Morris was right; Louis's defense by his loyal friend the aged Malesherbes was in vain. He was convicted and, in a very close vote on January 16,

1793, sentenced to death. The execution took place a week later. Morris reported to Jefferson that Louis had "died in a Manner becoming his Dignity."[77] Jefferson was unmoved. "We have just received here the news of the decapitation of the king of France," he wrote to a friend in March. "Should the present ferment in Europe not produce republics everywhere, it will at least soften the monarchial governments by rendering monarchs amenable to punishment like other criminals, and doing away with that aegis of insolence and oppression, the inviolability of the king's person." Madison was in full agreement, and condemned "spurious accounts in the papers of [Louis's] innocence and the bloodthirstiness of his enemies."[78]

Morris hoped that the execution would backfire, but there was no outcry. It did, however, heighten the hostility of England, a hostility returned with interest. On February 1, 1793, France declared war on England, and a month later on Spain. The military situation, already wavering, again reversed itself, and the fragile government shuddered under the stress. "The present prospects are dreadful," Morris wrote to Washington on the eve of late-February food riots in Paris.[79]

> [T]he disorganized State of the Government appears to be irremediable. . . . How all this will end God only knows but I fear it will end badly.
>
> I will not speak of my own Situation. You will judge that it is far from pleasant. I could be popular but that would be wrong. The different Parties pass away like the Shadows in a Magic Lantern, and to be well with any one of them would in a short period become Cause of unquenchable Hatred with the others.[80]

In mid-March, Dumouriez was defeated at Neerwinden and went over to the Austrians. He had hoped to march on Paris, release the remaining royal family and reestablish the constitution of 1791. "Perhaps he may experience a similar fate to that of Lafayette," Morris told the secretary, "but he is in much better circumstances for a high game, and much abler to play it." He was not able enough; his men refused to march and the general defected.[81]

The military threat rattled the nervous Convention, which decreed establishment of surveillance committees throughout France to keep an eye on foreigners and suspects. As Morris told Jefferson, "There seems to be more of Treason in this Country than was imagined, and every Day encreases Suspicion, which whether well or ill founded has always the

Effect of distracting the public Councils." The Revolutionary Tribunal had been established in March to examine crimes against the state, with "very large and wide Powers," Morris reported. "It is one of those Instruments whose Operations are incalculable and on whose Direction depends the Fate of the Country."[82] In mid-April *assignats* were decreed to be the required currency. The Montagnards, always sensitive to changes in Parisian public opinion, had abandoned the cause of free markets and were now advocating the price controls demanded by the citizens. The result was the first Law of the Maximum in early May.

The provinces were also in turmoil. Morris reported that the decree for conscripting a third of a million men had "met with serious opposition," and civil war in the Vendée erupted in mid-March 1793 with the revolt of thousands of Catholic peasants against conscription, the government's efforts to weaken the clergy, and the republic. The arrival of the powerful Montagnard representatives-on-mission throughout France sparked nascent resistance, and in Marseilles the mercantile community drove the representatives out. There were backlash movements throughout the Midi against the Jacobins, and in Lyon, depressed by the precipitous fall in demand for silk, departmental authorities used the National Guard to overthrow the Jacobin commune at the end of May.[83] The city would suffer terribly for its offense. By this time, the "Catholic Royal" armies of the Vendée had grown and were routing the Republican troops.

In Paris, the Montagnards began to plan a purge of the Girondins. Morris had heard of this planned insurrection by mid-March. The Girondins used the last of their strength in the Convention to send up their archenemy Marat for trial, but in late April he was acquitted by the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Girondins then publicly denounced their adversaries, but their threats of retaliation backfired. On June 2, close to one hundred thousand people surrounded the Convention while it considered a petition by the Paris Commune to arrest the thirty principal Girondin deputies. The Convention, cowed by the crowd, ordered the arrests. Morris thought it unlikely the Girondins would be able to recoup, "for the greater Part of them have only parole Energy."[84]

The purge exacerbated the civil war. By mid-June more than sixty of the eighty-three *départements* had rebelled against the Jacobins. Military reversals continued. General Custine was arrested on suspicion of treachery and France pulled out of Belgium. The shortage of food did not improve.

In early July 1793, the Dantonists lost control of the Committee of Public Safety. Although ostensibly one of several executive committees of

the National Convention, the Committe of Public Safety came to control the Convention and thereby the revolutionary government, due, originally, to the perceived necessity for centralized, rapid, and coordinated decision making concerning military, diplomatic, and domestic matters. With the onset of the Terror, after the ouster of Danton in July 1793, it had twelve members, including Robespierre; his young and fanatical follower Saint-Just; Lazare Carnot, a military engineer; and others of different areas of interest and in several cases, chilling reputations. Robespierre's election to the committee came the day after the surrender of Valenciennes to the Austrians, and passage of a new draconian measure, a law against hoarding for which the penalty was death.[85] The *Levée en Masse*, calling the entire country into the war, was issued at the end of August, just a few days before Toulon fell to the British.

"The present government is evidently a despotism both in principle and practice," Morris wrote to Washington. "The Convention now consists of only a part of those who were chosen to frame a constitution. These, after putting under arrest their fellows, claim all power, and have delegated the greater part of it to a *Committee of Public Safety.*" He described the function of the Revolutionary Tribunal as giving "unbounded scope to will." It was now "an emphatical phrase in fashion among the patriots, that *terror is the order of the day*," he told Washington. "Some years have elapsed since Montesquieu wrote that the principle of arbitrary governments is *fear.*"

France was now embarked on the Terror, and Morris grasped its nature clearly and predicted its inevitable effects:

> [W]hatever may be the Lot of France in remote Futurity . . . it seems evident that she must soon be govern'd by a single Despot. Whether she will pass to that Point thro the Medium of a Triumvirate, or other small body of Men seems as yet undetermin'd. I think it most probable that she will. A great and awful Crisis seems to be near at Hand. A Blow is I am told meditated which will shroud in Grief and Horror a guilty Land. Already the Prisons are surcharg'd with Persons who consider themselves Victims.[86]

The "Blow" may have been the order sent by the committee on October 13, 1793, to its member Georges Couthon, at Lyon, now subdued by the Jacobins. He was instructed to destroy the city for having dared to make "war on Liberty." Though Couthon was reluctant, his fellow committee

member Collot d'Herbois was not, and along with Joseph Fouché, fell to the task with enthusiasm. They began large-scale executions of all deemed to be "rebels." By April 1794, around two thousand had died in the *mitraillades*, in which batches of perhaps sixty people were marched to an open area, along ditches ready for their remains, shot with cannon and finished off with swords.[87]

Morris might also have been referring to the *noyades* in Nantes, which also took place in October 1793: mass drownings of perhaps two thousand men, women, and children, mostly Vendéens, a retribution exacted by the Montagnard representative-on-mission Jean-Baptiste Carrier.[88] October also saw the execution of Marie-Antoinette. "Insulted during her Trial and reviled in her last Moments she behav'd with Dignity throughout," Morris wrote to Washington.[89]

The religious element of the provincial uprisings convinced many that the Catholic religion was a threat to the Revolution, and a dechristianizing movement began. Religious relics and statues were smashed, and vestments were stolen to be worn in mock ceremonies. "I must, by the way, drop one word as to the overthrow of the Catholic Religion," Morris reported to Jefferson. "It is now expiring under wounds from the true French weapon Ridicule. The people who, five years since, fell down in the dirt as the consecrated matter passed by, now dance the *Carmagnole* in holy Vestments, and perform other Mummeries which it might seem profane to mention."[90]

Morris's wry description notwithstanding, he was troubled. Though he disliked Catholicism, he believed religion was "the only solid Base of Morals and that Morals are the only possible Support of free governments." He described the movement as a "new Religion" whose "Votaries have the Superstition of not being superstitious. They have with this as much Zeal as any other Sect and are as ready to lay Waste the World in order to make Proselytes. "[91]

On October 31, twenty-one Girondins—including Brissot—went to the guillotine. They had lingered for months, waiting for the "first great misfortune [to] call them from their dungeons as expiatory victims," Morris told the secretary of state.[92] A few months before, Jefferson, who called Brissot a "true disciple of liberty," had written him a very friendly letter of introduction for an American acquaintance.[93] Brissot never received this letter, just as Jefferson did not receive Clavière's friendly introduction to a Frenchman until after the former finance minister had committed suicide in prison in December 1793.[94]

This communication lag between America and France was an aspect of the times that illuminates the degree to which American opinion concerning the French Revolution had to do with domestic politics, rather than the real situation in France, in no case more notably than that of Jefferson. Jefferson had by now managed to absorb the most jarring disparity between his concept of the French Revolution and its reality: Lafayette's disgrace. He would do the same on learning the fate of the Girondins, at least for a while. Nonetheless, Jefferson continues to be credited by historians with a consistently "pro-revolutionary" creed dignified as a philosophy, despite these contradictory underpinnings. Morris, by contrast, has been viewed as consistently *anti*revolutionary despite the successive shifts of form of the revolutionary government, from nonfunctioning constitutional monarchy to the despotism of the Committee of Public Safety.

According to François Furet and Denis Richet, the Girondins' fall signaled that the Revolution was drifting "further off the course it had been set by eighteenth-century thought."[95] Morris said much the same, and could not observe these proofs of his predictions without distress. That concern, however, was now overshadowed by the effect on his own country. The internal cataclysms caused by August 10, combined with war with Britain, put great strain on the ties between the United States and France. The following year tested the American minister to the utmost.