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1

Learning to Doubt

A Protected Childhood Spent in Paris and Verneuil

Go back in time. Examine the babe when still in its mother's arms. See the external world reflected for the first time in the still-dark mirror of his intelligence. Contemplate the first models to make an impression on him. Listen to the words that first awaken his dormant powers of thought. Take note, finally, of the first battles he is obliged to fight. Only then will you understand where the prejudices, habits, and passions that will dominate his life come from. In a manner of speaking, the whole man already lies swaddled in his cradle.¹

Alexis de Tocqueville made these observations in *Democracy in America* to explain his rationale for studying America's "point of departure." Of course, the beginning is also where the biographer must start. For the young Tocqueville, that external world was dominated by figures from the highest military and administrative nobility of the Ancien Régime, survivors of the Revolutionary Terror, loyal to the exiled Bourbons, and dead set against the liberal views Tocqueville himself would eventually embrace. Presaging this divergence, Tocqueville displayed considerable independence of mind at an early age, and he repeatedly flouted expectations. At the same time, he developed the habit of casting doubt on much of what he did and saw.

Born in Paris on July 29, 1805, the third son of Hervé and Louise-Madeleine de Tocqueville, Alexis spent the first nine years of his life

between the Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris, where the family resided in winter, and the château of Verneuil-sur-Seine. These were comfortable homes; Hervé de Tocqueville had been skillful in recovering much of the family fortune after the Terror. A third residence, the Norman manor at Tocqueville, had remained uninhabited since the French Revolution, but the land was farmed profitably. On the Malesherbes-Rosanbo side, Louise-Madeleine owned an estate in Lannion in Brittany and inherited a share of her great-aunt Madame de Sénozan's domain of Verneuil. Since Malesherbes's sister had also been guillotined, the great Romantic writer Chateaubriand (who was the younger brother of Tocqueville's guillotined uncle) labeled Verneuil an "inheritance from the scaffold."²

Hervé de Tocqueville tactfully negotiated, over several years, agreements with the Malesherbes and Rosanbo heirs and creditors to acquire the property in full, a transfer made more complicated by the events of the Revolution. Some heirs had lost their property to the state by leaving France during the Terror.³ In the bid to recover these estates, it helped that a few family members had concluded that Napoleon had saved France from chaos and rallied to him, notably Félix Le Peletier d'Aunay, Louise-Madeleine's first cousin, and Louis-Mathieu Molé, a more distant cousin. Chateaubriand also rallied to Napoleon, albeit temporarily. Hervé de Tocqueville and his brother-in-law, Louis de Rosanbo, although fiercely loyal to the Bourbons, successfully solicited and obtained an audience with Josephine de Beauharnais, the First Consul's wife, and succeeded in having Madame de Montboissier (Malesherbes's youngest daughter) struck from the list of émigrés.⁴ In the end, by the time Alexis was born, the Tocquevilles owned Verneuil in full. Hervé de Tocqueville was an able proprietor, turning in a profit from two large farms, Verneuil and Mouillard, and collecting income from forestry, fishing, a large dovecote, and the rent from 103 small-time tenants.⁵

At Verneuil, Hervé de Tocqueville became a local official. The Seine-et-Oise prefect appointed him mayor in 1803.⁶ It was common under Napoleon for local nobles to serve in these minor posts, regardless of political loyalties, as long as they supported the national conscription of 400,000 men a year.⁷ The elder Tocqueville proved to be an able administrator. He responded forcefully when wounded returning

soldiers carried typhus into the town, having every house hosting soldiers fumigated with vinegar.⁸ He was knowledgeable and solicitous, with a demonstrated commitment to charity.

By all accounts, Alexis had a protected and happy childhood at Verneuil. His parents created an atmosphere of conviviality, and there was frequent entertainment. Despite suffering from underlying depression, Louise-Madeleine was a warm mother to her three sons and two adopted Chateaubriand nephews.

The family played parlor games and had literary evenings during which they read plays and recited poetry. Alexis remembered listening to readings of translations of popular English novels, even weeping over the fate of the unhappy Lady Clementina in Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*.⁹ Chateaubriand, who had purchased La Vallée aux Loups, an estate some forty kilometers away, visited occasionally to spend time with his two nephews and to join in such evenings. Once, he greeted Hervé de Tocqueville disguised as an old woman.¹⁰ Chateaubriand remembered in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* that Alexis, "the last famous person I would see ignored in his infancy," was nevertheless "more spoiled at Verneuil than I was at Combourg."¹¹

There were serious moments, too. Alexis remembered a family celebration during which his mother sang in her languorous voice a famous song mourning the king. It was only about the king. There was no mention of close family members who had suffered the same fate; elders did not want to inflict recollections of their personal tragedies on the children.¹²

Even so protected, young Tocqueville was taught the importance of service to God and nation. Abbé Christian Lesueur, who had tutored the father, also instructed the children (who gave him the nickname Bébé). A nonjuring or refractory priest with Jansenist leanings, Lesueur developed a special relationship with the youngest and most talented child.¹³ Alexis always loved his tutor even though he complained later in life that his teaching method had been less than perfect. Alexis once reminisced with his cousin Eugénie de Grancey that Bébé "had the singular idea to teach me how to write before knowing how to spell."¹⁴ As a result, for the rest of his life, Tocqueville was never totally sure of his spelling. Bébé also insisted that there was only one law, and that was

“the Gospel: its holy and charitable law, a law that brings happiness to all faithful Catholics.”¹⁵ Nation was next. Tocqueville recalled being repeatedly told in childhood that his paternal grandmother, Catherine Antoinette de Damas-Crux,

was a saintly woman [who], after having impressed upon her young son all the duties of private life, never forgot to add: “But what is more, my child, remember that a man’s first duty is to his country. For one’s country, no sacrifice is too burdensome, and its fate must be kept foremost in one’s mind. God requires man to commit, as needed, his time, his treasure, and even his life in service of the State and its king.”¹⁶

Tocqueville dutifully conveyed the same message to his nephew Hubert years later: “One must first belong to one’s country before one belongs to a party.”¹⁷

Supporting the country, however, became a lot easier with the return of the Bourbons and the Restoration of the king when European armies finally defeated the emperor. There was hope when already on March 12, 1814, a detachment of Wellington’s army occupied Bordeaux. By March 31, Russian, Prussian, and Austrian armies had retaken Paris. The Tocqueville family joined demonstrations taking place in Paris on the first days of April calling for the restoration of Louis XVIII, Louis XVI’s younger brother, to the throne of France. At age nine, Alexis was old enough to be an enthusiastic participant hoping for his family’s return to prominence. He joyfully reported to Bébé that he shouted “Vive, le roi!” along with the demonstrators.¹⁸ His mother may have joined other wives in distributing Chateaubriand’s tract, *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons, et de la nécessité de se rallier à nos princes légitimes pour le bonheur de la France et celui de l’Europe*. Napoleon formally abdicated on April 11, and Louis XVIII entered occupied Paris, after a twenty-three-year exile, on May 3.

The Prefect’s Son

Under the Bourbons, those nobles who had remained loyal to the crown regrouped and sought to recover prominent positions and prerogatives. Émigrés came back and demanded return of confiscated property. It was the hour of the Legitimists. The Tocqueville-Rosanbo family did well,

as would be expected for loyal heirs of the great Malesherbes, who had defended Louis XVI at his trial at the cost of his own life, and those of several of his children. Hervé de Tocqueville began a career as prefect in several *départements* as early as mid-June 1814. He had been prefect for only a few months in Maine-et-Loire (Angers) when Napoleon returned from exile on Elba and seized power again. But the emperor's dramatic return did not last. Waterloo marked the limit of Napoleon's Hundred Days and the Bourbon monarchy was restored for a second time in July 1815, again under foreign authority, a humiliation that the Republican and Bonapartist opposition never forgave.

The Malesherbes-Rosanbos-Tocquevilles remained favored in the second restoration. Uncle Louis de Rosanbo was made peer of France (Chambre des pairs), and Hervé de Tocqueville was immediately reappointed prefect, this time in the Oise, and he and Louise-Madeleine moved to Beauvais. He then was appointed to a third post in the Côte d'Or, and they moved again to Dijon. After Tocqueville was appointed to a fourth prefecture in the Moselle at Metz in March 1817, Louise-Madeleine had had enough and decided to stay in Paris with their youngest son.

Alexis was eleven years old by then. His two brothers, Hippolyte and Édouard, had started their military careers; twenty-year-old Hippolyte was a sous-lieutenant in the Royal Guard and sixteen-year-old Édouard was already a Garde du Corps in a company.¹⁹ Besides Bébé, Alexis had the frequent company of his cousin Louis de Kergorlay, one year his senior and the scion of another Legitimist family. The Tocquevilles and the Kergorlays lived a few blocks from one another in Paris on the rue Saint-Dominique. The two children became friends for life. Alexis also made regular trips to Metz to visit his father. He would often stay long enough that Hervé de Tocqueville arranged for a teacher from the local Collège Royal to tutor the child.²⁰

At his father's request, and to Bébé's and young Louis de Kergorlay's dismay, Alexis moved to Metz in 1820, at the formative age of fourteen. For over three years, until the summer of 1823 after he turned eighteen, Alexis lived with his father in a whole new environment, and these years proved critical in Alexis's development.

It was obvious to Alexis that he was the son of one of the most important men in the city. As a prefect during the Restoration, Hervé de Tocqueville's goal was to support the returned Bourbons by replacing Napoleon's appointees in the ranks of the local administration, suppressing liberal and Bonapartist opposition, and favoring royalists but preventing outright hostility between bourgeois and nobles. One easy way for the prefect to influence local politics was to appoint mayors in the various communes of the Moselle. He also oversaw the hiring of schoolteachers and of the National Guard. Most importantly, the prefect authorized group meetings and delivered permits to assemble only to associations that posed no political threats to the regime. Finally, as the Bourbons had returned under the authority of foreign armies, Hervé had to negotiate with military occupiers in the Moselle and meet their needs.²¹ The elder Tocqueville's deft handling of tasks that were both political and administrative would not be lost on his observant son. He became a reliable source on administrative matters and their entanglement with politics early in Alexis's career as he tried to identify the balance between equality and liberty in a democracy.

Hervé de Tocqueville was an "Ultra" or, some said, a "pure" royalist who tolerated little political dissent in the several departments where he served. Early in the Restoration, however, appeasement was the political order of the day.²² Louis XVIII sought to unify the country even as he insisted on the divine source of his authority. Disputes among the Ultras and those who advocated reconciliation, the so-called *Doctrinaires*, defined Restoration politics in the years to come.

Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, leader of the *Doctrinaires*, was key to implementing a national policy of reconciliation. Alexis de Tocqueville, who later came to know Royer-Collard well, portrayed him as a firm believer in the possibility of reconciling the spirit of the age inherited from the French Revolution (abolishing feudal privileges, guaranteeing equality before the law, ensuring the dignity and freedom of the individual) with "the old [royal] family." He sought to do so without approving of the revolutionary soul, which he thought, in agreement with the Ultras, was tainted by the spirit of adventure, violence, tyranny, and demagoguery.²³

François Guizot, a young history professor and close associate of Royer-Collard, was appointed Secrétaire général of the Interior Ministry, a junior but influential position. Guizot would become both a major historian and formidable statesman; he was also, like Royer-Collard, a significant presence in the young Tocqueville's life. One of his first initiatives as Secrétaire général was to order what we would nowadays call a public opinion survey, pioneering a new role for local administrators. The Bourbons had been in exile, and thus out of power, for so many years that they had to rediscover France. In September 1814, Guizot instructed all prefects to inquire about the "hearts and minds of the masses, their general opinions, the general mentality and assumptions of each profession and each rank, and how they shaped public affairs in the département, especially regarding those opinions that are resistant to the authorities."²⁴ Guizot would eventually think of "governance of the public mind" as "the great challenge of modern society."²⁵

Governing the minds of men could obviously be an instrument of repression as easily as one of reconciliation. In the early years of the Restoration, influential police minister Élie-Louis Decazes, a young man whom Louis XVIII treated as a protégé, pushed the king toward the national reunification Royer-Collard and others were calling for. Decazes was cautious about wielding repressive power, unlike Hervé de Tocqueville, and conflict between the two men sporadically erupted, accounting in part for the prefect's reassignments from one département to another. The last of these took place in Metz, in January 1820, before Alexis joined his father. Decazes judged Hervé de Tocqueville's censorship of local theater excessively heavy-handed and reminded the "Ultra" prefect that it was best to limit censorship to clear "cases of attacks on royal majesty and legitimate authority," and that there was no need to go further.²⁶

Their differences ended the following month when, on February 14, Louis Pierre Louvel, a Bonapartist worker, assassinated the duc de Berry, son of Louis XVIII's autocratic younger brother, the comte d'Artois. Because Louis was childless, Louvel believed that killing the duc de Berry would put an end to the Bourbon dynasty, which had so shamelessly reassumed power under the swords of foreigners. No one

knew at the time that the duchesse de Berry was expecting a child, the future comte de Chambord.

This dramatic political assassination instantly changed the direction of Restoration politics, as the Ultras came to dominate the government and put an end to Decazes's liberal reforms. By the time Alexis rejoined his father, the Ultras had the upper hand and were taking no chances with Republican and Bonapartist opposition while also neutralizing the liberal Monarchist camp. Because Louvel had lived in Metz in 1814, when Prussian, Russian, and Hessian troops attacked that city at the end of the Napoleonic wars, Hervé de Tocqueville played a significant role in the investigation of the assassination.²⁷ He gained additional influence when Chateaubriand became foreign minister in 1822, and he communicated directly with his relative in the cabinet. Chateaubriand orchestrated the French invasion of Spain in 1823, which aimed at restoring Ferdinand VII to power against liberal forces and giving the Bourbons the military prestige they lacked. Hervé de Tocqueville closely followed the reaction to the expedition in his department and appraised the minister of the local population's response, especially its fear of a return to absolutism.²⁸

Young Alexis's Experimentation

Amid the roiling changes of Restoration politics, Alexis enrolled full time at the Collège Royal of Metz in November 1821. He attended it for two full years, pursuing the curriculum in rhetoric and philosophy, and receiving his baccalaureate in 1823. He read classical Latin texts (Horace, Cicero, Tacitus, and Quintilian) as well as the seventeenth-century French tragedies of Racine.²⁹ Alexis performed brilliantly, collecting accolades and prizes. From afar, Bébé advised his pupil to spend time with the great Catholic preachers Bossuet and Louis Bourdaloue, but this was advice Alexis would follow only much later.³⁰ At the time, he much preferred the maxims of lighter moralists such as La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld.³¹ Alexis mingled with a few other boys, especially Eugène Stöffels and his younger brother Charles, who were of modest origins but conservative leanings, as well as another student named

Mathieu Henrion—all the while maintaining a regular correspondence with his childhood friend Louis de Kergorlay. In their company, Alexis in no way challenged his father's politics. The prefect took a special liking to the young Henrion, the most openly conservative of the group.

This seemed all too easy: a brilliant student, the son of the most powerful local civil servant, breezing through the last two years of high school before moving on to study law. In fact, at Metz, teenaged Alexis was ready for significant experimentation with other aspects of life. He remembered his youthful fearlessness in a letter of advice he later wrote to Alexis Stöffels, his namesake and son of his childhood friend Eugène. “You never succeed, particularly when you are young, unless you have a bit of the devil in you. At your age I would have leaped between the towers of Notre Dame if what I was looking for was on the other side.”³²

The pious Catholic student of Bébé ventured into his father's library at age sixteen, in 1821, before matriculating at the Collège Royal. There, Alexis had a dramatic encounter with religious doubt—his first major existential crisis. Tocqueville never specified exactly what he read, but the library contained much agnostic eighteenth-century philosophy. Alexis must have conveyed enough of his experience to Louis for the latter to be alarmed to see his friend “burying himself in doubt, becoming a sad Pyrrhonian, dark and heavy with thought.”³³ Lesueur also learned that Alexis was no longer receiving the sacrament and anxiously begged his protégé to “repair this atrocious evil.”³⁴

Religious doubt caused the young Tocqueville great pain. He later explained his feelings to Charles Stöffels, writing him from Philadelphia in 1831.

When I first started to think, I found the world full of self-evident truths. One merely needed to look carefully to see them. But as soon as I applied myself to consider the objects of thought, I could discern only inextricable doubt. I cannot tell you, my dear Charles, in what horrible situation such a discovery put me. It was the most unhappy time of my life. I can only compare myself to a man seized with vertigo who senses the floor giving way under him and the walls about to crumble. Even today it is with a sense of horror that I remember

those days. I can truly say that doubt and I were locked in hand-to-hand combat, and I have rarely done so since with more despair.³⁵

At fifty-one, still trying to regain his faith, Tocqueville related the full incident to Sofia Swetchine, a new friend and Parisian society figure leading an effort to promote a Catholic Church that would be more receptive to representative government. Tocqueville described to her the solitary visits to his father's library as if they had happened the day before. He recalled that his

life up to then had flowed in an interior full of faith which had not even allowed doubt to penetrate my soul. Then doubt entered, or rather rushed in with unprecedented violence, not merely the doubt of this or that, but universal doubt. . . . From time to time, these impressions of my first youth (I was 16 years old then) possess me again; then I see the intellectual world turn again and I remain lost and bewildered in this universal movement which overturns or shakes all the truths on which I have built my beliefs and actions. Here is a sad and frightening illness. . . . Happy those who have never known it, or who no longer know it!³⁶

Metz was also where Alexis had his first relationships with women. There is some evidence that at age sixteen, Alexis fathered a child with a servant, perhaps conceived in a cabin the young man had built as a retreat on the grounds of the prefecture.³⁷ Nothing is known of the child save her name, Louise Charlotte Meyer.³⁸ Tocqueville's later interest in welfare measures in Normandy to help single mothers and rescue abandoned children may well have been motivated by this experience, though he never reflected on it in any of his writings.

Alexis also began an enduring relationship with Rosalie Malye, daughter of the prefecture's archivist.³⁹ The love affair lasted several years, but ultimately her different social class made an alliance unthinkable. It was not unthinkable, however, to defend Rosalie's honor, if indeed such was the reason for a duel Alexis fought with a schoolmate. An alarmed Louis, whom Alexis had informed of the matter, wrote from Paris, "Did you imagine I would receive this news calmly?"⁴⁰ All we

know for sure is that Alexis was severely wounded, and that father and son made sure neither Louise-Madeleine nor Béb  would learn the cause of the injury.⁴¹

Time to Choose an “ tat”

Although childhood tutor B b  and childhood friend Louis expressed similar feelings of loss when young Alexis departed for Metz, they differed sharply in their views about Alexis’s choice of career after high school. Louis de Kergorlay relentlessly pushed his friend to join his older brothers and now himself in the army, thus following in the tradition of the nobility of the sword. B b , aware of Alexis’s fragile physical constitution and intellectual talents, vigorously protested and called on Alexis’s older brother  douard to counsel him:

You must convince Alexis not to join the military, my little  douard. You know the drawbacks of such a path, and on this point, he will listen to his brothers rather than to his father. It is that peculiar Louis de Kergorlay who put the idea in his head. The two have plans to meet, and I intend to plead with “Mr. Loulou” to leave us alone and to mind his own business. What a shame it would be to suffocate his talent, growing daily in distinction, under a helmet.⁴²

Tocqueville eventually chose the law but only after some significant soul-searching, which he later related to his nephew Hubert. Tocqueville rejected not only the army but also any consideration of a career in public administration such as the one his father had pursued. Although remaining a devoted son and respecting his father’s mastery of administrative affairs, he had made up his mind he could never subject himself to the mix of authority and submission such a job required. He told Hubert:

I have always had, no matter the regime (I make no exception), a repugnance for bureaucracy. . . . I noticed that, to get ahead, one needed to be pliable and obsequious to those who give you orders, and duplicitous or violent towards those who take orders from you. In

France, the administrative state does not conduct itself with the general welfare in mind, but only in the interests of those who govern. And no one can hope to rise in the ranks without subordinating his interests to those of others. . . . And though many things I encountered in my judicial career displeased me, I embraced what seemed to me the only career in civil service that gave me any independence from the transient groups that cycle through power in our country, the only one where one can both be civil servant and oneself.⁴³

By being “oneself,” Tocqueville meant being an independent agent responsible for his actions.

Tocqueville would not always be so sanguine about the law. At the time, however, he returned to Paris, after a brief excursion to Switzerland, to enter law school; he lived again with his mother.⁴⁴ Kergorlay, for his part, was admitted at the *École Polytechnique*, the military academy, in 1824, so the two friends were reunited, studying in Paris for two years.

Tocqueville did not leave Metz completely behind. He stayed in touch with the Stöffelses, and he maintained an epistolary relationship with Rosalie, who visited him once in Paris.⁴⁵ Kergorlay meanwhile was using all his powers of persuasion to convince Tocqueville that the time had come to break off a relationship that had no future. But this languishing love affair was seemingly the only source of drama of these two years in Paris, for nothing could be more intellectually deadening than the law school Tocqueville entered in late 1823.

Earlier in the Restoration, under the leadership of Royer-Collard, who served as president of the Commission for Public Education, the *Doctrinaires* led a liberal experiment to reform the university, the national education apparatus created by Napoleon. They wanted to create a university capable of educating young people of different political persuasions and religious commitments, which entailed broadening the scope of the curricula of the various schools. Under the Consulate and the Empire, one learned in law school only Roman law, civil code, and the penal code. Royer-Collard added instruction in natural law, international law, commercial law, and administrative law. He also initiated a

curriculum in both Roman and French legal history and a course for future lawyers in political philosophy. In other words, he sought to make law school a school of moral and political sciences. He pursued equivalent reforms in other parts of the university.⁴⁶ The greater openness brought with it unexpected student rebellion against the regime. In 1822, Kergorlay reported to Tocqueville that “Jacobin” law students were physically attacking Royalists, and there were similar incidents among medical students.⁴⁷

By the time Tocqueville began his studies, the Ultras dominated the university, directed, under Charles X, to serve only throne and altar. Already in late 1819, Royer-Collard had resigned his position as head of the university, under the weight of Ultra attacks and opposition to his reforms. An archconservative bishop *in partibus*,⁴⁸ Mgr. Denis-Luc Frayssinous, replaced Royer-Collard and put an end to the liberal experiment. Young philosopher Victor Cousin, Royer-Collard’s assistant at the Sorbonne, who taught in his place (as “*suppléant*”), was dismissed, not for expressing political opinions in his 1818 lectures *Du vrai, du beau, du bien*, but for teaching a philosophy that appealed to young people who loved to think freely. Before his stint in the Interior Ministry, Guizot, who had been appointed to a history professorship at the exceptionally young age of twenty-five, had assisted Royer-Collard in devising reforms. Forced out of the Interior Ministry after Decazes’s fall, he had resumed teaching. He too was dismissed.⁴⁹ If the university were to serve only church and king, there was no room for professors who, through the study of philosophy or history, were pushing knowledge into new areas. Half of the existing history chairs were eliminated between 1822 and 1828. Under Mgr. Frayssinous’s tenure as minister of cults and instruction, between 1820 and 1830, one-tenth of teaching personnel in Paris were fired or retired for political and religious reasons.⁵⁰

The teaching of law was now reduced to the very minimum: statutory law, positive law, penal code, and procedural practices.⁵¹ There were no controversies over points of theory that could stimulate original thinking. Not surprisingly, Tocqueville’s heart was not in it. Tocqueville ended up submitting two short, strictly factual theses, one in French on a technical point of law concerning the annulment of obligations,⁵² and

one in Latin, a brief commentary on a part of the pandects (Roman civil law), to satisfy graduation requirements.

It was unclear what would come next for Tocqueville now that he had completed a dull and uninspiring legal training. To mark the end of his studies, he went with his brother Édouard to Rome and Sicily in December 1826 and January 1827. In addition to being a refreshing distraction, the trip turned out to be an opportunity for Tocqueville to demonstrate his budding talents as a social observer and writer. From the fragments of the Sicilian diary that have survived, one sees Tocqueville's efforts to develop his prose which, ever his own harshest critic, he found to be mediocre. He wrote a dramatic rendering of a dangerous tempest during a sea crossing, a well-crafted account of two brothers' hike up to the crater of Mount Etna, as well as concise descriptions of the places they visited (Palermo, Agrigento, Syracuse, Catania, Messina, Milazzo). All along, he displayed a good grasp of mythology and ancient history, and he noted the ways Sicilians resisted Neapolitan absolutism and aspired to independence.⁵³

These diaries also show the first manifestations of Tocqueville's aptitude for deciphering processes of social domination, in this case, by observing how the land was developed. He attributed the absence of villages in Sicily to the fact that only the nobility and religious communities owned land. The only places on the island where peasants could cultivate their own land were the fertile but dangerous parcels surrounding the island's volcanoes. In discussing the Neapolitan constitution with Édouard a few years later, though, Tocqueville felt he had failed at the time of their trip to connect constitutional issues with the social trends he was observing.⁵⁴

Apprentice Prosecutor at Versailles

Tocqueville was still in Sicily with his brother when he learned that his father had secured a position for him as an apprentice prosecutor at the Versailles court. Hervé de Tocqueville had gained additional influence when the comte d'Artois, Louis XVIII's brother, became Charles X in 1824. He was now a member of the King's Chamber, which gave him the

privilege of accompanying the king to mass on Sunday and watching the king play whist after supper.⁵⁵ He was also appointed to the coveted position of Seine-et-Oise prefect, with its seat at Versailles. Alexis's British friend Richard Monckton Milnes once noted that "by making good use of his *Conseil général* (General Council), which is a kind of Parliament to him, [a prefect] may change the character of a whole province."⁵⁶ Hervé de Tocqueville's *Conseil général* was almost a family reunion. There sat his brother-in-law Rosanbo, and his wife's two cousins, Le Peletier d'Aunay and Molé.⁵⁷ It was a simple matter for the prefect to visit the minister of justice and get his son a job.

Alexis was not sure what this (unpaid) position as *juge auditeur* (apprentice judge) would entail. He seemed for a moment to have no special direction or even wishes. He had concluded his Sicilian diary by asking only one grace from God, "that he would one day make me want to do something that is worth the struggle."⁵⁸ At first, Tocqueville found he had landed at the Versailles courthouse in the company of "*cuistres*," priggish and pedantic young nobles from Legitimist families, who, as he told Kergorlay, "reason poorly and speak well."⁵⁹ Fortunately, not all fit that mold. The first exception was Gustave de Beaumont, Tocqueville's senior by three years, with whom he roomed. The pair experienced that sense of connection that Tocqueville described as "a new friendship that seemed old from the start."⁶⁰ This was especially true as Tocqueville was now feeling the first effects of fragile health. He relied on Beaumont for help during recurring disabling episodes of a stomach ailment that required much mental energy to overcome.⁶¹

Another new friend was Ernest de Chabrol, nephew of Prime Minister Joseph de Villèle's navy minister, with whom Tocqueville shared an apartment when Beaumont left Versailles after his promotion to Paris in the summer of 1829. At the same time, Tocqueville became friendly with Ernest de Blosseville, who preferred literature over law.⁶² Outside the courthouse, Tocqueville befriended Louis Bouchitté, a young philosopher teaching at the local Collège Royal.⁶³ Once Tocqueville had given his friendship, he rarely withdrew it. The man who would one day develop the theory of associations was himself content with only a few friends. Tocqueville wrote to Kergorlay at the time that

friendship, “once born, should not weaken with age, or even change in its essential nature I don’t think. Especially not for those who know its price, and ceaselessly tend to it, careful not to break that which supports it: trust, in matters both large and small.”⁶⁴

Tocqueville had a hard time finding his post as apprentice prosecutor interesting. He even told Kergorlay he was disgusted by “the turns of phrase and customs of the legal profession.”⁶⁵ But he overcame this initial rejection and reported on several important cases with a direct bearing on the enhanced status of the nobility in the Restoration. His role as *juge auditeur* was to conduct and report on the investigations that preceded a trial, assembling the facts, and interrogating the witnesses. Tocqueville cut his teeth on a complicated case involving a debt an émigré had incurred before the state confiscated his property during the Revolutionary Terror. The creditor was trying to collect the debt years later. Tocqueville, who sided with the defendant in presenting the case and more generally with the monarchist cause, conducted intensive background work. He studied the laws and edicts of the First Republic on confiscated wealth, as well as the subsequent legislation during the Consulate and Empire regarding restitution. Finally, he exposed state confiscation of émigré property as monstrous abuse.⁶⁶

It was a tradition at the courthouse to ask a junior member to give a lecture to his colleagues at the opening of the session. When the assignment fell on Tocqueville, he chose to talk about dueling, presumably because the civil code ignored the topic. Despite being injured in his first encounter, Tocqueville seems to have retained the romantic notion of duels as the embodiment of virtue and honor. With the help of a fresh reading of Montesquieu’s writings, Tocqueville argued that if crime there was, both parties were equally guilty. He also warned that the decline of dueling would lead to more murders.⁶⁷

Tocqueville, however, was not committed to a one-sided defense of aristocratic values. He also saw the abuses of reactionary government. During a popular rebellion at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a group of young workers was arrested for disturbing the peace while inebriated and shouting slogans against the monarchy. All were eventually condemned to severe prison sentences. Tocqueville tried unsuccessfully to assemble

facts that reflected the minimal seriousness of their actions, which he viewed as being motivated less by antimonarchist sentiment than by the precariousness of the economic situation and the high price of bread.⁶⁸ He was not to be confused with the fictional Restoration prosecutor whom Balzac portrayed in *Le cabinet des antiques*, a man who dreamed of boosting his career by uncovering yet another conspiracy against the absolute monarchy.⁶⁹

The young magistrates lived their bachelor lives together in Versailles. For Tocqueville, this entailed a drawn-out final act with Rosalie. It so happened that Kergorlay, upon graduating from Polytechnique, entered artillery school at Metz. In effect, the two friends traded places. At Metz, Kergorlay now saw Eugène Stöffels regularly. After having persuaded Tocqueville to end his relationship with Rosalie, he served as a go-between with Rosalie and her sister. And after Rosalie's unhappy marriage to a François Begin in 1828, Kergorlay conveyed to Tocqueville her request that he continue to write her.⁷⁰ Tocqueville obliged, using invisible ink made from lemon juice. But soon, Kergorlay and Tocqueville conspired to use their family connections to obtain for Rosalie a respectable position in the postal service and this ended the romance in the most unromantic way.⁷¹

Meanwhile, at Versailles, Tocqueville met an eligible English woman named Mary Mottley. Mottley, born on August 20, 1799, was almost six years older than Tocqueville and lived in a nearby apartment with the aunt who had raised her. She came from a middle-class family from Portsmouth, where her father worked as an agent for the local Royal Hospital.⁷² A portrait attributed to artist Candide Blaize from around 1830 depicts her as small-featured, with luminous eyes. She enjoyed Tocqueville's conversation. As their relationship progressed, Tocqueville found himself speaking to her candidly and unselfconsciously.⁷³

Reawakening of the Intellect

Work at the courthouse left significant time for other pursuits and in Beaumont, Tocqueville found a kindred soul who was similarly eager for intellectual stimulation. Guizot had resumed his lectures at the

Sorbonne, with immense success, and the two friends attended them assiduously. Both were avid readers and read widely. Beaumont delved into economics with Jean-Baptiste Say's *Treatise*,⁷⁴ Tocqueville into history with Prosper de Barante's *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne*, and John Lingard's multivolume history of England, occasionally locking himself up "like a monk" just to read undisturbed.⁷⁵

Tocqueville visited the uninhabited Château de Tocqueville, on his own and for the first time in his life, in early October 1828. There, he sat down to write a synopsis of English history in a lengthy letter to Beaumont. Tocqueville covered the period from the arrival of Angles and Saxons in the fifth century and their unification early in the ninth century and ended with the reign of the Tudors. This fast-moving account of England's extraordinarily complex dynastic history was even more astonishing because it was told from memory. Tocqueville acknowledged holes in his narrative and apologized to Beaumont for anachronisms as well as what he called "reveries" and flights of "imagination." The impetus for this outpouring seemed to be that he was only "one league away and within sight of the port where William sailed for England." When evoking his ancestor Guillaume Clérel's or Clarel's participation in the 1066 battle of Hastings and subsequent conquest of England, he admitted that he "succumbed to pride" and "juvenile enthusiasm."⁷⁶

There was great deal of the partisan in this retelling. As Tocqueville reviewed key episodes of the Hundred Years' War, he expressed pain at the devastation of the French nobility at Crecy and Agincourt. "All these events became engraved in my memory and I became animated by that unreflective and instinctual hate towards the English that sometimes comes over me." Indeed, Tocqueville took special pleasure at narrating the worst moments of British monarchical tyranny that forced the English people to change religion four times, or "the tyranny of Henry VIII, who never let a woman's honor get in the way of his passions, nor ever set aside his anger to spare a man's life."⁷⁷

Nonetheless, one can see in this account an insight that would provide the foundation of Tocqueville's historical thinking for the rest of his life. Contrary to the situation in France where, over centuries, the alliance of king and people weakened the aristocracy, Tocqueville

argued in his reading of British history that the British aristocracy had succeeded in forming alliances with the “democratic classes” (as he told Beaumont, he would resort to anachronisms) to keep the prince at bay.⁷⁸ Tocqueville could have added that Charles X’s systematic strengthening of the old nobility against the bourgeoisie that was unfolding under his own eyes (and that would ultimately bring the Bourbons’ final demise) was an oddity in centuries of French history.

When he wrote this interminable letter on English history, Tocqueville had not yet attended Guizot’s Saturday lectures at the Sorbonne, but he had already read some transcriptions. Like Guizot, he wanted to convey some “*idées mères*” in the letter—or core commitments that shape political cultures, and that Guizot defined as “common to the greater number of the members of the society” and exercising “a certain empire over their wills and actions.”⁷⁹ Tocqueville attended the lectures himself in the 1829–30 cycle. During the summer of 1829, Tocqueville also read “the greatest part” of Guizot’s works, including *Mémoires relatifs à l’histoire de France*, published in 1826–27, and probably also Guizot’s narrative history and memoirs of the English revolution, published in 1823–25. Tocqueville described Guizot’s work to Beaumont as “prodigious in its deconstruction of ideas and propriety of words, truly *prodigious*.”⁸⁰

Tocqueville found that he had an immense affinity with Guizot’s thought. First and foremost, he agreed with Guizot on the importance of history. In his lecture notes, Tocqueville underscored Guizot’s pronouncement that “a people with no memory of its past is like a mature man who has lost all recollections of his youth.”⁸¹ Some key insights Tocqueville adopted and made his own. First was Guizot’s idea of a “social state.” Again, Tocqueville marked this passage in his notes: “A given social formation imprints on the human spirit a certain direction: it provides it with a body of general ideas . . . which shape its development by sheer force of momentum.”⁸² Tocqueville also heard Guizot theorizing about the negative side of equality—that is, equality in powerlessness. In Guizot’s lectures, the third estate destroyed the feudal nobility and supported absolutism “so that at least all would be equal under one master.” Tocqueville underlined this remark in his notes.⁸³

Guizot awakened in Tocqueville the desire to analyze the immensely complex interplay of politics and society and in the process raised Tocqueville's political consciousness.

Tocqueville found in Guizot's "high stage of civilization" an early formulation of what would become, in the second volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville's own theory of soft despotism. Borrowing directly from Guizot, Tocqueville wrote to Charles Stöffels:

[In the case of a society] that has achieved a high degree of civilization, the social body has taken charge of everything: the individual has to take responsibility only for being born; for all else, society places him in the arms of its wet nurse, supervises his education, opens before him the paths of fortune. Society supports him on his way, brushes aside the dangers from his head. He advances in peace under the eyes of this second providence. This tutelary power that protected him during his life watches over the burying of his ashes as well: that is the fate of civilized man. Individual energy is almost extinguished.⁸⁴

Guizot had been talking about an advanced state of civilization, not democracy. At the time of Guizot's lectures, Tocqueville was not yet thinking of democracy either. Moreover, Tocqueville was not yet prepared to counter Guizot's endorsement of "modern centralization" that, in Guizot's view, made it possible for one people to become "unified and compact in all its parts . . . acting for one goal, stirred by the same ideas, agitated by the same passions, finally marching as one man to overcome the same obstacles."⁸⁵ The critique of this idealized centralization would prove to be one of Tocqueville's most important contributions to political theory, but that still lay in the future.

The year 1829 was one of reactionary political change in the nation. Charles X appointed the prince de Polignac as his prime minister and with him orchestrated a sharp turn toward absolutism. There was widespread opposition to the move even from conservatives. Chateaubriand resigned as ambassador to Rome.⁸⁶ At the courthouse, Tocqueville expressed deep concern to his friend and colleague Blosseville. He predicted that if the king would now rule with ordinances, "royal

authority would be playing with both its present and its future.”⁸⁷ Tocqueville believed, however, that the king and Polignac would fail. In writing to his brother Édouard and his wife Alexandrine, who were on their honeymoon in Naples, Alexis predicted significant resistance to any such attempt:

The day the king rules by ordinances the courts will no longer enforce them. I should know. Nobody wants the reign of executive decrees in France—that is a clear line in the sand. They serve the interests of no one. Judicial bodies would lose their importance, the peers would be without rank, men of talent would give up their hopes and dreams, the people would be without protection, and most military officers without hope for advancement. What to do against such a combined mass of wills?

Tocqueville also reported, “People’s spirits are profoundly calm. There is little agitation in France. We are waiting.”⁸⁸

There was no need to wait for long. On May 16, 1830, Charles X dissolved the Chamber that had challenged him. Badly in need of military glory to quiet domestic opposition, he initiated the conquest of Algeria. For some time, the king had been reviving talks of invading Algeria, nominally under Ottoman rule but led by an independent dey freely exercising piracy in the Mediterranean Sea. Three years earlier, in 1827, the French consul had refused to acknowledge a debt France had incurred during Napoleon’s Egypt expedition. Legend has it that the dey hit the French diplomat with a fly whisk three times in the face. The insult gave the French an excuse to blockade Algeria. Now Charles X launched a military campaign to consolidate his power. The fleet sailed from Toulon on May 25, 1830, with 103 warships, 350 transport ships, 83 artillery guns, 27,000 sailors, and 37,000 soldiers.⁸⁹ Tocqueville noted, “On our side we will need immense results, for the preparations have been prodigious, and if the ends don’t justify the means, this administration is finished.” On a personal level, Tocqueville was “mortally concerned,” for Kergorlay was scheduled to be among the first artillery combatants (but at the last minute, Kergorlay’s combat position was moved to the second battalion, not the first). Tocqueville also worried

because his brother Hippolyte had volunteered for the expedition (although in the end did not go).⁹⁰

News of the victory in Algiers arrived too late on July 5 to serve the government's bet. The previous day, elections to the Chamber had returned a large majority against the king. But with his Algerian victory, Charles X felt empowered to issue the four infamous ordinances that proved the undoing of his regime. In effect, the ordinances destroyed freedom of the press and reduced the size of the Chamber of Deputies by half. The property qualifications removed three-quarters of the electors from electoral rolls, and both Chambers were deprived of the right to amend bills. A new Chamber would be convened on September 28.⁹¹

Charles X signed the ordinances on July 25 and published them the following day. The king obviously expected unquestioning obedience from his subjects since he chose to go hunting that day in Rambouillet. His minister of war, Louis de Bourmont, was also away, while his interior minister, the comte de Peyronnet, was sitting for his statue.⁹²

Tocqueville's Versailles colleague Blosseville saw the first signs of a revolution as he passed through Paris on July 28: shopkeepers were already removing their shop signs ornamented with fleurs de lis.⁹³ Tricolor flags and barricades followed with surprising speed. On July 29, Tocqueville wrote to Mary, with whom he had by then developed a close relationship, "Civil war has begun."⁹⁴ Tocqueville felt his first duty was to protect his parents who were Ultras. So he joined them and accompanied them to Saint-Germain-en-Laye where they could stay safely with Édouard's new in-laws, baron and baronne Ollivier.

Although in awe of Guizot the historian, Tocqueville had not participated in the work of Aide Toi Le Ciel T'Aidera (Heaven Helps Those Who Help Themselves), the association Guizot had led to mobilize and enlarge the electorate. Tocqueville watched from afar as a radicalized Guizot who, elected to the Chamber only a few months before, was designated by his colleagues to draft a formal protest against the ordinances. On July 29, the Chamber called back the National Guard that Charles X had disbanded in 1827, and it put the marquis de Lafayette in charge of restoring order. Tocqueville joined the National Guard and was given a rifle, but he did not confront the popular insurgency.⁹⁵

After three days of bloody insurrection (*Les Trois Glorieuses*), the king withdrew the ordinances on the 30th and the duc d'Orléans accepted the Chamber's invitation to serve as lieutenant-general of the kingdom. On that day, Tocqueville, disturbed and ashamed of the government, confided in Mary, "I did not think it possible to so vividly experience feelings of this kind amidst the horrors that surround me. . . . I cannot convey to you the jumbled sensations of despair that fill my heart." And he unequivocally laid the blame on the king: "As to the Bourbons, they have behaved as cowards and aren't worth a thousandth part of the blood that has been spilled for their quarrel."⁹⁶ This is the first piece of evidence we have that Tocqueville had now begun seriously to question his loyalty to the Bourbons, if not yet to the idea of monarchy writ large.

The king fled Saint-Cloud on July 31, formally abdicating in favor of his grandson two days later. His first idea was to go to Versailles. Tocqueville spotted the king's party at the Porte de Saint-Cloud; Tocqueville's uncle Louis de Rosambo was among them.⁹⁷ Blosseville remembered that when Tocqueville returned to Versailles, he reported "in terms blending pain and humiliation" that the end had come. Small signs spoke volumes. Tocqueville was shocked to see the escutcheons on the doors of the royal carriages covered with dirt, yet at Trianon, on the grounds of the Palace of Versailles, another reality endured: the chambermaid panicked when the king arrived before fresh butter could be procured for his lunch.⁹⁸ Facing a cold reception on the part of the local population, the royal party rapidly moved on to Rambouillet, on its way to exile.

Tocqueville realized in the weeks following the Revolution that he had no future at the courthouse and that he did not want one in any case. Still, unlike Kergorlay who resigned his commission, Tocqueville took his father's advice, kept his options open, and swore an oath to the new constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe.⁹⁹ On August 17, Tocqueville wrote to Mary, "My conscience is clear, but I would rank this day among the worst of my life."¹⁰⁰ But when former Metz classmate and arch-Legitimist Henrion (who would later write a hagiographic account of the life of Mgr. Frayssinous, the man responsible for dismantling the university) mounted an attack on Tocqueville for having sworn the

oath, Tocqueville defended his actions. Henrion invoked Malesherbes's memory at the king's trial and expressed his admiration for Louis Le Peletier de Rosanbo, going so far as to convey the message by way of Tocqueville's mother, Rosanbo's sister. Tocqueville angrily fired back that he felt his great-grandfather "would have acted exactly as I have done had he been in my place. Just as I have the presumption of hoping that I would have done as he did, were I in his shoes."¹⁰¹

Tocqueville had routinely defied expectations in his youth, and he defied them again now. He refused to take sides between Orleanists, who promoted a genuine constitutional monarchy, and Legitimists, who resisted it. He looked for a way he could maintain his independence of judgment and perhaps, in the best of scenarios, make a unique contribution to the welfare of France. Tocqueville decided to leave France for America to study what a republic looked like.

Tocqueville gave his reason for leaving most succinctly to Charles Stöffels: "My position in France is bad in every respect." Although esteemed by his courthouse peers who recognized his deep intelligence,¹⁰² Tocqueville had never received a promotion or even a paid position, and this despite the fact that Hervé de Tocqueville, whom the king had made a peer of France, had made a point in September 1829 to see the minister of justice to obtain a better position for his son.¹⁰³ When the following month, Beaumont was promoted from Versailles to Paris, it was Chabrol, not Tocqueville, who was chosen to replace Beaumont. Tocqueville learned of this while traveling in Switzerland with Kergorlay. Recognizing his lack of oratory skills, he accepted the news as bravely as he could.¹⁰⁴ He remained Chabrol's friend and would room with him for the rest of his tenure at Versailles.

Tocqueville neither expected nor wanted better treatment from the new regime. As he explained to Charles Stöffels:

I do not wish for advancement, because to do so would be to tie myself to men whose intentions I find suspect. So, my role would be that of an obscure assistant judge, confined to a narrow sphere and with no way to make my reputation. If I attempt to oppose the government from within the justice ministry, I will be denied even the honor of dismissal.

With no confidence in the new July Monarchy, as it was called, Tocqueville had to figure a way out.

Now suppose that, without quitting the magistracy or giving up my seniority, I go to America. One will have formed a precise idea of the nature of a vast republic and of why it is feasible in one place and not feasible in another. Public administration will have been systematically examined in all its aspects. Upon returning to France one will of course feel stronger than one felt upon leaving. If the moment is ripe, a publication of some sort might alert the public to one's existence and draw the attention of the parties.

Then came the strategy to carry out the plan:

Beaumont and I will request a leave of eighteen months along with a mission to go to America to examine the state of the penitentiary system. . . . The issue is in no way political and has to do solely with the well-being of society in general. Of course, this is a pretext, but a very honorable pretext, which will make us seem particularly worthy of the government's interest, whatever the government happens to be, and will ensure that our request is looked upon kindly. . . . In order to obtain this mission we have drafted a memorandum, which I believe is well crafted.¹⁰⁵

How Tocqueville settled on this plan is unclear, but there was a widespread sense in Restoration intellectual circles that the Old World could learn from the grand American "experiment" of democratic governance.¹⁰⁶ George Washington was revered in France as a virtuous general who lived humbly, fought only when necessary, and relinquished his power at the end of his term—a kind of anti-Napoleon. Nobody drew the contrast better than Chateaubriand in his *Voyage en Amérique*, published in 1827 and widely excerpted in the French press. "Washington and Buonaparte both emerged from the republic's bosom; both were the children of freedom," Chateaubriand remarked but added, "Washington remained loyal to freedom, but Buonaparte betrayed it."¹⁰⁷ Praise for America came just as much from the opposition to the Restoration regime as from its proponents. One such voice was Arnold

Scheffer's. Scheffer was a member of the Charbonnerie, a secret society intent on dethroning the Bourbons. Scheffer attacked French repressive laws while praising Americans' First Amendment rights in his 1825 *Histoire des États-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale*.¹⁰⁸ Tocqueville would later turn to Scheffer, in the 1840s, for assistance in launching a political newspaper (see chapter 9).

To propose to study prisons to secure support for a journey to America was an inspired decision. The topic was in the air. During the early days of the Restoration, with the king's encouragement, Minister Decazes had founded a Royal Society for the Improvement of Prisons. The Society enlisted the most influential men of its time in the project of reforming France's chaotic prison system and produced the first national investigation of prisons in 1819, along with a law to introduce basic reforms.¹⁰⁹ Charles Lucas, a young lawyer who would later be called father of "penitentiary science," won the Montyon Prize of the French Academy in 1830 for a three-volume investigation of prisons in the United States and five European countries. He took his work to the Chambers of Deputies and Peers, strongly urging them to introduce a coherent penitentiary system in France, and the approving legislators responded by having Lucas made an inspector general of prisons.¹¹⁰ Camille de Montalivet, the newly appointed interior minister, was himself the son of a prison reformer and aware of the rising pressure to act.¹¹¹

Tocqueville's and Beaumont's interest in prison reform was also a natural extension of their prosecutorial responsibilities—and they gathered information to support their proposal. Their friend Blosseville had gone to Geneva and shared with them his observations on the experimental Swiss "cellular" system.¹¹² This led them to study other reform efforts, mainly by English theorists such as John Howard, who argued that prisons could reform prisoners by restricting their communication with one another, and Jeremy Bentham, who became so famous in France for his panopticon scheme for surveillance that he was made an honorary French citizen in 1792.¹¹³

From the courthouse at Versailles, Tocqueville and Beaumont made several visits to Poissy, the central prison of the département. They learned the rules and observed the inmates. When they reported that

Sunday meals at Poissy, where inmates could spend freely their “*pécule*” (earnings from their prison wages), resembled “a feast given by Satan to his friends,” this rang true with reformers. In other words, Tocqueville and Beaumont had gathered enough information to write a proposal seeking leave to see US penitentiaries in person. They each wrote a draft independently and then combined their texts.¹¹⁴ In the proposal, they depicted themselves as sincere reformers who wanted not only to punish criminals but also to rehabilitate them. They argued that firsthand observations were the most effective way to determine how Americans had seemingly achieved rehabilitation of criminals at moderate costs (and in some instances, profit).

It was a compelling, masterfully written proposal, and it worked, with some help from cousin Le Peletier d’Aunay, several times vice-president of the Chamber. Interior Minister Montalivet granted the assignment and Minister of Justice Félix Barthe the leave of absence. The assignment was unpaid, but the Tocqueville and Beaumont families came through, the Tocquevilles with 5,000 francs and the Beaumonts with 2,000, which the two promised to spend wisely. Then came the rush to prepare for departure, including collecting letters of introduction. Lafayette did not respond to a request for a letter, but it seems as though a member of his household alerted novelist James Fenimore Cooper. Prison reformer Charles Lucas was not enthusiastic about encouraging potential rivals but nevertheless provided Tocqueville and Beaumont a note for American secretary of state Edward Livingston, whose work on prisons for the Louisiana legislature he had translated; he also furnished them with a letter to James J. Barclay, a prominent member of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of the Public Prisons, who could help arrange visits to sites such as the Eastern State Penitentiary. Former minister to the United States Hyde de Neuville wrote a letter of introduction to fellow diplomat William Short (who had begun his career as Jefferson’s private secretary); the duc de Montebello provided one to Henry Gilpin, a noted Philadelphia Quaker who practiced law. Ex-consul David Bailie Warden, the baron de Gérando, and Chateaubriand likely provided letters as well. Tocqueville and Beaumont collected as many as seventy letters in total. The two friends also decided

to do some preparatory reading. They acquired a number of guides, including Volney's two-volume *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (1803) and, in translation, James Fenimore Cooper's *Lettres sur les mœurs et les institutions des États-Unis de l'Amérique du Nord* (1828), the book Lafayette had suggested Cooper should write.¹¹⁵

On April 2, 1831, they sailed from Le Havre. As Tocqueville reported to Eugène Stöffels, "The ship became our universe." They were "out of sight of land for 35 days." They socialized with other crossers but spent much time "in deep solitude."¹¹⁶ They worked on their English, read American history, studied Jean-Baptiste Say, and sketched out an itinerary.

Thus began a new chapter not just in their lives but also in the history of democracy, although at the time it was impossible to tell what the outcome of the trip would be and Tocqueville had no clear sense of it. Writing from Switzerland in October 1829, Tocqueville had told Beaumont, "Some good historical work might still come of our joint endeavors." But he added, perhaps as a reflection of the awakened political consciousness he owed to Guizot, "it is the politician that we must build up in ourselves."¹¹⁷ The time for that had not yet come. But Tocqueville had intuited that leaving France behind and exploring American democracy might someday make it possible.

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Note: In the index, AT is Alexis de Tocqueville, GB is Gustave de Beaumont, DA I is *Democracy in America* (1835), DA II is *Democracy in America* (1840), and ARFR is *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*. Page numbers in *italics* indicate maps.

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