

ist associate of Rohespierre, St. Just, in view of the steady rise in prices of the necessities of life, had proposed a scheme by which these prices should be established by law, at a rate proportionate to the wages of the working classes. This plan lingered in men's minds, taking shape in various resolutions and decrees until the whole culminated on September 29th, 1793, in the Law of the *Maximum*.

While all this legislation was high-handed, it was not careless. Even statesmen of the greatest strength, having once been drawn into this flood, were borne on into excesses which, a little earlier, would have appalled them. Committees of experts were appointed to study the whole subject of prices, and at last there were adopted the great "four rules" which seemed to statesmen of that time a masterly solution of the whole difficulty.*

First, the price of each article of necessity was to be fixed at one and one-third its price in 1790. *Secondly*, all transportation was to be added at a fixed rate per league. *Thirdly*, five per cent was to be added for the profit of the wholesaler. *Fourthly*, ten per cent was to be added for the profit of the retailer. Nothing could look more reasonable. Great was the jubilation. The report was presented and supported by Barrère,—“the tiger monkey,”—then in all the glory of his great orations: now best known from his portrait by Macaulay. Nothing could withstand Barrère's eloquence. He insisted that France had been suffering from a “*Monarchical* commerce which only sought wealth,” while what she needed and what she was now to receive was a “*Republican* commerce—a commerce of moderate profits and virtuous.” He exulted in the fact that “France alone enjoys such a commerce,—that it exists in no other nation.” He poured contempt over political economy as “that science which quacks have corrupted, which pedants have obscured and which academicians have depreciated.” France, he said, has something better, and he declared in conclusion: “The needs of the people will no longer

* For statements showing the distress and disorder that forced the Convention to establish the *Maximum*, see Levasseur, vol. i, pp. 188-193.