EFORELY, chance references in reading called to my attention a curious similarity between two outstanding men of the 18th century. Although separated nearly a hundred years in time and three thousand miles in distance they had many traits in common. Both possessed unusual intellectual ability and attainments, both acquired medical degrees, both found other spheres more attractive than science, and both are remembered, justly or unjustly, for their association with movements resulting in the destruction rather than the preservation of life.

One was John Cotton Mather, graduate of Harvard University in the three schools: law, theology, and medicine. His life and his connection, guilty or innocent, with the Salem witchcraft trials might be as interesting a study as the subject of this essay, Marat, one of the leaders of the French Revolution.

EARLY PART OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Even if this entire paper were devoted to a resumé of that important movement it would be quite inadequate. However, a few of the outstanding events must be mentioned in order to give a proper background to the presentation of this most interesting character.

Extravagance, oppression and indifference comprised a triple yoke under which most of the French people had labored for many years. At about the middle of the 18th century the first rumblings were beginning to be heard. The Encyclopaedists under Diderot and the Economists or Physiocrats, writing mostly from healthier residences in other countries, called attention to the numerous injustices and cried for reforms. Their influence, however, was not extensive since hard thinking was required of their followers. At about the same time Rousseau making similar appeals but advocating more radical measures and playing more upon the emotions of the common people, became a leader easy for the mob to follow. The constant demand for money for the court had entirely exhausted the lower classes and in 1789, Calome ordered a tax upon the nobles. This shocking and irritating procedure led them, in 1789, to call an assembly of the States-Gen-
eral which had not met since 1610. This body was composed of three divisions, the nobles, the clergy and the third estate, or commons. When the body met the first matter of importance was the distribution of voting strength. Voting as units, the nobles and clergy, representing but 1/25 of the population, could control all legislation. The representatives of the third estate naturally insisted upon individual voting by the various delegates and not by divisions. Because of their insistence they were excluded from the Palace at Versailles, the meeting place of the States-General. They then withdrew to an abandoned building which had once housed a tennis court and there took the famous “Oath of the Tennis Court” agreeing never to disperse until they had made a new constitution for France—and in the next breath shouting “Long live the King”, showing their grievances were against the government rather than the person of the king. The National Assembly thus formed established National Guard Units in many of the larger cities. On July 14, 1789, less than a month later, the Bastille was destroyed—not especially to free prisoners but to show how the mob felt regarding what it stood for. The people were thoroughly aroused but

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Jean Paul Marat was born in 1743 at Beaudry (or Boudry) in the province of Neuchatel, Switzerland, the province at that time, however, being a Prussian possession. His parents were respectable people of the lower middle class. The name was originally spelled M-A-R-A but Marat added the “T” when he went to Paris in order to make it appear more like a French name. His father was a teacher of languages and a designer of figures of cloth. He was a native of Sardinia and had originally been a Catholic, but on coming to Switzerland had accepted Calvinism. The belief that there was a possible Semitic strain is based upon these facts: first, in the classic times many Carthaginians came from Africa to Sardinia; secondly, the word “marah” (M-A-R-A-H) in Hebrew means “bitterness”, which was destined to be a most appropriate name for the figure of this essay, and thirdly, that the marriage registry record notes that the father’s witness was a Jew, Paul Abraham Medez. The mother was a Swiss, Louise Cabrol, and her father a Frenchman. It seems that Marat was fortunate in having the

MARAT’S MURDERESS, CHARLOTTE CORDAY, painted from Life by Jean-Jacques Hayer in the prison of the Conciergerie.