

MARIE ANTOINETTE IS EXECUTED
From Mary MacGregor's *The Story of France*
a companion volume to the well-known *Our Island Story* by H. E. Marshall.

The Assembly [which was governing France] soon found that they had not ended their troubles by beheading their king.

England showed her horror of the deed by ordering the French ambassador to leave London, an act which would probably be followed by war. Russia ordered all Frenchmen to leave her dominions within twenty days. Austria again invaded France.

But worse than her foreign foes were those France had at home, where the members of Convention were quarrelling among themselves.

To quell these disorders a Committee of Public Safety was formed, and on this committee sat Danton, Marat, Robespierre.

These men, along with six others, had the power of imprisoning and putting to death any one whom they suspected of even venturing to dislike the Republic.

The Convention was meanwhile holding its meetings in the hall of the Tuileries. Among its members there were some who were not such keen Republicans as were the members of the Committee of Public Safety. It would be well, said Danton, to get rid of these weak persons.

So the Tuileries was surrounded by troops, and the members suspected by Danton were dismissed from the Convention, and many of them were afterwards beheaded.

These Republicans who were not so fierce as the Jacobins were called Girondists. Some of the Girondists escaped from Paris to the provinces, and prepared to return in force to the capital to fight against the Jacobins. Many of the scattered Royalists joined the Girondists and so strengthened their own cause.

Marat, who had been one of the most determined to see Louis XVI. beheaded, was now overtaken by a speedy vengeance. Charlotte Corday, a beautiful young French girl, had often heard of the cruelty of Marat. She believed that her country would be saved if Marat was dead.

And so, brooding and brooding over the thought, she at length made up her mind that she herself would free her country from the cruel tyrant.

In July 1798 she left her home and travelled to Paris. Marat was ill and was forced to spend much of his time in a hot bath to ease his pain. Charlotte, when she reached his house, was told that he was too ill to see any one. But having determined to see the Jacobin, Charlotte Corday would take no denial. She went a second time to Marat's door and begged to see him, saying that she had important secrets which she must tell to him alone. Marat, in his bath, heard what the girl said, and called to her to come in.

Charlotte did not hesitate, she loved her country too well.

Eagerly she entered the house, and being admitted to Marat's presence, she told him the names of some pretended traitors. Then, as he turned aside to write down their names, she pulled her dagger from its hiding-place and stabbed, as she verily believed, the tyrant of France.

Marat screamed for help, and Charlotte Corday, who had not tried to escape, was at once arrested and soon after executed. She showed no fear as she was taken to her death, going to it calm and smiling, as one who had done her duty.

But Charlotte Corday had not accomplished what she had hoped by the death of Marat. His removal only left room for Robespierre and his terrible Council of Ten to begin the Reign of Terror.

This Council of Ten began its reign by imprisoning those suspected of disloyalty to the Government. In a few days the prisons were full, and to make room for others the guillotine was kept constantly at work.

Prisoners were taken for trial before the Committee of Public Safety. But as had happened earlier in the year the trial was a mock one, batches of seventy or eighty prisoners being taken at the same time from the prison to the place of execution.

No one dare trust another. A friend might at any time accuse his friend, a servant his master. Spies were in every household. Innocent and guilty suffered together, while noble ladies were thrown into prison with those who had been brought up in miserable hovels.

Marie Antoinette had been in prison ever since she had been taken to the Temple with Louis XVI. Her captivity was now drawing to a close.

She had changed greatly since sorrow had fallen upon her. Her hair, which had once been golden, was now quite white, much of her beauty, too, was gone, but she had grown quiet and patient, and no murmur at her treatment ever crossed her lips. She had her little son and daughter with her, and the poor queen spent her days teaching her children and working beautiful embroidery.

But in July 1793 her children were taken from her, and the dauphin was given into the charge of a rough and cruel shoemaker called Simon. Then, indeed, the queen thought that her heart would break.

At first she would watch hour after hour from the window of the Temple, that she might catch a glimpse of her little son as he was taken for his daily walk. Before long, however, she was removed from the Temple to a dark and gloomy prison. Here no candle was given to her, and even her needlework was taken away. Thus with no work for her hands, no occupation for her tired heart, the long days slipped by slowly and unheeded.

In October 1793 she was summoned before the Council of Ten and condemned to death. It was with little sorrow that she heard her sentence. Life had ceased to be of any worth when her son was taken from her.

Never was Marie Antoinette more a queen than when she stepped upon the scaffold and, quiet and brave, laid her head upon the block. In another moment her sufferings were ended.

After the queen's death, Elizabeth, the sister of Louis XVI., Philip of Orleans, who had voted for the king's death, and thousands of others, known and unknown, were hurried to the scaffold.

To add to the misery of the people, if that indeed was possible, the Jacobins now gave orders that prayers should no longer be offered in any church, that Sunday should no longer be observed. And in the cathedral of Notre Dame, where the people had ever gone to worship God, the Jacobins ordered an image of the Goddess of Reason to be set up and worshipped. When, as well as all these changes, the names of the days and months of the year had been altered, the Jacobins believed that a

new world had sprung into being.

The Council of Ten was growing weary of bloodshed, all save one, and that one was Robespierre. Little by little the other members began to fear this terrible man, to think that if he lived much longer even their lives would not be safe.

Lest, therefore, he should cause their fall, the Council resolved to accuse him as a tyrant.

When they tried to arrest him Robespierre resisted, and, rather than submit to be taken prisoner, he attempted to shoot himself, but the bullet only entered his jaw.

After a mock trial, such as he had himself given to others, the tyrant was condemned and taken to the guillotine. With Robespierre's death the Reign of Terror came to an end. A few days later the Convention ordered the prison doors to be opened, the prisoners to be set free.

But there was one little prisoner to whom the opening of the doors could do no good, and this was the dauphin, Louis XVII., as some few people called him.

As you know, the little prince had been taken from his mother and given into the charge of a shoemaker called Simon.

The child, who had always been loved and cared for, was now cuffed and kicked, taught to drink and swear, until his health was ruined and his mind was wellnigh a blank.

After about six months of such cruel treatment Simon gave up his post, and Robespierre sent no one to take his place.

The little dauphin was left in a cell, unwashed and neglected. Often he had barely enough to eat. When Robespierre was put to death, some of the less fierce Republicans remembered the little prince, and he was put under the care of respectable people. Even now, however, he was kept as a prisoner and treated harshly, though not with the cruelty Simon had used.

In May 1794 the child became seriously ill, and a doctor was sent to visit him. His nurses paid him but scant attention, while his sister, who lived in the same house, was not allowed to see her brother.

It is said by some historians that the prince died in June, that at the end happiness stole into the child-heart and he heard "heavenly music and the voice of his mother." But others tell us that the child escaped from his gaolers and lived quietly for many years after he was believed to be dead.