

THE TURBULANT TIMES OF PROSPER MENIERE

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Prosper Menière was born on the 16 June 1799. This was just four years after the reign of terror ended. His parents were Jacques-Guillaume Menière and Marthe-Mathurine Outin. They were married on 19 February 1774 when the reign of terror was at its peak.

One of the chief advocates of the reign of terror, was Maximilien Robespierre, a lawyer turned politician. Initially he was very left wing and supporting ways of helping the poorer people. It was Robespierre who coined the term 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité'.

He then joined the Jacobin Club and laws were passed to protect the French Revolution by any means necessary. Counterrevolutionaries were arrested and sentenced, many without public trial. About 300,000 were arrested, and 17,000 of them were tried and executed by the guillotine. Another 23,000 were killed without trial or died in prison. Not only were the aristocrats guillotined but also their servants. The stench of blood and the corpses filled the air in towns especially in Paris and Bordeaux.

By June 1794 France had become fully weary of the mounting executions (1,300 in June alone), and Paris was alive with rumours of plots against Robespierre.

A parliamentary revolt was initiated on July 27, 1794, which resulted in the fall of Maximilien Robespierre and the collapse of revolutionary fervour and the Reign of Terror in France. In the evening of July 28, the Robespierrians were arrested and the first 22 of those condemned, including Robespierre, were guillotined before a cheering mob on the Place de a Revolution (now the Place de la Concorde). In all, 108 people died for adherence to Robespierre's cause.

After Robespierre's death, his memory was relentlessly attacked, and a great many of his papers were destroyed. History portrays him as either a bloodthirsty creature or a timid bourgeois.

Jacques-Guillaume Menière, Prosper Menière's father, was an anti-Robespierrian, He must have been relieved when the reign of terror ended. He was a prosperous cloth merchant. Prosper Menière was his third child.

During Prosper Menière's childhood, he would have been aware of the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon was born in Corsica in 1769. He was not a brilliant student in contrast to Prosper Menière. In September 1785, he graduated from the military academy, ranking 42nd in a class of 58. He had a lack lustre military career until he became involved in the French revolution. At the age of 24 years, he successfully routed a royalist uprising which was supported by the British from the town of Toulon.

He joined the Jacobin club and became its president. There he was supported by Augustin de Robespierre, the brother of Maximilien, and was appointed the commandant of the

artillery in the French army of Italy. After the parliamentary revolt, when Maximilien Robespierre was arrested and guillotined, Napoleon, who was regarded as a Protégé of Robespierre was arrested. He was charged with conspiracy and treason and lost his military command. He was fortunate not to have had to face the guillotine himself.

In 1795, another royalist uprising threatened the republic. Napoleon was recruited by the republicans and was instrumental in defeating the royalist insurrection against the revolutionary government in Paris. He was promoted to major general.

Prosper Menière, during his childhood, would have relished in the victories accomplished by Napoleon. Napoleon was immensely popular. In 1804, Napoleon was crowned at Notre Dame as the Emperor of France.

When Prosper Menière was 15 years old, Napoleon having suffered the Russian defeat lost popularity and was stripped of his powers, Napoleon retained his title as Emperor and moved to the Island of Elba. Napoleon tried to abdicate on April 4th 1814 and nominated his son, Napoleon II to rule as Emperor but this was overruled. The Bourbon Monarchy was restored in France and the brother of the guillotined Louis XVI, Louis XVIII became king from 1814.

Napoleon returned from exile and raised an army but was defeated at Waterloo June 1815. Napoleon was then incarcerated by the English in St Helena. Napoleon died at the age of 51 years on May 25th, 1821.

Prosper Menière benefitted from the financial support of his family and was able to undertake higher education from 1812. He would have been 15 years old when Napoleon was finally defeated and the monarchy was restored. In 1816, he began his medical studies at the University of Angers. It was here his brilliance stood out. He received awards for being the most promising student in 1817, 1818 and 1819. He finished his medical studies at the Hotel Dieu and began his externship in 1822 and then his internship in 1823. He received the Gold Medal for educational achievements. He earned his doctorate in 1828.

Louis XVIII died in 1824 and was succeeded by Charles X, who was the brother of Louis XVIII. Charles X was overthrown by the July Revolution in 1830, known as 'Trois Glorieuses' and left for exile in England.

In 1830, Louis Phillipe, a cousin of Charles X became king. In 1848 he was deposed when the second republic was established. Initially, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was president but in 1852, he promoted himself to Emperor as Napoleon III and remained as such until 1870. In 1830, Prosper Menière worked in the clinic of Dupuytren. He tended to the wounded from the July Revolution. He wrote a book about his experiences (L'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris en Juillet et en aout 1830).

In 1832, there was an outbreak of cholera in France. Prosper Menière was put in charge of the service at the Hospital of the Reserve. He wrote about the importance of the signs of different illnesses including cholera in making the correct diagnosis.

Prosper Menière had an interesting role related to the claim by The Duchess Du Berry that she had a son who was the rightful king of France. In 1833, he was to care for the health of Marie-Caroline, the Duchess du Berry. The duchess had been married to Charles Ferdinand (The Duke du Berry) who was the nephew of Louis the XVIII. In 1816. She had four children before the assassination of her husband in 1820. The first two children died in infancy, then she had a daughter and finally the fourth child Henri Count of Chambord who was dubbed the 'miracle child' as he was the direct descendant of Louis XIV. (Louis VIII, Charles X and his son Louis Antone had no sons). Louis Phillipe had become king but was an Orléanist and not a direct descendant in the Bourbon line. The Duchesse du Berry claimed her son was the rightful king of France. She raised a small army which was soon defeated, and she was captured and incarcerated at The Chateau du Blaye. The duchesse had considerable popular support in France until she became pregnant and her remarriage was revealed. She had French nationality by her marriage to the Duke of Berry, but lost it on her remarriage to an Italian; thus, was in theory ineligible to serve as a regent (her son being 13 years of age). As she was no longer a threat to the French government, she was released in June 1833. Prosper Menière wrote a detailed, day by day, account of the health of the duchesse. He assisted at the delivery of her daughter.

In 1835, Prosper Menière was again asked to organise resources to deal with another outbreak of Cholera. He wrote articles on the importance of hygiene in avoiding infection. He also wrote learned articles on botany and the classics.

His interest in the ear began in 1838 when he succeeded Dr J-M G Itard as the physician in charge of the Institute of Deaf-Mutes. In 1842, he translated from German to French, Kramer's land mark book: 'Traité des maladies de l'oreille'. (Treatment of illnesses of the ear). He wrote that a leading cause of deaf-mutism was co-sanguinity (marriage between related parents).

In 1848, there was a republican uprising in France. Louis Phillipe abdicated and left for England. The second republic was formed and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was a popular choice as president. Napoleon I was his uncle. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the republic in 1852 and proclaimed himself Emperor Napoleon III. It seems that Prosper Menière was a royalist, but he kept himself away from politics preferring to continue to publish his studies especially those concerning the ear.

The third republic lasted from 1870 -1940. Then there was the Vichy Government subservient to the Germans during WW2. The fourth republic was established in 1946 until replaced by the fifth republic by De Gaulle in 1958 when extra powers were given to the president.

The following is abstracted from an article by Miles Atkinson when he translated the original papers of Prosper Menière (*Acta Otolaryngologica*, suppl 162, 1961).

"It was a cold, blustery, rainy day, the 8th of January 1861, and the attendance for the meeting at the Imperial Academy of Medicine was small and rather apathetic. Among others, a paper was read by M. P. Menière entitled, "On a particular kind of severe hearing loss resulting from a lesion of the inner ear". In this he described some cases which had

come to his attention in which recurring attacks of vertigo, previously ascribed to apoplectiform cerebral congestion, had as a sequel nothing except a gradually increasing deafness, a deafness which he postulated as arising from a disturbance in the inner ear, for reason which he gave. The title of the paper was not well conceived or descriptive of his postulate. The audience was not roused from its lethargy, or perhaps it was not greatly interested in deafness, which after all was incurable, or in the inner ear, which was to most at that time terra incognita. There was no discussion and the matter was politely shelved by appointing a commission to consider and report upon the work. Whether the commission ever met or not is not known – no report can be found. The death of Menière the following year led to its passing into well-deserved oblivion.”

The next week M Armand Trousseau read a paper entitled, “Concerning apoplectiform cerebral congestion and its relation to epilepsy” He cited several different conditions and cited Menière’s paper from the previous week. There was lively discussion over the next six weeks, but Menière not being a member of the Academy was debarred from entering the discussion himself. He subsequently wrote a critical report of the meeting which was published in the Gazette Médicale.

Menière wrote four more papers, and he reformatted his original paper but sadly he did not live to gain recognition prior to his death from pneumonia in 1862. It was Trousseau who recognised the significance and groundbreaking importance of Meniere’s studies, and he continued to promote the findings. In the 1864, Von Troeltsch wrote, ‘one of the most worthy contributions to the science of nervous deafness, we owe to late French investigators, especially to Dr P Menière...’ Soon other leading otologists recognised the contribution of Meniere, such as Politzer, St John Rossa and Dr A D Williams.

Menière always used one accent on his name in his publications. His son, Emile, added the second accent (Ménière) after his death and this is written on his grave.

- French Revolution of 1789 (1789-1792)
- First Republic (1792-1799)
- First Empire under Napoléon (1804-1814)
- Haitian Revolution (1804)
- Bourbon Restoration under Louis XVIII and later Charles X (1814-1830)
- July Monarchy under Louis-Philippe (1830-1848)
- Second Republic under Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (1848-1852)
- Second Empire under Napoléon III (1852-1870)