

14th July

Memory Verse: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Something to read from history¹

July 14th is Bastille Day, celebrated in France with a military parade and fireworks. What happened on that day in 1789 and why? The whole story of the French Revolution is too long to tell here. The best place to read an outline of the events is in the relevant chapters from Mary MacGregor's *The Story of France* which does for France what H E Marshall did for England in *Our Island Story*.²

The rulers of France had governed the country most unjustly. The common people had to bear all the taxes needed to pay for long wars and the great luxury and extravagance of the court. In spite of this, they themselves were unable to have any say in the government of the country. This was because the French Parliament had not sat since 1614! The nobles and clergy were exempt from taxation, yet the poor peasants had to pay as much as 85% of their earnings. The tax collection system was chaotic and corrupt so that much money was lost in collecting the taxes. There were often famines and the peasants were treated with great brutality by the landlords. The church was no help to the poor people either. The Protestant Huguenots had long been persecuted out of the land so there was no one to preach the gospel to them. The Roman Catholic clergy just took money in the form of tithes but could not show the people the way of salvation. The French nobles were exempt from military service but many French peasants had been sent as soldiers to aid the Americans against the English during the War of Independence. For the first time, in America, they saw people who lived with the benefits of freedom. When they returned home, they began to wonder why they should have to continue to endure slavery themselves.

The French nobility, meanwhile was toying with the philosophical ideas of the so-called “Enlightenment”;³ ideas that questioned the nobility's very right to exist. Two philosophers were particularly influential:

Voltaire (1694-1778) taught that human reason on its own was the highest authority not the Bible or the church and that a constitutional monarchy such as England had was superior to the absolute (all powerful) monarchy of France.

Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that civilization itself was the corrupting influence that caused evil in society, that people should get back to nature like the “savages” of the South Sea Islands discovered by Captain Cook. He thought that men should be governed by the general will of the people, not an absolute monarch. One should follow one's heart and consult one's reason when it came to religion, not the Bible or the priest. His little book *The Social Contract* (1762) proposed a kind of democracy that presumed no mandate from God and no Bible foundation on which to base the moral authority of the law. It was hugely influential in France.

The economy of France was in a dire condition. There was no money in the state treasury and poor harvests added to the problem. The starving peasants were the only people who had to pay taxes. There were few skilled workers, businessmen and entrepreneurs, now that the Huguenots⁴ were gone, to help the economy. The King, Louis XVI, decided he would have to call the Estates-General (the French Parliament). Louis XVI was a weak man who at every step of the crisis that followed,

1 Adapted from *The Story of God's Dealings with our Nation* Volume 2 which is available here: <https://www.creationresearchstore.com/s/search?q=The%20Story%20of%20Gods%20Dealings%20with%20our%20Nation>.

2 The book can be downloaded here: <https://www.heritage-history.com>.

3 This was a philosophical movement that replaced the “revealed religion” of the Bible with human reason. It's ideas still have a powerful effect today.

4 Huguenots were often skilled artisans, bankers, and traders.

backed down and changed his mind when threatened with force. It was his undoing, as you will find out if you read *The Story of France*.

The Bastille was a huge medieval fortress used as a prison, especially for political prisoners. A political prisoner is someone who has not committed crime such as robbery or murder which can be identified as a transgression of God's law. They have been imprisoned rather because the government sees them as a threat to their authority; usually because they are spreading ideas the government does not like. On 14th July 1789 there were only seven such prisoners in the whole of the gloomy old fortress. However, it *was* being used as a store for gunpowder. It was this that the mob who stormed it wanted, not the release of prisoners. The hungry mob, having seized weapons, wanted the gunpowder for their guns. Thomas Carlyle tells what happened in a vivid piece of prose which he pieced together with painstaking detail from contemporary reports and descriptions in his *History of the French Revolution*:

“Arms! Arms! A hundred-and-fifty thousand of us; and only every third man furnished with so much as a pike! Arms are the one thing needful: with arms we are an unconquerable man-defying National Guard; without arms, a rabble.” The cry rises.

No secret can be kept: “there are muskets at the *Hôtel des Invalides*.⁵ Thither will we hurry!”

The walls are scaled, no *Invalide*⁶ firing a shot; the gates are flung open. The arms are found; all safe there; lying packed in straw, and eight-and-twenty thousand sufficient firelocks are on the shoulders of so many National Guards, lifted thereby out of darkness into fiery light.

“And now, to the Bastille, ye intrepid Parisians!”

Old Governor de Launay of the Bastille withdrew into the inner fortress soon after midnight of Sunday. He has been there ever since in the saddest conflict of uncertainties. He is “invited” to admit the National Soldiers, which is a soft name for surrendering. On the other hand, His Majesty’s orders were precise. His garrison is but eighty-two old *Invalides*, reinforced by thirty-two young Swiss; his walls indeed are nine feet⁷ thick, he has cannon and powder; but, alas, only one day’s provision of victuals. “Rigorous old de Launay, think what thou wilt do!”

All morning, since nine, there has been a cry everywhere: “To the Bastille!” Repeated “deputations of citizens”⁸ have been to the fortress, passionate for arms; whom de Launay has got dismissed by soft speeches through portholes. Towards noon, Elector Thuriot de la Rosiere, a leader of the revolution, gains admittance; finds de Launay unwilling to surrender; nay disposed for blowing up the place rather. Thuriot mounts with him to the battlements: heaps of paving-stones, old iron and missiles lie piled up;⁹ cannon all duly levelled; in every embrasure a cannon,—only drawn back a little! Outside how the multitude flows on, welling through every street; alarm bells furiously pealing, all drums beating the call to arms: the Suburb Saint-Antoine¹⁰ rolling towards the Bastille wholly, as one man!

Thuriot descends; departs with protest; with a warning addressed also to the *Invalides*,—on whom, however, it produces but a mixed indistinct impression. The old heads are none of the clearest and they have been drinking. They think they will not fire,—if not fired on, if they can help it; but must, on the whole, be ruled considerably by circumstances.

5 A hospital and home for old or wounded soldiers.

6 Military veteran.

7 Nearly 3 metres.

8 In reality these were hungry ruffians.

9 Ready to be thrown down onto the mob.

10 An area near the Bastille.

Woe to thee, de Launay, in such an hour, if thou canst not, by taking just one firm decision, *rule* circumstances! Soft speeches will not serve; hard grape-shot is questionable; but hovering between the two is *unquestionable*.

Ever wilder swells the tide of men; their infinite hum waxing ever louder, into curses, perhaps into a crackle of stray musketry,—these, on walls nine feet thick, cannot do no damage. The Outer Drawbridge has been lowered for Thuriot to leave; a new “deputation of citizens” (it is the third, and noisiest of all) gets in by this means to the Outer Court: soft speeches cannot remove them so de Launay gives an order to fire and pulls up his Drawbridge. Insurrection bursts forth at sight of blood (for there were deaths by that sputter of fire), into an endless rolling explosion of musketry – and overhead, from the Fortress,

“let one great gun, with its grape-shot,¹¹ go booming, to show what *we could* do!”

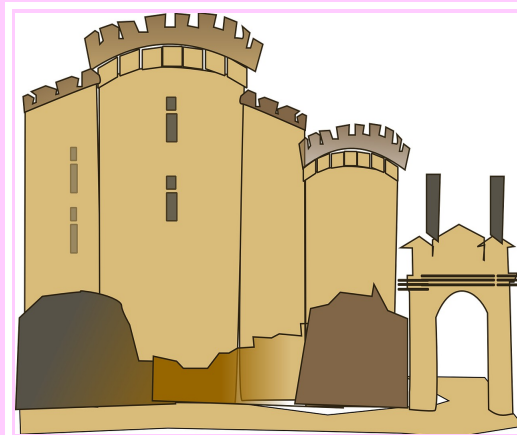
The Bastille is besieged!

“On, then, all Frenchmen for it is the hour!”

“Smite, thou Louis Tournay, cartwright of the Marais district of Paris, old-soldier of the Regiment Dauphine; smite at that Outer Drawbridge chain, though the fiery hail whistles round thee! Never, over nave or felloe¹², did thy axe strike such a stroke. Down with it, man; down with it to Orcus:¹³ let the whole accursed building sink thither, and Tyranny be swallowed up for ever!”

Mounted, some say on the roof of the guard-room, some say on bayonets stuck into joints of the wall, Louis Tournay smites at the drawbridge chain, brave Aubin Bonnemere (also an old soldier) seconding him: the chain yields, breaks; the huge Drawbridge slams down, thundering. Glorious: and yet, alas, it is still but the outworks. The Eight grim Towers, with their *Invalides*' musketry, their paving stones and cannon-mouths, still soar aloft intact;— the Ditch yawning impassable, stone-faced; the inner Drawbridge with its back towards us: “the Bastille is still to take!”

To describe this Siege of the Bastille (thought to be one of the most important in history) perhaps transcends the talent of mortals. Could one but, after infinite reading, get to understand so much as the plan of the building! But the grim Eight Towers: a labyrinthic Mass, are high-frowning there, of all ages from twenty years to four hundred and twenty;—beleaguered, in this its last hour, by mere Chaos come again! Ordnance of all calibres; throats of all capacities; men of all plans, every man his own engineer: seldom since the war of Pygmies and Cranes¹⁴ was there seen so anomalous a thing.



Paris wholly has got to the height of its frenzy; a grand Fire-Mahlstrom¹⁵ is lashing round the Bastille.

11 Many small pellets fired together in one shot of the cannon.

12 Parts of a cartwheel.

13 The underworld of Classical legend.

14 Homer wrote of a race of small people who were at constant war with the birds called Cranes.

15 The German word for a violent whirlpool or turmoil.

Cholat the wine-merchant has become an impromptu cannoneer! See Georget, of the Marine Service, fresh from Brest, ply the King of Siam's cannon!¹⁶ *Gardes Françaises* also will be here, with real artillery: were not the walls so thick!—Upwards from the Esplanade,¹⁷ horizontally from all neighbouring roofs and windows, flashes one irregular deluge of musketry,—without effect. The *Invalides* lying flat, firing comparatively at their ease from behind stone; hardly, show the tip of a nose through the portholes.

“We fall, shot; and make no impression!”

“Let conflagration rage; of whatsoever is combustible!”

Guard-rooms are burnt, *Invalides* mess-rooms. A distracted wig-maker with two fiery torches is for burning the saltpetres¹⁸ of the Arsenal;—had not a woman run screaming; had not a Patriot, with some tincture of science, instantly struck the wind out of him (butt of musket on pit of stomach), overturned the barrels, and stayed the devouring element.¹⁹

A young beautiful lady, is seized escaping in these Outer Courts, and thought falsely to be de Launay's daughter.

“She shall be burnt in de Launay's sight!”

She lies swooned on a paillasse:²⁰ but again a Patriot, it is brave Aubin Bonnemere the old soldier, dashes in, and rescues her.

Straw is burnt; three cartloads of it, hauled thither, go up in white smoke: almost to the choking of Patriotism itself; Smoke as of Tophet; confusion as of Babel; noise as of the Crack of Doom!

Blood flows, the food of this new madness. The wounded are carried into houses of the Rue Cerisaie; the dying leave their as their last request not to yield till the accursed Stronghold fall. And yet, alas, how fall? The walls are so thick! Deputations, three in number, arrive from the Hôtel-de-Ville.²¹ These wave their Town-flag in the arched Gateway; and stand, rolling their drum; but to no purpose. In such Crack of Doom, de Launay cannot hear them, dare not believe them: they return, with justified rage, the whew of lead still singing in their ears. What to do? The Firemen are here, squirting with their fire-pumps on the *Invalides*' cannon, to wet the touchholes; they unfortunately cannot squirt so high; but produce only clouds of spray. And still the fire-deluge abates not; even women are firing.

“The *Gardes Françaises* have come: real cannon, real cannoneers!”

How the great Bastille Clock ticks (inaudible) in its Inner Court there, at its ease, hour after hour; as if nothing special, for it or the world, were passing! It tolled One when the firing began; and is now pointing towards Five, and still the firing slakes not.—Far down, in their vaults, the seven Prisoners hear muffled din as of earthquakes; their Turnkeys²² answer vaguely.

16 Silver cannons that had been given to Louis XIV by an embassy from Siam.

17 Area round the *Hôtel des Invalides*.

18 gunpowder

19 “Devouring element” fire!

20 Straw mattress

21 Town Hall

22 warders

Woe to thee, de Launay, with thy poor hundred *Invalides*! Broglie²³ is distant, and his ears heavy: Besenval²⁴ hears, but can send no help. What shall de Launay do?

One thing only de Launay could have done: what he said he would do. Fancy him sitting, from the first, with lighted taper, within arm's length of the Powder-Magazine; motionless, like old Roman Senator, or bronze Lamp-holder; coldly apprising Thuriot, and all men, by a slight motion of his eye, what his resolution was:—Harmless he sat there, while unharmed; but the King's Fortress, meanwhile, could, might, would, or should, in nowise, be surrendered, save to the King's Messenger: one old man's life would be worthless, if it was lost with honour; but think, ye brawling *canaille*²⁵, how will it be when a whole Bastille springs skyward!—In such statuesque, taper-holding attitude, one fancies de Launay might have left Thuriot, and all the tagrag-and-bobtail of the world, to work their will.

And yet, withal, he could not do it. De Launay could not do it. Distracted, he hovers between the two; hopes in the middle of despair; surrenders not his Fortress; declares that he will blow it up, seizes torches to blow it up, and does not blow it. Unhappy old de Launay, it is the death-agony of thy Bastille and thee!

For four hours now has the World-Bedlam roared, blowing fire! The poor *Invalides* have sunk under their battlements, or rise only with reversed muskets:²⁶ they have made a white flag of napkins; go beating the *chamade*,²⁷ or seeming to beat, for one can hear nothing. The very Swiss²⁸ at the Portcullis look weary of firing; disheartened in the fire-deluge: a porthole at the drawbridge is opened, as by one that would speak. See Huissier Maillard²⁹, the shifty man! On his plank he goes swinging over the abyss of that Stone-Ditch; plank resting on parapet, balanced by weight of Patriots,—he hovers perilous: such a Dove towards such an Ark! “Deftly, thou shifty Usher:³⁰ one man already fell; and lies smashed, far down there, against the masonry!” Usher Maillard falls not: deftly, unerring he walks, with outspread palm. The Swiss holds a paper through his porthole; the shifty Usher snatches it, and returns. Terms of surrender: Pardon, immunity to all! Are they accepted?—*Foi d'officier*, On the word of an officer, they are! Sinks the drawbridge,—Usher Maillard bolting it when down; rushes-in the living deluge: the Bastille is fallen! *Victoire! La Bastille est prise!* The Bastille is taken!³¹

In spite of the storming of the Bastille, the starving peasants, led on by intellectuals of the upper classes who had taken in the “Enlightenment” ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau did not achieve a constitutional monarchy like that of Britain – let alone the Utopia³² envisaged by “Enlightenment” thinkers. They suffered the horrors of the Reign of Terror³³, put the king and queen to death and at the end of it all they were ruled by Napoleon. They had fought for *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* – “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” but Napoleon's attitude is summed up in this remark, “It is necessary that we should always talk of liberty, equality and justice ... but never grant any liberty whatever.”

23 Marshall Broglie who was at Versailles with the king.

24 The Royal commander who is in Paris.

25 Rabble

26 As used in a funeral procession.

27 Signal to the enemy of truce or capitulation.

28 Mercenary troops employed by the French King.

29 A revolutionary leader.

30 A military rank

31 Adapted and abridged from Carlyle, Thomas, *The History of the French Revolution* (London, 1837)

32 A perfect society that exists only in theory.

33 See *The Story of France* by Mary MacGregor for an explanation and account of this. Available here: https://www.heritage-history.com/site/hclass/christian_europe/ebooks/pdf/macgregor_france.pdf

Something to write

I think the best paragraph of Carlyle's description of the storming of the Bastille is the part about the clock. It's relentless ticking carries on through it all as if nothing was happening. Think of all the different clocks you know of, perhaps one on a local church, the one on the oven in the kitchen, a grandfather clock maybe, your alarm clock with a little light that shines in the dark while you are asleep... Choose a clock you know and think about the things that might be happening while it ticks away. I used to pass a huge digital clock on a biscuit factory every day on my way to work. Just imagine as it ticked – custard creams, fig rolls, jammy dodgers, rich tea, nice, chocolate digestives... Write a short paragraph about your chosen clock and what happens as it ticks off the seconds. Older children may notice that throughout his description Carlyle makes it vivid through the use of the present tense: he writes as if it is all happening *now*. See if you can do this too in your description of a clock.

Something to cook

The French are famous for their omelettes – a dish that dates back to Roman times. Omelettes make a very good breakfast or filled with cheese are delicious for lunch:



Ingredients for 1 omelette:

2 large eggs

Salt and pepper

2 to 3 tablespoons grated cheese (optional)

1/4 to 1/2 cup of other filling, such as mushrooms pre-cooked if necessary (optional)

2 teaspoons butter

Chopped parsley and tomato to garnish (optional)

Equipment: mixing bowl, whisk, frying pan of about 8 inch/20cm diameter.(If you pan is larger use more eggs and make a larger omelette), spatula, warmed dinner plate.

Method:

Whisk the eggs completely combined, and season with salt and pepper. If you're adding cheese or other fillings, make sure they are ready.

Warm the frying pan and melt the butter by tilting the pan as the butter melts to evenly coat the bottom. When the butter stops sizzling, the pan is heated and ready.

Pour the eggs into the pan and tilt the pan so the eggs coat the entire bottom. The eggs should sizzle on contact.

Use a spatula to gently drag and push the cooked eggs from the edges toward the centre of the pan, making space for the uncooked eggs and forming waves in the omelette. Tilt the pan so that the uncooked eggs flow into the open spaces.

The omelette will finish cooking in 1 to 2 minutes. When done, the bottom will be set and the edges will look crisp. The top of the omelette should still look fairly wet and uncooked, but there will no longer be any loose, easily flowing liquid egg. The omelette will continue cooking off the heat, so stop cooking when you think the top still seems a bit underdone.

If using, sprinkle the cheese and fillings down the centre of the omelette.

Fold the bottom third of the omelette over the centre, and then fold the top third down. If you prefer you can just fold the omelette in half.

Gently slide the omelette onto a plate and garnish with parsley. Eat right away while still hot.

Something to think about

What does the Bible have to say about liberty? The Bible describes us as slaves of sin (Romans 6:20) – all of us. But the Bible also has a hope of deliverance. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” said Jesus about those who were truly his disciples (John 8:32). In fact, Jesus himself *is* that truth. (John 14:6) If we are trusting in Him we are truly free – death itself has no power over us!

An exciting story to read³⁴

An adventure story from the French Revolution is included in today's Optional Resources file.

³⁴ From the Historical Fiction Selection (Volume 7) on the *Mothers' Companion* Flashdrive.
<https://motherscompanion.weebly.com>.