

# Life and Letters of Jean de Marsillac

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THE next subject which is associated with the name of Jean de Marsillac is the petitioning, early in 1791, of the French National Assembly by Friends of Languedoc and by American Friends who had settled at Dunkirk, as represented by J. de Marsillac, and William Rotch and his son Benjamin. The subject will be best introduced by the following letter from J. de M. to James Phillips (original and translation in **D.**) :

Paris, 9. 1 mo. 1791.

DEAR JAMES,

Thy letter of 25 ult. was rec<sup>d</sup> the day before yesterday. I observe with satisfaction thy sympathy with our wishes about bearing arms—which we can neither bear nor use. I had before opened my mind to our friends Rotch of Dunkirk & informed them that I had it at heart, at a suitable time, to present a petition to the National Assembly, that we may get an exception about *arms* and they approve of it. I have, several times, conferred with Rabaut,<sup>10</sup> & the abbé Grégoire<sup>11</sup> who are well disposed towards us. I have also seen Brissot de Warville<sup>12</sup> & some other good patriots, & having told them how needful it was for us to petition the assembly, they approved our intentions and judiciously observed that the success would much depend on the zeal and the address with which the President should present it; & they desired me to defer the business a couple of

<sup>10</sup> Jean Paul Rabaut de St. Etienne (1743-1793) was a son of Paul Rabaut (1718-1794), a Desert Preacher, and himself a pastor of Nîmes. Was a Girondist; was put to death at the guillotine.

See *Encyc. Brit.*; Tylor's *Camisards*, 1893.

<sup>11</sup> Styled in a subsequent letter: "l'Abbé Grégoire Desmeunier l'Eveque d'Autun."

<sup>12</sup> Jean Pierre Brissot de Warville (1754-1793) was the head of the Girondist party in France. He was "a pamphleteer and journalist, who had been imprisoned in the Bastille, and had imbibed republican notions in America" (Stephens, *Revolutionary Europe*, 1900, p. 101). During his residence in America he wrote his oft-repeated reference to Friends, which appeared in his *Nouveau Voyage en Amérique* and re-appeared in 1792, translated into German, as *Karakteristik der Quäker* and published in Boston (see *The Friend* (Lond.), 1868, p. 97; *Bulletin F.H.S. of Phila.*, viii, 110). He married Félicité Dupont (*Mary Capper*, 1847, p. 41 n.) He perished on the scaffold.

See *The Journal of John Woolman*, 1900; Tangye's *Tales of a Grandfather*, 1902.

weeks when it was said Mirabeau<sup>13</sup> would be chosen President, and as he is well disposed towards us & a great friend of Rabaut, Grégoire, Warville, &c., he will have pleasure in seconding the application with that energy & eloquence which has hitherto enabled him to combat all his rivals with success.

To profit by the delay, I have written to L. Mazolier desiring him to send me a power, signed by all our friends of the South who can write, authorizing me to present this petition to the National Assembly. I shall engage the Friends of Dunkirk to join us and I hope, by the assistance of Divine Providence, to get our respectful remonstrances laid before the Assembly : probably I may present them myself about the end of the month if no unforeseen accident intervene.

Many of the members have told us it would be proper to present a memorial to the President containing a summary account of our religious Principles. I am therefore about it & when I send it I intend to send with it some of William Penn's pieces in French. As during the times of despotic government, the Comte de Vergennes<sup>14</sup> made an exception in the Edict in our favour (which begins "As to those who do not acknowledge the necessity of baptism") it is to be hoped that in this day of returning liberty to France we shall be treated with still more consideration, if the Lord is pleased to favour us in the undertaking. I am therefore pressingly concerned to present this petition, but I believe it will be best to wait two or three weeks.

I have also seen La Fosse. He has sent me the books thou informed me of, which I am obliged for & for which I desire my acknowledgments to our dear friends of London. I have already distributed part of them to many members of the Assembly, to some professors of the college of Medicine at Paris & in some places of Education in that capital. I presume the intention of our dear friends was that those which were sent to me should be distributed among the inhabitants of this great City. I hope to get one presented to the Queen, and probably either to present one to the King myself or by the means of one of his guards.

J. MARSILLAC.

Translation from French, 1 mo. 9. 91.

The "pétition respectueuse"<sup>15</sup> was presented on Thursday, 10th February, 1791. One paragraph reads :

We are come to implore this spirit of justice, that we may be suffered, without molestation, to conform to some principles and to use some forms

<sup>13</sup> Honoré Gabriel Riqueti Mirabeau (1749-1791), president of the National Assembly. "During his presidential fortnight Mirabeau received various deputations—notably one from the Quakers—and replied to them in the happiest of brief speeches." (*Life of Mirabeau*, by S. G. Tallentyre, p. 322.)

<sup>14</sup> Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes (1717-1781), foreign minister of Louis XVI.

<sup>15</sup> *Pétition respectueuse des Amis de la Société Chrétienne, appelés Quakers*, etc. A Paris chez Badouin, Imprimeur de l'Assemblée Nationale, rue du Foin St. Jacques, no. 31, and often reprinted in French and English.

to which the great family of Friends called Quakers have been inviolably attached ever since their rise.

The petition desired freedom from taking up arms, and permission to keep separate registers of births, marriages and deaths, and exemption from oath taking.

Mirabeau's reply was sympathetic ; on the first subject he declared :

As principles of Religion, your doctrines will not be the subject of our deliberation. The relation of every man with the Supreme Being is independent of all political institutions. Between God and the heart of man what government would dare to interpose ?

He promised consideration of the other two requests and concluded by saying : " The assembly invites you to stay its sitting."

The following account of the proceedings adds interest to the narrative. It is taken from *Paris in 1789-94*, by J. S. Alger, published in London in 1902 :

In singular contrast with these diplomatic receptions is the appearance (at the National Assembly) of three *Quakers*, who, entering with their hats on their heads, on the 10th February, 1791, must have puzzled and amused the assembly. One was a Frenchman, Jean de Marsillac, who having adopted Quaker principles had quitted the army, had graduated in medicine at Montpellier and subsequently wrote a life of *Penn* and a treatise on gout. The others were William Rotch and his son Benjamin [see *Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1893]. . . . They pleaded for exemption [from military service] and cited *Penna.* in proof that a community could exist without war. Mirabeau was then President . . . and he had no need . . . of having notice of deputations. . . . He held out promise of exemption from oaths, but he argued that self-defence was a duty. . . . On the 26th October, 1793, Benjamin Rotch again waited on the Convention. . . . On the 15th September, 1798, at the sitting of the Council of Five Hundred, Pres. Marbot announced the presence in the gallery of a Quaker who desired permission on religious grounds to remain covered. The President remarked that such permission would demonstrate the respect of the Council for religious conviction. . . . The Council however " passed to the order of the day " ; in other words it declined to consider the application.

Marsillac wrote to James Phillips at this time, from Paris, 2 iii. 1791 (original in **D.**) :

Deux jours après notre dernière admission dans l'assemblée nationale nous avons eu la satisfaction de voir le général la Fayette<sup>16</sup> qui nous a très bien accueilli, fait diner avec lui et sa femme, et promis son assistance lorsque notre pétition sera rapportée ; là nous avons eu une occasion de parler de nos

<sup>16</sup> Marquis de La Fayette (1757-1834) married a granddaughter of the Duc de Noailles, then one of the most influential families of the time. *Enc. Brit.*

Principes a plusieurs personnes ainsi que moi a plusieurs officiers qui connoissoient ma famille ; je leur ai distribué de nos livres religieux qu'ils ont reçu avec des temoignages de plaisir et d'approbation, la femme de la faïette en a pareillement accepté avec apparence de joie.

Peu de jours après nous avons été visiter Rabaut [St.] Etienne, l'abbé Siéyès,<sup>17</sup> Mirabeau, l'abbé Gregoire Desmeunier l'Eveque d'Autun, Chapelier<sup>18</sup> et plusieurs autres membres tels que Barnave,<sup>19</sup> Lameth,<sup>20</sup> &c, qui passent pour les meilleurs orateurs de l'assemblée nationale et ont le plus d'influence dans les discussions politiques et Decisions constitutionnelles tous (excepté le jeune Barnave) nous ont très bien accueilli et promis leur appui en tems convenable. . . .

On the title page of Marsillac's *Vie de Guillaume Penn*, brought out in Paris in 1791 in two volumes, the author styles himself : “ *Député extraordinaire des Amis de France à l'assemblée Nationale* ” !

Although well received by the President and members of the National Assembly and brought into contact with numerous persons interested in the views set forth by William Rotch and himself, Marsillac soon found that the views he expressed did not meet with general approval and that the assembly had not met the wishes of Friends. From Boulogne, 16 vii. 1792, he wrote to Robert Grubb and Mary Dudley of “ divers grievous trials ”—“ the civic oath, the obligation imposed upon us by the National Assembly to mount guard personally & to arm & to declare the arms every one had in his possession.” He continues :

I was arrested at Paris because I had not the National Cockade, & signified my reasons for non-compliance before the Judges of the Peace & since that, before Pétion,<sup>21</sup> Mayor of Paris, who had me set at liberty saying he knew me to be an honest man & a citizen submissive to the Constitution. I complained to several Deputies of this violence, & I have a promise from several of them that they would dispense with my bearing arms, wearing the Cockade<sup>22</sup> and taking the oath, when the times shall be more tranquil and less turbulent. (Translation in D.)

<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Joseph Siéyès (1748-1836), abbé and statesman.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac René Guy Le Chapelier (1754-1794), “ a Breton lawyer, from Rennes ” (Stephens, *Revolutionary Europe*, 1907, p. 52.)

<sup>19</sup> Antoine Pierre Joseph Marie Barnave (1761-1793), one of the great orators of the Revolution ; a Protestant. Was executed.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandre Théodore Victor, Comte de Lameth (1760-1829), soldier and politician.

<sup>21</sup> Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve (1756-1794), writer and politician. His death took place by his own hand.

<sup>22</sup> David Sands and other travelling Friends had trouble anent the cockade, but succeeded in overcoming it. (*David Sands*, 1848, pp. 143, 148.)

The writer then refers to a proposal of his to gather some Paris children together for instruction, in which he had the concurrence of "Gregory, Bishop of Blois,<sup>23</sup> the great protector of unlimited toleration, and my particular Friend," but decided to await more settled times.

A concern to revisit the British Isles arose in his mind, which was opposed by his "Mother and all her Family," although his wife thought she might accompany him. He set off, armed with a passport, on the 9th July, 1792. In a letter dated 17th September, 1815, he refers to his "*dernier voyage en Angleterre qui eut lieu je crois vers le dixieme mois de l'an 1792.*"

NORMAN PENNEY

*To be continued*

<sup>23</sup> Henri Grégoire (1750-1831), ardent republican and noted politician.

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### FOES OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD

Lavington Sufferings brought in and are as followeth, viz. :

Taken from Isaac Axford, Jun<sup>r</sup> by his ffather Isaac Axford of Eaststoake in y<sup>e</sup> year 1706 :

2 <sup>d</sup> of 5 <sup>th</sup> m <sup>o</sup> by his father 2 Cocks of Hay value	0	1	6
4 <sup>th</sup> of y <sup>e</sup> same 5 Cocks of Hay by his Servants value	0	2	6
4 <sup>th</sup> of y <sup>e</sup> same by my Brother Will <sup>m</sup> . Note there was butt eight Cocks in y <sup>e</sup> whole, out of w <sup>ch</sup> he took four as above value	0	7	0
5 <sup>th</sup> took as much Hay in value	0	3	6
6 <sup>th</sup> took by my Brother Will <sup>m</sup> in hay in value	0	15	0
8 <sup>th</sup> took by my Brother Will <sup>m</sup> 6 Cocks of Hay value	0	3	0
9 <sup>th</sup> took by my Brother Will <sup>m</sup> in Hay value	0	3	0
29 <sup>th</sup> took by Brother Will <sup>m</sup> afores <sup>d</sup> for my ffather 27 Threaves of wheat value	0	6	0
30 <sup>th</sup> took by my Brother Will <sup>m</sup> 41 Threaves of Wheat & y <sup>e</sup> same day by my ffather 10 Threaves value	0	10	0
Taken away by my ffather 41 Threaves of Wheat	0	9	0

There is a similar list for the following month, the total for the two being £8 16s. 9d.

There are similar accounts in subsequent years.

*From Minutes of Southern M.M. of Wiltshire (in D.)*