Olin Levi Warner's Defense of the Paris Commune

ALBERT BOIME

Although the Paris Commune lasted for only seventy-two days, its fundamental ideological and symbolic significance thereafter for both the left and the right guaranteed its unfading presence in historical memory.¹ Class struggle was never more vividly demonstrated for France and the world, and that bourgeois society felt in 1871 the fears experienced by the aristocracy in 1789 is seen first in its frantic suppression of the short-lived experiment and second in the enormous swell of literature devoted to the justification of this suppression. It is certain that the form the early Third Republic took in the aftermath was decisively shaped by the Commune.² The original circumstances seemed even more shocking than previous revolutionary outbreaks since they did not begin with the unexpected, but could be logically traced to the rout of the French army by the Prussians in the autumn of 1870 and the ensuing four-month siege of the capital. It was as if Parisians had masochistically turned on themselves in their frustration over defeat, in an orgy of civil self-destruction that momentarily distracted their attention from the humiliating presence of their foreign conquerors.

The people of Paris heroically held out against the invader long after the French armies had surrendered at Sedan in September 1870, and this in the face of inaction on the part of the army officers based in Paris and the majority of the provisional government established under Adolphe Thiers after the capitulation of Napoleon III.³ The tense situation reached a boiling point two months after Paris yielded, when the anxious government—now transferred to Versailles—tried to seize the artillery of the Paris National Guard. This group, organized under emergency conditions, comprised mainly artisans and laborers who forged the pieces of light artillery with their own subscription money. The cannons did not belong to the government, and the guardsmen did not relish them falling into the hands of the Prussians along with the other arms and war munitions surrendered with the fall of Paris. They moved the artillery to the heights of Montmartre and kept close watch over them. When on March 18 the Versailles government sent a body of troops to capture the guns, the National Guard fought back and drove the Versaillais from the city, creating, in effect, a state of war between Versailles and Paris. It was under these exceptional conditions that the Commune was proclaimed.

The origins, evolution, improvisations, and final collapse of the Commune were observed with keen fascination by the international community. The memorable im-

---

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
the Paris emissary of the International's General Council, who reported total disorder among the members of the French branch as late as February 28, 1871. Nevertheless, some members of the Commune did belong to the International, which stood loyally by the insurrection, and for this it was easily made a scapegoat in the aftermath.\textsuperscript{13}

The chorus of abuse in the American press quickly mounted as the Commune unfolded, and after its destruction it was frequently used to epitomize all the horrors of "communist" philosophy. Not only the press, but the Sunday sermon, the political oration, and the popular pamphlet depicted the Communards as the most depraved specimens of the human race. The Commune became a kind of Rorschach test for conservatives and moderates, bringing out their worst anxieties about the family, religion, property, and social order. They constructed a demonic image of the Communard activists, and thus excused every atrocity by the Versailles.\textsuperscript{12} Harper's Weekly wrote that "in the interest of civilization [the Commune] must be suppressed," and on the eve of the all-out attack on the Commune by the Versailles armies, it declaimed that "popular madness ... rules the hour in Paris," and with the reds in control no one could guess "how soon the thirst for blood may be aroused." Finally, the crushing of the Commune that outraged "every instinct of religion and humanity" was a great victory for France. "The effort of the Commune ends, therefore, without the least sympathy or respect."\textsuperscript{13}

The obsession of the American press with the Commune is seen in the fact that it commanded a large share of the headlines during the early 1870s. Major newspapers gave their readers the impression that anarchy ruled in Paris, with bloodthirsty mobs sweeping the streets in search of innocent victims. Visceral images of the revolution of 1789 were recalled, suggesting a return to the Terror, mob rule, and the guillotine. This time, however, the victims were to be drawn not from the aristocracy but from the ranks of the wealthy middle class. The press emphasized that the working people had revealed their incapacity for governing by their resort to thievery and murder, and so in the end demonstrated the intimate connection between socialism and violence. Like those who calculatedly raise the cry of Marxism-Leninism today, the press persistently equated the Commune with "communism" and thereby identified it with the destruction of property. They warned further that the Commune was not just native to France but could be exported to America as part of an international conspiracy. As late as 1873, the New York Times, with the Commune in mind, could write:

\textit{If the time ever came—which we earnestly hope will not—when the socialists of the cities would combine to strike at the wealth heaped up around them, the native American [i.e., socialists were mainly "foreign agitators"] would be as ready to take the rifle to put down the rebellion against property, as he was to put down the rebellion against freedom.}\textsuperscript{14}
The dire example of the Commune could therefore be used to keep domestic dissidents in line. One paper labeled a contemporary coal miners' strike in Pennsylvania as "The Commune of Pennsylvania," and another identified the strikers with Communards. A few years later the New York Times ran an editorial, entitled "The Communists," that tried to placate rural fears of "Communist riots and socialistic outbreaks in this City." It admitted the existence of "a dangerous class" of "ruffianly, brutal, and uncontrolled" types such as inhabited Paris, who only needed an incentive "to spread abroad the anarchy and ruin of the French Commune." But it insisted that these potential rioters were only pawns, and that the hardcore communists were either French or German radicals who had fled undemocratic societies and still kept up their old ways. Working people generally ignored them, and only "a general calamity . . . would increase them to the surges which presage storm." Although the panic over the Commune now appeared over, it becomes clear in subsequent articles that the Times was warning against a storm of its own making.

It is certain that the press's systematic abuse did much to shape American public opinion on the Commune. Several popular novels of the late nineteenth century treated the Commune as a type of authoritarian state against which Anglo-Americans and their aristocratic French allies heroically pitted themselves. Although it had its defenders in the United States, they tended to be radicals painted by the press as would-be Communards themselves. Those moderates who refused to join the chorus of unqualified denunciation, like the vehemently antislavist Nation, acknowledged that the Commune could hardly have administered itself for any length of time if there had been only a gang of "lunatics and loafers" at the helm as other members of the press claimed. Indeed, the Nation's main worry was that it would provide a model for other attempts at "labor reform."

Even more positive was the impressive, authoritative report of John Russell Young for the New York Standard, which had been in the forefront of the denunciators. By chance, Young was sent by the State Department on a secret mission to Europe in May 1871, and he seized the opportunity to investigate the situation in Paris. He visited the barricades, attended club meetings, entered churches, and roamed the streets of Montmartre. He soon discovered that the Communards and their experiment had been viciously libeled and slandered. The city was operating in an orderly manner and there was no looting or mob action despite the apparent absence of the police. He observed one enormous crowd of at least thirty thousand men and women that conducted itself with the greatest decorum. He had expected churches to have been converted to some nefarious use, but instead he found the Church of the Madeleine to be a quiet place of worship. Finally, he learned that it was not the Communards but the Versaillais soldiers who had begun the shooting of prisoners and unarmed civilians in cold blood, and that during the combat they did more damage to property
than the Communards.19

Young recognized that his report ran counter to the popular version, and he stated that it would have been easier for him to have seconded the wild accounts: “The newspapers do little more than scream, and you wade through column after column with much of the feeling of stumbling through a morass or a field of briers.” But, like a dedicated journalist, he resisted the “exaggeration and falsehood” of his fellow correspondents and insisted on confining himself “simply to what I saw, or to such facts as come upon the responsibility of some trusty eyewitness.”20

In this context the legacy by a notable American sculptor, Olin Levi Warner (1844-1896), of a manuscript defending the Commune is of the utmost historical importance.21 Warner was surely a “trusty eyewitness” to the events, and it was probably the persistent calumny on the part of the American press that prompted him to write his paper. Significantly, Warner’s view of the Commune coincides with the contemporary leftist interpretations. It is not simply the fact that he defended it that places him among the radicals, but that his exposition focuses on those very issues singled out by radical proponents as the basis of their revolutionary hypotheses. For Marx the key to understanding the contribution of the Commune to socialist evolution was not simply the momentary “dictatorship of the proletariat,” but that it replaced long entrenched hierarchic and bureaucratic structures with democratic systems at every level.22 Here is Warner characterizing the actions of the Communards:

After completing its own organization in whole and in part, the first thing done by the Commune was to issue decrees abolishing certain wrongs so long inflicted upon the people by governments that had existed and establishing certain rights and privileges they were justly entitled to, but which had been so long denied them; in fact, the whole tenor of the Commune pointed to reform in all departments of the government and in all directions, and all of these reforms were perfectly just and natural.

Having been a wage earner most of his adult life, Warner inclined to a sympathetic understanding of the events of the Commune. In addition, he directly observed and participated in the events leading up to its formation. He joined the crowd celebrating the establishment of a republic on September 4, 1870, and although most foreigners fled Paris during the Prussian advance Warner decided to stick it out because his sympathies were “with the people.” When the Prussians began their siege, Warner enlisted in the corps of the Légion des amis de la France organized to supplement the regular forces. As the siege persisted month after month, he suffered with them the deprivations of fear, hunger, and cold. During the days of the Commune, Warner bore witness to the savage vindictiveness of the Versaillais as they bombarded and slaughtered innocent men, women, and children. He shared in danger faced by all Parisians in the poorer quarters as shells and bullets whistled all around him day and night. On the positive side, he profited from the Commune’s cancellation of rents owing for the period of the siege and worried that the decree would be revoked should the Versaillais resume power.23

Warner’s manuscript was prepared as the draft for a speech, perhaps meant to be delivered before a group that centered on the official U.S. organ of the International, Le Socialiste (founded in New York on October 7, 1871), which reached only the French community. Warner was especially close to this community of émigrés in New York City and eventually married the daughter of Dr. Elie Auguste Eugene Martinache, whose portrait he modeled in 1876, the year before he most likely prepared his address on the Commune (see note 37, below). Martinache had been a regimental surgeon in the French army until the advent of the Second Empire, when he immigrated to America and allied himself with other anti-Bonapartist exiles.24

Warner’s manuscript strikes at some of the most cherished conservative illusions concerning the Commune. He begins by stating his aim to discredit the mistaken notion “regarding the meaning, motives, and final results of the Paris Commune of 1871.” Like John Russell Young, he emphasized that what he had to say was not derived from previous historical or popular accounts, but would be based “upon facts and incidents of my own personal experience.” His reason for emphasizing his own participation and rejecting historical accounts is that thus far
history had been “one-sided” in dealing with the lives of the oppressed: “History... speaks of the crimes of the Commune! When she speaks of the tenfold darker crimes of Versailles then she will have dealt justly with the subject and not until then.” Warner’s outrage at the way the story has been told is seen in his rhetorical questions near the end of the manuscript:

Why is it that [the Communards] are still reviled and held in such contempt by even the thinking and intelligent and their deeds looked upon with such horror and their memories covered with such infamy while the Government of Versailles with her black hearted assassins escapes the censure of the world? Why are the crimes of the Army of Versailles dragged out of sight and hidden from the gaze of civilization when those crimes are as black and infamous as any that stain the pages of history.

Warner answers with a class analysis, although he simplicistically divides the antagonists into “labor” and “aristocracy.” When he uses the latter term again, he identifies it more generally with “conservatism” and exploitation and hence as an inclusive term for all the enemies of the Commune.25

Warner was disturbed to “find that most people in America have but a vague and in many cases an entirely mistaken idea regarding the real meaning of the term Commune,” which the press had deliberately identified as synonymous with communism and socialism. Warner points out that the term “commune” in France was used for the municipal governments in all the smaller towns and cities and implied a certain degree of regional autonomy. During the Second Empire, the major metropolitan centers such as Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles—also the most likely to have radical or republican politics—were denied the right to elect municipal officers and were governed by appointed officials. Thus the declaration of the Communal form of government at Paris in the wake of the French capitulation to the Prussians signified a renewed commitment to democratic politics in the actual and symbolic center of France.26

Warner next tries to dispel the popular image of the Commune as a rogue operation by tracing its origin to the logic of the circumstances—the defeat at Sedan, the abdication of Napoleon III, the proclamation of the Republic, the Prussian siege of Paris, the removal of the government to Versailles, the attempts to seize the National Guard’s artillery. As Warner stated, “There was nothing unnatural about this. Any of us would have done likewise if we had been men of principle and willing to defend those principles.”

Warner repeatedly points to the Versaillais as the aggressors and insists that most of the actions taken by the Commune were defensive. The Versaillais government continually bombarded Paris and sent forays led by gendarmes (line troops often fraternized with the populace whereas the police had less compunction about charging their fellow citizens) around the walls of the city. Warner witnessed daily funeral processions for national guardsmen slain by the Versaillais, and recounts one story after another about the latter’s atrocities. At the same time, he insists on the “perfectly honorable and just” motives and intentions of the founders of the Commune, and in his footnote to this statement dismisses the common notion “that the Communards were nothing more or less than a band of cut-throats and incendiaries with theft their object,” a conclusion derived from the fearsome idea “that Communism meant equality of fortune as well as equality of position in the body politic.”

Indeed, the first acts of the Commune included the publishing of a decree separating Church and State and several other political and social reforms that moved it closer to a democratic society, but they proved to be too radical even for those who had the most to gain from them. Warner blamed this on the basic conservatism of contemporary society. He also reminded his audience that the Commune declared its “good and peaceful intentions” by decreeing the burning of the public guillotine, thus demonstrating before all the world that it had no desire to return to 1793 and 1848. Here again Warner acted to dispel the inflammatory association of the Commune with the Terror of the French Revolution and the relentless allusions to the guillotine, Marat, and Robespierre.

Warner, however, is weak when it comes to defending the “crimes” of the Commune. One senses that he is on the defensive here, and he seems to have confused his chronology, suggesting that the Communards took the initiative in shooting sixty-four hostages that in turn led to reprisals by the Versaillais troops. The policy of shooting prisoners and unarmed citizens in cold blood had in fact been inaugurated in April, long before the bloody climax of the conflict. the semaine sanglante of May 22-28, and it was rigorously administered by the Versaillais all along. The shooting of the archbishop of Paris, Monsieur Georges Darboy, and five others, an action which was carried out reluctantly by the Communards in retaliation, did not take place until May 24, during the last days of the Commune. Several efforts were made to exchange Darboy and other clergymen for the veteran revolutionary Blanqui, but Thiers declined the offers.27 While the American press reacted in horror to the shooting of Darboy and the other hostages, it passed in muted judgment over the systematic execution of Communards, which had merely intensified during the Bloody Week. Whenever a barricade was taken every prisoner was shot on the spot, an act captured in the famous lithograph by Edouard Manet. Any citizen caught on the street with a weapon—loosely defined as a clasp knife, razor, or even a rock—was executed. When a citizen was found inside with Communard literature or was identified as a Commumard on the street, he or she was lined up against a wall and shot. Thiers had clearly given the order to show no quarter, and the result was the most vindictive massacre in French history.

Warner nevertheless feels the need to justify the Commune’s crimes, and he writes of the long history of the
Church’s support of tyranny and its role in the suppression of French people. Warner is unmistakably anticlerical—that perhaps is the subtext of his address—and goes on about the tyrant who owes his power to the priestly clan “as they keep the masses degraded for him.” The “poor laboring man” recognizes at last “that he is the slave of these vampires of humanity and longs to free himself from their vile clutches.” When granted their sovereignty at the moment of the Commune the people sought first of all to rid themselves of this huge incubus, and here Warner reiterates (incorrectly) that the initial act of the new government was to declare the separation of Church and State.28 Warner’s impassioned construction here of the motivations of the Communards suggests that he closely identified with them on this issue.

Warner claims that the shooting of the Archbishop and other priests took place “soon after” as an act of “vengeance” for the accumulated suffering and deprivation, an egregious error in chronology that compels an apology more in line with the explanations of the enemies of the Commune than with the actual historical circumstances. Similarly, he uses the same excuse for the early executions of General Claude Martin Lecomte (who on March 18 led the main attack against the heights of the Butte Montmartre to capture the guns and ordered his troops several times to fire on the unarmed women and children thrusting themselves between the hostile troops and the National Guard); and ex-General Clément Thomas (who was detested for the role he played in the repression after the Blanquist revolt of May 1848 and again during the workers’ insurrection of June 1848, and who as officer for the Government of National Defense during the siege again betrayed hostility to the working class by trying to prevent the general arming of the Paris National Guard and by pitting the bourgeois battalions against the proletarian ones). The assassination of these two generals, although to be sure encouraged by an infuriated crowd, was carried out by mainly military personnel and took place amid the wild disorder occasioned by the initial attempt by Thiers’s army to disarm the citizens of Paris on March 18.

Warner fails to mention the attack of the National Guardsmen on the Friends of Order, a group composed of a group of men from the upper classes who hoped to intimidate the Commune with a show of strength on March 21-22. Their demonstrations culminated at the Place Vendôme, where the National Guard headquarters were located. The first day the square was cleared peacefully, but on the second, the Friends of Order returned in a hostile mood with concealed weapons to contest the Central Committee’s control of Paris and their call for elections on March 26. They pressed up against the Guard who fired first into the air and then into the crowd, leaving a dozen people dead and a dozen more wounded. Although the shooting was not authorized beforehand by the government, the event gave a nasty twist to the Commune and betrayed some of its contradictory forces.29 Nevertheless, this was the last manifestation of violence on the part of the Communards until Bloody Week. Communard violence took place early on, at the height of confusion and anxiety about the actions of Versailles and the Prussians.

Surprisingly, Warner also fails to provide an adequate defense of the pulling down of the Vendôme Column, one of the most notorious acts of the Commune. Warner dismisses accusations of vandalism, and instead attempts to justify its destruction on the basis of aesthetic judgment. He claimed that the Vendôme Column “was no great work of art” and no great loss to the world of art. It was “merely a pretentious copy of the Trajan Column at Rome,” and the bas reliefs running spirally around the column represented “the worst kind of sculpture.” As a sculptor himself, Warner may have felt that his credentials allowed him to speak out authoritatively on the destruction on the column, but he seems to have lost sight of the fact that it was primarily a political act rather than one based on an aesthetic opinion.

Curiously, Warner owned a copy of the decree that ordered its destruction as “a monument of barbarism, a symbol of brute force and of false glory, a confirmation of military rule contrary to the international rights of mankind.” Young was another American eyewitness who appreciated the Communards’ destruction of the Column—which he called “a monument to assassination and misery and woe.” It symbolized the type of militarism that sent out the children of France “to murder and devastation.” And he went on:

But the thought that to-day a people have been brave
enough to root out a monument to murder; to say that there is a higher mission for nations of valiant people than Republicanism, that the time has come for people to do what statecraft has failed to do as yet, namely, to make peace and courtesy and living in the world which God sent them to occupy, without, of necessity, cutting their neighbor’s throat; the thought that this poor Commune, with all its recorded knavery’s has been wise enough to do this, and brave enough to bear witness to it, will live for ages as its best contribution to humanity and brotherhood. The falling of this column will be heard throughout the world.

Here the writer provides the political motivation underlying the demolition of the Napoleonic monument celebrating the victories of French armies at Austerlitz, and notes its significance as a bellicose rallying point for the Bonapartist forces that led the French people to their recent defeat at the hands of the Prussians.

When Warner discusses the burning of Paris during the retreat of the Communards, he uses a similar argument to justify what appeared to be acts of random violation and vandalism. Although he understood them as acts of desperation, he also saw a symbolic and tactical logic to them. The Tuileries had been the residence and headquarters of Napoleon III and the Hôtel de Ville had been the central organ of his control over Paris, while the Palais de Justice had been the site of innumerable cases of injustice and the Préfecture de Police had been associated with all “the murderous plots and intrigues against the people.” Warner also correctly notes that the Commune never issued an official decree or edict calling for the destruction of these buildings, and the burning was done by groups acting on their own initiative in the face of an advancing enemy. Strategically, it served to cover the retreat of the desperate Communards who knew that capture meant death.

The question of the burning of the buildings immediately invokes the women known as the pétroleuses—those who supposedly hurled the petroleum or kerosene oil onto the fireproof structures. Warner insists that the horrific image of the female petroleum thrower was “nothing more or less than a scare gotten up by the Versailles Government to excuse wholesale massacre of women and children after the Commune had ceased to exist.” He points out that none of the women accused of incendiaryism was found in the areas of the burnt buildings (actually, some were), but were invariably drawn from working-class districts remote from the site of incendiary activity. But were the pétroleuses myth or reality? Here is what Marx declared on the subject:

“This story is one of the most abominable schemes that has ever been invented in a civilized country. I am certain that not one woman, not one child, could be accused with the slightest semblance of proof of having poured kerosene in houses or of having tried to set anything on fire; and yet hundreds were shot for that, and thousands were deported to Cayenne. Anything

“Cutting the Base of the Column in the Place Vendôme, Paris,” The Illustrated London News, May 27, 1871.

that might have burned was burned by men.”

Warner concluded that the myth of the pétroleuses was a notion sparked by mass hysteria during the panic days of May and then exploited by the Versaillais. This is not to say that women did not play a role in the incendiaryism; the Paris fires were lit during the fighting and it is likely that women who were defending the barricades also had a hand in them. But what was never proven was a systematic plan to destroy the buildings by a select team of women designated for that purpose.

Warner’s discussion of the pétroleuses leads to his recognition of the pervasive contribution of women to the Commune. Contemporaries were struck by the extent of female participation. Never before in French history had women taken such an extraordinary role in all aspects of governmental and institutional life. Women like Louise Michel and Elizabeth Dmitrieff organized unions, clubs, and committees (such as the Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés and the Women’s Vigilance Committee of the Eighteenth Arrondissement) that were involved in a whole range of issues including the reorganization of work, education, and female military participation.

Warner inadvertently distorts this contribution by claiming that the women acted out of desperation, taking up arms only when they witnessed “their husbands and fathers struggling and dying behind the barricades.” He notes that in the end women were arrested en masse and summarily shot by the Versaillais and yet, as he reminded his audience, “we who are so civilized and so enlightened allow ourselves to be taught to look upon [these women] with a sort of horror.”

Here Warner touched on one of the central points of the phobic response to the Commune, whose threat to the privileged classes extended to their gender structures. Thus it is not surprising that the role of women in the Commune was attacked more viciously in the American
press than any other aspect of its history. After noting the frequent sight of bodies of women killed by the Versailles troops, Harper’s Weekly wrote that the “unsexed women” of the Commune are “ten times more cruel and unreasonable than the men.” and that the malcontent would be “almost safer in the hands of a tribe of red Indians than in the power of these infuriated Paris women.” Later, discussing a group of female prisoners, its reporter wrote:

These are the Amazons of the Commune, and give us an idea of what the warrior-woman really is—coarse, brawny, unwomanly, and degraded. . . . We generally endow [women] with those womanly qualities which we admire, forgetting that it may be the very want of those attributes which has induced them to quit the conventional mode of life. The vivandière of our imagination is always young and pretty and innocent, a gay young creature amidst the regiment of rough, kindly men, and our feelings receive a shock when we see the reality.

This denunciation of Communard women was part of the general condemnation of the “degraded” types participating in the Commune, and served as a warning to the men and women at home to stay in line or risk similar degeneration.

Warner’s contribution to our understanding of the Commune lies not only in his historical labors and re-collection of the facts. It is perhaps even more significant for its expression of empathy with the victims. What stood out with piercing clarity in his mind was the painful cry of the victims and vicious brutality of their oppressors. It was this memory that rose above every other detail of its history. Unlike most of the early accounts, Warner’s narrative places less emphasis on the Communards’ execution of the prominent hostages than on the thousands of nameless murders of working men and women perpetrated by the representatives of “law and order.” Indeed, Warner deliberately brought home the personal and human side of the events to his American audience to demonstrate the callous disregard and calculated lies of previous histories that submerged the brutal massacre of tens of thousands of unknown persons. After abruptly leaving off telling specific atrocities, “so horrifying that I do not care to go into further detail,” Warner observed:

I would not have related even these few incidents had I not deemed it necessary in order to give you [a] more complete and perfect idea of the manner in which the spirit of the Commune was crushed out by the French Government and strange to say that Government taking upon itself the name and title of a Republic.

Warner could also empathize with the thousands of suspected Communards deported and banished to the prison colonies on New Caledonia and Cayenne. Homes
hush them up and keep them from the world. There was no longer any freedom of the press, no more freedom of speech. Newspapers with any character whatever were gagged or struck out of existence and those who write or those who speak for the masses were thrown into prison and even exiled if they dare tell the truth.36

Warner's examination of the suppression of the Commune could stand as a paradigm for the behavior of authoritarian regimes in the modern period. It helps explain the perennial fascination the Commune has on both the right and the left. In his speech Warner contrasts the freedom of the United States with the unfreedom in France, admonishing his audience to "see and appreciate the liberties we enjoy." Yet it is clear that he is concerned above all that the distorted view of the Commune—all too easily accepted by the American community—portends an ominous future for the basic freedoms currently taken for granted by that community.37 The malicious reporting on the Commune and the glee with which the press received the news of the Commune's demise aroused his deepest anxieties. As he declared:

*Here in America we are supposed to be a liberty loving people. This is regarded as the great home of freedom. Then why is it that we who are such liberty loving, freedom adoring people are so willing, as we seem to be, to decry and brand as assassins and incendiaries a band of men who fought for the sovereignty of the people, but not being as fortunate as we were when we struck for our liberties, they lost their cause?*

Warner stresses that the Communards, like the rebels of 1776, fought for the "sovereignty of the people" for "the common cause of suffering humanity." Here Warner suggests a deep contradiction of American bourgeois society, the persistent acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of order and progress. Embedded in Warner's cry of alarm are the conflicts of interest that ultimately expressed themselves in such Cold War incidents as the destruction of Nicaraguans in the name of the "Founding Fathers" of freedom.

Warner's repeated emphasis on the class conflict between labor and aristocracy may have been stimulated by the domestic turbulence in 1877. His own manifold experience as a wage earner—first as a laborer in a glove factory, then as a telegrapher in New York and Georgia, and finally as an industrial designer—predisposed him to identify with the working classes who at that moment felt themselves in a state of siege. The United States was in the depths of a depression that had been touched off in 1873 by the failure of the banking house of Jay Cooke and would continue through the rest of the decade. Widespread homelessness and unemployment in 1877 led to labor marches and strikes in the textile mills of Fall River, Massachusetts, and the coal mining districts of Pennsylvania. In the same year a series of riotous strikes by railroad workers—representing a response to wage cuts, death and injuries on the job, and kickbacks and profi-

---


were broken, families divided, and spirits crushed merely because the Communards "dared to assert their manhood and strike for what they believed to be their rights and the rights of their children." In the most impassioned section of the manuscript, Warner rhetorically advances towards his audience to explain the motives of the Versailles government:

*I'll tell you why! It is because the one side in this melancholy affair represented aristocracy and the other labor. Aristocracy being more popular and consequently more powerful was enabled to crush out labor and make the men who represented it unpopular and with her power make them even more infamous. In order to crush out the Commune entirely and kill it root and branch the Versailles government was obliged to . . . resort to crimes that would blacken the darkest page of history and when those crimes were once committed resort to the most villainous and tyrannical means to
teering by the railroad firms—occurred in a dozen cities, shaking the nation as no previous labor conflict had done. Newspapers at the time of the railroad strike frequently invoked the Commune in such captions as “Commune in Pittsburgh,” “Commune in St. Louis,” “Commune in Chicago,” “Commune in Philadelphia,” and the “Reign of the Commune.”

During this period, the government protected business interests and often called on the Army to join with local police and the National Guard to suppress strike activity. Also in 1877 President Rutherford Hayes began withdrawing the remaining Federal troops from South Carolina and Louisiana (in part to provide the backbone of an army to oppose the striking workers of the North and resisting Native Americans in the far West), thus ending the commitment of the nation to insuring equal rights to newly enfranchised African American citizens. Hence Warner’s speech on the Commune was written in a climate charged by his own government’s battle against the “poor laboring man.”


One other factor may have predisposed Warner to a sympathetic reading of the Commune, his Masonic affiliation. Warner had belonged to the Freemasons since the 1860s and eventually advanced to Master Mason of the Third Degree.” In France, Masonry had been generally supportive of revolutions, and during the Commune it took an active role in trying to mediate a peace between Versailles and the Commune. When their efforts did not succeed, a major segment of Parisian Freemasons espoused the principles of the Commune and acted to preserve it from destruction. Prominent Communards such as Jules Vallès, Henri Rochefort, Jules Allix, and Gustave Lefrançais were affiliated with Masonry. Since the first week of April, the Masonic Order had become increasingly radicalized. On April 7, the lodge les Disciples du progrès held a meeting to discuss a plan of conciliation to end the bloodshed. The next evening the vénérables (masters) of the majority of Parisian lodges assembled at the headquarters of the Grand Orient on the rue Cadet to draft a statement against civil war. It summoned the belligerents to achieve peace, and a delegation proceeded to the Hôtel de Ville where they were warmly received. On April 10 the Masonic delegation traveled to Versailles and met with Thiers the following day. As one brother recalled, Thiers received them “with contempt, refusing to recognize the legality of its mandate.” That they were not taken seriously induced them to take a more political line of action, joining with other conciliator organizations. But in every case they met with benevolence only from the Commune, and indifference from Versailles. At a second meeting with Thiers on April 22, Thiers not only dealt with them with “cold politeness,” but actually reproached them for not taking up arms against Paris. The Masons protested that they were a pacific organization, but wondered in return how it was possible for Thiers to bombard his own people with such ferocity. Thiers rejoined: “A few buildings will be damaged, a few people killed, but the law will prevail.” Now an angered Masonry gathered on April 26 to challenge Versailles and to defend the Commune, and at least two thousand marched to the Hôtel de Ville where they were greeted by Mason Communards. Allix drew a parallel between the construction of the temple in the ancient world and the Commune’s plans for the modern reorganization of labor. A mass rally in the Louvre courtyard was called for April 29, and although the leadership disavowed it the rank and file of Parisian Masonry lined up behind the banners of their lodges and voted an overwhelming endorsement of the Commune. Thus it may have been the experiences of Parisian Masonry that reinforced Warner’s sympathetic reading of the events of the Commune.

Writing to his father from Paris on February 21, 1872, Warner debated returning to his native country despite the horrors that he had recently witnessed. He understood the need to earn a living, but his heart was then in France, for “I find everything that surrounds me is more congenial to my nature.” And he confessed:

I find those I can understand and who can understand me and who know my feelings better than my
own countrymen. I go to America to make money. It is contrary to my nature. I return to France to live. It is according to my nature. I would like to arrange it so I could go to America and return to France once a year. I think I could lead a contented life which is all I ask in this world. I have no other ambition. I look at life, society and the world differently from what I once did. I think freer and broader and am less trammeled by the infernal conventionalisms of society that abase men and keep their minds small.

Prior to the Commune, Warner’s correspondence indicated that his main purpose for residing in France was to secure the skills necessary to earn a living as a sculptor in America. This letter provides evidence that the Commune was a decisive rite de passage for Warner which profoundly transformed his outlook on life, and it was with this sense of self-understanding, as well as the desire to set the record straight, that he was moved to set down his thoughts on the subject for an American audience.

NOTES
This essay could never have seen the light of day without the inspiration of Garnett McCoy and the unstinting generosity of George Gurney, my "primary" source for an understanding of Warner’s life and work.


2. V. Fournerl, Paris et ses ruines en Mai 1871 (Paris: H. Charpentre, 1874), pp. 1-vi, 73, 78. Fournerl sounded the keynote of the early Third Republic in appealing to his fellow citizens to restore things as they were before the Commune—"Raise up the ruins, to bring about a rebirth of order, security, work, to repair the disasters of two sieges."


One exception to the antagonism of American intellectuals was Walt Whitman, whose "O Star of France:" written shortly after the Commune, bemoans its failure and praises its attempt.


11. Nation 13 (July 6, 1871): 2-3, referring to the International's public show of sympathy for the Commune, accused it of wanting credit for "all its atrocities and desperation."


15. Bernstein, "Impact of the Commune," p. 61; "Mob Law in Pennsylvania," New York Times, April 8, 1871. The Times editorial began: "We keep wondering at the spectacle of one of the world’s greatest capitals given up to the unbridled license of a rabble, when at our very doors we see the law defied by a handful of trades-union rioters." On the same day the Tribune ran back-to-back editorials on the "state of disorder and excitement" in Pennsylvania and the need for the "restoration of order" in Paris (New York Daily Tribune, April 8, 1871).


17. E. King, Under the Red Flag or The Adventures of Two American Boys in the Days of the Commune (Philadelphia: H.T. Coates & Co., 1895); G. A. Henty, A Girl of the Commune (New York: R.F. Fenno & Co., 1895); R.W. Chambers, The Red Republic: A Romance of the Commune (New York: G.P. Putnam’s & Sons, 1895). Edward King’s book, which is particularly vicious, praises the Versaillais Maréchal MacMahon, future president of the French Republic, "To whose energy and skill was due the suppression of the greatest insurrection of modern times" (p. 550). King was far more objective in his reportorial accounts: see E. King, Descriptive Portraiture of Europe in Storm and Calm (Springfield, Mass.: C.A. Nichols & Co., 1890), pp. 430-32. Chambers relishes his description of “maddened women” including an “old hag” who beat out the brains of one of the line troops with her wooden shoe (p. 88). It is interesting to speculate on the date 1895 for all three novels, the height of Populist agitation and the depletion of the national gold reserves.


22. Marx’s letter to Kugelmann, April 12, 1871, in Marx and Lenin, Civil War in France, pp. 86-87.

23. G. Gurney, "Olin Levi Warner (1844-1896): A Catalogue Raisonné of His Sculpture and Graphic Works," (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1978), pp. 7, 10, 29-30, 32, 35. A revealing glimpse of Warner’s class consciousness is found in a letter describing English society, written shortly after his arrival in France: "One striking peculiarity of English society is the aristocratic feeling the people (those who are not common laborers) always seem to have. Their airs, and their old foolish customs which are as unchangeable as the sun, are disgusting to an American. . . . The Houses of Lords & Commons would be mere ciphers if the members were not clothed in their robes & wigs. Little boys six or eight years of age must wear high hats & kid gloves or they are not of the ‘respectable youth.’ . . . In France it is far different. Society is freer & more Republican” (Warner would soon change his opinion on imperial France after settling there). Warner to his family, August 9, 1869 (M4), Mrs. Ralph F. Warner, Alvina Virginia.

Curiously, when an American correspondent asked Louis-Nathaniel Rossel—one of the outstanding leaders of the Commune—why he sat as President of the Military Tribunal in plain clothes, and not in uniform, he replied: "Oh, you know, we aim at being rather American in our ideas, and especially in our detestation of forms and ceremonies. We don’t want to sit in wigs and gowns, like the English judges" (Benham, Proletarian Revolt, p. 99).


25. This was not uncommon in leftist terminology at the time for describing middle-class ascendency. In his socialist novel The Iron Heel, Jack London characterizes the tyrannical “Oligarchy” of capitalist trusts as embodying “the aristocratic ethic or the master ethic” (J. London, The Iron Heel [New York: Gросс & Dunlap, 1906], p. 66).

26. Warner’s definition was overlooked by Marx who claimed a mistaken link between the old and the new: “It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus the new Commune, which breaks the modern state power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of that very state power” (The Civil War in France, p. 59). But see Benham, Proletarian Revolt, p. 7, for a definition close to that of Warner’s.

27. Young, Men and Memories 1:190.

28. The separation of Church and State, though embedded in the Commune’s program from the start, was not announced in its first decree of March 29, 1871, but was voted on April 2 and posted on the 3rd; it was later included in a general declaration on April 19, 1871. See G. Lefrançais, Etude sur le mouvement communautiste à Paris, en 1871 (Neuchâtel: G. Guillaume, 1871), pp. 231-32; and Soria, Grande Histoire 3: 268-79.

29. Marx claims that the demonstrators “ill treated and disarmed the detached patrols and sentinels of the National Guard they met with on their progress, and . . . attempted to break through the line drawn up there, and thus to carry by surprise the headquarters of the National Guard in the Place Vendôme” (Marx and Lenin, Civil War in France, pp. 48-51). According to Marx the Friends of Order began firing first, and when shots in the air proved unable to stop the violence, the officer of the National Guard gave the order to fire.

30. Young, Men and Memories 1:201-02. The power of this anti-hierarchical gesture is seen in the response of the reactionary Catulle
Mendès to the same decree preserved by Warner, which Mendès included in his private journal. Addressing the members of the Commune, he writes: "It was not enough for you... to have destroyed the present and compromised the future, you still want to annihilate the past!... Do not think that demolishing the Vendôme Column is just toppling over a bronze column with an emperor’s statue on top; it is unearthing your fathers in order to slap the fleshless cheeks of their skeletons and to say to them: You were wrong to be brave, to be proud, to be grand! You were wrong to conquer cities, to win battles. You were wrong to make the world marvel at the vision of a dazzling France." (C. Mendès, Les 73 Journées de la Commune [Paris: Lachaude, 1871], pp. 149-50). The Communist Louis Barron’s interpretation of the event approaches more closely the reading of Young: “This colossal symbol of the Grand Army—how it was fragile, empty, miserable! It seemed to have been eaten out from the middle by a multitude of rats, like France itself, like its tarnished glory...” (L. Barron, Sous le drapeau rouge [Paris: Savine, 1889], p. 167). Except for slight changes, I have made use of the translations in Ross, Emergence of Social Space, pp. 5-8. See also J. Castagnary, Gustave Courbet et la colonne Vendôme, plaidoyer pour un ami mort ([Paris: E. Dentu, 1883], pp. 8-11, 14-18, for an insightful, recent discussion of the demolition of the Vendôme Column see J. Weiner, “Paris Commune Photos at a New York Gallery: An Interview with Linda Nochlin,” Radical History Review, No. 32 (1985), pp. 59-70. 31. Interview in the New York Herald, August 3, 1871, quoted in E. Thomas, Incendiaires, p. 168. The reporter agreed, stating that he has yet to meet with a single person who actually saw a woman with kerosene. King, however, accepted the pétroleuse as authentic. See Descriptive Portraiture, p. 487. 32. Thomas, Incendiaires, pp. 165-216. Thomas’s book, originally titled in the French Les Pétroleuses, is focused on the full range of women’s contributions to the Commune. 33. Ibid., pp. 70-75, 147-49. 34. “Women of Paris,” Harper’s Weekly 15 (May 27, 1871): 485. 35. “Women of Montmartre.” Ibid., July 8, 1871, p. 620. 36. Warner’s passionate rhetoric here approximates Marx’s in this typical passage from The Civil War in France:

In all its bloody triumphs over the self-sacrificing champions of a new and better society, that nefarious civilisation, based upon the enslavement of labour, drowns the means of its victims in a hue-and-cry of columny, reverberated by a world-wide echo. The serene working men’s Paris of the Commune is suddenly changed into a pandemonium by the bloodhounds of “order.” And what does this tremendous change prove to the bourgeois mind of all countries? Why, that the Commune has conspired against civilisation! The Paris people die enthusiastically for the Commune in numbers unequalled in any battle known to history. What does that prove? Why, that the Commune was not the people’s own government but the usurpation of a handful of criminals! The women of Paris joyfully give up their lives at the barricades and on the place of execution. What does that prove? Why, that the demon of the Commune has changed them into Mégarees and Hecates! The moderation of the Commune during two months of undisputed sway is equalled only by the heroism of its defence. What does that prove? Why, that for months the Commune carefully hid, under a mask of moderation and humanity, the blood-thirstiness of its fiendish instincts, to be let loose in the hour of its agony! (p. 76).

37. What could have motivated Warner’s impassioned defense of the Commune at the time he wrote the manuscript? While the document itself is undated, some evidence suggests a date of 1877: on the back of sheet 41 Warner began doodling his signature and we can make out among the brief inscriptions the words “Washington,” his first name “Olin,” and his signature and date, “O. L. Warner 77.” On the recto of page 41 Warner describes the atrocities of the Versailles troops. At one point, he states that he went into the street to inspect the “havoc and traces of carnage.” He observed “piles of dead” in all directions, and close examination revealed that many of the corpses had been shot point blank in the head—proving that they had been killed after capture or surrender. It may have been the need to pause momentarily from these painful memories and to return to the safety of his present social space that he began doodling on the back of this page.

Yet it may not be coincidental that his free associations embrace the macro and the micro of his existence as a citizen of a national space, the capital of the nation and the signature of his subjective being. Warner here works through the tension between the bureaucratic state and the individual, between authority and personal identity, at the very moment when he forces himself to remember the shattering of identities in the name of the state. On the next page, Warner picks up the thread of his narrative, recalling a lone corpse on the sidewalk. He recalls taking out his sketchbook to memorialize this man, that is, he wanted to document his identity in perpetuity—an act comparable to Manet’s commemorative rendering of a dead national guardsman in front of a broken barricade near the Church of the Madeleine. As Warner sketched the body, an old man hobbled up to him and told Warner about the bravery of the dead man who held at bay a whole company of troops, and concluded with the statement, “I tell you, Sir, that man well merits the esteem of his country.” Warner then affirmed this to his audience: “Ladies and gentlemen, that man did merit the esteem of his country, but because he struck for his liberties his country killed him like a dog.”

The very year he prepared this manuscript Warner joined a group of dissident artists who eventually called themselves the Society of American Artists. Warner had not fared well between his return from France, in 1872, and 1877—at one point he had almost given up as a sculptor. His alliance with an organization of progressive artists in the 1870s may have been prompted by his experience of the Commune and his understanding of the need for collective action to survive (for a discussion of the formation of the SAA see E. Broun, Albert Pinkham Ryder [Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989], pp. 30-41; and W.I. Homer, Albert Pinkham Ryder: Painter of Dreams [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989], pp. 25, 29, 31-33).

Warner may have identified with the group of artists that formed themselves into the Fédération des artistes de Paris, a group organized during the Commune at the instigation of Gustave Courbet. Its committee, selected to draw up statutes, was to include painters, sculptors, architects, engravers, lithographers, and decorative artists, part of a conscious attempt to create ties of solidarity with the artisanate. (Coincidentally, the Society of American Artists also included artists who executed designs for manufactured objects—both Warner and his friend Albert Ryder worked for the decorative workshop of Daniel Cottier, for instance.) The liberal program of the Fédération called for regular and open exhibitions of new work to be arranged, with no prizes to be awarded, with the aim of encouraging “the development of the arts, the moral or intellectual emancipation of artists, and the improvement of their material status” (S. Edwards, ed., The Commune of Paris [Athaca, 1871], p. 157). For the organization of the arts under the Commune see J. Kaplow, “The Paris Commune and the Artists,” Revolution and Reaction, pp. 144-67; and A. Riffkin. “Cultural Movement and the Paris Commune,” Art History 2 (1979): 214-16.

38. Bernstein, “Impact of the Paris Commune,” pp. 68-69. Also see “The Pittsburgh Insurrection and Railroad Strike of 1877” (New York: Progressive Labor Party Pamphlet, 1977), I am grateful to Pat Hills for bringing this pamphlet to my attention. As usual the New York Times characterized the workers’ militancy as the inauguration of a “Reign of Terror” and compared the women who aided them to “their unsexed sisters of the Paris barricades” (New York Times, July 22, 23, and 26, 1877).

41. Warner to his father, February 21, 1872 (M24), Mrs. Ralph F. Warner, Alexandria, Virginia.
42. Warner to his relatives, with a special section to his father, September 28, 1869 (M6), Mrs. Ralph F. Warner; and Warner to his brother, November 29, 1869 (M8), and February 27, 1870 (M9), both in the collection of Mrs. Warner.
Olin Levi Warner's manuscript is written in pencil on seventy-three numbered sheets. After Warner's death it was preserved among his papers and donated to the Archives of American Art in 1972 by his daughter Frances O. Warner. In the following edited version we have corrected frequent misspellings and vagaries of punctuation and eliminated several repetitious and unfinished passages. We are indebted to George Gurney of the National Museum of American Art for providing advice and a working typescript.

Throughout the civilized world there seems to have gone out an erroneous idea regarding the meaning, motives, and final results of the Paris Commune of 1871. To attempt to enlighten your minds somewhat upon this least understood of all modern struggles for the establishment of the rights or the mistaken rights of men is my purpose this evening.

In the first place allow me to state that what I have to say upon this subject is not based at all upon the writings of any historian or other educator of the masses but upon facts and incidents of my own personal experience. [I] have had the rare opportunity of carefully watching the workings of the public mind and France through the last years of the Empire, during the siege, through the storm and whirlwind of the Commune, down into the peaceful times that followed the establishment of the present Republic, and these observations will form the nucleus around which the ideas I have to impart shall be clustered.

Revolution after revolution, government after government with its tyrant and hoard of emissaries leeching the very life’s blood from every vein of the people had followed in quick succession until the masses became so brutified that further toleration was impossible and the last Empire was the cap stone upon the whole pile. Twenty years of the basest and most tyrannical dynasties of modern times had degraded a proud but sympathetic and confiding people until they became weary, fretful, and irritable and it required only the shameful blunder of Sedan to arouse the indignation and wrath that culminated in the overthrow of the yoke. . . . The Prussian armies were already marching on the city of Paris and in a few days two millions of people were hemmed in by a circle of iron. After six weeks of inaction on the part of their leaders, and with starvation staring them in the face, the people became clamorous and discontented. They said to themselves, “why remain thus inactive and besieged by the Prussian Army when we have two hundred thousand able bodied men in our midst already in arms, let us take this matter in our own hands, overthrow this inactive government, govern ourselves and send our two hundred thousand armed men outside the walls of the city and let them cut their way through this circle of iron and bring us relief.” Such an act would have been virtually an organization of the Commune and upon the 31st day of Oct. it was attempted by a few battalions of the National Guard who made an attack upon the Hôtel de Ville and drove out the members of the Provisionary government then in session there. But the people were not yet sufficiently starved and the conservative element being too great the reaction that ensued caused the reinstatement of the government and thus the first attempt to organize the Commune failed, only to await its consummation on the 18th of March, nearly five months later.

I find that most people in America have but a vague and in many cases an entirely mistaken idea regarding the real meaning of the term Commune in French politics and here let me explain as briefly as possible the true meaning of the term especially as applied to the Commune of Paris. In France the balance of intelligence lies in the large cities. Here the revolutionary element prevails owing to the broad and liberal ideas entertained by the working classes and it almost necessarily follows that the principal opposition to any government other than a Republic is found here also. Now in France all the smaller cities and towns have their own municipal governments which are called communes. Under the Empire and other monarchical governments the large cities such as Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles have not had their own municipal governments, that is to say the people of those cities were denied the right of electing their own municipal officials and had them kindly appointed by the Emperor or King as the case might be, thus lessening the republican influence in those cities. You can readily see how unjust and tyrannical such laws must be. The leading cities of a great nation denied the right of electing their own city officers! To take this right and to elect those officers means the establishment of the Commune. For this the revolution of 1848 was brought about, for this the revolution of the 18th of March was instituted, and not for plunder and incendiarism as some of us suppose. To be just with the men of the Commune we must first look at their intentions and then the circumstances that governed their acts before we criticize those acts.

Defeat upon defeat had followed the French arms throughout the provinces and around the walls of the city of Paris. The Republic had been organized, to be sure, upon the surrender of Napoleon [III] at Sedan, but still, under the Republic, the French arms continued to be unsuccessful and Metz, Strasbourg, and Paris had capitulated. Alsace and part of Lorraine had been ceded to the Prussians and the five billions had been paid over. The people of Paris had heroically endured a siege of five months, one of the most remarkable on record. The inaction of the Provisionary government and the leaders of the army in Paris had driven the people to desperation. . . . Their contempt for the base manner in which their leaders were conducting the War would often grow into outbursts of desire to change matters, these outbursts always looking forward to an organization of the Commune.
The bloody spectre of revolution had so often been held up before the people by the cowards, conservatives, and government that to look the dreaded thing squarely in the face required no little courage. To raise the red banner of the Commune was a serious affair. That circumstance in the history of the Commune was not reached till the ever memorable 18th of March, two months after the surrender of Paris, and it came about in this wise: During the siege many battalions of the National Guard caused pieces of light artillery to be cast at their own expense. These pieces were the private property of these battalions, the men having paid for them out of their own pockets, and consequently did not consider them as belonging to the government and were determined they should not fall into the hands of the Prussians with the other arms and munitions of war that were surrendered with the capitulation of Paris. The government was already taking measures to seize this artillery and the National Guard, desiring to protect it, gathered all the pieces together and took them up onto the heights of Montmartre and there placed a guard over them. On the 18th of March the Versailles government sent a body of gendarmes or guards of Paris with a force of armed police to attack the National Guard and seize the cannon upon the heights. This was equivalent to a declaration of war. The National Guard threw up barricades, repulsed the gendarmes and police, drove them out of the city, and proclaimed the Commune. Thus passed the 18th of March. There was nothing unnatural about this. Any of us if [we] had belonged to the National Guard would have done likewise if we had been men of principle and willing to defend those principles. The ball was now in motion. The Commune was on the defensive. The aggressor was the Versailles government. There was one matter now that puzzled the government and that was how to induce the regular troops to fight against the National Guard. They were their own countrymen and in many cases their own brothers in the flesh. Whenever a regiment was sent against the National Guard it would invariably hand its arms over to the latter . . . without a word and then join them. This would not do. The troops must be brought to fight against their brothers in some way or the Commune must be recognized. But the difficulty was gotten over in this wise: The bitter hatred the populace have for the police and gendarmes (which are essentially the same) is well known and in fact is a matter of history. The police are men of no principle and are always ready to attack the populace or the soldiers of the populace which is the National Guard. Now the government took advantage of this fact, always causing an attack to be led by the police or gendarmes supported in the rear by the regular soldiers. When the engagement waxed hot the police at a given moment would retire by skillful maneuver and the troops would find themselves fighting face to face with the Federals or National Guard. Their passions at this juncture of course would be aroused and their ire kindled to boiling heat, so in they would go pell-mell and continue the fight against their own brothers without thought while the police were kept for future use for other more cool blooded butchery.

So for two long months the fight raged around the walls of the city . . . Its fierceness was attested by the continued roll of the muffled drums in the streets as funeral car after funeral car laden with the dead bodies of national guards passed towards cemeteries. Often these cars would be literally piled with the dead.

Now I wish to impress upon your minds one fact regarding the Commune: the motives and intentions of its original founders were perfectly honorable and just, no matter what the acts were that followed . . . The first act of the Commune was to issue a decree separating the Church from the State and several other general reforms so much needed by the people, all of them just and natural but unfortunately too radical to be received even by those they were intended to benefit. Thus it is ever. The world is conservative to a fault. The good and peaceful intentions of the Commune were also set forth by the desire that the public guillotine should be burned and it was burned, thus showing that this revolution should be a peaceful and not a bloody one as were [17]93 and [18]48. The next act was the shooting of Generals Lecomte and Clément Thomas. Now we have come to the crimes of the Commune. When we consider . . . the circumstances that lead to crime it is often difficult to explain what real crime is and it certainly is so in this case. The people had been betrayed so often by their leaders, they had been slaughtered so often by ambitious hirelings of the government, they had suffered tyranny so long and been sunken to such depths of brutification.

that all confidence was lost and at last finding the tables turned and the people in power they sought to rid themselves of everything that bore the stamp of government upon it. General Lecomte was an officer of the Versailles army and Clément Thomas was Commander of the National Guard during the Provisionary government. Both were suspected as being enemies of the people. In time of the great excitement that attend the revolutions in Paris the people act upon impulse and not upon deliberation and a mere suspicion is often equivalent to a condemnation. These two generals found themselves in the hands of the soldiers of the people. They were being conducted through the streets to prison. The suspicion of the ignorant throng that lined the streets was aroused and the air was rent with cries of “kill them, kill them.”

Whoever has seen a wild and infuriated mob in the streets of Paris in a moment like this knows its force and when its cry is “death” it seems as though no power on earth could resist it and the blow must be given. Lecomte and Clément Thomas fell but they fell like oaks before the whirlwind. Was this murder? Let future generations decide. The next act was the shooting of the sixty-four hostages including the Archbishop of Paris so often spoken of as one of the great crimes of the Commune. Now this has its explanation also. The great obstacle to freedom, intelligence, and the proper assertion of the true principles of mankind in some of the countries of Europe and especially in France is the Romish Clergy. This is sad to contemplate and is nevertheless true. The Church in these countries has been the great retarder of civilization. All thinking, all liberal minded people know this. The poor working man sits down to his scanty but hard earned meal with the sweat of evil toil upon his brow. In yonder palace dwells a proud tyrant rolling in luxury wrung from the very brow of this class of men. At his will this tyrant frames some excuse and gets up a massacre which we call war. This poor laboring man is dragged from his wife and little ones, set up as a target for some enemy to shoot at and that loving wife made a widow, and those little ones made helpless orphans and perhaps that very enemy may be a poor laboring man also forced by the same circumstances into this most unnatural position and all this that some lease-bloated tyrant may ride at the head of a victorious column and hear his vassals cry long live the King. This laboring man beholds costly edifices erected about him and these edifices called churches. They are paid for out of the public treasury. He sees able bodied men clothed in clerical robes and supported in idleness in and about these churches and he helps support them in their idleness by every morsel of bread he eats. He sees them take the very bread of his children from their mouths and this against his will. He sees that these men clothed in clerical robes are the faithful emissaries of yonder tyrant who owes his power in part to them as they keep the masses degraded for him and consequently for themselves as it is through this degradation they rise. He realizes that he is the slave of these vampires of humanity and longs to free himself from their vile clutches. He longs for the day when the people will be sovereign and men are men in every sense of the word and slaves no longer. That bright day at last dawned and the 18th of March finds the people sovereign and they seek to rid themselves of this huge incubus and the first act of the Commune is to declare the Church forever separated from the State. Soon after, sixty-four of the abhorred clergy so long at the bottom of all the ill the people have suffered fall into the hands of the soldiers of the people. Wrath and indignation burst upon them and the infuriated populace again rend the air with cries of death as the dark robed men are conducted to prison to be held as hostages. In the meantime the government puts to death a number of Communist prisoners. The hostages are led forth and shot, some of them dying like brave men and some like cowards. The Versailles government immediately retaliates by shooting in their stead not sixty-four but six hundred. Thus the crime is cancelled and history speaks not a word of the six hundred brave men who dared breathe of freedom but speaks of the murder of hostages and the crimes of the Commune.

We now come to the pulling down of the Vendôme

Column which was also one of the so called acts of vandalism indulged in by the Commune. We often hear people say, “What a pity to pull down such a beautiful work of art.” Now I hold that it was no pity at all. I would be the last one in God’s world to advocate the pulling down of a great work of art. I know how difficult it is to produce such things and how few there are to produce them. But the Vendôme Column was no great work of art and its loss to the world would not have been a heavy one. It consisted merely of a pretentious copy of the Trajan Column at Rome with the wars of Napoleon the 1st illustrated in bas relief of the worst kind of sculpture and running spirally around the Column from bottom to top in imitation of the noble sculpture of the Greeks on Trajan’s Column, and on top was placed a statue of Napoleon clothed in the garb of a Roman Emperor with a small angel of victory in one hand and I do not think when this effigy flattened out upon the pavement of the Place Vendôme the world wept very bitterly over its loss. If it did those tears were foolish ones as it was a bad work of art. The edict of the Commune ordering the pulling down of the Column covers the whole thing, listen to it:

On the --th day of -- the Column fell by the hands of the people. The windlasses and ropes were all adjusted. The arms of the windlasses were manned by strong Marines from the navy. The clear notes of the bugle sounded “the charge” and the windlasses commenced to turn, the ropes tightening and straining as the stalwart men went round. All at once one of the anchorages gave way and it was evident the Column could not be pulled over by such means alone so a long rope was fastened one end to the top and the other given to the throng in the street and then by a swaying motion the column was made to vibrate until over it toppled, falling into a thousand pieces.

It is not my purpose to go into detail and describe all the minute acts of the Commune. I have no time to speak of all those ambitious men who suddenly found themselves thrust into or who rather thrust themselves into places of trust and were of course incompetent to fill those places. Such men always exist in times of revolution. It is not my purpose to speak of the weak side of the Commune. History is one sided enough to do this for us. But it is my desire to treat this subject upon humanitarian principles and this history does not do. We will pass over the minor details and come at once to the last and greatest act of this eventful drama, the seven days struggle behind the barricades.

The Commune had been in existence over two months. It was now the 22nd of [May]. The evening before, the Versailles troops had effected an entrance to the city by the St. Cloud gate, which must have been delivered up by the treachery of the officer in command of that post. After gaining possession of the gate the troops merely held it till the following day which was the 22nd of [May] when the grand entry of the army commenced and the capture of the barricades began also, for no sooner was it known that the troops were in the city than the hasty construction of barricades commenced and in a few hours every street in Paris was a fortress. On the fatal morning the Commune issued the following proclamation which was the last ever emanating from the same source:

Proclamation
Citizens:

Saint Cloud gate, assaulted from four directions at a time and being abandoned by treachery, was at last carried by the Versailles troops who had thereby gained an entry to the city. This reverse instead of discouraging us should stimulate us to renewed action. The people who have dethroned Kings, who have destroyed Bastilles; the people of [17]93 cannot afford to lose in a day the fruits of the emancipation of the 18th of March.

Parisians: The struggle must not be abandoned by a single person; it is the struggle of the past against the future, of liberty against despotism, equality against monopoly, fraternity against servitude, the people against the egoism of their oppressors.

To arms!

Let Paris bristle with barricades and behind those improvised ramparts let her set up her cry of war, her cry of defiance and also her cry of victory, for with her barricades she is invincible.

Let the paving stones be torn up in every street, then the enemies’ projectiles falling on bare ground will be less dangerous, and these paving stones then forming a means of defense can be gathered upon the balconies of the houses to be thrown upon the heads of the invaders.

Let revolutionary Paris, Paris of ever memorable days do her duty. The Commune will be hers.

L. Comité de Salut Publique

Upon the issuing of this proclamation the alarm spread like wild fire. The awful peal of the tocsin rang clear and shrill upon the morning air. The rattle of the drum was heard in every street sounding the alarm and masses of the National Guard were seen forming upon the corners to superintend the construction of defences. Every heart throbbed with anxiety, every cheek was flushed with defiance. All realized by some incomprehensible, some indescribable instinct that the awful, the solemn moment had arrived. Some remembered [18]48 and were terror stricken. In the twinkling of an eye dark masses of paving stones and debris loomed up in all directions and Paris bristled with barricades and thousands of brave men resolved then and there to die or die for the Commune and for liberty. Somehow they believed the success of the Republic in France depended upon the success of the Commune and they were partially right. The Republic in France today is a Republic only in name. These men could live under a monarchy no longer and solemnly resolved that if a military despot rode triumphant through those streets he should ride over their corpses. One grand shout of “the Commune or death” went up to heaven. And today the bones of thousands of brave men who sent up that cry lie bleaching in the catacombs of Paris, silent witnesses of the sincerity of that resolve.
There is something fearful about the construction of a barricade. A spot commanding a street is chosen and in an instant paving stones are torn up and piled in a heap, omnibus hacks and all vehicles happening to pass that way at that particular moment are seized and overturned, squads of armed men enter the houses, seize furniture and bedding, pitch it out the windows, pile it on with the omnibuses and hacks and the whole mass is filled in with paving stones and dirt thus forming a barricade. Every person man or woman who chances to be in sight while the barricade is in process of construction is forced to aid in building it and often arms are put into the hands of the men and they are forced to defend it also. The haste in the construction of one of those defences is so great that the air for a moment seems filled with paving stones and debris, at least the excitement is so great that such is the impression. As soon as the structure is complete armed men stand behind the pile and silently await the attack.

The Versailles troops began a systematic attack upon the barricades nearest the gate by which they had entered the walls of the city and finished at the end of seven days on the opposite side. They set to work like so many butchers and carried it on like so many friars. Barricade after barricade fell before the overwhelming numbers of the troops and it could plainly be observed that they were making rapid progress. I myself happened to be in the heart of the city at this time and I could note distinctly the progress of the struggle by the near approach of the rattle of the musketry and the shriek of the shells. In a few hours it was evident the barricades were being assaulted in my immediate vicinity and when the one at the head of the street in which I lived was assaulted and at last captured the crisis was one of the most awful of all my life’s experience. I knew the exact moment when this occurred for there was a sudden lull in the firing and an instant after the sound of hurried footsteps was heard in the street. The handful of Communists overpowered by numbers were falling back from barricade to barricade. They were taking refuge in the one that happened to be in front of the house I occupied. The poor wretches blackened with powder and filled with rage, contesting every inch of ground as the troops advanced, made a stand here. At this instant a wall of pity and of fear went up from the female inmates of the house. Oh that wall, that fearful, that agonizing wail sounds in my ears still. If any of you have ever heard a woman’s cry of distress in a moment of terror, that half shriek half moan, that sound that demoralizes a man when nothing else on earth will, then you realize the sound of that cry of agony. I knew something terrible had happened. The barricade at the head of the street had been taken and men were dying at the door. The barricade in front of the house was now brought into requisition and with my own eyes I saw a mere corporal’s guard, a handful of brave and resolute men not more than six in number hold that barricade against a whole battalion of infantry and keep them at bay for thirty-six long hours. Finally the barricade was assaulted under cover of the night and the men who could escape took refuge in the building, firing upon the troops from the windows — others were captured and shot down in their tracks. In the rear of the house a low barricade blocked a small side street and this was held all day long by two old white haired men whose devotion to . . . the Commune caused them to fight like tigers . . . and when their barricade was at last taken they gave up their lives like two martyrs, as they were dispatched on the spot without one sign of pity. The Versailles troops showed no pity, gave no quarter. As soon as these barricades were taken I went into the street to behold the havoc and traces of carnage. Piles of dead lay in all directions. Every street was an amphitheatre. I examined many of the corpses and invariably found them with bullet wounds in the head indicating conclusively that they had been killed after having been captured. I saw one poor man lying dead upon the sidewalk. I took out my sketch book and pencil to make a sketch of him. While I was at work an old decrepit man came hobbling up to me and after looking at the man a few minutes turned to me and said: ‘I saw that man fight behind yonder barricade. He was a brave man and all alone kept back a whole company of troops for a long time and I tell you Sir that man well merits the esteem of his country.’

Ladies and Gentlemen that man did merit the esteem of his country, but because he struck for his liberties his country killed him like a dog, and, together with the thousands of his comrades who died with him, covers him with stigma, and the civilized world looks upon these men today with contempt and calls them brigands. The manner in which they fought from barricade to barricade contesting every foot of ground was worthy of the Spartans and, if we dare not, future generations will dare to call them brave men. For seven long days they fought fiercely, stubbornly, but overpowered by numbers they were continually forced to fall back until the last barricade was taken and even then they did not give up but taking refuge among the tombs of Père Lachaise cemetery the last battle of the Commune was fought. This handful of men hunted as by blood-hounds until forced to use the tombs of their ancestors for breastworks and to fight and die behind them thus furnishes a termination to this bloody contest surpassing in character and vividness any fiction that could spring from the wildest and most fertile imagination . . .

The strangest and most inexplicable of all acts of the Commune was the burning of the buildings, both public and private, during and immediately after the taking of the barricades. This has stamped the Commune with more infamy than all else together, and even this has its cause and may not be wholly inexplicable after all if we will stop to investigate. If there be causes that led to the destruction that followed in the wake of the Commune let us look for the causes and they might explain away the effects we so much deplore.

So many years of tyranny and oppression, of priesthood and forced ignorance, such great and long continued misfortune, so many fruitless struggles for their rights.
for their manhood, had so weighed upon the minds of the working classes that they resolved if ever they were freed from their oppressors they would leave not a stone unturned to preserve the rights of the people. Everything that bore the mark of tyranny became odious in the extreme to the sight of the laboring man. He now found himself engaged in a deadly combat with oppression...

... The wounded tiger at bay in his jungle turns upon his foe and crushes him. In 1793 the wounded people suffering from oppression until driven to madness and desperation turned upon their foe, erected the guillotine, and cut off the heads of all the nobility. In 1871 the people burned the palaces of the Kings. Therefore we should condemn the causes that lead to these acts rather than the acts themselves which were the natural outgrowth of unnatural causes. Had the fires of the Commune ended with the palaces of the Kings we could have understood them, but they went further; they burned the palaces of the people also... At the time the fires occurred the few Communists who were still fighting behind the barricades saw inevitable death before them. Life to them was an affair of only a few short hours, they saw their cause was lost and with it all hope, they became wild, crazed with despair, revenge took possession of them, and destruction was inevitable. Men do not reason in moments like this. They were seized with a sort of instinctive impulse to destroy something. They could not destroy their enemies, who represented all wrongs, all oppression, all tyranny the people had suffered through all the ages that had passed. The torch was applied to the monuments that marked the reign of this tyranny. The Tuileries and the Palais Royal burned, but the wild and infuriated people did not stop here, they burned the Hôtel de Ville and the Palace of Justice also. After all, was this so strange when we remember the Hôtel de Ville had been for twenty years the den of the infamous gang appointed by that most infamous of all rulers of modern times, Napoleon the Third, appointed to rule Paris and stifle the energies of her citizens? Was it strange that the Palace of Justice burned when we remember that in those halls justice had ever been but another name for crime and infamy and seated upon her chariot she there crushed the rights of the people beneath her wheels? Is it strange that the Préfecture de Police burned when we remember that here all the murderous plots and intrigues against the people had been so often hatched? No it was not strange if we will stop to consider all the circumstances bearing up the case. Furthermore, the burning was not done by any edict or order of the Commune but by individuals acting upon their own responsibility and upon the impulse of the moment during the exciting interval of transition between the two governments. Hence it was not in the power of either to prevent it.

After the fires had been kindled and the barricades given up, the reign of the Commune being over, the most melancholy, the most agonizing and heart rending scenes of this eventful drama were enacted. I now refer to the arrest and wholesale slaughter of men, women, and children carried on by the Versailles troops after they were in possession of the city. The crimes of the Commune are white as the Alpine snow compared with these, and yet we never heard them spoken of. All the invertebrate is heaped upon the Commune.

The Versailles government began the war. The Commune merely resisted, and battling for the most sacred rights of mankind, finally overcome by numbers, surrendered. And then a civilized world looks on and sees the soldiers of Versailles murder twenty thousand men, women, and children, and humanity drops not a tear nor raises a voice in defense of even the innocent, and yet we live in the enlightened 19th century. Twenty thousand is doubtless a small number, but I desire to be on the safe side and do not wish to be charged with exaggeration. Probably all the men who fell during the Commune and those who were banished and massacred after-wards, together with all the woman and children who were shot, would swell the number to double the figure I have given, if the truth were known, but the French government being ashamed of its own crime and desiring to keep the truth from the civilized world has taken every measure to keep an investigation of this affair from coming to light. Therefore nothing authentic can be obtained. We do know however that after the struggle was over many shops and factories of Paris found two thirds of their best workmen missing. This was a severe loss to the city and the nation but as it was the nation's own doing not a word dare be said. I have seen with my own eyes bands of hundreds of prisoners who were taken after the barricades were captured, many of them women and children, conducted by the soldiers of the line to the public squares and then shot. In front of the military school of St. Cyr the deadly mitrailleuse or Gatling gun (that by turning a crank fires so many shots a minute) was em-
ployed and as fast as convoys of prisoners were brought up and properly placed in line to be killed they were systematically mowed down by this engine of death by the mere turn of a crank.

We hear so much said about the pétroleuses or female petroleum throwers of the Commune. Let me explain what this means. All the buildings that were burned were fired by means of petroleum or kerosene oil as they were built of fireproof material, unlike some of our cities in America. It is a well-known fact that in all the revolutions in Paris the women have played their part, a subordinate but none the less conspicuous one. In 1793 and 1848 they threw paving stones upon the enemies’ heads and strewed the streets with broken bottles that the cavalry could not pass. In 1871 they may have done the same thing, but that they saturated the buildings with petroleum is not probable, the general belief to the contrary notwithstanding. All the hue and cry about the awful pétroleuses is nothing more or less than a scare gotten up by the Versailles government to excuse wholesale massacre of women and children after the Commune had ceased to exist. No women were in the streets or behind the barricades in the locality of the burnt buildings. All those who were taken and shot were from the quarters inhabited by the working classes and as no fires occurred to any extent in that locality it is unreasonable to suppose that women did the firing or carried petroleum with which to saturate the walls of the buildings that were fired. The fact is, when the barricades were being taken in the working people’s quarter, the women saw their husbands and fathers struggling and dying behind the barricades until human nature could forbear no longer and they fought the soldiers also with paving stones and everything that could be thrown from the windows. They even rushed into the barricades and seized the arms of those who had fallen and fought and died with their husbands like true heroines. Many of them doubtless fought with words instead of arms, for when the soldiers would enter the houses to search for weapons and to make arrestations these women would let fly their batteries of words and tell these fiends some truths which they could not bear to hear. The truth must not be spoken at all times. At this time for these women to speak the truth meant death for they were arrested en masse, conducted through the streets with the men, and without judge or jury shot, and we who are so civilized and so enlightened allow ourselves to be taught to look upon them with a sort of horror. A great many children were put to death also probably for the same reasons. Such atrocities cannot be surpassed. The crimes of the Spanish Inquisition are no blacker than these. For several weeks no soldier appeared in the streets unless armed to the teeth ready to take the law in his own hands at a moment’s notice. This was according to general orders from the military head of the government and the soldiers did take the law into their own hands whenever occasion required. I remember several instances that will serve to illustrate the character of this reign of terror.

One little girl eleven or twelve years of age was thoughtlessly sent to the lamp store for some kerosene oil soon after the barricades were taken. A soldier seeing her with a bottle in her hand stopped her, took the bottle, put it to his nose and discovered it contained kerosene oil. The poor little creature was rudely pushed around the corner and shot for a pétroleuse. A couple of soldiers came into a restaurant I knew of and sat down to eat, leaning their rifles against the wall. A workman sat at an adjoining table and seeing the two soldiers with cartridges in their rifles, being filled with contempt for them and their government, imprudently addressed them. He says: You are arranging the Republic nicely aren’t you by killing off all the best republicans. A fine set of patriots you are. What do you say? says one of the soldiers. We’ll show you how we arrange the Republic, and they seized the man, took him out on the sidewalk, shot him, and went in and finished his meal. Another man happened to have on a pair of canvas gaiters such as are used in the French army. Crossing the street immediately after the barricades were taken, some soldiers spied his gaiters and supposing him to be one of the National Guard and, without any further proof or ground upon which to base their supposition, fired at and killed him. A friend of mine was taken and with a hundred or so of others was marched off to Versailles to be shot or banished. Before they were marched off however the prisoners were drawn up in two lines facing each other and the officer in charge of the convoy walked between the two lines and if any person had anything peculiar enough about his dress or personal appearance to attract the officer’s attention (an odd cut of the beard or a strange hat for instance) by a mere nod of the head or motion of the finger the officer that person was seized by the soldiers and shoved out of the line, taken to one side, and shot. So down the two
lines the officer passed dealing out death by the motion of his finger and woe be to him or her upon whom the gaze of this officer happened to fall. All others were sent to Versailles, passed a sham drum-head court martial, and banished to New Caledonia or Cayenne for life. One poor woman in this convey became so weary she could not walk and fell behind the others. The gendarmes struck her with their muskets and she would make every possible effort to hasten her pace, but finding it impossible to keep up she sank down in despair and was actually killed by being struck with the butts of the muskets. These few incidents are sufficient to give you an idea of some of the atrocities committed by the Versailles army at that time and the subject and the incidents are so horrifying that I do not care to go into further detail. I would not have related even these few incidents had I not deemed it necessary in order to give you a more complete and perfect idea of the manner in which the spirit of the Commune was crushed out by the French government and strange to say that government taking upon itself the name and title of a Republic.

Another melancholy feature of this affair is the banishment of thousands of unfortunate men to the far off lands of New Caledonia and Cayenne. If there is any man under the light of the sun whose attachment to his country and her manners and customs is particularly strong that man is a Paristan Frenchman. It is a well known fact that Frenchmen, especially Paristanians, travel in foreign countries the least of any inhabitants of the leading nations of the world. The love of home and home institutions is so strong with these people that they never travel. Therefore to tear a Frenchman from his fireside and banish him to a distant and foreign clime to him is worse than death. Imagine the feelings of the thousands who were crammed into government ships and transported to Cayenne after the Commune had been crushed. Torn from their wives and children and everything that was near and dear to them on earth they see the blue hills of their native land fade from their sight as they are hurried out upon the dark waters of the ocean to be held in exile upon a strange and inhospitable shore, and all this because they dared to assert their manhood and strike for what they believed to be their rights and the rights of their children.

Why is it that these men are still reviled and held in such contempt by even the thinking and intelligent and their deeds looked upon with such horror and their memories covered with such infamy while the government of Versailles with her black hearted assassins escapes the censure of the world? Why are the crimes of the army of Versailles dragged out of sight and hidden from the gaze of civilization when those crimes are black and infamous as any that stain the pages of history, while a band of poor unfortunate men struggling for what they knew to be right are crushed out of existence and held up to the world as infamous and despicable? I'll tell you why! It is because the one side in this melancholy affair represented aristocracy and the other labor. Aristocracy being more popular and consequently more powerful was enabled to crush out labor and make the men who represented it unpopular and with her power make them even infamous. In order to crush out the Commune entirely and kill it root and branch the Versailles government was obliged to (or at least did whether obliged to or not) resort to crimes that would blacken the darkest page of history, and when those crimes were once committed, resort to the most villainous and tyrannical means to hush them up and keep them from the world. There was no longer any freedom of the press, no more freedom of speech. Newspapers with any character whatever were either gagged or struck out of existence and those who wrote or those who spoke for the masses were thrown into prison and even exiled if they dared tell the truth. In France even today freedom of speech and of the press is a thing of the past. Thus the great crime is smothered and kept so. All those who know most about it are either dead or pitied in exile. All others are silent. It would be impossible for a man to speak anywhere in France as I have spoken here tonight. No one dare even think of attempting such a thing. The contrast is so great between this unfortunate country and our own that it ought to enable us to see and appreciate the liberties we enjoy.

Victor Hugo, that great champion of wronged humanity, is the only man of weight in the world who dare breathe with proper respect the names of the men of the Commune. Therefore he deserves our highest esteem and applause; such men are few in the world. . . . History is one sided; she speaks of the crimes of the Commune! When she speaks of the ten fold darker crimes of Versailles then she will have dealt justly with the subject and not until then.

Had the Commune been successful (and it was on the verge of success at one time) an admiring world would have applauded its efforts; but as it was not successful the world turns and stamps it into the mud. Had the American Revolution of 1776 been unsuccessful (victory was upon the point of deserting her banners more than once), I say the men who engaged in it would have been condemned to oblivion, branded as traitors, and their deeds stigmatized by the entire world. But as their long and bitter struggle was at last crowned with success their names and deeds are household words throughout the length and breadth of a great land and are handed down to a grateful posterity and their memories revered by humanity at large. Here in America we are supposed to be a liberty loving people. This is regarded as the great home of freedom. Then why is it that we who are such a liberty loving, freedom adoring people are so willing as we seem to be to decry and brand as assassins and incendiaries a band of men who fought for the sovereignty of the people, but not being as fortunate as we were when we struck for our liberties, they lost their cause? The motive is there nevertheless and if we cannot applaud these men let us at least be charitable towards them. The great cause of humanity is ours also. 'Twas for the sovereignty of the people they fought, 'twas for the sovereignty of the people we fought, for their cause was the sacred, the common cause of all suffering humanity.