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Louis de Potter and the Belgian Revolution of 1830

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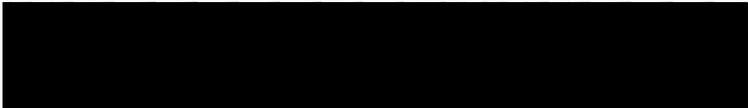
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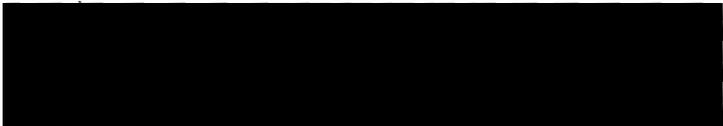
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Karen N. Groth for the Master of Arts in History, presented May 1, 1981.

Title: Louis De Potter and The Belgian Revolution of 1830

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Michael F. Reardon, Chairman


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Louis Joseph Antoine De Potter (1786-1859) was the gifted journalist who served as the catalyst of the successful Belgian revolution of 1830. He has been largely overlooked by students of the nineteenth century revolutionary era. Only one of De Potter's works is known to have been translated into English, his Vie de Scipion de Ricci.

The material for this thesis has been drawn mainly from De Potter's own autobiographical memoirs of the revolution (1839), and six other biographical works. Lucien Jottrand, who published his account in 1860, was a socialist and a long time personal

friend. Theodore Juste's study, written in 1874, was part of a series on founders of the Belgian monarchy. Socialist Maurice Bologne's book, which appeared in 1932, was based upon papers and correspondence, and examined the class conflicts of this period of Belgium's history. Mario Battistini, published from the 1930's to 1968, wrote about De Potter's relationships with various Italian liberals and radicals, both in Italy and Belgium, and L. Le Guillou studied the friendship between De Potter and Lamennais, in the 1960's. E. Van Turenhoudt's biography, written in the 1940's, derived much of its material from earlier works but has some data not found elsewhere.

This paper has examined the development of De Potter's thought from his youth up to and including his participation in the Provisional Belgian Government of 1830. For clarity this study has been divided into four chapters.

Chapter One has focused on the years as a young historian (1786-1823): De Potter's developing interest in the modern study of Christianity; his biography of Scipion de Ricci, the Jansenist Bishop of Tuscany; and his part in the circle around Vieusseux in early nineteenth century Florence.

Chapter Two has described the attempted innovations of King William I of the Netherlands, the "merchant king", and the Belgian's resistance to them. De Potter's role in the emerging Belgian press which criticized the Dutch domination and called for reform was emphasized. This chapter concluded with De Potter's imprisonment for an effective article criticizing King William's manipulations.

Chapter Three has covered the year and a half that De Potter spent in prison, busily writing pamphlets which catapulted him into the leadership of the Belgian opposition to the Dutch control of the government. The appendix of this paper can be referred to for translation of four of these pamphlets, previously not translated into English. Union des catholiques et des libéraux which allied these two sectors of Belgian thought into one political force contains some striking observations on the relationship of church and state. Chapter three ended with De Potter's exile and his subsequent victorious return after the Belgian uprisings of August and September of 1830.

Chapter Four explored De Potter the statesman's, relationships with the other members of the Provisional Government, and their attempts to create a new and better Belgian nation. It described De Potter's tenacity and unwillingness to compromise his desire for a federative republic of Belgium, explaining his ultimate withdrawal from public life. Chapter four closes with De Potter's flight into voluntary exile in France and the continuation of his tradition of outspoken and responsible journalism.

I have hoped to contribute to the study of this fascinating Belgian with this first biographical sketch of him in the English language.

LOUIS DE POTTER AND THE BELGIAN REVOLUTION OF 1830

by

KAREN NELSON GROTH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

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INTRODUCTION

In the historiography of nineteenth century revolutions, the revolutionary propagandist or activist has frequently been presented as a social type. The sources of this social typology were the lives of great figures, a Mirabeau, a Lenin. There has been created, therefore, a danger that the model will overshadow reality.

This thesis has examined the development of Louis De Potter from his youth and emergence as a writer and journalist to his involvement in the Belgian revolution of 1830.

It has attempted to reconstruct Louis De Potter's career in all of its ambiguity, to rescue him from the distortion of historical stereotype.

To understand a man like De Potter, to understand the reality devoid of the stereotype, it has been necessary to examine not only what he thought and wrote, but the major and minor processes that led him to his particular role in a political event. What may appear banal and insignificant from a later perspective may indeed have been important to the actual historical moment. My study has not attempted to reconstruct a logic of events. What has emerged may not fulfill the a priori expectations of historical continuity, but has attempted to preserve the reality of De Potter's life.

This thesis has taken De Potter from his youth to his participation in the Belgian revolution at age forty-four, only slightly more than half of his life. Because his latter years were

devoted to writing and were devoid of active political participation, his role in the Belgian revolution remained his greatest contribution to posterity.

For a man who was primarily a writer and scholar, this intense activity ran against type. De Potter's single great lasting contribution to the government of Belgium seems to have been his liberalizing effect on its constitution.

As the chronicle of a man obsessed with the idea of founding a Belgian republic, De Potter's story was that of a failure. As the narrative of a man who succeeded in unifying the two major sectors of Belgian thought, the Catholics and Liberals, into a single political unit capable of establishing an independent nation, it was one of the major success stories of the nineteenth century. This thesis has examined De Potter's role as a catalyst in the formation of this constitutional nation in 1830, a nation that has now endured, against great odds, for a hundred and fifty-one years.

CHAPTER I

LOUIS DE POTTER: THE YOUNG HISTORIAN

1786-1823

Born in Belgium during its Austrian occupation (1713-1796), Louis De Potter had the good fortune to be allied with staunch government supporters. His father, Pierre De Potter de Droogenwalle, was a member of the petite noblesse of Flanders, and his mother was the daughter of Maroux d'Opbracle or Opraekel, a superior officer in the service of Austria. His uncle and godfather, Louis Maroux was also an important officer charged with the religious reforms of the province.¹

Joseph II had ruled for only nine years when the Brabannons revolted against his arbitrary reforms. The Maroux and De Potter families, being Royalists, fled to Lille for one year. Louis was then three.²

The family was able to return a year later, and in 1792 hired a French émigré priest, Abbé Lucas, to teach the six-year old Louis to read. This arrangement lasted for less than a year. The armies of the French Republic, invading Belgium in 1792, forced the family to leave again, moving this time to Saxony where they resided for four years.³

This turmoil had a permanent effect on the young De Potter. He wrote in his memoirs that:

...le séjour prolongé de ma famille en Allemagne contribua pour beaucoup à donner à mon caractère le cachet d'opposition à tout arbitraire quelconque, auquel se rattacher-

ent dans la suite les qualités et les défauts qui me distinguèrent entre mes contemporains. Dans ces jours d'anxiété, de troubles, d'agitations, sans domicile fixe, sans certitude pour l'avenir, mes parents ne purent guère s'occuper de moi, me surveiller, me corriger, comme ils l'eussent fait dans des temps ordinaires. Je fus donc, à l'âge où l'enfance est si impressionnable, abandonné en grande partie à moi-même.⁴

Not only did his childhood experiences give him an independent nature, they seemed to make him fearless of authority. It is interesting that one biographer of his friend Lamennais insinuated that had he not been raised in the tumultous years of the French revolution, he might have been a more docile priest.⁵

By 1796, it was safe for the De Potters to reclaim their home in Bruges, now annexed to the French Republic, and the ten-year old Louis was sent to the boarding school of Simoneau. Here he learned to read and write French, learned arithmetic, studied geography and art, and detested the school.⁶ He was later to teach his own children himself, at home.⁷ While at this school, he witnessed Jacobin spectacles held in an old Jesuit church, which curiously, seemed to turn him more against orthodox Catholicism than Jacobinism. He said:

...et l'impression qui m'en est restée a déteint avec vigueur sur l'effet que produisent constamment sur moi l'aspect de toute église quelconque et la vue de toute cérémonie religieuse.

At the age of either fourteen or fifteen, De Potter left this first school in Bruges and attended a Latin school in Brussels run by M. Baudewyns.⁹ Jottrand wrote that the school had "une certaine célébrité dans notre pays,"¹⁰ apparently well-deserved, although it was stronger in the study of antiquity and ancient languages than mathematics.¹¹ In order to avoid recruitment into

the French army, certain in Bruges, De Potter stayed on at the school after his eighteenth birthday,¹² reading history and philosophy. We are told that he read Bayle, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau, among others. He learned Greek, English and German in order to read philosophers in their native tongue, but curiously, never learned to read Flemish well, although he spoke it.¹³

After the French school of philosophy he moved on to Leibnitz, Fichte and Schelling, and was particularly taken with the spiritualism of Kant. He composed a series of letters on metaphysics in order to combat the materialism of the eighteenth century with the spiritualism of the nineteenth. These letters were censured by the Napoleonic regime in 1810. He regained these papers during the Restoration, but burned them and some other writings.¹⁴

At this time De Potter made the acquaintance of an abbe who was the librarian of the Comte d' Arconati, possessor of a library of twenty-five thousand volumes. There were many theological works in this library, and De Potter became interested in the history of religion. He particularly remembered a book by Bernard Picart entitled Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde.¹⁵

In 1809, the French decided to form a new national guard in Belgium, and curiously, De Potter fled to France itself to avoid induction. It is not clear whether his medical pass was indeed genuine or obtained from a sympathetic doctor, but it seems that the latter was probably true. De Potter wrote that he had to move on to Rome in 1811 to avoid another call to arms.¹⁶

In Rome, De Potter found a wealth of material on the history of the Christian church. He wrote:

...je continuai de la même manière et dans le même sens à recueillir tout ce qui avait été écrit de plus essentiel sur l'histoire de l'Église pendant les huit premiers siècles de son existence, ne négligeant rien de ce que nous avaient laissé à cet égard, non seulement les historiens et dogmatistes des différentes hérésies chrétiennes, mais encore les antagonistes nés des chrétiens, les écrivains du paganisme.¹⁷

While De Potter was surveying religious history in Rome, the government of Napoleon fell and tiny Belgium acquired yet another ruler. Although the Kingdom of the Netherlands did restore a monarchy to the country, King William I was not someone the Belgians themselves would have chosen. His father was William V of the House of Orange, he was a Calvinist, and both his mother and his wife were Prussian princesses. Frederick the Great was his hero, he was a thorough admirer of things German.¹⁸ His principal contact with the French had been fighting them for many years, whereas Belgium had been steeped in French administration, French education, and French culture for the last twenty years. An entire generation of Belgians existed who could not even remember the old days under the Austrians.

Nevertheless, the older Belgians had hoped for a reunion with Catholic Austria. Austria had no land access to Belgium and was uninterested. Prussia and England, on the other hand, did not want this "keystone of Europe" to fall into the clutches of the French again and thought William was the solution.¹⁹

King William himself remarked in 1825 that he did not understand, or particularly like the Belgians, and would have been quite content to rule just Holland.²⁰

An economist, he thought that when the Belgians and the Dutch shared the same standards of living and education, they would also think alike. De Meeüs referred to him as, "a Marxist before the days of Marx."²¹ William saw the problem as two-fold, to raise the lower economic level of Belgium, and to eradicate what he considered the inferior system of Catholic education. Unfortunately, he was a better businessman than diplomat, and the former attempt was not appreciated as much as it should have been, the latter not at all.

De Potter's initial contact with the new government of William gave no indication that he would become its harshest critic, for in Rome, he rapidly became the protégé of the Chevalier Johann Gotthard R. Reinhold, Minister from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Rome after 1814. Reinhold, who was then forty-three, and a veteran diplomat, was his entree to both the Vatican archives and the Roman salons.²²

De Potter would have been attracted to Reinhold because of his interest in German literature, but he also found a kindred spirit in the friendly diplomat who became a close friend of the young Belgian.

In Rome, De Potter began to write a very nineteenth century church history. He said:

J'avais voulu présenter les événements dont se compose cette histoire, si longtemps dénaturés et faussés parce que toujours crus exceptionnels, sacrés et, pour ainsi parler, surnaturels et divins, j'avais voulu, dis-je, les présenter comme tous les événements ordinaires qui font partie du grand drame de la vie de l'humanité. J'avais pour cela conçu le projet de me placer au point de vue d'un historien qui aurait vécu au moins cent ans après l'entière extinction de l'Église, lorsque par conséquent elle

n'aurait plus eu ni courtisans ni détracteurs, seul moyen à mon avis de passer sur cette Église l'équitable niveau commun sous lequel se trouvent placées toutes les associations, et de soumettre exclusivement au jugement de la raison des faits que la mémoire ne conserve que pour les faire passer par cette solennelle épreuve.²³

...je voulais en faire conclure, naturellement et forcément que, dans l'histoire de l'Église comme dans toute histoire quelconque, il n'y a rien d'exceptionnel, rien de surhumain, ni surtout de miraculeux; que tout, bien au contraire, y est variation et versatilité, soumis autant que d'autres faits sociaux, je dirais presque plus que tous les faits sociaux quelconques, à l'influence déterminante du temps, des lieux, des événements, des hommes, et de leurs intérêts souvent les plus bas et les plus misérables, et de leurs passions souvent les moins avouables et les plus grossières; qu'enfin le quod semper, quod ubique, est un impudent quoique solennel mensonge des prêtres, dont le système sacerdotal et l'exploitation religieuse, si hypocritement décorés du nom d'Église, n'ont jamais été universels, pas plus qu'ils ne sont éternels.²⁴

This history, which treated the Christian story like secular history, was published in Brussels in two volumes in the year 1816. It was entitled, Considérations sur l'histoire de principaux conciles, depuis les apôtres jusqu' au grand schisme entre les grecs et les latins.²⁵ It is interesting that this work fit into the category of rational religion, which was so admirably advanced by Hermann Samuel Reimarus of Hamburg (1694-1768). Lessing published fragments of Reimarus's most important work in Hamburg between the years 1774 and 1778;²⁶ and De Potter's mentor, Reinhold, was living in Hamburg between 1775 and 1809 or 1810. Reinhold's biographer wrote that he met many intellectuals in Hamburg during his stay in that city, and that he visited with outstanding notables of the city in the Reimarus-Sieveking House.²⁷ It is likely that Reinhold, influenced by the great German's theological studies, may indeed have passed on ideas, possibly

even the published excerpts of Reimarus's life of Jesus, to De Potter.

Few historians had yet treated religious history with the impartiality brought to the study of profane history, and

"Dans un pays aussi catholique que la Belgique du XIXe siècle, un tel ouvrage devait apparaître comme inspiré des puissances infernales et valoir à son auteur une réputation qui le mettait en marge de la société bien-pensante."²⁸

De Potter had returned to Belgium in 1816 to have this first major work published.²⁹ His very unpopularity in Catholic circles encouraged the Protestant-dominated government to take an interest in him. Reinhold had praised De Potter to the Secretary of State, Falck, who entertained Louis and enjoyed his company. De Potter had promised Reinhold that he would present the king with a copy of his work; however, after the king granted him a royal audience, De Potter refused to put on court dress. The king finally made an exception, and De Potter was received at court wearing his Sunday clothes.³⁰ The king and the crown prince were friendly to him, despite the fact that De Potter made it clear to the king that his criticism of the Catholic church did not make him automatically a supporter of Protestantism:

Il lui semblait qu'ayant écrit contre le catholicisme, je devais nécessairement être protestant. Je lui répondis sans hésiter que je protestais en effet, mais surtout contre le protestantisme, parce qu'ayant ouvert la porte à la protestation contre l'autorité pour mettre celle-ci dehors, il s'était permis ensuite de la fermer arbitrairement, afin de rester seul dedans, lui³¹ protestantisme, après s'être constitué autorité à son tour³¹

De Potter wrote that King William only saw the originality of his thought and was amused; it did not occur to him that his opposition to religious Protestantism would turn into opposition to

his absolutism.³²

De Potter returned to Rome in 1817 and continued writing his history. Waiting for him there was his Italian lover, Matilde Malenchini, a member of the Academy of St. Luc de Rome and painter at the court of Tuscany. She was a married woman, seven years older than he, who was separated from her husband.³³ They were together for eleven or twelve years, and she mourned his absence for years after the end of their affair. She not only travelled in the social circles of Rome, her husband had been a Freemason in Tuscany, and she was an important link between De Potter and the liberal intelligentsia there.³⁴

The climate in Rome was noticeably chillier during his second visit. The Vatican had put De Potter's first work on the Index, and he had more difficulty using the Vatican archives for his research. Finally he appealed to Reinhold, and the latter went to Cardinal Consalvi, the papal Secretary of State, and interceded in De Potter's behalf. By submitting a list of books each week that he wanted to use, he was able to continue his work.³⁵

By August 1820, De Potter had finished the next part of his history of Christianity, and he returned to Belgium. He did not take the manuscript with him; Reinhold sent it to him by diplomatic pouch, possibly to avoid confiscation. This treatise appeared in Paris under the title of, Considérations philosophiques et politiques sur l'histoire des conciles et des papes depuis Charlemagne jusqu' à nos jours. The same year the son of Gracchus Babeuf published these first two achievements in one edition entitled the Esprit de l'Église.³⁶ Stendhal thought the contents

superb, but found his style tedious.³⁷

While he was in Brussels, De Potter was again cordially entertained by Minister Falck.³⁸ He also made several trips to Paris, probably to see his publisher, and it was there, in 1821, that he became friendly with the Abbé Henri Grégoire, the Constitutional Bishop of Blois, who was then seventy-one years old. There are several letters from this ardent republican in the collected correspondence of De Potter held in Brussels.³⁹

Reputedly, it was the Abbé Grégoire who interested the young author in editing the manuscripts of his friend, Scipion de Ricci, the Jansenist bishop of Pistoia and Prato.⁴⁰ De Ricci had become bishop in 1780 under Leopold I, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. A liberal, who leaned toward the French Jansenists and disliked the Jesuit power, he affected many sweeping reforms. Two of his most ardent supporters had been the Abbé Grégoire and the Abbé Bellegarde of Utrecht.⁴¹

The project would have been a natural one for De Potter whose family had been in the service of Austria. Leopold I, upon ascending to the throne as Leopold II in 1790 had ruled Belgium for two years during De Potter's childhood.

Abbé Grégoire knew that de Ricci had written some memoirs, which were in the library of his two nephews who resided in Florence, and that an abbé who had known de Ricci had another copy. With this project in mind, De Potter returned to Italy in 1822, and went to Florence, accompanied by Signora Malenchini. With a letter from Abbé Grégoire, De Potter was welcomed by de Ricci's nephews, who gave him free access to their uncle's

manuscripts. De Potter worked at their library for nearly a year.⁴²

It is likely that Signora Malenchini had known both the grand duke and Scipion de Ricci during the days of her youth. The bishop had died only twelve years before this, although he had not held the bishopric for thirty-one years (1791).⁴³ When the study of de Ricci was completed, it was illustrated with a portrait of him by Mathilde Malenchini.⁴⁴

For the view of de Ricci held by his opponents, it is useful to refer to a description of the bishop written by Eric Cochrane in 1973:

...the riot (of 1790) drove out of politics once and for all the two people who had been most closely associated with Pietro Leopoldo during the last years of his residence in Florence. The first was probably the most disliked man in Tuscany, Bishop Scipione de Ricci of Pistoia and Prato. Ricci had inherited the accumulated pride of two ancient patrician families (his mother was a Rucellai). The presence on his genealogical charts of one of the most spectacular saints in Florentine history, the sixteenth century mystic Caterina de' Ricci, made him sure of his infallibility in all matters of religion. No one could contradict him - neither the archbishop of Florence, whom he despised as a weakling, nor his fellow Tuscan bishops, whom he accused of betraying him at the National Synod in 1787, nor even the pope, whose authority outside the diocese of Rome he considered to be purely nominal. The only person he had any respect for whatsoever was the grand duke. But even Pietro Leopoldo noticed that Ricci became 'riled at the least opposition' and was a 'persecutor of whoever does not share his opinions,' and he learned to keep a certain distance from him.⁴⁵

According to Cochrane, all this Caesaropapism was not misguided, but de Ricci:

...insisted upon throwing out all the regular clergy, not just the offensive ones....banning all the devotions, even those which centuries of practice had proved to be innocent at best and harmless at worst....He closed chapels, demolished altars, transferred parishes, confiscated endowments, and moved clergy from one job to another without even informing the persons involved beforehand.⁴⁶

De Potter's work on de Ricci was completed in 1823, and probably appeared first in 1825 in Brussels, where it was printed by Weissenbruck, the King's printer, edited by H. Tarlier, and illustrated by Signora Malenchini's portrait.⁴⁷ De Potter said in the preface of his biography:

La vie de Ricci reporte nos regards sur l'époque qui, chez les nations les plus éclairées de l'Europe, précéda la lutte imposante des lumières contre l'ignorance, de la justice contre la force, de la liberté contre la tyrannie. Cette vie nous montre l'aristocratie et le sacerdotalisme rampant aux pieds du peuple, et cherchant à le flatter et à le séduire, pour l'armer contre les despotes bienfaisans, qui faisaient un dernier et légitime usage d'un illégitime pouvoir, afin d'apprendre à leurs sujets à connaître leurs propres droits et de les forcer à les exercer. Nous voyons Ricci lui-même acheter au prix de son repos et de son bonheur, la gloire de coopérer aux philanthropiques réformes de son prince, et armé du zèle le plus pur, prêcher la tolérance, attaquer la superstition et la fanatisme, relever la raison humaine, courbée jusqu' alors sous le poids des chaînes qui en flétrissaient le plus nobles facultés.⁴⁸

The unhappiness that De Potter was referring to was the fact that upon the death of Leopold, Scipion de Ricci was persecuted, imprisoned, and died a devout but feeble man who had recanted his "errors."⁴⁹ De Potter's book gained great notoriety, and is still today the work of De Potter most often found in libraries, because it pointed out all the corruption and immorality in Tuscan monastic life that had so offended de Ricci. De Potter also accompanied the work with pieces that supported the theory that Pope Clement XIV was poisoned by the Jesuits.⁵⁰

In his "Letters From Paris", Stendhal wrote in the London Magazine, written in August, published in September 1825:

Great God! when shall we be delivered from Monks! - Another book has just appeared which completely unmasks them. The grand business of the Jesuit police this month has been to prevent the importation of the life of Scipion de Ricci, bishop of Pistoia, published at Brussels by M. de Potter...⁵¹

Stendhal still didn't like De Potter's literary style, but thought that he researched his materials like "a learned German."⁵²

Vie et Mémoires de Scipion de Ricci not only was put on the Vatican Index, it earned the direct condemnation of Pope Leo XII on November 26, 1825.⁵³

The political climate in Paris had prevented the work from being published first in Paris, where it would have gained a wider audience, but De Potter's friends, the Bishop Grégoire and Lanjuinais were responsible for an expurgated version appearing in Paris, in 1826, published by the Badouin brothers.⁵⁴ De Potter immediately put together a supplement to this edition, composed of all the parts deleted by the French police, and had this published in Brussels.⁵⁵ The biography was translated into German in 1826, and into English in 1828.⁵⁶

Le Guillou saw an interesting parallel between De Potter's subject, de Ricci, and his later friend Lamennais.⁵⁷ Both were reformers, both were ordered to recant, and de Ricci did,⁵⁸ however Lamennais did not. De Ricci was a bishop with an episcopate and the confidence of the grand duke. Lamennais, on the other hand, never had a congregation, and was a gadfly in the face of the French government. Whereas de Ricci has been categorized as a Jansenist, and Lamennais as an Ultramontaine, they were both fierce individuals who tolerated little interference from their superiors.

The Florence of de Ricci had been, together with Milan and Naples, one of the three focal points of the Enlightenment in Italy.⁵⁹ In Tuscany, Joseph II, Leopold I, and then Napoleon had

all pried government and religion out of the clutches of the ancien regime. While the rationalism of the Enlightenment had brought forth Jansenism, unorthodox Roman Catholicism, and some Protestantism, it had not supported the idea of an Italian nation.⁶⁰

...Since it was believed that rational solutions of universal application could be found for political, social and economic problems, there was no more need to establish nation-states than representative institutions. Existing despots would be perfectly capable of implementing the programme to the universal satisfaction.⁶¹

The return of the Grand Duke Ferdinand III in September 1814, at first seemed to be more of the same. Secure in his power, he was tolerance personified. This was the nineteenth, not the eighteenth century, however, and the age of enlightened despots was rapidly drawing to a close. Louis De Potter's residency in Italy during the post-Napoleonic era placed him in that country at the time that many historians feel was the true beginning of its Risorgimento, the resurgence of Italy and its people.

The short lived Conciliatore newspaper at Milan, the more fortunate Antologia at Florence, the stirring verse of Berchet, the revived study of Dante, and of the history of Italy during the Renaissance, - all these were symptoms of the intellectual awakening, and evidence that there was gathering a body of temperate patriotic men who by example and precept should prepare their country to deserve freedom...⁶²

By being in Florence in 1822 and 1823, De Potter was exposed to the very center of Tuscan activism, and came to know most of the intellectual leaders of the duchy. At the eye of this whirlwind was Gian Pietro Vieusseux, who became a close friend of De Potter.

Vieusseux's library at Florence was the only place in Italy where men could freely meet to discuss political questions, or read the leading European journals. Florence

was the one city, where Alfieri's and Niccolini's plays could be presented on the stage.⁶³

Vieusseux, was born in Genoa of Italian-Swiss parentage, travelled widely, and did not settle in Florence until 1819. He helped to found several reformist journals, of which Antologia is the best known.⁶⁴ Mario Battistini wrote of Vieusseux's friendship with De Potter:

Ma torniamo a Vieusseux, amico affezionato del de P.; amicizia fiorita insieme col sorgere di quel gabinetto, che il ginevrino fondò in Firenze ai primi del 1820, e del quale il de P., fu frequentatore assiduo, in mezzo alla scelta schiera di uomini, il nome dei quali è stato rievocato nel magnifico lavoro del Prunas.⁶⁵ Frequentatore assiduo del gabinetto e collaboratore dell' Antologia fu il de P. e ad essa rimase sempre fedele, come in affettuosa amicizia fu sempre col buon Vieusseux che, per tanti anni, lo tenne particolarmente informato, e con tutti i collaboratori del giornale...⁶⁶

De Potter and Vieusseux corresponded avidly at first, their letters finally ceasing in the 1830's. They renewed their friendship again in 1854, when De Potter's artist son Eleuthère died in Italy; De Potter made a sad final journey to that country.⁶⁷

Battistini stated that while in Italy De Potter perfected his Italian, speaking "con la fluidità, l'armonia e purezza toscana," and writing "con eleganza e facilità."⁶⁸ After he returned to Belgium in 1823 because of the illness of his father, he not only corresponded with his Italian friends, he welcomed many Italian emigres to his country.⁶⁹

During his stay in Italy De Potter had friends in both the Carboneria and the Freemasonry.⁷⁰ The most renowned Tuscan radical that he was to encounter, probably in Belgium itself, was Filippo Buonarroti (1761-1837). It is unclear whether De Potter had

actually met him previously, but it is evident that upon Buonarroti's arrival in Brussels in May 1824, the sixty-three year old Italian was taken under the wing of Belgian Liberals, namely the Anspach brothers, the Doctor Mooremans, the Colignon brothers and De Potter.⁷¹ While De Potter did not share all of Buonarroti's ideas, he admired his intensity and the austere life that he led in order to dedicate his life to his ideals.⁷² Galante-Garrone felt that there was a certain ideological distance to this admiration, that De Potter was not a Babœvist. De Potter's high esteem for Buonarroti was shown in this letter he wrote to Niccolini and Vieusseux on June 16, 1827:

Fra le poche persone quasi tutte forestiere che vedo di tanto in tanto, vi sono diversi italiani e nominativamente due fiorentini. L'uno è secondo me il tipo della piú onorevole fermezza di carattere, nei principî i piú filantropici che in petto umano possano essere conservati: egli è il Buonarroti; spero di contribuire fra poco a fargli dare alla luce un'opera in cui [Conspiration pour l'égalité, dite de Babeuf] splenderà la sua bell'anima ancora di piú che la sua chiarissima mente.⁷³

Historians have claimed that Louis De Potter and the Belgian revolution of 1830 were one translation of the Buonarrotian dream into concrete activity.

The triumphant arrival of De Potter at the Brussels Town Hall in 1830 represented the 'first time in the history of the nineteenth century that a man closely linked with Buonarroti found himself at the head of a government emerging from a victorious revolution and attempted to impose, in the course of the revolution, a program of action that was typically buonarrotian'.⁷⁴

Battistini wrote that De Potter and Don Juan Van Halen (1788-1864) were the leaders of the Carboneria in Belgium and encouraged its development there.⁷⁵ He did not elaborate on this astounding statement, perhaps he was quoting one of his Italian

authorities on the Carboneria. This claim is complicated by the fact that Battistini often stated that someone belonged to both the Masons and the Carboneria, without making a distinction between the two.

Clearly De Potter had much in common with the Italian Carbonari, who were in favor of constitutional government and independence from foreign rule; however, whether there was indeed a Belgian Carboneria, and whether De Potter played such a prominent role in it remains unclear. There was indeed an active group of Freemasons in this country.

Don Juan Van Halen was a Spanish general of Belgian origin, primarily remembered in the Low Countries for taking command of the citizens of Brussels in September 1830 and successfully driving the Dutch from their capital city.⁷⁶ It is entirely possible that he would have joined the Carboneria, being something of a soldier of fortune.

A known Carbonaro, the Neopolitan General Guglielmo Pepe, the same Pepe involved in the uprising in Naples in 1820, settled in Brussels in 1825. Evidently Van Halen met Pepe through Charles Rogier, and Buonarroti met Pepe at the home of Renier, where many of the French and Italian émigrés gathered, probably Pierre-Jean Renier, known for his Fables.⁷⁷

Battistini contends that De Potter also knew General Pepe:

...la corrispondenza de Raffaele Poerio dimostra che il belga era stato in stretti rapporti d'amicizia con quest' esule napoletano e che il Pepe era pure stato con lui in rapporto nel Belgio.⁷⁸

Louis De Potter may also have known Vincenzo Gioberti, the Turinese priest who left the Piedmont after being implicated in the

Genoa plot of 1833. Gioberti taught philosophy at the small Collegio Gaggia in Brussels, the same city where he published his famous Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani in 1842. Battistini did not claim that the two men were indeed friends, but Gioberti was an active part of a circle of settled and newly arrived émigrés, many of whom were conversant with De Potter.⁷⁹

De Potter arrived in Italy in 1811 as a young man of twenty-five, and left it as a considerably more experienced thirty-seven year old. He took part in the cosmopolitan life of Rome, and the lively circle of Vieusseux in Florence. Surrounded by Italians who were to become the political and intellectual leaders of their region, it is unlikely that he would have been immune to their enthusiasm and progressive spirit. After he spent a year researching the reforms of Scipion de Ricci, it certainly might be argued that De Potter was interested in religious and social change. This wealthy young Belgian was also a serious student of church history, researching the Vatican archives; a dedicated biographer, who used the bishop's unpublished diaries for his source material. Friend of both Abbé Henri Grégoire and Buonarroti, De Potter was clearly influenced by two of the most radical thinkers of his day. In his own right, he seems to have been friendly, charming and sophisticated. Had he stayed in Italy, he might have remained one of the many bright young expatriates who travelled in the best circles, discussing serious subjects at great length. Upon his return to Belgium, De Potter soon found a worthy cause; Belgium acquired an eloquent spokesman.

CHAPTER II

LOUIS DE POTTER: THE LIBERAL JOURNALIST

1823-1828

The Belgium that Louis De Potter returned to in 1823 was rapidly becoming the second most highly industrialized nation in Europe, following the lead of England. King William I, King of the Netherlands, had already instigated some of his benevolent, if autocratic, projects; the country was feeling the first effects of what was to be its industrial revolution.

Geographically, Belgium is two main areas, the flat country of northern or Flemish Belgium, and the rolling hills of the southern or Walloon provinces. The land also differs in its main occupational centers - Flanders producing textiles, the Walloon area emphasizing the metal-working industry, and Antwerp having a trading heritage. This economic diversity has existed for almost a thousand years.¹

A line from Mouscron on the west side of the country, to Tongeren on the east, cutting just a little south of Brussels, would roughly separate the land into its mainly Flemish speaking North and its mainly Walloon speaking South. Flemish is linguistically similar to Dutch, and Flemish and Dutch are written alike, although the difference of pronunciation makes the one unintelligible to an illiterate speaker of the other.²

During the Belgian revolution, the Dutch discouraged the sympathy of their natural allies - the Flemish, by not being

aware that they were different from the Walloons.³

Walloon is:

...no broken down standard French, but in its classic form....just as old and valid a dialect as the court language of French kings, almost always being as close to the basic Latin and often closer.⁴

Naturally, during the revolution, more people in the Walloon area were sympathetic to a reunion with France.

Modern Belgium was actually created in the eighteenth century by her various rulers. The Spaniards unified Flanders and Brabant, the Austrians added Hainault, and the French, Liège.⁵

The French, although they had streamlined the government, and updated the legal code, had pillaged the country of its art, its church properties, and its men. When, after October 1795, Belgium became a part of the French Republic, not only were the feudal rights of the nobility and the clergy removed, all convents were closed except those either teaching or nursing. On December 6, 1796, Belgium was told that it was now governed solely by French law.⁶

The ancien régime of Belgium had thus been under assault for twenty years when the Napoleonic era ended, for much longer if the "reforms" of Joseph II are considered. The new Dutch Calvinist monarch did not seem to promise much of an improvement as a protector of Belgium's national institutions and beliefs.

The first Peace of Paris of May 30, 1814, stated in its Article Six that:

...'Holland, placed under the sovereignty of the House of Orange, shall receive an increase of territory.' A secret article attached to the same treaty defined this as 'the countries comprised between the sea, the frontiers, and the Meuse', that is Belgium.⁷

This Protocol of Eight Articles, adopted in London on June 21, 1814, also stated that, "...the two countries shall form but one and the same state, governed by the constitution already established in Holland."⁸

The "Concert of Europe", or Russia, Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and France, after 1818, were content to let the Dutch control the mouths of the Rhine and the Scheldt rivers, and confirmed this settlement on June 9, 1815, at the Congress of Vienna. The Battle of Waterloo on June 18, merely "gave the arrangements the ratification of military success."⁹

King William I rapidly proved himself worthy of his nickname, "the merchant king." His modernization policies gained him the support of the new industrialists of Belgium, particularly the bourgeoisie of the metal-working trades. The merchant traders of Antwerp also prospered, and became loyal subjects, except when threatened by Dutch competition. The textile manufacturers of Flanders were somewhat less enthusiastic, being constantly threatened by the strength of their English counterparts.

In ten years, Belgium was transfigured and the nation joined England at the head of world progress....The traffic in the port of Antwerp [where William improved the harbor] doubled in 10 years, and the number of ships using the port [the Dutch opened the Scheldt again] rose from 585 to 1,128. The Belgian textile industry, expanding to supply world markets, became a strong competitor of English industry. Ghent had 80 mills with 283,000 spindles; the Cockerill factories manufactured the most up-to-date machinery in Europe; and Verviers¹⁰ was exporting its woolen cloth as far afield as Timbaktu.

William built roads, improved harbors, and built the Maastricht-Bois-le Duc Canal in 1822 and the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal in 1827, set up schools of navigation at Ostend and Antwerp, and

started a school of mines at Liège.¹¹

After 1820, the use of gas for lighting purposes spread through the cities, providing a new use for coal. With the Newcomen steam pumps and Davy safety lamps, the yield from the collieries increased, and coal production reached 2.5 million tons annually. New mines now came into production and, just before 1830, no less than thirty-three new concessions were granted in Hainaut and the Namur district...¹²

King William's greatest single achievement was, without doubt, the establishment of the Société Générale pour favoriser l'industrie nationale des Pays Bas in 1822, which was "the world's first joint-stock investment bank." It was endowed with state land and 40% or so of its shares were subscribed by the king's personal fortune, with 5% guaranteed by all other subscribers.¹³ At the time of the Belgian revolution the Société Générale was the only important business corporation in the country.¹⁴

In 1830 the coal industry was still primarily organized on the:

...basis of sociétés civiles, holdovers from the ancien régime, in which miners, coal merchants, and others interested in the mines shared in both the direction and the profits. Ownership could not be easily transferred, and great difficulties attended the raising of new capital for expansion and technical innovation. The Dutch government authorized but 23 sociétés anonymes in the southern provinces, of which 13 were insurance companies. Only six were industrial concerns, and some of those failed before or during the Belgian revolution.¹⁵

The King did all he could to stimulate business. The Société Générale made direct loans to industrialists. Cameron said that individual industrialists were given loans from twenty thousand to one hundred thousand francs. John Cockerill and his brother between them received about four million francs.¹⁶ With this help:

Cockerill developed ironworks, blast furnaces, rolling mills, forges, mining machinery and glassworks on a scale then unknown in continental Europe...¹⁷

Despite William's spur to industry, the Belgians themselves did not invest in these enterprises. Whether from custom or caution, they put their money in government securities, land or short term mortgages, and most of the smaller companies either depended upon trade credit or financed themselves.¹⁸ The economic boom of 1830-1850 was, however, due to the impetus William gave to the economy in these earlier years. Mokyr claimed that the real fruits of this industrialization came in the last half of the century or even later.¹⁹

In addition to the high birth rate of the years under the French Empire, the population continued to expand rapidly under the new kingdom.²⁰ Although the economy was expanding rapidly, the standard of living was still a lot lower than that of prosperous Holland.²¹ This, in addition to the fact that in 1830, 3.9 million Belgians were still under the political thumb of 2.3 million Dutch, did not strengthen the bonds between them.²²

Evidence strongly supports the contention that the revolt in Belgium in 1830 was due mainly to three kinds of grievances: the inequitable structure of the government imposed upon the Belgians and the inequitable appointments to office that followed it; the interference, real or alleged, with Catholic religious practices and educational policies; and William's short sighted repressions of the freedom of the press and the freedom of association.

The economy, although severely depressed due to the bad harvest of 1829, was only a short-term factor in the immediate

flare up in Brussels.

The political domination of the Netherlands was imposed upon the Belgians at the time of the union of the two countries.

Holland had in March, 1814, adopted a Constitution. It was based on the old Dutch laws and was, among other things, strongly Protestant. A Commission was appointed for eleven Dutch, eleven Belgians, and two representatives for Luxemburg, to broaden this into a Constitution of the new kingdom....Eventually the Commission reported in favor of (1) equality and toleration for all creeds throughout the kingdom; (2) Holland and Belgium were to have an equal (i.e. disproportionate) number of representatives; (3) no capital was specified, but the King was to be inaugurated simultaneously at Amsterdam and at a town in Belgium.²³

The Upper Chamber of the Belgian parliament was to be composed of peers appointed for life by the King. The Second or Lower Chamber was to be composed of one hundred ten members elected for three years by the provincial States-Generals, fifty-five from Holland and fifty-five from Belgium. This was in spite of the fact that Belgium had three-fifths of the combined population of 5,500,000.²⁴

Along with the Constitution, a fundamental law was drafted and also submitted to the Dutch States General and to an assembly of Belgian leaders.²⁵ The Dutch States General passed them unanimously, but the Belgians voted 796 nay, 527 aye, and 250 abstaining. William, with what the Belgians called "Dutch arithmetic" counted the votes of 126 of those who had abstained from voting because of religious objections, as ayes and thus obtained enough votes to pass the Constitution and fundamental law on August 24, 1815.²⁶ He was crowned at Brussels on September 21, 1815.

The Dutch held most of the public offices and ran the

United Kingdom of the Netherlands for their own benefit. In 1830 only one out of the nine Ministers of State was Belgian, and of 219 men at the Ministeries of Interior and War, only fourteen were Belgian. Also, out of 1,967 army officers, Belgians comprised only 278.²⁷

Benjamin Constant said a few years after the Union, that of those holding the foremost offices in the kingdom, military or civil, 139 were Dutch and only 30 Belgians. This would have mattered less, had the Belgians been traditionally in the habit of looking up to the Dutch; but the reverse was the case. They knew themselves more numerous, and thought themselves culturally superior. After 1820, the Belgian discontent began to be focused in the representative Chamber, where the eloquence at the command of the Belgian Opposition was very superior to that of the Dutch Government.²⁸

It has also been pointed out that:

There were to be Ministers and a Council of State; but there was no provision that the Ministers were to be responsible for the executive acts of the Sovereign. If the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility, so well understood in Great Britain, had formed part of the Constitution in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the course of events would probably have been very different, and the House of Orange might still have been reigning in²⁹ the strong Barrier State set up by the Congress of Vienna.

Another sore point was the national debt. Belgium's share was the same as that of the Netherlands, although it should have been far less. The Belgian public debt at the time of the union was only thirty million gulden or £2,500,000, while the Dutch debt at that time was two milliards or £110,000,000.³⁰

Unfortunately for the Dutch, King William also made the mistake of deciding in 1819 to banish French as the official language in the purely Flemish provinces and Brussels, which he followed up with a ruling in 1823 that henceforth Dutch would be used for all administrative and legal purposes in these provinces.

These were most unpopular decisions.

An immediate protest was made, firstly by the Flemish bourgeoisie whose whole cultural outlook was French and who traditionally sent their children to be educated in the best French-speaking schools in either France or Belgium, and secondly the Catholic clergy who feared that the first step was being taken towards infiltration of Belgium by the Dutch Protestant Church.³¹

The rule of the Protestant king and the domination of a Protestant government were a lasting source of friction because:

...almost all Belgians were nominally Catholic at the beginning of the nineteenth century and have remained so down to the present...³²

King Leopold I, installed after the revolution in 1831, was also Protestant, but took a Catholic wife and agreed to raise his children as Catholics. Even more ironic is the fact that after the death of his Prussian wife, William of the Netherlands abdicated in 1840 in order to marry a Belgian Catholic! His second wife, Henriette, the Comtesse d'Oultremont, had been one of the ladies of the court during the united kingdom.³³

The new government of King William had legalized religious toleration. It was contrary to the Catholic faith to recognize false belief, which, they believed, is what had occurred. The new laws recognized only civil marriage, another threat to Belgian custom.³⁴ Article 193 of the fundamental law also sounded ominous, reading, "No form of worship may be prevented unless it disturb the peace and public order."³⁵

Belgians saw this as a possible excuse for governmental interference with religious processions and other ceremonies.³⁶

The new government got off to a very bad start when the Catholic bishops forbade their parishioners to take the oath of

allegiance to the Constitution, and, "thus put all who became members of either Chamber under their ban."³⁷ This interdict was finally contested in 1817, when the Archbishop of Mechlin, de Méan, declared that, "the oath implied no dogmatic concession but only a civic protection of the various creeds." After 1821 his interpretation was generally acknowledged.³⁸

Another matter of conflict with the Catholics was the building up of a state system of education. While in the United Provinces before the [French] Revolution many schools were operated by regional or town authorities, in the Austrian Netherlands they were completely controlled by the Church. Efforts by Maria Theresa and by the Directory to found state secondary schools had met with little success, and under Napoleon religious colleges had sprung up again alongside the imperial lycées. As for higher education, the ancient university of Louvain³⁹ had been suppressed in 1797.⁴⁰

King William considered the Catholic dominated education of Belgium inferior to that of his homeland, but he contended that by carefully educating the Belgian youth, he could not only improve their level of scholarship, he could create a climate much more favorable to his mainly Protestant government. In order to do this he opened three state universities at Ghent, Louvain and Liège in 1817, opened state athenaeums for classical education in all the main towns, and a teachers college at Lier near Antwerp.⁴¹

The clergy had, after William's organization of education, set up private schools organized by country parish priests and the teaching brotherhoods. [Not to mention the parochial schools already in existence.] Thus the state schools lacked pupils. The government's reaction was to ban the teaching congregations, and to re-enact all the measures⁴² of persecution introduced by Joseph II and Napoleon...

From 1824, members of the religious congregations had to apply for official permission to teach, as other schoolmasters had been obliged to do in 1822. Moreover the opening of new secondary schools was made subject to ministerial

assent and control, and nobody was allowed to teach in them without having⁴³ graduated in one of the universities of the realm (1825).

Louvain also became a new kind of seminary in 1825, the Collège philosophique de Louvain, where the King controlled the course of pre-theological study.⁴⁴ It appears that he wished to Protestantize the curriculum as much as possible. The Catholics were violently opposed to his efforts to influence their seminar-ians, and enrollment was very low. Once this college was made optional, it had to be closed, which occurred in January 1830.⁴⁵

Although a great many Catholics opposed William's educational schemes, there was definitely a difference between the older generation, some of whom wished to restore the privileges of the clergy, the tithes and the ecclesiastical courts, and the younger Catholics who were inclined to be more open-minded, as their union with the Liberals was to assert.⁴⁶

There were also regional differences between Catholic attitudes.

It is widely believed...that Flemings as a whole retained a higher frequency of Catholic practice than Walloons and that their Catholicism was more austere and puritanical, more 'fundamentalist' in keeping⁴⁷ with the fact that Jan- senism originated in Flanders.

This would hardly make Flanders receptive to new and secular practices, although it would not have necessarily approved of what the rest of Catholic Belgium desired either.

The difference in their initial reception of King William led to a polarization of the two leading Belgian political parties:

In [Belgium] the two parties [of the States-General] were sharply divided, the Catholics and the Liberals. The Catholics, led by Baron de Gerlache, supported the clergy in

their opposition to religious equality and State control of education. The Liberals, led by Charles de Broukère, deputy for the province of Limbourg, were in favor of the complete toleration provided for by the constitution,⁴⁸ and defended the King's measures for improving education.

The future leader of the Liberal cause, Louis De Potter, did not return from Italy until the "reforms" of William had been in effect for nine years. Shortly after his homecoming, his father, Pierre De Potter de Droogenvalle, died on January 23, 1824, and Louis, who had only one married sister, became the head of the family. At first quite preoccupied with family affairs, De Potter spent a lot of time at his residence on the rue Neuve of Brussels with his widowed mother and Madame Malenchini, who had accompanied him to Belgium. Malenchini does not seem to have found Belgium simpatico, and returned to Italy in July 1825, travelling by way of England and France where she visited with many Italian émigrés.⁴⁹

Evidently, De Potter had led Malenchini to believe that when he was able to do so, he and his mother would rejoin her in Italy. When it appeared that De Potter was not planning to return, Malenchini grew despondent, and several of their Italian friends, including Vieusseux, wrote to De Potter about her ill health and her improvised state of affairs. Louis did settle an annual pension on her, but seems to have decided that, for him at least, the affair was over.⁵⁰

By March or April 1826, De Potter seems to have been living with the young Belgian woman who was to become his wife and mother of his four children.⁵¹ Sophie de Champré, actually Sophie-Eugénie Van Weydeveldt, (1808-1896) was the eighteen-year old

daughter of a Bruges tapissier.⁵² The girl he chose had, he attests, honesty, honor, good sense, health and beauty.⁵³ She evidently was of a lower social class than De Potter, her father being in trade. De Potter defended his choice in his autobiography saying:

La grande affaire pour moi était le choix de ma nouvelle compagne, de la mère future de mes enfants. La prendre dans la classes où j'étais né, je ne le voulais pas. C'était celle que je connaissais le mieux, et je ne voyais là que des filles à la constitution appauvrie, et aux sentiments faussés par une éducation machinale, entichées de leur naissance ou de leur argent, la plupart du temps parce qu'elles manquaient des qualités dont on a droit d'être fier, celles de l'intelligence et du caractère; je ne voyais que des enfants ne pouvant atteindre les vertus de la femme et singeant tous les vices, des plantes étiolées à l'ombre du grand monde, des poupées, en un mot, se mouvant à ressort et simulant la chaleur et la vie.⁵⁴

Sophie was indeed a happy choice, for they spent thirty-three years of contented married life together, and De Potter has nothing but love and praise for his family.

Shortly after his father's death, De Potter discovered that his father had been in correspondence with M. Van Westreenen van Tiellandt, treasurer of the Heraldic Chamber of the Kingdom of the Low Countries, and had been negotiating for the return to the De Potters of their aristocratic titles and trappings. Louis quickly wrote to Van Westreenen van Tiellandt on January 31, 1824, and informed him:

Je ne connais d'autre noblesse que celle des sentiments; et, comme presque tous les hommes dont je révere la mémoire étaient vilains, je suis fermement décidé à le demeurer toute ma vie, n'ayant d'autre ambition que de pouvoir l'être, un jour, comme ils l'ont été.⁵⁵

His next letter to the treasurer, written on February 24, 1824, showed that he was still an admirer of King William:

Ce que vous appelez ma profession de foi en matière de noblesse ne me fera jamais être injuste envers les personnes qui, malgré le siècle, tiennent encore à l'innocent préjugé des titres. Comme vous, Monsieur le baron, je me fais gloire d'honorer la probité et le mérite, dans quelque classe de la société que je les rencontre. je crois que c'est là tout ce qu'on peut exiger de nous, en bonne conscience.

J'admire le noble prince d'Orange, le grand Guillaume, ce défenseur aussi désintéressé qu'intrépide des droits sacrés de ses compatriotes; je déteste le noble duc d'Albe, le sanguinaire bourreau de nos ancêtres; j'abhorre le noble comte Gérard, le fanatique assassin du héros des Provinces-Unies.

Si, donc, la noblesse ne donne point de vertus, et si elle peut s'allier avec tous les vices; si même elle peut devenir la récompense du crime; si, en un mot, la noblesse, par elle-même, n'est rien, pourra-t-on trouver étrange que je n'en veuille point?

...J'ai toujours répondu qu'e, bien loin qu'on ressuscitât en ma faveur les iniques institutions féodales, je ne cesserais jamais de bénir l'immortelle assemblée constituante de France qui les avait généreusement sacrifiées à l'humanité et à la raison. Je la bénis également, parce que, en jetant les fondements du nouvel édifice social, elle a réduit⁵⁶ la plupart des préjugés du moyen âge à leur juste valeur.

Curiously, although De Potter was above assuming his ancient aristocratic titles and coats of arms et. al., he was furious when his brother-in-law later contested his monetary inheritance on the occasion of his mother's death in 1833. By this time he was a husband and father and needed this money, which must have been derived at least partly from ownership of family land.⁵⁷

The first years of De Potter's return to Belgium were not only occupied with family affairs, he was involved in the process of finding a publisher for his Vie de Ricci. As has been mentioned, the work occasioned a direct papal condemnation in 1825, which earned De Potter a certain renown in his homeland.

Although De Potter was baptized in the Catholic church, there is little record of any subsequent religious practice. He was

buried in a Protestant graveyard, which would indicate that he had perhaps left the church at some point in his life.⁵⁸ At this point, however, one can assume that he was merely another fashionably irreligious man, with an indifference to church approval of his writing.

De Potter's independent attitude no doubt enhanced his popularity with the Protestant administration of Belgium. Henri Pirenne says that, "...il appartenait au petit nombre de Belges qui permettaient aux Hollandais de les appeler 'compatriotes'."⁵⁹ Not only did he dine with Secretary of State Falck, he had been a schoolmate of Van Gobbelschroy, now the Minister of the Interior, and knew well the Baron Goubau-D'Hoogvoorst, William's Director of Catholic worship.⁶⁰

In Brussels De Potter socialized with other young liberals who were sympathetic towards the government. Three of these men were Philippe Lesbroussart, Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quételet, and Sylvain Van De Weyer.

King William had instituted a Musée des Sciences et des Lettres at Brussels and these three men gave public courses there.⁶¹ Lesbroussart was a professor of French literature; Quételet an astronomer and mathematician, who later became famous for his statistical studies; and Van De Weyer, trained as a lawyer, became the librarian of Brussels under William's administration.⁶² Van De Weyer's career was linked closely to De Potter's as the latter says:

...M. Silvain Van de Weyer, alors mon ami dévoué, après cela mon chaleureux défenseur, puis mon très adroit collègue au gouvernement provisoire de la Belgique, ensuite mon ennemi irréconciliable, et finalement ambassadeur du roi Léopold auprès de la reine Victoria.⁶³

On April 25, 1826, De Potter, Van De Weyer, Lesbroussart, Quételet, Édouard Smits, Jean François Tielemans, Pierre François Van Meenen and four others founded "la Société belge pour la propagation de l'instruction et de la morale", which was interested in, as the title suggests, literature and politics.⁶⁴

Smits, a native Belgian, had already had a political career in Amsterdam, greatly enhanced by his marriage to a Dutch girl. In July of 1826, he was to become the Secretary of the Statistical Commission of the kingdom.⁶⁵ Tielemans, who was later exiled with De Potter, was only three years out of law school, and was to start a political career under King William in 1827.⁶⁶ Van Meenen, possibly the oldest of the group, fourteen years older than De Potter, was an attorney and already a well-known journalist, connected to l'Observateur.⁶⁷

The Société formed a Hellenic committee at the urging of Van De Weyer, and organized some demonstrations to raise money for the Greek insurgents, who had been struggling against the Turks since 1821.⁶⁸ Battistini records that the death of Lord Byron in Greece in 1824 had rekindled much interest and that committees were formed in every Belgian town to raise money, arms, and assistance in general, and that the better men of the country took the initiative to do this. De Potter, because he knew so many Italians, kept unity between the French, Italians and Belgians in the central committee of Brussels.⁶⁹ This Hellenic committee was De Potter's first active political role. The Société refused royal patronage, and was therefore dissolved by the government.⁷⁰

What De Potter called his "seconde manifestation publique" had occurred at the end of 1825, when the famous French historical painter, Jacques Louis David, died in Brussels.⁷¹ De Potter and many of his fellow Belgians organized a funeral parade which was denounced by many as a procession for a regicide. De Potter thought otherwise:

Il avait, malheureusement pour lui, été juge, mais, - nous devons le croire, -juge consciencieux; juge d'un roi, il est vrai, mais ce n'est point là un crime. Des pouvoirs extraordinaires lui avaient été conférés, à lui et à tous les membres de la Convention nationale, par les circonstances; et les circonstances de nécessité sociale feront loi, tant que la raison rendue incontestable ne pourra pas les dominer et être de cette manière la seule loi des hommes...⁷²

This is an interesting passage, being written by a man who was himself quite instrumental in the overthrow of a king.

Although De Potter and his friends favored The Voltairean concepts behind King William's re-vamping of the educational system, the Catholics felt that he was trying to undermine the legacy of the Jesuits, which was indeed true.⁷³

As has been discussed, the Collège philosophique de Louvain created in 1825 was particularly objectionable to the Catholics, who felt this measure in particular was an effort to "Protestantize" Belgium. De Potter's sympathy towards the king's policy can be seen in this letter he wrote to M. de Grovestins on October 29, 1825;

...Nous avons des ennemis forts, acharnés et on ne peut plus funestes à combattre. Il faut donc que le salut public soit la suprême loi; que le gouvernement se constitue en comité de dictature le plus ferme et le plus énergique possible. Il faut qu'il vainque, s'il ne veut périr. Nous voulons avec lui son existence et sa prospérité, quitte à le combattre lui-même dans la suite, s'il

n'abdique pas, en temps et lieu, l'autorité absolue, dont nous aurons été avec joie les agents les plus dévoués pendant l'urgence.⁷⁴

This passage did not present De Potter as a champion of freedom and liberty.

Between 1824 and 1826 De Potter wrote some satirical and liberal pieces which he called "badinage."⁷⁵ These were Pétition de saint Napoléon pour rentrer au paradis après la mort de l'empereur Napoléon, son protecteur et son patron sur la terre; Saint Napoléon au Paradis et en exil, published in Paris in 1825 and Brussels in 1827; Epître au diable published in 1824; and Epître à Saint-Pierre published in Paris in 1825 and Brussels in 1826. These compositions were all published without De Potter's name, and he later described them as mediocre writing and said that he should have met argument with argument instead of using ridicule.⁷⁶

In a serious effort, De Potter translated the most important letters of Pope Pius V concerning the troubles in France caused by the Calvinist reformation. De Potter attempted to demonstrate the pope's intense religious fervor and his fanatical restrictions of religious freedom. He maintained that the pope:

...avait été le véritable inventeur, l'instigateur et l'approbateur, du massacre de la Saint-Barthélemi [en 1572, et que]...l'Église a toujours violemment tyrannisé les consciences, par l'emploi de la force matérielle, brutale...⁷⁷

The work was published in Paris in 1826, and appeared there again in 1841 in extended form as Le Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemi, introduction historique. Lettres apologétiques du pape Pie V sur cette journée mémorable. Suivies d'un catéchisme,

catholique romain comprenant la législation pénale ecclésiastique en matière d'hérésie.⁷⁸

Naturally this polemical writing was well received by King William, who was trying to diminish the power of the Catholic church over his subjects.⁷⁹

In the years 1825-26, De Potter had already found his niche, "Publiciste déjà remarqué, collaborateur du Courrier des Pays-Bas, le plus influent organe de l'opinion libérale."⁸⁰ Jottrand said that when he became a contributor to the Courrier des Pays-Bas in April 1826, De Potter was well entrenched there.⁸¹ The Courrier had around nine hundred subscribers, a significant number of people for that period.⁸²

Both Édouard Ducpétiaux (1804-1868) and Lucien Jottrand (1803-1877) were young attorneys, considerably younger than De Potter. In 1826, Ducpétiaux was twenty-two and Jottrand, twenty-three, De Potter was already forty years old.⁸³ Also an ardent liberal, Jottrand was his biographer as well as his friend, and we are indebted to him for much first-hand information about De Potter.

Jottrand, Ducpétiaux, and De Potter were members of a new group, the emerging Belgian journalists. Before the rise of strong Belgian papers:

Most of the newspapers were managed by Frenchmen, who filled their columns with attacks on the Bourbons and the Jesuits, French epigrams, and Parisian witticism. This fostered the indifference of the people to public questions. But suddenly some new papers, with Belgian editors, appeared, and proposals were made that disputes about religion should be laid aside in favor of an agitation for Ministerial responsibility, a free press, and other reforms.⁸⁴

This transition did not occur overnight. By 1827 the journals had become strong, vocal, and interested, but disputes over religion had still not been erased by common objections to the government.

The leading Catholic paper at this time was the Courrier de la Meuse, founded at Liège in 1820.⁸⁵ Also prominent was the Catholique des Pays-Bas of Ghent, whose editor Adolphe Bartels or Barthels (1797-1862) was exiled with De Potter in 1830. Bartels was also a writer for l'Eclaireur de Namur.⁸⁶

In addition to the Courrier des Pays-Bas of Brussels, the Mathieu Laensberg of Liège, founded in 1824, was also a training ground for young Belgian statesmen.⁸⁷ The two most important Liberal publications in Belgium, they linked young newspaper men of similar attitudes in Brussels, Liège, Louvain, Antwerp, Ghent, and Bruges, thus creating a virtual network of Liberal opinion.⁸⁸ Linked by the same profession, these men soon became furthered united by their criticism of King William.

The Liberal journalists were predominantly of the middle class. The members of the Mathieu Laensberg group were mainly in their late twenties, and five of the seven had studied law. This composite picture of the involved liberal as being a well educated member of the bourgeoisie seems to hold true for those who were active in the Belgian revolution. The Catholic group, what Royer called the Aristocratic Catholic Party, was more inclined to have blue blood. De Potter was obviously not the typical Liberal. Not only did he have aristocratic blood, no matter how little he valued it, he also seems to have had enough money to travel and

pursue the relaxed life of a gentleman scholar.

In 1827, the favorable attitude of De Potter toward the Dutch-led government was jolted by two new documents, the Concordat, and a more repressive penal code.

On June 18, 1827, King William, always careful to appease both the Liberal and Catholic factions of his realm, signed a concordat with Pope Leo which contained three principle articles:

...le premier étendant aux provinces du nord (à la Hollande) le concordat napoléonien de 1801, observé en Belgique, qui faisait partie de la France lorsqu'il avait été conclu; le second portant que chaque diocèse aurait son chapitre et son séminaire; et le troisième, enfin, établissant un mode nouveau de nomination des évêques, qui consistait en ceci: le chapitre du diocèse présenterait au roi une liste de candidats à l'épiscopat; le roi aurait le droit d'en éliminer les noms qu'il voudrait, sauf à en laisser au moins au chapitre de quoi faire l'élection; le chapitre élirait l'évêque parmi les noms demeurés sur la liste, et le pape donnerait l'institution canonique.

Although the Concordat gave the king only veto power over the selection of new bishops, it was understood that they would show him the list before the nomination was formal. The clergy was also supposed to pledge allegiance to the king during mass. On the other hand, William was expected to close his hated Collège philosophique de Louvain.⁹⁰

The Belgian clergy violently disliked the Concordat and had to be warned from Rome, "not to be more Catholic than the Pope."⁹¹ They saw the agreement as a further erosion of their independence, and as a concession to an illegitimate and Protestant sovereign.

Many Liberals, on the other hand, saw the Concordat as a surrender to the demands of the Catholic clergy.⁹² De Potter considered the new treaty, particularly the method of nominating

bishops, an insult to the government, and also thought that the Collège philosophique de Louvain was a necessary intervention in the education of clerics. He wrote many articles in the Courrier des Pays-Bas in the latter half of 1827, criticizing the Concordat and its negotiator, the Comte De Celles, who now represented the Kingdom of the Netherlands at Rome.⁹³

The government of Belgium apparently still considered De Potter a friend and ally; however, for it was at this time that De Potter secured a governmental mission for his friend Tielemans.⁹⁴

It was Van Gobbelschroy himself, according to van Kalken, who "leaked" a confidential circular to De Potter, which the king had sent to his provincial governors telling them that they might interpret the concordat however they pleased.⁹⁵ De Potter was so disgusted with this maneuver, that he published the circular in the Courrier des Pays-Bas on October 14, 1827. In doing so, De Potter and the journal itself both showed that they questioned not only the particular circular, but the king's own credibility.⁹⁶ As Jottrand wrote in 1860:

...est encore curieuse à lire aujourd'hui, pour se faire une idée de la duplicité qu'on employait dans un régime dont le principal mérite avait d'ailleurs été jusque-là de tromper alternativement les deux grandes opinions [libéral et catholique] du pays sur la réalité de ses aspirations.⁹⁷

Before exposing the circular, De Potter had asked, probably Van Gobbelschroy, what the king was trying to accomplish, and was very dissatisfied with the answer he received:

Il [le roi] me fut répondu, au ministère de l'intérieur, que le roi s'était cru dans la nécessité d'accorder, du moins en apparence, quelque chose aux réclamations des catholiques; mais que son intention n'était pas et ne pouvait pas être de les satisfaire en tout. Je répliquai

que c'était cependant là a quoi il s'était engagé. On me prouva alors, par des instructions sous forme de circulaire confidentielle aux gouverneurs de province, qu'il fallait qu'ils interprétassent le concordat, quant à son execution, à peu près comme si jamais concordat n'eût été signé. Cette pièce me fût même abandonnée pour que je commisssé l'heureuse indiscretion de la communiquer au public. Elle parut dans le Courrier des Pays-Bas. Cette rouerie gouvernementale, sans rassurer les libéraux qui redoutaient toujours le concordat comme principe, irrita beaucoup les catholiques, de nouveau en butte à la férule ministérielle au moment même où ils croyaient y avoir échappé à jamais. Pour moi, elle me dégouta profondément, et ne servit pas peu à me faire progressivement adopter les opinions qui préparèrent un peu plus tard, la chute de la domination hollandaise en Belgique".⁹⁸

Some of the Catholic journals which had originally been in favor of the Concordat were also dismayed at the king's confidential circular. Nevertheless, by 1827, the government had made amends with the leading Belgian Catholics. In November of that year, the Prince de Méan, the Archbishop of Malines, praised the Concordat.⁹⁹

Clearly the publishing of the circular in the Courrier des Pays-Bas marked a major break between De Potter and the Dutch-dominated government. This was the turning point when De Potter ceased to be just a member of the Liberal group, and became an active leader of Liberal opinion.¹⁰⁰ Whether the "hard core" of Liberal writers, artists and scholars who met in Brussels had already started calling themselves the "Société des Douze" is unclear, but they had coined that name by 1828, and De Potter was an influential member of the group. Evidently this clique did not meet after the Liberal-Catholic union because it was no longer necessary.¹⁰¹

The entire assortment of Belgium Liberals was in reality

only a small group of educated men who followed the political events of the day. The right to vote was still the privilege of a very small group of people who possessed fortune or nobility, and most Belgians neither voted nor took any interest in governmental affairs.¹⁰² Bologne says that De Potter, "privilégié de la fortune (qui a renoncé à la noblesse) intervient comme acteur dans les élections."¹⁰³

De Potter was uninvolved in the first outcry against the penal code of July 1827, for he had temporarily ceased to write for the Courrier des Pays-Bas, and was occupied helping Buonarroti publish his book, Conspiration pour l'égalité, dite de Babeuf.¹⁰⁴

De Potter, as a service to his friend, helped put the material for the book in order, aided with revisions, and assisted with correcting the proofs. The work appeared in Brussels in 1828, published by Feuillet-Dumus. Buonarroti, one of Babeuf's fellow conspirators, had saved documents related to the conspiracy of Babeuf. De Potter thought that it was important that these papers be preserved for posterity, and was happy to give the old Italian the benefit of his editorial experience.¹⁰⁵

Although De Potter was too busy to notice this new piece of legislation, the rest of the Liberal establishment was not. The penal code, principally the work of the Minister of Justice, Van Maanen, was attacked by all the Liberal journalists. Tielemans, in particular, was disturbed by its infringement upon the freedom of the press.¹⁰⁶

Si le Concordat avait mécontenté les libéraux, le projet de code de Van Maanen allait les détourner à tout jamais et les jeter dans les bras de l'ennemi [les catholiques] d'hier.¹⁰⁷

Although the detested penal code may have brought the Catholics and Liberals closer together, in December 1827, tempers flared again, when the budget for the new year was discussed in the Second Chamber of the States-General. The budget called for 400,000 florins to implement the Concordat. The leaders of the Catholics were for the budget and the item relating to the Concordat. The Liberals were less enthusiastic and the heated discussion lasted throughout December and January of 1827-28 in many of the journals.¹⁰⁸

The Dutch-controlled administration was not displeased to see the Belgian factions quarreling again. It still did not see the dangers inherent in see-sawing between concessions to one side and then concessions to the other.¹⁰⁹

By the end of 1827, however, De Potter was sufficiently aware of the currents around him to see that both the Concordat and the new penal code exemplified the same governmental self-interest. He also began to suspect that he was being used as a tool of King William:

Arrivé à la fin de 1827, sous les excitations que nous avons fait comprendre, au paroxysme de la passion anti-catholique qu'avait peu à peu allumée et développée en lui ses études dirigées, à priori, quoi qu'il en ait pu dire, contre Rome, ses doctrines et sa politique, De Potter ne devait plus tarder à reconnaître qu'il était allé trop loin. Son instinct de patriote lui fit bientôt soupçonner qu'il avait trop servi le pouvoir pour l'escamotage adroit que celui-ci faisait de la liberté de tous, à la faveur des mêlées ardentes où il avait su pousser jusque-là les 'catholiques' et les 'libéraux' dans notre pays. L'incontestable loyauté de De Potter et surtout ses sentiments démocratiques dont il ne devait jamais échoir à personne d'avoir raison, le portèrent le premier à dénoncer la tricherie dont il avait été involontairement le complice. Nous [Jottrand] demandons ici la permission de nous glorifier, en passant d'avoir été un des premiers à entendre le cri

d'alarme qu'il poussa pour la liberté menacée, et à suivre résolûment, depuis, le drapeau qu'il leva pour appeler les écrivains belges à la rescousse.¹¹⁰

When an Italian named Libry-Bagnano, whose son De Potter had known in Italy, wrote a pamphlet defending the penal code, entitled le Concordat, le Code pénal et les Turcs, the newly aware De Potter, who had previously befriended the man, wrote him a scorching letter saying in part:

Votre Concordat paraît dicté par M. De Celles et votre Code pénal par M. Van Maanen, deux hommes que, vous ne l'ignorez pas, je n'aime guère; votre brochure est colportée et vantée par des gens je ne saurais estimer.¹¹¹

Libry-Bagnano was a wily former criminal who passed himself off as having been jailed because of political persecution.¹¹²

In 1827, before the pamphlet incident, the Minister of the Interior, Van Gobbelschroy, asked De Potter to see that Libry-Bagnano received a governmental gift of 30,000 florins, ostensibly for the foundation of a polymathic library, but actually for starting some journals which supported the administration's policies. It is unlikely that De Potter knew what the money was really for, but he was already beginning to distrust Libry-Bagnano, who mocked the very government that treated him so royally.¹¹³

Later, when it became apparent, that the money was being used for, among other things, the new pro-Dutch paper, the National, Libry-Bagnano was thoroughly denounced by the independent journals, who announced his former crimes in print. De Potter says that this protégé of King William, "contribua puissamment à irriter l'esprit public contre le gouvernement hollandais."¹¹⁴ After

their falling out in 1827, Libry-Bagnano became a vicious enemy of De Potter.

Van Maanen did not change his position because the Belgian journalists demanded a penal code which followed the dictates of the Constitution, and not that of the Dutch government. Instead he unleashed the police on his critics. Both Catholics and Liberals were prosecuted.

Ducpétiaux of the Courrier des Pays-Bas was the first one arrested, for writing a pamphlet criticizing the penal code. Arrested with him in February 1828, were his printer and his publisher; considered his partners in crime. This governmental harassment of the press lasted up until the Belgian revolution.¹¹⁵

Freedom of speech also became increasingly precarious and Catholic priests were prosecuted for remarks made in their sermons.¹¹⁶

Both parties grew more and more indignant about the oppressive atmosphere that the government was creating. Until the administration clamped down on the freedom of the press, a large part of the prosperous and liberally inclined bourgeoisie had approved of its anti-clerical measures, but its restriction of freedom of speech now angered them and made them more sympathetic to their Catholic brothers.

Van Maanen, Minister of Justice, was the advisor of the Crown in these prosecutions; and, though the constitution did not provide for Ministerial responsibility, he, rather than the King, was blamed. He gave great offense by telling the States General that the Ministers were agents of the Crown, and not servants of the people. 'The constitution of the Kingdom,' he said with perfect truth, 'recognises no other Ministerial responsibility.' This made him detested throughout Belgium.¹¹⁷

Freedom of religion and freedom of educational choice, both challenges to the Catholic citizens, had been threatened earlier. Freedom of association had been limited, so it seems, to those who had accepted royal patronage, as la Société belge pour la propagation de l'instruction et de la morale did not; now freedom of speech, at first affecting the Liberals, then the Catholics, was violated as the trials of "seditious" writers filled the courts of William.

The general mood of repression in the Belgium of 1828, may have been the result of King William's nervousness concerning the general state of unrest in Europe.¹¹⁸

Il faut dire à la décharge du roi Guillaume et de ses affidés que la marche des événements, dans toute l'Europe d'alors, ne permettait guère d'espérer beaucoup de succès de la pure habileté d'une politique de cour. On était, en France, à la veille de la chute du ministère Villèle. O'Connell tenait en échec toute l'aristocratie anglaise, et allait lui arracher bientôt le bill d'émancipation des catholiques.¹¹⁹

Many of the future leaders of the Belgian government emerged during this period. Agitating for reform and representation, they nevertheless moved the Belgians closer and closer to separation from Holland. Some of these men were Liberals like De Potter, others were fervent Catholics and monarchists. Félix, Comte de Mérode, was one of the latter. It is significant that while not a Bartels, Mérode (1791-1857) was one of the younger more liberal generation of Catholics in Belgium. In 1828, he published in Le Catholique, an essay called Un mot sur la conduite politique des catholiques belges, des catholiques français, which Eugene Duchesne calls, "une éloquente défense des doctrines soutenues alors par Lamennais..."¹²⁰

Vers la fin de juin 1828, le Courrier des Pays-Bas avait pris l'allure d'une opposition énergique au gouvernement, sans tenir compte de la réserve qu'observaient encore les écrivains du Mathieu Laensberg de Liège, ni des embarras d'une polémique, de libéral à catholique, qu'il devait continuer de soutenir contre le Catholique des Flandres. Le Courrier de la Meuse commençait déjà, lui, à s'abstenir à l'endroit de la guerre aux libéraux. Ce fut alors que l'on songea à constituer le Courrier des Pays-Bas sur de plus larges bases, et que fut arrêtée la société d'écrivains politiques constituée authentiquement, quelque temps après, pour rédiger et publier ce journal, conjointement avec l'imprimeur Coché-Mommens, son propriétaire antérieur.

De Potter n'entra pas dans cette société, uniquement pour ne pas s'astreindre à la part fixe de collaboration qu'elle imposait à chaque sociétaire; mais il promettait la continuation de son concours libre à la rédaction.¹²¹

Jottrand was arrested in October 1828, along with Pierre Claes, also of the Courrier des Pays-Bas, for writing articles that violated the strictly enforced penal code.¹²²

November 8, De Potter's famous anti-ministerial letter appeared. By publishing the circular in 1827 he had shown scorn for the methods of the Dutch-led administration, here he openly ridiculed the ministers of William. While in 1827, he had become sympathetic towards the Catholics, who were being manipulated by the government, here he pointed out to the Liberals that they were being manipulated also through their irrational fear of the Jesuits.¹²³ De Potter pointed out that it used to be a point of pride to tell French visitors that there were no Jesuits in Brussels, where the order had been forbidden. Of course now they could say:

...Quoi! pas de jury? - [les belges repondent] Non, mais aussi pas de jésuites.-Quoi! pas de liberté de la presse? - Non, mais aussi pas de jésuites.-Quoi! pas de responsabilité ministérielle? pas d'indépendance du pouvoir judiciaire? et un système d'impositions accablant et anti-populaire? et une administration boiteuse? - Il est vrai; mais point de jésuites.¹²⁴

In the finest passage in the letter De Potter stated:

Et c'est toujours sous prétexte de la peur qu'ils inspirent, qu'on vous refuse les garanties auxquelles vous avez droit, la liberté dont vous avez besoin, la prospérité qui fuira de plus en plus une terre où toutes les garanties sont illusoires, où la liberté est un vain mot, un leurre, une provocation pour convertir, quand il¹²⁵ plaît, les dupes en coupables, les patriotes en séditeux.

And he ended by proposing that instead of hunting Jesuites, the Belgians:

...bafouons, honnissons, poursuivons les ministériels; que quiconque n'aura pas clairement démontré par ses actes qu'il n'est dévoué à aucun ministre soit mis au ban de la nation, et que l'anathème¹²⁶ de l'anti-popularité pèse sur lui avec toutes ses suites.

It was not immediately clear the he was the author of this letter, because he had signed it only with an omega. On November 14, 1828, De Potter decided to reveal his authorship, probably to spare the editors of the Courrier des Pays-Bas. He was arrested the next day and taken to the Pètit-Carmes jail to await sentencing.¹²⁷ The letter he addressed to the government identifying himself as the author of the sarcastic piece of November 8, said in part:

...Au reste, je consolerai aisément, ou, pour mieux dire, je me glorifierai de ma mésaventure, si elle contribue à débarrasser plus tôt la presse belge des entraves qui la gênent. Car, si la manifestation de la pensée n'est entièrement libre, elle est, non restreinte, mais esclave; non limitée, mais nulle. Cette question est vitale chez nous. Sans l'affranchissement réel de la press, tout peuple est un sot et servile troupeau, tout gouvernement une arbitraire et rapace agence d'exploitation; la liberté des opinions et des cultes n'est plus qu' un dérision; l'esprit national, l' opinion publique sont des mots vides de sens; l'amour de la patrie est une duperie, et la terre hospitalière et classique devient la plus niaise des sottises.

Agréez, messieurs, s'il vous plait, mes félicitations sincères pour la fermeté avec laquelle vous défendez nos droits; mes excuses pour les tracasseries que je vous ai bien involontairement suscitées, et l'expression cordiale de toute ma consideration.¹²⁸

In his Revolution belge, De Potter explained that his attack on the lack of ministerial responsibility was not the most severe that had been made:

Le gouvernement avait laissé passer des attaques bien plus virulentes dans la forme que n'était la mienne. Mais sentant toute la portée de celle-ci, il crut devoir sévir.¹²⁹

De Potter also stated that after his arrest on November 15, he learned from his friends that the government was rather sorry it had made a fuss about the article, and thereby called attention to it, and it seemed that it might let him get out of prison with an easy sentence, so that the entire matter might be forgotten quickly. De Potter resolved not to let this happen and prepared his speech for the courtroom as an attack instead of a defense.¹³⁰ He also continued to criticize the government in the Courrier.

November 20, the Courrier printed a letter of De Potter's in which he seemed to speak as a leader of the government opposition. In this he called for the "frank execution of the fundamental law" which was supposed to guarantee "complete freedom of the press"; the "sincere acceptance of the principle of ministerial responsibility"; and the "the prompt and definitive organization of the judicial system."¹³¹

On November 22, 1828, De Potter followed this missive with another article in the Courrier called "Le Ministerialisme", in which he said:

...Pour tout membre d'une véritable opposition, le bien lui-même venant du gouvernement doit être suspect, tant qu'il n'est pas réalisé d'une manière immuable. Le soupçon ne peut disparaître pour faire place à la sécurité que lorsqu'une longue série d'actes, tous nationaux, a autorisé

la nation à se reposer, jamais encore à s'endormir, sur la foi de ceux qui la gouvernent. Le ministère est donc presque toujours supposé en guerre avec la nation; et les ministériels, surtout dans un moment de crise, sont, nous l'avons déjà dit et nous le répétons ici, justement bafoués, honnis et poursuivis par les amis de la liberté publique, qui les mettent au ban de la nation pour préserver celle-ci de leurs pièges, la prémunir contre leurs empiétements, la défendre contre leurs attaques...¹³²

De Potter's protest of November 8 was part of an enormous public outcry that month. Belgian leaders had circulated a petition which, with the support of the Catholic clergy and the Flemish masses, had collected 40,000 signatures during November.¹³³

Louis De Potter's trial started December 19, 1828.¹³⁴ He was defended by Sylvain Van De Weyer and Pierre François Van Meenen, which almost seems superfluous, because De Potter made such eloquent speeches himself.¹³⁵ As previously stated, he was more interested in making a statement in court than in defending himself.

De Potter made three requests at the beginning of the trial, that the debates take place in French, that the session be made public, and that the sentence should be given by a jury. The court did not adhere to any of the three, all being against the policy of William's government.¹³⁶

De Potter outlined, at this trial, all the griefs he had been accusing the government of perpetuating: previous censure, printers deleting sections before publishing material that might compromise them; non-ministerial responsibility, which made the monarchy a government based on good favor; poor organization of the legal system, making judges pawns of the government; lack of trial by jury; the severity of the legal codes, particularly the penal code;

the ban against the use of French in public affairs, particularly a hardship for older people who were accustomed to French; and the monopoly of education, by which the government hoped to mold docile, passive citizens who accepted its directives.¹³⁷

De Potter claimed that the Belgian's political, civil and natural rights were being chipped away bit by bit by William, who was disregarding the fundamental law. De Potter said that the opposition only wanted this fundamental law applied as it should be:

...En un mot, la loi fondamentale, et rien que la loi fondamentale, mais aussi toute la loi fondamentale, sans restrictions, ni exceptions, ni interprétations qui la détruisent ou la modifient...¹³⁸

At this same proceedings, De Potter gave an eloquent defense of journalism as a safeguard of the institutions of any representative government:

En effet, celui-ci, qu' a-t-il à redouter le plus? Ses propres fautes, et l'indifférence ou la perfidie des hommes qui les lui laissent accumuler jusqu'à ce qu'elles lui deviennent fatales. Sous ce point de vue, la liberté entière, et égale pour tous, de la presse, cette arme sacrée de l'opposition, est la véritable sauvegarde des gouvernements. C'est pour préserver le nôtre de dangers qui me paraissent imminents, que j'ai pris la plume. Et c'est dans les journaux que j'ai écrit, parce que les journaux sont les organes les plus actifs de l'opinion publique qui les inspire, et à laquelle, à leur tour, ils servent d'aiguillon. Et c'est le Courrier des Pays-Bas que j'ai choisi de préférence, parce que tous ses rédacteurs sont Belges, que je m'honore de les avoir pour amis, et que, sur bien des points, nos opinions politiques sont les mêmes. L'écrivain est le représentant de la civilisation de son temps: c'est à ceux qui l'ont précédé dans la même carrière, que les peuples sont redevables des institutions libérales qui les régissent; c'est à lui que les députés des peuples régis par un gouvernement représentatif doivent la confiance de leurs mandataires.¹³⁹

and he said:

Si la liberté de la presse eût été réelle dans le fait en Belgique, comme elle y est proclamée dans le droit, je ne me verrais pas poursuivi pour avoir dit que des malveillants travaillaient à gêner cette liberté précieuse, et que déjà elle se débattait péniblement sous le poids des chaînes dont on voulait l'accabler.¹⁴⁰

De Potter was fined one thousand florins and sentenced to eighteen months in prison. This was a stiff sentence, which Bologne thought represented "plus à une vengeance qu' à de la justice."¹⁴¹

The audience at court greeted the sentence with boos and cat-calls; just as throughout the trial the Belgians had cheered De Potter's speeches. As De Potter was led out, the crowd outside cheered him and booed Van Maanen, the Minister of Justice. Outside the demonstrators were mostly workers in the printing field, who, outraged at De Potter's sentence, threw stones at the house of the Minister of Justice, breaking his windows.¹⁴²

The Courrier des Pays-Bas denounced this vandalism in their December 22 edition, as a "manifestation anglaise." Two things are significant about this: first, the distaste of the liberal bourgeoisie for actual physical violence aimed at the government;¹⁴³ and secondly, the sympathy that the lower urban class was developing for De Potter. Both attitudes were prophetic of the actual revolt twenty months later.

CHAPTER III

LOUIS DE POTTER: THE UNIONIST PAMPHLETEER

1829 AND 1830

At the beginning of 1829, the Pètit-Carmes prison had become a virtual Liberal encampment. Imprisoned there were De Potter and his friends Jottrand, Ducpétiaux, Pierre Claes and the printer Coché-Mommens.¹ After his arrest on November 15, 1828, De Potter had commented on his political activity in prison:

Je n'étais en rapport direct qu' avec le Courrier des Pays-Bas et indirect qu' avec le Belge; les autres journaux cependant recevaient de moi une espèce d'impulsion morale qui donnait à tous l'unité d'où résultait notre force. En outre, ma prison était devenue un centre où se discutaient tous les moyens possibles de combattre légalement, et à l'aide des libertés écrites dans notre pacte fondamental, le despotisme monarchique dont les prétentions à l'arbitraire croissaient à mesure que nous précisions davantage comment et sur quoi nous voulions lui résister, et que nous serrions mieux nos rangs pour rendre impossible toute surprise, soit par la ruse et la corruption, soit par la force ouverte.²

The Courrier des Pays-Bas in Brussels, Le Politique, formerly the Mathieu Laensberg, at Liège, the Belge in Brussels, and soon the Catholique des Pays-Bas of Ghent, continued the discussion of the ideas De Potter had raised at his trial in December³. The Catholics had been impressed with a Liberal calling for freedom of education for them, and some had responded by calling for freedom of the press for the Liberals. De Potter felt that:

Lors de mon discours du 20 décembre, j'avais fait un grand pas vers la création de ce qu'on appela quelques mois après, l'union des catholiques et des libéraux...⁴

1829 was a year of intense political writing for De Potter, who had a greater influence on the revolutionary climate of Belgium in 1830 than any other journalist. Schueremans, the Procurator to the King, claimed in his memoirs that De Potter had given the government his word that he would refrain from political writing while in the Pétits-Carmes. If there had been such a promise, it would have been made under pressure, for De Potter had no intention of abandoning his criticism of the administration.⁵

His crusade to reform the Dutch-controlled government of Belgium had not escaped notice. While in prison De Potter received many sympathetic letters. One that he greatly appreciated was from the celebrated Victor Cousin.⁶

By April 4, 1829, De Potter had finished his first pamphlet written inside the Pétits-Carmes. It was entitled Rapport d'un ministre, ami de sa patrie et peu attaché à son porte-feuille au roi des Pays-Bas, sur la disposition actuelle des esprits et la situation des choses en Belgique⁷

Cette brochure eut tout le succès que lui garantissait d'avance la popularité, déjà fort grande, des idées de De Potter, aussi bien dans le parti catholique que dans le parti libéral, à un degré moindre toutefois dans ce dernier.

At this point many Liberals were still cautious of embracing their Catholic colleagues as partners in opposition. Fear of "Jesuitism" and memories of the abuses of the ancien regime still had not been replaced by an optimism for a more tolerant future. The Catholics, were, on the other hand, pleased to find one of their former adversaries advocating cooperation.

In Rapport De Potter began by recognizing that the ministry of William I had been disturbed by the lack of confidence the Belgian people had in the government, and by the increasingly unified opposition of the Catholics and Liberals of Belgium. De Potter thought that this discontent was not surprising, that the Belgians had been remarkably patient for the fifteen years that the Dutch had abused them.

De Potter said that the union of the Catholics and Liberals had been caused by the government, and the government could make the opposition cease, if it wished to. However, the alliance of the two factions, which formerly fought violently, had been a maturing experience for the nation. Both sides had learned tolerance, and were calling for equality for all:

Le ministère avoit fait sans le savior, et surtout sans le vouloir, l'éducation constitutionnelle de la nation. Les partis long-temps divisés se rapprochèrent, honteux d'avoir été dupes de leurs propres querelles, et plus encore d'y avoir en quelque sorte donné lieu en nourrissant des idées absurdes par cela même qu'elles étoient intéressées et exclusives. Le catholique n'anathématisa plus la liberté des opinions, même religieuses, et il accepta avec toutes ses conséquences le droit qu'a chacun de manifester librement ces opinions par la presse, et de les défendre par tous les moyens qu'avouent la raison, la conscience et les lois. Le libéral, de son côté, ou le philosophe rougit d'avoir pu excepter la croyance des catholiques de la tolérance qu'il réclamoit pour toutes les autres. Plus de privilèges pour personne! égalité pour tous! liberté entière, sans autres restrictions que les lois et la morale! devinrent la devise des deux partis; ou, pour mieux dire, il n'y eut plus de partis, il n'y eut plus qu'un seul peuple et une seule voix.

De Potter told King William that he could solve Belgium's griefs through total execution of the fundamental law, which the nation finally understood, and would no longer permit to be used against itself. As for the Catholics and Liberals, there must no

longer be a distinction made between the two parties, legally the government must only recognize citizens.

De Potter spoke of the articles in the journals and also the petitions which the Belgians had addressed to the deputies of the States-General. He went on to say that to prove his government is strong, King William should, when he became aware of a problem, solve it immediately and with pleasure:

Un gouvernement foible se laisseroit arracher pièce à pièce des concessions qu'il ne feroit qu'à la dernière extrémité, malgré lui, et toujours obsédé par l'idée que c'est un propriété qu'on lui enlève, des droits dont on le dépouille. Le gouvernement de V.M. [Votre Majeste] voudra prouver qu'il est fort; et il le fera dès l'instant que, reconnoissant la justice des demandes qui lui sont faites, il cédera promptement, volontairement et avec joie. Car, ne la dissimulons pas, on ne fonde solidement un trône que sur l'équité, et affermir un règne n'est autre chose qu'appliquer les lois de l'éternelle morale à l'art de gouverner ses semblables. Par conséquent, tant que ce sera votre peuple qui aura raison contre nous, quelque foibles que paroissent ses moyens de réussir, la force sera de son côté,¹⁰ et tôt ou tard, la victoire couronnera sa persévérance.

De Potter asked King William to dismiss Van Maanen, who was considered a despot, and to get Van Gobbelschroy to resign. Van Gobbelschroy, who had been a schoolmate of De Potter, was not pictured as offensive, but merely weak.

The king was then asked to declare a new law proclaiming a ministerial responsibility, outlining when ministers could be impeached, and defining the penalties for their offenses. This would give the public the right to protest abuses without being held for slander.

The exceptional legislation restricting the freedom of the press must be abolished:

La presse n'est qu'un moyen d'émettre des opinions, et les opinions sont libres; il n'y a pas le moindre péril à les laisser librement se combattre, puisqu' en définitive la vérité finira toujours par écraser le mensonge. Mais elle est aussi un moyen de faire le mal: eh! bien; le mal n'est-il pas prévu et puni par la loi?¹¹

Education must be reorganized so that the law alone defined it, and it was not at the mercy of the agents of the government.

The judiciary must be totally independent. De Potter asked for responsible judges appointed fairly, who would protect the nation, even against bad laws. Furthermore, the citizens of the Netherlands must have the right to trial by jury:

Faites à votre peuple qui le sollicite, l'inappréciable don d'une institution dont tout le monde civilisé a reconnu la valeur. Il seroit superflu d'en énumérer ici les avantages, qu'il n'est plus permis d'ignorer lorsqu'on a la moindre notion des travaux et des progrès de l'esprit humain dans le dernier siècle. Qu'il me suffise de dire que le jury contribue puissamment à attacher le citoyen aux intérêts de ses semblables et à ceux de sa patrie; qu'il lui fait sentir, mieux que toute autre chose, sa dignité de citoyen; et qu'il est enfin une espèce d'assurance mutuelle contre les abus de notre organisation sociale,¹² ainsi que contre l'ignorance et la méchanceté des hommes.

De Potter cautioned that sentences against the press and of a political nature, in the absence of a jury, would always seem to be revenge.

He stated that the milling and slaughtering duties must be abolished, because the nation was financially exhausted. A new system of taxes should then be devised. One that relieved the burden of the poor without bankrupting the wealthy, with the greatest possible division of the wealth of the state.

King William's public expenditures were also too high, the military out of proportion to the size of the country, and the bureaucracy overloaded. Pensions and salaries were granted indis-

criminally, also depleting the treasury.

De Potter also enumerated another major grievance of the Belgians, the ban against the use of French in public affairs. This, he claimed, was not only ridiculous, it had caused the domination of Belgium by the Dutch, a Belgium which also was unequally represented in the States-General, and had paid more than its share of the expenses of state.

De Potter concluded by returning to the question of the caliber of men in William's ministry, men he thought were moved only by personal interest, or feared of losing their positions, and thus feared everyone else. De Potter believed that if King William would surround himself with new and more capable men, his would be a model kingdom.

Although De Potter enumerated all of the major controversies of the era, in almost a state of the opposition address, the lower classes of Belgium seized upon his suggestion that the milling and slaughtering taxes be abolished as the sign that De Potter had indeed the interests of the country at heart. The controversy over these taxes went as far back as the beginning of the decade, when wages were frozen in 1820, and new taxes on flour milling and slaughtering in 1822 meant a rapid rise in the cost of bread and meat. The proceeds from these taxes were poured back into the expansion of industry, profiting the industrial bourgeoisie while the working class suffered.¹³ The lower classes, concluding that this particular issue was the one that had placed De Potter in jail, rallied to his cause as never before, and his popularity spread throughout the country.¹⁴

At least one concrete victory seemed to result from these and other journalist attacks on the Dutch controlled government. On May 16, 1829, a new law concerning freedom of the press was proclaimed which Bologne said, "C'était pour les unionistes une première victoire qui les encouragea à persévérer jusqu'à satisfaction complète."¹⁵

In June of 1829, De Potter's pamphlet Union des catholiques et des libéraux was published in Brussels. It was, without doubt, the most important work of his career.¹⁶ It was:

...le manifest de tout l'opposition, pour devenir, plus tard, celui de la révolution et servir enfin de programme à la constitution politique qui sortit de cette révolution.¹⁷

The Union pamphlet was, of course, written in his cell within the Pétits-Carmes. De Potter sent the pamphlet directly to the king with his regards, as well as his replies to the ministry's defense.¹⁸ In his letter of accompaniment De Potter said, among other things:

L'alliance qui, dans les Pays-Bas, vient d'être jurée sur l'autel de la patrie par la philosophie et la religion, est un des événements les plus remarquables de votre règne: il nous sera envié par les peuples civilisés des deux mondes.¹⁹

It is important to note that De Potter described a union which he thought ought to please the king. There has been an evolution from the Rapport of April, in which De Potter seemed to speak of the union as the unity of the opposition to the government. Here De Potter has described the union as a joint venture of citizens uniting to obtain and secure total citizenship. This union has evolved from social necessity - the necessity to preserve opportunity for the freedom of all opinions. This new

union was not just the closing of the ranks against a common enemy; this new union had become a philosophical ideal. Where opposing political entities could compete and cooperate in an atmosphere of mutual trust and fair play.

Heated controversies arose over the unionist idea of De Potter because both sides had to sacrifice, "d'intérêts ou de préjugés, et surtout des sacrifices d'amour-propre," and this was difficult for men to actually accomplish, no matter how much they liked his ideas.²⁰

The union as an ideal, even a somewhat utopian ideal, was greatly facilitated by the practical fact that both groups were becoming less fond of the Dutch-controlled government every day. De Potter's Union was an immense success, and pragmatism must have contributed to that success. Nevertheless the eloquence of De Potter's arguments shines today as in 1829, and it has remained a great political statement.

In the forward to Union De Potter emphasized that he thought that the manner in which the Catholic question, under a Protestant king, was resolved, would determine the future liberty or bondage of the Belgian provinces. He affirmed that religion was an individual affair between man and God, which was the province neither of society nor governments. He repeated what he alluded to in his pamphlet in April, that the union of the Catholics and the Liberals was natural, necessary, and inevitable, and that it would endure politically as long as the political climate that had created it. At this point, that of having obtained their political rights, De Potter thought that:

...il n'en résultera, ni que la religion a vaincu la philosophie, ni que la philosophie a triomphé de la religion: il en résultera que chacune d'elles, bien décidée dorénavant à demeurer sur son terrain, reconnaît qu'elle a, outre des droits à soutenir, des devoirs à respecter, et que, là où commencent les droits des autres, finissent les siens, et commencent ses propres devoirs.²¹

Aware of the privileges and obligations of true liberty, the two parties would learn peaceful co-existence.

De Potter continued:

En un mot, il en résultera que l'ordre moral et religieux, c'est-à-dire l'ordre des opinions, est exclusivement du domaine de l'homme, de l'individu, et que la société ou les hommes n'y ont pas juridiction; que par conséquent il n'y a ni pouvoir, ni institutions, ni lois qui puissent légitimement y intervenir. L'autorité qui s'en mêle, si ce n'est une autorité librement reconnue par les intéressés, n'est que de la tyrannie; et la sottise qui l'invoque dans l'espoir de se débarrasser par elle de ses adversaires, est tôt ou tard la dupe de sa maladroite injustice, soit par une réaction de la force aveugle qu'elle a eu l'imprudence d'appeler à son aide, soit par l'énergie nouvelle que la persécution ne tarde jamais à éveiller chez ses victimes. L'ordre positif et réel, c'est-à-dire l'ordre des actes humains et des faits matériels, est seul soumis à l'autorité et aux lois; et le premier, le plus grand intérêt de tous les membres de la société est que la loi ne franchisse pas les limites hors desquelles elle est incompétente, que l'autorité ne soit jamais arbitraire, et que les lois soient pour tous les mêmes.²²

De Potter maintained that Liberals preferred the rule of institutions, to the arbitrary rule of men; but Liberals had used unfair tactics when they needed them, especially against the Catholics. The Catholics, on the other hand, had tried to dominate, and had been intolerant. He claimed that the Catholics had finally seen that to deserve toleration and freedom they must grant to others what they expected for themselves.

In a memorable passage, De Potter argued:

Les libéraux de tous les pays commettent la faute impardonnable de vouloir réformer les idées par des lois. Ils ne savent donc pas que tourmenter, vexer, violenter les hommes est un très mauvais moyen de les convaincre, et qu'abattre des têtes n'est aucunement les changer! La conviction ne fait jamais place qu'à une autre conviction. Croit-on parce que l'on craint ou que l'on espère? non: on croit parce que l'on croit. Tout moyen humain échoue contre la foi, qui se fortifie dans la persécution et ne fléchit que devant un foi nouvelle. Le raisonnement seul est puissant contre le raisonnement. Dès qu'il manifeste des prétentions au pouvoir, il prépare lui-même le pouvoir plus grand qui l'enchaînera, le ballonnera un jour; dès qu'il s'abaisse à comprimer l'opinion qu'il devait se borner à réfuter, il doit s'attendre à être plus tard également comprimé et étouffé. Laissons les doctrines naître et s'établir librement, s'entrechoquer et disparaître sans obstacle. Ne défendons que les droits de tous les citoyens, et parmi ceux-ci les droits mêmes des partisans de la doctrine la plus opposée à celle en laquelle nous avons foi: nous servirons ainsi l'humanité, la société, la patrie, et plus que toute autre chose nos intérêts particuliers et ceux de l'opinion qui est notre propriété la plus chère, celle de notre conscience.²³

De Potter discussed national churches. He had a low opinion of them. He stated that, "...la vérité elle-même imposée violemment perdrait tous ses charmes;..."²⁴

In another excellent passage, De Potter remarked that Liberals often made the fatal error:

...de croire qu'il suffit de n'être pas catholique pour être libéral, erreur opposée à celle si souvent blâmée chez les catholiques, de penser que la dévotion seule constitue le vrai patriotisme.²⁵

Our author maintained that a person's religious or philosophical beliefs were merely opinions and:

...les opinions sont au-dessus des lois de la société: elles sont une propriété morale inviolable, sur laquelle la société n'a aucun droit, et qui n'est soumise qu'à l'ordre intellectuel, où d'autres opinions ont seules sur elles un pouvoir purement moral comme elles.²⁶

That Catholics of any country should resort to force in order to destroy liberal institutions was only counterproductive because:

Avoir recours à une force étrangère, c'est d'abord confesser l'insuffisance des raisons que l'on apporte; c'est ensuite compromettre la cause que ces raisons devaient servir, et exposer ses partisans à gémir un jour sous le poids de la même contrainte, sous lequel ils auront étouffé la pensée rebelle à leurs violences.²⁷

and he continued:

Il faut maintenant au catholicisme, comme à toutes les doctrines, soit philosophiques, soit religieuses, soit soeurs, soit rivaux, une vie propre et entièrement indépendante, qu'il ne tienne que de lui-même²⁸, et qu'aucun pouvoir, hors le sien, ne puisse lui ravir.

De Potter said that in Belgium, where Catholicism was not dominant, Catholics had formerly been against freedom of the press, of worship and of opinions, and said that even in a country where Catholicism was politically dominant:

...se bornant à réclamer l'égalité, cette première condition de l'équité, comme l'appelle si justement Montaigne, à invoquer la liberté en tout et pour tous, non seulement le catholicisme atteindra pleinement son but, mais il se donnera encore une vie et une vigueur qui semblaient lui échapper. Ses ennemis ne pourront plus lui contester ce qu'il ne contestera à personne; et, devenu le plus chaud partisan d'institutions régénératrices, il trouvera aussi en elles le plus ferme, le plus inébranlable appui.²⁹

Le catholicisme, en ce case, loin d'être menacé par les progrès des lumières et de la civilisation, méritera d'être placé parmi les opinions qui auront contribué à faire faire à cette civilisation un des pas le plus rapides et les plus décisifs. Il sera devenu libéral en ce sens qu'il aura réclamé le régime de la liberté. Doit-on s'étonner si, dès ce moment, les libéraux marchent avec lui à la conquête de leurs droits communs, et s'il deviennent sincèrement constitutionnels, à l'exemple d'adversaires généreux avec lesquels ils se voient forcés de reconnaître enfin qu'ils ont les mêmes intérêts?³⁰

The Catholics would no longer seek domination, and Liberals would hold out their hands to Jesuits and Ultramontanes who no longer seek preferential treatment. What was a fierce combat would become only intellectual discussion, and whoever prevailed, "Le

triomphe de l'opinion par sa propre force n'est jamais une tyrannie."³¹ Nor was this coalition artificial:

Cette alliance n'est pa le résultat d'une convention humaine, conclue au profit d'une opinion ou de quelques hommes; elle est le produit de la force des choses: outre la conquête de la liberté civile, elle a pour but l'affranchissement de toutes les intelligences, la liberté de toutes les opinions, et de ceux qui ont attaché leur dignité à les maintenir; le gage de sa stabilité³² est la nécessité qui l'a établie et sur laquelle elle repose.

The Union pamphlet, was a philosophical statement of what both liberal Catholicism and open minded liberalism could become. As surely as the writings of Lamennais must have given De Potter confidence in the ability of Catholicism to absorb new ideas, this pamphlet must have given Lamennais hope that Catholicism could still flourish in a secular state. It would have been almost a certainty that someone, perhaps Félix de Mérode, would have sent Lamennais a copy soon after its appearance.

The first edition of De Potter's Union des catholiques et des libéraux was sold out in fifteen days. In the second edition, which appeared in the first days of July, De Potter added some notes refuting some objections Liberals had made.³³ Both the Liberal and Catholic press had praised the pamphlet however, and De Potter wrote:

Jamais, J'ose le dire, succès ne fut plus prompt, plus complet et plus flatteur. Il arriva ce qui arrive toujours quand on ne fait que résumer les idées de tout le monde, qu'il n'y eut qu'une voix sur mon écrit. Je fus comblé de louanges, porté aux³⁴ nues par les journaux des couleurs les plus opposées...

Although De Potter declared optimistically that the union of the parties was now "réelle, parfaite et profonde", there were dissenters, particularly in the Liberal camp.³⁵ A Charles Durand

and a D. Marie both wrote against the Unionist idea as dangerous to the Liberal party, and the same summer, De Potter felt impelled to write another pamphlet refuting some of the objections Liberals had made to this concept. It was called Réponse à quelques objections ou éclaircissemens sur la question catholique dans les Pays-Bas, and appeared on July 14, 1829.³⁶

The pamphlet was in the form of a dialogue between De Potter and the anonymous author of a Réponse to his union pamphlet which had appeared at Ghent. The author of the anonymous pamphlet was clearly Charles Durand, a Liberal and extremely competent pro-governmental writer.³⁷ In De Potter's Réponse, "Anonymous" questioned whether opinions were really oppressed in Belgium because the Jesuits were not teaching there. De Potter replied:

...la proscription d'un seule opinion met en danger toutes les autres, à chaque variation dans la manière de voir du pouvoir proscripteur; elle détruit, par conséquent, la liberté de conscience, de même que la détention arbitraire d'un seul individu³⁸ remet en question l'inviolabilité de la liberté individuelle.

"Anonymous" was afraid of citizens who believed in the intellectual, moral and religious infallibility of the Pope, and he asked if the Catholics wouldn't choose to follow him instead of their constitutional king. De Potter defended Ultramontanes:

Si, par influence, c'est direction morale que vous entendez, ces bon esprits, supposé qu'il leur fallût nécessairement faire un choix, s'empresseraient de choisir celle de l'ultramontanisme, dont le siège est éloigné de nous, et qui n'a plus chez nous de moyens de contrainte à sa disposition, autres que ceux de l'opinion. L'état moralement dirigé par le souverain qui, devenu par cela seul maître des lois et de leur organs, et chef absolu d'une armée de satellites, pourrait ainsi faire emprisonner, torturer, mettre à mort quiconque ne penserait pas comme

lui, serait sous le joug du despotism dans sa beauté la plus idéale et la plus sublime.

Si l'influence dont vous parlez n'est que le gouvernement du royaume, elle est définie et réglée par le pacte fondamentale, et celui qui voudrait y faire intervenir activement l'étranger, tomberait encore une fois dans l'un ou l'autre cas prévu par la législation pénale.³⁹

"Anonymous" was afraid that a Catholic electorate, a Catholic States-Provincial, and a Catholic majority in the Chambers might lawfully force even a constitutional king to make unjust concessions. De Potter replied that laws legally constituted were not concessions, they were laws:

Cela fait, de deux choses l'une, ou ces lois seraient justes pour tous, et alors pourquoi les craindre? ou elles violeraient les droits (je ne dis pas seulement qu'elles froisseraient les prétentions) de la minorité, et alors cette minorité, ne fût-elle que d'un seul homme, se recruterait et se fortifierait à la longue par le seul ascendant de l'équité et de la raison, jusqu'à ce qu'elle secouât le joug de l'arbitraire et de la violence, qu'elle aurait pendant quelque temps subi.⁴⁰

De Potter pointed out that it was wrong to praise priests for having philosophical ideas, for they were entirely free to have either sympathy or antipathy for these ideas, just as philosophers might have sympathy or antipathy for dogmatic ideas. One should not be afraid of priests persecuting, burning or exiling people for heretical beliefs, although they had indeed done this elsewhere, because the penal code of Belgium had provided that no one could persecute, burn or exile another for his beliefs.

De Potter emphasized that a Catholic government was not impossible with a Protestant sovereign. While more difficult than a government entirely Protestant or entirely Catholic, a fair, and constitutional government would uphold the rights of its citizens whatever the beliefs of the king, ministers, or citizens.

He also made the important point that he was not in revolt against the Protestants or the Dutch:

Il n'est aucunement question de s'armer avec les catholiques et les Belges contre les protestans et les Hollandais, ni avec ces derniers contre les autres; il es question seulement, et vous le savez aussi bien que personne, de forcer les protestans et les Hollandais à être justes, ou plus tôt de forcer le pouvoir à ne pas sortir de ses limites, c'est-à-dire à laisser à tout le monde tout la liberté à laquelle chacun a droit, et à n'être⁴¹ lui-même ni protestant ni catholique, ni Belge ni Hollandais.

In the post-script to his pamphlet, De Potter made an eloquent statement about the relationship between civil government and religious societies:

La société civile n'a aucune suprématie sur les doctrines de la société religieuse, pas plus qu'elle n'en a sur les opinions de chaque individu; car c'est comme individu, comme homme, et non comme citoyen, qu'il embrasse, qu'il professe un religion quelconque, dont les dogmes sont toujours pour lui des opinions individuelles, sans être jamais la doctrine d'une société, même de celle dont les opinions se confondent avec les siennes. De son côté, la société religieuse ne pourra aucunement dominer la société civile, ni même avoir sur elle la moindre influence, en ce qui concerne son pacte fondamental, sa législation, son administration, sa police, qui ne la regardent point, et qui, par conséquent, existent sans elle et, s'il le fallait, existeraient en dépit d'elle, pas plus qu'elle ne peut faire plier par des moyens de contrainte aucun individu à ses opinions, à ses formes à ses pratiques, en un mot, à son gouvernement.

L'une de ces sociétés ne relevera donc jamais de l'autre, n'aura ni ne pourra jamais avoir le pouvoir souverain sur l'autre.

La société civile aura beau proclamer: J'approuve telles doctrines; je protège telles opinions; cette forme de culte m'est agréable; ces pratiques d'église me plaisent; la foi en ces dogmes plutôt qu'en autres dogmes me conviendrait fort. L'homme indépendant, la société religieuse qui se respecte, se garderont bien d'apostasier: et, s'ils le faisaient, ils perdraient à l'instant tout droit à leur propre estime; ils seraient déchus de toute dignité morale, leur principal bien, leur force, leur vie.

D'une autre part, la société religieuse ne sera jamais admise à intervertir, à troubler l'ordre politique et civil établi. Ses membres allégueront en vain leur foi, leur culte, les préceptes auxquels, ils se sont soumis, la règle

qu'ils se sont prescrite ou qu'ils ont acceptée, soit pour légitimer un acte que les lois défendent, soit pour s'exempter d'un devoir qu'elles imposent.⁴²

Réponse clarified the relationship between religion and government, and made a powerful case of the argument that under a carefully constituted government, religion could not deprive men of their civil liberties. Strangely enough, his argument that a Protestant sovereign was perfectly able to govern a nation of Catholic citizens and deputies, applied equally to both William I of Holland, and Leopold I, the future king of Belgium, also a Protestant. It was significant that Catholic Belgium, having divested itself of one Protestant sovereign, did have enough faith in the strength of its constitution to risk choosing another Protestant king.

The next month, August 1829, De Potter felt impelled to write still another pamphlet in defense of his Unionist position. This was called, Dernier mot à l'anonyme de Gand, sur l'union des catholiques et des libéraux dans les Pays-Bas.⁴³

De Potter's own tolerance had evolved a long way from his early days as a graduate of the French system of education who had enthusiastically supported King William's Collège philosophique de Louvain.

These three pamphlets of the summer of 1829, accomplished what their author intended. By the end of the summer, all of the leading Catholics and Liberals of Belgium shared De Potter's Unionist idea.⁴⁴

While in prison in September 1829, De Potter wrote two articles for the Courrier des Pays-Bas, September 23 and 26,

firmly opposing the annexation of Belgium to France, which had been suggested by General de Richemont. These rebuttals clearly demonstrated that De Potter was a champion of national independence.⁴⁵ Although all his memoirs were indeed written after the fact, they contained a strong grain of nationalism; and as De Potter stated in Souvenirs, "...mes idées à ce sujet n'ont jamais varié."⁴⁶

Evidently, King William would have gladly released De Potter from prison if he had made the slightest move toward reconciliation.⁴⁷ De Potter not only made no effort to show repentance, he seemed to enjoy his role of national martyr. His writings received so much attention, it is curious that the king continued to let him write while imprisoned.

One of the men King William sent to visit De Potter and investigate the possibility of his accepting a pardon was Van Bommel, the Bishop of Liège. A native of Holland who became an ardent Belgian partisan, De Potter nevertheless thought he was one:

...qui alors jouait le catholique réformateur pour essayer de servir le clergé courtisan, les nobles serviles, et le gouvernement hollandais, et qui depuis, évêque de Liège, sert réellement les mêmes prêtres ambitieux, la même noblesse adulatrice, mais auprès du gouvernement belge.⁴⁸

That fall, however, De Potter did petition to have the Second Chamber reconsider his case, because he had been found guilty under a decree of April 20, 1815, which had been revoked since his arrest. The new law of May 16, 1829, upgraded governmental toleration of the press, and De Potter contended this exonerated his actions. Evidently De Potter wished a pardon to come from the States-General and not the king. It is unclear,

however, why he waited five months to appeal. He published a demand for his appeal in the presses in October, and appealed to the States-General in November. The delegates to the States-General debated his case spiritedly, but he did not receive a pardon.⁴⁹

This evidently did not discourage De Potter. He wrote to Charles de Broukère that:

Jamais,....je n'ai fait de ma cause un cause personnelle: je voudrais que jusqu'au bout on continuât à ne la considérer que comme un moyen de pousser les affaires générales...⁵⁰

Petitions circulated in October 1829 by Bartels, de Haerne and Rodenbach were sent to the Lower House of the States-General in November demanding governmental changes. These were part of some 150 petitions presented to this Chamber during the year of 1829, containing more than 360,000 signatures.⁵¹ De Potter wrote in his Souvenirs that:

Un demi-million [peut-être une exagération] de pétitionnaires, demandant tous le même redressement des mêmes griefs, ne laissa plus de doutes sur les progrès que nous avions fait dans tous les rangs de la nation, et sur le résultat définitif de la lutte engagée entre le gouvernement et nous, à la première occasion⁵² que les circonstances fourniraient pour la mener à terme.

The majority of the petitioners of 1829-30 were Flemish peasants. Some Flemish noblemen and clergy had also signed, practically none of its bourgeoisie. The peasantry, largely illiterate, had evidently been assisted by what Bologne calls the clergy of the second order. In the French or Walloon towns there was also support from the liberal intellectual sector.⁵³

Another investigator, M.F. Magnette, found proof that Dutch subjects in northern Brabant also signed these petitions, which means that the union had found adherents in Holland as well,

Dutchmen who also found the reign of William oppressive. It was not stated whether these Hollanders were found to be of the Catholic minority, and thus more sympathetic to their Belgian compatriots.⁵⁴

Throughout Belgium the industrial bourgeoisie was almost totally behind the Dutch-led government, but the urban proletariat had remained uninvolved.⁵⁵ There was widespread unemployment in 1829 and 1830; however, which meant that the new industrial work force was becoming increasingly agitated. Assuming that these people were until fairly recently members of the illiterate peasantry, they would not have had the educational level to participate in petitioning. Assuming also that displacement had lessened their intimate contact with the clergy, they would not have had the assistance of the clerics' literacy. This might explain why the rural peasantry, while economically slightly more advantaged than their city brothers, was politically involved, while the urban proletariat was not.

King William's address to the States-General on the opening of the legislative session of 1829-30, October 19, 1829, was so bland, that Jottrand said, "...il est impossible d'imaginer les ardentes luttes qui occupaient le pays..."⁵⁶

De Potter's own "state of the union" message appeared on November 15, 1829, and was addressed to Van Gobbelschroy, for whom De Potter claimed to have still, "...conservais toute l'estime et tout l'attachement d'un ami..." although he had already called for his resignation⁵⁷ This pamphlet was entitled Lettre de Démophile à M. Van Gobbelschroy, sur les garanties de la liberté des

Belges, à l'époque de l'ouverture de la session des états-généraux (1829-1830).⁵⁸

Lettre à Van Gobbelschroy indicated that De Potter thought the Kingdom of the Netherlands was still, with modification, a viable institution. De Potter himself supported this conviction:

C'était la première fois que mon langage pouvait sembler révolutionnaire: je ne voulais cependant qu'effrayer; car j'espérais toujours une réforme pacifique, et j'aimais mieux l'ajourner que de risquer⁵⁹ de l'ensanglanter et peut-être même de la compromettre.

In Lettre à Van Gobbelschroy, De Potter's purpose was to warn his friend that a new day had dawned in Belgium. The union of the opposition was real, had now existed for a year, and the Catholics and Liberals were both calling for liberty and equality for all.

Dissatisfaction had not been erased, nor the Belgian's griefs redressed. But the people themselves would not be lulled to sleep again. They were awake and ready to make sacrifices for their rights. Van Gobbelschroy must think of himself as being in a free country, so that he could perform his duties in an entirely different manner. De Potter concluded by saying that:

...si vous aimez votre place, votre réputation, si vous aimez vous-même, votre route tracée...⁶⁰

One passage in this pamphlet was particularly impressive:

Toute nation qui aime la liberté est déjà libre de droit; aussitôt qu'elle saura vouloir être libre, elle le sera de fait. Jamais peuple ne fut long-temps esclave s'il ne méritait de l'être: on peut toujours dire que la libéralité d'un gouvernement est en raison directe de l'énergie morale dont les citoyens sont doués, et de la générosité des principes qui guident leur conduite.

J'ai dit que, pour être libre, il suffisait de vouloir. Ce mot ici est pris dans le sens le plus large. Car on ne peut prétendre qu'elle veuille la liberté, la société dont

chaque membre est toujours tremblant devant l'autorité, craint plus que toute autre chose la perte de ses biens, de sa liberté, de sa vie, ne vise qu'aux honneurs que le pouvoir distribue, aux faveurs qu'il prodigue à ses valets, aux places où on peut le servir.

Une nation libre se compose de citoyens prêts à toute espèce de sacrifices, qui savent résister à l'arbitraire, sans s'effrayer de ses menaces, sans se laisser séduire par ses promesses, fiers et inflexibles quand ils souffrent pour la patrie, simples et modestes quand ils triomphent avec elle, défiants à la fois les rigueurs injustes et les offres corruptrices, et n'ayant qu'un seul but, celui de l'indépendance de tous, de la liberté et de l'égalité en droits de chacun.⁶¹

Curiously, the Courrier des Pays-Bas recommended De Potter for a vacant seat in the Second Chamber of the States-General, although he was still a prisoner in the Pètits-Carmes. De Potter guessed that the idea was, "...probablement d'embarrasser le gouvernement..." De Potter refused the candidacy and further elaborated on his ideas in a letter to the Courrier des Pays-Bas on December 1, 1829, which was published.⁶² De Potter wrote later in his Souvenirs that:

Je n'aurais pas fait difficulté d'accepter la candidature si j'avais cru avoir à assister à une révolution prochaine c'est-à-dire à la mise en question de ce qui faisait le fondement de notre édifice social. Mais cette idée ne m'était jamais entrée dans l'esprit, ni, je pense, à personne en Belgique. Je ne croyais possible qu'une réforme péniblement élaborée, acquise chèrement, et lentement progressive; et tous mes efforts ne tendaient qu'à avancer dans⁶³ la voie où cette réforme s'opérerait tout naturellement.

However the speech King William made to the States-General on December 11, 1829 was anything but conciliatory. Jottrand compared his attitude to the French ordinances of July 1830.⁶⁴

Ce préambule où le roi Guillaume affecte purement et simplement le pouvoir de droit divin, et la faculté qui en résulte de régler comme il l'entendait les institutions⁶⁵ du pays, doit faire juger de tout l'ensemble du document.

William declared a new and stricter law against freedom of the press, supposedly to prevent attacks on the government. He vowed it was necessary to combat the Catholic religion's renewed attempts at state domination, and he spoke against ministerial responsibility, which he did not feel was a parliamentary right. He evidently thought that the king, who had divine rights, was alone responsible for the acts of his ministers, and that he alone should decide when they were wrong.⁶⁶

De Potter replied quickly with a new pamphlet attacking the King's position; Lettre de Démophile au roi sur le nouveau project de loi contre la presse et le message royal qui l'accompagne was issued on December 20, 1829.⁶⁷ De Potter took a grave and serious tone:

Mon épigraphe était le serment du roi d'observer la loi fondamentale, et celui du peuple de recevoir le roi en vertu de cette loi même; mon début, l'annonce d'une catastrophe inévitable et prochaine si le chef de l'État continuait à se laisser tromper et égarer et persistait dans le système qui le perdait sans retour. Je repoussai avec indignation, au nom de la Belgique, les prétentions ministérielles de ne voir dans la loi fondamentale qu'une modification de la monarchie pure et de gouverner les Pays-Bas paternellement. J'accusai directement les ministres d'être des factieux qui, eux et non pas nous comme ils auraient voulu le faire croire, troublaient réellement l'ordre public et la bonne harmonie des citoyens, qui provoquaient à la révolte et finiraient par opérer un révolution.⁶⁸

This pamphlet was the first place that De Potter had brought up "la menace d'une séparation," even if parliamentary and administrative only, between Holland and Belgium. The opposition was at this point still only agitating for reform, and the idea of even an administrative separation did not find support until after the revolt nine months later in August 1830.⁶⁹

Apparently De Potter's pamphlet was written as sincere advice, not just an inflammatory writing, as his letter to Tielemans written December 18, 1829, seems to indicate. In this letter De Potter wrote:

J'écris au tuteur (le roi), pour lui faire toucher au doigt les impertinences et le gaspillage de ses gens (les ministres) qui, non contents de ruiner ses pupilles (le peuple), les injurient encore et les maltraitent.⁷⁰

The beginning of 1830 found De Potter still in his cell at the Pètit-Carmes. When not writing pamphlets or letters to the journals, he was occupied revising his ecclesiastical history, which was to be published at Paris in 1836-37 in eight volumes as the Histoire philosophique, politique et critique du christianisme et des églises chrétiennes, depuis Jésus jusqu'au XIXe siècle.⁷¹ One can see in the works of De Potter a continuum running from his early interest in religious history to this later interest in Christian socialism and rational socialism which dealt with problems of his own era, and possible future solutions. Like his later friend Lamennais, another religious maverick, De Potter was an intensely spiritual man.

In January 1830, King William incurred the wrath of Belgium once again when he ousted six members of the States-General and took away their pensions, because they had dared to vote against the king's ministers on December 11, 1829. They either were members of the Lower Chamber who had voted against the budget, or as De Potter implied in his Souvenirs, they had refused to sign a political formulary, in other words a loyalty oath. At any rate, William felt that they had "displayed an absolute aversion to the

principles of my Government."⁷²

Evidently several newspapers conceived the idea of taking up a national subscription for opponents of the government that had lost positions because of their activities. On January 31, 1830, seventeen journals suggested this subscriptions at the same time.⁷³

Tielemans and De Potter went one step further and came up with the idea of a patriotic confederation.⁷⁴ Jean François Tielemans, who was the one who originally envisioned the confederation, was at that time a referendary in the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Hague.⁷⁵

De Potter had met Tielemans at the home of the publisher of his biography of Scipion de Ricci, Tielemans at that time being a student courting the publisher's daughter. Later De Potter had approached Van Gobbelschroy about him and gotten him a governmental position. De Potter and Tielemans had been corresponding since 1827, and had become the best of friends.⁷⁶

De Potter proposed the Patriotic Confederation in the February 3 issue of the Courrier des Pays-Bas.⁷⁷ The Confederation was to be what we today would simply regard as a political party, however besides accepting donations from its members, it would tax each one of them in order to create a bank from which needy members might draw. The idea was that timid men might be more willing to join the opposition if they knew they would be guaranteed a kind of "unemployment insurance". If drawing up a new constitution to insure liberty and justice for all was subversive, this was indeed a subversive organization.⁷⁸

Van Maanen did not let this plan go unnoticed. On Feb-

ruary 5, 1830, he wrote to King William that this idea was definitely dangerous and subject to punishment under the penal code.⁷⁹ The King apparently agreed, for on February 9, De Potter's papers, which contained his correspondence with Tielemans, were seized and he was put in what seems to have been solitary confinement. De Potter wrote that this upset him greatly because his child was very ill, and he was no longer able to see his wife.⁸⁰

As soon as the government realized that Tielemans was the real originator of the idea of the Patriotic Confederation they arrested him at The Hague and threw him into prison also. In addition to De Potter and his friend, the government seized J.J. Coché-Mommens of the Courrier des Pays-Bas; Adolphe Bartels of the Catholique des Pays-Bas; J.B. de Nève, publisher of the Catholique; and E. Vanderstraeten of the Belge. Their offenses included suggesting the Confederation or praising it, and allowing people to send money to their journals.⁸¹

Until February 9, De Potter's treatment in prison had been good, even mild, but now for the first time he was indeed treated as an enemy of the state. He took a particular dislike to the Procurator of the King, Schueremans, who he felt was an inherently cruel person. In his Souvenirs De Potter writes that between February 9 and February 26, he was questioned eleven times, sometimes for two or three hours at a time.⁸²

The February arrests must have either shocked or terrified the nation, for both the citizens and the delegates remained mute.⁸³ Nevertheless, the opposition had actually made great progress for:

La puissance royale n'avait pour elle que sa force matérielle: on pouvait encore trembler devant l'expression de sa colère et ses menaces; mais elle ne réveillait plus ni sympathie ni respect; toute illusion était détruite; cette puissance avait perdu sa force morale, on n'y avait plus foi.⁸⁴

The memoirs of Schueremans related that the government was fully aware of the delicacy of the situation. Van Cuylenburgh, Van Maanen's private secretary, was sent to Brussels at the end of February to confer with Schueremans, and at the end of the next month, the Prince of Orange arrived in Brussels to see what was happening.⁸⁵

In March, despite the tightening of security around him, De Potter produced another pamphlet, Lettre de De Potter à Sylvain Van de Weyer. De Potter felt that the government was perpetuating lies about him and his correspondence, and that he should defend himself.⁸⁶

The trial started on April 16, 1830, in the cour d'assises of southern Brabant.⁸⁷ The correspondence between De Potter and Tielemans was probably produced by the government as evidence against them, but De Potter said that Van De Weyer, he was defended by Van De Weyer, Van Meenen and Gendebien, used the same letters to discredit the Dutch-led administration.⁸⁸ He also used the letters to show De Potter's true character was quite opposite from the dismal portrait the government wished to paint, a "méchant ambitieux sans foi ni religion." All the defendants were supposedly, "ambitieux coriphées des troubles et de l'anarchie dans l'opinion publique."⁸⁹

Gendebien, on the other hand, speaking in defense of De Potter, said that the real goal of the prosecution was to

destroy his popularity:

Chacun a pu se convaincre que le but principal des poursuites intentées contre M. De Potter est de détruire sa popularité; popularité devenue importune, popularité qu'on lui a faite et qu'il a acquise malgré lui; popularité qui est l'oeuvre du gouvernement,⁹⁰ c'est-à-dire d'un ministère aussi imprudent que peu sage.

Given the mood of the king and his ministers, a sentence of guilty was preordained. The men were all found to have engaged in seditious activity and sentenced on April 30, 1830. Presumably Coché-Mommens and Vanderstraeten received lesser sentences, the other four men were exiled. De Potter was banished for eight years, to be followed by eight years of surveillance; Tielemans and Bartels banished for seven years, with seven years of surveillance, de Nève, for five years each. The defendants were also fined.⁹¹

In sentencing two Liberals, De Potter and Tielemans, and two Catholics, de Nève and Bartels, the king was punishing both parties, a tactic that had subdued the opposition before. Unfortunately for William, the sentences not only increased the popularity of all the men, it extended De Potter's renown to the lowest classes of Belgium.⁹² They had already sympathized with his call for the abolition of the milling and slaughtering taxes, this intensified their adulation. It is perhaps difficult for anyone of the twentieth century to appreciate the natural suspicion and distrust the lower classes would have felt for a man of De Potter's status, a born aristocrat, a nephew and grandson of two of the most powerful men of the Josephist regime. By May 1830, however, King William had indeed created a folk hero. Belgium's love object

was then a graying scholar, 5 feet 3 inches tall and forty-four years old.⁹³

On May 3 the government printed the private correspondence of De Potter and Tielemans.⁹⁴ De Potter thinks that this was clearly the idea of Libry-Bagnano, because what were considered important parts of the letters were printed in italics, typical of Libry.⁹⁵ The idea was to discredit De Potter, whose private life and views were somewhat unconventional.⁹⁶ Many refused to read the publication at all, considering it an invasion of privacy.⁹⁷ In general, the plan back-fired because those who did read the letters saw:

...les sentiments élevés de dévouement à l'humanité et de désintéressement politique, qui brillent un lui dans toute cette correspondance.⁹⁸

By the spring of 1830, King William evidently realized that the situation in Belgium was tense. His government was caught in a trap not entirely of its own making. Like the French revolutions of both 1789 and 1830, the Belgian revolt was preceded by bad harvests and a shaky economic situation:

The winter of 1829-30 had been exceptionally severe, an economic crisis of unexpected proportions had swept the country. Factories had gone bankrupt and leading bankers had closed their doors. Poor relief could not meet the demands made for the simple necessities of life and hundreds of unemployed were aimlessly and dangerously roaming the streets of Brussels, Liège, Verviers, Antwerp, and Ghent.⁹⁹

Another summary stated that:

On the very eve of the revolution the town of Ghent was petitioning the Ministry of the Interior for a grant of two million florins to ease the lot of its unemployed and find them work.¹⁰⁰

Even in normal times the standard of living in Belgium was exceedingly low. The poor struggling English worker still made twice as much as his Belgian counterpart.¹⁰¹ To a country with a long-suffering peasantry, the industrial revolution had added a new and dangerous dimension, the urban poor. No one in Belgium, however, De Potter included, thought that the lower classes were capable of instigating a revolt without the organization of the bourgeoisie or the nobility. King William felt amazingly secure with his "rabble-rousers" like De Potter either in prison or exile.¹⁰²

The king did make a few concessions to the demands of his Belgian subjects. He modified his stand on education on May 27; allowed the use of French in public affairs after June 4; and made an effort to stabilize the cost of living.¹⁰³ It was, however, the classic example of too little, too late. Also, Van Gobbelschroy had merely been moved, in December 1829, from the Department of Interior to another place in the ministry.¹⁰⁴ Van Maanen, whom the Belgians hated, was still the Minister of Justice.

Although sentenced to exile April 30, 1830, the four journalists spent thirty-eight days waiting for permission to reside in France, and were finally requested to leave without it. Felix de Merode had tried to arrange with de Polignac for the men to stay in Paris, but the France of Charles X was not interested in the four Unionists, which pleased William.¹⁰⁵ In his Souvenirs De Potter compared the two kings:

Charles X, congrégationiste bigot par haine pour liberté, ne voulait pas de nous qui étions en butte aux persécutions de Guillaume, intolérant anti-jésuite par la même haine. Tellement l'union entre gens qui veulent la même

chose, liberté ou despotisme, est naturelle, quels que soient d'ailleurs leurs principes et leurs convictions.¹⁰⁶

De Potter said that before the trial neither he or Tielemans had met Bartels or de Nève. He attests that they became friends, and he particularly enjoyed the company of Bartels.¹⁰⁷

The group left Brussels on June 7, 1830, for Aix-la-Chapelle, but was turned back by the Prussians and had to return to the Belgian border town of Vaels. There they stayed for almost two months, until finally they received permission to cross Prussia and reside in Lausanne, Switzerland. Madame De Potter, Madame Tielemans and their children had joined their husbands at Vaels, De Potter does not mention the other families. All of them were glad to leave Vaels where they lived in cramped quarters under what appears to be house arrest.¹⁰⁸

On July 31, 1830, while still at Vaels, the men heard the news of the revolution in Paris. This made the group nervous because they feared that King William, upon hearing of that revolt, might imprison them again to prevent their going to Paris.¹⁰⁹ They demanded their right to exile and left Vaels either on August 1 or 2, escorted by the burgomaster and several lawyers from Maastricht.¹¹⁰ Evidently these people's sympathies lay with the banished party and not the government.

From Aix-la-Chapelle De Potter sent a letter to King William, on August 2, 1830, in which De Potter clearly implied that a revolution could erupt in Belgium, just as surely as one had in Paris:

Dans la lutte qui se prépare, Sire, et partout où elle s'engagera, c'est, il n'en faut pas douter, la cause de la justice, du bon droit, de la raison, de l'humanité, la cause du peuple, en un mot, qui tôt ou tard l'emportera. Et les ministères, les gouvernements, la royauté elle-même, si elle est mal avisée, assez imprudente ou mal conseillée pour entrer en lice, seront précipités dans l'abîme que le vertige du despotisme et la cupidité creuse de longue main sous leurs pas.¹¹¹

He also said, "...sauvez la Belgique, il en est temps encore; Mais hâtez-vous de la sauver: car il pourrait bientôt n'en être plus temps."¹¹²

Here for the first time, one doubts the sincerity of De Potter's warning. On the last evening De Potter was interred in the Pètits-Carmes, De Potter, Tielemans and Gendebien had discussed the future of Belgium:

Pendant trois heures, le futur contingent des révolutions, et spécialement de la Révolution belge, fut l'objet de notre conversation. Nous pensions qu'elle commencerait d'abord en Prusse, que nous devions nous y associer immédiatement; qu'elle ne tarderait pas à se propager en France. Ils insistèrent vivement et finirent par me persuader¹¹³ que je devais nécessairement en prendre la direction.

The direction of the revolution that they hoped would soon occur? This and the fact that De Potter not only mailed this letter to the Belgian king, but to various French journals, secure in the knowledge that they would print it, indicated that De Potter might have been more interested in keeping his name before the Belgian public, than actually warning the king. This did indeed happen, the literate Belgian public obviously had easy access to these French journals, and of course they would have been reading them diligently to obtain news of the latest developments in France itself.¹¹⁴

The émigrés travelled from Aix-la-Chapelle to Mannheim,

where instead of continuing on to Lausanne, they headed toward Strasbourg, France en route to Paris. De Potter described the trip as tiring. Evidently the German territories could not get rid of them fast enough, and he said that the journey was particularly exhausting for his wife, who was nursing a seven-month-old baby, an infant who was obviously the result of a conjugal visit to the Pètit-Carmes.¹¹⁵

De Potter did not say that he actually kissed the French soil, but the group's spirits lifted immediately upon entering Strasbourg. They were welcomed in great style by a ceremony performed by the municipal commission. The French tricolor was still flying, which pleased De Potter the republican. While still at Strasbourg, they learned of the election of Louis-Philippe, which did not please De Potter. He thought the French had merely exchanged one dynasty for another.¹¹⁶

By August 14, the group's passports were in order and they had rested sufficiently to embark for Paris.¹¹⁷

The company also received a hero's reception in Paris on their arrival August 20. They were met and escorted to their hotel by a contingent of the National Guard, complete with a band.¹¹⁸

On August 21 the four émigrés were received by General La Fayette¹¹⁹. There was good rapport between the men, and De Potter later wrote that La Fayette:

...qui lui a donné les les preuves les plus touchantes et les plus affectueuses de cette noble sympathie qu'éprouve l'illustre vétéran de la liberté pour les hommes d'un beau talent et d'un noble caractère, dévoués à la sainte cause des peuples opprimés.¹²⁰

On August 24, 1830, the day before the riot in Brussels, De Potter addressed another letter to King William I. The King received this letter by the same courier that brought him the news on August 27, of the uprising, which had, "saccagé et brûlé les maisons de Libri, de Van Maanen, du procureur du roi Schuermans et de M. de Knyff, directeur de la police, aux cris de, "Vive de Potter! Vive la liberté!"¹²¹

In this prophetic letter of August 24, De Potter related that:

...je lui adressai ce jour-là même, une lettre dans laquelle, comprenant mieux les circonstances de la révolution des trois journées, je lui prouvai en les retraçant, que partout où l'on s'entêterait dans le système maladroit et perfide, que peuvent seuls soutenir un ministère exécré et une cour inepte, ministère, cour et dynastie disparaîtraient devant la colère du peuple, et l'arbre de la liberté reverdirait sur les ruines d'un trône vermoulu. Puis je comparai le ministre Van Maanen au ministre Polignac, le message du 11 décembre aux funestes ordonnances du 25 juillet, l'exploitation batave à la prépondérance des émigrés et des jésuites français. Enfin, j'exhortai le roi à provoquer lui-même le rappel de l'union avec Hollande, pour autant qu'elle confondait les deux peuples sous le malheur commun, les Belges d'être opprimés aujourd'hui par les Hollandais, les Hollandais de devoir être plus tard dominés par les Belges: je lui signifiai qu'à ce prix il pouvait continuer à régner sur le royaume entier, mais qu'il ne le pouvait qu'à ce prix.¹²²

The Belgian revolution itself was largely confined to a few days in August and four days in September, at the end of which time the Dutch retreated from the country. They attempted to take over again in the summer of 1831, but the brand new King Leopold's armies were rescued by the arrival of French troops. Diplomatic negotiations, on the other hand, were long and drawn out and lasted until 1839.

The first fighting broke out in Brussels on the evening of August 25, 1830, after a moving performance of Auber's La Muette de Portici, an opera celebrating a Neapolitan revolt in 1648.¹²³ It was the week of King William's fifty-ninth birthday, and he had withdrawn to his northern capitol at The Hague for the festivities. His aides had feared possible demonstrations, inspired by the Paris uprising of July, and had cancelled the fireworks scheduled, but had felt it safe to proceed with the opera. When the cast came to the patriotic aria, "Amour sacré de la patrie", the audience at the Théâtre de La Monnaie, and the crowd surging outside, both went wild,¹²⁴ "...des groupes de jeunes gens allèrent saccager la librairie de Libry-Bagnano et incendier l'hôtel du ministre Van Maanen.¹²⁵ The outbursts found the authorities unprepared, and they did nothing effective.

The bourgeoisie began to fear for their property the next day when the mob still had not settled down, and formed a bourgeoisie guard. This unit was headed by Emmanuel Baron van der Linden d'Hoogvorst.¹²⁶

Some Belgians wanted annexation to France, particularly the French republican society, "The Friends of the People;" and Organist groups were to pop up around the country, notably at Ghent and Antwerp; but the Brabançonne flag was flown over the town hall at Brussels, and it was an hour entirely Belgian.¹²⁷

It took two days to reestablish order, and Brussels was clearly a city in revolt:

"News of the Brussels uprising quickly spread to the main provincial towns and there similar incidents occurred which were handled in like manner. Thus power slipped

imperceptibly into the hands of the bourgeoisie throughout the whole of Belgium before William had even time to recover from his surprise or make anything like a display of military force. He was completely outmanoeuvred by events.¹²⁸

Despite indications that the revolt itself may have been entirely spontaneous, and this is something we may never be completely able to determine, there is evidence that some revolutionary activity had been underfoot. According to Blok there had been much sentiment for a reunion with the newly liberal France:

Early in August De Brouckère, De Stassart, and Le Hon went to Paris to negotiate over the union with the now liberal France. The offices of the Courrier des Pays-Bas became the centre of secret deliberations, and Gendebien, supported by the young lawyer Van de Weyer, took the lead in the proposed movement. The French government, however, was not ready and asked postponement.¹²⁹

King William sent the Prince of Orange and his brother, Prince Frederick to Belgium with Dutch troops. They arrived in Vilvoorde, near Brussels, on August 31, and were asked by the Baron vander Linden d'Hoogvorst, and another delegation the next day, not to fight their way into the city. The princes finally agreed to enter the city with merely a retinue, and not the army. The Prince of Orange entered Brussels on September 1, "calm and even smiling." A popular prince, he decided, after consulting with some notables, to go to The Hague and mediate between the Belgians and the government.¹³⁰

In early September a delegation from Belgium, returning with the prince, presented King William with their grievances, which were essentially the same that De Potter had enumerated in his pamphlets.¹³¹ William seemed unmoved:

...he told them that ministerial responsibility was against the constitution, that with the knife at the throat he could not dismiss his ministers, but that he would think of it; [although he did in fact dismiss Van Maanen, after proclaiming his satisfaction with the hated minister] he refused to yield 'to wild threats, to complaints, to grievances imagined by some disturbers of the public peace.'¹³²

September 5, King William called for patience and announced that he would convene the States-General on September 13.¹³³

September 28, 1830, the States-General, meeting at The Hague decided by a large Dutch majority that the fundamental law of the Kingdom of the Netherlands did not have to be revised, and secondly that relations between the North and South established by treaties and the fundamental law did not require any alteration. A proposal that the two kingdoms be separate but share a common monarch was also defeated by forty-seven to ten, the Dutch voting against it. There being no common ground the Dutch and Belgians could decide on, the States-General was adjourned and its members returned to their respective homes.¹³⁴

When the rioting occurred in Brussels, on August 25, De Potter and Fielemans had gone immediately to confer with the General La Fayette. The general did not seem to think that the outbursts in Brussels had been the start of a real revolution, but De Potter insisted that unless King William paid attention to their complaints, which was unlikely, that it was as much a revolution as that one Paris had just witnessed. Answering La Fayette's query, De Potter said that Belgium did not seek annexation to France and that "...ils vous accueilleront toujours en frères si vous ne vous présentez pas en maîtres." De Potter did think that the new French government should encourage the insurgents, and wrote this down

for La Fayette to give to the King.¹³⁵

It may seem strange that a group of Belgians in Brussels were considering, even seeking, a reunion with France while De Potter, in Paris, was against the idea. These men were mainly monarchists who saw the government of Louis-Philippe as an improvement over the Calvinist William. Stassart, in particular, had long been an administrator under Napoleon before returning to his native country.¹³⁶ De Potter, on the other hand, was a republican, and did not see Louis-Philippe as much of an improvement, if any. He hoped that Belgium could form an independent and much more progressive state.

De Potter learned from visiting with La Fayette that the new French government was indeed not favorable to revolution in Belgium. It not only threatened the stability of Louis-Philippe's government, it would cause the other major powers to suspect the French of intrigue. A republic was a particularly unsettling idea:

Louis-Philippe ne voulait pas,...de république à une journée de marche de Paris; cependant il n'y avait que cela de possible, car il n'osait ni réunir la Belgique, à la France, ni envoyer un de ses fils y régner pour lui.¹³⁷

Louis-Philippe did not even want to act as a mediator between the Belgians and the Dutch.¹³⁸

If the conference with La Fayette, the chief officer of the French National Guard, was discouraging, his encounter at a banquet with one of its commanders was almost insulting. When De Potter toasted the National Guard as Belgium's firm friend and ally who would come to her rescue if necessary, the embarrassed commander replied that such a serious act was only for the king

to decide, although he personally wished the Belgians independence and liberty. De Potter heard later that Louis-Philippe had congratulated the commander for rejecting De Potter's "maximes subversives et séditieuses."¹³⁹

If the official stance was cold, the sympathy of the Parisians and the expatriate groups of Paris, can only be described as very enthusiastic. August 31, 1830, the First Legion of the National Guard had held a banquet for the exiles at the Châtelet, the law courts of Paris, which was attended by guardsmen, Belgians, Russians and Poles. The band played, a Parisian crowd gathered outside shouting "Vive De Potter!," and the evening ended with five thousand people singing the "Marseillaise."¹⁴⁰ Every day someone came to De Potter offering to form a legion to help the Belgians.¹⁴¹ Such enthusiasm seemed to make him nonchalant about the lack of official support for a full-fledged Belgian revolution.

After the summer uprising, De Potter remained in close contact with his friends in Brussels, although he was surprised that his letters reached them because the postal service was almost entirely controlled by the Dutch.¹⁴² He does not seem to have been worried that his letters might be read by the Hollanders en route.

In a letter to Gendebien on September 9, he continued to stress that separation, at least administrative and parliamentary, "...n'est pas un projet de loi; c'est un fait que votre révolution a posé et que vous devez maintenir à tout prix."¹⁴³

De Potter did not stop there however; he wanted the Belgians to stand firm:

Vous imposerez ce fait-là à votre chef future, comme condition préalable de sa royauté, avec le sinon non. Ensuite à vous autres tous seuls, vous vous donnerez une constitution belge, que vous ferez jurer au roi des Pays-Bas, s'il veut être roi des Belges. Et s'il ne ratifie pas, s'il ne jure pas, déclarez franchement et hardiment votre indépendance absolue, et érigez-vous en république fédérative.¹⁴⁴

Gendebien had evidently cautioned De Potter about returning to Belgium too soon. De Potter reassured him that, "Chassé de la Belgique par les Hollandais, je dois avant tout être rappelé par les Belges."¹⁴⁵

De Potter wrote an indignant letter to Sylvain Van De Weyer reproaching him for a short and somewhat offhand reply that De Potter should remain tranquil, when De Potter had offered him the aid of the eight thousand Belgians in Paris who wanted to march on the country and liberate it. Not to mention "des Allemands, des Anglais, des Polonais, des Italiens, [et] des Espagnols" who wanted to help, too. The revolutionary spirit of Paris had made De Potter even more ebullient than usual.¹⁴⁶

September 12, De Potter wrote again, this time a joint letter to both Van De Weyer and Gandebien. He again offered to lead a citizen army to Brussels, if given the signal. He claimed that:

Je vous ai dit que j'avais sollicité auprès du gouvernement français la déclaration positive, franche et officielle du principe de non-intervention, avec celle d'une promesse précise qu'on interviendrait pour empêcher les autres d'intervenir. J'ai ajouté que j'avais obtenue des réponses franches, précises, positives; mais officielle, non. Car, enfin, je n'avais pas mission pour en demander, et on craignait encore alors d'en donner même aux personnages à mission.¹⁴⁷

This alleged promise from someone in the French government, that the French would not intervene unless it was to come to the

aid of the Belgians, is particularly interesting in that they did just that in the summer of 1831, and De Potter was then living in Paris!

De Potter, badly informed as to what had actually occurred in Brussels that summer, had assumed a revolutionary spirit existed in that city, that in fact did not.¹⁴⁸ The violence of August seems to have been led by the unemployed working classes and perhaps youthful enthusiasts, and the bourgeoisie and nobility, even the liberal ones, were horrified at the destruction. As Levae finally wrote to De Potter:

Ce peuple bientôt a connu sa force et en a profité non pour faire une révolution comme l'avaient sans doute espéré ceux qui l'ont déchaînée, mais pour faire ses propres affaires: il s'est mis à brûler les fabriques, à briser les mécaniques, à piller, à dévaster. Toute la propriété était menacée, elle a dû s'armer....[et il ajouta] La bourgeoisie ne s'était armée que pour maintenir l'ordre dans le principe; tous ses efforts ont donc été dirigés dans l'intention de contenir le peuple...¹⁴⁹

Belgian deputies de Brouckère and de Langhe visited Paris, apparently in September, although Blok has also placed de Brouckère there earlier, and spoke with De Potter. He prevailed upon them to work towards a separation of the two countries within the States-General. Evidently they did agree to do this, and "cet fut ainsi qu'ils montrèrent d'abord quelque velléité d'instituer un gouvernement provisoire belge,..." although they intended to debate the issue of separation at the States-General before taking any action.¹⁵⁰

September 8, the deputies left Brussels for The Hague to attend the meeting of the States-General. The radicals took advantage of their departure by creating a Commission of Public Safety

superior to the Regency of the Prince of Orange. Gendebien, Van De Weyer, and de Mérode sat on this council.¹⁵¹

A more radical group, convinced that the King was insincere about meeting any of Belgium's demands, created the la Réunion centrale on September 15 or 16. Charles Rogier, an ardent nationalist, and the same man who had brought a group of men from Liege to assist Brussels that summer, was the acknowledged leader of this group. Also in the club were Ducpétiaux; Van Halen; Pierre Rodenbach of Roulers; François Chazal and Charles Niellon, professional soldiers; Engelspach, a well-known mineralogist; a doctor Grégoire; and Pletinckx an old army man turned innkeeper. This group planned to reorganize the defense of Brussels by calling in the Belgian militia. After about September 15, 1830, la Réunion centrale had more administrative power than the rather cautious Commission of Public Safety.¹⁵²

Then, September 19 or 20, a group of men, led by a crowd from Liège, disarmed the bourgeoisie guard and tried to take control. All was chaos and the Committee of Public Safety - Van de Weyer, de Mérode and Gendebien and others fled to France.¹⁵³

King William then decided that Prince Frederick, at Antwerp with around ten thousand soldiers, should march on Brussels. The decision to do so was made on September 21.¹⁵⁴

Gendebien, Van de Weyer, de Mérode, Niellon, and Rogier supposedly all fled over the French border between September 21 and 23, to avoid capture by Prince Frederick.¹⁵⁵

We know that on September 20, De Potter went to Lille, France, ostensibly to pick up his aged mother who was to live

with the De Potters in Paris. That she might have been an excuse for the trip is indicated by the fact that arriving in Lille, approximately 154 miles northeast of Paris, De Potter met Gendebien, Vleminckx, and Pierre Rodenbach who persuaded him to go to Valenciennes, France with them. There the group joined Sylvain Van De Weyer on September 22.¹⁵⁶

The tenor of their meeting seems to have been discouragement. Van De Weyer "nous annonça que définitivement tout était perdu." De Potter did not agree with them, but he does not elaborate what was discussed.¹⁵⁷

Gendebien and Van De Weyer returned to Brussels first, presumably arriving there sometime between September 23 and September 26, when they and Félix de Mérode were proclaimed the first three members of the Provisional Government.¹⁵⁸

Fighting in Brussels began on September 23, 1830 when Prince Frederick attacked the city with his troops. The men, women, and children of Brussels erected barricades and fought fiercely. Aided by the men from Liège and Louvain, and led by the Belgic Spaniard Don Juan Van Halen, they managed, by September 27 to drive the Dutch from the city.¹⁵⁹

This historic street fight proved the turning-point in the revolution. The records of barricade fighting in the European capitals during the nineteenth century show no other instance in which the success of the citizen volunteers over regular troops was so marked, or entailed such important results. The Dutch, though no doubt badly led, were veteran soldiers. The Belgians lost some 600 killed [Blok says 400], who were buried in the Place des Martyrs....With this price they were freed. Their capital was never attached by the Dutch again.¹⁶⁰

Elated by their countrymen's victory, De Potter, Rodenbach and Vleminckx left Lille on September 26, travelling to Brussels in Rodenbach's carriage.¹⁶¹

The success in Brussels was not long in spreading across the country. September 26 Bruges fell to the Belgians, and September 28 two thousand men from the garrison at Ostend went over to the side of the new Belgian government, and these were typical of Belgian cities in all the provinces.¹⁶²

There is some discrepancy about De Potter's addition to the Provisional Government. According to Bologne, De Potter sent Windelinckx, de Tirlemont, Deneck, and de Molenbeek to the city hall of Brussels on the night of September 26 to request permission to return to Brussels. The next morning the Provisional Government sent word to De Potter at Enghien, a Flemish town eighteen and one-half miles southwest of Brussels, that he was formally invited to return to the capital as a member of the Provisional Government.¹⁶³

De Potter's trip across Belgium, and particularly the last part of the way from Enghien to Brussels, was a veritable heroic procession. He wrote:

D'Enghien jusqu'à Bruxelles, ce ne fut plus qu' une marche triomphale, et à Bruxelles même ce fut un enthousiasme qui tenait du délire. Les rues, les fenêtres, les toits des maisons offraient des milliers de spectateurs qui tous étaient animés d'un même sentiment et ne poussaient qu'un seul et même cri. Des combattants des quatres journées et jusqu' à des blessés [le combat eût continué à ce jour] portaient (cette expression doit être prise ici à la lettre) le cabriolet dans lequel je me trouvais, et qu'aucun cheval n'aurait pu traîner par dessus les barricades dont toutes les rues étaient coupées...¹⁶⁴

De Potter finally reached the city hall that night at seven followed by an immense crowd. After embracing the victorious leaders of the city, De Potter was introduced to the crowd outside by Engelspach.¹⁶⁵ The next day the Provisional Government, which now consisted of Charles Rogier, Sylvain Van De Weyer, Félix de Mérode, André Jolly, Baron F.De Coppin, Joseph vander Linden, J. Nicolai, Baron Emmanuel Vanderlinden D'Hoogvorst, and Alexandre Gendebien, officially announced that De Potter was now a member of their body.¹⁶⁶

CHAPTER IV

LOUIS DE POTTER: THE REPUBLICAN STATESMAN

1830

De Potter's career as a statesman was the shortest episode of his life, consisting of less than two months. He was, in fact, to regret later having accepted a place in the Provisional Government, which he came to see as reactionary.

Il emporterait au tombeau, disait-il, le regret mortel d'avoir compris trop tard que se véritable place n'était point dans le gouvernement. Resté en dehors, ajoutait-il, il aurait été son auxiliaire tant que ce gouvernement aurait fait le bien, et auxiliaire puissant, car il aurait continué à représenter la volonté et la force du peuple; il l'aurait maintenu jusqu'au bout dans le devoir, ou il l'aurait renversé dès qu'il en serait sorti.

Ill prepared for political infighting, De Potter no doubt antagonized potential allies, and failed to placate his enemies. Overruled and outvoted by a majority in favor of constructing a monarchy, he made no concessions. He was, emphatically and irrevocably, a republican and the fierce opponent of feudal or aristocratic dominance. He did not want a Kingdom of Belgium, nor a monarch, however enlightened he might be. A hero in September, he was an exile in February, having fled to Paris to avoid possible arrest as a republican conspirator.² It is possible that he would indeed have conspired against the government, but not likely that he would have resorted to violent measures. Juste thought that De Potter did not seize control of the leadership of Belgium when his popularity was at its height because:

...de Potter ne possédait point les qualités que doivent avoir les organisateurs d'un État. Il n'était pas homme d'action, il était même dépourvu de ces connaissances qu'on appelle positives.³

Our philosopher-hero should not be misjudged as spineless or withdrawn, however. Jottrand, who knew him well, described him as:

...vif, gai, parfois jovial. Il avait bien son espèce particulière d'égoïsme dans lequel il ne fallait pas trop le déranger; mais il était spontanément serviable envers tous ceux pour lesquels il avait de l'estime ou de l'affection. C'était, avant tout, l'homme de la règle; et, sous ce rapport, comme sous celui de sa grande assiduité au travail, il avait, dans la vie du monde, beaucoup des qualités et des habitudes du cénobite. Son spiritualisme toutefois ne le portait pas à mépriser ni même à négliger les jouissances sensuelles. Seulement, chez lui la règle y présidait encore, comme en tout autre chose.⁴

De Potter did not waste any time in making his position clear. In his first speech as a member of the Provisional Government, on September 28, 1830, he made an impassioned plea for independence and a republic. His speech concluded thus:

Plus d'hésitation, plus de ménagements. Il faut éloigner à jamais de nos foyers les assassins qui y ont porté le fer et le feu, le viol et le carnage. Il faut sauver nos mères, nos femmes, nos enfants, nos propriétés. Il faut vivre libres ou nous ensevelir tous sous des monceaux de cendres.

Soyons unis, mes chers concitoyens, et nous serons invincibles. Conservons l'ordre parmi nous; il nous est indispensable pour conserver notre indépendance.

Liberté pour tous! Égalité de tous devant le pouvoir suprême: la nation; devant sa volonté: la loi. Vous avez écrasé le despotisme; par votre confiance dans le pouvoir que vous avez créé vous saurez vous tenir en garde contre l'anarchie et ses funestes suites. Les Belges ne doivent faire trembler que leurs ennemis.

Peuple, ce que nous sommes, nous le sommes par vous. Ce que nous ferons, nous le ferons pour vous.⁵

In addition to the emotionalism of the day, which made him overstate the depravity of the Dutch, De Potter's stay in Paris

had strengthened his resolve for the republican form of government. Both the idea of independence and the call for equality for all were stated as possible political goals in this speech. Possibly this was the first time they had been advocated in Belgium by a member of the government.⁶

De Potter thought that the Provisional Government should have a Comité central, a smaller number of men who would act as its executive branch. This Comité central was created on September 29, and consisted of De Potter, Charles Rogier, and Van De Weyer. To these ardent Liberals was soon added de Mérode, a moderate.⁷ Gendebien did not become its fifth member until October 10, when he returned from Paris, which gave De Potter twelve days of almost unlimited power.⁸ Although de Mérode, an aristocrat, was an opponent of De Potter's motions to eliminate rank and privilege, he could easily be outvoted by the other three.⁹ De Potter said of him that:

Je ne trouvais donc d'opposition que dans M. de Mérode, caractère tenant à la fois de l'esprit dominateur du prêtre et de l'outrageuse superbe du grand vassal, dont M. Van De Weyer disait plaisamment qu'il ne connaissait d'autre droit que le droit canon, d'autres canons que celui de la messe. Du reste, seul, M. le comte n'était guère redoutable; il n'était que gênant: ses chicanes et ses détours de sacriste ennuyaient, mais n'empêchaient rien.¹⁰

With the addition of Gendebien to the Comité central, De Potter's woes began. At first the committee had gone along with the popular De Potter. The only member of government well-known abroad, De Potter was generally assumed by foreign countries to be the President of the Provisional Government.¹¹ Although he claimed it was not his intention to assume control, he clearly

enjoyed the attention.¹² In 1830, Charles Rogier was thirty years old, Sylvain Van De Weyer was only twenty-eight. De Potter, as we have mentioned, was forty-four. De Mérode was not much younger, being thirty-nine, and Alexandre Gendebien was himself forty-one years old.¹³ While the younger men might have followed De Potter's lead, de Mérode and Gendebien would have demanded their own say in matters.

Gendebien not only demanded his own say, he was frankly worried about De Potter having too high a regard for himself.

Nous avons fait de De Potter un drapeau; nous savions par expérience qu'il n'avait que la valeur d'un drapeau; mais ce drapeau, tenu et dirigé d'une main ferme, pouvait rendre de grands services à la cause que nous avons embrassée avec ardeur, soutenue avec persévérance et que nous étions décidés à faire trompher, par tous les moyens, sans en négliger aucun.¹⁴

De Potter, on the other hand thought that Gendebien came to see him as a threat:

J'étais à ses yeux, dit-il, un ambitieux qui ne tendait qu'à dominer: en combattant mon ambition prétendue, il eut, je n'en doute aucunement, les meilleures intentions du monde; mais il ne s'en trompa pas moins d'une manière funeste pour moi, pour lui-même et, j'ose le dire, pour la Belgique, dont notre accord eût fondé l'indépendance réelle, assuré la liberté et consolidé le bonheur.¹⁵

Ironically De Potter claimed:

...M. Gendebien était certes de tous les membres du gouvernement provisoire l'homme avec qui je sympathisais le plus pour les opinions et les principes, ou pour mieux dire, il était le seul homme avec qui je puisse sympathiser.¹⁶

Somewhere along the way, Gendebien the liberal friend of De Potter, became a Gendebien who was definitely against the creation of a republic with De Potter as a likely candidate for president.¹⁷

Although Royer did not seem to like De Potter very well, we have in his work, Les hommes politiques de la Belgique a view of the two men that appears to be the testimony of a third person, perhaps another member of the committee. According to Royer, De Potter took to signing all the decrees of the Provisional Government just below the text, in the first place one could sign. Gendebien then attempted to sign between De Potter's signature and the text. Royer also claimed that De Potter always arrived early, as much as an hour early, to the sessions, and took the presidential chair before anyone else arrived. One afternoon, when he arrived early as usual, De Potter found Gendebien already seated in this particular place. After that day De Potter supposedly abandoned "ses projets de dictature."¹⁸ Whether or not he aspired to power, De Potter definitely enjoyed the prominence his exile had given him; Blok calls him "the Belgian Lafayette."¹⁹

On October 2, King William appealed to the four great powers of the Vienna Congress to help him end the disturbances in Belgium, with armed help if necessary. France objected to this idea and sent Talleyrand, then seventy-six years old, to London.²⁰

Fortunately for Belgium, none of the great powers of Europe was particularly interested in fighting a war in Belgium in the fall of 1830. Louis-Philippe had only been king since July; Austria had had her chance to regain Belgium in 1814 and did not want its problems; Russia and Prussia had a revolt on their doorsteps, Poland, after November; and that fall, Palmerston, who was more sympathetic to Belgium, replaced Wellington in the Foreign Office of England.²¹

The Provisional Government declared Belgium an independent nation on October 4, and called for the election of a National Congress. The National Congress was to reaffirm this act by again declaring Belgium's independence on November 18.²²

A constitutional committee was formed consisting of Van Meenan, de Gerlache, Devaux, de Brouckère, Fabry, Ballin, Tonde, Thorn, and Tielemans after October 10. This committee was also to determine the requirements for election to National Congress.²³ An amusing sidelight - the young Baron Jean-Baptiste Nothomb got himself appointed Secretary to this constitutional committee, and he and Paul Devaux managed to have the minimum age for candidates set at age twenty-five years. Since Nothomb was then twenty-five years old, he was able to run, did so, and was elected a delegate from Luxembourg.²⁴

October 5, the Prince of Orange, at Antwerp, announced that he intended to set up a Belgian government under his direction; on October 13, King William appointed him the ruler of the Southern Provinces.²⁵ The Prince tried to set up a government that the Belgians would appreciate, by removing some of their grievances, but it was too late for this to be effective.²⁶

The addition of Gendebien to the Provisional Government had coincided with the return of De Potter's young friend Tielemans from Paris, on October 10. De Potter relates that Tielemans became a member of the Provisional Government at that time, replacing Nicolai, who became a judge.²⁷

Early October had been the time of many governmental

decrees. The decisive period, at least for De Potter's programs, seems to have been between October 7 and October 10.²⁸ De Potter declared that the judicial branch of the government was the first thing that had to be reorganized, because it had been so thoroughly controlled by the Dutch. He said that he had to be careful to avoid "des motifs de vengeance personnelle." He was upset at the way people scurried after the new governmental positions.²⁹

The government's decrees of October affected many needed reforms: the municipal police were better regulated; the lottery abolished; freedom of association was assured; the lottery abolished; the secret police abolished; right of public access to communal budgets and councils of war asserted; and the right of the accused to a freely chosen legal counsel confirmed.³⁰

One of the measures that was voted on while De Potter was in the Provisional Government was the establishment of the property requirements for voting and candidature for office. These standards were set very high, and thus were very restrictive. It is unlikely that De Potter, who was in favor of universal suffrage as early as 1831, would have supported these elitist standards if he had truly understood them.³¹ Possibly here is one place that De Potter's governmental inexperience was pointedly revealed. The one measure that we do know he regretted not having achieved was the abolition of the death penalty, an attitude indeed ahead of its time.³²

Voting restrictions aside, much that was excellent in the

new Belgian constitution was to come out of these decrees of October. De Potter himself said:

Dans les temps ordinaires, mieux vaut sans doute une loi passable mais appliquée, exécutée et respectée que toute un code de bonnes lois que l'on méprise ou qu'on néglige. Mais nous représentions pour la Belgique une époque toute exceptionnelle: ce n'étaient point en effet des lois pour le moment présent que nous promulguions, mais bien des principes que nous posions pour source et pour base des lois futures. Et c'était sous ce point de vue tout d'avenir, que je voulais que nous renversassions le plus possible d'obstacles qui s'étaient jusqu' alors opposés à notre émancipation et à nos progrès. Je sentais bien que nos successeurs n'auraient ni le courage, ni la force de revenir sur nos réformes; et notre constitution, une des moins imparfaites qu'il y ait, entièrement puisée, pour tout ce qu' elle a de bon, dans les arrêtés du gouvernement provisoire pendant le mois d'octobre, prouve assez que j'ai eu complètement raison.³³

The Constitution was the cause of the final rupture between the former friends Gendebien and De Potter. De Potter wanted the Provisional Government to go over the Constitution which was drawn up by its committee, and to present a body of work to the National Congress that was essentially all ready for ratification. Gendebien evidently wanted the National Congress to have full legislative power over the document, not just a rubber stamp sort of seal of approval. The main issue seems to have been whether the government would be a monarchy or a republic.³⁴ De Potter knew that his republic would not stand a chance with the more conservative assembly.

By October 16, Gendebien had the Comité central convinced that the final say should be made by the National Congress.³⁵ October 18, De Potter wrote to the Courrier Des Pays-Bas:

Si le mode de gouvernement adopté ne me convient pas, ou si le chef choisi pour exécuter le pacte social n'est pas celui que j'aurais désiré moi-même, je ferai comme

j'ai toujours fait, de l'opposition, au risque, si je déplaçais, de me faire bannir une seconde fois.³⁶

After October 18, the break between Gendebien and De Potter was open and complete.³⁷

When the Secretary of the constitutional commission, Nothomb, read the proposed monarchical Constitution to the Provisional Government on October 27, De Potter was furious and said, "Ce n'était pas la peine de verser tant de sang pour si peu de chose!"³⁸ Nothomb himself said that the Constitution was "généralement considéré comme une oeuvre de réaction."³⁹

In De Potter's Profession de foi politique published October 31, 1830, De Potter reaffirmed his attitude toward monarchies:

J'ai dit que la révolution faite par le peuple devait tourner tout entière au profit du peuple: cela n'aura lieu et ne peut avoir lieu que lorsque, après lui avoir rendu la nomination de ses magistrats, on aura fixé l'assiette vraiment populaire des impôts et que leur diminution réelle sera devenue une conséquence directe de celle des dépenses⁴⁰ publiques. Or, point d'économie possible sous la royauté.

Later in the same paper he stated:

Ne nous rendons pas la risée de l'Europe et de la postérité en ne répondant à cette noble attente que par une copie froide et décolorée de ces chartes modernes, de ces constitutions illusoire au moyen desquelles on n'a jusqu'aujourd'hui réussi qu'à amortir temporairement les généreuses révolutions des peuples et à nécessiter peu après des révolutions nouvelles.⁴¹

De Potter thought that titles and heraldic ornamentation were all right, as long as they were only a personal affair, not recognized legally, nor awarded by the state. Religion and the priesthood should also be a private concern, and no religion or priest should be singled out for legal recognition or rank by the government.⁴² This of course would make aristocracy a matter of

only social status, and hopefully, unimportant. It is interesting how so many of his various liberal friends received titles and honors in later life, and seemed quite happy to have achieved them. Even Tielemans, the one member of the constitutional committee who had voted against it and refused to sign the Constitution on October 27, because he was against a monarchy, in his latter years received the Order of Leopold for distinguished citizenship.⁴³ He, of course, deserved the award, but it was hardly a republican honor.

After Gendebien and De Potter had their dispute, beginning October 16-18, De Potter found that Rogier and Van De Weyer no longer stood by him against Gendebien or the aristocratic de Mérode.⁴⁴ De Potter became more and more frustrated at his inability to get any legislation through the Comité central.

In late October there was another national crises when hostilities erupted at Antwerp. The Dutch commander of the garrison there had lost his patience with numerous harrassments from the Belgians of the city, and had bombarded the town, killing many people. The fighting lasted from October 26 to 30, when a truce was finally agreed upon.⁴⁵

October 31, De Potter tried to get the Provisional Government to pass a resolution banning the House of Nassau from the Belgian throne, but the others thought that the National Congress should make this decision.⁴⁶ On November 22, the National Congress did exclude the Nassau family from ever ascending the throne of Belgium.⁴⁷ De Potter's motivation was again the desire for a republic; he considered the House of Nassau the only serious

contenders for the Belgian throne, and wanted to make them ineligible! He also feared their power in Antwerp, their ability to stir up intrigues around the country, and the ability of the Dutch troops to interfere with the approaching national elections. Curiously, De Potter said that de Mérode would have supported his idea to exclude the Nassau dynasty.⁴⁸

Earlier, de Mérode had called De Potter a "Robespierre" for wanting to punish Orangists who had started various incidents around the nation, but de Mérode realized his mistake when De Potter was firmly against reprisals, such as breaking Dutch dikes, after the bombardment of Antwerp.⁴⁹

Although De Potter was involved with many of the legislative acts of the Provisional Government, the only diplomatic decree that he signed was the Protocol One of the London Conference, by which Belgium agreed to let the five great powers, England, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia, mediate the difficulties between Belgium and Holland.⁵⁰

Protocol One was later much criticized by the Belgians, who claimed that the Provisional Government had in fact signed away its right to self-determination by allowing the great powers to arbitrate the terms which Belgium and Holland ultimately had to accept.⁵¹

De Potter argued that the Provisional Government intended no such action, that it believed it was only agreeing to a suspension of war so that terms might be discussed, that it was only a declaration of armistice, "tous les droits des deux parties restent saufs."⁵²

Quoi qu'il en soit, je signai cette pièce, non-seulement parce que je crus convenable et utile, mais parce que je crus juste de le faire. Ce fut à mes yeux un acte de devoir, et je le remplirais aujourd'hui comme je le remplis alors, c'est-à-dire spontanément l'abuse si honteusement coupable qu'en firent les cinq puissances, ne saurait rendre cet acte mauvais en lui-même. La diplomatie, cet art infernal d'employer la parole pour dissimuler la pensée, abuse de tout, et elle n'a pas besoin d'occasion ni de prétexte pour le faire.⁵³

In De Potter's address on the occasion of the opening of the National Congress on November 10, the same day that the protocol was signed, he had signified his hopes for a settlement that was entirely at odds with what did occur:

Ces communications nous font espérer, avec la cessation prochaine des hostilités, l'évacuation, sans condition aucune, de tout le territoire de la Belgique.⁵⁴

The great powers had contacted Belgium on November 4, Belgium signed Protocol One on the November 10. De Potter's resignation from the Provisional Government three days after the document was signed, and the subsequent management of Belgium's foreign affairs by the National Congress, relieved him of any blame connected with this agreement. Also, the actual armistice was signed on December 15, after he had left the government.⁵⁵

The London Conference's disadvantages for Belgium could not be fully assessed until the final treaties were signed in 1839. The difficulty all along, of course, was that Belgium was actually powerless to dictate the limits of her own boundaries.

It was De Potter's opinion that the London Conference was determined to destroy the revolutionary elements of the Belgian revolt from Holland; that when the Belgian diplomats accepted its diplomacy they also accepted its counter-revolutionary goals, name-

ly to create a monarchy, preferably under the Prince of Orange, and to prevent the formation of any kind of republic.⁵⁶

De Potter was particularly wary of France's motives, and it is important to remember that he was writing this in 1839:

Je suis intimement convaincu aujourd'hui....que la politique de la France, d'où résulta la proposition expresse d'alors, est encore sa politique, mais cachée actuellement. Elle veut un état provisoire, par Léopold, comme elle l'a voulu par le prince d'Orange: un état définitif quelconque peut seul déjouer ses projets." [que'étaient annexion à France]⁵⁷

De Potter's colleagues in the Provisional Government had a very different concept of its function than De Potter. De Potter felt that the Provisional Government had a mandate from the people of Belgium to construct a new state, the articles of which would be ratified by the National Congress. De Potter, his co-governors, and also most of the delegates who were elected to the National Congress, all agreed that with the opening of the National Congress, the legislative power of the Provisional Government officially ceased, having been transferred to Congress. The transfer of executive power was not this clearly established. Unlike De Potter, the other members of the Provisional Government seemed to contend that they still retained some executive functions after the opening of Congress, and they did not feel the same urgency that De Potter did to settle some of the major issues before the larger body assembled.⁵⁸

Evidently Van De Weyer agreed with him that the elections for the National Congress should be delayed until some of the most important problems were settled, but it is unclear whether this delay actually took place. Van De Weyer did help De Potter with

another matter; however, the reduction of the size of Congress. It was justified by De Potter in this manner:

...une assemblée délibérante, fort nombreuse et composée d'hommes probablement plus timid encore que consciencieux, n'aurait pas pris un parti aussi arrêté par nous. Nous obtinmes simplement la réduction de moitié du cens électoral pour les campagnes seules (16 octobre).⁵⁹

The combination of the fact that only citizens of a certain educational level, the capacitative system, and those who paid a certain amount of taxes, the censitaire system, meant that "out of a total population of approximately 3,921,000 only 46,000 could [even] vote."⁶⁰

By November 3 De Potter had reached a state of exasperation. He wrote to Gendebien saying:

Jusqu'ici, tout ce que j'ai proposé a été repoussé par le Comité central; bien des propositions de mes collègues sont passées contre mon avis. Je me trouve donc avoir décrété ce que je ne voulais réellement pas, et n'avoir pas réussi à manifester ma véritable volonté.⁶¹

He also asked:

...s'il lui convenait mieux que je m'expliquasse à cet égard comme membre du comité ou comme citoyen.⁶²

In his memoirs Gendebien pretended that he never received this letter, but it was found in the correspondence of De Potter.⁶³ Nine years after all of this De Potter wrote to Gendebien, who was still active in the government, and commended him on his opposition to the Treaty of Twenty-Four Articles.⁶⁴ It is interesting that in 1859, Gendebien, once his loyal friend, afterwards his bitter enemy, walked in De Potter's funeral cortege.⁶⁵

Charles Rogier heard of De Potter's state of mind and acted as a mediator, begging him to stay on at least until the opening

of the National Congress, a week later. De Potter relented and agreed to this.⁶⁶

Some of the members of the Provisional Government had evidently run for Congress and had been elected, but De Potter not only had not sought a position, he had refused to be considered for candidacy.⁶⁷ It is possible that De Potter subconsciously expected to be elected anyway due to his great fame, and in spite of his professed indifference. This did not happen and he was not to be a part of the National Congress.

According to De Potter he chose not to run for office because:

Je croyais de mon devoir de demeurer au gouvernement provisoire jusqu'à la création du pouvoir définitif: et chargé par le peuple d'exécuter sa volonté, je ne croyais pas qu'il me fût permis d'aspirer à siéger parmi ceux qui allaient formuler cette même volonté nationale. Je pense encore de même aujourd'hui.⁶⁸

It is curious that this conflict of interest did not seem to bother many others. De Potter, though, always tried to act as he thought one should, and Jottrand credits him with being a "...pur philosophe, travaillant pour un idée, et nullement pour ses intérêts personnels..."⁶⁹

In his Profession de foi politique De Potter also made another plea for a Belgian republic, claiming that:

"...que l'on ne craigne pas les rois d'Europe: ils ont accepté le renvoi du roi de Hollande et la séparation de la Hollande et de la Belgique, qu'ils ne voulaient pas; ils accepteront, en rechignant si l'on veut, mais ils accepteront la république si nous la fondons. Peuple, déclarez votre juste volonté avec calme fermeté, elle est toujours la loi suprême: sous les rois, elle fait les révolutions; sous la république, elle les empêche à jamais."⁷⁰

The new National Congress opened on November 10, 1830. Solidly bourgeoisie, there were also fifty aristocrats elected, and a few clergymen. Coppieters claims that the Catholic and Liberal sectors were of equal strength. Alexandre Gendebien, the oldest elected member of Congress, took the presiding chair, and De Potter, the elder statesman of the Comité central, was given the honor of presenting the opening address. The Baron Louis-Érasme Surllet de Chokier of Liège was elected its president.⁷¹

On the appearance of the provisional government at the table of the hall [they were escorted there], M.de Potter delivered an address, setting forth the objects of the congress, the causes which had brought the members together, the course which had been pursued by him and his colleagues in the administration of affairs, and also the necessity there was⁷² for harmony of deliberation and independence of action.

De Potter wrote his letter of resignation to the States-General on November 13. He also wrote to his partners in the Provisional Government announcing his retirement. Both letters were read aloud in Congress.⁷³

There is no doubt that De Potter's leaving the Provisional Government weakened it:

Le retraite de l'ancien chef de l'opposition belge fut regrettable. Elle affaiblit le gouvernement provisoire. De Potter était le seul dont le nom fût connu hors de Belgique, et, par sa popularité, il avait contribué à donner a véritable éclat au pouyoir populaire qui venait d'accomplir de si grandes choses.⁷⁴

After De Potter's letter of resignation was read before Congress, Gourieff wrote to Nesselrode on November 24, 1830, that:

En passant à l'ordre du jour sur la lettre de M.De Potter, dans laquelle il présentait ses observations, le Congrès déclara la défaite du parti républicain.⁷⁵

Gourieff was probably referring to the fact that on November 22, the National Congress voted 174 to 13 in favor of a "hereditary, constitutional and parliamentary monarchy." Bologne thought this was to be expected of a "Congrès censitaire".⁷⁶ It was altogether, a government of the propertied classes, for the propertied classes, and by the propertied classes.

While refusing to sit in National Congress, De Potter made it clear that he intended to speak out on important issues.⁷⁷

On November 23, he published Lettre à mes concitoyens, explaining his political behavior up to that point.⁷⁸ Some, like L'association patriotique liégeoise praised his career,⁷⁹ but his fall from popularity had already begun. His enemies took advantage of his withdrawal from politics to attack him furiously at this time:

Propos d'estaminets, caquets de salons, articles de journaux, tantôt moqueurs, tantôt outrageants, tout fondit bientôt sur ma tête.⁸⁰

Juste reported that De Potter, "Avec une remarquable ardeur et une rare ténacité," continued to write articles in the journal le Belge.⁸¹ We do not know what happened to his close relationship with the Courrier des Pays-Bas.

By February, the bourgeoisie's regard for De Potter had sunk to an all-time low. He was not just a well-known journalist, retired from the government, and opposed to the search for the new Belgian king; he was a popular hero, probably still beloved by the lower classes, in other words, dangerous. Watched carefully by the police, and suspected of plotting with his republican friends at the Café le Bergère, he took his family to Paris in late

February 1831, and did not return for any length of time until 1838.⁸²

His voluntary exile prevented De Potter from experiencing first hand the new government of Leopold I, who was formally made King of Belgium on July 21, 1831. Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was not the Belgians' first choice, but apparently was a good one:⁸³

A Belgian delegate in London, Sylvain Van de [sic] Weyer, had proposed Leopold's name in November 1830 but it was Lord Palmertson who again influenced the final decision. Leopold was English by culture and sympathy; better still, he was a widower [and the uncle of Queen Victoria] and could marry one of Louis Philippe's daughters, [Louise-Marie] which would be a neat way of satisfying the pro-French sympathies of many Belgians. True, he was a Protestant; but he was believed to be wise and fair-minded, perhaps the very man to hold the balance between Belgium's Catholics and anti-clericals if their alliance should not last. Besides, any children of his future marriage would, as native-born Belgians, be brought up in the Catholic faith. On 4 June [1831] the Congress elected him king by 152 votes out of 195.⁸⁴

Not all of De Potter's ideas were rejected by the infant nation. While all religions received support from the state, which must have annoyed De Potter, there was no established national church. The new King Leopold had been sworn in on the steps of a church and not crowned inside of it. Both the Catholics and Liberals gained much freedom from interference with a new constitution which resolved many old abuses; and the first cabinet of the Kingdom of Belgium, the de Muelenaere government, was a Unionist one, containing both Catholics and Liberals, a coalition which lasted in governments until 1846.⁸⁵

The London Conference, meeting on and off until 1839 when the final treaties were signed with Holland, was itself a progres-

sive example of settlement by negotiation. The war-weary great powers, seeking to make the "Concert of Europe" a continuing reality, actually sat down at the conference table, instead of settling the Belgian issue with a European war. Furthermore, unlike most peace conferences, it neither followed a major war, nor did its conclusion benefit one particular nation. However much the Belgians disliked being a pawn of the great powers, the conference did substitute discussion for bloodshed.⁸⁶

De Potter's residency in Paris during the 1830's placed him in that city during a period of intense Catholic renewal. As one of the contributors to L'Avenir, and a staunch supporter of Lamennais, De Potter would have had close contact with the leaders of this movement.⁸⁷ This period of De Potter's life would merit further study.

De Potter wrote an excellent appraisal of the relationship between the church and state. His Union des catholiques et des libéraux contained an interesting philosophy which is still relevant today. Further work might be done comparing De Potter's statement to the way other nineteenth century philosophers related the religious to the secular society.

Historians have stated that the liberal German journalist Görres knew the editors of L'Avenir.⁸⁸ This thesis has shown that De Potter was intimately connected with the Italian Vieusseux. It would be interesting to study the interlocking relationships between the various editors of the liberal journals of revolutionary Europe at this time.

After 1838, De Potter returned to his role of loyal opposition. While he spent the second part of his life as a private citizen, he remained an active critic of the Belgian government.

De Potter considérait la publication de ses Souvenirs [Révolution belge 1828 à 1839, souvenirs personnels] comme son testament. Ce n'est pas à dire qu'il se soit condamné dès lors [1839] à l'inactivité; comme on l'a déjà remarqué, il ne laissait passer aucune question philosophique ou politique, sans en dire publiquement son avis; et, jusqu'à sa mort, [1859] il resta inébranlablement dans l'opposition.

De Potter never withdrew from the mainstream of progressive European activism. He kept and corresponded with his German, Italian, and French friends, and encouraged the many Italian expatriates who found a haven in Belgium. Within Belgium, he retained his elder statesman role, and was even proposed, but declined the honor, as a candidate on the Catholic party's ticket in the 1850's,⁹⁰ a tribute to his enduring unionism. The world of the European intelligentsia, small and interlocking, owed much to Louis De Potter of Belgium.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I LOUIS DE POTTER: THE YOUNG HISTORIAN 1786-1823

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⁴Louis Joseph Antoine De Potter, Souvenirs intimes: retour sur ma vie intellectuelle et le peu d'incidents que s'y rattachent, 1786 à 1859 (Brussels: Imprimerie Veuve Monnom, 1900), p.10.

⁵Peter N. Stearns, Priest and Revolutionary (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), pp.13,149.

⁶Bologne, LDP, p.21.

⁷De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.11-12.

⁸Ibid., p.12.

⁹Ibid., p.13.

¹⁰Lucien Jottrand, Louis De Potter (Brussels: Librairie polytechnique, Au.Decq., 1860), pp.6-7.

¹¹De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.13-14.

¹²Ibid., pp.16-17.

¹³De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.19-21; Jottrand, LDP, p.7.

¹⁴De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.21-23.

¹⁵Ibid., pp.23-24.

¹⁶De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.27; Bologne, LDP, pp.24-25.

¹⁷De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.28.

¹⁸Adrien de Meeüs, History of the Belgians, trans. G. Gordon (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1962), pp.264-66.

¹⁹Emile Cammaerts, The Keystone of Europe: History of the Belgian Dynasty, 1830-1939 (London: Peter Davies, 1939), p.9fn.

²⁰de Meeüs, History of the Belgians, p.265.

²¹Ibid., p.264.

²²Bologne, LDP, p.25.

²³De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.31.

²⁴Ibid., p.32.

²⁵Ibid., p.29.

²⁶Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, a Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede, with a preface by F.C. Burkitt, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p.14.

²⁷Allgemeine deutsche biographie, 1889 ed., s.v. Reinhold, Johann Gotthard R.

²⁸Bologne, LDP, p.27.

²⁹Ibid., p.26.

³⁰Bologne, LDP, pp.28-29; De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.30-31.

³¹De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.30-31.

³²Ibid., p.31.

³³Bologne, LDP, pp.42-43.

³⁴Mario Battistini, "Livornesi amici di Luigi de Potter," Bollettino storico livornese A.I. (1937): 63.

³⁵De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.34-35.

³⁶De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.34; Bologne, LDP, pp.30-31.

³⁷Bologne, LDP, p.31.

³⁸Ibid., p.30.

³⁹Ibid., p.31, 31fn.

⁴⁰Bologne, LDP, pp.31-32; De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.41.

⁴¹Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1949 ed., s.v. Ricci, Scipione de.

⁴²Bologne, LDP, pp.31-32; De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, pp.41-42.

⁴³Enciclopedia italiana, 1949 ed., s.v. Ricci, Scipione de.

⁴⁴Bologne, LDP, p.34.

⁴⁵Eric Cochrane, Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p.416.

⁴⁶*ibid.*, p.498.

⁴⁷Bologne, LDP, p.34.

⁴⁸Louis Joseph Antoine De Potter, Vie et mémoires de Scipion de Ricci, évêque de Pistoie et Prato: réformateur du catholicisme en Toscane, sous le règne de Léopold etc., 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie de J. Tastu, 1826), pp.6-7 of preface.

⁴⁹Memoirs of Scipio de Ricci, late bishop of Pistoia and Prato, reformer of Catholicism in Tuscany under the reign of Leopold etc., trans. and ed. Thomas Roscoe, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1829) 2: 257-59.

⁵⁰Bologne, LDP, pp.34-35.

⁵¹Stendhal [pseud], "Letters from Paris: By Grimm's Grandson, No.9," London Magazine, new series No.9 (September 1, 1825): 128.

⁵²*ibid.*

⁵³Bologne, LDP, pp.35-36.

⁵⁴De Potter, Souvenirs intimes, p.56.

⁵⁵*ibid.*

⁵⁶Bologne, LDP, p.36.

⁵⁷L. Le Guillou, "Notes et documents: Lamennais et Louis De Potter, lettres inédites (1834-1840)," Revue de littérature comparée 42 (April-June 1968): 258-60.

⁵⁸Roscoe, Memoirs of Scipio de Ricci, 2:242-44.

⁵⁹G.R. Elton, ed., Historical Problems: Studies and Documents, 11 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971; New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971) No.11: The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy, by Derek Beales, p.28.

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⁶¹Ibid., p.30.

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⁶⁴Dizionario enciclopedico italiano, 1955-61 ed., s.v. Vieusseux, Giovan Pietro.

⁶⁵Refers to P. Prunas, "L'Antologia" di G.P. Vieusseux (Rome, Milan: n.p., 1906).

⁶⁶Mario Battistini, "Le relazioni di Luigi de Potter col Vieusseux e con i collaboratori dell''Antologia'," Rivista storica degli archivi toscani (Florence: Vallecchi editore, January-March 1930) :39.

⁶⁷Ibid. :57.

⁶⁸Mario Battistini, Esuli italiani in Belgio 1815-1861 (Florence: Brunetti editore, 1968), p.159.

⁶⁹See Battistini's Esuli italiani in Belgio (1815-1861) for a study of De Potter's many Italian emigre friends.

⁷⁰Ibid., p.160.

⁷¹Ibid., p.161.

⁷²Ibid., p.162.

⁷³Alessandro Galante-Garrone, Filippo Buonarroti e i rivoluzionari dell'ottocento, 1828-1837, 2nd ed. (Turin: Piccola biblioteca Einaudi, 1972), pp.98-99.

⁷⁴Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The First Professional Revolutionist: Filippo Michele Buonarroti (1761-1837) (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959), p.85.

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CHAPTER II LOUIS DE POTTER: THE LIBERAL JOURNALIST
1823-1828

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⁵Ensor, Belgium, p.122.

⁶J.A. van Houtte, "The Low Countries," in The New Cambridge Modern History, ed. C.W. Crawley, vol. 9 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1965) p.464.

⁷Robert Balmain Mowat, The States of Europe, 1815-1871: A Study of Their Domestic Development (New York: Longmans, Green & Co.; London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1932), p.71.

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⁷²Ibid., p.59.

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CHAPTER III LOUIS DE POTTER: THE UNIONIST PAMPHLETEER
1829 AND 1830

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CHAPTER IV
LOUIS DE POTTER: THE REPUBLICAN STATESMAN
1830

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⁴³Biographie nationale, 1914-37 eds., s.v. Tielemans, Jean François.

⁴⁴De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:179.

⁴⁵Blok, People of the Netherlands, p.426; France, Belgium and Poland, pp.230-32.

⁴⁶Juste, LDP, p.100.

⁴⁷Coppieters, The Belgian Dynasty, p.7.

⁴⁸De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:180, 182-83.

⁴⁹Ibid., 1:185.

⁵⁰Jottrand, LDP, pp.80-81.

⁵¹Ibid., p.81.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:199.

⁵⁴Jottrand, LDP, p.86.

⁵⁵Jottrand, LDP, pp.81-82; De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:202.

⁵⁶De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:203.

⁵⁷Jottrand, LDP, p.83, quoting De Potter, Révolution belge.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp.84-85.

⁵⁹De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:179-80.

⁶⁰Coppieters, The Belgian Dynasty, p.6.

⁶¹Bologne, LDP, p.120, quoting De Potter to Gendebien, November 3, 1830.

⁶²De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:196.

⁶³Bologne, LDP, p.120fn., quoting Jules Garsou, Alexandre Gendebien, p.346.

⁶⁴Juste, LDP, p.123.

⁶⁵Bologne, LDP, p.157.

⁶⁶Juste, LDP, p.103-4.

- ⁶⁷Ibid., p.95.
- ⁶⁸De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:187.
- ⁶⁹Jottrand, LDP, p.83.
- ⁷⁰De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:190-91.
- ⁷¹Coppieters, The Belgian Dynasty, pp.6,11; Juste, LDP p.104; France, Belgium and Poland, p.233.
- ⁷²France, Belgium and Poland, p.233.
- ⁷³Jottrand, LDP, pp.86-87, 106fn.; Bologne, LDP, pp.121-22.
- ⁷⁴Juste, LDP, p.107.
- ⁷⁵Bologne, LDP, p.122, quoting Gourieff to Nesselrode, November 24, 1830.
- ⁷⁶Bologne, LDP, pp.123-24, quoting Nothomb, Essai historique et politique sur la révolution belge, p.99; Coppieters, The Belgian Dynasty, p.9.
- ⁷⁷De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:190; Bologne, LDP, p.124.
- ⁷⁸Juste, LDP, p.109.
- ⁷⁹Bologne, LDP, p.125, quoting De Potter, Correspondance, 4:192.
- ⁸⁰Ibid., quoting De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:204.
- ⁸¹Juste, LDP, p.111.
- ⁸²Juste, LDP, pp.112-14, 120; Jottrand, LDP, p.88.
- ⁸³Theo Aronson, The Coburgs of Belgium (London: Cassell, 1969) pp.xiii,iv.
- ⁸⁴Lyon, Belgium, p.42.
- ⁸⁵Lyon, Belgium, p.43; Coppieters, The Belgian Dynasty, pp.16,21; Val Lorwin, "Religion, Class and Language in National Politics," Political Oppositions in Western Democracies, ed. Robert A. Dahl (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p.150.
- ⁸⁶J.S. Fishman, "The London Conference of 1830," Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis (1971):419.
- ⁸⁷De Potter, Révolution belge, 1:257; Juste, LDP, p.120.

⁸⁸Philip Spencer, Politics of Belief in Nineteenth-Century France (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1954), p.71.

⁸⁹Juste, LDP, p.122.

⁹⁰Bologne, LDP, p.155.

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APPENDIX

Letter to the editors of the Courrier des Pays-Bas, November 8, 1828

"Of all the foolish things that I have heard about the deplorable legal actions that you have stirred up, the most odd, without contradiction, is that which is attributed to a notable: it proves the truth of the witticism, that there is nothing petty about the great.

"The notable therefore, chatting about some business of the day, wished to convince those to whom he spoke of the danger that pursued the state, since the regeneration of the Courrier, and that... it has become, gentlemen, I give you a thousand guesses... That it's because the Courrier has become Jesuit.

"He curses Jesuits, they have done us much harm by their existing; and, although interred in France, their shadow still continues to haunt us!

"At first, in order to defend ourselves against them, people had us, like the horse of the fable, saddled, bridled and mounted; and now that we no longer have anything to fear, we remain with the strap under our belly, the halter under our chin, and our lords on our backs.

"It would almost be better if the good fathers would continue to govern Paris; we would at least know why people thrashed us, flogged us, switched us.

"Then, it was so easy to be able to respond to the French who, after a sojourn of fifteen days in Brussels, said to us: What! no jury? - No, but also no Jesuits. - What! no freedom of the press? No, but also no Jesuits. - What! no ministerial responsibility? no independence of the judicial power? and a system of taxation overloaded and unpopular? and a lop-sided administration? - It is true; but no Jesuits.

"Eh! the French screamed at us, these Jesuits who are so dreaded, who keeps them among us, a bad government.

It has only to make them fade away; they are already gone.

"And it is always under the pretext of fear that they inspire, that people refuse you the guarantees which you have a right to, the freedom which you have need of, the

prosperity which will elude you more and more in a land where all guarantees are illusory, where freedom is an empty word, a lure, a provocation to convert, when it pleases them, dupes into the guilty, patriots into the seditious.

"These speeches irritated me at first; then grieved me: they will end up discouraging me.

"How, I would readily ask our neighbors, how can we extricate ourselves from that? As soon as we want to be better supported, better defended, better judged, better governed, and better on all accounts, which seems to us, those of who pay in order that it be so, the easiest thing in the world, in a word, as soon as we interfere in our own affairs, people exclaim about the Jesuits, and voilà we are beyond our common rights.

"Tell me, gentlemen, that if one calls a man a Jesuit, does it follow that it is necessary to imprison, torture, judge and condemn him? Do all his actions themselves become crimes, and all his words absurdities?

"It seems to me that it must first be necessary to prove Jesuitism, and then the guilt of the Jesuit, unless people did not want to, which would be more reasonable, being content to establish the incriminating facts without regard to the opinions of the accused.

"If, however, people demand that you prove that you are not Jesuits, you would be, I believe, gentlemen, very embarrassed. One can not prove that it is not a brand of hell.

"An idea occurs to me: let us oppose words with some other words. Until now people have hunted the Jesuits; let us sneer at, shame, pursue the ministers; that anyone who will not have clearly demonstrated by his acts that he is not devoted to any minister will be banished from the nation, and that the anathema of unpopularity [will] descend on him with all its results."

"Let us agree, etc., etc.,

Omega

Rapport d'un ministre, ami de sa patrie et peu attaché à son porte-feuille, au roi des Pays-Bas, sur la disposition actuelle des esprits et la situation des choses en Belgique

Sire, in the memorable period when a new life comes to animate the minds of my fellow citizens and hastens the development of the destinies of your good kingdom, the confidence with which your Majesty honors me, imposes upon me the duty both precious and sacred, of responding here with total truthfulness and, as people say, with a hand on my conscience. Without other justification nor a longer preamble, I enter into the matter.

Two things particularly, Sire, are surprising and disturbing to your minister, learning of the general distrust which means that the people no longer believe in the promises of the government, and the union so unexpected of the Liberals and the Catholics.

I do not share one nor the other of these feelings. The sole thing which surprises me, is the length of time and, I will say even the inconceivable patience, with which the Belgians have, for fifteen years, allowed themselves to be lulled by some words that people had, finally, acquired the custom of believing magical, since hardly pronounced, they straight-away ceased the more accurate claims, stifled the more legitimate complaints, forgot the worst affronts, and again set out sacrifices. From time to time, your ministers, your counselors slipped a few of these words into some speech of state, to which the august mouth of your Majesty

gave a new merit; next they dropped off into easy sleep at the edge of an abyss, where they had to, I foresaw a long time ago, hurry to wake up.

And of what would I be afraid of, Sire? Of their approaching and inevitable fall? No, no: the country, my fellow citizens and your Majesty, that is what occupies me; and there is nothing to fear concerning their safety. The loss of some ministers is scarcely important. It is they themselves moreover who are lost: they are gathering what they have sown; they are realistic only with regard to themselves alone, that they are departing abandoned by everybody! Let us save the country: generosity only requires us to overlook those who have failed to head it towards its ruin.

As for the Catholics and the Liberals, their union no longer has the right to astonish me only to terrify me; for it is natural. One owes it only to the government; and it will depend nevertheless upon the government to make it cease when it desires to.

This union prepared itself for a long time as a necessary result of the conduct of the ministry towards the two parties, that is to say, towards all who were not themselves the ministry.

The Catholics, originally, it must be admitted, expressed some unconstitutional claims; the Liberals believing in the constitutionality of the government, aided it in all the efforts to reject them. New still to the career of liberty, the Catholics were badly frightened with regard to that of freedom of the press and of worship, which they saw only as a weapon to fight them. As badly

advised as they, the Liberals joined themselves to the authority in order to force those who they regarded as their adversaries, to present the flank to this army, without making them feel at the same time that it could also serve them as a shield, and even become for them, if need be, a powerful means of attack. The ministry vigorously sustained by zealous writers, abused its easy victory, and restricted the Catholics even in their rights as citizens and men; and its blind auxiliaries, counting on sweet but fallacious words, contributed not a little to legalizing this, if one can use this expression, a kind of despotism which people appeared to want to use only to hasten the triumph of reason and justice.

But it was soon that this justice and this reason themselves became suspect to the authority, and thus they would interfere with its views and inconvenience its operations. The Catholics were reduced to silence: the Liberals appeared dangerous on the other hand. People examined sermons and catechisms; people interpreted articles in gazettes: and, the cours d'assises decided to replace the abbés with the advocates and men of letters.

There were a great number of these struggles where the gendarmes and the jailers were always in "ultimate ratio" to the ministry, who believed itself victorious because it punished. It did not notice that, little by little, the applause of the onlooking party at the defeat of its alleged enemies, became more and more rare, and finally it had ceased entirely.

The ministry had caused without its knowledge, and particularly without its wishing to, the constitutional education of the

nation. The parties, divided for a long time, drew together, ashamed at having been the dupes of their own quarrels, and more than that of having in any way given rise to the nourishing of absurd ideas by the very fact that they were selfish and exclusive. The Catholic no longer cursed the freedom of opinions, even religious, and he accepted with all its consequences the right that each has to manifest freely his opinions in the press, and to defend by all the means which reason acknowledges, the conscience and the laws. The Liberal, on his side, or the philosopher blushes at having been able to exclude the belief of the Catholics from the tolerance which he claimed for all the others. "No more privileges for anyone! Equality for all! Total freedom, without any restrictions other than those of the laws and ethics!" became the slogan of the two parties; or, to say it better, there no longer were parties, there was only a single people and a single voice.

The arbitrary, from then on, in whatever color he appeared, no longer found partisans, even among those whose interests he seemed to sustain: he was equally rejected by the opinion that he boasted momentarily that he was protecting, and by the one which furnished him with some victims.

The government is lost, the ministers exclaim. Myself, Sire, on the contrary, I tell myself: the nation is saved; and the government, if it finally becomes prudent at an opportune time, will have on the whole gained by the fusion of the opinions which, while colliding with excessive violence, tore its breast. This victory will have gained it, not at its expense, but at the expense of a few men whose sacrifice ought to cost it nothing,

since their system of governing their fellow men was none other than that of demoralizing them by making better progress with their opposition, of confusing them by controlling them easily, besides by stripping them of their character of men by handling them, by fleecing them, by dispatching them as one would a flock of sheep.

But if the old adage of the politician could work in the past: "Divide and conquer," could still seduce a ministry in the nineteenth century: "Oh! well, yes, divide, I will say to him; but remember well that there is now for you, after so much clumsiness, so many mistakes, so many blunders, only a single way to do this." This is the way.

Do the right thing frankly, without restriction nor ulterior motive, regarding the just demands of the people. Redress generously, nobly and, in some way, spontaneously the griefs which, in energetic writings, the nation has exposed you to, of which the representatives of this nation, in patriotic speeches, have proven the importance. You can do this, since the nation invokes only the fundamental law, in the manner that the fundamental law itself has prescribed; you owe this, since it only asks of you the whole-hearted execution of this fundamental law which you have imposed on it in spite of it, that it accepts now, but while declaring that it has finally understood, and that, from now on, it will no longer permit you to interpret this law against it in order to make of it an instrument of oppression and enslavement.

This immense step being accomplished, you can await the outcome with patience. Authority having been demonstrated as just, this outcome can only be favorable to it, the consequence of a

duty fulfilled always being a right assured. Of two things one will happen without fail: either the Catholics, become sincerely citizens of a free state, and, in return for the certainty of never being vexed by anyone, renouncing in good time ever obstructing the others, will be the zealous partisans of a tolerant and protective government; and then, for what purpose would it combat them? or indeed (I avow that all this permits one to predict a better future: the dangers passed, the engagements so formally taken, the concord so patriotically pledged, the equity and liberty so solemnly invoked in order to preside over a new era, must reassure us forever); or indeed, I say, they will breed some indiscreet vows, will wish to restore a domination, which time, the public reason and the progress of civilization have refuted: in this case, I repeat, this is nearly impossible, because the government will always have enough strength to bring them in again into the ways of integrity and our institutions, and all men of sense, every patriot will lend his pen and his limbs for this.

I am not speaking here of simple controversies, of the purely literary discussions about speculative opinions, from which some major and particularly more urgent troubles have given us respite for some time. The latter will reappear, without doubt, as soon as the great interests will have quieted down. But they must never attract the attention of the government, whose influence and control must only extend over deeds. These debates, when no one of the parties can invoke the intervention of authority, always terminate, in the last analysis, to the profit of reason. And we have every reason to believe that henceforth the government will

be wise enough to remain outside of discussions which are not of its province, and that the citizens will guard indeed against pleading before it cases where the victors ordinarily lose more in costs than they are able to gain on the substance of the cause.

I believe, Sire, I have sufficiently dwelt upon the account of the Liberals and the Catholics. My conclusion which I express without hesitating, is that one has been wrong to notice the distinction between these two parties. The government as the law must only see citizens. That these citizens are divided among themselves as they intend; that they argue about what seems sound to them; that presently one, presently the others gain some proselytes; who they have recruited through education or through the press: is unimportant. That does not impede governing, nor governing well; that is to say of only governing altogether fairly as is necessary, without a spirit of coterie or of sect, without pedantry of the regent of the college or gossip in the court, without this interference which pretends to understand everything, to settle everything, and meddles with everything.

I ask it of unprejudiced minds: in which, for example, would the dogma of the temporal power of the Pope over the sovereigns itself disturb your Majesty, if those who profess it, obey the laws, honor your person and your dynasty? The answer of the Roman catechism that "it is necessary to avoid heretics as the plague," and the clause in the oath of the bishops that "it is necessary to persecute them," will they be considered as more dangerous in your kingdom, than the Protestant belief which likens the mass to an act of idolatry, if, in spite of these opinions, the

Catholics live in peace with their fellow citizens the Protestants, and if their pastors consider themselves very honored to dine at the table of your ministers, without distinction of religious communion, just as Protestants are quietly allowing the priest at the altar to elevate the host which he presents for the adoration of the faithful? Condescend, Sire, to believe my wise experience: that it would never be the doctrine that you would impose which would triumph over its rivals. Enlighten your people, and allow time to do the rest: the proper doctrine will make some proselytes as reason makes some progress. The court of Rome, let us never forget, had its warmest and most dangerous partisans in the Austrian Netherlands, then precisely how many did Austria hold onto in combat. This zeal of controversialists being calmed, Josephists and ultramontaines became again all fittingly Catholics; and, bourgeois by profession, lived without anxiety or hatred; subject to the magistrates and their parish priest. It is only since then that your ministers, setting themselves up as doctors to both sides, have wished to put Febronianism back in fashion again, that the anti-Febronius merits the honor of further assessment. Let us cease to create sextons and, governing without respect of persons or of sects in the interest of all, soon only really important affairs will occupy the citizens, and the scholastic quibbles will fall back into oblivion from where some imprudent apprentice persecutors have drawn them.

But it is time to examine the question of the griefs of which the people are complaining, at first through the medium of the journals, next the petitions which, from all the provinces,

from all the towns, from all the villages, have been addressed to the deputies of the nation.

Pardon, Sire, my frankness; it is that of a servant, but not of a courtier of your Majesty: You must, Sire, listen to the voice of your dissatisfied subjects; you must do more: you must grant their wishes. If some individuals have only meant you to understand some isolated crises, I would have permitted your ministers to dismiss them, during several instances, while questioning the just ground of their complaints. But, after a forbearance that I admire, at the moment when the endurance degenerated into guilty apathy, the nation very completely has arisen as a single man, and sustained by the natural defenders of its rights, it has enlightened you better than any minister would have been able to, about the true state of things.

A feeble government would let itself tear away piece by piece some concessions which it only made as a last resort, in spite of itself, and always haunted by the idea that this is an essential faculty that has been removed, rights that have been stripped from it. The government of your Majesty will wish to prove that it is strong; and it will do this in the instant that, recognizing the justice of the demands which are made it, it will promptly give way, voluntarily and with joy. For, let us not conceal it, one can only solidly found a throne upon equity, and to strengthen a reign is nothing other than applying the laws of eternal ethics to the art of governing one's fellow-men. Consequently, as long as it is your people who are right and we are wrong, however weak their means of succeeding appear, the strength will

be on your side, and sooner or later, victory will crown your perseverance.

Therefore far from diminishing your authority in condemning openly the conduct of your ministers, and in coming back with dignity from the false route on which they were engaged, you will increase, Sire, in all the love of your subjects and in the invaluable sanction which the seal of justice and of truth gives to human actions.

But a new career requires therefore some new men in order to embark on it. It would be poor judgment of the human heart to expect from it the sincere approval of principles diametrically opposed to the principles that it has adopted, avowed, praised and sustained with tenacity. Now, what one does not approve of with conviction, one can only execute with half-heartedness and even with repugnance, if it is true that people do not put up still more obstacles.

Two of your ministers particularly, Sire, have become unpopular. One has done very much evil, and only evil; the nation has never expected anything of him: the other has still not done indeed what his fellow citizens had the right to hope from his elevation to one of the more eminent nobilities of the state. The one is obstinate in error; the other, if he has dared to proclaim the truth, has done it with such timidity that, in yielding to treacherous insinuations, ends up becoming the accomplice of the treachery. The ascendancy of the one has served only to mislead us; the good intentions which we suppose in the other has not sufficed to put us back on the true course. The people see in the

one only a despot; they have for a long time regarded the other as the one who ought to set them free and render them happy: they no longer ask anything of him now, tired of always asking in vain, and no longer wanting to desire without hope of obtaining anything. They are disposed however to render onto him all their confidence at the least step which would prove the will to do good, at the first deed which would indicate the resolution, the constancy and the firmness. It is necessary, Sire, to sacrifice the one man for yourself and for the safety of the state: regarding the other, it is necessary to allow him to regain the love of the people, that then he will prefer them to his office; and that he will no longer be wasted, as soon as he will always demonstrate himself ready to leave this office in order to conserve the love of the people.

It is while selecting some other counselors that you will declare them responsible morally and legally for their acts, as they ought to be under a constitutional regime such as the one of which your Majesty is the head. And, from the fear that this declaration might still appear a principle without applicability, it will be correct to propose a law concerning ministerial responsibility, specifying at the same time under what authorities the ministers will be able to be indicted and the penalties that the High-Court will inflict upon them. In this law, the necessity of a public investigation exercised continuously over all the acts of authority, the merit of which is that there is for the least citizen the opportunity to reveal abuses and to point out the authors, and the impossibility of slandering a functionary, a magistrate, a

minister, as such, will be formally and solemnly acknowledged.

The most urgent thing after that will be to rid the press of its fetters: the way to do it is simple; to do that it is only necessary to abolish the exceptional legislation which has for such a long time only prostrated and withered thought, and which has become too eminently dangerous to be allowed to exist still one more day, one more instant. The press is only a means of transmitting some opinions, and opinions are free; there is not the least peril in allowing them to contend with each other freely, since finally truth will always end by dwarfing falsehood. But it is also a means of doing evil: oh! well; is not evil anticipated and punished by the law? it will no longer be exempt from chastisement for having been committed by the press. There is no need to enchain the press or to submit to unconstitutional censure printers, bookshops and peddlers, under the pretext of co-ownership, cooperation or complicity, in order to prevent them from directly provoking sedition, to outrage or to slander citizens, to undermine the social pact, and put in doubt the legitimacy of the reigning dynasty. It is sufficient to punish direct provocations, outrage and slander, as well as attacks reaching as far as the fundamental law and the established form of government, by the press as by any other method.

Freedom of thought, of speech and of writing are obviously connected to freedom of education. Speech and books are a continual education, which reform, modify and change men, and with them their doctrines including their education itself. That a wise and liberal law might organize this education in such a

manner that henceforth it would no longer be at the mercy of the arbitrary, in which the letter of the law alone and not the power of its agents sanctioning it according to their whim, in particular that, ceasing to restrain it in its progress, by preventing abuse of it, people would only watch for it to repress and punish the evil of which they speak, so that finally the single goal of it being determined, the choice of the proper methods succeeding here would be allowed by the wisdom of each. A similar law is easy to make and takes very little time if one really has the intention of renouncing the hope of monopoly which people were accustomed to regarding as a right for that person alone who had succeeded in consummating the illegal seizure of it. If, on the contrary, one wishes only to reluctantly set free some rings of the chain, if one wishes to only have the air of delivering liberty, by only covering with a hypocrite's mask the absolute power of which one has indeed resolved to keep the benefit, it will be necessary for several months of arrangements in order to invent a similar masterpiece of deceit and imposture. Meanwhile, your ministers would drag things out; and the commissions of consultation, of revision, of legislation are always there in a similar necessity in order to lend their benevolent assistance. But they will no longer deceive anyone.

This is what in ministerial slang people call "stalling for time." I call it, myself, Sire, losing time, and to lose time most precious to your Majesty, during which good faith and readiness would have drawn to him millions of benedictions, that they merit, and which some clumsy ministers make expire on the lips where they were formed.

The total independence of judiciary power is vividly called for by all the Belgians. This is a sacred debt of the government which, by not discharging it for so many years, it has exposed itself with a cheerfulness of heart to being accused of nourishing treacherous, I would say almost sinister intentions. This power should be organized as soon as possible; so that men who ought to be invested in it should be chosen consciously from those who are endowed with the most vast knowledge, with the most sound reason, and particularly of the most honorable character. Nomination should be neither the reward for services rendered to the power, nor the anticipated payment of services rendered to it. That is to say rather that an immense responsibility weighs on the new men that your Majesty will charge with one of the most important tasks of his rule. Instead of bad judges rendering even good laws impotent; let us have good judges who shield the nation, even against bad laws. If ever some independent tribunals composed of irremovable magistrates had discussed our rights, today we would not have to mourn so many and such deplorable injustices which have ulcerated the courage of all good and honest citizens.

The magistrates are men and, consequently, subject to error; let us complain about them when the error is, so to speak, inevitable: but they have submitted to passions which blind them, and the error that they would then commit can perhaps be prevented. Your Majesty feels that it is of the jury that I wish to speak. Give your people what they solicit, the invaluable gift of an institution of which every civilized society has acknowledged

the value. It would be superfluous to enumerate here its advantages, which one is no longer permitted to ignore when one has the least notion of the toils and of the progress of the human spirit in the last century. But it is sufficient for me to say that the jury contributes powerfully to connecting the citizen to the interests of his fellowmen and to those of his country; as it makes him feel, better than any other thing, his dignity as a citizen; and as it is finally one hope for mutual assurance against the abuses of our social organization, as well as against the ignorance and wickedness of men.

And then, Sire, it is enough that a great part of your subjects have expressed the need of it. Another part, it is true, still seem to reject it. Oh! well; all can be reconciled: that reserving the jury in ordinary judgements for times when the custom and consciousness of its usefulness will have defeated the most recalcitrant egoisms, one limits its introduction to political causes, to proceedings against the press, where the authority, at the same time both judge and interested party, renders necessary the intervention of disinterested and impassive citizens, who protect imprudent weakness against the hatred and relentlessness of power. When even this intervention would be imperiously protested in the interest of individual safety, it would be by the authority itself and for the justification of its acts. Indeed, its sentences in matters political and concerning the press, as long as they will not have emphasized the decision of a national jury, will always appear dictated by vengeance, and those who it will have stamped as guilty, will be pitied as victims by the public.

"No more milling or slaughtering!" has been the universal cry against some odious taxes. It is necessary to abolish them. That can and ought, consequently, to be done, today, without delay and even at once. Because, one can not hide it, the nation is exhausted; some savings are necessary, are indispensable, are urgent. As people begin therefore by deciding there will be no fresh supply of milling and slaughtering, and that people seek next how they can be excused from whatever these taxes were caused by. That is the most urgent problem. When men will have attended to this, men will be able to be occupied at leisure with a new system of taxes, less ruinous for the country, and established in such a way that the poor prosper, that the well-off man is not improverished, and that the rich cease to accumulate and concentrate more and more of the fortune of the people in their hands. The greatest possible division of the wealth of the state, and by this means a distribution as just as the organization of society requires, of happiness to which each of its members has an equal right, must be the goal of every wise, equitable, and humane administration.

In general, Sire, the public expenditures are too high; they are excessive: a military system out of proportion to the size of our territory, our population, our means and our needs; a wasteful host of employees of every kind, multiplied to infinity in the sole interest of the government which believes it can never use enough of these creatures, have enough devoted slaves for the least of its whims; a scandalous profusion of pensions granted, whether to people from whom the nation has never received any

service, or even to people who, for no reason, have perhaps betrayed it; by disgraceful salaries flung to filthy strangers to injure us, slander us, shape us, as far as it is in them, with the discouragement of apathy, with the degradation of oppression and servitude: this is, Sire, the gangrene which corrodes the kingdom and which, if people do not make haste to arrest while there is still time, will penetrate as far as the heart.

There is another just subject for complaint: that is the tyrannical obligation of using a language which people do not know, in some cases where the most perfect knowledge of his own language is hardly sufficient for a citizen to establish his rights or to defend them in case of dispute. The man, Sire, who has advised your Majesty of the monstrous moral expropriation of a great part of your subjects, by means of the measure by virtue of which the French language and those who speak it have been put outside of the common law of the Netherlands, ought to be considered as your most mortal enemy, unless he is the most inept minister a king may have ever charged with his affairs. Condescend, Sire, to excuse the harshness of my expressions: my indignation never finds them strong enough, when it concerns the stigmatizing of the acts whose sole possible effect is to accumulate hatred and prepare for misfortunes. The government had, it said, the project of separating us from France. If it speaks the truth, Sire, and it is the sole judge of its intentions, its good faith is hidden; but it is only in totally divorcing good sense that it rescues its faith. Things were totally otherwise if, in opposition to its words, it had not really had any other goal than that of

disguising from its betters the revolting partiality which it wished to show for the Dutch, and which has so profoundly wounded the Flemish. Language, indeed, appears to have been only the means and the pretext to hand over the provinces of the South to those of the North, as one hands over a subject people to the exploitation of its conquerors. And God knows up to what point some avid speculators have made and are every day still making this valuable and, they suppose it at least, inexhaustible agency bear fruit! Your Majesty cannot ignore the truth of what I advance: when one throws a glance over the different ministerial departments, over the embassies abroad, in a word over all the branches of the administration, and one sees the North dominating, humiliating, crushing and devouring the South, after however this South had generously paid its debts, and while unequally represented in the States-General, it also sustains unequally and always to its detriment the expenses of the state. And how can one not say that all the luminaries are Dutch and Protestant: I will appeal to a sole experience, and I will ask how until this day these men without prejudices, men so enlightened, so wise, so superior to their scorned brothers, have governed us, where they have led us, where are they now pretending to lead us?

They wanted to nationalize us, to render us less French! Oh! who in Belgium thinks like the French, if this is not so why is there any reason to establish between us and them a parallel to our disadvantage? If there is ever a fact necessary to cite, are not there found just as often in the governments of England and the United States of America, with whom nevertheless one does not

have a common language, some institutions to envy, some examples to follow? Will it only be when people speak German here, that people will admire such and such a measure of the kingdoms of Bavaria and of Wurtemberg? Is it only in our journals written in French that one has pledged to the public loathing the Villèles, the Peyronnets and the Corbières? And the liberal sheets of the North have they not devoted their Dutch columns to exalting the good profession of faith of the present government of our neighbors relating to the freedom of the press?

It is truly disgraceful, Sire, to have to speak to certain of our so-called men of state, about the most common elements of the art of governing, the most simple rules of reasoning.

But what do they fear? They understand neither men nor things; they comprehend nothing about our position, nothing of the general spirit of the age that they live in. What should they do for the sake of our future? The past is without lessons for them, and the present is important to them only for themselves. What need have they to question the facts, provided that they are living and they are ruling? Without determined purposes, without a fixed plan, without a system, they travel aimlessly, occupied with a single and unique task, that of not losing their appointments; fearing besides, above everything else, in the case of anyone who approaches them, talent and the luminaries who would disclose their emptiness and would serve to reveal their disgraceful and uncertain course, as well as the strenght of spirit and firmness of character before which their weakness and their faint-heartedness would appear in all their baseness. Strangers to every noble and

lofty sentiment, they are only moved when aroused by the lowly stimulant of personal interest, or prompted by a cowardly fear of losing their place and their appointments; and, judging all others according to themselves, promises and menaces are therefore the single motives of which they have a thorough knowledge and which they bring into play in order to move men. These unfortunates! they do not know therefore that, outside of the corrupting atmosphere of the courts, there are still some generous minds who are only sensitive to honor, and some pure consciences besides those who run aground seductions and rigors in turn; who do not set favors in motion; who are not terrified at all by disgraces?

I have responded, Sire, with frankness and impartiality, to the challenge of your Majesty: were he able to appreciate the motives which have guided my pen! I owe you the truth; I have told it to you completely, without hesitation or detours: my task is fulfilled. My most ardent wish is for the happiness and glory of your Majesty. You will be, Sire, as happy as you deserve, and your reign will serve as the model for all the reigns to come, if, changing with the men who you have employed until now, the system by means of which these men have put the state upon the brink of its ruin, you finally pay attention only to your own justice and the love which you have for your people. Surrounded by loyal ministers and counselors, you will hear, Sire, around you only praises and benedictions; they will have, the former, all the value that a prosperous and free nation can give them.

Brussels, the 4th of April

Union des catholiques et des libéraux

At the mere sight of the title of this pamphlet, men of bad faith and of ill wishes will cry: "For a retraction!"

We will ask what harm there would be in a retraction, providing it was sincere? To be of this or that other opinion, that is not a crime: why would it be to abandon one opinion that one believed warped, in order to embrace another that appeared more true? Only hypocrisy is sinful; it is disgraceful and cheap to affect a belief that one does not have.

But it is in no way a question either of retraction or even conversion, it is only a question of justice. The principles once professed with full and complete conviction, are still the same; they are sustained with a constancy that nothing until the present has been able to shake. Only these principles are allied more and above all better than ever with this fair tolerance, the first of our duties as a man and a citizen, which grants to all doctrines, either philosophical or religious, that men do not speak with the same degree of truth (but this is what is inconsistent, that necessarily it must be one or the other of us that is wrong), but that all men have the same legal rights and, if it can be expressed thus, the same bourgeoisie customs. These principles, in a word, remain subordinate to sound reason, which teaches and proves that in political matters such as legislation, in administration such as of the police, opinions, and doctrines ought to be free as the thought from which they emanate and which they

manifest; that the law not being able to take hold over them, it must regard them all as indifferent, all as of no account in the circle outside of which the law itself is no longer anything.

The Catholic question is vital in the Netherlands. On the manner in which it will be resolved, depends, according to us, the freedom or the future enslavement of our provinces. This question acquires the same importance everywhere Catholicism is able to be the opposition; now, everywhere it can, it must be if it wants to be free, that is to say if it wants to exist. And where shouldn't it be able to? The system of so-called national churches, which is no other thing than the churches under the yoke of politics and its power, isn't it an eternal obstacle to its independence in France and in Germany, as the established church and Toryism are in England, Protestantism and Josephism in Belgium? There are no longer national churches only national consciences. Religion is an individual affair between man and God, which can not be either the province of society or its governments.

Once he is frankly constitutional, the Catholic will demand, as the Liberal and with the Liberal, freedom for all, equality of all before the law, the emancipation of all minds and of all doctrines; and, from then on, nothing will be able to prevent any longer the one or the other from obtaining what they will have demanded.

We believe that it has become urgent indeed to pose the Catholic question, in order to prevent any ambiguity, any intrigue, any plot that could still in the future arouse again the enemies of freedom and harmony among us. In showing the

Belgians that they have been dupes until now of an empty ministerial fantasy, by means of which the ghosts in turn of Jesuitism and of Jacobinism were evoked in order to frighten them; proving to them that the union most sincere is for them the sole and last plank of safety, we hope to have rendered this union indissoluble, and to have affirmed it on these foundations which people will no longer succeed in undermining.

Union of the Catholics and the Liberals

It is no longer a question of knowing if the Catholics and the Liberals of Belgium can agree. They are in agreement: it is a fact; and a fact that doesn't need to be proven. One can seek to explain it; and it is this that we are going to try to do.

To this effect, we will examine what are Liberals in general; what are Catholics generally, and what were the Belgian Catholics; what the latter are now becoming; what change this conversion has made among the Liberals of the Southern Provinces of the Netherlands.

The object of this examination is to demonstrate that the alliance of the Catholics and the Liberals, far from being, what the men of power who opposed it have called it, "monstrous," is on the contrary natural, was necessary, inevitable, and will endure as long as the circumstances which have brought it about; that is to say therefore for as long a time as there will be sincere and disinterested friends of institutions and public freedoms, who will profess some different opinions on speculative or

religious matters: the results of this alliance will reassure completely whosoever does not have a personal interest in being afraid or at least in pretending to be afraid, and sensible men who never tremble for the sole pleasure of trembling.

In order to attain our goal, it will only be necessary, it appears to us, to pose clearly and frankly the questions.

And, this goal attained, will result, neither that religion has vanquished philosophy, nor that philosophy has triumphed over religion: the result of it will be that each of them, properly decided henceforth to stay on its own terrain, acknowledging that it has, apart from some rights to sustain, some duties to respect; and that, at such a point where the rights of others begin, end their own, and begin their own duties. The result will be that philosophy and religion have the same right to entire independence, to an unlimited freedom to assert themselves as they consent to, to establish the bases on which they want to found their existence, of spreading and of being propagated by the spoken word and in writings, by preaching and by teaching, by attacking and by defending themselves; except the duty strictly imposed by the possession of this right, to be aware, to permit the defense of the adverse party, to endure even its attacks, and to allow it every latitude to form on its side some partisans and proselytes. The final results of this will be that, one and the other having only a single temporal mission to fulfill, that of being mutually guaranteed all the freedom and all the security that the law assures them, it is inconceivable, not that they will be, after so many quarrels, reconciled for their common good, but

that they will have been able for such a long time to combat each other and, by their divisions, furnish the authority with the easy means of humbling them and of enslaving one and the other of them.

In a word, the result will be that the moral and religious order, that is to say, the order of opinions, is exclusively the domain of man, of the individual, and that society or men do not have jurisdiction there; that consequently there is neither a power, nor institutions, nor laws that can legitimately intervene. The authority that interferes with it, if this is an authority not freely recognized by those concerned, is only tyranny; and the folly that is brought forth in the hope of being freed by it of its adversaries, is sooner or later the dupe of its clumsy injustice, is on account of a reaction of the blind force which it has had the imprudence of calling to its aid, and is because of the new vigor that the persecution is never long in arousing among its victims. The positive and real order, that is to say the order of human acts and of material deeds, is subject to authority and to laws; and the first, the greatest interest to all the members of society is that the law does not cross the limits outside of which it is incompetent, that authority will never be arbitrary, and that the laws will be the same for all.

Let us pass to questions that we have proposed to summon in this writing.

In the natural sense of the word, the Liberal Party is the opposite of the servile party, and the Liberals are the partisans of the rule of institutions, substituted for the despotism of men. In

this sense, liberalism should be the born enemy of every restrictive measure, of every exclusive system. However the contrary until now has often taken place, and still takes place everywhere other than Belgium. Convinced of the goodness of their cause, and preoccupied with the fear which the opposing cause inspires in them, the Liberals in general have believed they ought to demand some guarantees against the Catholics, who they supposed or pretended to suppose had opinions destructive to the freedom that the progress of civilization had provided for people. But were they not aware that to violate, as they did, this liberty, was to expose it to the outrages of anyone who would think themselves, as they did, beyond it? that the Catholics had the same right as they to impose their opinions as the only mode admissible of improvement, as the necessary condition of national prosperity? that they would not have missed trying this on the first occasion favorable; and that thus, through a certain reversal of events, the slightest incidence could, from one moment to the next, overthrow the established system at such enormous costs of violence, despotism and injustice?

But, object the Liberals, we wish for tolerance: now the Catholics are intolerant in principles; we will not ever consent voluntarily to being their playthings: and it is our duty to outlaw a doctrine which, if we allow it to dominate, would proscribe us ourselves. - Yes, if this doctrine were strengthened, it would be necessary, let us agree, to fight it, and to resist the oppression by force: in case of defeat, we would have to submit ourselves to and suffer all the consequences of conquered feebleness. But then

it would no longer be a question of doctrine; it would be a question of despotism: and, with a little bit of patience, one would soon see this despotism succumb to its own excesses. That is how today the Belgian Catholics feel as well about the Liberals. They see clearly that one can invoke against them the same injustice to which they have formerly had recourse in order to ruin their adversaries; and they acknowledge that they need to be tolerant, if they want to be tolerated: they have comprehended finally that, in order to avoid servitude, they must renounce the right to dominate; that, in order that they can pride themselves in being really free, it is necessary that everybody is free like them. They have therefore renounced domination by assault, the only thing which could be harmful. When after this, a habit of dogmatism and intolerance still breaks through their opinions, their writings, their teaching, we can not see how this simple theory can hurt the friends of justice and order. Besides, how can we prevent the Catholics from expressing themselves? it is only possible by virtue of the dominion of the strongest; and from then on, having themselves called despotism to their aid, the liberal doctrines would be found in their turn exposed to the first sudden change of fortune.

Liberals of every country commit the unpardonable fault of wishing to reform ideas with laws. They don't ever realize that to torment, vex, do violence to men is a very bad way to convince them, and that to knock off some heads is not all to change them! Conviction only takes the place of another conviction. Does one believe because one fears or because one hopes? No: one believes

because one believes. Every human means fails against faith, which is strengthened by persecution and gives way only before a new faith. Reasoning alone is powerful against reasoning. As soon as one manifests pretensions to power, he prepares himself the greatest power which will hold him in check, that will one day muzzle him; as soon as one stoops to restrain the opinion which one is bound to refute, he ought to expect to be equally restrained and stifled later. Let us allow doctrines to be born and established freely, to clash and to disappear without an obstacle. Let us defend only the rights of all citizens, and among the latter the very rights of partisans of the doctrine the most opposed to that in which we have faith: we will thus serve humanity, society, our country, and more than anything else our particular interests and the one opinion which is our most cherished possession, that of our conscience.

We have only spoken up to now of the uselessness of the efforts of the Liberals to subdue the Catholics. We have been able to cite as examples, the unfruitful attempts that people had made in France and in Belgium to establish, on the ruins of ultramontanism, so-called national churches, by means of either some principles called Gallican, or those of the Austrian Josephists; while justice guided by reason made at the same time tranquil and peaceful conquests over the opinionated of all the parties. What people tell us now about these efforts is that they are indeed lawful. Has one the right to force someone to believe or at least into acting as if they believed, showing that one is of good faith and that one has only honest intentions? No indeed: truth itself

violently imposed would lose all its charms; she would become odious: it would be out of dignity and duty for all independent men to reject her as an intruder who fails to recognize their real rights to involve, to convince the human intelligence, while depending on the law to restrain tempers. And what person does not believe that with force and violence we would be understood here as mad persecutors, the bloody torments by which formerly people wished a little while ago to create partisans of the Pope, presently used to remove them from him. We know only that these extreme methods are no longer in fashion: people generally agree today on the uselessness and even the danger of creating martyrs; but, in order to be more moderate and more mild, is modern intolerance itself more legitimate? Isn't it always by virtue of the same principle that in the past the Protestant has been heatedly condemned by the Catholic, the Unitarian by the Calvinist, the atheist by whosoever believed in God, that people today condemn such a class of citizens to the privation of a party more or less extended from their natural and civil rights. - People are afraid of them. - That's right! that people clear away from them at first, while reassuring them, every interest is hidden; next people watch them attentively and strictly. But fear does not justify iniquity; and it is always iniquity to punish one who has not committed a crime. Only the tyrant enchains those before whom he trembles: the law smites the culprit, not that one who is supposed able and even might become one. Preventive measures are all acts of injustice, which sooner or later fall back on those who have perpetuated them.

The faults which we have reproached in Liberals are the consequence of a poor argument which we will summarize thus: "We love, we wish for liberty, and we are not of such religion; therefore our liberalism takes its source in our philosophical principles: so again, out of love for liberty, we should not permit that people be of this religion." This is grossly mistaken, as the Catholics are mistaken when they have pretended that people cannot be free in their own manner. It results in the fatal error of believing that it is enough not to be Catholic in order to be liberal; the opposite error of this so often made in the case of the Catholics, of thinking that devotion alone constitutes true patriotism.

One must be bound to recognize this incontestable truth, to know that, as citizenship is independent of doctrines and of beliefs, likewise it ought not to admit anyone exclusively, it ought not exclude anyone; and that the good citizen, that is to say that one who wishes equality of rights for all, is able, without compromising in the least the cause of liberty, to proclaim himself the disciple of the philosophies of the eighteenth or of this the nineteenth century, give up the dogma of the absolute or assume only the principle of utility, to believe in the infallibility of the Pope or acknowledge the legitimacy of examination, to work in the climate of all men of virtue and good faith or to maintain that, outside of the church, there is no possible salvation. They are neither virtues nor crimes; they are opinions: and, as we have already said, opinions are above the laws of society; they are an inviolable moral property, over which society has no right, and

which are subject only to the intellectual order, where other opinions have only a purely moral power over them like their own.

What we have established pertaining to Liberals, will greatly shorten the admissions we have to make about the Catholics. It is nevertheless the same false route. While the one group would wish to impede belief, the others would desire that people be believed. Neither one nor the other understands that in politics it is not and it cannot be only a question of systems or dogmas; it is only a question of liberty realized, of equality of rights put into practice; and for this, it is necessary, before everything else, to be aware of and acknowledge that, whether it is immaterial in fact that one believes or does not believe, it must at least remain entirely free to believe or not to believe.

It is truly inconceivable that the Catholics of all countries still persist in the error of working with all their power toward the destruction of liberal institutions, under which they are able to exist as well as their long-standing adversaries. Are they driven to despair by the doctrine which they believe themselves called upon to make triumphant? They candidly give up because of not having full confidence, when complete faith is the sole authority which they announce as being the truth! To have recourse to an unfamiliar force, is first of all to confess the insufficiency of the reasons that one produces; it is next to compromise the cause that these reasons must serve, and to expose its partisans to groaning one day under the weight of the same constraint, under which they will have stifled thought rebellious to their violances.

Would you wish to prevent reasoning or at least very important reasoning: eh! are you able to prevent thinking? Let us suppose for an instant that you would succeed in enchaining the human intelligence, in breaking every pen, in muzzling every mouth: what will this succeed in doing? That violence will replace discussion; confusion, order; a perpetual state of hate and war, goodwill, calm and peace. You are today the strongest: do you really dare to brag about your victory? Will you have proven, what? that you were right? not at all; but only that you used to be the most powerful and most numerous, and that you have exploited this honest advantage until you found yourselves in the presence of enemies more numerous and more powerful than you. You will be written about with R.P. Macedo in his Bête écorchée [Flayed Beast]: "Let us hurry to seize the constitutionals who, if the devil placed them above us, would seize us ourselves!" This is, to be sure, a preemptory manner of reasoning; because the dead do not reply: but, as one cannot kill everybody, the survivors grow tired in the end, and even stained; and then daggers do the justice of hangmen, and of new excesses prepared and necessitated by new reactions and new vengeancees.

We have said that Catholicism was very well able to exist under the regime of liberty for all, beside doctrines which contradicted it; this is not enough: it must be said that henceforth it will no longer exist, that is to say exist honorably, under this regime. For she has nothing of the honorable humble enjoyment of a freedom allowed as in France, and more or less restrained by some ordinances which vary with the caprices of power; this is

debasement of the calm of the tombs which the Catholic shares with the faithful of other cults under the clumsy patronage of Austria; it is the savage profession that is abominable which has condemned itself to take place in Portugal and Spain. It is necessary now in Catholicism, as in all other doctrines, whether they are philosophical, religious, sisters or rivals, there be a life neat and entirely independent, which it has only of itself, and which no power, except that of its own, is able to ravish. Without freedom of opinions full and unlimited, which necessarily carries with it the freedom to be mistaken, truth itself is struck dead. Let us ask the Catholics if it depends on their not wanting this freedom, at least one does not suppose them wishing to work towards their own ruin. And if they maintained that they were not mistaken, that they alone were on the right course, we would recognize readily their right to continue to maintain this, of even establishing it if they are successful, and of proving it. But this results precisely in other doctrines having an equal right. Allowing them to be debated freely among themselves and by themselves, all will be balanced, and will be settled spontaneously and by them: if one of them on the contrary appeals to an influence other than reason, all become entangled again and are confounded; and, instead of one very intellectual struggle for the sole profit of truth, are engaged in a combat to the death between persecutors and victims, which, taking turns in this role, now drains the cup of humiliations and griefs, now undertakes all the odiums of high-handedness and injustice.

These reflections ought to be taken seriously by the Catholics of the Netherlands, who, like all their co-religionists in every country, have, formerly, cursed freedom of the press, that of worship, that of opinions. What for! is the press silent for them alone? is it not a cult which they profess? are there not some opinions which they express? What do they have faith in, not in the laws nor in men; but in their opinions themselves, and in them alone: and their doctrine will have acquired, by no longer being wasted, the incontestable right to a free and independent existence in comparison with its rivals, with whom it combats, to propagate and to extend by all the moral means that it has at its disposition. And this is what it will always conclude by occurring anywhere where Catholicism is not dominant, and where it is not able to become so. In this position, it [the church] no longer asks these privileges so disastrous to itself in the future, they [these privileges] are asked the moment when the church obtains them because of those who it wishes to crush by its supremacy: on the contrary, in restricting oneself to call for equality, this first condition of equity, as Montaigne so properly calls it, to invoke liberty of all and for all, not only will Catholicism fully attain its goal, but it will be dealt again a life and a vigor which had seemed to escape it. Its enemies will no longer be able to challenge what it will not deny any person; and, becoming the most warm partisan of regenerating institutions, it will find in them therefore the most strong, the most steadfast support.

This is what Catholics of all countries will end by comprehending, and from then on their doctrine, at such a point where

it will not encounter obstacles, will flourish in peace; at such a point where people will have the stupidity of wanting to repress her, youthful in opposition and strong with justice, she will break all the bonds which people will have wished to encircle her, and will weaken the codes and the tribunals, the legislators and judges, with her irresistible ascendancy which will have put her outside of the law which she has in common with every human opinion.

Catholicism, in this case, far from being menaced by the progress of the enlightenment and by civilization, will deserve to be placed among the opinions which will have contributed to causing this civilization to be made one of the most swift and most decisive. It will become liberal in the sense that it will have reclaimed the rule of liberty. Ought people to be surprised if, after this moment, the Liberals march with her towards the conquest of their common rights, and if they become sincerely constitutional, with the example of benevolent adversaries with whom they are finally seen forced to acknowledge that they have the same interests?

In the final analysis, what is civilization if it is not intellectual and moral freedom without limits or restrictions, joined with physical liberty, civil liberty, restrained by the fewest possible laws, and restrained only by the law?

The Belgian Catholics have already comprehended all these truths: they can not therefore refuse any longer to understand them in the future; for, in the manner of the enlightened, one can not voluntarily take retrograde steps. Since they have been

constituted free by law, they have acquired the certainty that they will soon be free in fact, and that they will never again cease to be (liberty belongs to whoever merits her), that is to say that they will no longer pursue, by aiming to be elevated into domination, the risk of falling back into servitude.

Rome herself will be aware of it; and, always flexible to circumstances, will be careful indeed of giving her nuncio in Netherlands, the same instructions with which she charges those whom she sends to Austria, to France and to Spain.

In fact, if these people have the mission of opposing the despotism of the ignorant government, the fanatic and the Jesuits; if they must now be allied with an intolerant power, now be armed against it, now beg for or prescribe themselves some severe measures against their downcast enemies, now arouse their partisans against persecution; in Belgium their vocation henceforth can only be and can never again be other than, under penalty of losing all influence there, that of awakening and nourishing the public spirit, becoming the natural guarantor of religious rights, of impressing on patriotism the venerable seal of religious sanction, of imposing in a word the love of liberty and all the virtues of the citizen as duties of conscience.

This conversion of the Belgian Catholics has necessarily brought about the amendment of sincere Liberals. Putting aside all puerile and fanciful fear, they have called for the whole-hearted exercise of all the moral liberties for their fellow citizens and brothers, who had ceased to claim every civil privilege. They have cordially held out their hand to the Jesuit and the ultramon-

tane who confess the illegitimacy of all perogatives whatever they are and in whomever's favor they exist. They have worked without respite for the demolition of the Gothic edifice of instruction monopolized for the sole profit of power, under pretext of interest, either of knowledge, or of morals, either of society, or the orthodoxy of such a time, of such a country, of such a family; and they will abandon this entirely constitutional enterprise only after having led it to its desired end. Their opposition to the opinions of the Catholics, from a combat to the bitter end which it was at first, combat with people on both sides using arms which it was necessary to outlaw forever, has become a simple entirely intellectual discussion, where doctrines grapple with other doctrines, are defended by argument, and triumph by virtue of reason and truth.

Everyone has recaptured his place then, and each his natural rights. Freedom of worship has no longer been only a strict consequence of that of the opinions, freedom of the press of that of thoughts, freedom of education of that of speech. And these liberties have had to be complete, because it had been arbitrary, unjust, and tyrannical to limit them only on account of the fact that it was possible for people to misuse them: and there was no longer the least danger of thus surrendering the doctrines themselves, because all the freedoms must be equal for all without any exception, and that, the principles which they fused where professed, upheld, and publicly bestowed, mutual surveillance served as their check. But, after all, no longer having any mystery there (and there could not be any when no one was forced to dissimu-

late) all perversion becomes impossible: there is no longer any cause for conversion; and it would be even more absurd than unjust to want to prevent minds from being open to persuasion, minds from being open to conviction, of wanting to be a patron of an authority which seems in error, against the moral ascendancy of what appears to be truth. The triumph of opinion by its own force is never a tyranny.

People concur that there are still some interested parties who dread this triumph; but, they are still looking backwards, and that, judging the future by the past, they are finally admitting the uselessness of their efforts: that they could be doing even better; because, considering how many times some similar efforts have served to accelerate a victory that they had supposed it should prevent, they are giving up voluntarily, and returning to the way of integrity which is always that of order and of peace.

As for sensible people, of good faith and good intentions on both sides, who have only dreaded the next rupture of an alliance in which, in spite of their wishes, they scarcely dared to believe, we hope that this writing will fully convince them of the small basis of their fear. This alliance is not the result of a human covenant, concluded for the profit of one opinion or a few men; it is the product of the force of circumstance: above the conquest of civil liberty, it has for its goal the freeing of all intellects, the freedom of all opinions, and of those who have attached their dignity to upholding them; the pledge of its stability is the necessity which has established it and on which it reposes.

There will be indeed, from time to time, something exagger-

ated by one or the other party, which will appear to momentarily endanger their common interests by endangering the concord. But these will be mild clouds which will not be long in disappearing. Has the folly of such an isolated individual ever hampered the unanimous progress of sensible men toward well-being? has it reversed the natural order of things which is none other than the combination of the constant efforts of people towards the same end?

With perseverance and skill, we will thwart in the end all the plots that people would weave against our union; with moderation and calm, we will prevent without difficulty the imprudents, whatever follies that there will be in their proceedings, whatever hazards that there will be in their words, from ever troubling it.

Let us particularly guard against allowing ourselves to be misled or discouraged by some fanciful terrors. Let us always have confidence in ourselves. Let us walk conscientiously and with a firm step in the new way which is open before us; and, Liberals and Catholics, all equally friends of the public liberties and the institutions which consecrate them, let us cordially close our ranks, while saying in the example of O'Connell speaking to Cobbett:

"We have ratified our eternal reconciliation; that henceforth he would be declared unworthy of receiving the handshake of an honest man, that one among us who would not fight with all his strength for the freedom of the conscience, for the liberty of all men, whatever religion they belong to, whatever opinion they profess, whatever their sort is, their class, their status."

Réponse à quelques objections, ou éclaircissemens sur la question
catholique dans les Pays-Bas

Notice

An anonymous pamphlet has appeared in Ghent, in response to my own on the Union des catholiques et des libéraux. It makes me say what I have never said nor thought.

I would have disdained this maneuver as both convenient and not very fair, and would reply upon the good sense of the public to judge between the two writings. But the Réponse confuses and falsifies the Catholic question, and I believe it useful to give some enlightenments toward that which it advances.

I have presented them in the form of a dialogue between the author of the Réponse, with whom I assume textually what resembles an argument, and myself.

The silence of contempt will be all with which I will oppose the injuries that the anonymous person addresses me; they concern only me alone, and can dishonor only him.

I have responded in advance to the insipid pleasantries which I expect concerning my pretended conversation, by saying in my first pamphlet, that this is in no way a retraction of my philosophical principles: in fact, I profess them today as I professed them twenty years ago. I have varied only in the practical application that I make of it in my conduct. What is amazing about that? Everything has changed around me, men and things.

As for the greed and ambition which the author of the Réponse makes as the motive of all my actions, he has given in that the proof of a rare wisdom. I would not know how to deny it: I am invested with the contestable rights to the first pension that the government will allow; and, in reward for my active services, it will assign me at the earliest to settle into, either an easy-chair in the council of state, or a sinecure in the royal chamber. To judge by the path that I have taken, and by the place that I occupy at this moment, it is clear that nothing equals my cleverness in the great art of succeeding.....

This is all that I will say in this respect, not to the anonymous one, to whom I owe neither a confession nor a denial, and whom I will not gratify even with a denial; but to my fellow citizens.

I will confine myself, besides, to treating purely and simply the point of the union of the two Belgian oppositions, and the unchanging principles on which it rests.

July 14, 1829

Response to Some Objections

Dialogue

THE ANONYMOUS AUTHOR OF THE RÉPONSE:

The Liberals have united with the Catholics, but only to sign some petitions and to demand the redressment of some griefs. And there you are pronouncing that their alliance is indissolvable.

ME: I pronounce that their alliance will be indissolvable as long as the one would wish to unite with the other, that is to

say, for as long as the Catholics and Liberals will persevere, the one with the other, in wishing for freedom with equality of rights for all. The permission, given by the authority, to the Liberals to oppress the Catholics, would today no longer be an improvement in the course of civilization, as that permission was never accorded in the past by the same authority to the Catholics to dominate and vex the philosophers.

ANONYMOUS: Do you wish to give to the priest-party definitely and forever those Liberals who have put some confidence and some hope in you.

ME: I do not want to give anyone to any party, nor the Liberals to the priest-party, nor the priests to the philosophical-party. I am only trying to make all the parties comprehend that they are all losing mutually, if they are not dealt with frankly and without reserve according to the cause of liberty. The authority alone profits from their dissensions. Their concord will force the authority to be just toward all, that is to say to allow whole-hearted freedom for all.

ANON.: To love the public liberties, without consenting to the alliance with the priests, is this what it is to be liberal to your way of thinking?

ME: Without doubt. Because to be liberal, it is only necessary to love the public liberties. But let us understand indeed: these public liberties are for the Catholics and their priests, for the ultramontanes and even for the Jesuits, as well as

for the Protestants, the philosophers, and the atheists.

That you would not consent explicitly to an alliance with the priests, is unimportant: as long as the priests want the same freedoms that you yourself want, you will be tacitly allied with them; and that is all that your country asks of you. As soon as the priests would want domination, and I of course will break with them; from then on the priests will be lost, not because you and I will have abandoned them, but because they will have, themselves, betrayed the cause of liberty which gave them all their strength.

ANON.: The constitutionals, not being partisans of the Catholics, are in your eyes the most guilty in that they are not constitutionals.

ME: No, if you please; but the constitutionals who, through hatred of the Catholics, violate the constitution when the latter call upon it, are in my eyes, I confess, more guilty than if they had never affected respect for the fundamental pact.

ANON.: You have written on your so-called liberal banner: "Outside the church there is no salvation."

ME: Another error. I have said only that those who profess that dogma, if in addition they fulfill their duties as citizens, must not because of that be deprived of their political and civil rights, since they have naturally the indefeasible right of thinking whatever they wish about the questions of the future salvation of mankind, as about all other questions.

ANON.: The word pseudo-liberal that I find again in your writing....

ME: This word, not only is not found there again, but is not found there even a single time.

ANON.: This word, would you apply it to all the friends of this liberty, who do not sympathize with the Jesuits?

ME: If I had employed it, I would have applied it to the alleged friends of liberty, who reject the Jesuits, solely as Jesuits; who do not wish for freedom that the Jesuits share with them, even when the Jesuits only ask for freedom for the anti-Jesuits as well as for themselves.

ANON.: What! the men who have written of the spirit of the church, a scene so sad and so deplorable, these men were able to pretend? they have pretended to imply that the priest did not love liberty!

ME: The men who have written impartially the history of the church, have shown there some priests who did not love freedom; they have recorded a fact. The actual fact of priests loving freedom, and calling for it for others as for themselves, is not less real. And this fact is easy to explain. The priests were able to dominate in the past, and they dominated. Freedom alone can triumph today; and she will triumph over the priests, when the priests will struggle with her, with the priests and for the priests, as for the other citizens, when the priests will have fought for her.

ANON.: Better informed than I, you know positively that the priest-party, being able to conquer the power, has had the modesty to refuse it.

ME: I know more than that; I know that the self-denial of the priests of power is, as that of the nobles of their privileges is, as that of the rulers of the arbitrary is, a renunciation, if not forced, at least brought about by the compulsion of things, and that, consequently, its irrevocability is guaranteed by the same necessity which has rendered it inevitable.

ANON.: I see where I am learning from some edifying accounts.... with what respect the priest-party speaks of the civil laws, of those of marriage, for example; with what eagerness it has acceded to the philosophical idea of praying for all men, and particularly for the lawyer Hosselet, dead without confession.

ME: The priest, as such, owes precisely the same respect to the civil laws of marriage, as the philosopher to the nuptial benediction of the Catholics. He, like that person, who, as a citizen, would violate these laws, would be punished, not because he is a priest, but because he would have violated the laws.

With regard to that which is required when a priest agrees to a philosophical idea, it is entirely as reasonable and as tolerant as if one demanded that a philosopher agree to a religious dogma. The Catholic priest is no more obliged to pray for the lawyer Hosselet, than the lawyer has ever been obliged to confess himself to a Catholic priest.

ANON.: What you are saying, people do in France and in England, people do even in some non-constitutional countries, such as Germany and Tuscany.

ME: In France, there is an established church just like England; it is the Gallican church. For, in order to do what I say, it is necessary that the state not interfere with anything of the church, neither to establish it nor to overthrow it, neither to patronize it nor to enslave it. The Gallican church enslaved or, if you like it better, patronized by the government, is entirely at the same time a burden to the Catholics who wish to be independent, and to the Protestants and philosophers who protest fairly against the privileges of a state religion. In England, it has only been a very short time since she has ceased to oppress the Catholics, and she still has not entirely emancipated them.

As for non-constitutional Germany, that is to say particularly the Austrian states, and as for Tuscany, all the sects who are tolerated there, all the parties which people allow there, live in peace, I admit, in Austria and in Lombardy under the baton of the master, in Tuscany under the rod of the regent. Opinions which are not dangerous are free there: others, and the power to declare dangerous those which it pleases him to, must be carefully hidden. This country is still the least well off I have spoken of.

ANON.: To say that in Belgium the opinions are oppressed, because the Jesuits are not directing education there...

ME: It would be a foolish thing to say that. But to maintain that opinions are repressed there, and that one opinion among others is denounced there, because the Jesuits are not able to take part in education, to teach jointly with the Josephist Catholics, the Protestants, the philosophers and the atheists, is to point out a fact. Oh well! the proscription of a single opinion puts in danger all the others, to each variation in the point of view of the censoring authority; it destroys, consequently, the freedom of conscience, likewise the arbitrary detention of a single individual puts back into question the inviolability of individual liberty.

ANON.: People are intolerant, you say: where is the proof of this?

ME: I am coming to give you that. I will add here that which furnishes all the official or officious refutations of my pamphlet, which has no other goal but the founding of the reign of truly universal tolerance.

ANON.: People deprive one class of its rights, who?

ME: The Jesuits, to cite here only one of them: a single example suffices.

ANON.: And of what rights?

ME: Of the right of teaching, to speak only of that one. But, it is a right of the citizen, and the Jesuits are citizens.

ANON.: People exercise some preventive measures; what about them? on what occasion?

ME: I have spoken to you about that. To impede a person from teaching is a preventive measure. The repressive measure consists only of punishing those who, Jesuits or others, have committed, by teaching, an offence provided for by the penal code. He who sees only a single preventive measure by necessity will soon see many others, and render them all possible: far then from preserving the state from the least danger, they always end by precipitating some evils from which only the return to these principles will succeed in extricating it.

ANON.: Society, whatever one says about it, can request an account of the education of its citizens, as it can of the maintenance of its army, as it can of the action of its tribunals.

ME: The army and the courts belong to the society which makes them give account of themselves. The citizens do not belong to it; they are themselves the society, and have nothing to disclose about what only concerns each individual. Society, the state, can take the most detailed account of its particular schools; but it has only the right to supervise the schools which individuals set up and manage, and in the direction of the schools it is no longer permitted to involve itself, or in the administration of the individual estates, the domestic affairs of citizens, the private education they are giving or trying to furnish their children, the conversations they hold in their homes, their opinions, their thoughts. In order to prevent parents from handing over their infants to institutions that you condemn, you hand over the parents to the government: would not the remedy be worse than the

disease? and to avoid what you judge as possible abuse, would you commit a real injustice?

ANON.: The cassock in the eyes of society is no more than a gown, today, prejudiced by science; society no longer has the same preconceived idea of morals.

ME: That is only fair. But is it anything other than society that has been prejudiced by ignorance, by corruption, by fanaticism, by unconstitutionality? Be fair towards the cassock and gown; and wait to punish the man, the citizen whom they clothe, that the priest and the monk would be rendered, by some acts, unworthy of the protection of the law: until then justice is due them entirely as much as you.

ANON.: Rome ought to feel, if I believe you, the necessity of improving itself.

ME: She will refrain certainly, you talk to me thus in order to reproach me with this phrase, from giving to her nuncio to the Netherlands the same instructions with which she charges those she sends to Austria, to France and to Spain. You forget to add what is found several lines lower, namely: under penalty of losing, that is to say in the Netherlands, all her influence. Rome then will contribute among us to awake, to nourish the public spirit, these are still my words which follow immediately, to impressing upon patriotism the venerable seal of religious sanction, to impose the love of freedom and all the virtues of the citizen as the duties of conscience; or indeed all its influence will be lost here: Rome

will no longer do anything here nor will be able any longer to do anything here!....I would desire warmly to know what you deplore so bitterly, if it is the loss of the Roman influence or the awakening of the public spirit. Before answering, consult the government.

ANON.: I will speak to the government... You are never weak or disarmed in the face of Rome.

ME: I will speak to the citizens, you are never disarmed before power, in whatever hands it is found, either those of Rome or of its enemies. And if some auxiliaries reach you to combat the abuses of this power, never ask if they come from Rome or elsewhere.

ANON.: The services which the liberals render to the priest-party are of the present; those which they expect from it are future. I see where they are dupes.

ME: And myself also, I see this: it would be possible however that I would see it for other reasons than Anonymous. I do not see, myself, as duped by those who no longer dupe us and divide us, or at least profit from our divisions.

In order to prevent the former double-dealing from recurring, the opposition has cordially agreed to the present service of freedom of the press, which the Catholics have strongly helped to obtain for them; and she will agree likewise to the future service of freedom of education, which the Liberals will not grow tired of demanding for her.

ANON.: Whoever does not love the Jesuits, whoever reproaches them in constitutions, in orders and in education fatal to the people and to the kings, is a false Liberal.

ME: Not entirely true. One can not love them, one can make all the reproaches imaginable to them, without being a false Liberal. One would become one only by begging for some exceptional laws against them; but while invoking, in order to refute their doctrines, the assistance of the attorneys of the king and of the constabulary.

ANON: There are only false Liberals in England and in France; the Lachalotais, the Monclars, the Séguiers, the Gilberts de Voisins, and in our days the most honourable supporters of the French court, are all false Liberals.

ME: Pardon: those in England and in France who are opposed and are opposing still the domination of the clergy and of the Jesuits are true Liberals. Formerly one could only be a true Liberal there in that manner. Now, everywhere the clergy and the Jesuits have felt that it is enough for them to be free, everywhere they have comprehended that they had to be confined to being equal before the law with all the citizens, true liberalism consisted of sustaining them against every infraction of their rights; the false Liberals on the contrary have sought to spread suspicion between them and the citizens in order to better hand over one or the other to the authoritarians in power.

ANON: It must be recognized that one class of citizens depends upon a foreign sovereign.

ME: All the citizens must obey the law; but they owe only this to her: that is why those who want to can believe in the intellectual, moral, and religious infallibility of a foreign prince who people call the Pope: because the law has not forbidden this and did not have the right to forbid it.

ANON.: It must be admitted that this class allows the Pope the right of deposing kings.

ME: Let us suppose that it allows him this, the king who will have always been just, will he be less firm upon his throne? and the Pope arriving at the head of his soldiers in order to overthrow him, will this king find fewer citizens ready to shed their blood for the country and its institutions?

ANON.: It still must be admitted that these kings could be killed when the Society of the Jesuits finds it profitable.

ME.: You wish to say when the Society of Jesuits is powerful enough to commit this murder, or rich enough to pay for it. She has this in common with all other societies, with all individuals. The public strength and the laws are to prevent such crimes at this point.

ANON.: It will be necessary....to permit people to preach sedition and regicide to the young people.

ME.: The penal code will answer you; it punishes direct provocation in violation of the laws.

ANON.: In choosing between the influence of the constitutional king and that of ultramontaniam, good minds will never hesitate.

ME.: No, most certainly, they will not hesitate. If, by influence, it is the moral direction that you mean, these good minds, supposing that they must necessarily make a choice, would be eager to choose that of ultramontaniam, whose seat is far from us, and which has no longer among us the means of compulsion at its disposal, other than that of opinion. The state morally directed by means of a sovereign who has become in this the sole master of the laws and their organs, and absolute chief of an army of henchmen, could thus imprison, torture, put to death anyone who does not think as he does, would be under the yoke of despotism in its most ideal and most sublime beauty.

 If the influence of which you speak is only the government of the realm, it is defined and regulated by the fundamental pact, and those who would wish to actively bring the foreigners in here, would fall still one more time into one or the other circumstance provided for by the penal legislation.

ANON.: It is not a matter here of anything other than that of returning to the Jesuits the mind of the new generations.

ME: No one has the right or the power to make this restitution; but also no one has the right or should have the power to stand in their way, if the spirit of the age would naturally lead

us there. Therefore, I ask you, does the spirit of the age generally manifest to want to be yielded to the Jesuits? You know very well that it doesn't. The spirit of the age manifests itself as wanting freedom, but very whole-heartedly; and consequently, even the freedom of giving itself to the Jesuits if ever it desires to take that course.

ANON.: The very constitution of the Jesuits, their rules, their character obliges them to do certain things which are not of opinions alone, but the manifestation by exterior acts, of these guilty opinions.

ME: You add: and that extent of the domain—the laws. I would not have been able to better answer you.

I will nevertheless still make you observe that acts alone will be guilty before the law, but in no way the opinions which will have given rise to them.

ANON.: The Catholics and the Liberals will no longer be divided! who says so?

ME: Their interest.

ANON.: Who orders them to do this?

ME: Necessity.

ANON.: Who has any orders to give them?

ME: Their firm intention to be free.

ANON.: Do you believe that the alliances of opinions and doctrines are commanded as the charge in the twelfth period?

ME: The opinions and doctrines, no; the interests, yes.

ANON.: Some among us have believed that it was advisable to sign petitions;.....everyone has done this who wanted to.

ME: Except those who have sacrificed their conscience to their private interest, to their hope of succeeding.

ANON.: This liberty, we do not want to hand it over, to alienate it, to surrender it to anyone.

ME: Nor particularly to the authority.

ANON.: The friends of liberty....they will separate themselves from the Catholics, if they judge it convenient, without that no one can force them to act in a sense opposite to what they will have resolved.

ME.: And I pledge myself, if likewise I find it convenient, to aid them, as far as I will be able, to executing this generous resolution.

ANON.: Education given to the Jesuits. Anyone who is not for them then, is in your eyes in the same position as one who defends the absolute power.

ME: That is, education permitted to the Jesuits as to all others: I have told you why. Those who violate with impunity one

principle, can violate all of them. Is that not absolute power then?

ANON.: Until now the priests have more or less served, although in their interests, the friends of liberty.

ME: It is solely in their interest that they had to help them: that proves to us only that, as long as they will love liberty, they will continue to help its friends.

ANON.: Now the friends of liberty can only be of further use to the priests.

ME: The friends of liberty only help in this way: they back up the priests who serve it with them.

ANON.: The hypocrites of our days, with those words of intolerance and of ministerialism, have lost in public acceptance all of even the most disinterested friends of philosophy and of liberty.

ME: One loses no one in the public opinion with words, unless those words signify something real and speak something of truth. Intolerance; I have given some proofs of that (because people are intolerant in yet a different way than in vexing in the Pope's name): ministerialism; it would be useless to give oneself up to it.

As for the disinterested friends of philosophy who pension, and of liberty who find a place for it, their conduct, to be sure, has been at all times very liberal and very edifying.

ANON.: To go to their goal, to fend off their adversaries, and to arrive at domination, this is their project and they follow it.

ME: It is no longer the concern of disinterested friends: these friends would be ours if we succeed one day in this lucrative domination that they suppose is the object of our desire. However little that pains them, let us hasten however to reassure them; they will not have to change masters. Our goal being the triumph of all rights and the rights of all, there will not be domination other than that of the law. We will maintain it for them by fending off our adversaries with the truth, but never by violent means, but only by distinguishing them as disinterested friends of philosophy in the government and of freedom in its offices.

ANON.: The good men write to each other: how does one become accustomed to my parish priest in Paris always preaching absolute obedience to me, and my parish priest in Ghent always preaching freedom to me?

ME: I answer those who make the good men speak thus, that actually in civil rights it is not their parish priest who is charged ex professo to make them understand the extent of it; that every citizen is obliged to maintain these rights, when he possesses them, to try to obtain them, when he is deprived of them. That he will in no way refrain from listening, if he finds them correct, to the decisions of the cures of Paris and Ghent on

matters of conscience, and that will make him also follow the good counsels of the cure of Ghent solely, in political matters.

ANON.: Does the Pope have two languages and Catholicism two opinions?

ME: What does it matter to you? is it not sufficient that, among us, the priests have only one language and that they are only of the opinion of those who wish for liberty?

ANON.: When the convert writer will tell us that the priests are allied with virtue and patriotism, we will answer that it is because virtue and patriotism are able for the moment to be good for something for them.

ME: That is what I would have answered also. And, I would have added, that I am convinced that patriotism and virtue will be equally good for something for them, afterwards and a long time after the actual moment, I permit myself thus to hope that they will continue indefinitely to be allied with patriotism and virtue.

ANON.: The wise man does not ever believe in the opinions of the priests and their devotees.

ME: As it will please him. But will he refuse to believe in their behavior?

ANON.: I know, he says, that among all the nations of Europe, the clergy has tended to be dominant; and I know that, successful in power, the clergy has never allowed freedom.

ME: Therefore one must indeed be wary of letting them succeed here. You say that, once the clergy has become the power, all that is not the clergy ceases to be free: this is to reason forcibly! It is clear that, if the clergy dominates, it will not allow freedom, more than it will allow any dominant authority which is not the clergy. This is not therefore a question of dogma, of beliefs, of sect, of religion; this is very correctly a question of power. Oh well! the opposition or, if one prefers, the nation will always be there in order to prevent this power from abusing its strength, without being anxious to know if it is the clergy or not.

ANON: The clergy aspires to domination.

ME: When that will be proven with regard to the actual Belgian clergy, as it still must, before the punishment of its keen desire to govern us, there must have been a beginning of the execution of the usurpation of the power which people accuse it of, and that by means of an ordinary material act contrary to established laws. For, I do not suppose that one would want to arm the law against those who would also be suspected of aspiring to domination.

ANON.: When the clergy possesses domination, it robs the people of all hope of freedom.

ME: That is no longer worthwhile. Under any given absolute government, priestly or otherwise, there are only some slaves who only have as their own what the master wishes indeed to allow them.

ANON.: To work to accelerate the domination of the priest-party,....to ally oneself to the clergy in order that it would be stronger,...that is, one can affirm it, the secret thought of the convert M.De Potter.

ME: I will certainly refrain from affirming what is the secret thought of the anonymous one: I content myself with pointing out his obvious falsehoods.

ANON.: In the Netherlands, under a Protestant king, this domination is forever impossible.

ME: Why then publish a pamphlet against my secret thought? But the anonymous one does not say enough: he would have had to say that this domination is impossible under some liberal institutions, whatever the religion which the chief of state professes.

ANON.: Who can say that with some Catholic elections, some Catholic States-Provincial, and a Catholic majority in the Chambers, that the king would not be forced, in order to comply with the perverted public spirit, to some concessions which he would make while groaning and out of pure necessity?

ME: First of all, let us agree on the sense of the word perverted. Several kings, in extreme times, have made while groaning, and out of pure necessity, some concessions to the public spirit of the period, which is love of liberty and the urge for equality. This is not, I think, the spirit that you call perverted.

This point settled, let us consider the concessions which the

King of the Netherlands would make to the Catholic majority in the Chambers, the result of Catholic elections, for the sake of some Catholic States-Provincial. Would these indeed be concessions? It seems to me that, according to the very text of the fundamental law, these would be some laws of sound and due form, emanated from the three branches of the legislative power, legally constituted.

That makes, of two things one, either these laws would be just for all, and then why fear them? or they would violate rights (I do not say only that they would break the aspirations) of the minority, and then this minority, if it were only a single man, would enlist and fortify itself in the long run for the sole ascendancy of equity and reason, until that time when society shook off the yoke of the despot and of violence, which it would have suffered for some time.

ANON.: In a constitutional state, is a Catholic government so impossible with a Protestant sovereign?

ME: Even an equitable government, frank, constitutional, although certainly more difficult to form than a government entirely Catholic or Protestant, is not impossible. Also, it has for its goal that of upholding the wishes of the citizens, Catholic and Liberals, certain then, that what is besides the belief of the ministers, is quite impartially free.

ANON.: Today real alliance with the priest-party; and tomorrow, if it acquires the power or if it approaches it, alliance against it with those whom we reject today.

ME: No. Alliance with any party, against any party, as a party is understood; is not variation of any kind. On the contrary, perseverance calm but steadfast in the continuous progress against the authoritarian, with whatever party that it supports, with those who follow this same progress, without those who follow another. Indissoluble union with the friends of the public liberties, whoever they may be, against the enemies of these liberties, likewise whoever they may be.

ANON.: the devotion to the clergy that you yourself will have worked for such a long time to consolidate.

ME: Here it was now or never to cite, to prove; but it would have been necessary to cite accurately, to prove incontestably, and that was impossible. I defy the anonymous one to produce a single line of writing where I have preached devotion to the clergy. I will repeat to him for the hundredth time that I condemn all devotion just the same, if this is in the cause of freedom and truth, and that I have not any interest in getting angry or in wishing to appear angry when the Catholics condemn it like me.

ANON.: This terrible dilemma crushes you: either you will hope for the domination of the priests, and you are in this case only among the hypocrites and false Liberals; or you think that in the crisis which they can give occasion to, someone will always be there to save the country. Who? your enemies!

ME: Not so terrible. I believe them of having already replied victoriously.

Remaining with the crisis of the country and the generous enemies who should then save us. This supposed crisis would be, above all, fatal to those who would have aroused it, even without our having been aided by actual enemies (it is you who have called them that) regarding the public liberties, who would then become friends.

ANON.: Is it correct that the priest-party dominates in a constitutional state?

ME: You force me to always answer the same thing: in a constitutional state, the fundamental pact alone rules; and the good citizens watch without respite so that, under its name, none usurp the public authority.

ANON.: Is it loyal to aid this party, still oppressor of public liberties, in binding its cause to that of these liberties?

ME: No, when it oppresses the public liberties; yes, when it defends them.

ANON.: Is it proper to praise the sympathy of the priests for philosophical ideas, when everywhere they have persecuted, burned, or exiled the philosophers?

ME: It would be folly; for it is free to the priests to have antipathy for these ideas, entirely as the philosophers have for many of the dogmatic ideas.

The penal code has provided for this in that no one can persecute, burn, or exile any person for what he thinks or what he believes.

ANON.: And in the case where one could foresee that they will seize the power, the only means of safety being united with Holland and with the Protestants, is there from then on any disgrace in founding this future safety on some men who people now insult every day in order to please the Catholic party?

ME: Unless you specify where, when, and how I have insulted the Protestants and the Dutch, you will undergo still another time and for the sake of terminating this overly long dialogue, the disgrace of a formal denial.

Man of bad faith! it is in no way a question of arming ourselves with the Catholics and the Belgians against the Protestants and the Dutch, nor with these last people against the others; it is a question solely, and you know this as well as anyone, of forcing the Protestants and the Dutch to be fair, or rather of forcing the authority not to exceed its limits, that is to say to allow everybody all the freedom to which each has a right, and in being itself neither Protestant nor Catholic, neither Belgian nor Dutch.

Post-Scriptum

At the moment when this writing was on the press, people told me about a critical article that one of the journals of Brussels had published against the pamphlet, the Union des catholiques et des libéraux. This article, in addition to the obliged accompaniment of abuses, essential to every official refuta-

tion, contained the single plausible objection which has been made to the principles expressed in this pamphlet. Here it is textually:

"The law can not evaluate a doctrine as long as it remains speculative; but, as soon as it is converted into positive application, it pretends to rule the exterior conduct of men, it returns to the jurisdiction of the civil law, to which it must conform."

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"In order for us to make it better understood, let us turn to things of the highest nature: religion is only an intimate rapport between each man and God, and as long as this feeling remains individual, the law has nothing to see. But is not there in the nature of religious feelings something more, do they beget nothing more than a simple correlation between man and God, and are they not between men a source of rapport, from which necessarily spring a religious society, a government of this society, practices, forms, in a word, a sacerdotal government?"

"And, if it is thus, which of the two societies, either the civil or the religious, ought to have supremacy, the sovereign government of society, which of the two must depend on the other? what does M.De Potter respond.

"We have already said, a government cannot be the judge of the truth of dogmas, but when they concern the civil order, it must apprehend the knowledge of it, be it what the nature of the doctrine is if it is something contrary to the public good, be it what is the manner of designating it."

I responded indeed willingly as they had invited me to.

A doctrine, as such, is forever only speculative, even when it prescribes some material acts, and it does not fall under the power of the law; the applications to which it is turned, proceeding from it only: it does not fall under the civil jurisdiction as intending to rule the exterior conduct of men, nor even as ordering it; but this exterior conduct enters in again there: and, likewise that the social man, in so far as thinking, is beyond the law; likewise the social man, in so far as acting, must submit there. Thought is and is only able to be the domain of the conscience; the law has nothing to do with it: acts are and can only be in the domain of the law; doctrines do not serve, in any case, to excuse them.

Yes, religious sentiment with a correlation between man and the Divinity is a source of relations, from where there flows necessarily a religious society, but entirely deprived; practices, but entirely, if I can express myself thus, domestic; forms, but entirely voluntary; and a sacerdotal government, but without coercive means, without any force other than that of opinion; that is to say entirely opposed to what people mean by government, and to what a true government in fact is.

That is, it seems to me, the difficulty resolved. Let us add however to these reflections some new reflections.

The civil society has no supremacy over the doctrines of the religious society, no more than it has over the opinions of each individual; for it is as an individual, as a man, and not as a citizen, that he embraces, that he professes a religion, whose dogmas are always for him individual opinions, without ever being

the doctrine of a society, even of one whose opinions are identical to his own. On its side, the religious society will in no way be able to dominate the civil society, nor even have over it the least influence, in what concerns its fundamental pact, its legislation, its administration, its police; which do not concern it, and which, consequently, exist without it and, if it is necessary, would exist in spite of it, no more than religious society can make any individual give way by some means of constraint to his opinions, to his forms, to his practices, in a word, to his government.

One of these societies will never therefore be dependent on the other, neither will have nor will ever be able to have the sovereign power over the other.

The civil society will proclaim in vain: I consent to such doctrines; I patronize such opinions; this form of worship is agreeable to me; these practices of the church are pleasing to me; the faith of these dogmas would be much more agreeable to me than that of some other dogmas. The independent man, the religious society which has respect for itself, will beware indeed of forsaking its faith or principles: and, if they would do this, they would lose in an instant all right to their own esteem; they would become torn apart from all moral dignity, their principal welfare, their strength, their life.

On the other hand, the religious society will never admit to inverting, to troubling the established political and civil order. Its members will allege in vain their faith, their worship, the precepts to which they submit themselves, the rule that they are ordained in or which they have accepted, to legitimize an act

which the laws forbid, to exempt themselves from a duty which they impose.

If the law leaves the circle which has been marked out for it by the very nature of things, by ordaining an act or defending another over those to which it does not extend its power, this law is unjust; it will hardly endure. It is generally because of this that all the governments have had to cease administering by force the sacraments to those whom the church or the priest had declared unworthy of it; it is in this manner still that they cease little by little to intervene in the refusal, not of burials, but of the ecclesiastical ceremonies with regard to deaths; it is thus finally that they will cease soon to demand that the civil marriage precede the sacramental benediction which constitutes the religious marriage, and that the law must limit itself not to recognize, without putting any obstacle there under any pretext or in any event.

The effective and active protection which the Catholic church still asks for in the tribunals, in a few countries, for its dogmas, is it not openly disapproved by all the sensible souls, as much by the religious party as by the philosophical party? The opposition placed by the jurisprudence to the civil marriage of a priest, because of his sacerdotal character is an obstacle to ecclesiastical marriage, while the code acknowledges for every citizen, civilly free, the right to be married, does it not bring a smile of pity to anyone who has the least idea of the true principles of legislation and of their most strict consequences? The conscript called up by the law, would be discharged as unfit

because he said, for example, that the monastic order to which he was pledged, did not permit him to bear arms? Would the monk succeed in removing himself from the taxes which strike him, under the pretext that he has taken a vow of poverty?

Let us not confuse what is in itself very distinct; and let us declare frankly that the dogmas would not be able to interest the social organization, and that, consequently, it is forbidden to it to meddle there; that, without growing anxious about anything if one doctrine, regarding its nature, or regarding the manner of stating something, has something contrary to the public good, it must be restricted to maintaining the public order, by means of the full and straightforward jurisdiction that it has, in the name of the law, over the acts of the citizens: and the public order will be maintained as long as there is liberty for all, equality for all. But therefore let us clearly and incontestably establish this real omnipotence of society over acts, that no doctrine can exonerate them if it condemns them, nor condemn them if it absolves them.

Let us above all not confuse the very material, very temporal church, such as it was able to exist and as it really existed in the past, and the church of our day, very spiritual, very intellectual and moral, a simple school of opinions, of dogmas and of doctrines, such as it exists today, everywhere where the most simple ideas, the foremost practical notions of public and natural right have penetrated into its spirit. The church formerly has had, in fact, out of wealth and power, a government and some laws which it has made people observe, be it by means of the

forces which it might prevail upon itself, be it those of the secular arms which it invoked and which never refused it their support. It has preserved out of all that only its laws and its forms: but material strength is missing it, and, if it is still an authority to whom people listen to voluntarily and whom they obey freely, it is no longer nor can no longer be anything on account of power. It is today no longer hostile to the governments which allow it all its independence, all its liberty, as the heads of the modern knight-templars are not feared who, rendered power equally, are dividing still, without the kings of the land finding anything to fault, the provinces of their states, and while ruling those whom they have joined together, unknown to the people, from the foundation of the assemblies where they play the roles which they have indeed been innocently dealt.

But, let us not forget, the condition of allowing the entirely independent and free church is important, is decisive for the peace of the people and the governments. The least clash attracts to it attention, gains interest, stirs up opinion in its favor, augments its zeal, hundred-folds its moral forces, and prepares in the distance a storm which will be too late to exorcise when it will be close to exploding on the imprudent people who were not able to foresee it.

Fin.

Lettre de Démophile à M. Van Gobbelschroy, sur les garanties de la liberté des Belges, à l'époque de l'ouverture de la session des états-généraux (1829-1830)

Advertisement

The advocate Jottrand presented, several weeks ago, his ideas on the Garanties de l'existence du royaume des Pays-Bas: I am trying to assemble mine on the certainty that the Belgians have to finally become and then to remain free, under the protection of a national power, such as the fundamental law has established, that is legal, impartial, just and therefore strong.

The Belgians cherish their existence as a nation only because it guarantees them freedom. These pages ought then to be considered as a sequel to the pamphlet of M. Jottrand, and as a proof besides to add to those which he has so patriotically gathered, of the inviolability of our national independence.

I have addressed these reflections to M. Van Gobbelschroy, because in my eyes this minister is to us the personification of the one erroneous system which could be able for some time, to mislead the power, to lose uselessly several men of merit to the public opinion, and to retard the progress of the liberty: this system is that of half-measures, of timidity, of a show of moderation which is only weakness, of groping, of hesitations, the system in a word as absurd and as disastrous to the people as it is to the ministers, called see-sawing.

As for M. Van Maanen, his colleague, who proceeds more

directly and more rudely, and who never lets go, even to get better control afterwards, is sufficiently known and consequently without real danger to us: he can still annoy us, do us some evil, but can no longer deceive us nor impose silence on us.

He deserts temporarily the employ as head of the office of the Department of Justice, for the expedition of current affairs; but, as minister, he is constitutionally dead.

Letter from Démophile to M. Gobbelschroy

My Lord,

Will you always be so mistaken about men and about things?

At the time of your nomination as Minister of the Interior, the Belgians buried in the sleep of the most profound apathy under which the particular affairs of each was not concerned, allowed M. Van Maanen the means and the leisure to organize the paternal despotism of which they began, after one year only, to feel all the weight. We are not restrained; far from it: the extravagant system of taxes which they overburden us with was vividly felt and bitterly criticized; but simply at home and between friends, because people still ignored what the public manifestation can be, firm, unanimous with the indignation of all the people. People whispered, people hated and people paid for it.

You saw then, my Lord; and, liberal up to a certain point, if not out of conviction, at least to conform to the vogue of the men of your time, you abated, not the system by which you oppressed, but the exterior forms of this system of ruin and death: you did not break our chains, but you sheathed them with care,

in a way that they no longer offended us to the quick as before, as people treat the convicts whom they do not want to be liable to succumb before they can reach their destination. Why do you suppose that men who do not complain, have reason to complain? We continued to champ the bit and carry the pack with which we had been charged; and our country, tranquil on the inside in spite of the violation of all our rights, celebrated outside of it where people believe these rights are respected; our poor country, domineered like a vast college of little babies silent and trembling under the rod, is fulfilling in the case of our neighbors the epitaphs today so disparaged and so foolish in the classic land of hospitality and freedom.

Can you yourself ascribe to, as far as it is in you, this cruel derision? Having understood that your liberalism cannot be maintained on the side of the opposition to some of our representatives, although it was only an illusion, a shadow of opposition, a decoy, and perhaps even a particular speculation, you have sought to muffle it, and have succeeded there without much difficulty. It was there, my Lord, and you are often praised as for a brilliant victory, that was the culminating point of your insignificant political career. The trumpeters always independent of the ministers were playing well for some time to proclaim your lofty deeds and your glory. There was no longer an opposition! You had overwhelmed it with the government, as liberal itself as this opposition had ever been able to desire it to be! There remained only to enjoy so much success: and I scarcely doubt that the ministers and their creatures do not enjoy it with all their

faculties, at the expense of what is right.

But it was necessary to prevent the opposition from reviving. One tried it, charming each day the ears of the new counselors of state, peers and governors, as well as those of the aspirants to these sweet refuges, by the recital of the exploits of the power against the monsters of ignorance and fanaticism, always ready, they said, to devour us. The ministerial liberalism par excellence did not cease to give the most irrefutable proofs of its existence and of its strength. The Jesuits were outlawed; the students of the Fathers dispersed: the Catholic clergy finally forced to be trained in everything that was in the interest of the government which it knew, to render itself capable of everything that the government might require of it. Who would have been able to demand more? Did this not suffice, and even beyond, in order that it was demonstrated that the ministers governed according to fundamental law? The bishops were not censors; would more be necessary so that the press would be entirely free? Teaching was forbidden to disobedient priests; it did not matter consequently who this was.

It is indeed true that, at times, some Liberals who were too credulous who wished to use all these liberties which people extolled to them without cease, were cruelly punished because of their good faith or rather their simplicity, and that they paid dearly for the error of having believed that, since people were able to slander the Catholic religion and its clergymen with impunity, one ought at least to be permitted to examine the conduct of the agents of the king, of the constabulary, keepers

and other public officers of the place. These rigors made a fairly disagreeable impression. But the government was soon successful in counteracting this with the joy which the news of whatever coup d'état allegedly caused in the interest of the wounded party; and the Jacobins, as people decently called the Liberals independent of the government, indeed quickly forgot the unconstitutionality committed to the detriment of any one of them, at the sight of two or three French priests, described as agents of Mont-rouge, escorted to the frontiers like some evil-doers, or of an expedition of M. Walter against the Ignorantins.

Nevertheless, the moment which put an end to this hoax was at hand. The Catholics had ceased to speak of religion, theology, dogmas; as far as they kept this language, they had only been understood in the seminaries, and their opposition had only been the opposition of the sacristy: they appealed to all now, and in all their prayers, this freedom that the majority of them had for so long a time not appreciated, and the entire nation listened to them. Far from fearing the press more, they loudly asked for the complete emancipation of it, and called out for open concurrence in the future legislation on education, to the profit of everyone as to their own: in a word, they brought into the doctrine, only good, only truth, only the equitable, only the unchanging, for the common good.

If these things had remained thus for several years, the Catholics, as one of their journals has very spiritually said, would have monopolized the opposition in their hands alone; and, rejected by the Liberals, persecuted by the authority, placed at

the head of the regenerating movement by the people, they would have given to Belgium a spectacle which, most certainly, she had never again expected. Happily the very strength of things might urge on towards a much more appropriate denouement satisfying every disposition.

It is difficult, my Lord, it is even impossible that the word LIBERTY can be pronounced before a generous nation, without finding sympathy there in more than one soul, an echo in more than one heart. This is what happened and what necessarily had to happen in Belgium. Soon people only heard resound from every side "liberty, equality for all": and "the Union," this terrible union, the death knell for our ministry, was projected, concluded, consolidated, and, as people have already told you, my Lord, it was indissolvable. There were in the entire country only the ministers who were astonished, who could not understand anything, who still doubted the truth.

Well, they had never understood anything save their private interest, their interest of the moment: now, this interest, which had become for them a question of existence, demanded imperiously that they continue to excite, to maintain the division. Had they not always done this? Since they wished to do this still, would they likewise succeed again? Why would not the Catholics be charmed, as usual, by seeing themselves offered the philosophers in sacrifice? Would the latter no longer accept with alacrity being able to profit from the oppression of the Catholics, who had henceforth handed them over without any reserve?

No, my Lord; all this had become impossible: and why? I

am going to tell you. All the Belgians wished to be free: they had finally perceived that it would not impede that moreover, either being Catholic, or being Protestant, or being philosophical, and that, whatever they were moreover, they were not less free because those who were another thing or even entirely opposed, enjoyed an equal freedom. They agreed therefore, unless I am mistaken, they felt spontaneously and generally that the Catholic citizen, the Protestant citizen and the philosophical citizen have constantly one quality which is common to all of them, that of the citizen, an interest which is common to all, that of liberty, that is to say of maintaining inviolable the rights of each, defended by the general will. There is no need, my Lord, of telling you the rest. Your sagacity will supply that without difficulty, and you will foresee little by little that freedom in Belgium could at last one day be assured, be guaranteed.

To better convince you, please reflect with me on the following truths:

Every nation who loves freedom is already free by right; as soon as she will want to be free, she will be in fact. People were never slaves for a long time if they deserved to be free: one can always say that the liberality of a government is in a sense directed by the moral energy with which the citizens have endowed it, and the generosity of the principles which guide their conduct.

I have said that, to be free, it is sufficient to want it. That word is taken here in the largest sense. For one can only pretend that the society wants freedom, in which each member is always trembling before authority, dreading more than all other

things the loss of his property, his liberty, his life, aspiring only to the honors which the authority distributes, to the favors that it lavishes on its valets, to the places where one can serve it.

A free nation is composed of citizens ready for every kind of sacrifice, who know to resist the high-handed, without being frightened of its menaces, without allowing themselves to be seduced by its promises, haughty and inflexible when they suffer for the country, simple and modest when they triumph with her, defiant in times of unjust harshness and corrupt offers, and having only a single goal, that of independence for all, of liberty and equality in the rights of each.

Now, does it not seem to you, my Lord, that there is beginning to be in our provinces a good number of these citizens? For myself, I have never doubted for an instant that, as soon as some would have had the courage not to give way, the clumsy anger that the government would be eager to explode against them, would have soon multiplied them beyond even the most legitimate hopes.

The thing has happened precisely so, and the victory of good reason, that of the people, will no longer be uncertain. Today it is only a matter more or less of the time that it will take to obtain it intact, solid, durable; and for that, the same means which have served to prepare for it, must serve again to render it complete. It is always out of unselfishness that it must be, out of vigor, out of resolution, out of constancy, out of unity in purposes, out of union and out of the general view among those

people who, having the same cause to defend, to sustain, to make triumph, must always march under the same flag and obey the same slogan.

For some days, the ministerial barkers have become hoarse crying that the union has dissolved; that such and such a Catholic journal no longer mentions its colleagues the apostolic foreigners, and holds forth with complaisance on the royal amenities of Don Miguel; that a Liberal sheet has, by reprisal, resolved to no longer turn its attention to some griefs of the party of which it is the organ; that the deputies are ready to follow this example, and that they will have scarcely recovered from the kind of bewilderment where the recognition of the false route that they have been so blindly engaged on during the last year has thrown them, when they will begin anew among them the combat to the bitter end, whose result will be for us the domination of the Pope, represented by the Capucins and the Jesuits, or else the paternal government of the dynasty which has, so say its salaried flatterers, imported freedom and hospitality into Europe.

I will not quibble over words. The view that I wish to give here while passing to the deeds themselves, should be as fleeting as the circumstances which are the object of it, and does not require lengthy development.

I will confine myself to saying that, even if all who advance so immodestly as champions of our pitiful men of state would be true to the letter, it would still not prove anything to the detriment of the cause that the Belgians have, for a year, so ardently embraced. What are some journals that an unforeseen and

more trivial circumstance, their interest offended by a stockholder, their self-esteem wounded by a collaborator, can mislead at every instant? The other journals are not in favor of pointing them out then or profiting by their fall, without which there was never anything lost for the public, whose opinion was to them on the whole an incentive and a reward? What would be even the defection of one party of the opposition, be it Liberal, be it Catholic, for the thousandth time sunk under by vain hopes, illusive promises, childish fears? What would be produced finally, if they were possible, the slackening, the discouragement, the hesitation, the torpor of all the national representation? Some days, some weeks, some months more of a delay, and after that a redoubling of the ardor and strength, which, instead of permitting what people were amused for a long time to call the seat of capitulation, would sweep it along on the bayonette of assault.

For, is no one aware, that this is what has to draw our deputation out of the lethargy in which, for fifteen years, it had been immersed almost entirely? The accumulated governmental injustices, offending presently the rights of the Catholics, soon those of the Liberals, always the fundamental law and the rights of every citizen; injustices backed up with a humiliating arrogance, with a revolting obstinacy, and which the journals pointed out, proclaimed, repeated until they had officially become the grievances of the nation; in a word, the general dissatisfaction. Now, and let us never lose sight of what the whole question is, has the dissatisfaction ceased? The former tranquility, the result, not of the irreproachability of the authority and the satisfaction of the

governed, but of the apathy of those who could no longer revive, the irritation which has taken its place has it been calmed by the certitude that the affairs of the nation have finally assumed a national progress, that the people no longer have anything to long for? Have all the griefs been redressed? Have the journals of the opposition been reduced to silence by the impossibility of still finding some abuses to reform, some improvements to demand? Are the Liberal sheets losing their readers who, convinced that henceforth everything is for the best under the best of governments, wish now only to hear regarding this government some hymns of gratitude, some concerts of praise? You, yourself, my Lord, would not dare to assert it.

Let us say then rather that the disgusting toadies, some flatterers of our so-called men of state and their acts appear in the midst of us and disappear unobserved, and appear again only by means of the money that these men derive from our purses in order to pay their ignoble eulogists: let us say that, except for the bondage of the press, all the former abuses still exist, and that they are today as a year ago, as fifteen years ago, and more than fifteen years ago, exploited for the profit of greediness and of the tyrannous; let us say that the list of the griefs is still frightening, that the griefs themselves are real, demonstrated, incontestable and clearly enumerated; let us say that in the final analysis, the question is no longer that of knowing if we will be more or less free, free in such a manner rather than in some other, but indeed if we will be free or slaves, if we will be freely governed by the agents to which we have entrusted the

authority necessary for the conservation of public order, will they still reserve us the right of supervising them, of rebuking them, of rejecting them, or if we will be muzzled and penned up, in order to be today pedantically ruled by one, tomorrow paternally chastised by the other, always despotically held on the leash for the good pleasure of the master and the needs of his favorites.

All this is understood, all this is profoundly felt by everybody, and the universal exasperation of which it is the result, is the only real guarantee that we ought to hope for, the only good guarantee that we can have of the perserverance of the national opposition, of the future regeneration of Belgium. For, one should not be mistaken about this: if, since the limit of the sufferings of the people has been reached, the grievances of the parliamentary opposition have found support in the nation which repeats its clamors, it is now the nation itself which requests with great cries the fall of a system rendered unpopular, an odious monument to the ministry which has sown only injustice and humiliation, and which has only reaped hatred and contempt.

It is therefore in vain, my Lord, that the power would still attempt in the future to spread the divison, to organize discord, to flatter some vanities, to frighten the timid, to make promises to the ambitious, to put to sleep the most credulous: the people are awake, and' this suffices for their safety. They will arrive at their goal with or without the opposition of the chambers: they will arrive there by their own energy if not by that of their representatives; by the noble and firm attitude which they themselves would know to take, if these agents do not show themselves

worthy of them.

One can, my Lord, prolong the sleep of a people: you particularly, to whom nature has accorded the art so precious of diplomacy, of ancient politics, of caressing opinion, of appealing to one group, of flattering the other, of not shocking anyone with the repulsive appearance of absolutism in its scandalous nudity, you were able better than anyone to soothe us for several years more, telling us from one time to the next some of these stories that you know so well. But, once a nation awakens, one can never again lull it to sleep. The hour of dreams, now an agreeable one of prosperity, now of future liberty, sometimes as terrible as congregations extinguishing with one hand the torch of the sciences and with the other setting alight the woodpiles, has passed without return. It is for present happiness that people wish, and, for acquiring each in his own way, real liberty, by means of which every individual who obeys the laws lives, with regard for the rest, absolute master of his person, of his actions, of his opinions, of his interests, and arranges his own affairs as he intends, that is to say much better than if the government had done it, always and above all exclusively occupied with his own welfare. And the congregations, and the barbarity that they drag along behind them, and the inquisition which they keep all ready to purify us with, makes even the most credulous of us shrug our shoulders, even the children. With liberty, my Lord, one fears nothing from all this: one allows the monsters to approach, and, instead of the scoundrels which they appeared to be, one recognized them as wavering batons. In spite of the ministry, and even

with the help of the congregations, as long as they interfere, free competition will maintain by itself alone the sacred fire of the letters and sciences; the press will supervise and when it must, will harass the authority, and will force it to govern in the interest of all; the love of a country where each has his rights and exercises them, will give birth to some prodigies in the moment of peril, and finally one will have a true classical land of liberty, because it will belong to the citizens, of hospitality because it will be inhabited by men.

Look at this idea, my Lord, and as you will acquire little by little the custom of believing yourself to be in a free country, where the government is made on behalf of the citizens, and not the bourgeois on behalf of their lords; where the law must be the expression of eternal justice, in harmony with the rights, the needs and the will of each person; where the agents of authority are only the employees of the nation, managing the affairs of the nation, in the interest of the nation alone, and accountable for their acts before the nation; where each citizen owes nothing to anyone if he respects the rights of others, free besides to think, to speak, to write, to dogmatize, to teach as he judges suitable, about its risks and perils: if, I say, my Lord, that you will acquire this habit, you will be able to play in your emancipated country an altogether different role than that which, until now, you would have lowered yourself to undertaking.

What if, on the contrary, it is the vessel of the arbitrary whose bitterness you merely want to disguise by rubbing its edges with honey; if it is the Van Maanen system which you seek to

replaster, to revarnish, to beautify; if these are the petty methods that you continue to employ, the petty measures you assume, the petty intrigues you command, the petty finesses you make triumph, believe me, my Lord, you will not be long in perceiving that the theater of your operations has entirely changed face, and that what once earned you the applause of the principal boxes, will now draw to you the hisses of the ruthless but just pit, which has recovered possession of its right to judge the actors without appeal. The ruses with which you would wish to serve yourself would be discovered, and, consequently, outwitted as soon as they were put into effect: you would no longer deceive anyone, or at least you would not deceive them for long, and anyone who would have been your dupe, would become the most heated of your enemies: the men who you would have thought gained for the government, would no longer be, because of what you would have lost in goodwill, for in the literal sense hurt by the government and by you; you would have only deputized in the ranks of the opposition some others indeed more vigorous than they, who would only surrender the hiatus to some combatants even more violent; because, won over by the ministry, these turn-coats would be lost forever in the eyes of the people, and I suppose that it is useless to prove to you any further that the people are everything, and, without them, the government, you, the national representation even, are nothing: the chamber room which you would flatter yourself as having overcome, or corrupted, or misled, or muffled, would be without strength, not only to serve you, but even to prevent the nation from compelling you to retreat: the insufficient

concessions which you would offer, only reveal your weakness in the eyes of a people who henceforth, in the interest of their dignity, will wish the frank and total acknowledgement of all their rights, and, in the interest of justice, without which there is no possible freedom, will demand that this acknowledgement take place for the profit of all and for all equally, without restriction or distinction: the union that you would have believed dissolved by causing something to be exaggerated by one party or the other, would be restored with all its ministerial hatred: this union no longer depends on some blunders which would make such a Catholic impassioned, such a philosopher intolerant; it has taken root in the spirit of everybody, and everybody, you know, my Lord, has more reason, more good sense and even more mind than you; it is founded today on rights well recognized and common needs, which it is not given to the ministers to destroy, and which once aware of, people would never again know how to forget.

Behold, my Lord, my completed task, and, if you like your post, your reputation, if you like yourself, your way is marked out. The foundation of the era of liberty and justice in Belgium is now sure, or, to speak in the language of the bureau, is inevitable: let us never forget it. The opposition to the former conduct of the government is henceforth invincible, whoever's hands it falls into, whoever are its spokesmen, in spite of all the obstacles with which people are able to oppose them; because behind them will be constantly found the profound, ineffaceable sentiment of the rights of the violated nation, and the general discontent. This discontent, my Lord, and the wholesome defiance

which it has given rise to, and the active vigilance which is shown in the national inclinations, and the energy, and the perseverance, and the unselfishness, and the steadfastness, and the courage, no longer of a few boasters, but of all, understand, my Lord, of all, guarantees us a better future, better than your sugary promises, than your deceitful protests, than your popular figures; guarantees us in one word what is the object of all our wishes, what will be henceforth the goal of all our sacrifices, of all our efforts, liberty.

Eleutheropolis, 15 Novembre.