

D'Alembert, Helvetius, Turgot, Buffon, Condorcet, Marmontel, Rousseau and St. Lambert were all contributors, while towering above them was "Patriarch" Voltaire, as he was affectionately called, and of whom, as philosopher, litterateur, poet and politician, Carlyle has said: "So far as present knowledge enables us to judge, it may be said that to abstract Voltaire and his activity from the eighteenth century, were to produce a greater difference in the existing figure of things (1829) than the want of any other up to this day." Indeed, the then thirst for knowledge may be said to have become a universal passion, and it is stated that at this time the sale of books in Paris was four times as great as in London. Remembering, as Lecky writes, that, "in France absolute monarchy had destroyed all liberty and all opposition, and having prevented a school of practical reformers, politics came to be treated like a problem in geometry or ethics, to be worked out on general principles with a complete disregard to the traditions and the special circumstances of the nation," it is little wonder that Rousseau's "Contrat Social" came to be looked upon as a new gospel, and for the influence it exerted we must class it with Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations." How could it be otherwise when it set forth what were then new ideas, but to us now mere axioms?—That (a) society originally was formed for the protection of the lives and property of those composing it; (b) that to live in peace and security was the right of individuals; (c) to this end certain organizations and laws were necessary; (d) that as to do this costs money equalized taxation was necessary and majorities should rule. The outcome of such teachings to a people to whom science was revealing the marvellous secrets of nature and teaching a uniformity of laws, and the dominance of intellect is obvious. Of that ever memorable 4th May, 1789, when Versailles saw the Convocation of the States-General, which had not met since 1614, in a country where existed "no Habeas Corpus Act, no liberty of the press, no legalized religious liberty, no trial by jury, and no national representation," Carlyle says: "It is the baptism day of Democracy—sick Time has given it birth, the numbered months being run—the "extreme unction" day of Feudalism; a superannuated society, decrepit with toils . . . . is now to die; and so, with death-throes and birth-throes, a new one is to be born." Amidst all the horrors of that revolution, which advanced with lightning rapidity, there is to be observed the influences that preceded the Renaissance, regarding which Talleyrand remarked: "He who did not live before 1789 has never known the charm of life." As expressed by Lecky: "The study of physiology, botany, comparative anatomy, and electricity advanced with gigantic strides; and in the enthusiasm which prevailed it was imagined that physical science would soon unlock the secret of the universe and disclose the mystery of life."