Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France

Higgs, David

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Higgs, David.
Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France: The Practice of Inegalitarianism.


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/67863

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2391644
1

The Number of Nobles

Before the French Revolution some nobles boasted, in the manner of Orlando’s forebears, that their families came out of the mists wearing coronets. They claimed noblesse immémoriale, meaning that they were descendants of the factions who put Hugues Capet on the throne in 987 or simply that their family’s distinction was of time out of mind. Their filiation was too antique to have left so mundane a trace as a written grant of title. However, the larger portion of the noblesse dated from the previous two or three centuries and recalled that French kings bestowed membership in the second estate, titles, and sometimes financial rewards for valor in battle, ready cash, sexual favors, or governmental and other services. Throughout their history the French nobility accepted new members, since only in that fashion could they compensate for losses sustained from war, pestilence, poverty, an absence of male heirs, or sterility. There was always a discrepancy between aristocratic evocations of ancient antecedents, or at the least three generations of titled relations, and the constant recruitment of fresh nobles. This led to collective hypocrisy over the actual recruitment, contrasted with the resounding statements about the need to uphold endogamy and to sustain family honor against contamination by the vulgar. At any time in the nobility’s history, it is important to contrast what was said and what in fact was done. This is particularly true of the nineteenth-century nobles, who, facing new pressures exerted on their self-imagery, needed to explain how they defined themselves in a France where, henceforth, all men were equal before the law. Who was noble after 1800?

Posing this question might suggest that for the time before the Revolutionary decade we have its answer, but this is very far from the truth. No accurate, let alone widely accepted, count was ever completed in France, despite various “registrations” of nobles under Louis xiv and
Louis xv, which were essentially devices for making financial levies on the noblesse. There is an enduring margin of uncertainty, unlikely ever to be definitively dispelled, as historians juggle disputed and inaccurate genealogies, unreliable statistics, and shifting definitions of rank in an effort to produce a plausible count of nobles. Many years have passed since Marc Bloch’s unanswered call for reliable statistics about the ratio of nobles to the populations of the French provinces over time. Almost equally difficult to know is how numerous nineteenth-century nobles were in the nation at large. Unless we investigate those who should be counted as noble, we can say little, save in the most speculative way, about their place in the national elite. Moreover, the latter concept commands no consensus among sociologists and historians. There is a tacit agreement about the existence of an establishment, a ruling class, a top drawer, or of a dominant group under some other name, singular or plural, and there is a distinctly healthy trend towards thinking about the elite(s) as a significantly large category of people, in the top 5 percent of the national population in total wealth, including almost all those who hold public office above the level of mayor and local judge. In nineteenth-century France, as we shall see, the nobles played a fluctuating but leading role in that larger national elite from 1800 to 1870 and, indeed, afterwards.

A summary of estimates of the nobility’s numbers before 1789 is instructive. Between Louis xiv’s accession to the throne at the age of four in 1643 and the abolition of the second estate on 19 June 1790, the nobility shrank in numbers, just as the national population grew. In the mid-seventeenth century the population of France was perhaps 20 million, of whom half a million made some claim to nobility. By the eighteenth century’s end the national population probably exceeded 25 million, and R. Dauvergne estimated the nobles as some 400,000 persons. This estimate exceeds by 50,000 the long-established estimate popularized by Mathiez, who counted the second estate in 1789 as numbering 350,000. More recent scholarship has attacked these figures: Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret has advanced a figure of 110,000 for the end of the Old Regime, while Thomas Beck extrapolated from documentation of the 1830s a similarly emaciated total. Despite the eighteenth-century practice of ennoblement—here again historians are at odds in their estimates, with Jean Meyer counting 10,000 individuals and Chaussinand-Nogaret 6,500, multiplied by a factor of five per family—the infusion of perhaps as many as 50,000 individuals was insufficient to reverse the steady drying up of the demographic pool. These variations in the numbers put forward by historians derive from the necessary use of mathematical probabilities and regional extrapolations in the absence of any satisfactory census of nobility during the Old Regime. Yet if there.
is no agreement on the precise size of the second estate or the number of new recruits to it, there is unanimity in one direction: the steady shrinkage of the number of nobles as a proportion of the French population.

After 17 June 1790 the use of qualifications nobiliaires, together with the display of coats of arms and distinctive livery on servants, was prohibited. No longer were titles like monseigneur, éminence, grandeur, excellence, altesse, prince, duc, comte, vicomte, vidame, chevalier, écuyer, messire, or noble homme to be used. Withdrawal of legal recognition and consequently of record of titles—save in the case of unfortunate nobles arrested on charges of counterrevolutionary activities—made estimations of the numbers of the noblesse ever more difficult. Family archives were dispersed as a result of emigration and property confiscations. Under the Reign of Terror, the noblesse suffered more cruelly from executions in proportion to their place in the national population than did the middle and lower classes. There was a surge in mortality among the noblesse still under arms in the Republican and Napoleonic armies, as well as in those of their opponents. Perhaps as many as 30 percent of the Republic’s officers were like Caulaincourt, noblesse who remained on active service or, like Noailles, part of the wave of new aristocratic recruits under Napoleon too young to have served before 1789. The cumulative effects of absence, injury, and death among eligible partners affected the matrimonial prospects of an entire cohort of noblewomen. Combined with the suppression of ennoblements in the 1790s, these effects thinned the ranks of the noblesse more brutally than during any decade since the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion.

The Reign of Terror once past, there were signs that fondness for ranks and hierarchy had not died in all hearts. In private gatherings the government’s fulminations against titles remained more or less a dead letter. After the fall of Robespierre, the fashionable affected the prefix ci-devant in the conversation of a smart salon or reactionary circle, which were often one and the same. A British visitor to Paris in 1802 said of the noblesse: “In the course of conversation, take special care not to omit the title of the person to whom you address yourself. Such an instance of forgetfulness savours of a man of the new régime.” Under the authority of First Consul Bonaparte, the revulsion against the excesses of Jacobin egalitarianism seemed to encourage its opposite. There was a return to the use of titles in conversation and even in correspondence by those engaged in a pinprick war against egalitarian behavior. This was effective when the experience of Jacobinism was fresh in the minds of flustered notables. In 1807, a year before Napoleon introduced a new system of titles, the police reported that more than 150 family seals had
been cut by jewellers whose shops were on fashionable streets in Paris. Those who had ordered seals had names like La Rochefoucauld, Choiseul-Stainville, Levis-Mirepoix, Saint Aignan, and others of the Old Regime court aristocracy. Curiously, in that atmosphere it was easier than before the Revolution to affect titles or to slip particles into surnames. Benjamin Constant de Rebecque, as he called himself during the Directory, was only one of innumerable social climbers. In that diffuse invocation of rank and distinction we find the necessary preparation for Napoleon’s revival of titles.

Except during the brief Second Republic, titles were to be used to reward partisans by every regime in France from 1808 to 1870. How did those new nominations affect the nobility at large? To answer this it is vital to abandon the exclusivist position that only those with a title legally recognized before June 1790 were “true” nobles. Despite the sympathy of biological descendants of the former second estate to the notion that they were of another noble essence from those with titles created after the end of the Old Regime, the social historian can safely abandon that hypothesis to the student of mentalités, or the psychohistorian. Instead, we discern various strata among the post-Revolutionary nobles, the largest of which was the pre-1790 noblesse. Without renewals, this collection of individuals slowly shrank over the decades before Sedan. The second stratum adapted to the century by taking or renewing a title from the ruler, and this included, besides noblesse, individuals and foreigners whose families had no previous French claim to rank. In what follows, this adaptable and accommodating group will be called titrés when it is necessary to distinguish them from the noblesse. The third stratum was the smallest and was also characterized by adaptability and wealth: the aristocracy.

The contours of the aristocracy are not easily defined, for even among the courtiers who surrounded the ruler there were those who, at different times, belonged more definitely than did others. Sometimes this was by reason of royal approval, so with Louis xviii’s fondness for Elie Decezès; or by association with aristocratic rituals, as in the case of the Dreux-Brézé family’s administering under the Restoration the lessons of protocol learned at Versailles; or simply because of the antiquity and splendor of the lineage, as in the case of the Noailles. The court festival guest lists convey the relative standing of families, as in the case of the 1830 invitations to the Tuileries in honor of the visiting king and queen of the Two Sicilies. The aristocracy was an amalgam of noblesse and titrés but transcended both, marching to its own drum in the pursuit of power, distinction, and wealth. The great names of the last century at Versailles were common among them—Noailles, Choiseul, Gramont,
Talleyrand-Périgord, Bauffremont—and as families if not as individuals they were never far from the focus of power. Aristocracy, titrés, and noblesse were themselves the top of a pyramid of those who hungered for visible signs of success, some of whom were ready to “crash” the nobility. Under the Old Regime, if those who wanted to accede to nobility had the means and patience to support a distinctive life style, they almost always reached their goal. Ennoblement by gradual acceptance remained possible in the nineteenth century if the newcomers showed themselves ready to undertake the adjustments necessary for the osmosis to occur.

The social history of the nineteenth-century nobles in France should, at least initially, skirt those endless battles between genealogists over who was the noblest of them all. Disputes of that ilk were intrinsic to Homo hierarchicus in France as much as elsewhere in Europe, and since the prestige of the nobility is intimately bound up with age, relative scarcity, and family traditions, it is only natural that these are all systematically exaggerated. Before 1789 there was a known pecking order of more or less proven origins among nobles that could be modified by radical changes in wealth or governmental patronage. After the Revolution the noblesse were likely, in line with the historical principles of evaluating eminence, elegance, distinction, grace, and other intangibles, to denigrate more recent titles as gewgaws. The historian with no brief for particular families is concerned with understanding a whole universe of status aspirations. The vital element for the study of nobles in modern France is the desire to appear noble. That volition was essential in a society where all Frenchmen were equal before the law. Lazare Carnot never used the title of comte with which he was decorated in the decree naming him minister of the interior on 20 March 1815. Noblesse who wished to shed their rank could do so by no longer using a title, seal, or visiting card embossed with the appropriate crown. Impoverished nobles were most likely to do this. Others with the means to live nobly could arrange to be granted a title by the regime or perhaps simply claim a title or affect a resounding family name complete with particle. 12 There is in all this an element of imprecision and overlap inevitable in the pursuit of rank, but the historian of the nineteenth century, and indeed the twentieth, needs to depart from a conception of French nobles frozen in late eighteenth-century terminology and eternally discussed in the light of the French Revolution and its success or failure.

The elections that ratified the Constitution of the Year VIII made it clear that, at least among the wealthier sectors of French opinion, order and hierarchy in the nation were much longed for. In the years before the establishment in 1808 of his own honorific system with noble titles
and coats of arms, Napoleon included some *noblesse* in the taxonomies of the departmental lists of notables (1801), the Legion of Honor (1802), the Senate (1803), and the six hundred highest taxed individuals (1805). Despite his own origins in the Corsican gentry, Napoleon seems to have had little regard for the intrinsic merits of the *noblesse*, but he was interested in harnessing any residual prestige they might still command among the peasantry. The initial intention was to absorb all well-disposed nobles into the new enumerations of supporters of the regime. A variety of studies have shown that the *noblesse* figured on the lists of notables and among the greatest landowners in the departments, although with regional variations.¹³

In establishing the Legion of Honor on 19 May 1802, Napoleon hoped to produce something between a Praetorian Guard and Janissaries, loyal and beholden, to which the bravest combatants were to be named and rewarded with a high salary. The two thousand or so recipients of *armes d'honneur* were automatically members of the new order. The pay in fact never materialized in the tight money situation of the war years. In 1805 the orders of the Iron Crown and of La Réunion were set up. In due course the Legion of Honor would be fitted into the system of hereditary honors that came into being in March 1808 when it was laid down that the title of chevalier was hereditary after it had been passed on for three generations to the eldest male with a minimum salary of three thousand francs. However, the thirty thousand or so members of the Legion named by Napoleon were too demotic and too variegated in their relationship to distinction to achieve the prestige or social authority envisaged.

Napoleon's conception of power was monarchical at least from the time when he was first consul and moved his lodgings, significantly, to the former royal palace of the Tuileries in the heart of Paris. Almost immediately a staff and protocol proliferated to ensure the foremost representative of the Republic a stately setting. The young general’s entourage came increasingly to resemble a court, and the first enterprising members of the Versailles aristocracy began to make their appearance. The *noblesse* found the military uniforms at the new “court” rather oppressive after the multicolored costumes of Versailles: comte de Saint-Aulaire, whose father had been a page to Louis xv, thought court events were like reviews with ladies taking part. Busy conquering Europe, Napoleon had little time for the niceties of etiquette and tailoring, but he wanted around him those who did. He believed that ritual and show were necessary to the exercise of power. Napoleon frequently said that formality and magnificence were needed to overawe the French into respectful obedience, especially the Parisians.

In 1803 Napoleon tried to link honor, wealth, and politics by singling
out senators to be especially requited with incomes to enable them and their families to live in great style. In the jurisdiction of each regional appeal court, an estate and a house enjoying an annual revenue of between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand francs was to be awarded as a sénatorerie for life to the senator chosen by Napoleon from the three nominated by their colleagues (14 nivôse II). The senators were the acme of the opportunist and manipulative political class spawned by the Revolution, as they demonstrated in 1814. Napoleon soon disabused himself of the notion that he was endowing a loyal territorial peerage. He realized that his senatorial endowments were aimed at a small set of people too close to the levers of power to feel lasting hereditary gratitude for particular rewards, while the Legion of Honor was so unevenly and widely spread a distinction that membership in it could not constitute a hereditary Praetorian Guard.

After his coronation Napoleon returned to an old vocabulary for new purposes. In 1806 he created the hereditary dignities of the Empire, carrying the titles of prince and altesse sérénissime, with eldest sons to be styled duc and with “tiefs” in conquered Italian and German territories. Even the president of the Senate was to be called excellence. The intention was to make his ministers and high officials more impressive to the public (imperial edicts dated 30 March 1806 and 28 May 1807). Cambacérès, the plump, shrewd southerner who so enjoyed society life, quickly divined the drift towards monarchical hierarchy in France. He was appropriately rewarded with the title archichancelier and grand dignitaire of the Empire and was encouraged to give glittering dinner parties to those clearly loyal to the regime. Only a few dozen great officials enjoyed such opulence and resounding titles. The remaining republicans had deep suspicions of ever more sinister designs being forged upon the anvil, and these were confirmed when Napoleon set up what is usually called the imperial nobility.

To do this the emperor used a decree of 1 March 1808 rather than a fundamental law, which would have gone to discussion by the Corps législatif. The Legion of Honor was created by a fundamental law that did not pass without legislative criticism of the growth of hierarchical spirit in French society and expression of fears of revived feudalism. Napoleon seemed intent on avoiding even the limited public discussion of his parliamentary assemblies on the subject of restoring titles to use in French life. The 1808 decree never employed the word noblesse but spoke only of titles that could become hereditary to the eldest son on certain financial conditions. The newly titled individuals were to be an honorific aggregate, a rather obscure entity intended to “nourish in the hearts of our subjects praiseworthy emulation, by perpetuating illustrious memories and by conserving for future ages the ever-present
image of the recompenses which under a just government follow great services rendered to the state.” In order to underline that the purpose of these titles was also to strengthen loyalty to the regime, the imperial monopoly of titles was emphasized. Articles 14 and 15 of the decree spelled this out:

14. Those of our subjects upon whom we shall confer titles shall not display other armorial bearings nor have other liveries than those that shall be set out in the letters patent of creation.

15. We forbid all our subjects to arrogate to themselves such titles and qualities as we shall have not conferred upon them, and to officials of the public registry [état civil] notaries and others to use them [in public documents]; renewing in so far as necessary against those who contravene those provisions laws presently in force.

The Council of State reiterated in 1809 the prohibition of the display of feudal coats of arms stated in various laws of 1791, 1793, and 1798. The 1810 Criminal Code included an article prohibiting the use of titles or the wearing of uniforms not permitted by the government. The intention of these measures was perfectly plain: only those loyal to the regime would have the trappings of title and rank.

Between 1808 and 1814 Napoleon bestowed 3,263 titles. Over half of the recipients (58 percent) had not held a title previously. They were mainly officeholders, lawyers, and landowners from families who either had risen in social position before 1789 or had made rapid advances thanks to the Revolution. Among the most famous was a former canon of Chartres and author in 1789 of “Qu’est-ce que le Tiers Etat?” Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyes, named comte in May 1808. Another was Joseph Fouché, the infamous pacifier of Lyons in 1793, who became successively a comte (April 1808) and duc d’Otrante (August 1809). The imperial nobility translated into the traditional forms of prestige the achievements of the new men of the Revolutionary decade. Twenty-two percent, however, had been noble before 1789, and they were by no means restricted to recent additions to the second estate but included men of antique lineage. One member of the Somme electoral college noted that the nobility of the Chassepot de Pissy family dated from 1300, that they originated in Buguey of the former Savoye: “[The family] has always been devoted to the service and defense of the State and of its Prince.” In June 1810 Napoleon noted of these anciens nobles that “above all it was necessary that they should have kept wealth [in order to be useful to him].” In the years immediately following 1808 Napoleon gave most titles to military men, ranging from members of the noblesse like Marmont, Davout, Caulaincourt, Le Lièvre de la Grange, and
Flahaut de la Billarderie to commoners like Masséna, Soult, and Ney. This prominence among the titres of military men continued under later regimes, as will be shown below.

A striking illustration is the successful request by Charles-Reynald-Laure-Félix, son of senator Antoine-César Choiseul-Praslin (whose family property is discussed in more detail in chapter 3), a year after the setting up of the imperial titles to be named a comte and to establish a majorat. The young man sought to explain why he had resigned from the military service but still considered that he merited a title: “in favor of the services of his ancestors, most of whom spilled their blood for the defense of their country and who had the glory of upholding the honor of French arms.” He pointed out that since his father had died before receiving the title of comte, he was asking for it himself. He recalled that he had been a student at the Ecole polytechnique in the year IV (virtually from its first days), in the engineering school in the year VII, and a captain in the year X and that his brother had been killed in action. As a result, he had been obliged to resign in order to render to his relatives the necessary consolations and care. Napoleon also used new titles to secure the affections of influential local worthies who could form opinion. Henri Maloteau de Guerne, member of the Douai municipal council, former président à mortier in the Parlement of Flanders and a member of his local electoral college, as well as the possessor of an income of more than twenty thousand francs from biens nationaux, went on from the enumeration of his substance to point out a strong devotion to family tradition:

The petitioner who has not ceased to be in the ranks of the National Guard since its establishment joins with his son to ask you, Sire, for comtal letters [patent]. Both would find in that grace a compensation for the [hereditary judicial] post of président à mortier of which the Revolution deprived them. This grace would also recompense a distinguished act carried out by the forefather of the petitioner, who, being chief provost of the Valenciennes magistrates in 1722, marched at the head of the workers to stop the fire that was beginning to take hold in the powder magazine as the result of a violent storm.

This recitation of praiseworthy past acts presented to the sovereign, in the event Napoleon, as evidence of the continuing merit of the Maloteau de Guerne family was accepted, and the title of baron was bestowed in 1814. A majorat was set up in 1817.

In a similar vein, the widow of a marquis and maréchal de camp of Louis xvi, Charles-Louis d’Hautefeuille, unsuccessfully petitioned Napoleon in 1813 to ennoble one of her sons, an officer in the Second
Dragoons: “Your Majesty would complete all his benevolences for the sons, and would cause the gratitude of the mother, who would never forget for the rest of her life the honor that her ancestors and she had to lodge in their country and town residences Henri iv in 1603, Louis xiii in 1620, and Your Majesty at an epoch that will never be effaced from her memory and from that of her relatives.”\(^20\) Such fulsome sentiments may be dismissed as merely sycophantic, but they were in fact utterly within the logic of a service noblesse.

The primacy of family ambitions over political loyalties to a particular dynasty was a striking feature of nineteenth-century nobles, although a certain demure prudery prevented this obvious truth from being trumpeted too loudly. Perhaps many nobles did not themselves see any inconsistency in their conduct. Theories about political change in France (the feudal nobility vanquished by a capitalist bourgeoisie), just as much as earlier disputes in royalist and liberal historiography (the ultra and noble Restoration locked in battle with the liberal and commoner Monarchy of July), have distracted attention from the striking continuities in the defense of family interests from the second estate to the post-Revolutionary nobles. Of course individuals might hold passionate loyalties, as did the devoted Avaray (d. 1811), whose dukedom was the only title created in exile by Louis xviii, and Ferdinand de Bertier, whose royalist beliefs shaped an entire life. Some old aristocratic families were less opportunist than others: the Damas, Fitzjames, Duras, and Croys were among those who remained aloof from Republic and Empire. Overall, however, the aristocracy and noblesse accommodated themselves to political change, just as they had always done earlier, and accepted new recruits and gradually ingested the titrés of successive regimes.

This amalgamation was not automatic. Not all noblesse who sought a Napoleonic title were accepted. Jacques Rose de Voisins, a former artillery captain and mayor of the village of Burgailrolles in the Aude, hoped for the title of comte not merely to reward his efforts as a former président de canton who was now a member of his department’s general council. He wished even more to refurbish a lineage approved by Chérin before the Revolution. (Perhaps mention of the celebrated court genealogist was to recall that the last Chérin to be charged with checking the ancestry of those to be presented at court died a general of the Republic.) Voisins petitioned that he was “jealous to perpetuate in my race honorable memories.”\(^21\) Similar avid pursuit of new titles among the noblesse can be studied in the dossiers of both successful and unsuccessful applicants for titles. The motives of families who went early to the Tuileries have been set down to the relative penury of families like the Rémusats or Ségurs, or to the hope of protecting their fortunes by
fabulously wealthy aristocrats like the Luynes and the Choiseul-Praslin. Ambition motivated able striplings like Molé and Broglie. Self-interest and self-esteem are not easily separated in the circumstances of the Revolutionary aftermath, but one can confidently advance the idea that the observed behavior of the noblesse was attentiste in the sense that family went before royalism. From the inner circle of the fewer than one thousand individuals who comprised the Versailles court nobility there was a keen interest in again getting close to power. On 1 January 1814 the emperor’s chamberlains included Mercy d’Argenteau, Montesquiou-Fézensac, Aubusson de la Feuillade, Talleyrand, Galard de Béarn, Mun, Choiseul-Praslin, Contades, Nicolay, Miramon, Louvois, Rambuteau, d’Alsace, Turenne, Brancas, Gontran-Biron, Saint-Aulaire, Gramont, Montalembert, Lur-Saluces, Haussonville, and Montmorency; écuyers, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé. Aristocratic ladies at court included Fontanges, Rochefort, Chabrillan de Moreton and Lauriston; and pages, Bougainville and Dreux-Brézé.
imperialists. Marshal Jourdan, a soldier and a small-ware dealer in Limoges before the Revolution who then became a republican die-hard, was made a hereditary comte on New Year's Day, 1815, a grace Napoleon I had always refused him. In March 1819 Louis xviii named him a peer. However, in an inexplicably inconsistent gesture, Louis xviii refused to wear the decoration of the Legion of Honor until the last days of the first Restoration, with Napoleon already on the return from Elba. Louis was perhaps not unconscious of the irony of wearing on his portly person an award for courage in battle, but his sense of the ridiculous slighted the pride of many thousands of brave men. In general, however, there were no ruptures in the honorific system of the Empire, although some slight adjustments were made in the mechanism of granting titles. The officials charged with verifying, registering, and setting fees payable drew attention to the fact that royal letters, not the possession of office, were the way to ennoblement. The ennobling venal offices of the former provinces of the kingdom were now transmuted in the nineteenth century to more bureaucratic, more Parisian forms. As one 1817 pamphlet lamenting the absence of an accurate census of nobles put it, “By contrast with the former nobility, one had the new, wherein all was constant and certain.” It was a novel thought that recent titles were less open to question than the old. Candidates for titles discovered that partial claims to ennoblement derived from services rendered before the Revolution were discounted. This noblesse inachevée, holders of pre-1789 ennobling office whose tenure necessary to gain title had been brought abruptly to an end by the suppression of offices early in the Revolution, found scant sympathy in the chancellery. Individuals requested a title not merely citing the years spent in the defunct office but invoking other grounds for approval, including, significantly enough, titles bestowed by Napoleon. The Commission du sceau accepted some requests, especially from former trésoriers de France such as Pierre-Anne Delpech, born in 1758 (Tarn-et-Garonne), and Jean-Marius Devoisins de Lavernière, born in 1744 (Haute-Garonne), both ennobled in 1816-17. Nevertheless, the refusal of other candidates and the brushing aside of claims based on Old Regime practice underlined that the Napoleonic centralized dispensation of titles would be maintained by the Bourbons.

The epic events of the Hundred Days, when Napoleon escaped from his island prison of Elba (March 1815) to seize power again until his defeat on the field of Waterloo (18 June), did not change the trend but revealed the lively animosities that the noblesse had excited. Enthusiastically welcomed into Lyons during the “Flight of the Eagle” from the Mediterranean coast to Paris, Napoleon decreed that all émigrés who had returned to France since 1 January 1814 were again exiled. These
measures were aimed at the most loyal retainers of the Bourbons, and their property was to be confiscated under the supervision of the prefects and tax officials. This was understandable enough, since only the most irreducible loyalists of the Old Regime had not made their peace by 1814. However, on the same day, 15 March 1815, “Napoleon, by the Grace of God and the Imperial Constitutions,” abolished the noblesse that had been resuscitated by the 1814 Charter: “Feudal titles are suppressed.” This, of course, did not include noblesse who held imperial titles, but in its aggressive rejection of the others it ran contrary to the earlier policy of encouraging their rallying to the Empire. The Chamber of Peers convened in a truncated form and claimed to support the emperor’s return. However, in the dramatic and crucial situation of that spring, Napoleon hoped for more short-term gains from the support of vengeful egalitarians than rewards from his long-term aim of co-opting the noblesse. During his last days of power prior to the fall on 4 June 1815 the emperor bestowed only a handful of new titles: twelve comtes and five barons.

The returned Bourbons simply took up where they had left off. Their policy was to weld together titrés and noblesse in a steady dispensation of titles, after a cursory vetting of political suitability and a more thorough one of wealth. Louis xviı accepted that the peerage should be hereditary in the summer of 1815, although he regretted that this would give them too much independence.27 The crown tried to weld the Legion of Honor with the older titles of chevalier of the orders of Saint Louis, Saint Michel, or the Saint-Esprit, in line with the traditions of the military nobility. On 8 October 1814 Louis xviı had issued an ordinance repeating légionnaires’ right to a personal title of chevalier if they had net income of three thousand francs from real estate located in France and adding that if the forefather, the sons, and the grandsons had been members of the Legion of Honor with the necessary letters patent, the grandson would be noble by right and would transmit his nobility to all of his descendants.28 Here the words noble and noblesse in the ordinance text showed the government’s intent to encourage the proliferation of a petty nobility: at any given time the number of chevaliers was unlimited, although the higher grades were limited to a total of 2,640. In fact the title never established itself in popular esteem in the nineteenth century.

Almost two-thirds of all the titles granted between 1815 and 1830 were bestowed during the first five years. This revealed the rush of families who wanted to take a rank they had been unable or unwilling to solicit from Napoleon. Efforts were made to clear old debts of gratitude. They included the shower of honors bestowed upon one of Louis xviı’s favorites in the emigration, the provençal Blacas, who became a peer.
(1815), a chevalier of the Order of the Saint-Esprit, a hereditary comte (1817), and a duc (1824), and the more modest appreciation shown a Parisian barrister, Chauveau-Lagarde, who in April 1817 was given letters patent that “bestowed on him noblesse and authorized him to use the title écuier” in recognition of his courage and devotion to the defense, before the Revolutionary tribunal, of Marie-Antoinette and the sister of Louis XVI, Madame Elisabeth. Business was honored in the person of Ternaux, the textile manufacturer and businessman who also sat as a deputy for the Seine department (1818–24) and Haute-Vienne (1827–31). Given letters of nobility in 1816, he was made a baron in 1819 but caused a scandal when he renounced his title in 1821 to protest against the “lettres de relief” given to a man whose father had derogated from the nobility by engaging in commerce. Titles were also bestowed on officials, such as the judge who asked for a title on the occasion of his nomination to preside over the Poitiers Appeal Court:

I venture to say to Your Excellency that an honorific title which I could pass on to my son would have for me in this connection much more worth if it were linked to my nomination; it would serve as a recommendation to him and his family in recalling in the future the circumstances in which it would have been granted; and from the present time it would testify that my nomination has been the spontaneous testimony of the confidence of H.M. and you, Monseigneur, and in giving more weight to the acts which the public good and the needs of the service dictate to me in the exercise of my functions, and in giving me more credit with my new colleagues and those under my jurisdiction it would make it easier to serve H.M. more efficaciously, which shall ever be the goal of all my efforts.

He was made a hereditary baron, and his son succeeded to both the title and a judgeship at the Poitiers court.

In their effort to bind nobles to them in loyalty the Bourbons ennobled fewer commoners than had Napoleon; before 1789, 56 percent of all titrés were commoners and 42 percent were nobles, with a margin of uncertainty for the remainder. Of those receiving a Bourbon title, 27 percent already possessed an imperial one, an important contingent of individuals showing the continuity of their search for family distinction under regimes of opposing loyalties. The regilding was quite evident in 1816–17: a Toscan du Terrail (a gendarmery captain from the Hautes-Alpes), a Borel de Bretizel (a judge at the Paris Cour de cassation), a Faulcon (a member of the Vienne electoral college), and a Tarrible (a maitre des comptes) are examples of the hundreds who added a Bourbon title to one given by Napoleon. Continuity was particularly striking among the military noblesse. General Tilly, at the seventeenth degree of a family with Norman origins, enlisted before the Revolution, fought
under the Republic, became a general on the day of Louis XVI’s execu-
tion, and received further distinctions under Napoleon, who named
him, successively, chevalier, baron, and then comte de Tilly et de l’Emp-
pire. His son Charles-Edouard showed a similar appetite for status. A
midshipman in 1813, he continued to serve through the Restoration
(which made him a comte héréditaire in 1823) and remained on active
service under the July Monarchy. In fact, officers made up the largest
professional group among those granted titles by the Restoration (40
percent), trailed by those in central administration (12.5 percent), local
administration (10.6 percent), and others. However, as will be seen, the
same proportions did not apply for those who actually entailed land for a
hereditary title (majorat sur demande). Talents outside the well-beaten
tracks of state service were rarely recognized, although Ancelot, the
playwright and member of the Académie française, was given letters of
nobility in April 1830. More representative of the newly titled was
Andlau, at the fifteenth degree of an Alsatian aristocratic family. Ar-
mand, son of a lieutenant general of the Old Regime army, was a cham-
berlain of Napoleon named comte in April 1810 and a hereditary peer in
November 1827, who entailed an estate to carry the title of majorat the
following year.32

Heredity for nineteenth-century titles was to be linked to entailed
property to ensure the continuance of the holder’s family wealth.
Napoleon donated land from his German and Italian conquests to some
of those he wished to gratify, but this property was lost when the French
were driven out. The Bourbons also required peers, or individuals who
established majorats sur demande, to possess entailed property. Indi-
viduals with majorats sur demande without the political right of a seat
in the Chamber of Peers represented “pure” status for its own sake.
Holders of a majorat sur demande were not a power elite in the reduc-
tionist sense beloved of the C. Wright Mills school, with its vision of
societies manipulated by tiny, and usually sinister, minorities. No ma-
ajorat sur demande, for example, figured on the painting of the main
court dignitaries at the coronation of Charles x.33 It would be wearisome
to demonstrate at length that the bulk of the noblesse who took majorats
sur demande were of families of decidedly secondary prestige under the
Old Regime. The Falentin de Saintenacs were condemned for usurpa-
tion of noblesse in 1666, although this was reversed by a decision of
1701; the Drouilhet de Sigalas only registered in 1784 letters patent
first bestowed in 1654; the elder Boutray had been an écuyer avocat and
a trésorier général et payeur of the Paris municipality, which, while
lucrative, were faintly unseemly positions. However, those who set up
majorats sur demande linking wealth and title knew that henceforth
with every passing year their rank would gain luster.
Enough has been said to establish the overlapping and layering of noblesse, aristocracy, and titres discernible under the Empire and Restoration and flagrant by the Second Empire. The amalgamation desired by Napoleon and Louis XVIII had in fact taken place. The intermarriage that consolidated the process will be discussed in chapter 7, dealing with the noble family, but the taking of titles and position from successive regimes had the same meaning in civil society. An aristocrat like Auguste-Michel-Félicité Le Tellier de Souvre, marquis de Louvois, the wealthiest voter in the Yonne, whose extensive holdings at Ancy-le-Franc (Yonne) escaped Revolutionary confiscation, showed the style: he became a comte in 1811 thanks to Napoleon and a marquis in 1819 thanks to Louis XVIII, and in 1830 he was the most prominent noble in his region to rally to Louis-Philippe. Another example of this de facto noblesse acceptance of the new status was the second son of the Bois-le-Comte family, one of robe origins, who received his first title in 1825 and another in 1847. The cavalry officer Commaille, son of an Old Regime tax collector from the Orléans region, established a majorat of baron just before the 1830 Revolution. Like Pandin de Narcillac and other officers, he completed the formalities of his new letters patent under a different regime but in the same year. Later, in 1837, he added to his name a papal marquis bestowed by Gregory XVI. Claude-Etienne Chaillou was an official in Lower Silesia in 1806 and then a prefect (Ardèche and Creuse) from 1810 to 1815; despite his Hundred Days service, he was created a hereditary chevalier in January 1816, with the right to add des Barres to his surname, and raised to a hereditary baron in 1825, which in turn was confirmed by new letters patent from Louis-Philippe of 29 March 1842. In 1805 he married Mlle Nompère de Champagny, the daughter of the duc de Cadore. These random examples drawn from Reverend show the behavior of the most adaptable of the titres, which in turn was emulated by their more timid fellows bent also on the pursuit of family status over that of political loyalties.

More than seven thousand titles were granted between 1800 and 1830. Some were based on entailments to support hereditary transmission, while others existed simply for the lifetime of the recipient. In practice, families that did not set up majorats continued to use their titles among their descendants. This evolution was sanctioned by the general aspiration for nobility in the adding of particles to names and in a climate of opinion that was sympathetic to the use of titles in daily life. This generalized interest was evoked by one descendant of the robe noblesse of Toulouse who said that the descendants of more recent municipal officials under the Old Regime had suddenly and miraculously transformed themselves into “high and mighty seigneurs” and now called their modest rural residences châteaux, comtés, or mar-
quisats and that never had there been more titled personnages in the city.35

The Restoration Bourbons produced for the first time an amalgam of families with legally recognized nobility before 1789, those post-Revolutionary titles given by Napoleon and themselves, and a relative tolerance towards a noblesse of pretension more numerous than during the Old Regime. By the mid-1820s ennoblement was less cluttered with political references to the recent past. Gradations of rank and title were understood as markers on a cursus honorum of success at court, in the administration, especially in the army, and more rarely in law, business, or other professions. The title marquis, not used in the 1808 decrees, retained the strongest royalist connotation. Among the noblesse who received Napoleonic titles it was usual after 1815 to prefer the Old Regime title. However, de Caulaincourt bequeathed one of his titles to each of two sons: the eldest was duc de Vicence (an imperial title), and the younger, marquis de Caulaincourt (Old Regime).36 By the closing years of the Restoration there was a substantial fusion of the nobles, with a focus on the court of Charles X to provide a glittering focus for “the palace dignitaries, the three hundred gentlemen of the king's bedchamber, the masters of horse, the officers of the venery, of the household, the pages, the bodyguards, the officers of the royal guard, everybody covered with gold and embroideries.”37

After the July 1830 Revolution, in order to underline the contrast with the practice of the Restoration and to assuage the jealousy of the middle classes, the Orleanist regime in its early years seemed opposed to noble pretensions. Ninety-three recent peers were unseated on 7 August 1830, and the Chamber of Peers was warned that it was to be reorganized. The aging liberal aristocrat La Fayette was noisily opposed to the maintenance of the Chamber of Peers. During the 1831 debate over the complete abolition of Article 259 of the Penal Code, which punished illegal use of noble titles, he observed that after the Revolution it would be quite grotesque to defend noble titles with an article of the code.38 Among the military honorific orders only the Legion of Honor was maintained. In the new governing class there seemed to be a widespread hostility to rank and hierarchy. Eusèbe de Salverte, a Parisian deputy notorious for his ferocious atheism, denounced in the Chamber of Peers the probable results of failing to abolish the heredity of the peerage, whose three hundred leaders would “soon despise the rights of the nation and who would believe they were only in contact with it in order to absorb property, favors, and dignities.”39 The deputies went further in the opposition to the use of titles: between 1831 and 1835 a cluster of decrees were issued that, particularly as they related to hereditary titles, sharply slowed the induction of nobles. The apparatus for
administering new titles was dismantled when the prestigious Commission du sceau de France was demoted to an ignominious subbureau in the Ministry of Justice. Although Article 23 of the revised Charter gave the king after 1830 the same unlimited right to create peerages, either for life or as hereditary titles, this was docked by the law of 6 October 1831, which restricted the possession of newly created peerages to one generation. On 17 January 1834 the setting up of majorats on titles bestowed before 1831 was forbidden, in order to prevent some Legitimist families from becoming titled dynasties, as many of those who held Restoration titles now belatedly went through the legal process of entailment in order to make them hereditary under law. In May 1835 the deputies’ attack on hereditary titles went a step forward with a prohibition of the majorats for new titles: Article 2 of the ordinance prohibited existing majorats based on personal property from remaining in force for more than three generations. In 1837 another law declared a majorat to be unnecessary for the transmission of any title originally based on an entailment. This cluster of legislation throughout the 1830s attempted to halt the strengthening of a wealthy hereditary nobility. It also attests to the deputies’ continued preoccupation with rank.

From this brief survey of Orleanist legislation against hereditary titles and entailments, one might wrongly conclude that the July Monarchy drastically accelerated the decline of the French nobility. In society at large there was no such reticence about noble pretensions, and increasing numbers of individuals began to use the particle in their family name. Among famous writers, Balzac first added de to his name in 1831, and both Gobineau and the Maupassant family did the same around 1846. Gérard Labrunie became Gérard de Nerval, and Barbey exhumed the long abandoned suffix d’Auréville. As so often happens, practice was quite different from bureaucratic regulation. Innumerable textbooks have propagated a misconception by describing Louis-Philippe as a citizen-king, but although affable, unprepossessing, and considerate to the bourgeois, the monarch was of the blood royal and did not forget it. He created his own titles, maintained an urbane court, and although less exacting than under Charles x, the ceremonial surrounding the royal family emphasized their rank. Moreover, in the last years, the entourage of the duc and duchesse de Nemours provided a socially exclusive venue for the Orleanist aristocracy. Legitimist nobles who supported the elder line affected to question the regime’s moral authority, and at a splendid ball at the Austrian Embassy in 1847 literally turned their backs on the Orleanist aristocrats. However, lines of cleavage between families and individuals were rarely complete ruptures. Earlier and in a similar way there had been a cool, face-to-face
formal civility between Napoleonic titrés and the more ultraroyalist members of the noblesse but one that left enough room for subsequent accommodation. The nobility never saw a complete breakdown of communication between its pre-Revolutionary members and the modern titles. Similarly, there was no definitive rupture of contacts between Legitimists and Orleanists after 1830.

Throughout the whole period a new usage created titles independently of the crown: the so-called decrescendo of titles, initially envisaged by Louis XVIII as a right limited to the eldest son of a hereditary peer (sur majorat) to carry a title before he inherited that of his father. This was based on a hierarchy of rank: the son of a duc called himself marquis; the son of a marquis, comte; the son of a comte, vicomte; and the son of a vicomte, baron. Under the July Monarchy’s new conditions, and even more under the Second Empire, this device multiplied the use of titles considerably. In 1868 one genealogist denounced the carelessness with which the nobility used the decrescendo, which he mistakenly believed inflated its total numbers. In the hope of restricting a proliferation of titles, another writer suggested that all males of a lineage should carry the same rank, as was done in high aristocratic French families, and cited the La Rochefoucauld, Choiseul, Croy, Montesquiou, and Broglie families. Louis-Philippe also gave titles to his partisans, but there were fewer title registrations than under either Napoleon or the Bourbons. The Orleanist monarchy’s political program was at least to avoid confrontations with the country noblesse, if not to win their support. Leading commoner Orleanists like Guizot did not appear to covet titles as avidly as their predecessors in other assemblies.

An increasingly elaborate de facto certification of modern nobility was that of genealogies and guides to nobility. These were nothing new in France: nobles had long used checklists to know their fellows should instinctual recognition fail. They employed professional genealogists to provide satisfactory accounts of their forebears. The crown had entrusted the checking of proofs of nobility, on the best hereditary principles, to the Hozier family. The last of them, Ambroise, was using the family archives to produce a revised Armorial général in 1823.

Compilations of family genealogy fascinated nobles of scholarly disposition. Early in the Restoration there was a desire to catalog the noblesse survivors of the Revolution, those who died for the counter-Revolution, and to distinguish between old and recent titles. An 1817 prospectus for a “Martyrologie de la Révolution française, ou recueil monumental consacré à la mémoire des victimes par leurs familles” is an example. Contributing noble families were promised a discount for providing memoirs and portraits of individuals for the publication. A single copy, printed on black paper with tasteful silver lettering, was
promised to the individual who sold the most subscriptions. Subscribers were assured that their name, title, and residence would be printed. This project may have appeared a trifle ostentatious, for it seems not to have been published. Courcelles (1759–1834), who had written a genealogical dictionary of the peers of France, proposed to produce a “Conservateur de la noblesse territoriale et légale de la France” dealing with families whose members, although only titled with such as bannerets, chevaliers, or écuyers, were no less illustrious than families who possessed lands that transmitted titles. In an open letter of 25 October 1827 the comte de Croy-Chanel published a denunciation of Courcelles as venal, without any official authorization, without any claim to the title chevalier, and being in fact named Jullien, a former notary at Orléans.

Other works, such as the Manuel héraldique and the Etrennes de la noblesse, were republished, as though to continue the format used in the 1780s, but the volumes were doubled in size by the inclusion of interleaved blank pages on which the owner could update, in alphabetical order, his—or her—genealogical researches. From the 1840s, there was a remarkable proliferation of vanity publications dealing with noble families. The inauguration of the Salle des Croisades at Versailles in 1839–40 has often been derided as an example of romantic fascination with medievalism in a completely inappropriate setting, but it also reminds us how congenial the mental climate was to the compilers of dictionaries of provincial nobilities, of engravings of châteaux, of guides to aristocratic usage, and of journals for nobles and their mimics, the whole decked out with heraldic devices and bad poetry in fake old French. Yet gradually this accumulation of publications began to confer its own legitimation.

The publication of the Mémorial historique de la noblesse, edited by A. J. Duvergier, in 1839 serves as a convenient marker for a sharp increase in the network of publishers and experts on heraldry, genealogy, and the like. These congeries of publishers, archivists, and editors of the reviews of learned societies and local newspapers became a variant of the Armorial de France. With the revival of genealogical literature, the compilers' expertise was questioned. Certification of noble standards progressively passed into the hands of specialists. In the past the court of appeal on such matters was the Commission du sceau de France, and earlier still the crown’s genealogists. By the time of the July Monarchy the downgrading of the registration procedures, as well as the noncooperation of the Legitimists, left the judgment of contentious matters of lineage in the hands of self-appointed experts. The Revue historique de la noblesse (1841) evoked its authority to judge these matters:
In the absence of heralds of arms and of royal genealogists whose functions have been abolished by the French Revolution, the Revue historique de la noblesse gathers together archivists, paleographers, and students of the École des chartes, the only official genealogists of our age, only inheritors of the de Marle, the de Chérin, the d’Hozier, and the learned Benedictines... for in the insertion of genealogical notices and articles the one requirement is a severe and conscientious examination made by the editorial committee which, located near the big archival depots of the capital, can itself undertake researches and investigations necessary for the families involved.48

Not only technical skill and archival research were pressed into service to justify the new works. It was thought desirable that France should enjoy publications of the type found in other countries. A prospectus produced by de Milleville for an Armorial de France cited England, where “on every household table one or several of these volumes are always to be found, and if you wish to know more precisely the family connections, the dates of the life of a man of bonne compagnie whom you saw a moment before, you have only to open the volume.” A catalog of every profession’s members was a necessity: “However obscure or modest, there is no artisan who cannot find in a special book the names of his confrères.”49 Nobles expected no less. Comte François de Croy-Chanel, who had savaged “M. de Courselles [sic]” nine years earlier, published in 1836 a vehement attack against Lainé—“great author, faker, and seller of genealogies supposedly truthful but really false, abusive, grotesque, and mendacious.”50 The same P. Louis Lainé denounced André Borel d’Hauterive in 1850 as an intriguer and the son of a Lyonnais ironmonger and perfumer who tried to palm himself off as descending from a Dauphinois noble family extinguished by the Revolution. In his efforts to attract clients, Borel claimed to be the only official genealogist of the time thanks to his training at the École des chartes. This was contested by Lainé and others, who pointed out that France lacked an official genealogist. Lainé claimed roundly that most of the genealogies published under the Restoration by Saint Allais (whose Nobiliaire universel de France appeared in twenty-one volumes from 1814 to 1843) and de Courselles were his work, and he gave references that he felt constituted acknowledgments. On 20 October 1845 Lainé had struck Borel on the rue Vivienne and was judged on 10 December 1845 at the 7th chamber of the court of petty sessions.51 Lainé’s aversion was fueled by jealousy of Borel d’Hauterive’s archival training which gave him an advantage over Duchesne, Anselme, and La Roque, who lacked it. For his part, Borel d’Hauterive sued Aubert for publishing
an almanac of the nobility, but although initially successful at the commercial tribunal, his case was dismissed by the first chamber of the Paris Appeal Court on 26 June 1847.52

These disputes illustrate the animosities among this heterogeneous group, including nobles and commoners, who made a living from the nobility’s concerns. Men like Gabriel Eysembach or Clairefond, of the Mémoirel, claimed a special expertise as historians. Others had legal training, such as Louis de la Roque, an avocat at the Paris Appeal Court, or Edouard de Barthélemy, who had been an auditeur at the Council of State. These men were nobles, but A. J. Duvergier had only the particles in his family name. The commoner publisher Bachelin-Deflorenne was the most successful in this line of publishing: he had a Paris printing house which produced nobiliaires for other authors, as well as his own directories. He found the business sufficiently profitable to persist in it from the 1860s to the 1880s, listing titles, coats of arms, addresses, and the heads of families.

The authors mentioned above worked on a national scale and with an eye on the aristocracy and its mimics, but in each part of France there were provincial experts. They probably found less reward for their efforts. Some journalists specialized in genealogical matters, such as the chief editor of the Bordelais Revue d’Aquitaine, Joseph Noulens, who often dealt with family histories in his newspaper pages. From 1861 he wrote a series of books and pamphlets on the subject, including regional publications (Maisons historiques de Gascogne ou galerie nobiliaire [1863]), family histories, and documented attacks on those whose claims he wished to crush, such as that of the comtes de Brêda against “la rédaction anonyme” of Le Chartier français or that of comte P. J. T. J. de Pardaillan against members of the Treil family, “the first calling himself comte de Pardaillan, the second baron de Pardaillan, the third de Pardaillan.” In Toulouse, always a hotbed of noble pretension, Alphonse Brémont produced listings of nobles and lost heavily on the publication of his Nobiliaire toulousain. When they realized that costs would not be covered, the printers sold the remaining copies, as Brémont bitterly complained, “dirt cheap and at auction,” leaving him with no profit after years of labor.53 Quite striking to the twentieth-century mind is the lack of “market research.” Among people as touchy as nobles the credibility of a nobiliaire was crucial. To be listed in the right one was heaven; to appear in the pages of one thought to be the work of an unscrupulous compiler was ridiculous. Brémont tried to amass local credibility by producing a series of lesser publications, but his major commercial venture was a flop.

The Parisian and provincial developments of genealogical silk-purse factories emphasized the widening gap between noblesse certified by
royal letters patent, titres with similar enactments from the nineteenth century, and the transformation of status by commercialism and ambition. Library shelves groaned under the weight of large volumes with tooled leather and gilt inlay, the apparatus of a self-sustaining genealogical scholarship. This resurgence of noble pretensions in the years following the regime’s change in 1830 explains the virulent reaction against them under the Second Republic in 1848. All titles were abolished in France (29 February 1848), and it was forbidden to mention them in public documents such as marriage contracts. The next month saw the prohibition of the public display of coats of arms or the use of outriders with carriages: in general “are abolished forever all noble titles, all distinctions of birth, class, or caste.” General Alphonse d’Hautpoul commented indignantly on the loss of titles of nobility and of official positions that overtook him in the spring of 1848: “At that time I remained, however, without a shred of prestige. As a result of the Revolution I lost at one blow my qualities of peer of France, of general councillor of the Aude, and of lieutenant general: I could not even [my emphasis] use my title of hereditary noblesse. I was just citizen d’Hautpoul but surrounded, it is true, with the esteem and consideration of the public.” On 22 December 1849 the son of the Napoleonic duc d’Istrie called himself in a procuration “Mr Napoleon Bessieres d’Istrie, ancien pair de France,” which constituted at least an echo of former distinctions. Others forced to sacrifice to modesty were doubtless vexed by enforced egalitarianism.

The hurt of those who had lost their titles was assuaged four years later on 24 January 1852 when the prince-président revoked the suppression of former French titles. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s the campaign to solicit support from nobles and notables was evident. One newspaper editor was outraged in 1857 that two-thirds of the Senate and 48 percent of the Corps législatif had either titles or particles in their surname, and his book denouncing this trend went through three editions. Nobles who complained that the state had ceased to give them any aid or comfort in maintaining a proper sense of distinctions in social place were soon to be answered. On 7 May 1858 a proposed law was introduced to the Corps législatif by Duvergier and two other state councillors that provided a rotund defense of the concept of hereditary honor. Reinstatement of Article 259 of the Penal Code suppressed in 1832 was called for:

It is neither timely nor moral to abandon to the encroachments of vanity or to fraudulent maneuvers an institution to which are attached the great memories of the former monarchy, which the glories of the Empire surrounded with a new brilliance and which
are upheld at the same time by the respect due to the antiquity of traditions and by the obedience that is due to the most solemn acts of contemporary legislation.\textsuperscript{59}

The speaker emphasized that the force of law was required to prevent the proliferation of illicit use of titles and particles. He took up the fundamental objection to the existence of ranks of in society, that of egalitarianism, by saying that such a principle did not demand a sacrifice of purely honorific titles and decorations which were rewards for talent, courage, and faithful service to the state. This point was elaborated by de Beauverger, du Mirail, General Parchappe, and de Rigaud, the leading speakers supporting the committee report. This the assembly endorsed, but not without signs of reticence about appearing to nurse retrograde enthusiasms. The proposed article included the word \textit{noblesse}: “Anybody who shall wear in public a costume, a uniform, or a decoration that does not belong to him or who shall have taken without right a title of \textit{noblesse} shall be punished with imprisonment of from six months to two years and a fine of from 500 to 5,000Fr.” A highly significant change was made before the law was accepted (211 for, 23 against): the word \textit{noblesse} was replaced by \textit{distinction honorifique}, which seemed more appropriate to the legislators.\textsuperscript{60}

With the pragmatism of the Bonapartist tradition, Napoleon III used for the benefit of his regime those tendencies among nobles already discussed. He preferred to “confirm” earlier claims to a title or to renew them rather than to create new titles \textit{ex abrupto}. Of course, the Second Empire was particularly congenial to the beneficiaries of the First, that is, to those of them who retained sufficient wealth, connections, and skills to be politically or socially useful. By imperial decree of May 1859 the \textit{avocat} Sieyès was declared comte by the transmission of his bachelor great-uncle’s title. While the titles of the First Empire were naturally well-thought-of, Napoleon III did not view titles of other provenances as anything more than a decoration of that part of the national elite prepared to throw its lot in with his. Adélaïde-Joséphine Bachasson de Montalivet was the granddaughter of a comte and donatory of the First Empire who had passed a hereditary peerage to her father during the Restoration. Her father, a liberal and a minister of state under the July Monarchy, had been blessed with five daughters and no sons, so Adélaïde, married to Antoine-Achille Masson, was authorized to add the name Montalivet to that of her sons. By a decree of the Third Republic (5 January 1892) the three sons were permitted to raise (\textit{relever}) the Bachasson de Montalivet name—and presumably to drop the less sonorous patronym Masson. Although titles had never been more lavishly used in society, it is interesting that the Second Empire gave out fewer titles
than either the First Empire or the Restoration: about five hundred. This included the valued permissions to add the particle de to a surname, conferred in letters patent rather than by the less elegant procedure of obtaining a court order. In short, by the Second Empire there was a synthesis in matters of nobility. Titles were considered the decorations of success across a broad band of elite opinion.\textsuperscript{61}

One example of how a family might rise and fall over time shows the difficulty of deciding who is in the top drawer of society at any given moment. In the eighteenth century the Baudon de Mony might have been looked down upon from the more commanding heights of the bonne compagnie. They sprang from a seventeenth-century fines collector and, one hundred years later, a secrétaire du roi and tax farmer whose son married another tax farmer's daughter. Evidently they had an atavistic skill with money, for they were wealthy enough in the nineteenth century to have the adoptive grandson of Senator Colchen made a baron in 1843 and to marry their daughters into such aristocratic houses as the Maille de la Tour Landry, the Rohan Chabot, and the Rosanbo. The men of the family were less grand—for example, the Cour des comptes official who added the name Colchen in 1843—but they were extremely well-connected under the Second Empire. Napoleon III hoped to encourage just this type of supporter in his effort to found the regime on the affection of the prosperous, conservative nobles and notables.

A circular of 19 June 1858 from the Ministry of Justice to the procureurs généraux condemned pretensions that an “excess of permisiveness has permitted to emerge” but underscored the need to apply the new May 1858 law with as much prudence as firmness.\textsuperscript{62} In 1859 the Commission du sceau des titres was reestablished, another sign of the keen interest the regime bestowed on regulation of the honorific system. The Second Empire did not apply Article 259 with much rigor, which is understandable, since those likely to transgress it were precisely those who supported the regime. Enquiries to procureurs généraux of the appeal courts were almost invariably returned marked “néant”—at least if the Marseilles file copies are representative. The procureurs were instructed not to initiate prosecutions on their own initiative but to do so only after preliminary consultation with the garde des sceaux. However, the introduction of legislation on the subject and the definition of administrative procedures illustrate the political importance attached to the question of hierarchy in society by the Second Empire.

Legislators were equally vexed by the ursurpations of what they called nobiliary names: “as much as the title, more even than the title, the particle is added to the name, makes a part of it which communi-
cates and is transmitted. In our customs it decorates the name almost to the same extent and sometimes heightens the prestige of a name’s origin. . . . Its usurpation is damaging to the respectable rights of those who possess it legally. “The idea that the particle in itself was an honorary distinction was vigorously criticized by various authors, such as the lawyer P. Biston in several diatribes published around 1860. What Biston had in mind was exemplified by another, more prominent lawyer, Paul Bresson, for a time avocat général at the Cour de cassation and a member of the Conseil du sceau de titres, who in 1863 added the particle de to his name, in 1865 was granted the reversion of his dead brother’s title of hereditary comte awarded by Louis-Philippe in 1838, and in 1866 had his own son’s right to the hereditary title confirmed. Although before 1789 members of the second estate did not all have a particle in their family name, nineteenth-century practice increasingly linked titles, particles, and nobles together.

Despite the Second Empire’s reputation as a paradise for social climbers, the rate of legalized “cosmetic” alterations to family names was no greater than during the Restoration and the July Monarchy. A decision of 10 April 1818 laid down that notification of name changes should appear in the official government newspaper, Le Moniteur. Some alterations scarcely demand comment: MM. Chieux, Cochon, Cocu, and Couillaud understandably found their patronyms a trial. Various Jews Gallicized their names—from Abraham to Abrand, for example. Between 1803 and 1868, however, nearly eighteen hundred alterations were made that were distinctively ornamental—such as Bobé de Moyneuze (1826) or Bobiere de Valiere (1861)—but the changes were made at a fairly regular rhythm over the years between the First Empire and the Second. This pursuit of a resounding name, of the use of the particle, and of titles was vexing to contemporaries of egalitarian disposition but also witnessed the hunger among the elite, or the elite among the socially hungry, for a distinctive appellation. The journalist Edmond About, whose hobereau wife had been disowned by her family after their wedding, railed bitterly against the whole trend as degrading.

One curious feature in the new world where status was signified by title was the decline of some older forms. Most striking was the fading of the prestige in being called chevalier. Napoleon had established chevaliers at the bottom of his hierarchy of titles: the revenue in francs required to establish a hereditary majorat (3,000F) was only a fifth of that required for baron, the next title in the ascending series (15,000F). There were also numerous chevaliers of the Legion of Honor. Both its ubiquity and its low price level, together with its association with elderly and often penurious chevaliers de Saint Louis named under the Old
Regime, lowered its prestige. The Bourbons were fairly prodigal in bestowing it on businessmen and others whose financial abilities commanded respect, but not to excess. Antoine-Joseph Le Marchant de Gomicourt, son of the farmer-general of a marquisat in Picardy, had been active at the Amiens finance bureau before 1789 and subsequently a deputy to the Conseil des Cinq-Cents and the Corps législatif. He was named chevalier both by the Empire (February 1814) and by the Restoration (February 1815), but he had no children to carry his hereditary title. In general it can be said that by the 1830s, use of the title chevalier had gone out of style save for among the elderly.

Another venerable appellation that withered away was that of écuyer. Before the Revolution this had been the basic building block of the honorific system: the March 1600 edict of Henri iv linked it to exemption from the taille and hence to the fundamental privilege of the second estate. Napoleon did not revive the title in 1808, perhaps because it was already used at court by equerries (écuyer de l'empereur). Under the Restoration it was occasionally bestowed simply to indicate ennoblement, as in the case of the barrister Chauveau-Lagarde mentioned above, and was found, although infrequently, on formal documents, such as the 1829 marriage contract of a judge from the Chartres tribunal de première instance, who had the word entered alongside his profession.66 Thirty years later, however, even in the backwaters of provincial society, even to another noble the use of écuyer had become grotesque: “I shall never forget the effect produced on the numerous company gathered, twenty-five years ago, in the main room of the Poitiers town hall, at the reading aloud of a marriage certificate that included along with the name of the bridegroom’s father this quality of écuyer. The most worthy man, who had exercised his right in this solemn occasion, seemed to return from the other world, and the most indulgent listener at that time thought him ridiculous.”67 The incident took place at a legal ceremony, where under the Old Regime participants would have been absolutely punctilious in enumerating their “qualities.”

It falls outside this book’s framework to explore the situation after the fall of the Second Empire in 1870. However there is a strong impression that the autorecruitment of the nobility by vanity publications, name changes, and use of the particle actually accelerated sharply. The Belle Époque may have seen a brief reverse in the declining numbers of those who lived as nobles and who wished to advertise the fact. The Third Republic permitted the use of titles to those who felt so inclined. Showers of grandiloquent additions to surnames were registered for little more trouble than the legal fees. M. Barbier, a barrister from Alençon, must have felt like an emergent butterfly that first morning in 1891 that
he awoke as Faulcon de la Parisière, if in fact he existed.68 Those who still clung to Old Regime genealogical concerns and who were unhappy that nineteenth-century nobility mirrored wealth, success, and style rather than bloodlines were outraged. Representative of disdainful recrimination by the noblesse (an enduring literary genre) was an 1898 article later expanded into a book replete with contempt for the "the coats of arms that les misses américaines bought with their cash" and for aristocrats who intermarried with Jewish families: "Let them frankly admit that their half-commonness, half-Jewishness, and half-cosmopolitanism ['leur mi-roture, leur mi-juiverie et leur mi-cosmopolitisme'] henceforth prevents their claiming to be part of la noblesse française: that of Agincourt and of Denain."69 In the twentieth century other specimens of this xenophobic, exclusionist, and hierarchic literature would be published in France, but that cannot concern us at present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Noblesse</th>
<th>Titres</th>
<th>Aristocrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>Born Common</td>
<td>Noble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>400,000c</td>
<td>70,000d</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>350,000e</td>
<td>25,000–30,000f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>140,000f</td>
<td>110,000a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>25,000h</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>1,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>25,000h</td>
<td>45,000h</td>
<td>2,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,000h</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,246h</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>[90,000]b</td>
<td>20,000b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:

aRévérend.
bAntoine Bachelin-Deflorenne. *Etat présent de la noblesse française, contenant le dictionnaire de la noblesse contemporaine...* 1866 (Paris, 1866). The edition of 1868 gave 30,000. Other editions swelled the numbers in 1869, 1884, and 1887. The 1884 edition gave "Les noms, qualités et domiciles de plus de soixante mille nobles... 5e édition, revue, corrigée, expurgée et considérablement augmentée." The introduction noted that "aujourd'hui le nombre des nobles, ou ayant la prétention de l’être, peut être évalué à environ 60,000. Mais combien en est-il réellement? 8 à 9,000 peut-être" (p.xix).
this point a table usefully summarizes the probable evolution of the French noble population between 1800 and 1870 by showing the range of estimates put forward by historians and others (see table 1).

The most inexorable distrain upon remaining noble was poverty. This grieved the fellows of the impecunious, who liked to think of the nobility as innate and imperishable. After the Revolution, when a privileged access to public position was no longer assured to them, nobles were obliged to be highly attentive to private financial concerns. De Tocqueville remarked in \textit{L'Ancien Régime} that a lasting divorce between nobility and wealth was a chimera that led either to the destruction of the first or its amalgamation with the second. The need for careful management of one’s funds was equally evident to a twentieth-century noble who observed: “Simply to last it is necessary to be sober, thrifty master of one’s passions, prudent. To remount the slope it is necessary to join to these virtues work, courage, and luck. Families that last are the result of a selection.”

All editions of the \textit{Etat présent} count adult males primarily, and for the total noble estimated population the numbers should be multiplied by 4.5. Names changes were calculated from the appendix to Bachelin-Deflorenne: “Les changements de noms ou liste alphabétique d’après le \textit{Bulletin des lois} de toutes les personnes qui ont obtenu du gouvernement l’autorisation de changer ou de modifier leurs noms par l’addition de la particule ou autrement depuis 1803 jusqu’à 1868, contenant les noms, prénoms, professions et lieux de naissance de chaque individu cité dans ladite liste.”

\begin{itemize}
\item Guy Guérin, \textit{Législation et jurisprudence nobiliaires} (Lille, 1961), 15.
\item Charles Ganilh, \textit{De la contre-révolution en France} (Paris, 1823), XXIX: “L’ancienne classe privilégiée est réduite à quarante-cinq mille familles ou à deux cent vingt cinq mille individus, ce n’est pas le vingtième des classes qui vivent du revenu, et la centième partie de la population.”
\item Charles Nodier, “De la loi des élections et de l’aristocratie,” \textit{Le Défenseur} 1 (1820): 460, which says that this is the number of noble families “qu’on dit exister en France.”
\item Thomas D. Beck, “The French Revolution and the Nobility: A Reconsideration,” \textit{Journal of Social History} 15, no. 2 (1981): 223: “My lists on the electorate of the July Monarchy, which contained 13,721 nobles, covered 90 percent of the population [of male adults paying a \textit{cens electoral} of 200F]. The missing lists, therefore, should have contained approximately 1,525 nobles, which would raise the total for all of France to 15,246. In round numbers, then, there were 3,000 titled nobles and 12,000 nontitled nobles fifty years after the revolution.”
\end{itemize}

\textit{Note}: There is an element of overlap and extrapolation in each category, and the table is meant to show the variety of estimates and rough proportions.
The strangling noose of poverty was tightest on the fringes of France, in poorer regions, Brittany’s north coast, or the recesses of Gascony. Marriage into the aristocracy was quite impossible for families who could never raise the necessary dowries. Even in the remoter valleys of the Pyrenees or Burgundian backwaters, everywhere lurked the threat of wealth insufficient to maintain a noble station as understood by one’s fellows. Exclusion was not a brutal breaking of minimal civilities or respect to individuals diminished by financial distress and who still had the self-esteem necessary to meet with other nobles; rather, the eye of the needle through which such individuals could no longer pass was the contract of suitable weddings for themselves or their children. That was how the Revolution definitively expelled many of the noblesse, such as the impoverished bachelor chevaliers de Saint Louis, who although admitted to the salons of good society in the provinces could never make a suitable match. For many the 1825 legislation that gave compensation for those émigrés whose property had been confiscated, in the main from western and northwestern departments, came too late. Noble marriage patterns are investigated in more detail below, in chapter 7; here it suffices to bear in mind that the value of dowries governed the social reproduction of the nobles.

A number of authors have tried to calculate the rate of decline in the numbers of nineteenth-century nobles, although they have not always measured the same thing. In 1923 the Belgian baron Woelmont thought that of 50,000 French families with claims to nobility at that time, some 5,200 were of authentic chevaleric descent, although he subsequently revised that figure downwards. In the second edition of a book on the modern French nobility, published in 1946, vicomte Marsay was less generous in listing the chevalresque families of his day. In the century and a half since 1800, 20–46 percent of those families had disappeared, leaving a mere 1,314 families surviving. Both Woelmont and Marsay were obsessed above all with identifying descendants of the sword noblesse. In a 1959 discussion Guérin calculated that 3,100 families descended from the pre-1789 second estate survived, ennobled by any means, and he expressed them as a percentage of the number of nobles in 1790 (half of the figures advanced by Woelmont) and claimed that only 12.4 percent of them still had direct male descendants carrying the family name. He considered separately those with a claim to nobility from offices held just before the Revolution (he counted 3,900 offices), and then multiplying them by the same rate of decline as that of the older families, he suggested that 3,900 × 0.0124 equals 480—all his own nominal count convinced him that 350 was more likely. A demographic study of the high dignitaries of the First Empire, a third of whom had belonged to the noblesse previously, revealed a striking decline over the nineteenth century. Of fifty-nine dignitaries
born before 1785 only thirteen had male descendants born after 1900 and still alive around 1960; stated another way, only 22 percent of a wealthy and powerful group of titrés survived in direct line after 160 years. There is thus plenty of evidence of rapid declines in generational replacement for old and new noble families.

As a further cause for decline one can consider the effects of emigration by marriage or residence abroad, although there was always a countervailing immigration, particularly of Slavic nobles. Foreign nobles who were naturalized French needed authorization to carry their titles. This requirement was spelled out again by the royal ordinance of 31 January 1819 and yet again by a decree of 5 March 1859. Croy-Chanel was refused the right to use the title of prince during the 1860s. Foreigners appeared briefly among titrés, for example, Georges Stacpoole, born in Cork, Ireland, was named comte héréditaire with a majorat based on rentes sur l'état. His son was first a comte after his father's death in 1825 but then became a papal marquis (Leo xii in 1828) and later a papal hereditary duc (Gregory xvi). The son was born and died in England and had a large family: in 1859 his seventh daughter married Auguste Fornier de Boisaiyrault, known as the comte d'Oyron. As a result of the emigration some nobles were "exported," such as the children of M. de Bombelles, who had lived abroad as an ambassador before the Revolution, entered orders in 1803, became a canon of Breslaw, and was named almoner of the duchesse de Berry in 1816 and then bishop of Amiens. His children never returned to France but remained in the Austrian service with court positions. The first born to the third marriage of the marquis de Raigecourt was an émigré who served in the Austrian army and lived out his life in Vienna. Similarly complicated international families did not, however, reverse the overall shrinkage of the French noble population.

Neither the making of new titrés nor the more amorphous recruitment of noms à particule reversed the steady decline in the number of French families who could claim to be nobles between 1800 and 1870. The titrés added perhaps 35,000–45,000 individuals. In the late 1890s the writer who used the name vicomte Royer de Saint-Micaud and whose outburst was quoted above waxed indignant that 45,000 families claimed to be nobles. Bachelin-Deflorenne, one of the most successful publishers of a directory of the nobility, included ever greater numbers of individuals in each edition: in 1866 he listed 20,000, and by 1884, 60,000. This may reflect a search for subscribers as much as anything else, but it also suggests that in Marcel Proust's world there was a rally against the steady shrinkage in the numbers of nobles. That may explain the 1875 prohibition of collateral lines taking over existing majorats or the proposal in 1882 for a complete abolition of titles and "particules nobiliaires." That fascinating period brought to an end by
the Great War is not here our concern. However, it is highly unlikely that even in the sunshine heyday of the Belle Epoque the numbers of those who claimed to be nobles seriously reversed their continuing decline as a percentage of the French population which had been afoot since the middle of the seventeenth century.