

The Fox 311

Chapter 311: A Visit

The preparations for military exercises still required some time, but wasn't the USS America idle for now? Since it was, why not send her for a friendly visit to a certain targeted country? With a command from Napoleon, the French Foreign Ministry initiated contact with the British, proposing that both countries enhance mutual understanding and deepen their friendship and trust. Each navy would dispatch a warship to the other for a cordial visit. The French expressed their intention to send the USS America as the "messenger of friendship" to Britain. During this time, the amiable British citizens could board the USS America, guided by relevant personnel, to learn about the details of the French warship. Some lucky spectators might even get a chance to simulate operating certain equipment.

When Prime Minister Addington got wind of this proposal from the French, he was taken aback. He immediately called upon the ministers of the Navy and Foreign Affairs for consultation. They unanimously perceived it as a French display of power.

"So, shall we decline their visit?" inquired Prime Minister Addington.

"How could we? That would make us look timid," retorted the Minister of the Navy. "Moreover, it's the USS America, and it's indeed unusual. We do wish to examine this ship closely."

"What's so special about this ship?" the Prime Minister asked.

"It's a steam-powered patrol ship, though labeled as such, it's the size of a second-rate battleship. It's equipped with relatively fewer cannons. Recently, it engaged in two battles with the American navy in the Caribbean. It either captured, sank, or severely damaged an American vessel in each encounter, nearly decimating half of the American navy in one go."

"Ha-ha-ha, those rebels, their entire navy comprises only six vessels," chuckled Prime Minister Addington. However, noticing the lack of laughter from the Minister of the Navy, he inquired, "Why? A second-rate battleship—even if they call it a patrol ship—sinking three patrol ships, isn't that normal?"

"Your Excellency, the issue is that the American three patrol ships are also vessels nearly the size of second-rate battleships. In a certain sense, they are similar to the French USS America, sacrificing some firepower for increased speed. These ships are not primarily meant for battles in the line of battle; they are designed for attacking supply lines. Most of our warships, those that can beat them, are mostly unable to outrun them, and those that can outrun them, cannot defeat them."

"According to our observations during the USS America's second battle with the Americans, none of our ships could outrun her, and the USS America could sail all the way to the Caribbean, showing remarkable endurance."

"Are our recently developed steamships with propellers also inferior to her?"

"Unfortunately, Your Excellency, yes. Our propellers suffer a drastic efficiency drop and intense vibration at high speeds. We haven't entirely resolved this issue yet. So, currently, our ships haven't achieved the speed of the USS America."

"Furthermore, based on our accounts of the USS America's second battle, besides speed, there are two other surprising aspects. One is her firepower. While she only has nine cannons on each side, during actual combat, the number of shells fired per unit time is almost on par with a third-rate battleship. If a ship can reach a speed of 15 knots, and that's without relying on wind power, and still possess such firepower— it's truly formidable. If the reports are accurate, our entire navy, including the HMS Victory, currently lacks a vessel that can defeat the USS America in combat."

"Not even the HMS Victory?"

"Yes, Prime Minister. Due to her speed advantage, she can easily take a position. This makes the HMS Victory's firepower advantage relatively less effective."

"Ah, I see. You mentioned the first surprising aspect of that ship was its cannon's firing rate. What about the other one?"

"It's her defense. Our observers noted that both sides exchanged fire at a close range, yet not one of the American cannons managed to penetrate the USS America's hull. All their shells bounced off the USS America's hull. Later, from information acquired from the Americans, they even suspected that the USS America might be a genuine ironclad ship."

"So, you wish to take this opportunity to visit that ship?"

"Yes, Prime Minister."

"Very well then, I have no objection. In any case, we can't afford to show weakness to the French, can we? But then, which ship should we send to visit France?"

While the decision about which ship to send needed careful consideration, since the French dared to showcase their most advanced warship to the British, would the British dare to show timidity? Moreover, the French media had already begun to hype this event.

The Scientific Truth Gazette was the first to disclose this news. In its typical style of short news with huge implications, the front page used only two lines: "The French Navy's USS America, a steam-powered cruiser, will conduct a friendly visit to London on May 10. Citizens are welcome aboard for visits."

Placed on the front page without further explanation, it easily grabbed readers' attention. However, this alone wasn't sufficient. Following this, the London Businessman published an article asserting that the USS America's visit signified the continuous elevation of strategic mutual trust between England and France. This friendly visit, it claimed, would further enhance mutual understanding, thereby strengthening the hard-earned peace and friendship between the two nations.

However, at this point, the significant newspapers in England had yet to weigh in. At most, they merely republished related news without further commentary. It was the smaller publications that covered the matter, with their basic content summarized as follows: "The Royal Navy is virtuous, while the French Navy is deplorable."

These smaller reports from the British seemed to displease the French. Subsequently, the Sun Newspaper (English Edition) comprehensively introduced this groundbreaking French warship. It covered everything, from its propulsion system to its astonishing capabilities. Essentially, although the Sun Newspaper didn't explicitly state it, the implication was clear: "This ship could easily overpower any vessel in the Royal Navy in a one-on-one confrontation."

However, the exaggerated coverage in the Sun Newspaper (English Edition) irked many Britons. Consequently, numerous British tabloids began to counter, mocking the unreliable boasting in the Sun Newspaper's coverage. The claims of revolutionary technology increasing cannon firing speed four to five times and enabling the USS America, equipped with only nine cannons on each side, to possess firepower comparable to a battleship were dismissed as baseless.

As for the notion of increasing cannon firing speed four to five times, considering that the French navy's cannons originally fired more than half slower than those of the British, coupled with their smaller size (approximately 110mm in caliber, roughly equivalent to 12 pounds), it seemed audacious to mount 12-pound cannons on a warship. Just look at the caliber of cannons on our British warships!

Overall, despite the clamor, the noise level wasn't too high. At least, the more substantial and weighty media outlets refrained from joining the fray. Some among them, privy to certain insider information, chose not to come forward at this time, only to be contradicted by reality a few days later. Generally, the people of this era were relatively straightforward. Although they lied, deceived, and stole, they were at least somewhat hesitant to label it as a constant pursuit of glory. They wouldn't concoct jokes like someone claiming one day that nobody would die and the next day stating that if fewer than 100,000 died, it showed how capable they were.

Ultimately, this wasn't due to the moral superiority of the people of this era, but rather because the poor in this era lacked education. Education served two purposes: one to enlighten, and the other to make people more foolish than the uneducated. In the latter aspect, the education of this era differed significantly from later times, so in this age, establishing a beautiful new world was impossible.

As for the major newspapers that didn't have access to special information, their silence stemmed from their belief that engaging in squabbles with tabloids was beneath their dignity and didn't align with the United Kingdom's elegant demeanor.

The British were exceedingly confident in their navy. One way this confidence manifested was their indifference to criticism and their willingness to acknowledge others' merits. To them, what others perceived as strengths and progress were akin to an elementary student scoring full marks. "Wow, the little one is so smart, so excellent. Here, have a lollipop."

However, if they suddenly discovered that the others hadn't achieved full marks in an elementary exam but rather secured top marks in a higher institution, their emotions might change. It was like the situation between the Red Hare Country, which initially had a significant gap compared to the Beacon Country, and how the Beacon Country held a much better opinion of the Red Hare Country. Once the Red Hare Country's GDP approached that of the Beacon Country, the situation completely changed, and the giant panda immediately turned into a ferocious dragon.

Chapter 312: Open Day

On the very first day when the "Free Trade" entered the port of London, it wasn't entirely open to the British public. That's quite natural considering the ship had just arrived; there's always a bit of chaos and busyness in such situations. And indeed, there was a bit of an incident. It involved a French naval chaplain who disembarked from the ship and immediately encountered a journalist. The journalist asked, "Chaplain, what do you think of those French streetwalkers on the streets of London?"

"What? There are French streetwalkers in London?" The chaplain was taken aback.

Later that afternoon, a certain evening paper carried this headline: "French naval chaplain in a rush to inquire about streetwalkers in London upon arrival."

Of course, what such tabloids say hardly concerns anyone. Moreover, a chaplain accompanying the troops, assisting and rescuing the souls of streetwalkers, is a noble deed, nothing substantial to fret about.

Though the "Free Trade" wasn't officially open for public visits that day, people could still come close and observe as long as they didn't board. Some individuals gathered around to get a glimpse of the ship.

This brought an immediate answer to a puzzling question about the "Free Trade" — why it possessed such outstanding defensive capabilities. Despite the black-brown paint coating the steel plates affixed to the ship's exterior, making it resemble wooden planks from afar, at such close proximity where one could almost touch, the distinction between the steel plates and wooden boards was quite evident.

"So, they really did outfit it with iron plates," a special agent from the Sixth Investigation Division remarked, marveling at the close proximity of the "Free Trade." The Sixth Investigation Division had sacrificed several colleagues just to unravel the secrets behind this ship's defenses. Now, here it was, presented before them without any cost — it was perplexing and almost made one question the meaning of life.

"Considering the French expertise in steelmaking, these are likely steel plates, aren't they?" remarked a British naval officer while observing the "Free Trade."

That day, these were the only secrets the British managed to uncover. On the following day, the first batch of visitors stepped onto the deck of the "Free Trade." These were mostly British naval officers, ranging from commanding officers to various technical personnel.

Overall, these officers were quite disciplined. They refrained from touching anything without the host's permission on the French warship. Although later, in some British newspapers, stories emerged about "reaching out and finding dust on cannons," aiming to denigrate the French, in reality, the British behaved themselves.

However, when it came to questioning, the British were forthright. They asked any and every question, knowing there would be no harm in doing so. Surprisingly, most of their inquiries were met with responses from the accompanying French.

"Captain Lefebvre, I've noticed the 'Free Trade' is fitted with external armor plates. I wanted to ask if these plates are wrought iron or steel?" inquired a British military officer with the rank of major on his shoulder.

"They are steel plates," Captain Lefebvre replied.

"May I ask about their thickness and how you ensure they don't suffer severe corrosion during voyages?" continued the British major.

"I can tell you about the thickness, roughly around 20 millimeters. As for the rust prevention, that falls under the technical secret of the Lorraine Steel Company. We're not privy to it. If you wish to know more, you should approach them."

Under the guidance of the French, they proceeded to the "Free Trade's" gun deck.

"Gentlemen, this is the gun deck of the 'Free Trade.' Our ship is a steam-powered warship, thus, compared to conventional warships, we have additional space occupied by the engine room and coal bunker. Consequently, our gun deck is relatively smaller, allowing for fewer cannons. However, this isn't an issue because we are equipped with the world's most advanced and powerful breech-loading rifled steel cannons, giving us superior firepower compared to ships of similar tonnage," explained Captain Adrian, responsible for the artillery.

"Captain, you mentioned using breech-loading cannons?" another British naval technical officer hastily inquired.

"Yes, breech-loading cannons. This enables our cannons to have a firing rate several times higher than conventional muzzle-loading ones," Captain Adrian responded.

"May I have a close look at these cannons?" the technical officer asked.

"Absolutely. We French have nothing to hide from our friends. Moreover, if you're interested, under Captain Adrian's guidance, you can even simulate the firing process," Captain Lefebvre said, genuine in his tone, as if France and Britain were indeed close friends.

Naturally, the British didn't let this opportunity slip away. Several British officers quickly inquired, "How do we simulate it?"

"I need ten individuals to form a temporary gun crew," Captain Adrian stated. "Then, I'll guide you through the entire process."

The British huddled together briefly and selected ten people.

"Captain, we're at your service. You can give us instructions," a British lieutenant colonel said to Captain Adrian.

This gun crew was undoubtedly the highest-ranking one Captain Adrian had ever seen. There wasn't a single officer in the crew below the rank of colonel. Adrian felt that after this visit, he'd have some impressive tales to boast about.

Adrian gathered the "gun crew members," led them to the cannons, and gave them a brief explanation of the cannon's structure and loading procedure. He noticed their exceptional understanding; they grasped almost everything at once, surpassing even his subordinates.

However, when it came to actual operations, Adrian swiftly revised his initial thoughts. These British officers had a significant gap in muscular strength and coordination compared to his subordinates. These temporary gunners were technical officers, knowledgeable about cannons, but they were experts in studying cannons, not operating them. Hence, despite having breech-loading cannons that were supposed to fire faster, they ended up slower than muzzle-loading ones under their operation.

Everyone understood the reason behind this outcome. Even the British officers present had a conclusion: claiming a four to five times increase in speed might be an exaggeration, but a three to four times enhancement was indeed possible.

Once these "gun crew members" loaded training ammunition into the cannon, secured the breech, and simulated the firing, then returned to the queue of visitors, a colonel quietly asked one of the "gunners," "Did you get a clear understanding of the structure of the breech-loading cannon?"

"I did. The structure isn't overly complicated, but there might be some difficulty in craftsmanship, leading to higher costs," the "gunner" replied. "But considering one cannon can function as three, I believe it's worth it."

"Given the space saved, even if it's just equivalent to 1.5 cannons and the price triples or quadruples, it's still worthwhile," another "gunner" chimed in.

However, the British thought claiming a four to five times increase in firing speed was an exaggeration because the French provided them with sectional ammunition for training. In reality, these cannons could utilize fixed ammunition for faster loading.

After exploring the cannons, the French took the visitors to the lowest level of the warship, situated below the waterline. Here was something else worthy of showcasing to the British — the "Free Trade's" steel

keel.

As experts, when they saw the steel keel, the British visitors immediately reached a conclusion: "As long as the French steel production is sufficient, it's incredibly easy to disrupt the enemy fleet. The critical material restriction has been surpassed."

This marked the final part of the British visit. Some British officers requested to see the steam engine, but Captain Lefebvre promptly refused, stating, "No, there are many secrets with the steam engine."

"Isn't it said that we are friends, and friends shouldn't have secrets?" jestingly remarked a British person.

"Well, theoretically, that's true," Captain Lefebvre replied. "If it were solely naval matters, it would be possible, but within that space, there are also commercial secrets of our civilian enterprises. For them, aside from customers, everyone else could potentially become future competitors. So..."

The British shrugged, and that was the end of it. In truth, the British had seen more than enough that day, perhaps even exceeding their expectations.

"The French aren't really that impressive. It's all about having an abundance of steel," remarked a British technical officer upon disembarking. "Honestly, how much steel did this ship use? They're not treating steel as steel; it's almost like wrought iron. It's extravagant!"

"Did anyone understand their steel's rust prevention technology?" someone asked.

"It seems like just painting it?"

"The exterior armor plates might be because those are clearly detachable. But what about their keel? Can it be rust-proofed just by paint?"

"We really need to intensify our research on this."

Chapter 313: The Meeting of Christian Underclass

After bidding farewell to the British naval visitors on the first day, the "Free Trade" vessel opened its doors to French expatriates the following day. However, as the day drew to a close, the "London Businessman" suddenly reported groundbreaking news.

"According to information from the French Ministry of Foreign Trade, the steam patrol vessel 'Free Trade' might become a shelf item at the next Paris trade fair. This visit actually carries a promotional intent. Moreover, following the visit to England, the 'Free Trade' will continue its visits to other countries..."

The purpose of this French action had been speculated upon by the British beforehand. Most assumed it was a display of defiance toward Britain. Many questioned if the French had intentions of stirring trouble in Ireland or elsewhere. Now, it seemed the French had an entirely different agenda.

"Are the French utterly fixated on money?" the butcher scoffed. "They'd sell you the rope to hang themselves if you paid them enough."

"You're not wrong, Butcher," declared Fekin, just returned from Ireland to Petticoat Lane.

"However, your perspective is somewhat limited. The French love money, but they also have grander ambitions. It's not just about selling a few ships. Their aim is still to make a statement."

"Why the display?" Barkley asked. "Are France and England gearing up for war again?"

"The French don't wish for it. That's why they're showing the British government the potential losses in case of war. Think about who benefits from peace, and you'll know who truly desires it."

"What a pity," Barkley sighed.

"Barkley, don't place hope solely in these matters. The liberation of the British people ultimately rests on themselves. Primarily, it's crucial to make people realize their own strength."

"People's strength?"

"Yes, the strength of the people. That's the most important lesson I've learned from my travels in France and Ireland. Even though many in the French government love money, which isn't entirely condemnable given it's a common trait, they dare not evict farmers from their lands like the English, pushing them into factories for three or four years of deferred death sentences.

French soil is far more fertile and warm than England's, naturally producing more crops. In France, I've seen the government allocate funds specifically to construct canals and install electric pumps for farmers. This even caused a significant rise in copper prices across Europe. The agricultural taxes in France are the lowest in Europe. The French farmers, cultivating fertile lands free from aristocratic rent, barely pay any national taxes — taxes that may not even cover the cost of these irrigation systems. Why does the French government treat them so well, even aim to please them?"

"Why?" Barkley inquired.

"Because they've shown their strength," Fekin continued. "In the Revolutionary Wars, most soldiers hailed from rural areas, from among the farmers. They formed a collective in the military, maintaining close ties even after demobilization. These veterans organized the French farmers. So, if the French government attempts anything against their interests, these veterans, who have fought and rebelled, are capable of anything. The French government not only refrains from oppressing them but also strives to appease them.

Moreover, during my extended stay in Ireland, I witnessed the same pattern."

"Fekin, enlighten us about Ireland," the butcher requested.

"Well, since France and England reached peace, the British government and the Irish insurgents agreed to a temporary ceasefire. This stopped large-scale conflicts, but it didn't mean peace had truly arrived. Small-scale skirmishes were incessant.

In the 'Non-Pacified Zones,' which are essentially the headquarters of the United Irishmen, preparations for war hardly ceased. Initially, the weaponry of the Irish Independence Army partly came from French aid, partly from seizing arms in battles against the British. However, now, the Irish Independence Army had another source — their own production.

The United Irishmen realized that the current peace was unreliable. Any chance the British get, they'll return. After signing the ceasefire, the aid from France gradually decreased, understandably, as aid requires funds, and currently, there's no immediate danger, leading to a natural reduction in support.

"'Revolution and independence ultimately lie in our hands; we can't rely on the French for everything. The French are our friends, our friendship deeper than the mountains and seas. But we can't rely on friends entirely. If someone relies on friends for everything but does nothing themselves, what should we call such a person? Shouldn't we call them useless? Our comrades in the union can't become such wastrels.' That's what Russell, the chairman of the union, said to his fighters. Therefore, during this period, they've insisted on self-reliance, even establishing their own armaments factory," Fekin explained.

"Their own armaments factory? A group of farmers set up an armaments factory?" Ironjaw exclaimed. "What can they produce?"

"Some simple yet effective weapons, like landmines. However, more importantly, during this time, they've stockpiled a vast amount of supplies and continually strengthened their organization. Strengthening the organization is the fundamental key.

Butcher, Barkley, Ironjaw, do you know what I've learned in France and Ireland? That organization is paramount. To consolidate strength, we need a broad organization to fight for our people's interests. I've decided; we need to reorganize our group, expand it, and first bring in nearby workers."

"And then?" the butcher inquired.

"Then our union, represented by the workers, will present our demands to those establishing factories for their interests. Naturally, there'll be struggle, both overt non-violent and covert, perhaps more familiar to us. Initially, we won't aim too high; we'll start from small but significant points where workers can feel the impact..."

"Well, you're the leader; your word is law," Barkley said. "What shall we name this new association?"

"We indeed need a new name," Fekin pondered. "Hmm, we spread the true gospel of God, about salvation, about liberation. Let's call it 'The Meeting of Christian Underclass.' In these days, I've also discussed doctrinal issues with some clergy in France. I feel I've come closer to understanding God's will."

"Tell us about it, boss," the butcher requested.

"Alright, in Toulon, I met a priest named Torres, who had participated in the Revolution. He spoke to me, mentioning his experiences during the Revolution. I asked him: 'What's your perspective on the French Revolution?' He replied: 'The Revolution is God's will, a correction by God for the church that had strayed from the path of redemption.' So he recounted a story to me.

A forty-year-old woman, appearing as aged as seventy, approached him sorrowfully after Mass and said, 'Father, I didn't confess before taking the Eucharist.'

'How did you get here, my child?' he asked her.

'Father,' she replied, 'I arrived late. For three days, besides water, I had nothing to eat; I was starving. When I saw you distributing the Eucharist, handing out those tiny bits of bread, I approached just to have a morsel of bread.'

His eyes welled up, recalling Jesus' words: 'My flesh, it's true sustenance... those who eat me will live because of me.'

That night, during prayer, he received a fresh revelation. He said:

'Man is created in the image and likeness of God. The voice of the poor crying out for life is God's voice. God isn't a God of death but a God of life, listening to the cries of His people. The judgment of history is the final judgment, what's done to the poor and humble is done to Jesus, the Savior worshipped by Christians, who manifests in these distorted faces due to poverty. Christians cannot remain indifferent in such history. The tranquil contemplation of heavenly mysteries in academia must perish; theology must be grounded, bearing the cross of history, fighting for the lives and liberation of the poor. This is the Messiah's salvation. Salvation is liberation.'

To him, the church had made numerous mistakes, veering further from Jesus' path. Thus, God used the Revolution, blood, and fire to correct it.

He told me, 'Such history cannot be missed; missing it means missing God's revelation, missing the opportunity to become true Christians.'

I find such thoughts and interpretations of the Bible extremely profound and practical. Father Torres gave me a notebook of his Bible readings, filled with his reflections. Henceforth, we must rouse and organize workers with these theological thoughts."

Chapter 314: The Gospel of Revolution

Fekin spoke while reaching into a nearby briefcase, pulling out a notebook as thick as a large dictionary. It was a simple notebook with a plain white cover, red ink inscribed on it: "Notes on the Bible."

Several people gathered around as Fekin flipped open the first page, revealing a line of text: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword..."

Everyone recognized it as a passage from the Gospel of Matthew. Father Torres had placed this sentence here for a reason.

As he turned the pages, there was a preamble-like text, hastily written, indicating Father Torres's intense excitement while jotting down these words.

"While I was in prayer, a spark of thought suddenly appeared, a flash that illuminated me. No, it wasn't just a spark; it was a lightning bolt in the pitch-black night, a miracle, akin to when God said, 'Let there be light.'"

For years, I immersed myself in studying the Bible and the works of theologians at the monastery, gradually distancing myself from the beautiful world God created. I built a barrier between myself and this world, believing that distancing myself from humanity brought me closer to God. Looking back now, it's utterly dizzying! It reeks of self-righteousness and arrogance.

Under the inspiration of that light, I realized that the Bible and the world aren't separate. The Bible is God's word, and isn't the world also God's creation? Just as understanding an author involves not only reading their autobiography but also their other works, how can one claim to know everything about an author just by reading their autobiography? If a reader claims to understand everything about an author by merely reading their autobiography, how arrogant is that? How can we say that by reading the Bible, we can disregard God's most important creation—the whole world? Those who think they can close their eyes to the entire world just because they hold a Bible commit a sin of arrogance.

We must not only read the Bible but also understand the world.

So, I shared my thoughts with the monastery's head. He warned me, 'Young man, your thoughts are perilous; you're stepping into heresy. Satan has entered your heart, misled you. Quickly abandon these untimely thoughts and return to orthodoxy!'

At that moment, a phrase from the Bible struck me: 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.'

The term 'Pharisee' comes from ancient Hebrew, meaning 'separate,' indicating those who isolated themselves from the secular world in pursuit of purity. They strictly followed Moses's laws, considering themselves devout. However, Jesus rebuked them. Why? Some say the Pharisees' intention was initially good, aiming to adhere strictly to God's law and maintain spiritual purity, but they deviated, becoming self-satisfied, arrogant, and hypocritical.

But were the Pharisees only later deviating from the right path? No, from the moment this sect appeared and sought separation from God's created world, the seeds of arrogance and hypocrisy were sown. If separation alone aligned with God's will, why did Jesus come to earth? Why didn't he disappear into the desert and never return? Why did he carry the cross for sinners? This shows that God's will doesn't desire separation from the world. Therefore, when the Pharisees shot their arrow, it had already veered off course. It started subtly, but as the arrow flew forward, it deviated further and became more apparent.

I told the head of the monastery that I intended to leave and travel the world. As he saw my disregard for his advice, he grew furious, but it didn't stop me from departing.

During my travels across France, I noticed the country was increasingly divided into two worlds. One belonged to the impoverished, living in hellish conditions, devoid of joy and happiness. No, they didn't live near hell; they lived in it. Dante supposedly witnessed hell's gates with a terrifying inscription: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.' Cold and suffering weren't their greatest calamities; their true misery lay in the absence of hope. Yes, hell wasn't distant; it was right here on earth.

What was Jesus's first miracle? It was at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where the wine ran out. To have no wine at a wedding, naturally, indicated poverty. Historians say the regions near Lake Genessaret and its surroundings were inhabited by incredibly impoverished people.

Then Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water, and they did so, to the brim. He said, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, and the master tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

At that time, Jesus hadn't yet arrived. But he performed this miracle in advance because of God's love. Whoever loves people will certainly love their joy. That's the significance of Jesus's arrival, his true redemption—bringing joy to more people. That's the real redemption.

The other world belonged to nobles and high-ranking clergy. It was luxurious, debauched, sustained by exploiting the poor, living sinful lives akin to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then I witnessed God's redemption and punishment—revolution.

Revolution is redemption for those trapped in hell. Just as Jesus always stayed with the poorest, I realized the mystical and spiritual significance of the poor's history. Their voices in our time are akin to Moses hearing God's voice in the burning bush. The poor entered the stage of history, proclaiming that poverty isn't divine but human, a consequence of oppressive societal structures that can and must be changed, and the poor are initiating that change. This is liberation, or rather, redemption.

Revolution is also punishment for those who betrayed the masses, trampling upon those who should have been brothers and sisters, killing them, consuming their flesh, and drinking their blood. They faced God's punishment in the revolution, just as God struck down Sodom and Gomorrah.

I gradually understood the meaning of revolution. Then I remembered this line from the Bible:

'I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.' It's a sentence from the book of Revelation, depicting the new world after the apocalypse. I had never truly understood it before. But now, I finally grasped God's intent. Revolution is filled with pain, much like the apocalypse in Revelation, but it's only the end of the old world. The old, sinful world will be shattered by the revolutionary hammer, and after the revolution, a completely new world will unfold before us.

In this world, what separates people, the class divisions that create an ocean between them, will cease to exist.

'I also saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.'

'I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

Yes, heaven, true heaven, isn't in the ethereal sky; it's here on earth. Don't waste energy seeking God's dwelling in the heavens; it's not up there—it's here on earth. As long as we, through

revolution, demolish the old world, heaven will manifest itself on earth, and God will dwell among us. Then 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' My friends, heaven is on earth. Revolution is the only way to bring about heaven, it's redemption!

"No wonder Jesus said, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' No wonder, in the earliest days when Jesus was present, his disciples abandoned all personal possessions. No wonder the Romans, the Jews, wanted to kill Jesus," the butcher remarked.

"But Jesus couldn't be killed. He resurrected after three days. Because revolution cannot be killed. As long as there are people needing redemption, the revolution will continually resurrect. That's the significance of Jesus's resurrection, that's the true gospel," Fekin said. "I believe if Jesus were alive today, in this new century, he would undoubtedly be a revolutionary warrior. A warrior spreading the gospel of revolution in the new era, fighting for it!"

"Amen!" everyone echoed together.

Chapter 315: God's Tabernacle

In the Roman court of heresy.

This stands as the highest religious court in the Catholic world, established by Pope Paul III in 1542. It holds the highest authority in religious judgment within the Catholic world, overseeing religious trials across the Catholic realm.

Differing from the Spanish Inquisition established in 1478 under Queen Isabella's direct authority, primarily aimed at handling heretics, the Roman court of heresy is managed directly by the Pope. In a sense, this court showcases the power struggle between the church and secular authority. After all, the power to determine heresy should never rest in the hands of kings, even the most devout ones.

Pope Paul III appointed six cardinals to form a central court known as the Sacred Roman Congregation of the Universal Inquisition. This institution demanded public penance from accused individuals, including self-flagellation, pilgrimage to holy sites, fines, and wearing identifying clothing. For severe cases, it could result in property confiscation, imprisonment, or even execution by fire.

However, those were practices long past. Though the Roman court of heresy still exists, its authority has significantly waned. Nonetheless, it still holds a crucial power—to judge whether a doctrine falls under heresy.

"Your Eminence, a new form of heresy has emerged. It was discovered in Spain," a priest dressed in black handed a document to Cardinal Dominico, in charge of the Roman court of heresy.

Truth be told, heresies have become quite common in recent years. Ever since Martin Luther initiated religious reforms, advocating "solely by the Bible," nearly half of Europe has turned heretical. The insistence on biblical interpretation has led to numerous absurd heresies, coupled with various ambitious individuals and fraudsters participating. If a day passes without a new sect suspected of heresy, it would be abnormal.

"Rentini, refrain from swift judgments. We need further research to determine if this is heretical," the Cardinal smiled, shaking his head gently. In this era, dealing gently with those suspected of

heresy is necessary. Thorough study is required to ascertain if redemption is possible, then persuasion can be attempted. Previously, they would have been swiftly arrested, interrogated, and if unrepentant, dealt with warmly and without bloodshed.

However, today, the stakes are higher. The days of public executions are gone, and even labeling someone a heretic isn't done casually. If labeled, and if they acknowledge it, they might renounce Catholicism, turning to Protestantism, leading a flock away. Where would the Papacy be left to shepherd then?

Look at the French church; they've made such a mess. As long as they claim to be Catholic, the Papacy hesitates to call them heretics. Honestly, the majority of heretics in the past were far less troublesome than the French church's heresy.

As Rentini nodded, the Cardinal opened the document he had received. Upon seeing the prominent words "Revolutionary Theology" on the cover, the Cardinal frowned, almost dropping it. Those words sparked a notion—was this theology related to the French Revolution? Was it concocted by the same group that even the French church, initially agreeing not to proselytize across districts, could possibly have spawned? How could they betray their promise, their fundamental trust?

However, even if they had, what could be done? Could they declare them heretical? Such actions could easily turn the Papacy into the heretical one!

Suppressing his disgust, the Cardinal continued reading. But as he progressed, his hands trembled uncontrollably, causing the papers to rustle loudly. It became impossible to continue. Placing the documents on the desk, he clasped his hands, praying to God, "Oh Lord, this is truly, terribly blasphemous..."

After a while, the Cardinal regained composure and continued reading. Grim-faced, he finished and set the document down. Turning to Rentini, who stood nearby, he squinted and asked, "Rentini, have you seen this document?"

"Yes, Your Eminence," Rentini replied, bowing his head.

"What are your thoughts on the contents?" the Cardinal inquired.

"I believe it's heresy, the most evil kind in history!" Rentini promptly replied.

"You're right. But God remains forgiving. I'll discuss this matter with the Pontiff and other cardinals. Until then, absolute secrecy is crucial. Understood?"

"I understand, Your Eminence."

The Cardinal nodded, took the document, and left, heading straight to the Papal Palace to meet Pope Pius VI.

In history, Pope Pius VI faced imprisonment and died in 1799 due to his vacillations. But in this timeline, due to France's decisive victory, he avoided immediate conflicts, surviving to this period.

After meeting the Pope and explaining the situation, the Cardinal handed over the document. After reviewing it, Pope Pius VI remarked, "This is undoubtedly a cursed heresy! Do you suspect this relates to the French region?"

"Yes, Your Holiness. I'm concerned this might have ties to France. Shall we reach out and inquire?" Cardinal Dominico asked.

"No need. This document surely has connections to the French, but not from their jurisdiction. At least, the individuals in the French territory won't acknowledge this doctrine as their own. Do you understand our implication?" the Pope responded.

After a brief contemplation, Cardinal Dominico understood the Pope's implication. The "Revolutionary Theology" contained extremely radical statements, exuding a Jacobin flavor, or even the radical faction within the Jacobins. If these teachings were followed, nearly every elite in France today would face the guillotine. Though on a global scale, their turn on the guillotine might come later.

"Your Holiness, do you imply that remnants of the radicals are behind this?"

"It's possible, but not certain," Pope Pius VI said. "It might be French mischief aimed at causing trouble elsewhere. Those wretched French excel at that! Let's copy this document and send it to the French, informing them of our discovery, observing their response."

Soon, the Vatican's missive reached the French Church, then quickly landed in the hands of Minister Fouché.

Fouché knew that this version of "Revolutionary Theology" circulating in France would be detrimental to the country's stability. While the revolutionary spirit stemmed from France, some views echoed his own. Yet, he was not keen on witnessing another revolution. In this regard, Fouché was an anti-revolutionary now. He understood that none from the Bonaparte family supported revolutions.

However, he also knew this wouldn't pose a significant threat to France at present. The French had encountered similar theories before, enduring through those times. Life then was incomparable to today. Thus, Fouché wasn't concerned about the spread within France. It would more likely spread outside France, which, at least for now, wasn't detrimental to the French.

As for Lucien, he was privy to more information. He knew a group, including remnants of French radicals, had purchased vast lands in Louisiana, intending to establish a "God's Tabernacle" there—a region embracing democracy and communal ownership.

The Bonaparte brothers believed this organization could restrain America and pose a serious threat to Spain. Hence, it was worth supporting. While Spain was France's ally, it didn't

imply a lack of conflicts between them. Besides, isn't undermining an allied nation quite normal?

France had long eyed Spain's vast American territories. With the "God's Tabernacle" and "Revolutionary Theology," Spain's territories in America would be in turmoil, offering various opportunities for France.

For instance, war would boost arms sales. France could sell weapons to Spain while allowing the American liberators through Louisiana's "God's Tabernacle" to purchase civilian weaponry—after all, the "God's Tabernacle" citizens were legitimate French citizens.

Moreover, France could infiltrate the Americas, especially South America. South America's economic structure was severely distorted. They lacked an independent economy, entirely subservient to Europe's economy. Even the so-called "liberators" couldn't change this. Hence, France had a chance to turn the entirety of South America from Spanish territory to nominally independent but practically French territory.

Chapter 316: Danger in Mexico

The Vatican swiftly received a response from the French diocese. The diocese believed that determining whether a religious sect was heretical was the responsibility of the Vatican, and they had no objections to that.

This meant the French gave the Vatican the go-ahead to label "Revolutionary Theology" as heretical. Although, it was somewhat embarrassing for the Vatican to have to check in with the French diocese before exercising its theoretical authority, especially concerning French matters. But this wasn't the first time such a thing had happened with the Vatican, especially regarding France. Remember the Templar heresy case? Didn't the French king say who was heretical, and the Vatican echoed that sentiment?

Receiving the response from the French diocese didn't embarrass the Vatican much; in fact, they were rather pleased. It meant they could now make judgments freely in their own interest.

The Roman court promptly initiated an investigation into the incident, quickly understanding that this "Revolutionary Theology" discovered in Spain had spread from the Americas.

"What is the Mexican court doing? How could they not detect this thing or take action? When such heretical thoughts cross the Atlantic back to the Old World, it's not just a one or two-person problem over in the New World. It's like finding one cockroach in a room; there won't be just one, they'll be everywhere." Cardinal Dominico himself was Spanish and understood the threat this kind of thinking posed to Spain when it appeared in the Americas.

So, Cardinal Dominico immediately proposed to the Pope to declare "Liberation Theology" as heretical. He urged the various dioceses to investigate related heresies to protect "God's flock." Especially towards the Americas and the Mexican court; otherwise, there might be significant trouble there.

The religious tribunal, besides its headquarters in Rome, had two crucial branches, historically even older than the Roman tribunal.

The first branch was the Spanish religious tribunal, established during Queen Isabella's era. With her support, the Spanish religious tribunal and the queen collaborated, turning a once green region in history into a different shade.

The other branch was the Mexican religious tribunal. Its history was equally ancient, even predating the Roman tribunal. During the Spanish conquest of the Americas, Catholicism and the Mexican tribunal played pivotal roles.

In a sense, the interests of the Vatican and Spain were deeply intertwined, particularly after the chaos in France due to the Revolution.

So, Cardinal Dominico's suggestion was swiftly accepted. The Vatican promptly passed a resolution, declaring "Revolutionary Theology" a "cursed heresy" and dispatched envoys to various dioceses.

The most critical envoys were those sent to the Americas. Because other dioceses either likely had few of these heresies or, even if they did, it wasn't the Vatican's priority.

The envoy dispatched to the Americas was Bishop Carlos, Cardinal Dominico's nephew, from a noble Spanish family. He had previously worked in the Mexican diocese, familiar with the situation there.

Upon receiving the task, Bishop Carlos, after consulting Cardinal Dominico, immediately set off for Mexico. He knew that the fastest route to the Americas wasn't from Spain but finding a merchant ship willing to take passengers from France.

So, he headed straight to the port of Le Havre, where he could find a clipper bound for the Americas.

For most people, clippers weren't ideal for travel due to their extreme swaying. But the Vatican was deeply concerned about the heresies causing havoc in the Americas, so they urged Bishop Carlos to expedite. Moreover, Bishop Carlos himself desired to elevate his status for both himself and his family, willing to endure hardships. Plus, having sailed many times, he could handle it.

However, finding a reliable ship heading to the Americas took time. If he inadvertently boarded an unreliable ship, in the vast sea, the consequences could be dire.

Yet, Bishop Carlos managed to find a trustworthy ship. It belonged to Stephen Girard and regularly sailed between France and Mexico, relatively dependable. More importantly, Bishop Carlos knew the ship's captain, Lopez.

Lopez's ship was scheduled to set sail in two days, so Bishop Carlos had to wait. During this time, he conversed with Captain Lopez about the current situation in North America. In their discussion, Bishop Carlos mentioned "Revolutionary Theology."

"Ah, I know about this. It's the lunacy coming from Louisiana. Father, you might not know, but the French, to develop Louisiana, passed something called the 'Homestead Act.' Any man who can speak French—even my crew here, with their low French skills—willing to swear allegiance to France, can apply for land in Louisiana. It's quite a lot of land, over a hundred acres! Farm it for a few years or pay a small sum, and it's yours.

They even gave prisoners in jail a choice: work as farmers in Louisiana or feed mice in jail. So, various criminals were dumped in Louisiana. I've heard even some extreme Jacobins were exiled there.

They've concocted this 'Revolutionary Theology.' Apparently, quite a few madmen believe in it. They've gathered in the northern part of Louisiana, bought a huge piece of land, and established their own village. They've set up their own church organization there called 'God's Tabernacle,' meaning 'God's Tabernacle on Earth.'

Their practices there are somewhat similar to what's described in the early apostles in the Bible. They've donated all their possessions to the church. Inside these cities they've built, everything, whether it's meals or anything else, is free, distributed by the church. The church members are democratically elected. These fellows sure know how to play."

"Have many people joined them?" Bishop Carlos asked.

"Not many. Why would anyone give up personal wealth when they can get land from the government? But I've heard they've attracted quite a few from the Old World. Besides, some

struggling Mexicans are willing to join them. They teach them French, arrange an oath of allegiance..."

"And then they get land?" Bishop Carlos chuckled.

"Not always, if they willingly choose. From what I know, not many are voluntary. But there are some. Because compared to working alone, they do have some advantages. For instance, they can pool resources for things other individuals can't manage. Like having the best irrigation for their land. I heard they're planning to build a power plant, possibly the first in all North America. Also, they have many dealings with the indigenous people, making a good profit. Seems they're living quite well."

"These cursed heretics!" thought Bishop Carlos.

"Captain, do these people do missionary work outside?"

"Of course. Have you ever seen a church that doesn't spread its message? But in Louisiana, not many pay attention to them. But I've heard in Mexico, many indigenous and poor people are willing to listen."

Bishop Carlos felt a jolt within. He then asked, "Doesn't the religious tribunal intervene?"

Here, the religious tribunal referred to the Mexican religious tribunal. Compared to the European tribunals forced to civilize, the Mexican tribunal still possessed significant authority. In the Americas, Spain's rule heavily relied on Catholicism, and Catholicism, in turn, gained a position in Europe that was otherwise impossible. Although theoretically, Mexico's tribunal had civilized and no longer had the power to directly imprison or execute, much

like how Calvin didn't rely on religious courts but used the municipal authorities to burn Servetus. Mexico's religious tribunal influenced secular courts to handle heretics and non-believers as they wished.

"The Mexican religious tribunal? How could they deal with the French? Even if those 'God's Tabernacle' fellows aren't welcomed in France, they're still French. The tribunal might target those who listen to these French missionaries. But how effective could that be?" Captain Lopez sneered.

Chapter 317: The Theological Revolution

Before dawn, Father Miguel Idalgo Castilla, as usual, rose to prepare for his sermon. Idalgo was a Mexican-born Caucasian in a society divided by hierarchies. At the top were the "Peninsulares," authentic Spaniards born on the Iberian Peninsula. They held sway in Mexico, controlling the upper echelons of the church and the government, and owning vast lands and interests.

The second tier, the "Creoles," born in the Spanish colonies, were also considered "white." However, they didn't enjoy the same status as the Peninsulares. Spanish rule in Mexico included the killing of many indigenous people and the migration of poor individuals from the Iberian Peninsula to the Americas. Women among the poor who managed the journey overseas were rare, causing a scarcity of women in Mexico.

This issue needed resolution for the stability of the colony. The solution was grim: killing indigenous men and taking their women. Consequently, the indigenous population declined while the number of white people increased. However, these whites often had an indigenous mother or grandmother, seen as tarnishing their purity by the "Peninsulares."

Although legally recognized as Spanish and white, the Creoles were marginalized from high positions in the church and state. They were barred from economic activities in competition with the motherland, like textile workshops, vineyards, olive groves, or money lending.

The third tier comprised the fewer indigenous people, many of whom were slaves. Additionally, they bore higher taxes compared to other classes.

This led the Creoles to feel oppressed, believing they had fled from one form of mistreatment in the Old World to encounter it anew in the New World.

This class system, in Joseph's words, showcased the astounding extent of human stupidity. Discussing colonial plans in North America, Joseph addressed his brothers:

"Politically, the basic principle should be to unite more people against our enemies. Pull everyone who can support us closer, reduce our enemies. But the Spanish fools? The Creoles, natural political allies, are forced into a lower class. No wonder they resent Spain! Their rule's asking for trouble!"

Since Spanish rule faltered in the Americas, the Bonaparte brothers felt it fairer to favor France over Spain. Despite their alliance, they believed it unwise not to take advantage of Spain's foolish stance.

Simultaneously, as France's situation improved, burgeoning production outpaced market capacity. To ease tensions, disquieting elements within France and across Europe were exiled. Lucien devised a plan named "Ideal Country," aiming to entice troublemakers to Louisiana to pursue their ideals, effectively stirring the pot.

This plan later included using indigenous people to disrupt the "Mountain-Top City." To evade attention, it was renamed "God's Tabernacle."

Under the deliberate guidance of the "Ministry of Truth," dissenters in northern Louisiana bought considerable land, establishing their "God's Tabernacle." Like all Abraham-based religions, the "Revolutionary Theology" sect fervently preached, interpreting Saint Paul's missionary journey to Rome:

"To carry the cross is to make the redemption and liberation of all humanity our goal. Establishing a land of equality and freedom in the New World is a start, but it's not enough. True liberation means ensuring every brother worldwide is redeemed and liberated. A genuine Christian is only liberated when all humanity is freed. This is why Saint Paul risked spreading the gospel to Rome."

So, the priests of "Revolutionary Theology," based in Louisiana, propagated their doctrine. They even established a "Liberation Theological Institute" in Hope City, Nebraska, showcasing their zealous missionary spirit.

Idalgo received his theological training at the Baladrés Theological Institute in Baeza, Spain, earning a master's degree. Returning to Mexico, he prepared to continue his priesthood. On his journey back, he debated with a "Revolutionary Theology" priest named Benjamin on theological matters. Idalgo, agitated, launched vitriolic attacks on Benjamin.

To Idalgo's surprise, Benjamin laughed heartily. He said, "Father Idalgo, I understand your fervor. You're not opposing me; you're fighting your inner voice. I won't debate you further; it's late, and I'm not one for staying up late. If you're interested in theological discussions in the future, knock on my door. I'm in the adjacent cabin."

Benjamin retired to his cabin, leaving Idalgo restless in bed, mentally continuing their argument.

Idalgo was thoroughly defeated in their debate. He found himself silenced by his inner Benjamin, even harboring thoughts of harming this "Satan."

For several days, Idalgo secluded himself in his cabin, avoiding interaction. After a week, nearing the Americas, he emerged and knocked on Benjamin's cabin door.

Originally set to disembark at Altamira Port, Idalgo joined Benjamin and disembarked at New Orleans, continuing up the Mississippi River towards the Liberation Theological Institute in Hope City.

His two-month stay at the institute was transformational. He claimed to have truly discovered God and truth there. The fog that clouded his vision dissipated, revealing a clear understanding of the world.

Returning to Mexico armed with his master's degree, Idalgo obtained the position of parish priest in the entire Catholic Dolores Parish, the highest position a Creole could attain within the Church.

The Dolores Parish had many indigenous converts and some Creoles with indigenous heritage. Yet, life was harsh for both pure-blooded indigenous and mixed-race Creoles. The land's fertility for crops like maize was poor, and the taxes imposed by the Spanish were burdensome.

The region's climate was suitable for vineyards and olive groves, but to safeguard Spain's high-priced wine and olive oil markets, planting grapes and olives was forbidden across Mexico.

Utilizing his status, Idalgo aided indigenous and Creole individuals to acquire grapes and olives, assisting in winemaking and oil production, which they sold clandestinely.

These actions earned Idalgo admiration and a growing congregation. During his sermons, he subtly integrated elements of "Revolutionary Theology," resonating deeply with indigenous and impoverished Creoles. Now, a growing number rallied around him.

Forming a cooperative, comprising grape and olive cultivators, they stockpiled weapons under the guise of opposing smuggling patrols.

Today was another preaching day, and Idalgo was ready early, expecting his congregation. However, urgent hoofbeats disrupted the silence outside the church.

Chapter 318: Dolores' Call

Hearing the sound of hooves outside, Idalgo was slightly surprised. Dolores was quite remote, with few people passing through during the day, so a group riding hastily at this hour meant something was amiss. Turning to Josephine, who was helping him arrange his preaching materials, he said, "Stay here; I'll go check."

Catholic priests were expected to remain celibate, but that didn't mean they lacked certain needs. There were reasons why some priests in Catholicism developed an unhealthy inclination towards young boys. However, there had been a gradual shift in this rule. While celibacy persisted in principle, the understanding evolved to allow priests to do as they pleased as long as their actions remained hidden. For instance, the renowned Pope Pius VI maintained numerous mistresses, one of whom was even his own illegitimate daughter.

Following the trend, many Catholic priests, Idalgo included, had partners and children. In these respects, "theology of revolution" directly stated: "God resides in the love between people; only the devil hates the love among them."

Josephine nodded, and Idalgo grabbed a lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other, opening the door to investigate the source of the approaching hoofbeats.

The eastern sky remained pitch black, the darkest moment before dawn.

In the distance, Idalgo spotted several lanterns approaching.

"Who goes there?" Idalgo asked.

The horses halted, and a figure jumped off the front one, raising the lantern hung on the saddle to illuminate a face adorned with a bushy beard.

"Father, it's me, Alexander!" Captain Alexander was Idalgo's friend, a white native of the land. Previously, he had been of great assistance in smuggling wine and olive oil through Dolores.

Upon Idalgo introducing elements of "revolutionary theology" into his sermons, Captain Alexander promptly warned him. He cautioned that such thoughts were perilous; if discovered by the Mexican religious tribunal, Idalgo would be deemed a heretic.

He emphasized that being labeled a heretic in Europe might not have severe consequences, but in Mexico, the religious tribunal still wielded the power to execute!

"I understand your point. It makes sense. But, my friend, I don't want to see you become a torchbearer. However, are you... I mean, are you sincere? Do you truly believe in what you say and are willing to fight for it?"

"Yes, my friend. Just as Jesus said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' I live not for food but for truth," Idalgo replied.

"Then count me in!" Captain Alexander said. "The time for change in this world has arrived!"

This conversation became a crucial step in the Mexican revolution. The revolutionary group began arming themselves.

"Alexander, my friend, what's happening?" Idalgo hurriedly asked.

"Someone has informed the religious tribunal that you're a follower of 'revolutionary theology.' You know, half a month ago, a bishop arrived from Rome, specifically tasked to hunt down 'revolutionary theology' heretics. Last night at nine, I received word that the police would come to arrest you at dawn," Captain Alexander said. "Fortunately, they don't know we're all in this together, all deemed 'heretics.' The situation is dire. What's your plan? We'll follow your lead!"

Upon hearing this news, Idalgo expected to be shocked, but oddly, he remained remarkably calm. Faced with this sudden development, he felt no agitation; he even found himself smiling.

"My friends, we've prepared for so long, all for this day, haven't we? You're not here alone but with our comrades from the army, all for this day. We've toiled in the wilderness these days, all to 'prepare His way, make His paths straight.' Now, this day has finally arrived! Alright, everyone, you've worked hard. Come inside, rest, and when dawn breaks, when the masses assemble..."

The cavalry led their horses to the back of the church, preparing.

As the sun rose, Father Idalgo donned a black robe, came to the church's entrance, and rang the bell himself.

By mid-morning, a crowd had gathered. They encircled Father Idalgo's pulpit, awaiting his sermon.

Father Idalgo began preaching, openly including the contents of "revolutionary theology," overturning the "Bible twisted by the false church of Satan's followers." Finally, he proclaimed that Jesus' path was a path against all oppression, a path of redemption, and liberation.

"The Bible says: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" This path is Jesus' path, leading people to liberation from slavery, the road to freedom and redemption, just as legislator Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt..."

At that moment, a cloud of dust rose from the road – galloping horses approaching. Probably the police coming to arrest Father Idalgo for his beliefs.

Shortly after, a few policemen arrived at the church's entrance. Led by a white native, they brandished batons, pushing aside some Indigenous people gathered nearby, advancing toward Father Idalgo's pulpit.

Father Idalgo had noticed them earlier. Now, as his sermon reached its climax, he shouted to the crowd, "My children, do you desire freedom? Do you wish for a happy life? Three hundred years ago, detestable Spanish colonial thieves stole our ancestors' lands. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to reclaim them?"

Indigenous and white natives around shouted in unison, "Hang the colonial thieves!" "Long live independence!" "Long live freedom!"

At that moment, the colonial police, having just reached the pulpit, were about to announce the arrest of Father Idalgo in the name of God and the king. Surrounding cries drowned their speech. The thunderous roar overwhelmed the lead policeman, who stood agape, unable to utter a word.

As the surrounding clamor subsided, everyone noticed the policemen now close to the pulpit. Countless eyes fixated on them, a gaze as weighty as the Rockies, making the policemen break into a sweat.

The lead, trembling policeman opened his mouth and finally shouted, "Hang the colonial thieves! Long live Mexican independence!"

His fellow policemen immediately raised their fists high, joining in, "Down with the wicked Spanish, long live Mexican independence!"

With those words, the policemen felt a sudden lightness. The stares that had been fixed on them softened.

The lead policeman hastily grabbed the white native who had led them, dragging him forward and kicking him to the ground in front of Father Idalgo. Father Idalgo glanced down and recognized him as Leonardo, a smuggler who had purchased their wine.

"Father, it's this guy who snitched!" the policeman indignantly pointed at Leonardo with his baton.

"So, it was you who informed?" a mixed-race man drew his knife.

"You betrayed us? How much did you sell us out for? Thirty pieces of silver?" an Indigenous man questioned.

Father Idalgo stepped forward, asking, "What's going on?"

"Father, it's like this," the chubby policeman replied with a smile, "the damned Bishop Carlos arrived recently, offering rewards for catching 'revolutionary theology' heretics. This traitor, this shameless scoundrel, for

money, ran to snitch! I spit on him! Such shameless bastards, traitors, Judases! He went to the religious tribunal and snitched that you're a 'revolutionary theology' heretic. Spit! What's wrong with revolution? Mexico should've been damned well revolutionized! Damn those peninsulares, those nobles, those bishops! It's high time we hanged those damned colonial thieves on the gallows! So, we brought this traitor here for you."

"Sheriff, how could you..." the smuggler began.

The chubby policeman swiftly struck him in the mouth with his baton, knocking out two teeth.

"Shut up, you damned Judas! I hate the Spanish thieves second, you traitors first! If I can't beat the Spanish thieves, can't I beat you?" he said.

Then, with a grin, he said to Father Idalgo, "Father, are we starting a rebellion? I know the city inside out. I'm willing to join the revolution, let me lead the way! I'm willing to support the revolution; let me guide the revolutionary army!"

"Yes, yes!" other policemen chimed in. "Father, we're ready to guide the revolutionary army! Let's act now, Father! Let's catch those Spanish thieves off guard!"

Chapter 319: Telegrams and Codes

News of the uprising in Mexico took nearly a month to reach Europe, and it didn't cause much of a stir there. After all, Mexico seemed too distant for the average European. Only the Spanish ambassador to France submitted a weakly worded protest, urging France to restrain the activities of heretics within its borders and control the flow of weapons.

"Juan, as you know, our 'Code of Law' guarantees religious freedom," Talleyrand calmly accepted the protest handed by the Spanish ambassador, casually placing it in the drawer of his desk.

"Though personally and among those with some knowledge of religion, we know that this 'theology of revolution' is heretical. But in our country, heresy is lawful. Unless they commit something truly drastic, we can't constrain them according to the law. Heresy and preaching itself, we can't control. At least not in France and its territories. You might not be aware, but there are about five or six fellows wandering in France claiming to be the living Jesus. We haven't thrown them all into jail because of our religious and speech freedoms."

"As far as I know," Ambassador Juan remarked, "of those 'living Jesus' individuals, there were five, and four ended up in mental asylums."

"That's because their families applied to hospitals, and with qualified doctors' diagnoses, they were admitted. This is a matter of medicine. How could that be considered imprisonment?"

"But there's one 'living Jesus' detained in prison by your government?"

"Oh, he's inside, but not for religious reasons. I'm sure he wasn't arrested due to religious grounds. In our France, it's a free and democratic republic. Our people have the liberty to believe in any religion or none, switch from one faith to another, or even embrace all religions at once. No one

here gets locked up for religious reasons. The one you mention was detained for illegal medical practice resulting in death. He claimed that by touching the patient and shouting 'I am Jesus, I command illness to leave this person,' he could cure them, which ended up fatal. If the patient hadn't died, we wouldn't have arrested him. Our government lacks authority over religious beliefs."

Talleyrand gestured helplessly. "But these heretical theories are so absurd. Strengthening education might quickly refute their erroneous views and resolve this."

Ambassador Juan realized he couldn't expect much help on this issue from a group of devout Catholics. Even today, was there a greater heresy than the French Church? Even Lutherans or the entire Protestant movement were labeled heretics by the Church. Unlike the French, who were clearly heretical, the Church refrained from acknowledging it.

"What about weapon control?" inquired Ambassador Juan.

"Ah, that's not a significant issue," replied Minister Talleyrand briskly. "Our nations are allies. We won't aid each other's enemies. We certainly won't sell them weapons. I assure you; we haven't sold arms to Mexico."

"But from our knowledge, the rebels in Mexico possess French weapons," the ambassador mentioned.

"That must be smuggling," Talleyrand asserted calmly. "In the Americas, especially Louisiana, where laws are scarce, one's safety and property security rely on a gun. Unlike Europe, firearms are freely traded there, and it's challenging to control. For instance, a group of new immigrants planning to farm further north encounters Native Americans and American bandits. To peacefully buy furs from the Native Americans, we must ensure they have enough weapons for self-defense."

"In Louisiana, all sorts of firearms, even the latest cannons, can be legally purchased—only for French citizens. Because up north, there have been instances of British, American, and even Native Americans using cannons to rob our settlers. We can't watch them oppress our immigrants with cannons."

"We assure you, if a Mexican crosses the border into Louisiana and attempts to buy weapons from a store without legal documentation, not even a fruit knife would be sold to them. If any store violates this, they'll be fined severely. But if they wait outside and casually persuade a Frenchman heading in to buy guns for them, that's beyond our control. It's not that we don't want to regulate it; our law enforcement in the New World is insufficient. We'll enhance border patrols and intercept smugglers. Your country should do the same to prevent weapon smuggling."

Talleyrand smiled suddenly. "However, Ambassador Juan, you know the border between Louisiana and Mexico is vast. Completely sealing such a lengthy border isn't easy, nearly impossible. Alternatively, your country could directly purchase more and better weapons from us. With your superior resources and manpower, combined with our advanced arms, I believe your country can successfully quell the rebellion in Mexico."

Observing Talleyrand's earnest, almost royal-like smile, Ambassador Juan almost lost control and wanted to throw his white glove at Talleyrand's face. However, he restrained himself, telling Talleyrand, "Minister, our nations are allies. We abide by the treaties, cherish our friendship. I hope, at this time, we can sincerely assist each other and navigate through these turbulent waters."

With that, Ambassador Juan bid farewell and hurried back to the embassy. He documented today's negotiations with the French and translated them into coded reports, sending them via telegraph from Paris to Madrid.

Between France and Madrid, commercial telegraph lines existed by now. However, since these lines were managed by French companies, crucial and confidential messages needed encryption. Even with encryption, it was still unsafe. Telegraph companies archived these messages, and with enough data combined with current events, deciphering these codes wasn't difficult. Considering that cryptography hadn't emerged in this era, the so-called "encrypted messages" were of poor quality, akin to childish rhymes or overly obvious hints.

However, among the French, there was a man named Joseph who had crossed over. Though he himself knew only a single term related to cryptography, he had some understanding of permutations and combinations. Coupled with a general direction and the lack of proper encryption awareness in this era, deciphering these messages became easier when one could automatically access all telegraphed content. Unlike these times, the encryption tactics were constant, like the Kuomintang, using the same code for years, making it easy for the White Eagle to feed false information to them.

Comparatively, despite the poor encryption skill of the former Rabbit, the Grasshopper Army thought they could crack Rabbit's codes in at most two months, but they never succeeded until the Grasshopper Army surrendered because the Rabbit changed codebooks every month or so.

So, in the eyes of the Ministry of Truth and Public Security, the ciphers used by the Spanish government were almost as good as plain text. Just as Ambassador Juan's message was relayed, the French already knew its content. When directives from Spain returned, Lucien learned this even earlier than Ambassador Juan, as the latter had to wait for the telegraph company to deliver the message. Lucien, on the other hand, received the translated content directly via telephone.

"Interesting, the Spaniards are resolute... What? How could the Spaniards do this? This is too..." Lucien was startled by the decisiveness of the Spanish.

Chapter 320: Land Acquisition

The day after receiving orders from Madrid, Ambassador Juan once again visited the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet with Foreign Minister Talleyrand.

At this point, Talleyrand was already well aware of Juan's purpose. The Ministry of Truth had handed him organized intelligence the day before. Having reviewed reliable documents supposedly obtained from a contact in Spain, Talleyrand mentally applauded Lucien and promptly went to meet Napoleon, discussing and preparing their response.

In the opulent reception room of the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Juan met Foreign Minister Talleyrand again.

"Your Excellency, I am tasked with presenting a proposal to your country," Ambassador Juan said.

"My friend, I am all ears," Talleyrand replied, spreading his hands.

"We wish to purchase a quantity of arms from your country," Juan stated.

"That's not an issue," Talleyrand smiled. "We are allies; our arsenal is open to our friends."

"However, Your Excellency, you are aware that at present, we might struggle to produce such a large sum of money," Ambassador Juan added.

"That is not a problem; we can loan you the money," Talleyrand smiled. "For our allies, we are always willing to offer reasonable assistance within our means. I know several bankers, and I believe, given Spain's status and reputation, favorable loan conditions can be obtained from them."

Indeed, Spain's economic state wasn't much better than pre-revolutionary France. Before the French Revolution, King Louis XVI had resorted to borrowing from bankers to sustain finances. However, he overextended himself, failing to repay, resulting in a cycle of borrowing anew to settle old debts. In modern times, this might not be a bad strategy, like some nations nowadays.

However, there was a significant difference in this era—the interest rates for loans were generally much higher. While modern nations might secure loans with an interest rate of two to three percent, here, rates could soar as high as twenty-three percent if things went awry. Such rates, coupled with the influence of the mightiest forces in the universe, made this tactic unsustainable.

In this era, dealing with bankers was akin to dealing with usurers. The interest rates for loans were not a minor concern; they could reach twenty-three percent with an ounce of conscience. Such rates, combined with the influence of the most potent forces, made this approach untenable. The inevitable consequence would be a default on the debt, making future borrowing arduous and conditions stricter.

While Spain hadn't reached Louis XVI's level, its credit in the debt market was mediocre. This meant that even borrowing would demand higher interest rates, attracting lenders only if offering more significant interest rates—a "favorable loan condition" claim was misleading.

Regarding French government aid, well, the Napoleonic Code explicitly stipulated France's adherence to free markets and trade, without governmental intervention.

Of course, this was theoretical. In reality, the expanding Franco-Bank Alliance was assuming a central bank-like role. Considering the Bonaparte family's status in this alliance, they could easily align the union's actions with France's policies. Some even argued that it wasn't the alliance aligning with France, but rather the government aligning with the union.

In essence, Talleyrand's words sounded good, but whether borrowing from the French or English, the interest rates wouldn't likely be low.

"Our King does not intend to accumulate excessive debt as it burdens our people," Juan remarked. "His Majesty is a benevolent ruler, unwilling to burden his people excessively."

"It's not about avoiding burdening the people but fearing that the Spanish populace might initiate a revolution akin to the French," Talleyrand thought to himself. Aloud, he said, "Your country's King has an admirable heart for his people. I believe your people, under your King's wise leadership, will overcome these minor hardships."

It sounded pleasant, but the actual implication was, "I cannot assist you; you're on your own. Your fate lies with you."

"Your Excellency, we have another proposal," Ambassador Juan said.

"I am all ears. We have always been willing to assist our allies when an opportunity arises," Talleyrand replied.

"Your enthusiasm in exploiting allies is quite noteworthy," Juan thought inwardly, but his smile remained genuine.

"We plan to sell a portion of our territories in North America to obtain necessary funds," Juan stated.

"Ah," Talleyrand feigned surprise. "Which areas does your country intend to sell?"

"We plan to sell Florida. Does your country have an interest in it?" Juan replied.

At present, Florida belonged to Spain, yet American influence there was substantial. If the land were sold to the Americans, they'd gain a strong foothold in the Caribbean. This wasn't good news for France, especially as they aimed to develop Louisiana and expand northward. Hence, both Talleyrand and Napoleon agreed yesterday that it was unwise to let this land fall into American hands.

However, they also saw selling Florida as a means to pressure France into offering more money. Losing Florida would bring the Americans closer to the Caribbean, posing a greater threat to Spain's interests.

Moreover, Spain's claim to sell Florida aimed to further provoke tensions between France and the United States. Though Florida belonged to Spain, it had been under British rule just twenty years ago. The primary population there was Anglo-Saxon. Despite legally being Spanish, the Spanish couldn't control the territory. If no other intervening forces appeared, it was only a matter of time before it fell into American hands.

If this land were to end up in French possession, given France's current strength, American infiltration would be difficult. This would inadvertently secure other Spanish territories, particularly Cuba.

"Florida? That area is rich. Your government should profit significantly from it. Selling it off now, isn't that regrettable?" Talleyrand questioned. "Moreover, due to the demographics in that region, to be honest, our interest isn't substantial."

The American navy was not yet capable of severing the link between France and Louisiana. So, when Joseph discussed Spain's intention to sell Florida with Napoleon, he emphasized that even if Florida fell into American hands, the immediate threat would be relatively limited. Assuming control of the area would bring about a slew of problems. Thus, Talleyrand's current stance was not just bluffing to drive up the price.

"If your country isn't interested, then we'll have no choice but to sell this land to the Americans," Ambassador Juan said.

"This is your internal affair; we do not wish to interfere," Talleyrand responded. "However, given our alliance, we are willing to assist your country in this matter. I believe any transaction, with only one buyer, finds it challenging to fetch a good price. We can cooperate to create an appearance of keen interest in purchasing Florida, helping raise its price. Of course, this would antagonize the United States, for which we would require compensation."

This request surprised Ambassador Juan, but he inquired, "What kind of compensation do you require?"

"We also hope to purchase some of your country's lands in North America. We wish to acquire several ports on the Pacific to expand our trade routes. Since our trade with the Far East has been disrupted since our setbacks in India, we seek to re-establish it through this route. Thus, we hope to buy the Panama region. Additionally, for facilitating whaling activities in the Pacific, we wish to purchase San Francisco and San Jose from your nation."

The strategic importance of

Panama didn't need elaboration—even without a canal. As for San Francisco, it had a name familiar to many Chinese: "Old Gold Mountain." This name stemmed from a shallowly buried gold mine nearby, inciting a famous gold rush. Joseph had seen numerous Western films in his previous life involving these regions. If they could secure these territories through the Mexican revolution, it would undoubtedly be a profitable move.

Convincing Napoleon and Lucien to support him wouldn't be difficult. Previously, he had dispatched exploration teams to North America under the guise of the French Academy of Sciences to study its geology and flora and fauna. Then he informed Napoleon, "Our people have discovered gold deposits near San Francisco."

This wasn't a lie since Joseph had specifically sent these exploration teams to these locations.

"Captain Jones of the exploration team discovered gold particles in the rivers near San Francisco. But he's cautious and hasn't disclosed this secret. Hence, it remains undisclosed. Right now, these areas are wilderness; acquiring them at this juncture won't cost much and is undoubtedly profitable," Joseph explained to his two brothers.