1. The Plot to Turn Back the Clock

Napoleon had been defeated. In 1814 he was shipped off into exile on the island of Elba. His enemies hoped that this would be the end of Napoleon. But somehow he escaped in 1815, and for a time known as the Hundred Days, he won battle after battle. His moment as the great conqueror had passed, however. The Battle of Waterloo was his final defeat. This time, he was sent far away, to the island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean. There he spent the rest of his days.

Now that Napoleon was gone, the scene shifted from the battlefield to the meeting room. Kings and ministers of the major powers of Europe met in Vienna, Austria, from 1814 to 1815. They redrew the map of Europe. Their goal was to “turn back the clock” to the “happy days” before the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Let us see how they proposed to return to those “good old days.” Here, we sit in on a meeting of Czar Alexander I of Russia, Prince Metternich of Austria, Viscount Castlereagh of Great Britain, and Talleyrand of France. They are discussing the past and the future of Europe.

Ask yourself why they wanted to turn back the clock. Do you think that it was possible to turn back the clock? How did they try to prevent the rise of another Napoleon?

Vienna July 1815

CASTLEREAGH. There is one thing we can all agree on.
Things have changed in Europe.

TALLEYRAND. Things—I’m not so sure I know what you mean. Aren’t we back where we started before the Revolution? Haven’t we turned back the clock to the good old days? Change has been wiped out!

CASTLEREAGH. Don’t be a fool, Talleyrand. (He raises his voice slightly.) Things will never be the same. We can try, but the French Revolution and Napoleon will always be with us.
METTERNICH. Don’t say that! Thank God, Napoleon is gone. We’ve shipped him off to Saint Helena. I could not sleep if he were as close as Elba. Put the man on a battlefield and you never know what might happen. He took boys and gave them guns. Somehow he won ten battles in twenty days! That man is dangerous!

TALLEYRAND. I still dream of his escaping and rallying the mobs around him once again. What a nightmare! Never again will a man rise from nowhere and become an emperor, as Napoleon did. Only those born to the throne may be rulers!

(Czar Alexander enters the room. He listens to Metternich.)

METTERNICH. You are right for once, Talleyrand. It was clever of us to choose old Louis, the dead king’s brother, to sit on the throne of France. There is no question about his being the legitimate ruler. It was a blessing that there was at least one real Bourbon left in France.

ALEXANDER. Not clever, Metternich—we were not clever at all. We are lucky that Louis happened to be available. The clever thing was to make it look as though the French people were calling Louis back to the throne. What fools they were! Now he is Louis XVIII. Stupidly, he thinks that he was made king of France by the grace of God!

METTERNICH. He looks like a fool and acts like a fool. But he is the king of France. And that’s it! Revolutions are over! There will be no more changes in the governments of Europe. The common people will never rule our nations. They will never be given a chance to get control. We must keep the mob in its place! Legitimacy—inherited rank and privilege—is the answer! We must never forget that!

CASTLEREAGH. I repeat: You cannot turn back the clock! We can try to hold back the hands of the clock. We can try to prevent changes. But gentlemen, the world is not the same. It can never be!

METTERNICH (angrily). Wrong again, Castlereagh! We are going to keep things exactly the way they are. We will insist upon it! Everything we have done here in Vienna has one goal: Keep things as they are. The present order will remain forever. We have made revolutions impossible!
TALLEYRAND (places a map of Europe on the table). Look at this map of Europe. The countries of our continent are all locked in. There is simply no room for change. No new nations can ever rise. Notice how Italy is broken up into many states; each is weak and helpless. And don’t forget how cleverly we’ve divided Germany! There are now 38 weak states, and they’re really controlled by Austria. No, there will never be a united Germany!

CASTLEREAGH. I wonder—are we really all that clever—Belgium ruled by the Netherlands, Norway ruled by Sweden? Do you honestly think that all of this is going to last forever?

ALEXANDER (in a commanding voice). Gentlemen, I have a simple suggestion that will make all of this last forever. We must protect our thrones through definite action. I hear too much talk about how things will never change. To prevent revolutions, I propose a Holy Alliance of the kings and queens of Europe. Let the people try to revolt. We will crush them without a second thought! We must be sure of ourselves. We must work together. We must fight together to keep things from changing!

(Talleyrand and Metternich seem pleased and excited by Alexander’s suggestion. Castlereagh’s expression does not change.)
CASTLEREIGHT. You once said that kings and queens were put on their thrones because God wanted them there. Then why do you need an alliance?

METTERNICH. Castlereagh, you know better than that. God helps us, but he does not fight our wars. We must never permit the world to be ruled by people like Napoleon. This is the best of all possible worlds for us! Let us keep it that way! My government will support Czar Alexander's proposal for a Holy Alliance!

CASTLEREAGH. England cannot become part of your alliance. It is not to our advantage to support one side or the other.
ALEXANDER. Nonsense! Who suffers from change? We who have created legitimate governments are the ones who must pay. Look what happened to your own country, Great Britain, during your American Revolution! Those little colonies made the great British empire look almost idiotic! And have you forgotten what the Americans did during the last years of the wars with Napoleon? What did they call it?

CASTLEREAGH. The War of 1812. Your Highness, no one likes to lose. But we have to face the facts. The world changes no matter what we try to do. We cannot stop the movement of time. It is not in England's best interest.

METTERNICH. Tell me, Castlereagh, if your king and queen lost their throne, what would you do? Would you whine and complain? Wouldn't they be better off having all the other rulers of Europe help them?

TALLEYRAND. Do you think that those who have once tasted freedom will forever be satisfied with rule by others? We must always be alert and prepared!

CASTLEREAGH (for the first time his face reddens with anger). Enough of this talk of freedom and revolution! Britain may help, but it will not be part of your plan! (He quickly walks out of the room.)

ALEXANDER. He simply does not understand. God's will is that the governments are not to be changed. We must protect our rights! If we do not help each other, we are lost!

TALLEYRAND. I wonder—is it too late? Can we keep the seeds of nationalism and freedom from growing forever?

Postscript

The purpose of the Congress of Vienna was to return Europe to the political system that existed before the days of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte. Change and reform were rejected. People were expected to live under governments that severely restricted their freedoms. But many people refused to conform.

In 1819 German university students demonstrated for more freedom and German unification. Metternich's response was the Carlsbad Decrees.
Newspapers and magazines were strictly censored. Political comment against the government was forbidden, and a committee watched for “revolutionary” activity. No protests were permitted.

Also in 1819, a crowd gathered in Manchester, England, to hear speeches on voting and parliamentary reform. A cavalry troop was ordered to charge into the crowd. Several people were killed, and hundreds were injured. This event was called the Peterloo Massacre.

In spite of Metternich, power was shifting in Europe. The upper middle classes were now in control in England and France. Louis XVIII, who understood this, died while king of France. His successor, Charles X, who refused to accept middle-class leadership, was driven from his throne by a revolution in 1830. He died in exile.

In the United States, the common people achieved more democratic rights. In 1832 the election of President Andrew Jackson represented a shift in political control from the rich, industrial northeast to the poorer, agricultural west. In Canada, an uprising led England to grant more political freedom.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW**

1. What did the European leaders at Vienna hope to accomplish by “turning back the clock”?
2. What did Castlereagh mean when he said that the world would “never be the same”?
3. Why was Louis XVIII chosen to be the king of France?
4. Why was Talleyrand so sure that the new map of Europe would not change?
5. Why did Czar Alexander propose a Holy Alliance?
6. How did the Carlsbad Decrees limit freedom?

**UNDERSTANDING THE STORY**

A. Write T for each statement that is true and F for each statement that is false.

1. Napoleon was exiled first to the island of Elba and later to the island of Saint Helena.
2. Most of the leaders at the Congress of Vienna felt that everyone, rich or poor, should benefit from the French Revolution.
3. Many of the leaders at the Congress of Vienna wanted to turn back the clock of history.
4. Metternich and Talleyrand worried that Napoleon might return to Europe.
5. Metternich said that the common people should rule.
6. Castlereagh said that the world would never be the same.
7. “Europe must change” is a remark that Talleyrand might have made.
8. Czar Alexander proposed the Holy Alliance.
9. Castlereagh said that England would not join the Holy Alliance.

B. Imagine that Germany and Britain go to war. Britain is defeated. Germany now attacks several other countries and also defeats them. The United States then goes to war against Germany and wins. Should the United States use the ideas of the Congress of Vienna in dealing with Germany? Write a peace treaty between Germany and the United States. Use the ideas of the Congress of Vienna.

**ACTIVITIES AND INQUIRIES**

1. Look at the map of Europe after the Congress of Vienna, on page 298. Copy the map in your notebook. Now look at the map of present-day Europe on page 543. Make a list of countries that were not free in 1815 but later became independent.
2. Pretend that you are an American newspaper reporter at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Interview Czar Alexander. Write a newspaper article telling why the czar feels he must have a Holy Alliance.
3. Interview Castlereagh. Write an article on why he is against the Holy Alliance.
4. Use each of the following key terms in a sentence: exile reactionary Holy Alliance reaction legitimacy nationalism.
5. Castlereagh stands alone several times in our story. He does not agree with the other three men. Tell which statements Alexander, Talleyrand, and Metternich would accept, but Castlereagh would reject.
   a. We must have a Holy Alliance.
   b. We must turn back the clock.
   c. It is not in Britain’s interest to join an alliance.
   d. The world will never be the same.
   e. There will be no more revolutions in Europe.