

The Fox 241

Chapter 241: Steel and Economic Warfare

Lucien's defense found some understanding and support from Joseph, but it couldn't shield him from the consequences Napoleon and Joseph had in store for him. The reason? Disregard for authority.

"So, you think you can pull something of this magnitude without discussing it with us first? Tell me, are you simply audacious, or are you so self-assured that you've lost your sense of judgment? Well, you can pick one of these judgments yourself..."

"Joseph, I..." Lucien's face turned pale.

"Joseph, Monsieur Lavasie had something sent over." Just then, Fanny pushed the door open and walked in. 458

Joseph furrowed his brow but temporarily set aside the matter with Lucien. After all, if Lavasie was sending something over, it had to be important. "Could it be...?" Joseph's heart raced.

"What is it?" Joseph inquired.

"Right here, take a look for yourself." Fanny revealed the shiny little ingot she had concealed behind her back, placing it in front of Joseph.

Joseph took the small ingot and examined it closely. He even used a paper knife from the desk to make a slight cut to confirm it was indeed steel and not wrought iron. His excitement intensified.

"You're lucky today," Joseph turned to Lucien. "I have other matters to attend to, and I can't be bothered with you right now. Go find Napoleon yourself."

In truth, ever since his brothers had become influential figures in their own right, Joseph had rarely resorted to imposing 'family discipline.'

With Lucien dispatched, Joseph immediately arranged for a carriage and set off for Lorraine.

Three months earlier, Lavasie had completed an experiment in the outskirts of Paris, using hot air blown into a blast furnace. He successfully produced a batch of steel. Though the quality of this steel wasn't ideal, particularly at low temperatures, it was still superior to copper and iron by all means.

Joseph knew the issue lied in the phosphorus and sulfur content in the steel, specifically from the iron mines in Lorraine. The phosphorus content was too high, and even with a basic refractory lining in the furnace, it couldn't be completely eliminated. Of course, with more time, more experiments, adjustments to slag-making materials and process, the quality of the steel could be improved further, but...

"We can't afford to wait any longer. We've already expended too much capital, and we need a product that can bring in returns quickly. Besides, as long as it's not used in extreme conditions, the steel we have right now is sufficient," Joseph declared after receiving news of the initial success of the experiment. He immediately stopped further funding for experiments and instead pushed for the immediate commercialization of the existing technology, urging the rapid establishment of a fully functional steelworks.

Lavasie agreed wholeheartedly with this decision, as it meant the project was finally profitable, and he could claim his own estate. Thus, when it came to swiftly industrializing the steelmaking process, he was even more eager than Joseph.

So Lavasie personally went to Lorraine to supervise the construction of the first modern steelworks.

Clearly, the sooner the steelworks were constructed and put into operation, the greater the benefits for the military-industrial complex. To meet the deadlines, many things were overlooked, leading to a series of problems. During the first run of the steelmaking furnace, a major accident occurred, with the furnace collapsing due to construction defects, triggering a fire.

The military-industrial complex suffered substantial losses in this fire. It claimed the lives of hundreds of workers and more than ten engineers. If Lavasie hadn't coincidentally felt unwell and gone to the restroom, he might have been caught in the flames. Of course, a few worker casualties and some of Lavasie's assistants weren't considered a significant loss.

However, the fire destroyed most of the steelworks' facilities. This resulted in a delay of nearly a month, and from the perspective of the high-profile individuals within the military-industrial complex, this was the real disaster.

Due to the reconstruction's delay, the steelworks only began trial operations recently. Before that, the iron-smelting blast furnaces had been operational for a few months, while the associated factories were left idle, waiting for steel. Every minute of waiting equated to substantial waste.

Joseph arrived in Lorraine four days later. As soon as he arrived, he sought out Lavasie.

"What's the situation now? How much are we producing each day?" Joseph inquired.

"About as expected," Lavasie replied, "If everything goes smoothly, we can produce approximately ten tons per day, which amounts to 3,650 tons of steel per year. But you know this isn't entirely feasible, as there will be downtimes for maintenance. Nevertheless, even with those interruptions, the factory should be able to produce around 3,000 tons of steel in a year."

"It's still not enough, far from it," In contrast to Lavasie's perspective, in Joseph's eyes, a factory with an annual output of just around 3,000 tons of steel was insufficient. Considering his past life... and the numerous applications for steel now, it was too little.

Joseph's visit wasn't for the purpose of witnessing molten steel being poured from the steelmaking furnace. After the fire incident, he had no intention of going near the steelworks, not only due to the fire hazard but also because of the high temperatures, noise, and air pollution that posed significant health risks.

In this era, people were unaware of the health hazards posed by these factors, but Joseph was well-informed. However, even with this knowledge, he hadn't taken significant measures to address them. Some of these issues were technical in nature, such as waste gas and water treatment. In this era, there was no technology for such treatments, and even the scientific theories required for developing these technologies were nonexistent.

Fortunately, in this era, there were no theories suggesting that various types of pollution could harm human health, and the foundations for such theories, be they in sociology or natural sciences, hadn't been established. So, Joseph could act as if he didn't know, without any concerns for the consequences of polluting the environment.

There were some safety measures that were feasible even with the technology of this era, such as dust masks and earplugs for protecting workers. However, implementing these measures increased costs. It made sense for highly skilled technical workers who had the potential to damage valuable machinery. But for general laborers who could be found on the street and shifted between jobs regularly, equipping them with such gear was economically unjustifiable. Of course, masks and earplugs could be sold near the factories for those who chose to buy them.

Safety training was another necessity. Without it, workers could damage valuable machinery due to poor handling. However, excessive training would also add to costs. So, it was primarily provided to more skilled, stable workers in the factories, with an emphasis on safeguarding machinery.

As for general laborers, like those operating hand-drawn carts, there were many risks in their work. But considering their status as entirely independent workers, moving from one factory to another as it suited them, training them extensively wouldn't be cost-effective. So, these workers didn't receive safety training.

Joseph's visit had two main goals: to ensure the factory's efficient operation and the production of high-quality products, and then, following his plan, to distribute the steel where it was urgently needed.

Machinery was the most pressing need for steel. Many machines used cast iron for moving parts, such as the crankshafts in steam engines, and the transmission components of textile looms and water pumps. The strength of cast iron was significantly lower than that of steel. This meant that parts made from it, if not adequately robust, would often fracture, while parts that were robust enough would become overly heavy, reducing the efficiency of the machinery. Replacing them with steel parts would greatly enhance reliability and efficiency.

However, steel production was quite limited, so Joseph decided to prioritize its use for steam engines and ore crushers. Afterward, they would allocate it to farm implements and other profitable civilian uses. As for the steel cannons and rifles Joseph had promised to Napoleon, a couple of cannons and a handful of rifles would be produced, then a military technology expo would be organized. This would serve to intimidate foreign governments, primarily those that posed no direct threat to France, and help secure enough funding.

"The British, with their steam engines and textiles, are about to lose their easy money-making days in Europe," Joseph told Napoleon after confirming that steel production had reached a level for mass production. "Now is the time to prepare for an economic counterattack against the British."

"Then how do you plan to counter the British?" Napoleon asked. "Once we gain the upper hand in steam engines and textiles, the British will immediately tear up the contracts. And you, reluctant to deploy the latest technology in the military, how do you plan to counter the British then?"

"Ah, Napoleon, you still have much to learn about economics," Joseph scoffed. "Let me ask you this: in a period when business is booming, what sort of social situation arises?"

"Don't take me for a fool; I've read Adam Smith's 'The Wealth of Nations.' If such a situation occurs, more resources will naturally flow into the industry. The steam engine manufacturers and textile factories will multiply, with more people investing in the industry. As supply increases, prices will naturally fall, and the industry won't be as profitable. Capital will gradually shift away from this industry..."

"Why all this talk?" Joseph interrupted, "You've said so much without getting to the point."

"Then go on," Napoleon replied.

"We'll initially surrender steam engine manufacturing and textiles to them," Joseph explained, "making these industries their primary income sources. Then, we'll gradually undermine their other industries. This way, we'll gain an advantage in other sectors, and if they don't want to suffer a major trade deficit, they'll have to rely more on steam engine manufacturing and textiles."

In such a scenario, their situation will evolve into a point where they're entirely dependent on these two industries. During this period, wise men in Britain will undoubtedly recognize the danger. They'll raise their voices and attempt to prevent this situation. These people will try to sabotage our trade agreements. However, the people who have been profiting significantly from steam engines and textiles will respond, and how will they react?"

Napoleon chuckled, "Joseph, this is a cunning and shameless plot that reeks of your style. Those profiting significantly from these industries won't tolerate others jeopardizing their fortunes. As Machiavelli said, a person can easily forget who killed their parents, but they will never forget who deprived them of their wealth. To put it in your words: 'Blocking the path to others' wealth generates more hatred than killing their parents.'"

"Those who can make a fortune with these two industries are bound to be influential and powerful. Their financial path isn't easy to block, and trying to do so will cause internal issues in Britain. But if we don't block them and they become entirely reliant on these two industries, when that happens, any disturbance in their relations with us will be fatal to their economy."

"Joseph, we must tear up the agreements then," Napoleon argued. "We won't gain an advantage in other industries if we wait too long, and we might risk their technological leapfrogging."

"Of course, we can occasionally threaten to tear up the agreements," Joseph said. "Besides, do you know why I decided to leave textiles and steam engine manufacturing to them?"

Napoleon pondered and replied, "Textiles employ many workers, so a crisis in the industry would lead to widespread social unrest. As for steam engines, as long as we protect the steelmaking secrets, they'll have to depend on our raw materials. Any disturbance in our relationship, in that context, will be fatal for them."

"Correct, Napoleon," Joseph said. "We don't need to tear up the agreements. We only need to occasionally threaten to do so. Besides, I have another idea. We will emphasize our superior quality products and create brand recognition. Even if other countries can produce steel, it will be of lower quality compared to ours. This strategy will enable us to maintain good relations while being the dominant supplier."

Napoleon smiled, "Well, Joseph, it seems you have this all planned out."

Chapter 242: The Bolton-Watt Company

The new year of 1800 had just begun, and the streets of London were still covered in thick, dirty, grayish-white snow. Around nine in the morning, a public carriage stopped not far from the entrance of the Bolton-Watt Company. A burly young man stepped down from the carriage, his neck pulled down into his coat to shield himself from the cold. With one hand clutching his slightly undersized

coat tightly, and the other hand carrying a large box, he braved the freezing weather. His bare hands turned red from the cold.

The man looked around, spotting the sign of the Bolton-Watt Company. His face, now red from the cold, broke into a tiger-like smile when he recognized the place. He hoisted the suitcase and briskly made his way to the entrance of the Bolton-Watt Company.

The name "Bolton-Watt Company" gave a hint about its significance. This was the company founded by James Watt, the innovator of the steam engine and a key figure in the onset of the first industrial revolution. James Watt, however, was only the second shareholder in the company. The primary owner was Mr. Bolton, who owned two-thirds of the company, including the patent rights.

The young man reached the entrance of the Bolton-Watt Company and spoke to the waiter standing there, also shivering in the thin, cold air, with a heavy accent in his not-so-fluent English, "I've come to speak with Mr. Bolton and Mr. Watt about a substantial deal we previously arranged. My name is Gérard."

The waiter regarded Gérard with suspicion, eyeing him up and down. A wealthy Frenchman named Gérard was expected to visit this morning, and the waiter knew about it. However, preoccupied with watching the luxurious carriages with heaters that passed by, he hadn't noticed this man who had walked over, carrying his own luggage. Was this shabbily dressed fellow really the "wealthy Frenchman" mentioned by Mr. Bolton?

But Gérard claimed his name was Gérard, and the other information he provided seemed accurate. So, the waiter couldn't reject him simply because he looked like a penniless Scot wandering in London. He responded with a touch of hesitation, "Mr. Gérard, Mr. Bolton and Mr. Watt are expecting you. Please follow me."

The waiter, while speaking, opened the door and was about to help Gérard with the luggage out of habit.

Gérard declined the offer, saying, "Oh, this suitcase contains very important items, and it's quite heavy. I'll carry it myself." He followed the waiter into the company.

Guided by the waiter, they ascended to the second floor. Gérard's heavy steps on the staircase made the waiter frown slightly, and he silently labeled this Frenchman as "uncultured" while proceeding upstairs.

Finally, they reached a door, and the waiter knocked gently. "Mr. Bolton, Mr. Watt, Mr. Gérard is here."

"Please come in," came the reply from inside.

The waiter opened the door, and a rush of warm air greeted them. Gérard entered the room to find two elderly gentlemen standing up to welcome him.

"Are you Mr. Gérard? Please have a seat over here; it's closer to the fireplace and warmer," said the elder of the two.

Gérard placed his suitcase on the floor and took a seat on the sofa, near the fireplace. The waiter brought him a cup of tea and set it on the small table beside him.

"Thank you," Gérard said, lifting the teacup and downing it in one go.

"Now that I'm feeling warmer, I must say, London is a frigid place. I left my hotel, and in the blink of an eye, I could hardly breathe from the cold. The winters here are truly freezing!"

"London isn't so bad, actually, and James's hometown is even colder. But you Southern folks are lucky; your hometowns are always warm," the older gentleman remarked.

They exchanged pleasantries and introductions. "I am Mr. Bolton, the owner of the company, and this is my partner and friend, Mr. Watt."

Gérant, in turn, introduced himself, saying, "I am Gérard, a shareholder of the French Lorraine Ironworks. I've been sent by our board to explore potential business collaborations with your esteemed company. If our collaboration is fruitful and we all profit handsomely, we hope our friendship will endure."

They continued the conversation, and Mr. Bolton asked, "Mr. Gérard, as far as I know, your company is part of the military-industrial complex, and the military-industrial complex has its own steam engine manufacturer. May I inquire about the reasons behind your company's decision to collaborate with us rather than with Bonaparte Steam Power, which is also part of the military-industrial complex?"

Gérant replied, "There are two primary reasons. The Bonaparte steam engine was initially designed for naval use. From what I understand, they spared no expense to achieve extreme performance. However, their machines, although excellent, come at an exorbitant price. Furthermore, many of their technologies are highly classified."

Gérant paused briefly and continued, "I believe, gentlemen, especially distinguished scientists like Mr. Watt, may be very interested in Bonaparte's steam engine, but I doubt either of you has seen one in person. Frankly, I haven't either. However, I know that the military-industrial complex has employed various means to boost the boiler pressure of those steam engines to about one and a half times that of the products you offer. Ships using them have an unrivaled speed advantage. Additionally, their machines, under the same horsepower, are more compact and fuel-efficient. You see, space is limited on ships, and saving coal means more cargo capacity. Sailing at higher speeds allows for more round trips, which in itself brings substantial profits."

"But any improvement comes at a cost. To my knowledge, the manufacturing cost, maintenance cost, and maintenance time for this type of steam engine are much higher than that of a conventional steam engine. Only users with high profits or extremely demanding performance requirements, like smugglers and the navy, are willing to accept such expensive equipment. As for Bonaparte Steam Power, they are still tightly holding on to the demand from the navy, and they currently lack the capacity to provide us with the usual, cost-effective steam engines."

Bolton and Watt exchanged a glance. If this Frenchman's seemingly casual information was reliable, then it seemed that Bonaparte Steam Power wasn't pursuing general-purpose power. This reduced the threat to their business considerably. However, they couldn't be sure if everything this man said was true.

"So, what type of steam engine does your company intend to order from us?" Bolton inquired.

"We currently require a custom-built, extremely large steam engine," Gérard replied. "Much larger than anything your company has constructed before."

"How large precisely?" Watt asked.

"As large as it can be. Ideally, one engine should have ten thousand horsepower," Gérard stated.

Gérant's request startled Watt. "Mr. Gérard, why would you need a steam engine of such immense power? I must admit I can't fathom what kind of work would require such tremendous force."

"We need it for power generation," Gérard revealed. The French had already developed electric motors and had begun widespread use in rural water management projects, which had led to soaring copper prices throughout Europe. Moreover, most of Europe, including France, had recently transitioned from using copper cannons to iron cannons. This was knowledge that the British were aware of, but they hadn't yet utilized these electric technologies themselves due to French export restrictions, designating them as "military technologies."

"With electric motors, tasks that used to require many small steam engines can now be accomplished with electric motors. So, now we only need a single or a set of super-sized steam engines in places where power generation is required. Currently, the power generation units and electric motors are under technical control, limited by raw materials, and confined to specific areas in France. However, I believe they will eventually expand to more sectors and regions. Therefore, Mr. Watt, in the not-so-distant future, all small and medium-sized steam engines, apart from those used on ships, will lose their market. So, I suggest that your company prepare in advance and invest all its efforts in the development of super-sized steam engines as the power source for electricity generation. Only super-sized steam engines capable of prolonged and continuous operation will have a future."

With that, Gérard took a document from his briefcase and handed it to them. "These are the technical requirements we have for this type of steam engine."

Watt received the document and examined it closely. After a considerable time, he looked up with a perplexed and regretful expression. "Your requirements for performance are too high, and your demands for reliability are even higher, and these two requirements conflict with each other. As for the price you're offering...though I hate to say it, I have to admit that, both technically and cost-wise, we're not capable of taking on this order. I'm certain there's no other manufacturer in the world that can handle such an order. So, I suggest that your company reconsider these requirements."

"What if we could provide you with a substantial amount of low-cost steel?" Gérard suggested.

Chapter 243: Spreading Warmth and Education

While Gérard was discussing the sale of steam engines by the cozy fireplace with Watt, little Oliver was busy delivering warmth to the residents of Petticoat Lane under the guidance of Feigin.

This act of delivering warmth was truly heartfelt. A week earlier, a brutal and invisible intruder known to the doctors as "pneumonia" had stealthily entered Petticoat Lane. This uninvited guest roamed through the lane, touching here and there with his icy fingers. This malefactor boldly strolled through, leaving a trail of victims behind, dozens and even scores of unfortunate souls in every courtyard he entered.

For the impoverished people of Petticoat Lane, falling ill at this time was akin to stepping through the gates of the underworld. Starting three days ago, every morning, cold, lifeless bodies were dragged out from the dark little houses on either side of Petticoat Lane. These bodies were placed on stiff wooden carts, one, two...until the cart was filled to the brim. The shivering cartman, numbed

by the cold, cracked his whip, and the horse's nostrils exhaled white mist as the iron-clad hooves pounded on the hard, iron-like ground. The cart rumbled slowly forward, the ungreased wheels emitting a low, intermittent friction sound, akin to the lament of a worker's wife, who had been awakened by the cold in the middle of the night, realizing that she had no idea how to fill her husband and children's hungry stomachs the next day.

This dire situation greatly concerned Feigin. Dealing with pneumonia was beyond his capabilities. At this point, he could only rely on natural means and the grace of God, hoping that the residents could rely on their own resistance and divine protection to weather this calamity. Then, after the elderly and children had mostly succumbed to the disease, perhaps...a form of herd immunity might emerge.

This demonstrated Feigin's remarkable talent and insight, ample qualifications to serve as a prime minister in a later century's corrupt country. Being a mere gang leader within a small faction seemed quite underutilized for his talents.

However, Feigin was determined to alleviate some of the residents' suffering. He believed that the severity of pneumonia in Petticoat Lane was, to a great extent, due to the extreme cold. Thus, he had to find a way to raise the nighttime temperatures in the area.

Recent improvements in the economy were reflected in the earnings of Feigin's crew. Their success rate as pickpockets hadn't increased, but the amount they collected from each affluent gentleman had significantly risen.

Furthermore, not long ago, Feigin had successfully collaborated with a young man eager to extract more money from his miserly father to fund his visits to taverns and encounters with women. They executed a kidnapping scheme together. With the enthusiastic cooperation and assistance of their "victim," they obtained a total of three thousand pounds from an elderly gentleman (though the victim took away a portion of the loot). Additionally, Feigin's wealthy friend, who had now become a Frenchman, generously donated a thousand francs. This year, Feigin's pockets were fuller than ever before.

This allowed Feigin to be more generous when delivering warmth this year. In the past, he could only provide each Petticoat Lane household with a small piece of cloth. However, this year, he could provide each household with an actual blanket.

These blankets were all secondhand goods that Feigin's friends had scavenged from various flea markets. Compared to purchasing brand-new blankets, buying secondhand items offered better value. If Joseph were present, he might suggest boiling these secondhand blankets in a large pot.

However, in this era, while bacteria had been discovered, the link between bacteria and disease had not yet been established. People were unaware that certain bacteria could cause illnesses or how to eliminate them. Consequently, no one paid attention to such matters.

Oliver followed Feigin as they went from house to house, delivering the blankets. Every family was deeply grateful to the virtuous Feigin, and even Oliver felt a sense of pride accompanying him. However, there wasn't much of a smile on Feigin's face. In fact, whenever he left a house, the smile on his face was immediately whisked away by the biting cold outside.

That evening, Feigin gathered the key members of his gang and shared some surprising news with them.

"Tooth, Butcher, and Cuckoo, gather around. I've called you here for a reason. You know Jacques Goren has returned, and he's now the second secretary at the French Embassy. He's visited me several times and even made some donations to our cause."

"I know. Back when we were just kids, we used to hear stories about 'Sparrow's Luck' from you. He's a true, loyal friend. Even after achieving success, he hasn't forgotten us," one of them replied.

"Back, Jacques Goren has talked to me several times, and he thinks our approach is wrong," Feigin explained.

"Our approach? Does he think we should change our tactics now that he's successful?" Tooth raised an eyebrow.

Feigin shook his head. "No, Jacques Goren has always been our brother. But after spending so many years in France, his experiences and perspectives have grown. He believes that our small-scale activities won't change anything."

"Then what does he want? Does he want to become the next Feigin?" Butcher asked.

"He doesn't want to take my place; I would be more than happy to hand it to him if he did. After all, it was supposed to be his from the beginning, before he had to flee to France for a certain reason. But as I mentioned, Jacques Goren has broader horizons. You see, he participated in the French Revolution. He was there, cheering when Louis XVI was sent to the guillotine."

"Good Lord! He actually witnessed the beheading of a king?"

"He even participated in it. He was part of the storming of the Bastille, he followed Saint-Just—whom the French call the Archangel of the Revolution. He served as Saint-Just's messenger on the battlefield, and in Paris, he gathered information for the Jacobins. He personally sent many noble gentlemen to the guillotine. Now you understand why I say his ambitions are grand," Feigin explained.

"Dear God, is he thinking of introducing something like that here?" Butcher asked.

"He hopes that we can unite the poor people of the entire slum, not just for higher wages through strikes, but for political rights. He believes we can change the rules for this country, for the world. It's a risky endeavor," Feigin paused and continued, "you know, it's a matter of life and death."

"Most of us here have faced life and death situations," Butcher replied.

"This is different," Feigin shook his head. "I've been thinking a lot. While I trust Jacques Goren and find his words reasonable, I must go to France personally to see the place after the revolution. Then I'll come back and discuss it with all of you before making a decision."

"Feigin, you're leaving for a while? Who will lead us?" Tooth quickly asked.

"Jacques Goren supports my decision to visit France and suggested that I train in Toulon—a place where the Irishman Lassalle reportedly trained and now has a thriving business. Perhaps I'll visit Paris first, then Toulon, maybe even Ireland before returning," Feigin explained.

"How long will you be gone, Feigin?" Butcher inquired.

"At least half a year, maybe longer, but not more than a year. I'll probably leave next month. During this time, Butcher will temporarily take charge in my absence. Butcher, you can discuss things with Tooth. Also, if there are any serious issues, you can turn to Jacques Goren. You can trust him

completely; he's still our brother. I'll leave at the end of next month, so in the meantime, start managing the gang's affairs, and I can provide guidance while I'm here."

Chapter 244: Chronicles of France (1)

A month later, Félix sat in a carriage bearing the emblem of the French Embassy, heading directly to the pier through the VIP channel, formally reserved for diplomats.

Boarding from here was relatively safe. After all, Félix was a wanted man in England, and if caught, he'd face the gallows. Even though the regular channel had portraits of several wanted criminals, including Félix, hanging prominently, some of those faces were familiar to him. However, he hadn't seen a single image that even closely resembled him, and some of the portraits even got the gender wrong.

These images had weathered and faded due to wind and sun, making them nearly indecipherable. But Félix knew their importance. For the police, these slightly similar yet different portraits allowed them to question individuals who didn't use the VIP channel for boarding, giving them the opportunity to say, "You look a lot like Félix. We need to take you in for questioning."

At this point, those who knew how the game worked would promptly offer a bribe to the police and change their appearance, no longer resembling Félix. As for the less savvy, they'd be taken to the station, and trust him, they'd learn to cooperate eventually. So, creating wanted posters for criminals was an art. The key was to make the image somewhat similar to everyone while still being a bit different.

But boarding through the VIP channel eliminated these troubles. People here were well-connected and respected, and the British police, who could be fierce when dealing with the common folks, turned as docile as a house pet in this setting. They were even more polite and humane compared to a house pet.

It was Félix's first time waiting in a VIP lounge filled with "well-to-do" people. He looked around, feeling out of place amidst the opulence. Most passengers here had servants in tow, and they were currently seated on sofas, waited on hand and foot. Félix, on the other hand, was dragging a sizable suitcase (provided by Jaque Gaultier, along with the slightly more respectable clothes he was wearing), exuding what was considered a "vulgar" air.

The well-to-do passengers only spared him a cursory glance, and, seeing his rough, strong hands, reddened and wrinkled, and his face resembling sandpaper, albeit in relatively decent attire, immediately categorized him as "nouveau riche."

However, most well-to-do people, despite their inner superiority complex, were wise enough not to show it. These nouveau riches, despite their appearance, had become wealthy for a reason. Apart from luck, they were undoubtedly capable individuals. When there were no conflicts of interest, offending them without reason was unwise.

Therefore, although Félix looked like a commoner, stories of flashy newcomers didn't abound.

Félix looked around, seeking a place to sit. He noticed a young man not dressed any better than the ordinary folks and looking even more out of place than Félix amidst the luxurious VIP lounge. He was sitting alone not too far from the fireplace.

Most other well-to-do passengers kept their distance from him, probably repelled by his air of poverty. However, this was exactly what Félix needed, so he approached the young man and asked, "May I sit here?"

The young man gave a warm, friendly smile and replied in imperfect English, "Of course."

So Félix sat down beside him and struck up a conversation. He quickly discovered that this man, named Géraud, was a French merchant who had made a fortune during the French Revolution and was now on the verge of a big business deal in England, preparing to return to his homeland.

"These ship tickets are absurdly expensive," Géraud complained. "The price of one ticket could match my monthly income from back in the day. If the company hadn't purchased the ticket for me, I'd never have paid it out of my own pocket. So, Mr. Félix, what brings you to France? What are your plans?"

Félix replied, "I'm headed to Paris to see what opportunities there might be to strike it rich. But, you know, I can't exactly tell him that I'm going to check if the Revolution has benefitted the common people, then go to London to study revolutionary theory and techniques, then off to Ireland for some practical application, and finally return..."

If the well-to-do folks nearby heard this, they'd probably report him to the police immediately, and the police would be highly efficient in arresting him.

When Félix had mentioned to everyone that he might be getting into some dangerous business, Buck had dismissed it, saying, "Who here hasn't done something that could cost them their head?"

At the time, Félix replied, "It's different." However, he didn't go into the specifics. Félix knew that if he were caught by the police now, he'd likely face the guillotine, but the police wouldn't exert much effort to capture him. If they did catch him, that would be good; if they didn't, it wouldn't matter much. However, once he took that path, the entire police system would consider him a significant threat. The police in London weren't all fools; most of the time, they didn't arrest him simply because they felt his capture wasn't an urgent matter.

But his response had sparked Géraud's interest. Géraud informed him that there was a market in France for British textiles because of their affordable prices. Conversely, French products, like red wine, were in high demand in England. He himself hailed from the Somme region, known for its wine production, and the quality rivaled that of Bordeaux. Just slap on a Bordeaux label, and even the French couldn't tell the difference.

"If Mr. Félix is interested in the wine business, he can contact me when he arrives in France," Géraud offered, leaving Félix a contact address.

The departure time was approaching; VIP passengers boarded first. So Félix and Géraud boarded the ship together, and by pure chance, their cabins were next to each other.

This naturally gave Géraud an opportunity to continue promoting various goods to Félix. During their conversation, he gradually realized that Monsieur Félix wasn't familiar with, and didn't seem particularly interested in, wines and the like. However, he showed a keen interest in various weapons and blades. So Géraud expressed that he knew several arms dealers who could assist him with such trades...

The journey from England to France wasn't long, and two days later, the ship docked in Calais. Géraud and Félix bid farewell, with Géraud boarding a mail coach to Lorraine. Before leaving, he repeatedly reminded Félix not to forget him if he intended to do any business.

Félix also boarded a mail coach headed for Paris, finally able to breathe a sigh of relief at getting away from Géraud. He felt a sense of relief as he watched the landscape pass by, realizing that he was free from Géraud's sales pitch.

The mail coach sped along the roads of France. It was still winter, and the fields were desolate. Typically, during this time, farmers had little work and enjoyed a leisurely period of idleness, huddled in their homes while awaiting the end of winter. The countryside should have been very quiet at this time.

However, on the journey, Félix couldn't help but notice large groups of peasants toiling in the fields.

"What are they doing?" Félix asked in his unpolished French, addressing the other passengers in the mail coach.

"They're digging canals," a merchant-looking man replied. "These are veterans from the Army Association, helping the villagers dig canals during this idle period."

"Is it worth it to work so hard in the dead of winter?" Félix inquired.

"It's hard work, but it's worthwhile," the merchant responded. "These veterans have connections; they can get their hands on electric water pumps. So, all they need to do is dig the canals in winter, and when the wheat needs watering, they simply switch on the electric pump, and vast fields of wheat are irrigated. I heard that in some areas, they've been using these machines since last summer, and the wheat yields have skyrocketed. The rural folks in those places are already enjoying white bread."

"The peasants' lives seem to have improved a lot nowadays," another person interjected. "Now that the nobility is gone, although the national tax revenue is technically higher than it was during the kingdom, the farmers are left with much more due to the absence of the nobles' land rents. Add in the electric water pumps, and the Army Association even brought in experts to teach the technology. After the revolution, things have genuinely improved for these farmers."

"What about the situation for the poor in the cities of France?" Félix inquired again.

"In the cities? The poor are struggling as much as ever, perhaps even more than before," the merchant replied. "While it's not as rosy as we'd hoped, at least they have bread to eat now. When you get to Paris, you can see for yourself."

Chapter 245: Chronicles of France (2)

Regarding the merchant's statement, that "the town's workers are working harder than before, but at least they have bread to eat," Félix didn't find anything wrong with it. Because Félix wasn't a time traveler, in his view, working hard and then barely making a living was just the normal course of life. It was even God's will.

"God said: 'You will toil for your entire life to make a living.' This is our destiny," Félix thought, and his fondness for France actually increased.

That afternoon, the stagecoach stopped in an unknown small town for a rest. Everyone disembarked and took shelter in the town's only inn, which also doubled as a tavern.

As soon as they got off the stagecoach, the inn's waiter tended to the horses. The stagecoach driver greeted the innkeeper and casually took a bottle of wine from the counter.

Félix knew that the stagecoach stopping in such a small town was likely due to some cooperation between the driver and the innkeeper. This situation was quite common even in England.

The innkeeper handed them a register to record the travelers and examine their identification documents. This practice was also seen in England, so Félix didn't find it strange. He presented the identity certificate issued by the French Embassy in the UK and signed his name in the register. Then the innkeeper went inside to fetch them dinner bread.

As the sun was just beginning to dip in the west, a faint haze rose over the distant fields. In the twilight, Félix saw a few militiamen walking along a path heading out of the town.

"Why, is it not peaceful here? The fact that these militiamen are patrolling so late in the evening suggests otherwise," Félix asked the innkeeper, who was bringing him bread.

"It's peaceful, for the most part. It's just that there have been more petty thieves around lately," the innkeeper replied. "Over there, we have a hydroelectric power station, and the irrigation of our local fields relies on it. With winter now, the water level is low, and the power station is not operating much. But there's quite a bit of valuable copper inside it. Copper is particularly precious these days. So some folks, looking for easy gains, sneak in at night to steal copper. Our nearby farmland depends on that power station, and these rascals are putting it at risk. It's a shame we're not in an era of the guillotine; otherwise, these thieves would be in trouble."

This talk made Félix, who had a history as a thief, somewhat uncomfortable. So he asked, "Why are these people resorting to theft? Is it because they can't make a living for some reason?"

"Oh, sir, you're quite a kind-hearted person," the innkeeper said. "If we're talking about earlier years, that's a different story. Before the revolution, the common folk couldn't even survive. The meager crops they managed to grow were all taken away by the nobles and clergy. People who tilled the land themselves were starving. Back then, many people took desperate measures to avoid starvation.

After the revolution, things got even worse for a while. To counter foreign kings and their armies, a large number of young men were conscripted into the army, leading to vast areas of farmland lying fallow due to a lack of labor. Food became scarce. To feed all those soldiers, the government heavily requisitioned food..."

"Don't they pay for it?" Félix asked.

"They pay with vouchers. But can you consider vouchers as money?" the innkeeper said. "So, during that time, people's lives got progressively worse. Many even wished for the return of the nobles. In those days, even those who rebelled against the aristocracy did it out of necessity.

But those times are long gone. Since the establishment of the Consulate, after General Bonaparte defeated the foreign kings, the army started to recover, and the young men returned to farming. They also brought back real money. Taxes were reduced, and people's lives gradually improved. Plus, with water pumps, as long as you work diligently, you won't starve. Even if you don't own

land, you can find a way to make a living in the city. So, in this situation, when people are still resorting to thieving, even stealing copper from the power station, don't you think these scoundrels should be dealt with?"

"It's not ideal, but it's better to reform and educate them," Félix said. "After all, even bad people can change for the better. Minds are not like grass; once cut, they won't grow back."

"Haha, you're making a good point," the innkeeper replied, not particularly firm in his views.

The stagecoach continued its journey for two more days and finally arrived in Paris on the third day.

Jacques Goulong gave Félix a letter of introduction. When he reached Paris, he could directly take it to the Ministry of Truth. The Ministry's personnel would receive him and provide assistance, arranging for him to receive specialized knowledge and skills training in Turin.

However, Félix wasn't planning to report to the Ministry of Truth immediately. He didn't completely trust the Ministry. His brother, Jacques Goulong, who served at the Ministry, once described the department to him in the following way:

"The Ministry of Truth generally doesn't lie, but you must understand that when it's necessary to mislead others, the truth is more effective than a lie." To reinforce his point, Jacques Goulong cited various examples from the Ministry's flagship, "Science of Truth," during the Battle of Verdun. Finally, he said, "See, from start to finish, 'Science of Truth' never told a single lie. However, it still managed to deceive the English, the Prussians, and those aristocratic royalists. Well, the Ministry of Truth is the best at such tricks."

So, in Félix's view, the "Ministry of Truth" was essentially the Department of Deception. It might need an additional adjective, "truth-telling," before the term "deception" to describe it more accurately.

In order to avoid being deceived by those skilled truth-telling tricksters, Félix always considered himself quite vigilant. He believed that regular con artists couldn't fool him. However, after hearing the example Jacques Goulong had shared, Félix felt that if he were a general from England, Prussia, or a royalist leader at that time, he'd most likely fall for the same tricks. This made him somewhat apprehensive about the "Ministry of Truth."

Because of this, Félix decided not to report to the Ministry of Truth right away. Instead, he opted to explore Paris on his own, seeing it with his own eyes before potentially being misled by the Ministry.

So, Félix first found accommodation in the largest slum district of Paris, the Saint-Antoine district. Just like on the road, he had to show his identification and fill out forms. Félix naturally complied. If he were in England, he would have been more cautious, but in France, he had no criminal record, wasn't a fugitive, and possessed official, completely legitimate credentials. Therefore, Félix confidently displayed his documents and signed his name in the register.

The next day, even before dawn, Félix was awakened by the commotion outside.

"It should be time for the workers to start their shifts," Félix, residing in the working-class district, didn't even need to open his eyes to know what the ruckus was about. The factory workers were about to begin their work.

Félix got up, dressed, and went outside.

Though it was still not fully light outside, the Saint-Antoine district was already bustling. During the Robespierre era, the French established several saltpetre refineries in this area. Later, after Napoleon achieved significant victories and opened up trade routes, the French no longer needed to extract saltpetre through inefficient and expensive means. These refineries were then sold off to the military-industrial complex at a low price, consolidated, and became France's largest arms factory. After peace was achieved, these factories began to produce other things, such as various farming tools and household items. With relatively inexpensive iron and steel produced by the Lorraine Steel Company, these factories continued to thrive.

Félix noticed that the workers preparing for their shifts didn't look as healthy as the farmers he had seen in the countryside. However, compared to the workers in England, these people appeared to be in much better condition. Additionally, he observed something different from England even in the Saint-Antoine district: police officers patrolling the streets.

There was still some time before the factory opened, so everyone took the opportunity to have a quick meal. Félix walked over and noticed that the workers were eating the same black bread, seemingly mixed with various other ingredients. However, the portions were larger than what the workers in England ate, and there were hardly any children among them.

This discovery raised Félix's opinion of France once more.

At that moment, a police officer arrived at the inn where Félix was staying and inspected the guest register.

"An Englishman staying here?" The police officer immediately noticed the entry about Félix. He then summoned the innkeeper and questioned him thoroughly, instructing the innkeeper to act as if nothing was amiss.

"Officer, do you think this Englishman might be a technical thief here to steal our secrets?" The innkeeper inquired. In the recent past, the police had arrested quite a few such thieves—some from England, Austria, and others coming from French allies like Spain, Northern Italy, and the Rhine Confederation. Of course, the majority were former employees of other French enterprises.

"I don't know, maybe, maybe not. Anyway, keep an eye on him. But... if he really is... he's just registered his own nationality and didn't even bother to create fake identification. He's most likely an inept thief," the police officer chuckled.

Even if this "suspicious individual" was most likely not a thief, at most, he was just an "inept thief." According to the regulations, the incident still needed to be reported.

"Well, where did that Englishman go?" the police officer inquired.

"He just left a moment ago, but his belongings are still here. He's probably going to return," the innkeeper replied.

Chapter 246: Chronicles of France (3)

"Keep an eye on him, but don't make it obvious," the policeman instructed before leaving. He then walked out the door and headed to the next inn.

After a busy morning, young policeman Vebitzki finally returned to the police station. As per the routine, he reported the situation to Chief Armand.

"Chief, here is the information on the new guests at various inns today," Vebitzki handed over his record book to Armand.

"Is there anyone noteworthy?" Armand took the record book, placed it aside, and asked.

"There's one Englishman named Collier who checked in at the inn near the Fifth Factory. You know, that factory belongs to the Northern Industrial Company, and it produces all sorts of vital things. Some foreigners have always been interested in its secrets."

"I'm well aware of that. Deputy Chief Olivier caught an Austrian spy attempting to steal secrets from there, which is how he became the vice-chief, right?"

"Exactly. Deputy Chief Olivier has been trying to convince his superiors to let him return in his capacity as vice-chief and continue investigating that case. He claims there were loose ends from the last operation. Deputy Chief Olivier isn't getting any younger, and he's less than two years away from retirement. Still, he's pushing hard. Does he hope to become the chief?"

"Becoming the chief? That's highly unlikely. Not to mention, he's nearly retiring, and becoming chief is not solely about solving cases," Armand shrugged. "I think he's aiming for a two-rank salary increase before retiring, reaching the pinnacle of a vice-chief's pay. Then he can enjoy his retirement with a handsome pension."

Going from vice-chief to chief is as challenging as Madame Dubarry (King Louis XV's mistress) trying to become queen. But getting a salary bump of two ranks only requires cracking a few cases."

As he spoke, Chief Armand flipped through the record book. He quickly found Feigin's entry, widened his eyes, shook his head, and said, "He's openly registered his nationality and hasn't even bothered with fake identification. This shouldn't be a significant issue, but we'll keep an eye on him. Even if we catch an inept thief, it's still an accomplishment."

Just then, an undercover old man entered.

"Deputy Chief Olivier, you're here again?" Armand quickly stood up.

"Well, this place feels like home to me. The police station is too boring. Today, when I was coming here, I spotted an old thief. Absolutely an old thief; I could tell at a glance. He was near the Fifth Factory, chatting with the workers. I didn't want to arouse suspicion, so I didn't tail him. Can you show me yesterday's inn registrations?"

Deputy Chief Olivier naturally spotted Feigin's entry.

"Well, this is interesting," Deputy Chief Olivier said, pointing at Feigin's record with his finger. "An openly staying Englishman right next to the Fifth Factory, not hiding his identity. Armand, do you think there might be a large group, and this Englishman...?"

Deputy Chief Olivier continued, "This Englishman is likely a decoy operating openly to draw our attention, while others hide in the shadows. If that's the case, we'll be quite busy. Armand..."

Deputy Chief Olivier glanced at Armand, and when he saw that Armand seemed more energized, he added, "Armand, you know, I'm about to retire."

That statement immediately had an effect. Armand was instantly motivated.

"Chief, should we arrest the Englishman and question him thoroughly?"

"No need, but we should keep an eye on him. Just assign two rookies. I met that old thief, and I believe he might be a key figure. Tomorrow, Vebitzki, you'll tail the Englishman. Armand, put on plainclothes and come with me to find the old thief."

The next afternoon, Feigin returned to the inn. He had spent the entire day exploring, and he had seen quite a lot. In general, France was no paradise. While the workers here lived slightly better than their English counterparts, their lives only allowed them to fill their bellies somewhat. Compared to before the revolution, their lives had improved significantly, but they still couldn't withstand any shocks. Sudden illnesses, injuries, or disabilities could ruin them.

"If I had joined the army and gone to war back then, maybe things would be different," Feigin and many other workers mentioned this. "Being a soldier in a war doesn't necessarily mean death for many. You receive decent pay, and there are plenty of benefits after retiring. For example, you can purchase land from the state at a low cost. With land, who would want to work in a factory?"

In addition to lamenting not enlisting in the army during wartime, most people had another aspiration.

"I heard that now, ships to the New World can sail freely. Going to the New World is also a good option. Isn't it just farming? I've heard that over there, it's relatively easy to obtain land of your own. Once I've earned enough money at the factory, I'll go to the New World and become a happy farmer."

Furthermore, Feigin noticed that he was being tracked. The one following him was an expert, tracing him from the Saint-Antoine district to a neighboring wealthy area, employing various tricks. He even approached a policeman, feigning panic, and said, "Officer, I believe someone's been tailing me, all the way from the XX Bank's entrance to here..." It was through such clever tactics that he shook off the pursuer. Encountering a master tracker in such a poor district was no ordinary occurrence.

Typically, these skilled trackers were either police or members of criminal organizations. In terms of numbers, the police were more prevalent. However, there were some distinctions in their tracking methods. For instance, gang members usually wouldn't venture outside their territory. Saint-Antoine district and the adjacent wealthy district clearly didn't belong to the same gang's territory. So Feigin speculated that the one following him was likely a policeman.

Though Saint-Antoine district had its own police presence (which was already better than London), the number of police officers couldn't compare to other areas. The likelihood of encountering an expert was naturally lower. It seemed odd that he was being watched by the police right after arriving in Paris.

"Perhaps there's a major case here, and I just happened to walk into it," Feigin thought as he returned to his inn.

As he entered the inn, Feigin saw the innkeeper leading a French policeman towards him.

"Mr. Collier, isn't it?" asked the young policeman Vebitzki.

"Yes. Is there something you need?" Feigin was slightly surprised. He hadn't expected to encounter a policeman in a rundown inn in a poverty-stricken district.

"It's like this," Vebitzki explained, pulling out an identification card, "We routinely check the information of guests here. What brings you to Paris?"

"It seems like there's a big case going on," Feigin thought. He replied, "I have a friend who came to France a few years ago. I heard he's in Paris now, so I came here to find him."

"What's his name? Do you have his address?" Vebitzki asked, jotting down notes.

"Jacques Goren," Feigin answered with some irrelevant but realistic details, "But I've only heard that he was seen in the Saint-Antoine district of Paris. I don't know his exact address."

"Paris is a vast city, not easy to find someone. Did you come all the way here just on a rumor?" Vebitzki inquired.

"Of course not. I'm just passing through. In a few days, I'll be heading south," Feigin replied.

"Do you have any specific business in the south? Ah, you don't have to answer that question."

"Oh, it's no secret. Just some business. But I can't disclose the details," Feigin responded.

"One last question. When do you plan to leave Paris?" Vebitzki asked.

"The day after tomorrow. Tomorrow, I'll inquire and try to find my friend, then I'll leave the day after," Feigin replied. Honestly, he didn't want to be inexplicably pulled into any major cases.

"Alright, thank you for your cooperation. I hope I didn't disturb you too much." Vebitzki put away his notebook and left.

Once Vebitzki left, he ran into Deputy Chief Olivier, disguised as an old worker.

"Vebitzki, what does that Englishman you just saw look like?" Deputy Chief Olivier inquired.

Vebitzki proceeded to describe Feigin's appearance and attire in detail.

"Damn! That's the old thief I saw yesterday! What on earth is this guy up to?" Deputy Chief Olivier exclaimed.

"Do you want us to arrest him immediately?" Vebitzki suggested.

"No need, keep watching him. This time, I'll do it myself. He's definitely up to something!" Deputy Chief Olivier declared.

Having lost the old thief the previous day due to his conspicuous worker's outfit, Deputy Chief Olivier felt a deep sense of shame. He was determined to uncover this guy's plot.

However, the following day, he realized that all of his earlier assumptions might have been wrong.

Early the next morning, the old thief left as usual. This cunning character went straight to the wealthy district, where Deputy Chief Olivier, dressed in attire suitable for anywhere, quietly followed Feigin.

Feigin, on the other hand, didn't engage in cat-and-mouse games with Deputy Chief Olivier today. After exploring the wealthy district's conditions, he headed directly to the Ministry of Truth.

Chapter 247: The Conspiracy of the Ministry of Truth (1)

As the "old rogue" smoothly entered the grand building of the Ministry of Truth, Deputy Director Oliviera wasn't dismayed. Instead, he was even more excited.

"So, it's someone from the Ministry of Truth! What on earth are those folks up to with their conspiracies?" Deputy Director Oliviera pondered. The Ministry of Truth and the Ministry of Public Security had always been at odds, a well-known fact. After all, their operations had significant overlaps, and it was common knowledge that birds of a feather seldom flocked together. Moreover, there was the issue of budget rivalry, further intensifying the animosity between the two departments. The feud had almost escalated to the point of being irreconcilable, comparable to the rivalry between the navy and the army in a certain oriental country in later years.

If they could uncover the secret activities of the Ministry of Truth, perhaps even intercept one of their schemes, it would undoubtedly please Minister Fouché immensely.

Under normal circumstances, Deputy Director Oliviera had no chance of being promoted to the position of director. However, if he made a breakthrough in this matter, the director's seat would no longer be an unattainable dream.

But Deputy Director Oliviera had no intention of investigating this matter on his own. He wasn't arrogant enough to believe he could single-handedly delve into the activities of the Ministry of Truth. This matter needed to be reported first.

Deputy Director Oliviera headed directly to the Ministry of Public Security. Anything related to the "Ministry of Truth" had a high priority and secrecy level, which warranted immediate reporting to the Ministry of Public Security.

"What is the Ministry of Truth up to now? They must have discovered something. Regardless of their plans, keeping an eye on them is the right move," Assistant Minister Léon was quickly briefed and issued these instructions.

The Ministry of Truth was indeed involved in a conspiracy. That was entirely normal because conspiracies were one of its core functions, and they hatched hundreds of them every day. However, by a fortunate twist of fate, the Ministry of Truth had indeed uncovered industrial espionage activity near the Fifth Factory. The only thing they hadn't determined yet was whether these industrial spies were foreign or domestic. As a result, the entire case was still being processed according to procedure.

But at this very moment, agents from the Ministry of Public Security suddenly burst in with lightning speed, swiftly uncovering the spy ring. This left Lucien greatly infuriated, and he even began to suspect that there might be spies from the Ministry of Public Security within his own ranks.

So, Lucien initiated a departmental reorganization within the Ministry of Truth, using undercover agents embedded in the Ministry of Public Security to reveal several operatives who received allowances from both the Ministry of Truth and the Ministry of Public Security. This sparked Minister Fouché's own effort to reorganize the Ministry of Public Security.

While departmental reorganization was crucial, it couldn't overshadow the main work at hand. After all, merely capturing people wasn't the specialty of the Ministry of Truth. The Ministry of Public Security was more professional in that regard. The Ministry of Truth could keep a grip on the Ministry of Public Security because, apart from Lucien being a Bonaparte, the Ministry of Truth excelled at orchestrating high-level conspiracies. At least, that's how Lucien saw it.

For example, at this very moment in England, the Ministry of Truth's conspiracy was progressing systematically.

In the post-peace era, London's publishing scene had become lively. A multitude of French newspapers began publishing their English editions in London.

Among them, the renowned "Scientific Truth Gazette English Edition" was dedicated to speaking the truth, providing economic information, the mostly reliable "Businessman," occasionally inaccurate due to rushing for news, the entertainment-focused "Popular Entertainment English Edition," the sensational news outlet "The Sun English Edition," the comic magazine "Woodpecker Charlie English Edition," and the highly serious and professional "Nature," focusing on mathematics and basic science, and the medical-focused "The Lancet."

The emergence of this range of publications enriched the cultural and intellectual life of the people in London. More importantly, these newspapers were generally very affordable. For instance, "Scientific Truth Gazette," as a daily newspaper with four large-sized octavo pages, was priced at just four pence per copy, even less than the cost of wrapping paper.

However, "Businessman" was even more of a bargain, particularly for those who needed to sleep in cold rooms. This newspaper had sixteen octavo pages, with the exception of the first page, all the other pages were filled with mostly deceptive (in the majority) or truthful (a minority) advertisements. It was even cheaper, priced at just three pence.

Due to their low prices, these two newspapers became incredibly popular in London as soon as they were launched. London newsboys loved to bundle these two newspapers together, dashing along the streets and shouting, "Today's news is truly great! Two newspapers for just seven pence!"

Apart from these two newspapers, the magazines "Popular Entertainment" and "Woodpecker Charlie" were also well-received, with the latter, set in the time of Louis XIII in France, as the backdrop for its political satirical comic, "Yes, Bishop." It left British readers laughing uncontrollably.

As one of the results of many years of war, the perspectives of the French and the British towards each other had never been favorable. The upper echelons of both nations resented each other due to conflicts of interest, while the lower classes held grudges against each other due to propaganda.

However, "Yes, Bishop," a satirical comic that portrayed the selfish and greedy Richelieu, as well as the foolish nobles surrounding him, an oblivious king, a voracious clergy, and the clueless knights and officials, provided endless amusement for British readers and left them in stitches.

However, some sensitive Englishmen began to notice that the jokes in "Yes, Bishop" seemed to align quite well with the current situation in England. Many plotlines and dialogues brought to mind various events in England. Sometimes, what the British Prime Minister had announced or decided just the previous month would appear in "Yes, Bishop" the following month, albeit with the protagonist switched to the Frenchman Richelieu. Perhaps only a fool wouldn't realize that Richelieu, at least in "Woodpecker Charlie," wasn't just the historical French statesman of over a hundred years ago; he was also serving as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom today. Apart from that, Richelieu's bishop character in the comics shared some physical traits and quirks that closely resembled Prime Minister Addington.

So, soon enough, the current Prime Minister Addington acquired the moniker "Bishop Richelieu." Initially, Prime Minister Addington took pride in this, as Richelieu was undoubtedly a great figure in European history. However, he quickly grasped the implications.

After thoroughly examining the serialized "Yes, Bishop" in "Woodpecker Charlie," his face twisted with anger. He nearly issued an order to immediately shut down "Woodpecker Charlie." If it weren't for the fact that the Tories privately supported his ideas, he might have gone through with it.

The Tories were extremely disappointed with Prime Minister Addington's inaction – if he had taken such a step, it would have given them the perfect opportunity to accuse him of suppressing free speech.

Furthermore, some Tories had long been eyeing "Woodpecker Charlie." If "Woodpecker Charlie" were shut down, they planned to immediately bring the entire editorial team to the United Kingdom and launch "Woodpecker Richard." At that point, the ongoing comic might no longer be "Yes, Bishop" but rather "Yes, Prime Minister."

"I won't fall for it!" Prime Minister Addington muttered silently.

If "Woodpecker Charlie" only earned the Tories' hatred and the Whigs' favor, "The Sun" was genuinely beloved by all walks of life in England. That was because peeping into the private lives of public figures, especially the lives of the rich and famous, was a common human pastime. In this respect, the British were no different from the French.

"The Sun" in England maintained the same style as in France, focusing on all sorts of sensational news, especially the personal lives of prominent figures. In the French version of "The Sun," Lucien had the highest frequency of appearances among French officials – he appeared in "The Sun" more often than all other ministerial officials combined.

In England, the Tories could always find a Whig figure's scandal in "The Sun's" English edition, and the Whigs had no reason to feel unfairly treated. They could also always find a Tory bigwig's unmentionable stories somewhere else, even in several places. What's more, they weren't too keen on debunking such stories because, the more they denied, the more others believed.

However, the effect of this newspaper was somewhat different in France and England. In France, if you told people that Lucien was a womanizer and had numerous love children, most would consider it a testament to Lucien's charm, a mark of a real man. But in England, with its future "Victorian mindset" that proclaimed, "Discussions in polite society should never venture below the waist, not even to discuss piano legs, to avoid undesirable associations," such matters might not be so well received. To more conservative Englishmen, these kinds of stories indicated moral decay.

As for the scientific publications, they subtly showcased French civilization to the English. Since these publications offered very high pay, many British scholars gradually started submitting articles to them.

Chapter 248: The Conspiracy of the Ministry of Truth (2)

Honestly, when it came to the activities of the French media and the political conspiracies hidden behind them, the British were not oblivious. After all, when it came to conspiracies, the British considered themselves second to none on a global scale. Whether it was their innate cunning or the skills accumulated over the years, the British excelled in the art of conspiracy.

So, when the French came to England to run their media, the British naturally reciprocated by establishing various French publications in Paris. However, the circulation of these British publications in France was far from matching the popularity of French publications in England, not even by a small margin. In fact, they couldn't even hold a candle to their French counterparts. The primary reason behind this was that the costs for these British publications remained relatively high.

In France, the main source of income for various publications, apart from academic journals like "Nature," was not the cover price, but advertising revenue. Of course, journals like "Nature" were non-profit organizations by nature and weren't intended to make money.

For a newspaper, the larger the circulation, the more valuable its advertising space became, and the higher the revenue it generated from ads. A lower cover price, while maintaining quality, could also boost circulation. Under Lucien's leadership and with the support of the military-industrial conglomerate, French publications came to Britain with not just journalists and editors but an entire squad of advertisers. Consequently, even without the immediate goal of turning a profit, the French could slash their newspaper prices significantly.

But in the British market, they didn't have a monolithic entity like the "military-industrial conglomerate," and they lacked the backing of an "advertising brigade." This led to a frustrating cycle for these British publications.

The first issue these British publications faced when printed in France was pricing. In France, affordable newspapers had become the norm, with cover prices often barely covering the cost of materials, such as paper and printing. Their revenue primarily came from advertising. But the new British publications couldn't afford to operate that way, which resulted in a rather unfortunate consequence: their newspapers were more expensive than the French ones.

This had disastrous effects as the high cover prices deterred potential buyers. Fewer buyers meant less advertising interest, which in turn meant higher prices for their papers. This created a self-sustaining loop. Even though these British publications made an effort to pull in advertisements, it was challenging. Even British businesses preferred to advertise in the French publications – after all, why advertise in your papers when you can't sell them?

In France, their counterparts were just as discerning. So, the advertisements these British publications managed to secure were mostly things like lost-and-found ads or missing pet notices – low-value ads. Even establishments like the Moulin Rouge in Paris shunned these British publications, which were considered "insignificant and overpriced," as the average per-ad cost was absurdly high due to their low circulation. The joke in the Paris entertainment scene for such establishments and washed-up dancers was, "You might as well advertise in British papers."

Hence, while it seemed like Lucien had raised a rather unreasonable flag, currently, the likelihood of him being shot into the sun inside a cannon was quite slim. Unlike someone else, who had enough room to enjoy a week-long vacation on the sun.

In fact, even in London, British native publications felt the pressure from the cheap French publications. Selling two copies for seven pence was unsustainable, especially without considering advertising revenue. The two papers barely turned a profit.

However, these two papers had the backing of the French "Scientific Truth" and "French Businessman" publications. It was said that Mr. Newington, a director of "French Businessman," stated during a board meeting:

"Britain is a new market, and at this point, the most critical thing for our newspapers is not profitability, but gaining market share as much as possible. Gentlemen, if we can temporarily make less money, even temporarily not make any money, or even incur small losses, to force our competitors to make significant losses or even go bankrupt, then these losses will be worthwhile and should be seen as successful investments.

Gentlemen, once traditional British publications, under our attack, go bankrupt one after another and finally exit the market, do you still worry that we can't make money? At that time, all advertisements will only be published here, to be widely known. All parliament members, whether from the Whigs or the Tories, will have to go through us to make their voices widely heard. Do you still worry about not making money?"

Of course, the British were well aware of the danger this situation posed. However, at this time, the UK had not yet formed a massive media trust. To be more precise, the UK was still in the classic era of laissez-faire capitalism, with the stars not yet aligned in the right positions. Monopolistic organizations with their countless tentacles hadn't had a chance to fully form. And then suddenly, they found themselves facing an unexpected supernatural invasion.

Only nuclear weapons could counter nuclear weapons, only breeder reactors could counter breeder reactors, only the former dominators could counter the former dominators, and only a trust could counter a trust.

Relying solely on those British newspapers to fight individually, none of them would be a match for the French media trusts. So, on the day Fei Jin left Paris, a group of British newspapers gathered in London and held a successful and victorious meeting, announcing the establishment of an organization called the "England News Alliance." On the same day, the "England News Alliance" declared that the assets under the alliance would undergo optimization, with many poorly performing newspapers being gradually closed down. Some inadequate staff would be removed, and the resources would be concentrated to create new newspapers - "The Times Review" and "England Economic Observer."

Clearly, these two newspapers were direct competitors to the two newspapers of the "Seven Pence Alliance."

In addition to the owners of several existing newspapers, some gentlemen from other industries also joined the alliance and invested in it. The highest-ranking investor in the alliance was the former British Prime Minister, Little Pitt.

One well-known fact was that Little Pitt was broke. Due to previous investment failures, Little Pitt was a notorious debtor. So many people speculated that the money Little Pitt had invested was probably lent to him by the King.

With Little Pitt's involvement, this alliance naturally leaned towards the Tory party.

As soon as such a Tory-leaning media alliance emerged, it raised alarm bells for the Whigs. Although this "England News Alliance" seemed to be targeting the French "Seven Pence Alliance," they were still not as deadly a threat to the French as they were to the Whigs.

Just as scattered British media couldn't compete with the "Seven Pence Alliance" in the past, now that media leaning towards the Tory party had formed a large alliance, they might not be able to

immediately repel the French, but they could easily crush the remaining small newspapers that leaned towards the Whigs.

So, a few days later, another media alliance, the "England Free News Alliance," was also established in London. Perhaps due to the rushed formation, most of its organizational regulations were copied from the "England News Alliance."

The main instigator was Charles James Fox, the leader of the Whigs, and he had the support of several wealthy individuals behind him.

As a result, England's news battlefield suddenly had three major players.

"Mr. Fox is a very interesting person. In terms of ideology, he is closer to the French, and even more so to the Jacobins. During the American Revolution, he openly praised the people of North America for resisting tyranny. When we beheaded Louis XVI, he openly said in parliament that it was Louis XVI's own fault. Such an extreme stance caused him to lose many friends and gave the Tories the upper hand in parliament. In fact, many Tory members of parliament who had originally been Whigs became Tories because of ideological differences with him.

Well, this guy is an excellent orator and debater. In parliamentary debates, he has never been at a disadvantage, and anyone who confronts him will be left speechless. However, when it comes to voting, he has almost never succeeded.

Due to his pro-French stance, this time, there are some textile merchants and steam engine businessmen behind his alliance. However, overall, his alliance is still far from matching the 'England News Alliance.' Joseph, Napoleon, I think we can offer them some support. Let's come up with a conspiracy against the 'England News Alliance,' using the discovery you made, Joseph, which hasn't been made public yet."

Chapter 249: Closing the Door, Trouble-Making Lady

What Lucien mentioned as a new discovery referred to the identification of pathogenic bacteria.

Bacteria had been discovered quite early, as far back as 1702 when Dutch scientist Leven Hook used his own invention, the microscope, to spot these microorganisms. However, at the time, people didn't connect bacteria with diseases. Moreover, due to their colorless and transparent nature, even with microscopes, you could barely see faint shadows caused by the refracted light due to bacteria's movements. This made it impossible to discern the structure or quantity of bacteria accurately.

For a long time, the discovery of bacteria, apart from being an interesting topic for discussion, held little significance.

Since the relationship between bacteria and diseases couldn't be established, techniques like disinfection and sterilization remained non-existent. In earlier wars, Joseph, under the pretext of finding an old medieval note about barbarians in the East using boiled cloth for bandaging to reduce fever and suppuration in wounded soldiers, had initiated experiments. Although this claim lacked scientific evidence, it was worth verifying.

The results were astonishing. Using boiled and sun-dried cloth for dressing wounds instead of untreated materials significantly reduced the chances of infection and death among the wounded.

Though the cause remained unknown, the efficacy of this method prompted its widespread adoption throughout France when Napoleon became the First Consul. Even "The Lancet" magazine noted this practice.

Joseph believed, "Existence is reasonable." If this method proved effective, there must be scientific reasons behind it yet to be discovered. So, Joseph offered a prize of five thousand francs to encourage scholars to delve into the scientific principles behind this discovery.

Not long ago, Joseph's Irish student, Carol, with Joseph's guidance, achieved a significant breakthrough.

"My teacher had a suspicion," Carol recounted, "he suspected that wounds, ulcers, and fevers were caused by some kind of parasitic organism. These parasites were minuscule, perhaps even smaller than mites, making them invisible to the naked eye. Mr. Leven Hook had once used a microscope to discover some very tiny creatures. My teacher suspected that these might be the culprits behind wound ulcers, fever, and other ailments.

If my conjecture is correct, these creatures must proliferate abundantly in the pus-filled ulcers of wounds. It's just that these creatures are colorless and transparent, making them invisible. We can't even determine their numbers. If only we could make them opaque, give them color!"

Inspired by this idea, Carol continued, "Why not try dyeing these tiny creatures with some dye or pigment?"

Napoleon was impressed by this suggestion and encouraged Carol to pursue research in this direction. He told Carol, "I believe you can become Ireland's pride in the realm of science."

Under Napoleon's encouragement, Carol faced numerous failures while attempting various dyes. However, his persistence paid off in the end, just as Napoleon had predicted, "Opportunity always favors the prepared mind."

With the development of bacteria staining techniques, the relationship between bacteria and various infections became evident.

Within a little over a week of acquiring this new technique, Carol identified dozens of pathogenic bacteria, including *Clostridium tetani* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. Building upon this discovery, Carol wrote a paper and submitted it to the French Academy of Sciences.

It was an era-defining revelation, but Lucien suggested postponing the publication of this paper.

Lucien said, "Joseph, ask your student to refine the paper. I don't believe the evidence is strong enough. We need clinical data to support it. Let's establish a strict disinfection protocol in a French hospital and record the infection rates. Then, select a British hospital, preferably one with Tory and Anglican affiliations, to compare their infection and mortality rates under similar conditions."

He further elaborated, "We will first publish an article in 'The Lancet' titled 'Experiments in French Hospitals.' We'll introduce this effective method as coming from historical records of nomadic Eastern tribes. Then, we can present Carol's parasitic hypothesis and compare the infection and mortality rates between our hospitals and British hospitals."

"The Lancet" had a limited readership, and this article wouldn't cause much of a stir. That's exactly what we needed. We'd wait for a month and then have "The Truth of Science" report it in their popular science section. We'd point out how, after a month of "The Lancet" introducing the effective

French method, the British medical establishment remained unresponsive to such a life-and-death matter. Lucien continued, "This report is bound to irk those British fellows. Next, we'll have 'The London Businessman' publish an article analyzing it from an economic perspective, concluding that it's more cost-effective for the British to let the lower classes die than invest in improving hospital conditions."

Continuing, they planned to involve "The Sun" and "Charlie the Woodpecker" to mock and satirize the situation with the sharpest language, igniting a massive debate. They aimed to keep this argument going for about a month, creating various spectacles to let the British perform to their full potential. Then, they would have "Nature" and other publications under their influence join the fray.

Napoleon interjected, "Lancet is a bimonthly, and the next issue is about to be published. In this issue of 'The Lancet,' we'll introduce conclusive evidence, your student's paper, to completely defeat them."

"We'll start by creating a bigger wave, ideally undermining the entire field of British medicine, even luring the Royal Society to endorse the British Medical Association, then we, as a team, will bring them down. We'll tarnish their reputation, both in the British media and the Royal Society," Napoleon added. "To stir up the Brits further, and make them act crazier, I have a suggestion..."

At this point, Napoleon suddenly paused, looked at Joseph, and said, "Well, it's just a suggestion. If it's not feasible, we can discuss it together."

Joseph, frowning, responded, "Napoleon, what are you talking about? It's just us brothers here. There's nothing we can't discuss. Spit it out, and stop beating around the bush!"

Napoleon hesitated for a moment, then continued, "I have a suggestion... If it's not acceptable, just forget I mentioned it."

Joseph insisted, "Enough with the preambles, get to the point!"

Napoleon cautiously began, "I think Lucien's plan, with a few adjustments, could be refined. We can have Pauline and my sister-in-law..." Here, he stole a quick glance at Joseph, who didn't seem angry. Napoleon proceeded, "Send Pauline and my sister-in-law to London for a visit, and as part of a charity activity, they can donate to a particular British hospital. Since it's charity, we can choose a hospital with poorer conditions.

Then, the controversial article in 'The Truth of Science' can be written by Pauline under her pseudonym. The British won't tolerate a woman pointing fingers and giving them a hard time. They will react even more vigorously. Let Pauline engage in a war of words with them... Pauline can be as sharp and sarcastic as she likes, irresponsible even. Other newspapers can follow suit, ridiculing the British for their lack of scientific literacy compared to a woman. This is amusing, even more so than the comedies of Molière... Well... Joseph, if you don't think it's a good idea, we can come up with another plan."

Joseph replied, "Why not? I think it's a good plan. But, why involve Fanny? Why don't you let Pauline do it herself? After all, she's the one with a knack for causing trouble. Let her be her true self. Of course, this should be done with Pauline's consent. She must do it willingly... Now, who's going to talk to her about this?"

Napoleon immediately shifted his gaze to Lucien.

Lucien retorted, "Why me?" He knew well that getting that trouble-making lady to agree to this plan wouldn't pose any difficulty. However, if he personally broached the topic, and in case the lady went overboard and caused trouble, leading to their mother's inquiries, considering the brothers' consistent partiality, he was almost certain they'd place all the blame squarely on him.

Lucien protested, "You should know what I mean. It's just us brothers here, so why are you all being so secretive? Just spill it, already!"

Chapter 250: Paulina's Journey

The decision to release the mischievous troublemaker was final. Joseph returned to his laboratory, while Napoleon and Lucien boarded a carriage back to Paris.

"Joseph is truly...remarkably cunning," Napoleon suddenly remarked.

"Indeed. If we could persuade my sister and Paulina to go together, it would relieve us of much post-incident work. It's mainly your fault, Napoleon. Your suggestion was so hesitant, it raised his suspicions. Blame it all on you, Napoleon!" Lucien grumbled.

"That suggestion should have come from you. You're the professional deceiver!"

"It's precisely because I'm a professional that I couldn't be the one to suggest it. Joseph is so cunning, and I specialize in such matters. If I had proposed it, he would have seen right through me. In the end... it's Joseph's cunning that's the issue!"

"You're right. It's not our incompetence; it's really Joseph's cunning!" The brothers quickly reached an agreement on this matter.

As for convincing the troublemaker, it was a simple task. Lucien had only just initiated the conversation when Paulina immediately said, "Sure, I'm bored anyway. Can I go alone?"

"I'll arrange for a few people to accompany you," Lucien replied. Sending the troublemaker alone would be too much trouble.

"Get ready; tomorrow I'll take you somewhere for a special training session. After all, we need to prepare since you're going abroad," Lucien said.

"Special training? Great! Do they have revolver training? I want to dual-wield..."

"Shut up. We're not sending you to Louisiana!" After saying this, Lucien paused for a moment and continued, "But, there is some basic weapon training. Surprisingly, London doesn't have the best security."

"Oh, by the way, can I bring someone along?"

"Anyone except my sister is fine," Lucien replied.

A week later, the tall and slender Paulina, dressed in men's hunting attire, exuded a confident air. She even brought a petite and graceful female companion. They were accompanied by a group of burly bodyguards as they boarded a ship bound for England in Calais. In their wake, there were a dozen luggage porters and a few empty-handed servants.

Just as Paulina stepped onto the ship, Captain Denis approached.

"Mr. Crystelle, welcome aboard. Would you like to see your cabin?" Denis asked courteously.

"You can take my servants to see it. As for me, I'll walk on this deck. Don't bother me unless it's necessary," Paulina replied in a deliberately deeper voice, but it still sounded somewhat tender, as if she hadn't completely finished her voice change.

Captain Denis didn't know who this "Mr. Crystelle" really was, but judging by his demeanor and the fact that he had chartered the entire ship, he figured that "Mr. Crystelle" must come from a wealthy and influential family. In the now-stable France, wealth equated to status.

"Emma, I remember you always had a dream. You wanted to stand at the front of a ship, spread your arms, and feel like you were soaring, right? Now's your chance. Let's go to the bow," he said, encouraging her.

Then, Paulina turned and noticed her four-wheeled carriage being securely fastened, lifted by a crane, and carried to the deck. She furrowed her brows and told the people nearby, "Anderson, make them work faster. I don't want to stay at the harbor waiting for them until it gets dark."

Since "Mr. Crystelle" was dissatisfied, the pace of loading and preparations clearly picked up. Half an hour later, the ship departed from Calais.

"Mr. Crystelle" wasn't a stranger to sea travel, but Emma, his companion, had never been on a sea voyage. So "Mr. Crystelle" used this opportunity to show off a bit in front of her and eventually took Emma to the ship's bow.

"Emma, do you see that statue?" "Mr. Crystelle" pointed to the figurehead at the bow and prodded, "Let's climb up there..."

Two days later, the ship arrived in London. "Mr. Crystelle" disembarked, hopped into his luxurious four-wheeled carriage brought all the way from France, and headed straight for the small country house that Lucien had arranged on the outskirts of London for her.

"Mr. Crystelle" rested there for a day and, the following day, set off on a whirlwind tour of London with his companion, all the while beginning to write articles for the literary section of the "Science of Truth Journal."

The "Science of Truth Journal" had a good reputation in most areas, but its literary section was an exception. This section often published articles from individuals who fancied themselves as great writers, though in reality, their works were no better than essays by talented middle school students.

However, these individuals typically had money, status, or both, and they believed themselves to be literary geniuses. The journal's editors couldn't afford to offend these contributors, so they published their works. As a result, the literary section of the "Science of Truth Journal" had a reputation not much better than the literary section of "The Sun" newspaper.

This situation, fortunately, was limited to the French version of the "Science of Truth Journal" at least up to that point. The German and English versions hadn't faced such issues yet, mainly because the individuals who made the editors of the French version uneasy were primarily French writers.

However, this luck came to an end. After a day of gallivanting around London, "Mr. Crystelle" handed over the first part of her "London Journal" to the editors of the "Science of Truth Journal." These editors immediately worked overnight to translate it into English, polish it, edit it, and even

create new content. Once "Mr. Crystelle" left the UK, her journal was ready for serialization in the "Science of Truth Journal."

To be honest, the quality of Paulina's journal was slightly better than that of an above-average middle school essay. However, after the editors' efforts, the quality improved, especially in the English version, which ended up surpassing the French version.

But these matters were of no concern to "Mr. Crystelle" now. She was busy causing havoc everywhere.

The next day, "Mr. Crystelle" had a verbal confrontation with the London police over their excessive use of violence against beggars. Her bodyguards intervened, preventing her from experimenting with a recently acquired skill on one of the officers.

On the third day, "Mr. Crystelle" visited a charitable hospital run by the Church of England and donated 500 pounds. However, a dispute erupted between her and the hospital's doctors over various medical techniques and procedures. "Mr. Crystelle" even had her entourage demonstrate the correct medical procedures to them. However, from the hospital's director down to the nurses, everyone thought that this French child was utterly insane. Nevertheless, her money wasn't rejected.

In the following days, "Mr. Crystelle" visited several more hospitals, made donations, and promoted what she claimed were the correct medical procedures.

"Really, The Lancet has been advocating these techniques for a while now! Why are you Britons so behind?" Arrogant "Mr. Crystelle" even spoke rudely to James, the director of the "Charity Hospital," who was also a member of the British Medical Association.

James couldn't tolerate this insult and retorted, "We have indeed seen the articles in The Lancet, but we consider them to lack any scientific basis. The Lancet elevates superstitions of a bunch of barbarians to gospel. It's a disgrace to the reputation of scientific journals."

And so, "Mr. Crystelle" and Dr. James engaged in a heated discussion about the standards of discerning truth. They finally reached an agreement on one thing: "That guy is a fool."

A week later, "Mr. Crystelle" finally left the UK. Shortly after her departure, her journal, "Paulina's Travels," began serialization in the "Science of Truth Journal."

In the English version of the "Science of Truth Journal," Paulina used the pen name she had always used: Crystelle. Right from the first part of her journal, she began writing about her experiences in London, disguised as a man. In the first part of her journal, she highly praised England's achievements in science and literature, expressing sincere admiration.

A French woman writing a journal while dressed as a man—it was intriguing to say the least. Even before considering the content of the journal, this fact alone was enough to pique the interest of many readers. Moreover, in the first part of her journal, she spoke highly of England's contributions to the progress of human civilization. This naturally made English readers more intrigued, as people tend to enjoy hearing compliments. In fact, in the future, some countries' media even preferred to deliberately invite foreigners to praise their nation in order to reminisce about the golden era.

However, the subsequent content began to leave certain English readers dissatisfied. Firstly, there were detailed descriptions of England's vast wealth disparity. Crystelle meticulously depicted the extravagant lifestyles of the wealthy in England and the shocking poverty of the lower classes. She

dramatically portrayed the double standards exhibited by the English police when dealing with the wealthy and the destitute. She subtly implied her French pride.

This journal became a subject of debate. Some agreed with Crystelle that she was right, highlighting the unfairness of England's system, with the common people consistently getting the short end of the stick. Others believed it was a malicious attack on England. While they acknowledged the wealth gap, they argued that it was an issue shared with France. Furthermore, they contended that compared to the French, the English people enjoyed greater freedom—freedom to accumulate wealth and freedom to go bankrupt.

"We have much more freedom than the French," these individuals claimed.