

Albert-Sorel, Jean, Le déclin de la monarchie (1715-1789).
Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1947.

I read I read the chapter on "L'esprit du siècle et les moeurs du temps." The author points out how authors like Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Quesnay and others created a climate of opinion different from that of the seventeenth century. In that century royal absolutism reached its climax. There was rationalistic thinking but always based on religious dogma.

The "philosophes" went beyond religion to nature, and as matter of fact, many became anti-Christian if not definitely atheistic. Reason reigned supreme and was to discover what was given in nature. The concepts of natural rights emerged; there was a back to the simplicity of nature movement. Commerce also must function according to nature and from there the laissez-faire philosophy. "L'esprit du siècle" sapped the edifice of absolute monarchy. Albert does not believe that the "philosophes" are the cause of the Revolution but he maintains that their ideas are very corrosive.

Becker, Carl L., The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers.
New haven: Yale University Press, 1932.

This is This is a great little book. I have read it twice and I think that it deserves another reading; so rewarding I have found it.

The thesis of the book is simple. The author argues that

the eighteenth-century philosophers were closer to mediæval thought than they ever realized. They denounced Christian philosophy yet were hardly emancipated from it. They rejected any fear of God but nevertheless had a respectful attitude toward Deity. They ridiculed the idea of creation in six days yet they sincerely believed in the beautifully articulated world-machine designed by the Supreme Being. They believed in a Golden Age in former times but rejected the idea of the Garden of Eden. They rejected the Bible but had a naïve belief in the authority of nature and reason.

The author argues rather successfully that the basic preconceptions of eighteenth century thought - allowance being made for certain improvements- were the same as those of the thirteenth century.

Elliot, Frances, Old Court Life in France. Leipzig: Bernhard Tachnitz.

This book reads like a novel. The intrigues of the court during the reign of Louis XIII are presented in life-like situations. The author mingles dialogue with narration. Louis XIII is presented as eccentric, conscious of his weaknesses and dominated by Richelieu. The King, as if to mortify the Queen, always falls in love with the maid of honor, first Madame de Hautefort and later Madame de Lafayette.

Anne of Austria appears as a victim of the King's caprices but specially of Richelieu's policy. All her hatred and that of her many close friends is directed toward the Cardinal.

Hearnshaw, F.J.C., ed., The Social and Political Ideas of Some Great French Thinkers of the Age of Reason. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1931.

Hearnshaw wrote the article on Rousseau. He, it seems to me, makes a very good attempt to understand Rousseau. He recognizes that there are contradictions in the man, and that the scholars differ in the interpretation given to certain passages in Rousseau's works. Yet he points out that in spite of all tangles there is meaning in Rousseau. He presents the main thread of Rousseau's political ideology in terms of the Biblical picture of paradise lost and paradise regained. He sees the influence that the Bible had on Rousseau, although this influence was secularized and could hardly be called Biblical in the true sense of the word. To him the greatest contribution that Rousseau has made to the science of government has been the idea of the general will, a concept which he thinks leads inevitably to collectivism.

Kaufmann, M., "Latitudinarianism and Pietism" in The Cambridge Modern History, Lord Acton, ed., The Age of Louis XIV. vol. V. Cambridge, 1908.

Kaufmann points out that in the later half of the seventeenth century two tendencies prevented the development of the Reformation: (1) the spirit of growing insubordination or the excessive use of the right of free enquiry. (2) the lapse into a hardened dogmatism, limiting the area of free debate in disregard

of the principle of private judgement.

In order to counteract these two tendencies, Latitudinarianism and Pietism arose.

The object of Pietism was to infuse a "fresh spirit of religious fervor and to bring into use forms of faith and worship better calculated to satisfy the craving for depth of soul in devotion and the desire to face the profounder questions which gather round religion."

The Latitudinarians were a middle of the way party. They regarded theology as the "queen of the sciences" but were very much under the influence of the philosophical speculations of the times. They wanted to lift up the small voice of reason to quell the storm of religious passion.

Lemaître, Lules, Jean Jacques Rousseau, New York: The McClure Co. 1907.

Here we have a man that can hardly spare words to criticize Rousseau. Of the Discours on inequality he says: It "is the most extravagant, the most revolutionary, of all his works, the most pregnant after the Contrat social, with future and fatal consequences."

Of the Social Contract he says: " To my mind the Contrat Social is , with the first 'Discours', Rousseau's most mediocre book, the most obscure the most chaotic, with all its apparent solemnity. Later on, it became the most disastrous of all."

Lemaître attacks Rousseau for his lack of objectivity, and for promoting the growth of the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Rule. Of course, he means his ideas. He thinks that the most stupid and murderous prejudices of the Revolution came from the Social Contract. He thinks that no writer has done more harm than Rousseau, who, he thinks, did not even know what he was writing.

Manuel, Frank E., The Age of Reason. Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press, 1951.

This is the second book of a series being put out by Cornell University to trace the development of Western society from Greek times to the present.

Some of the Chapters II & III present in broad outline the intellectual climate of opinion of the times. Some of the basic tenets of the age are presented. (1) The Newtonian world-machine upset the Christian view of God and the universe. (2) The Philosophers applied what they called the scientific method to religion and accepted as true those parts that could only be validated by reason. (4) Many rejected revelation; those that kept it interpreted it in rationalistic terms. (5) The problem of terrestrial happiness became the center of morals. (6) The philosophers tried to discover the laws of society as if they had been dealing with the physical universe. (7) Self-love was exalted. (8) They were not political radical, but were confident that the laws of reason could operate under any system.

Morley, John, Rousseau. Vol II. New York: MacMillan & Co.

Morley criticizes Rousseau for his lack of historical interest. Rousseau showed no real interest for history in his writings. He made sweeping generalizations about the origin of society but takes no pain to verify them through research and inquiry. His assumptions concerning the origin of society are completely mistaken. The subject is too complex and intricate to be treated by bold generalizations.

Morley says that Rousseau borrowed from Hobbes the true conception of sovereignty and from Locke the true conception of the ultimate seat of authority. Of these he made the great image of the sovereign of the people.

Kunstler, Charles, La vie quotidienne sous Louis XIV.
Paris: Nacheffe, 1950.

This book shows French life during this period in detail. As to the family life the author says that husband and wife lived in different quarters- this of course if they had a big enough house- and they addressed each other as M. and Mme. Children did not have an important place in the family. They were given to nurses and did not know too much tenderness.

France at this time had the best roads of Europe but they were not used too much. Many were built for military purposes and forced labor was used in their construction.

The author says that no generalization can be made to

apply to the economic condition of the French peasant. at the time of Louis XVI. As some travellers have recorded many of them lived in dire poverty, eating poorly and inhabiting one room houses. Yet in certain provinces the peasants had plenty to eat and also good houses. Many of them appeared poorer than they were in order to evade taxes.

Physiocrats , article in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol, 17.
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947.

This is briefly the economic theory of the physiocrats:

" Only those labours are truly productive which add to the quantity of raw materials available for the purposes of man; and the real annual addition to the wealth of the community consists of the excess of the mass of agricultural products (including, of course, metals) over their cost of production. On the amount of this produit net depends the well-being of the community, and the possibility of its advance in civilization." (885)

The Physiocrats favored free trade. They failed to see in their economics that the individual in following his selfish interests is not necessarily following the welfare of the group.

Randall, John Sherman, The Making of the Modern Mind, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940.

This is a profound treatment of the cultural development of the Western world. Five chapters are given to the social and

cultural developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These chapters cover the following topics: the Newtonian world-machine, the religion of reason, the sciences of human nature and of business, the science of government, and the morality of reasonableness,

In the chapter on religion, the author traces the development of the humanistic spirit from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century. Under the impact of the new science, humanism had a profound effect in religion. Its two basic tenets were the goodness of man and the value of human personality.

The Christian revelation was severely under attack. At first it was above reason; then it was the equal of reason; then below reason, and finally it was discarded by the atheist.

Sée, Henri, L'évolution de la pensée politique en France au XVIIe siècle. Paris: Marcel Giard, 1925.

Here is an admirer of Rousseau. He maintains that Rousseau remains throughout all his political writings an individualist. He deals with several aspects of the ideas of Rousseau: the influence of sentiment on the ideas of Rousseau, the so-called contradiction between the Discours on inequality and the Social Contract, the individualism of Rousseau, his conception of popular sovereignty, and similar topics. I

I shall touch on one of these topics, namely, religion.

Rousseau had a creed for the state that he was proposing. It was

Deistic, involving the believe in God, in the immortality of the soul, in the future punishment, etc. The outstanding thing about his position concerning the relation of religion to the state is that he advocates death for any who would not believe in the civic religion.

Willert, P. F., "Philosophy and the Revolution" in Cambridge Modern History, Lord Acton, ed., The French Revolution. Vol. VIII. Cambridge, 1908

Willert presents the contradictory opinions of the scholars concerning the influence of the philosophers in the coming of the French Revolution.

Mallet du Pan thought that it was philosophy that really brought about the Revolution. Intellectual anarchy prepared the way for social anarchy. To Rousseau he attributes the role of the prophet of the Revolution.

MourniMournier on the other hand holds that the philosophers contributed but little to the overthrow of the old political and social order. He thinks that ruined finances, fiscal oppression, vacillation, weakness, and incompetence in government were the primary causes of the Revolution.

Willert takes a middle of the road position. He says: "Even if we believe that the philosophers did not cause the Revolution nor originate the ideas which determine the form it was to take, we must allow that they precipitated it by giving a definite shape to vague aspirations, by clearing away the obstacle which restrained the rapidly raising flood of discontent, by depriving those, whose interest and position made them the defenders of the old order, of all faith in the righteousness of their cause, and by inspiring the assailants with hope and enthusiasm." (p. 35)