

Reflections on the Revolution in France

Edmund Burke

1790

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—The division into Parts is not in the original, and is purely for ease of management on this website.—The section-headings are not in the original. Each marks the start of a new topic but not necessarily the end of the preceding one.—This work was written in 1790, three years before the executions of the French king and queen and the ‘reign of terror’ that followed.—In the last paragraph of this work Burke says that his life has been mainly ‘a struggle for the liberty of others’. So it was. His opposition to the French revolution was one of the four main political battles in his life, the other three being support for the American colonists, for the Irish, and for the people of India (see page 25).

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Glossary

artificial: Resulting from human intelligence and skill. Antonym of ‘natural’; not in the least dyslogistic.

assignat: ‘Promissory note issued by the revolutionary government of France on the security of State lands’. (OED)

bull: papal edict. Burke’s application of this term to Price’s sermon is one of several mocking indications that he thinks Price is pontificating like a Pope, an ‘archpontiff’.

cabal: Small plotting group.

description: This used to have as one of its meanings ‘kind’ or ‘type’ or ‘class’, and in Burke’s usage it usually means ‘kind (etc.) of men’. For example, on page 19: ‘the various descriptions of which your community was composed’.

dissenter: Adherent of a protestant denomination other than the Church of England.

emolument: Income by virtue of work or position; salary.

entailed inheritance: Inheritance of property that passes down the family line and is forbidden by law to go anywhere else.

estate: see **states**.

job: ‘A public service or position of trust turned to private or party advantage’ (OED).

levity: Unseriousness.

manly: Upright.

meretricious: Glittery and cheaply decorative (from Latin *meretrix* = ‘prostitute’).

mess-john: Scottish slang term for ‘priest’.

Old Jewry: A street in central London. The meeting-house in it for dissenters was famous.

orders: see **states**.

parlements: Courts of justice and tribunals.

pecuniary: Having to do with money.

popular: Here it means ‘of the people’, and doesn’t imply ‘liked by the people’.

positive law: Man-made law (in contrast with natural law). Similarly (on pages 11–12) ‘positive authority’, ‘positive institution’.

prejudice: A preconceived or long-held opinion, not necessarily concerning race, sex, etc.

prescription: The legal doctrine that something’s being in effect for long enough eventually creates a *right* to it—e.g. a public path through private land. Burke’s concern here is with prescription as a basis of ownership—e.g. a family that has had the use and control of a landed estate for centuries thereby *owns* it—and as a basis for the legitimacy of a government, something that ‘through long usage mellows into legality governments that started in violence’ (page 90).

prince: As was common in his day, Burke often uses ‘prince’ to mean ‘monarch’.

principle: On pages 4, 26, 28, and a number of other places Burke uses this word in a now-obsolete sense in which it means ‘source’, ‘cause’, ‘driver’, ‘energiser’, or the like.

revolution: When Burke speaks of ‘our revolution’ or ‘the glorious revolution’ he is referring to the events of 1688 in which James II was replaced by the Dutch William and

Mary of Orange as joint sovereigns of England. (William was invited in by many powerful people; he came with an army, but had no need to use it.) Before William and Mary were crowned, arrangements and agreements were made which had the effect of establishing a *constitutional monarchy*.

sentiment: This can mean 'feeling' or 'belief', and when certain early modern writers speak of 'moral sentiments' they may mean both at once, or be exploiting the word's ambiguity. On page 42 Burke speaks of 'a mixture of opinion and sentiment', which clearly treats sentiment as feeling.

sophistry: Tricky and deceptive logic.

states: The three segments of the French nation: the clergy,

the nobility, and the common people. Burke also calls them 'estates' and 'orders'.

States-General: A French advisory parliament in three assemblies for the three 'states' of the French nation (see preceding entry). As the Revolution developed, the three were merged into one, the National Assembly, and went from being merely advisory to having legislative and executive power.

Third Estate: The 'common people' part of the States-General.

tolerable: reasonable, allowable, fairly acceptable.

Why this work has the form of a letter

The following Reflections had their origin in a correspondence between myself and a very young gentleman in Paris who did me the honour of wanting my opinion on the important transactions that then so much occupied the attention of all men and have done so ever since. I wrote an answer some time in October 1789, but for prudential reasons didn't send it. That letter is mentioned at the start of the following pages, and has been since forwarded to the person to whom it was addressed. In a short letter to the same gentleman I explained the delay in sending it. He responded with a new and pressing application for my sentiments [see Glossary].

I began a second and more full discussion of the subject, and had some thoughts of publishing it early last spring. But as I worked on it I found that what I had undertaken was going to be far too long for a letter, and that its importance required a more detailed consideration than I had time to give it. However, having thrown down my first thoughts in the form of a letter, and having begun this intending it to be a private letter, I found it difficult to change the form of address when my sentiments had grown into a greater extent and had turned in another direction. I am aware that a different plan might be more favourable to a commodious division and distribution of what I have to say.

Part 1

The Revolution Society

Dear Sir, You are pleased to ask again, with some earnestness, for my thoughts on recent events in France. I shan't give you reason to imagine that I think my sentiments are so valuable that I *want* to be asked for them. They are of too little consequence to be very anxiously either communicated or withheld. . . . In the first letter I had the honour to write to you, which at length I send, I wrote neither for or from any description [see Glossary] of men, nor shall I in this letter. My errors, if any, are my own. My reputation alone is to answer for them.

The long letter I have already sent you shows you that though I heartily wish that France may be animated by a spirit of rational liberty, and that I think you are bound in all honest policy to provide •a permanent body in which that spirit may reside and •an effective organ by which it may act,

it is my misfortune to have great doubts regarding several important aspects of your recent doings.

When you wrote last, you thought I might be counted among those who approve of certain proceedings in France, because of the solemn public seal of approval they have received from two clubs of gentlemen in London—the Constitutional Society and the Revolution Society.

I have the honour to belong to several clubs in which the •constitution of this kingdom and the •principles of the glorious revolution [see Glossary] are held in high reverence, and I count myself among the most forward in my zeal for maintaining that constitution and those principles in their utmost purity and vigour. It is because I do so that I think it necessary that there should be no mistake about what this zeal involves. Those who cultivate the memory of our revolution and are attached to the constitution of this kingdom will take good care not to get involved with the

persons who, under the pretext of zeal toward the revolution and the constitution, often wander from their true principles and are ready on every occasion to depart from the firm but cautious and deliberate spirit that produced the revolution and that presides in the constitution. Before addressing the more substantial matters in your letter, I shall give you what information I have been able to obtain concerning the two clubs that have taken it upon themselves to interfere in the concerns of France. I start by assuring you that I am not and never have been a member of either.

The first, calling itself the Constitutional Society or Society for Constitutional Information or some such title, is seven or eight years old, I believe. This society appears to have a purpose that is charitable, and to that extent praiseworthy. It was established for the circulation, at the expense of the members, of many books that few others would spend money on and that might lie on the hands of the publishers, causing great loss to that useful body of men. Whether these charitably circulated books were ever as charitably read is more than I know. Possibly several of them have been exported to France and, like *goods* not in demand here, may have found a market with you there. I have heard much talk of the enlightenment that can be gained from books that are sent from England. What improvements they underwent en route (as it is said some liquors are improved by crossing the sea) I cannot tell; but I never heard a man of common judgment or the least degree of information speak a word in praise of the greater part of the publications circulated by that society; and no-one (except some of its members) has regarded its doings as of any serious consequence.

Your National Assembly seems to have much the same opinion that I do of this poor 'charitable' club. As a nation, you reserved the whole stock of your eloquent acknowledgements for the Revolution Society, when in fairness their

fellows in the Constitutional Society were entitled to some share. Since you have selected the Revolution Society as the great object of your national thanks and praises, you will excuse me for making its recent conduct the subject of my observations. The National Assembly of France has given importance to these gentlemen by *adopting* them; and they return the favour by acting as a committee in England for extending the principles of the National Assembly. So now we must consider them as a kind of privileged persons, as considerable members of the diplomatic body. This is one among the revolutions that have given splendour to obscurity, and distinction to invisible merit. I don't recall having heard of this club until very recently. I am quite sure that it never occupied a moment of my thoughts or, I believe, of the thoughts of anyone outside their own set. I find, upon inquiry, that on the anniversary of the Revolution in 1688 a club of dissenters [see Glossary] (of I don't know what denomination) have long had the custom of hearing a sermon in one of their churches and spending the rest of the day cheerfully, as other clubs do, at the tavern. But I never heard that any public measure or political system—let alone the merits of the constitution of any foreign nation—had been the subject of a formal proceeding at their festivals; until to my astonishment I found them issuing a congratulatory address that gave authoritative approval to the activities of the National Assembly in France.

I see nothing to object to in the original principles and conduct of the club, at least so far as they were declared. I think it very probable that for some purpose new members may have entered among them, and that some truly Christian politicians, who love to dispense benefits but are careful to conceal the hand that distributes the dole, may have made them the instruments of their pious designs. [That is a joke. Burke is suggesting that the Revolution Society has been taken over by

'new members'; he doesn't seriously think that their purposes are 'pious' or that their attitude to secrecy is 'truly Christian'.] Whatever I may have reason to suspect concerning private goings-on, I shall speak only of what is public.

I would be sorry if anyone thought that I am directly or indirectly concerned in the Society's proceedings. In my individual and private capacity I take my full share, along with everyone else, in speculating on what did or does happen on the public stage in any place ancient or modern—in the republic of Rome or the republic of Paris. But having no general apostolic mission, and being a citizen of a particular state and subject in a considerable degree to its public will, I think it would be at least improper and irregular for me to correspond formally and publicly with the actual government of a foreign nation, without the explicit authority of the government under which I live.

I would be still more unwilling to enter into that correspondence under an equivocal description of who was writing, which could lead foreign readers to think that the document to which I was subscribing was the act of persons in some sort of corporate capacity acknowledged by the laws of this kingdom and authorised to speak for some part of it. Because of the ambiguity and uncertainty of unauthorised general descriptions, and of the deceit that can be practised under them, the House of Commons would reject the most sneaking petition for the most trivial object if it came with the mode of signature that the Revolution Society has used in its address to your National Assembly. You have been deceived by it into throwing open the folding doors of your presence chamber ushering the Society's proclamation into your National Assembly with as much ceremony and parade, and with as great a bustle of applause, as if you were being visited by the whole representative majesty of the whole English nation! If what this Society has seen fit to send you had

been a piece of argument, it wouldn't have mattered much whose argument it was; it would be neither more nor less convincing because of the party it came from. But this is only a vote and resolution. It stands solely on authority; and in this case it is the mere authority of individuals, few of whom appear. Their signatures ought to have been annexed to what they wrote. The world would then know how many they are; who they are; and what value their opinions may have given their personal abilities, their knowledge, their experience, or their lead and authority in this state. To a plain man like me the proceeding looks a little too refined and too ingenious; it has too much the air of a political trick adopted for the sake of giving, under a high-sounding name, an importance to the public declarations of this club—declarations which, when they came to be closely inspected, they didn't entirely deserve. It is a policy that has very much the complexion of a fraud.

I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any member of that Society; and the whole course of my public conduct has perhaps given as good proofs of my attachment to that cause as any of *them* could boast. I grudge liberty as little as they do to any other nation. But I can't stand up and praise or blame anything relating to human actions and human concerns, on a simple view of the object, as it stands stripped of every relation, in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction. Some gentlemen count circumstances as *nothing*, but in fact they are what give to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what make every civil and political scheme beneficial or harmful to mankind. Abstractly speaking, government is good and so is liberty; but ten years ago could I in common sense have congratulated France on her enjoyment of a government (for she then *had* a government) without considering what the

nature of that government was or how it was administered? Can I now congratulate the same nation on its freedom? Is it because liberty in the abstract is one of the blessings of mankind that I am seriously to congratulate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty? If a murderous highwayman escapes from prison, am I to congratulate him on the recovery of his natural rights? . . .

When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle [see Glossary] at work; and for a while this is all I can possibly know of it. The wild gas has clearly broken loose; but we ought to suspend our judgment until the first effervescence has subsided a little, till the liquor is cleared and we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface. Before I venture publicly to congratulate men on a blessing, I must be tolerably sure that they have really received one. Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver, and adulation does no more good to the people than to kings. So I should suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France until I was informed about how it had been combined with

- government,
- public force,
- the discipline and obedience of armies,
- the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue,
- morality and religion,
- the solidity of property,
- peace and order,
- civil and social manners.

All these are good things too, in their way, and without them liberty isn't likely to last long and isn't a benefit while it does. The effect of liberty on individuals is that they may do

what they please; we ought to see what it will please them to do before we risk congratulations that may soon become complaints. Prudence would dictate this ·even· in the case of private men considered individually; but when men act in bodies, liberty is *power*. Thinking people won't declare themselves ·on this· until they see the use that is made of power, and particularly the use of such a testing thing as new power in new persons of whose principles, temperaments and dispositions they have little or no experience, and in situations where those who *appear* the most active in the scene may not be the real movers.

All these considerations, however, were below the high-minded dignity of the Revolution Society. When I wrote to you I was still in the country, and had only an imperfect idea of their transactions. On returning to town I sent for an account of their proceedings, which had been published by their authority, containing a sermon of Dr Price, with the letter of Duke de Rochefoucault and the Archbishop of Aix, and several other documents annexed. The whole of that publication, obviously aiming to connect the affairs of France with those of England by drawing us into an imitation of the conduct of the National Assembly, gave me a considerable degree of uneasiness. The effect of that conduct on the power, credit, prosperity, and tranquility of France became every day more evident. The form of constitution to be settled for its future polity became more clear. We are now in a position to discern with tolerable [see Glossary] exactness, the true nature of the object we are being invited to imitate. If the prudence of reserve and decorum dictates silence in some circumstances, in others prudence of a higher order may justify us in speaking our thoughts. The beginnings of confusion with us in England are at present feeble enough, but with you ·in France· we have seen an even more feeble infancy growing rapidly into a strength to heap mountains

on mountains and to wage war with heaven itself. When our neighbour's house is on fire it can't be wrong to have the fire-engines to play a little on our own. Better to be despised for undue anxiety than ruined by undue confidence.

Price's sermon

Solicitous chiefly for the peace of my own country, but by no means unconcerned for yours, I want to communicate at more length and in more detail what was at first intended only for your private satisfaction. I shall still keep your affairs in my eye and continue to address myself to you. Indulging myself in the freedom that letter-writing gives me, I shall throw out my thoughts and express my feelings just as they arise in my mind, with little attention to formal method. I start with the proceedings of the Revolution Society, but I shan't confine myself to them. How *could* I? It appears to me as if I were in a great crisis, of the affairs not of France alone but of all Europe, perhaps of more than Europe. All circumstances taken together, the French revolution is the most astonishing one that has ever happened. The most amazing things are brought about, many of them by the most absurd and ridiculous means, in the most ridiculous ways, and apparently by the most contemptible instruments. Everything seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity [see Glossary] and ferocity, where all sorts of crimes are jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragicomic scene, the most opposite passions succeed other in the mind—alternate contempt and indignation, alternate laughter and tears, alternate scorn and horror—and sometimes the opposites mix together.

But it can't be denied that to some people this strange scene appeared quite different from that. In them it inspired only sentiments of rejoicing and rapture. They saw in what

has happened in France nothing but a firm and temperate exercise of freedom, so consistent on the whole with •morals and with •piety as to deserve not only •the secular applause of dashing Machiavellian politicians but also •the devout effusions of sacred eloquence.

In the morning of last 4 November Dr Richard Price, an eminent non-conforming minister, preached to his club or society at the dissenting meeting house in the Old Jewry [see Glossary] an extraordinary miscellaneous sermon. It includes some good moral and religious sentiments, not badly expressed, mixed up in a sort of porridge of various political opinions and reflections; but the main ingredient in the cauldron is the Revolution in France. I regard the address transmitted by the Revolution Society through Earl Stanhope to the National Assembly as originating in the principles of this sermon and as a corollary of them. The address was moved by Dr Price. It was passed by those who came steaming from the effect of the sermon, and they passed it without any censure or qualification, expressed or implied. If any of the gentlemen concerned want to separate the sermon from the resolution, they know how to acknowledge one and disavow the other. They can do it; I cannot.

For my part, I saw that sermon as the public declaration of a man much connected with literary conspirators and intriguing philosophers, with political theologians and theological politicians both at home and abroad. I know they set him up as a sort of oracle because he, with the best intentions in the world, naturally orates and chants his prophetic song in exact unison with their designs.

That sermon has a tone that I don't think has been heard in this kingdom, in any of the pulpits that are tolerated or encouraged in it, since 1648 when the Rev. Hugh Peters made the vault of the king's own chapel at St. James's ring with the honour and privilege of the saints who, with the

'high praises of God in their mouths, and a two-edged sword in their hands, were to execute judgment on the heathen, and punishments on the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron'.

Few harangues from the pulpit, except in the days of your league in France or in the days of our Solemn League and Covenant in England, have ever breathed less of the spirit of moderation than Dr Price's lecture in the Old Jewry. And even if something like moderation *were* visible in this political sermon, still politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity. The cause of civil liberty and civil government gains as little by this confusion of duties as does the cause of religion. Most of those who leave their proper character and take on what doesn't belong to them are ignorant both of the character they leave and of the character they take on. Wholly unacquainted with the world in which they are so fond of meddling, and inexperienced in all its affairs that they pronounce on so confidently, they have nothing of politics but the passions they arouse. Surely the church is a place where mankind's dissensions and animosities ought to be allowed one day's truce.

This pulpit style, revived after so long a discontinuance, had to me the air of novelty—a somewhat dangerous novelty. I don't find every part of the discourse to be equally dangerous. The hint given to •a noble and reverend lay divine who is supposed to hold high office in one of our universities, and to •other lay divines 'of rank and literature', may be proper and seasonable, though somewhat new. Dr Price advises these noble Seekers, if they find nothing to satisfy their pious fancies in the old staple of the national church, or in all the rich variety to be found in the well-stocked warehouses of the dissenting congregations, each to set up

a separate-meeting house on his own particular principles. It is somewhat remarkable that this reverend divine should be so earnest for setting up new churches and so perfectly indifferent concerning the doctrine that may be taught in them! His zeal is of a curious character. It is not for the propagation of *his own opinions* but just of *opinions*. He is zealous not for the diffusion of truth but for the spreading of contradiction. As long as the noble teachers dissent, it doesn't matter from whom or from what they dissent. This great point once secured, it is taken for granted their religion will be rational and manly [see Glossary]. I doubt whether religion would reap all the benefits that the calculating divine computes from this 'great company of great preachers'. It would certainly be a valuable addition of unclassified specimens to the ample collection of known genera and species that at present beautify the display-cases of dissent. A sermon from a noble duke, or a noble marquis, or a noble earl, or baron bold would certainly increase and diversify the amusements of this town that is starting to be bored. I would only stipulate that these new Mess-Johns [see Glossary] in robes and coronets should keep some sort of bounds in the democratic and leveling principles that are expected from their titled pulpits. I expect that the new evangelists will disappoint the hopes that are conceived of them. . . .

But I may say of our preacher 'If only he'd devoted the whole of those savage times to frivolities' [Burke gives this in Latin, quoted from the Latin poet Juvenal]. Not everything in this thunderous bull [see Glossary] of his are so harmless. His doctrines affect our constitution in its vital parts. He tells the Revolution Society in this political sermon that his Majesty 'is almost the only lawful king in the world because the only one who owes his crown to the choice of his people'. As to the kings of the world, all of whom (except one) this archpontiff of the rights of men, with all the plenitude and

with more than the boldness of the papal deposing power in its 12th century fervour, puts into one sweeping clause of ban and anathema and proclaims to be usurpers: . . . they had better consider how they admit into their territories these apostolic missionaries who will tell their subjects that they aren't lawful kings. That is their concern. *Our* concern, as an important domestic matter, is to consider seriously the solidity of the only principle on which these gentlemen acknowledge a king of Great Britain to be entitled to their allegiance.

This doctrine, as applied to the prince [see Glossary] now on the British throne, either •is nonsense and therefore neither true nor false, or •affirms a most unfounded, dangerous, illegal, and unconstitutional position. According to this spiritual doctor of politics, if his Majesty does not owe his crown to the choice of his people, he is no lawful king. Now nothing can be more untrue than that the crown of this kingdom is so held by his Majesty. So if you follow their rule, the king of Great Britain, who certainly does not owe his high office to any form of popular [see Glossary] election, is no better than the rest of the gang of usurpers who reign (or rather *rob*) all over the face of our miserable world with no right or title to the allegiance of their people. The policy of this general doctrine, thus understood, is evident enough. The propagators of this political gospel hope that their abstract principle—that a popular choice is necessary for the legal existence of the sovereign rule—would be overlooked as long as the king of Great Britain was not affected by it. In the meantime the ears of their congregations would gradually get used to it, as if it were a first principle admitted without dispute. In the meantime it would operate only as a theory, pickled in the preserving juices of pulpit eloquence and stored for future use. . . . By this policy, while our government is soothed with a reservation in its favour to

which it has no claim, the security it has in common with all governments—so far as opinion is security—is taken away.

Thus these politicians go ahead while little notice is taken of their doctrines; but when they come to be examined on the plain meaning of their words and the direct tendency of their doctrines, then ambiguities and slippery constructions come into play. When they say the king owes his crown to the choice of his people and is therefore the only lawful sovereign in the world, perhaps they'll tell us that they mean only that some of the king's predecessors have been called to the throne by some sort of choice, and therefore he owes his crown to the choice of his people. Thus, by a miserable subterfuge, they hope to make their proposition safe by making it vacuous. They are welcome to the asylum they seek for their offence, since they are taking refuge in their folly. For if you admit this interpretation, how does their idea of *election* differ from our idea of *inheritance*?

And how does the settlement of the crown in the Brunswick line derived from James I come to legalise •our monarchy rather than •that of any of the neighbouring countries? At some time or other, to be sure, all the beginners of dynasties were chosen by those who called them to govern. There is ground enough for the opinion that all the kingdoms of Europe were, a long time ago, elective, with some limitations on the objects of choice. But whatever kings might have been here or elsewhere a thousand years ago, or in whatever manner the ruling dynasties of England or France may have begun, the king of Great Britain is today king by a fixed rule of succession according to the laws of his country; and for as long as the legal conditions of the compact of sovereignty are performed by him (as they *are*), he holds his crown regardless of the choice of the Revolution Society, who don't have a single vote for a king among them, either individually or collectively (though I'm sure they would

soon erect themselves into an electoral college if things were ripe to give effect to their claim). His Majesty's heirs and successors, each in his time and order, will come to the crown in a manner to which their choice is equally irrelevant.

Whatever success of evasion they may have in explaining away the gross error of fact which supposes that his Majesty owes his crown to the choice of his people, nothing can evade their full explicit declaration concerning the principle of the people's right to choose—a right that is directly maintained and tenaciously adhered to. All the oblique insinuations about election rest on this proposition. Lest the foundation of the king's exclusive legal title should pass for a mere rant of adulatory freedom, the political divine [= Price] proceeds to assert dogmatically that by the principles of the Revolution the people of England have acquired three fundamental rights, all of which (in his hands) compose one system and lie together in one short sentence. It is that we have acquired a right:

- (1) to choose our own rulers,
- (2) to dismiss them for misconduct, and
- (3) to form a government for ourselves.

This previously unheard-of bill of rights, though made in the name of the whole people, belongs to those gentlemen and their faction only. The body of the people of England have no share in it. They utterly disclaim it. They will resist the practical assertion of it with their lives and fortunes. They are bound to do so by the laws of their country made at the time of that very Revolution ·of 1688· that is appealed to in favour of the fictitious rights claimed by the Society that abuses its name.

The first claimed right: to choose our own rulers

These gentlemen of the Old Jewry, in all their reasonings on (2) the Revolution of 1688, have (1) a revolution that happened in England about 40 years earlier and (3) the recent French revolution, so much before their eyes and in their hearts that they are constantly running the three together. It is necessary that we separate them. We must check their erring fancies against the acts of the Revolution that we revere, for the discovery of its true principles. If the principles of the Revolution of 1688 are anywhere to be found, it is in the statute called the Declaration of Right. In that most wise, sober, and considerate declaration—drawn up by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by hot-headed and inexperienced zealots—not one word is said, nor one suggestion made, of a general right 'to choose our own rulers, to dismiss them for misconduct, and to form a government for ourselves'.

This Declaration of Right is the cornerstone of our constitution as reinforced, explained, improved, and in its fundamental principles for ever settled. It is called 'An Act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for settling the succession of the crown'. You will observe that these rights and this succession are declared in one body and bound indissolubly together.

A few years after this period, a second opportunity came up for asserting a right of election to the crown. With the prospect of King William's having no offspring, and the Princess (afterwards Queen) Anne likewise, the legislature had to consider again the settlement of the crown and further security for the liberties of the people. Did they this second time make any provision for legalising the crown on the spurious revolution principles of the Old Jewry? No. They followed the principles that prevailed in the Declaration

of Right, indicating with more precision the persons who were to inherit the crown in the Protestant line. Following the same policy, they incorporated our liberties and an hereditary succession in a single act. Instead of a 'right to choose our own governors', they declared that the succession in the Protestant line drawn from James I was absolutely necessary 'for the peace, quiet, and security of the realm', and that it was a matter of urgency 'to maintain a certainty in the succession thereof, to which the subjects may safely have recourse for their protection'. Both these acts, in which are heard the unerring and unambiguous oracles of revolution policy, instead of countenancing the delusive gypsy predictions of a 'right to choose our governors' rigorously *prove* how totally the nation's wisdom opposed turning a case of necessity into a rule of law.

A small and temporary deviation

Unquestionably, there was at the Revolution, in the person of King William, a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession; but it is against all genuine principles of jurisprudence to draw a principle from a law made in a special case and regarding an individual person. If ever there was a time favourable for establishing the principle that a king of popular choice was the only legal king, without doubt it was at the Revolution. Its not being done then proves that the nation thought it ought not to be done at any time. Anyone who isn't completely ignorant of our history knows that the majority in parliament of both parties were so little inclined to accept anything resembling that principle that at first they resolved to place the vacant crown not on the head of the Prince of Orange but on that of his wife Mary—daughter of King James, and the eldest born of the offspring of that king

which they acknowledged to be undoubtedly his. It would be repeating a very trite story to recall to your memory all the circumstances showing that their acceptance of King William was not properly a choice but—to all those who didn't want to recall King James or to deluge their country in blood and again to bring their religion, laws, and liberties into the peril they had just escaped—it was in the strictest sense a necessity.

In this episode parliament departed—for a time, and in a single case—from the strict order of inheritance in favour of a prince who, though not next in line, was very near in the line of succession [Charles I of England was his maternal grandfather]. It is curious to observe how Lord Somers, who wrote the bill called the Declaration of Right, comported himself on that delicate occasion. It is curious to observe how skillfully this temporary departure from the strict order is kept from the eye, while all that could be found in this act of necessity to support the idea of an hereditary succession is brought forward, developed, and made the most of by this great man and by the legislature who followed him. Leaving the dry, imperative style of an act of parliament, he makes the Lords and Commons engage in a pious legislative exclamation, declaring that they consider it 'as a marvellous providence and merciful goodness of God to this nation to preserve their said Majesties' royal persons most happily to reign over us on the throne of their ancestors, for which, from the bottom of their hearts, they return their humblest thanks and praises' . . .

In the act of King William, the Lords and Commons didn't thank God that they had found a fair opportunity to assert a right to choose their own governors, much less to make an election the *only* lawful title to the crown. Their having been in a position to avoid the very appearance of it, as much as possible, was considered by them as a providential

escape! They threw a politic, well-woven veil over every detail tending to weaken the rights that they meant to perpetuate in the improved order of succession, or that might furnish a precedent for any future departure from what they had then settled forever. . . .

[He goes on at some length about the strength of the language in which parliament highlighted the idea of hereditary succession, and about the sources of that language in ‘the declaratory statutes of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth’.]

They knew that a doubtful title of succession would too much resemble an election, and that an election would utterly destroy the ‘unity, peace, and tranquillity of this nation’, which they thought to be considerations of some importance. To provide for these objectives—and therefore to exclude for ever the Old Jewry doctrine of a ‘right to choose our own governors’—they follow with a clause containing a solemn pledge taken from the earlier act of Queen Elizabeth, as solemn a pledge as ever could be given in favour of an hereditary succession, and as solemn a renunciation as could be made of the principles attributed to them by this ‘Revolution’ Society: ‘The Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, do in the name of all the people aforesaid most humbly and faithfully submit themselves, their heirs and posterities for ever; and do faithfully promise that they will maintain and defend their said Majesties, and also the limitation of the crown herein specified and contained, to the utmost of their powers’ etc.

So far is it from being true that we acquired a right by the Revolution to elect our kings that, if we had possessed it before, the English nation did at that time solemnly renounce it for themselves and for all their posterity forever.

These gentlemen may value themselves as much as they please on their whig principles, but I never desire to be thought a better whig than Lord Somers, or to understand

the principles of the Revolution better than those who brought it about, or to read in the Declaration of Right any mysteries unknown to those who wrote it—those whose penetrating style has engraved in our ordinances and in our hearts the words and spirit of that immortal law.

It is true that the nation, aided by the powers derived from force and opportunity, was at that time in a sense *free* to take what course it pleased for filling the throne, but only free to do so on the same grounds on which they might have wholly abolished their monarchy and every other part of their constitution. But they didn’t think they were entitled to make such bold changes. It is indeed difficult, perhaps impossible, to state in abstract terms what the limits were to the supreme power exercised by parliament at that time; but

the limits of a moral competence making (even in powers more indisputably sovereign) occasional **will** subordinate to permanent **reason** and to the steady maxims of faith, justice, and fixed fundamental policy are perfectly intelligible and perfectly binding upon those who exercise any authority, under any name or under any title, in the state. The House of Lords, for instance, is not morally competent to dissolve the House of Commons, nor even to dissolve itself or to abdicate its part in the legislature of the kingdom. A king may abdicate for his own person, but he can’t abdicate for the monarchy. And for at least as strong a reason the House of Commons can’t renounce its share of authority. The engagement and pact of society, generally called ‘the constitution’, forbids such invasion and such surrender. The constituent parts of a state are obliged to keep faith with each other and with all those whose interests are seriously affected by their activities, just as the whole state is bound to keep its faith with separate communities. Otherwise competence would soon be confused with power, and no law would remain but the **will** of a prevailing force.

On this principle the succession of the crown has always been what it now is, an hereditary succession by law; in the old line it was a succession by the *common* law; in the new, by the *statute* law operating on the principles of the common law—not changing the substance but regulating the method and describing the persons. Both these kinds of law have the same force and are derived from an equal authority emanating from the common agreement and original compact of the state, by the collective contract of the commonwealth [Burke gives this phrase in Latin], and as such they are equally binding on king and people as long as the terms are observed and they continue the same body politic.

If we don't allow ourselves to be entangled in the mazes of metaphysical sophistry [see Glossary] it is perfectly possible to reconcile •the use of a fixed rule with •an occasional deviation, reconciling •the sacredness of an hereditary principle of succession in our government with •a power to change its application in cases of extreme emergency. Even in that extremity (if we take the measure of our rights by our exercise of them at the Revolution), the change is to be confined to the part •of the government• that made the deviation necessary; and even then it is to be done without decomposing the whole civil and political mass so as to originate a new civil order out of the basic raw materials of society.

A state with no means to make changes has no means to preserve itself. Without such means a state might even risk the loss of the part of its constitution that it most devoutly wished to preserve. The two principles of •conservation and •correction operated strongly at the two critical periods of the Restoration •of the monarchy after the collapse of Cromwell's regime• and the Revolution, at each of which England found itself without a king. At both those periods the nation had lost the bond of union in their ancient edifice, but they didn't reduce the whole structure to rubble. On

the contrary, in both cases they regenerated the deficient part of the old constitution through the parts that were not damaged. They kept these old parts exactly as they were, so as to make the recovered part fit with them. . . . The sovereign legislature may never have shown a more tender regard for that fundamental principle of British constitutional policy than when, at the time of the Revolution, it deviated from the direct line of hereditary succession. The crown was carried somewhat out of the line in which it had before moved, but the new line was derived from the same stock. It was still a line of hereditary descent, still an hereditary descent in the same blood, though now qualified with Protestantism. When the legislature altered the direction but kept the principle, they showed that they held the principle to be inviolable.

On this principle, the law of inheritance had admitted some amendment in earlier times long before the era of the Revolution. Some time after the •Norman• Conquest •in 1066•, great questions arose about the legal principles of hereditary descent. It became a matter of doubt whether a deceased monarch's crown should go to his oldest offspring or the oldest member of his family, but through all this—and the matter of the crown bypassing a Catholic so as to go to a Protestant—the principle of inheritance survived with a sort of immortality through all transmigrations. . . . This is the spirit of our constitution, not only in its settled course but in all its revolutions. Whoever came in and however he came in, whether he obtained the crown by law or by force, the hereditary succession was either continued or adopted.

The gentlemen of the Society for Revolution see nothing in the revolution of 1688 but the deviation from the constitution; and they take •the deviation from the principle to be •the principle. They have little regard to the obvious consequences of their doctrine, though they must see that it leaves very few of the positive [see Glossary] institutions

of this country with any positive authority. If the unwarrantable maxim that *no throne is lawful except the elective* is established, no one act of the princes [see Glossary] who preceded this era of fictitious election can be valid. Do these theorists mean to imitate some of their predecessors who dragged the bodies of our ancient sovereigns out of the quiet of their tombs? Do they mean to accuse and retroactively disempower all the kings who reigned before the Revolution, and consequently to stain the throne of England with the blot of a continual usurpation? Do they mean to invalidate, annul, or call into question not only

- the titles of the whole line of our kings, but also
- the great body of our statute law that passed under those whom they treat as usurpers?

This would be to annul laws of inestimable value to our liberties—at least as valuable as any that have passed since the time of the Revolution? If kings who didn't owe their crown to the choice of their people had no title to make laws, what will become of

- (i) the statute *de tallagio non concedendo*?
- (ii) the petition of right?
- (iii) the act of habeas corpus?

[(i) a 13th century law forbidding the king to raise taxes independently of parliament; (ii) a constitutional document of 1626 setting other limits to what the kind could do; (iii) a legal protection against secret imprisonment.] Do these new doctors of the rights of men presume to assert that King James II, who came to the crown as next of kin to the deceased Charles II, according to the rules of a then unqualified succession, was not to all intents and purposes a lawful king of England before he had done any of the acts that were rightly taken to amount to an abdication of his crown? If he was not, much trouble in parliament might have been saved at the period these gentlemen commemorate. But King James was a bad king with a good title, and not

a usurper. The princes who succeeded, according to the act of parliament that settled the crown on the Electress of Hanover Sophia and on her descendants, being Protestants, came in as much by a title of inheritance as King James did. He came in according to the law as it was at the time of his accession to the crown; and the princes of the House of Brunswick came to inherit the crown not by *election* but by the law as it was at the times when they variously came to the crown through Protestant descent and inheritance, as I hope I have shown sufficiently.

The law by which this royal family is specifically destined to the succession is the act of the 12th and 13th of King William. The terms of this act bind 'us and our heirs, and our posterity, to them, their heirs, and their posterity', being Protestants, to the end of time, in the same words as the Declaration of Right had bound us to the heirs of King William and Queen Mary. It therefore secures both an hereditary crown and an hereditary allegiance. On what ground, except the constitutional policy of forming an establishment to secure that kind of succession—precluding a choice of the people forever—could the legislature have fastidiously rejected the abundant choice which our country presented to them and searched in strange lands for a foreign princess from whose womb the line of our future rulers were to derive their title to govern millions of men through a series of ages?

The Princess Sophia was named in the act of settlement of 1701 as a stock and root of inheritance to our kings. She was named not for her merits as a temporary administratrix of a power that she might not (and in fact did not) ever exercise, but for just one reason, stated in the act:

'The most excellent Princess Sophia, Electress and Duchess Dowager of Hanover, is daughter of the most excellent Princess Elizabeth, late Queen of Bohemia, daughter of our late sovereign lord King James I of

happy memory, and is hereby declared to be the next in succession in the Protestant line etc., etc., and the crown shall continue to the heirs of her body, being Protestants.'

Parliament made this act so that through the Princess Sophia not only was an inheritable line to be continued in future but (what they thought very important) it was to be connected with the old stock of inheritance in King James I, so that the monarchy might preserve an unbroken unity through all ages and might be preserved (with safety to our religion) in the old approved mode by descent. . . . They did well. No experience has taught us that our liberties can be regularly perpetuated and kept sacred as our hereditary right except through an hereditary crown .

An irregular, convulsive movement may be necessary to throw off an irregular, convulsive disease. But the course of succession is the *healthy* habit of the British constitution. When the legislature passed the act for the limitation of the crown in the Hanoverian line, drawn through the female descendants of James I, did they lack a proper sense of the drawbacks of having two or three or even more foreigners in succession to the British throne? No! They had a proper sense of the evils that might come from such foreign rule—more than a proper sense of them. They continued to adopt a plan of hereditary Protestant succession in the old line, with all the dangers and drawbacks of its being a foreign line fully before their eyes and operating with the utmost force on their minds. There couldn't be a more decisive proof of the British nation's full conviction that the principles of the Revolution did not authorise them to elect kings at their pleasure and without attention to the ancient fundamental principles of our government.

A few years ago I would have been ashamed to support with heavy argument a matter so capable of supporting itself;

but this seditious, unconstitutional doctrine is now publicly taught, avowed, and printed.

- My dislike for revolutions, the signals for that have so often been given from pulpits;
- the spirit of change that is spreading through the world; and
- the total contempt that prevails with you, and may come to prevail with us, for all ancient institutions when they oppose a present sense of convenience or a present inclination;

—all these considerations make it advisable, in my opinion, to call our attention back to the true principles of our own domestic laws, so that you, my French friend, should begin to know them, and so that we should continue to cherish them. We ought not on either side of the water to let ourselves to be imposed on by the counterfeit wares that some persons, by a double fraud, export to you in illicit barges as raw commodities of British growth (though wholly alien to our soil), in order then to smuggle them back again into this country, manufactured into an 'improved' liberty after the newest Paris fashion.

The people of England won't ape the fashions they have never tried, or return to ones they have tried and found to be harmful. They look on the legal hereditary succession of their crown as among their rights, not their wrongs; as a benefit, not a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not a badge of servitude. . . .

Divine right of kings

Before I go any further, let me take notice of some cheap tricks that the abettors of election, as the only lawful title to the crown, are ready to use so as to make the support of the just principles of our constitution a dislikable task.

When you defend the inheritable nature of the crown, these tricksters present you as supporting a fictitious cause and fictional people. They commonly argue as if they were in a conflict with some of those exploded fanatics of slavery who used to maintain what I believe no-one now maintains, namely 'that the crown is held by divine hereditary and indefeasible right'. These old fanatics of single arbitrary power dogmatised as if **hereditary royalty** was the only lawful government in the world, just as our new fanatics of **popular arbitrary power** maintain that a popular election is the sole lawful source of authority. The old **prerogative** extremists did indeed speculate foolishly, and perhaps impiously too, implying •that monarchy has more of a divine sanction than any other mode of government, and •that a right to govern by inheritance is something that no civil or political right can be, namely strictly indefeasible in all circumstances for any person who is in the line of succession to a throne. But an absurd opinion concerning the king's hereditary right to the crown doesn't prejudice one that is rational and based on solid principles of law and policy. If all the absurd theories of lawyers and divines were to destroy the things they are talking about we would have no law and no religion left in the world! An absurd theory on one side of a question doesn't justify telling untruths or promulgating mischievous maxims on the other.

The second claimed right: to dismiss kings for misconduct

Of the three claims of the Revolution Society listed on page 8, the second is 'a right of dismissing their governors for misconduct'. If the declaration of the act implying the abdication of James II had any fault, it's that it was rather too guarded and too circumstantial [here = 'clotted with detail'];

and this may have been because those ancestors of ours were anxious not to form such a precedent as that of 'dismissing for misconduct'. But all this guardedness and all this accumulation of circumstances serves to show the spirit of caution that predominated in the national councils in a situation where men irritated by oppression and elevated by a triumph over it might have abandoned themselves to violent and extreme courses of action; it shows, regarding the great men who influenced the conduct of affairs at that great event, how anxious they were to make the Revolution a parent of settlement and not a nursery of future revolutions.

No government could stand for a moment if it could be blown down by anything as loose and indefinite as an opinion of 'misconduct'. Those who led at the Revolution based the virtual abdication of King James on no such light and uncertain principle. They charged him with nothing less than a design, confirmed by many open illegal acts, to subvert the Protestant church and state and their fundamental, unquestionable laws and liberties; they charged him with having broken the original contract between king and people. This was more than 'misconduct'. A grave and overruling necessity obliged them to take the step they took, and took with infinite reluctance, under that most rigorous of all laws [presumably referring to the original contract between king and people]. They didn't rely on future revolutions for the future preservation of the constitution; the grand policy of all their regulations was to make it almost impracticable for any future sovereign to compel the states [see Glossary] of the kingdom to have recourse again to those violent remedies. They left the crown in the condition of being perfectly irresponsible [= 'completely exempt from legal responsibility'], which is what it had always been in the eye and estimation of law. In order to lighten the crown still further, they added responsibility to ministers of state. •By the statute called

‘the act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for settling the succession of the crown’, they enacted that the ministers should serve the crown on the terms of that declaration. •Then they secured frequent meetings of parliament by which the whole government would be under the constant inspection and active control of the popular representative and of the magnates of the kingdom. •In their next great constitutional act. . . for further limiting the crown and better securing the rights and liberties of the subject, they provided ‘that no pardon under the great seal of England should be pleadable to an impeachment by the Commons in parliament’. These three—•the rule laid down for government in the Declaration of Right, •the constant inspection of parliament, and •the practical claim of impeachment—they thought to provide an infinitely better security for their constitutional liberty and against the vices of administration than could be provided by their claiming a right so difficult in the practice, so uncertain in outcome, and often so mischievous in the consequences, as that of ‘dismissing their governors’.

Kings as servants of the people

Dr Price in this sermon very properly condemns the practice of gross, adulatory addresses to kings. Instead of this fulsome style he proposes that on occasions of congratulation his Majesty should be told that ‘he is to consider himself as more properly the servant than the sovereign of his people’. As a compliment, this new form of address doesn’t seem to be very soothing! Those who are servants in name as well as in effect don’t like to be told of their situation, their duty, and their obligations. . . . It is not pleasant as compliment; it is not wholesome as instruction. After all, if the king were to adopt this language and take the label ‘Servant of

the People’ as his royal style, I can’t imagine what good this would do us, or him. I have seen very proud letters signed ‘Your most obedient, humble servant’. The proudest denomination that ever was endured on earth—the Roman Catholic Church—took a title of still greater humility than the one now proposed for sovereigns by the Apostle of Liberty [Price]. Kings and nations were trodden down by the foot of one calling himself ‘the Servant of Servants’; and mandates for deposing sovereigns were sealed with the signet of ‘the Fisherman’.

I would have considered all this ‘servant’ stuff as merely a sort of flippant empty discourse in which some people allow the spirit of liberty to evaporate, if it weren’t plainly offered in support of the idea of ‘dismissing kings for misconduct’. In that light it is worth some discussion.

Kings are undoubtedly the servants of the people in one sense, because their power has no rational purpose except the general advantage; but (by our constitution, at least) it isn’t true that they are anything like servants in the ordinary sense of the word. The essence of a servant’s situation is to obey the commands of someone else and to be removable at pleasure. But the king of Great Britain obeys no-one else; all other persons are—individually and collectively—under him and owe him a legal obedience. The law, which doesn’t know how to flatter or to insult, calls this high magistrate not our servant, as this humble divine [Price] calls him, but ‘our sovereign Lord the king’; and *we* have only learned to speak the primitive language of the law, and not the confused jargon of their Babylonian pulpits.

Because he is not to obey us and we are to obey the law in him, our constitution doesn’t in any way make him, as a servant, in any degree *responsible*. Our constitution knows nothing of a magistrate like the Justicia of Aragon, or of any legally appointed court or legally settled process

for submitting the king to the responsibility belonging to all servants. In this he is not distinguished from the Commons and the Lords, who in their various public capacities can never be called to account for their conduct. Yet the Revolution Society chooses to assert, in direct opposition to one of the wisest and most beautiful parts of our constitution, that 'a king is no more than the first servant of the public, created by it, and responsible to it'.

Our ancestors at the Revolution wouldn't have deserved their fame for wisdom if they had found no security for their freedom except making their government feeble in its operations and precarious in its tenure; if they couldn't devise any better remedy against arbitrary power than civil confusion. Let these gentlemen state *who* the representative public is to whom they will affirm that the king as a servant is to be responsible. It will then be time enough for me to show them the positive statute law that affirms that he is not.

The ceremony of dismissing kings, which these gentlemen casually talk about so much, can seldom if ever be performed without force. It then becomes a case of war, and not of constitution. Laws are commanded to hold their tongues among arms, and tribunals fall to the ground with the peace they are no longer able to uphold. The Revolution of 1688 was obtained by a just war, in the only case in which any war, and much more a civil war, can be just. 'Wars are just to those for whom they are necessary' [Burke says this in Latin, misquoting Livy]. The question of dethroning or 'dismissing' kings always was and always will be an extraordinary question of state, and wholly out of the law—a question (like all other questions of state) of dispositions and means and probable consequences rather than of positive rights. Not having been made for common abuses, it isn't to be thought about by common minds. The theoretical line of

demarcation where obedience ought to end and resistance must begin is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It isn't determined by any single act or single event. Governments must be abused and deranged indeed before dismissal can be thought of; and the prospect of the future—if there is no dismissal—must be as bad as the experience of the past. When things are as bad as that, the nature of the disease will have to indicate the remedy to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities this crucial, ambiguous, bitter medicine to a sick state. Times and occasions and provocations will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case; the irritable from awareness of oppression; the high-minded from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands; the brave and bold from the love of honourable danger in a generous cause; but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good.

The third claimed right: to form a government for ourselves

The third of the three rights claimed from the pulpit of the Old Jewry and listed on page 8 is the 'right to form a government for ourselves'. This gets as little support—whether through precedent or principle—from anything done at the Revolution as each of their first two claims. The Revolution was made to preserve our ancient, indisputable laws and liberties and that ancient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty. If you want to know •the spirit of our constitution and •the policy that predominated in that great period that has secured it to this hour, please look for both in our histories, our records, our acts of parliament, and journals of parliament—and *not* in the sermons of the Old Jewry and the after-dinner toasts of the Revolution Society!

In the former you will find other ideas and another language. The third rights-claim is as ill-suited to our temperament and wishes as it is unsupported by any appearance of authority. The very idea of the making of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. At the time of the Revolution we wanted, as we still do, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers. We have taken care not to graft onto that body and stock of inheritance any shoot that is alien to the nature of the original plant. All the reformations we have proceeded on the principle of reverence for antiquity; and I hope—indeed, I am convinced—that any future reformations will be carefully formed on analogical precedent, authority, and example.

Our liberties as an inheritance

Our oldest reformation is that of Magna Charta. You will see that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of our law and indeed all the great men who follow him. . . .work hard to prove the *pedigree* of our liberties. They try to prove that the Magna Charta of King John was connected with another positive [see Glossary] charter from Henry I, and that both of these were nothing more than a reaffirmation of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom. On the matter of fact these authors appear to be mostly in the right though perhaps not always; but if the lawyers go wrong in some details that proves my position still more strongly, because it demonstrates the powerful tendency to favour antiquity that has always filled the minds of all our lawyers and legislators and of all the people they want to influence, and the unchanging policy of this kingdom in considering their most sacred rights and franchises as an inheritance.

In the famous law of Charles I's time called the Petition of Right, the parliament says to the king 'Your subjects

have inherited this freedom', claiming their freedoms not on abstract principles as 'the rights of men', but as the rights of Englishmen inherited from their forefathers. Selden and the other profoundly learned men who drew up this Petition of Right were at least as well acquainted with all the general theories concerning the 'rights of men' as any of the discourses in our pulpits or on your tribune in Paris—as well as Dr Price or the Abbé Sieyès. But, for reasons worthy of the practical wisdom that superseded their theoretical science, they preferred •this positive, recorded, hereditary title to everything that can be dear to the man and the citizen to •the vague theoretical right that exposed their secure inheritance to being scrambled for and torn to pieces by every wild and litigious spirit.

The same policy pervades all the laws that have since been made for the preservation of our liberties. In in the famous statute called the Declaration of Right, of the time of William and Mary, the two houses of parliament don't utter a syllable of 'a right to form a government for themselves'. You will see that their whole care was to secure the religion, laws, and liberties that had been long possessed and recently endangered. 'Taking into their most serious consideration the best means for making an establishment that will not again put their religion, laws, and liberties in danger of being subverted', they ceremonially initiate all their proceedings by stating as some of those best means 'in the first place' to do 'as their ancestors in like cases have usually done for vindicating their ancient rights and liberties, to declare. . . .'—and then they pray the king and queen 'that it may be declared and enacted that all the rights and liberties asserted and declared are the true ancient and indubitable rights and liberties of the people of this kingdom'.

You will observe that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right it has been the uniform policy of our

constitution to claim and assert our liberties as an entailed [see Glossary] inheritance that we have from our forefathers and are to transmit to our posterity—as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom, with no reference to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves its unity in the great diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown, an inheritable peerage, and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties from a long line of ancestors.

This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection, or rather the happy effect of following *nature*, which is wisdom without reflection and above reflection. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temperament and limited views. People who never look back to their ancestors will not look forward to posterity. Besides, the people of England know well that the idea of *inheritance* provides a sure principle of •conservation and a sure principle of •transmission, without at all excluding a principle of •improvement. . . . Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement, held tight for ever. By a constitutional policy that follows the pattern of *nature*, we receive, hold, and transmit **(i)** our government and our privileges in the same way as we enjoy and transmit **(ii)** our property and **(iii)** our lives. The **(i)** institutions of policy, the **(ii)** goods of fortune, and **(iii)** the gifts of providence are handed down to us, and from us, in the same course and order. Our political system is placed in a sound correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world and with the kind of existence possessed by a permanent body composed of transitory parts. ·God's· stupendous wisdom molds together the great mysterious body of the human race in such a way that the whole thing is never at one time old or middle-aged or young, but moves on—unchangeably constant—through

the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state: •in what we improve we are never wholly new; •in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering to our forefathers in *this* way and on *those* principles, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians but by the spirit of philosophical analogy. In this choice of inheritance we have given to our political structure the image of a blood-relationship, binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties, adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections, keeping inseparable (and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities) our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.

Through the same plan of conforming to nature in our artificial institutions, and by calling on the aid of nature's unerring and powerful instincts to strengthen the fallible and feeble contrivances of our reason, we have derived several other considerable benefits from seeing our liberties as an inheritance. The spirit of freedom when left to itself inclines to misrule and excess, but when it acts as if in the presence of canonised forefathers it is toned down by an awesome solemnity. This idea of a liberal descent [i.e. the idea that our freedom is something that has *come down* to us] inspires us with a sense of habitual native dignity which prevents the upstart insolence that almost inevitably infects and disgraces those who are the *first* acquirers of any distinction. By this means our liberty becomes a noble freedom.

It carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits, its monumental inscriptions, its records, evidences, and titles. We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle

upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men: on account of their age and on account of those from whom they are descended. All your logic-choppers can't produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly [see Glossary] freedom than the course that we have pursued, choosing our nature rather than our theories, our hearts rather than our inventions, as the great conservatories and store-houses of our rights and privileges.

How France missed its opportunity

You could have profited from our example and given to your recovered freedom a corresponding dignity. Your privileges, though they had been discontinued, were not lost to memory. It's true that while you were out of possession your constitution suffered waste and dilapidation; but you possessed some of the walls and all the foundations of a noble and venerable castle. You could have repaired those walls, and built on those old foundations. Your constitution was suspended before it was finished, but you had the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished. In your old states [see Glossary] you possessed

- that variety of parts corresponding with the various descriptions [see Glossary] of which your community was happily composed;
- all that combination and all that opposition of interests;
- that action and counteraction which, in the natural world and the political one, draws out the harmony of the universe from the struggle amongst discordant powers.

These opposed and conflicting interests, which you saw as such a great blemish in your old constitution and in our present one, call a healthy halt to all precipitate decisions.

They make deliberation a matter of necessity, not of choice; they make all change a subject of compromise, which naturally begets moderation; they produce temperaments that •prevent the sore evil of harsh, crude, unqualified reformations, and •make all the headlong exertions of arbitrary power—whether in the few or in the many—for ever impracticable. Through that diversity of members and interests, general liberty had as many securities as there were separate views in the various parts of society, while the separate parts would have been prevented from warping and jumping out of their allotted places by the downward pressure on them of a real monarchy.

You had all these advantages in your ancient states, but you chose to act as if you had never been molded into civil society and had to begin everything anew. You began badly by despising everything that belonged to you, setting up in trade without any capital. If the recent generations of your country struck you as not very distinguished, you could have passed them by and derived your claims from an earlier race of ancestors. Piously favouring those ancestors, your imaginations would have found in them a standard of virtue and wisdom beyond the vulgar practice of the present; and, setting them as the example you wanted to imitate, you would have risen. Respecting your forefathers, you would have learned to respect yourselves. You wouldn't have chosen to consider the French as a people of yesterday, as a nation of lowborn servile wretches until the emancipating year of 1789. You would not have been content to be represented as

a gang of runaway slaves suddenly broken loose from the house of bondage and therefore to be pardoned for your abuse of the liberty that you weren't accustomed to or well fitted for,

—a representation that you *did* allow, at the expense of your honour, as an excuse to your English defenders for various of your crimes. Wouldn't it have been wiser, my worthy friend, to have people think (as I for one always have thought)

- that you are a generous and gallant nation, long misled to your disadvantage by your high and romantic sentiments of fidelity, honour, and loyalty;
- that events had been unfavourable to you, but that you were not enslaved through any anti-freedom or servile disposition;
- that in your most devoted submission you were actuated by a principle of public spirit, and that it was your country you worshipped in the person of your king?

If you had made people understand that in the delusion of this amiable error you had gone further than your wise ancestors, that you were resolved to resume your ancient privileges while preserving the spirit of your ancient and your recent loyalty and honour; or if, unsure of yourselves and not clearly seeing the almost obliterated constitution of your ancestors, you had looked to your neighbours in England who had kept alive the ancient principles and models of the old common law of Europe, improved and adapted to its present state; either way, by *following* wise examples you would have *given* new examples of wisdom to the world. You would have

- made the cause of liberty venerable in the eyes of every worthy mind in every nation;
- shamed despotism from the earth by showing that freedom is not only reconcilable with law but helpful to law;
- had an unoppressive but productive revenue;
- had a flourishing commerce to feed it;
- had a free constitution, a potent monarchy, a

disciplined army, a reformed and venerated clergy, a friendlier but spirited nobility to lead your virtue, not to oppress it;

- had a liberal order [see Glossary] of commons to emulate and to recruit that nobility;
- had a protected, satisfied, hard-working and obedient people, taught to seek and to recognise the happiness that is to be found by virtue in all conditions.

I'm talking about the virtue that involves the true moral equality of mankind, and not that monstrous fiction which—by giving false ideas and vain expectations to men destined to travel in the obscure path of working life—serves only to intensify and embitter the real inequality that it never can remove and that the order of civil life establishes as much for the benefit of •those it must leave in a humble state as •those it raises to a condition more splendid but not more happy. You had a smooth and **easy** career of happiness and glory laid open to you, beyond anything in the history of the world; but **difficulty** is good for man, as your example shows.

The harm the French revolution has done

Compute your gains: see what is achieved by those extravagant and presumptuous theories that have taught your leaders to despise •all their predecessors, •all their contemporaries, and even •themselves until the moment when they became truly despicable! By following those false lights, France has bought undisguised calamities at a higher price than any nation has purchased the most unequivocal blessings! France has bought poverty by crime! France hasn't sacrificed her virtue to her interests, but abandoned her interests so that she might prostitute her virtue. All other nations have begun the structure of a new government or the reform of an old one by establishing

originally, or by enforcing with greater exactness, some rites of religion. All other people have laid the foundations of civil freedom in stricter manners and a system of a more austere and vigorous morality. France, when she let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the license of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners and of an insolent irreligion in opinions and practice, and has extended through all levels of society—as though distributing some privilege or laying open some previously restricted benefit—all the corruptions that have usually been the disease of wealth and power. This is one of the new principles of *equality* in France!

France, through the treachery of her leaders, has. . . given support to the dark, suspicious maxims of tyrannical distrust, and taught kings to tremble at what will from now on be called the ‘delusive plausibilities’ of moral politicians. Sovereigns will regard those who advise them to place unlimited confidence in their people as subverters of their thrones, as traitors who aim at their destruction by leading their easy good-nature to allow combinations of bold and faithless men to have a share in their power. This alone is an irreparable calamity to you and to mankind. Remember that your parliament of Paris told your king that in calling the states together he had nothing to fear but the extravagant excess of their zeal in providing for the *support* of the throne. It is right that these men should hide their heads. It is right that they should bear their part in the ruin that their counsel has brought on their sovereign and their country. Such soothing declarations tend to lull authority to sleep; to encourage it to engage rashly in perilous adventures of untried policy; to neglect the provisions, preparations, and precautions which distinguish benevolence from idiocy and without which no man can answer for the salutary effect of any abstract plan of government or of freedom. For lack of these they have seen the medicine of the state go bad

and become its poison. They have seen the French rebel against a mild and lawful monarch with more fury, outrage, and insult than ever any people has been known to rise against the most illegal usurper or the most bloody tyrant. Their resistance was made to concession, their revolt was from protection, their blow was aimed at a hand holding out graces, favours, and immunities.

This was unnatural. What followed is not. They have found their punishment in their success:

- laws overturned;
- tribunals subverted;
- industry without vigour;
- commerce expiring;
- taxes unpaid, yet the people impoverished;
- a church pillaged, and a state not relieved;
- civil and military anarchy made the constitution of the kingdom;
- everything human and divine sacrificed to the idol of public credit, with national bankruptcy as the consequence;

and, to crown everything, the paper securities of new, precarious, tottering power—the discredited paper securities of impoverished fraud and beggared robbery—held out as a *currency* for the support of an empire in place of the two great recognised species that represent the lasting, conventional credit of mankind. These two—silver and gold—disappeared and hid themselves in the earth from which they came, when the principle of *ownership* (whose creatures and representatives they are) was systematically subverted.

Were all these dreadful things necessary? Were they the inevitable results of the desperate struggle of determined patriots, compelled to wade through blood and tumult to the quiet shore of a quiet and prosperous liberty? No! nothing

like it. The fresh ruins of France, which shock our feelings wherever we can turn our eyes, are not the devastation of civil war; they are the sad but instructive monuments of rash and ignorant thinking in a time of profound peace. They are the display of authority that is rash and presumptuous because unresisted and irresistible. The persons who have thus squandered the precious treasure of their crimes, the persons who have made this extravagant and wild waste of public evils (the last stake reserved for the ultimate ransom of the state), have in their progress met with little or no opposition. Their whole march was more like a triumphal procession than the progress of a war. Their road-makers have gone ahead of them and demolished and laid everything level at their feet. Not one drop of their own blood have they shed in the cause of the country they have ruined. They have made no sacrifices of greater consequence than their shoebuckles while they were imprisoning their king, murdering their fellow citizens, and bathing in tears and plunging in poverty and distress thousands of worthy men and worthy families. Their cruelty has not even been the morally low result of *fear*. It has been the effect of their sense of perfect *safety* in authorising treasons, robberies, rapes, assassinations, slaughters, and burnings throughout their harassed land. But the cause of it all was plain from the beginning.

This unforced choice, this foolish *choice* of evil, would seem perfectly inexplicable if we didn't consider the composition of the National Assembly. I don't mean its formal constitution—which as it now stands is bad enough—but the materials of which it is mostly composed, this being ten thousand times more important than all the formalities in the world. If we knew nothing of this assembly but its title and function, no colours could paint to the imagination anything more venerable. In *that* light the mind of an

inquirer, subdued by such an awe-inspiring image as that of *the virtue and wisdom of a whole people brought together into a focus*, would pause and hesitate to condemn even the things that looked worst. Instead of being blameworthy they would appear only to be mysterious. But no name, no power, no function, no artificial institution whatsoever can turn the men who compose any system of authority into something other than what they have been made by God, nature, education, and their habits of life. The people don't have the power to give their representatives any capacities but these. Virtue and wisdom may be the objects of the people's choice, but their choice doesn't confer either virtue or wisdom on those upon whom they lay their ordaining hands. They do not have the engagement of nature or the promise of revelation for any such powers.

The Third Estate: common people

After I had read over the list of the persons and descriptions [see Glossary] elected into the Third Estate [see Glossary], nothing that they afterwards did could astonish me. I did indeed see among them some of known rank, and some of shining talents; but not one with any •practical experience in the state. The best were only men of •theory. But whatever the distinguished few may have been, it is the substance and mass of the body that constitutes its character and must finally determine its direction. In all bodies, those who wish to lead must also to a considerable extent follow. They must make their proposals conform to the taste, talent, and disposition of those whom they wish to lead; so if an assembly is viciously or feebly composed in a very great part of it, the men of talent disseminated through it will become merely the expert instruments of absurd projects! They might be saved from this by having a supreme degree of virtue, but

this would be a level of virtue that very rarely appears in the world, and for that reason cannot enter into calculation [the last eight words are Burke's]. Or if the men of talent are actuated by sinister ambition and a lust for meretricious [see Glossary] glory, then the feeble part of the assembly, to whom at first they conform, becomes in its turn the dupe and instrument of *their* designs. In this political traffic, the leaders will be obliged to bow to the ignorance of their followers, and the followers to become subservient to the worst designs of their leaders.

If the leaders in any public assembly are to be in the least reasonable in the proposals they make, they need to respect—to some extent perhaps to *fear*—those whom they lead. To be led other than blindly, the followers must be qualified if not to act then at least to judge; and as judges they must have natural weight and authority. The only way to secure steady and moderate conduct in such assemblies is for the body of them to be made up of people who are respect-worthy in their condition in life or permanent property, their education, and their having habits of the sort that enlarge and liberalise the understanding.

In the calling of the States-General [see Glossary] of France, the first thing that struck me was a great departure from the old way of doing things. I found the representation for the Third Estate to be composed of six hundred persons, as many as the other two orders [see Glossary] put together. If the orders were to act separately, the number wouldn't matter much except for the expense. But when it became apparent that the three orders were to be melted down into one, the policy and necessary effect of this numerous representation became obvious. A very small desertion from either of the other two orders must throw the power of both into the hands of the third. In fact, the whole power of the state was soon resolved into that body, ·the Third Estate·, so that its

composition became infinitely more important.

Judge of my surprise, Sir, when I found that a great proportion of the assembly (a majority, I believe, of the members who attended) was composed of practising lawyers—

- not of distinguished magistrates who had given pledges to their country of their science, prudence, and integrity;
- not of leading advocates, the glory of the bar;
- not of renowned professors in universities

—but mostly of the inferior, unlearned, **mechanical**, merely instrumental members of the legal profession (how could it be otherwise in such a large number?). There were distinguished exceptions, but mostly they were

- obscure provincial advocates,
- stewards of petty local jurisdictions,
- country attorneys,
- notaries, and
- the whole train of the servants of municipal litigation, the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation.

From the moment I read the list I saw distinctly all that was to follow, saw it very nearly as it has in fact happened.

The esteem that the members of any profession have for themselves is based on the esteem that outsiders have for that profession. Whatever the personal merits of many individual lawyers might have been (and in many they were undoubtedly very considerable), in that military kingdom no part of the profession had been much regarded except the highest of all, who often combined their professional roles with great family splendour and were invested with great power and authority. These certainly were highly respected, even with a considerable level of awe. Those in the next level down were not much esteemed; and the **mechanical** ·part of the legal profession· was at a very low level of repute.

When supreme authority is given to a body composed in that way, it is being placed in the hands of men •who haven't been taught habitually to respect themselves, •who don't have reputations for good character that they risk losing, and •who can't be expected to bear with moderation or exercise with discretion a power that they themselves (more than any others) must be surprised to find in their hands. Who could soothe himself with the hopeful thought that these men, suddenly and (as it were) magically snatched from the humblest rank of subordination, would not be intoxicated by their unexpected greatness? Who could conceive that men who are habitually meddling, daring, subtle, active, with litigious dispositions and unquiet minds would easily fall back into their old condition of obscure contention and laborious, low, unprofitable trickery? Who could doubt that they would—at any expense to the state (of which they understood nothing)—pursue their private interests (which they understand all too well)? This wasn't an outcome depending on chance or contingency: it was inevitable; it was necessary; it was planted in the nature of things. If they didn't have the talents needed to lead, they must at least join in any project that could procure for them a litigious constitution, opening up to them the countless lucrative jobs [see Glossary] that follow all great convulsions and revolutions in the state, and particularly in all great and violent permutations of property. Was it to be expected that they would attend to the stability of property, these people whose existence had always depended on whatever made property questionable, ambiguous, and insecure? Their objectives would be broadened with their rise •to power•, but their disposition and habits, and their way of accomplishing their designs, must remain the same.

Well! but these men were to be tempered and restrained by the views of other descriptions [see Glossary] with more sober and more enlarged understandings. Were they then to

be awed by the super-eminent authority and awe-inspiring dignity of •a handful of country clowns who have seats in that assembly, some of whom are said not to be able to read and write, and by traders who, though somewhat more instructed and more conspicuous in the order of society, had never known anything beyond their counting house? No! Both these descriptions were formed to be overborne and swayed by the intrigues and artifices of lawyers rather than to become their counterpoise. . . . To the faculty of law was joined a considerable proportion of the faculty of medicine. In France this faculty wasn't esteemed as it should have been, any more than the law was; so its practitioners must have the qualities of men not habituated to a sense of dignity. But supposing they had ranked as they ought to do, and as in England they do actually, •that would deal with the 'dignity' point, but still wouldn't fit them for parliament•: the sides of sickbeds are not the academies for forming statesmen and legislators. Then came the dealers in stocks and funds, who must be eager at any cost to change their notional paper wealth for the more solid substance of *land*. All these were joined by men of other descriptions, men from whom as little knowledge of (or attention to) the interests of a great state was to be expected, and as little regard to the stability of any institution; men formed to be instruments, not controls. Such in general was the composition of the Third Estate in the National Assembly, in which one could hardly see the slightest traces of what we call the natural landed interest of the country.

The British House of Commons

We know that the British House of Commons, though it doesn't shut its doors to any merit in any class, is—by the sure operation of adequate causes—filled with every-

thing illustrious in rank, in descent, in hereditary and acquired affluence, in cultivated talents, in military, civil, naval, and political distinction that the country can provide. But suppose (though it's almost impossible to suppose) that the House of Commons were composed in the same way as the Third Estate in France, would this dominion of trickery be borne with patience or even thought about without horror? God forbid I should insinuate anything derogatory to the lawyers, that profession that is another priesthood, administering the rights of sacred justice. But while I revere lawyers in the functions that belong to them, and would do all I could prevent their exclusion from any role, I cannot flatter them by giving the lie to nature. They are good and useful as members of an assembly; they must be harmful if they preponderate so as virtually to become the whole. The very qualities that make them excellent in their professional functions may strike others as far from a qualification. It can't escape notice that when men are too much confined to professional and faculty habits. . . ., they are disabled rather than qualified for whatever depends on the knowledge of mankind, on experience in mixed affairs, on a comprehensive, connected view of the various, complicated, external and internal interests that go to the formation of that multifarious thing called a state.

If the House of Commons were to have a wholly professional and faculty composition, what is its power when •circumscribed and shut in by the immovable barriers of laws, usages, positive rules of doctrine and practice, •counterpoised by the House of Lords, and at every moment •at the discretion of the crown to continue, prorogue, or dissolve it? The direct and indirect power of the House of Commons is indeed great; and long may it be able to preserve fully its greatness and the spirit belonging to true greatness; and it will do so as long as it can keep the breakers of law

in India from becoming the makers of law for England [look up 'Warren Hastings' in Wikipedia]. Yet the power of the House of Commons at its greatest is as a drop of water in the ocean compared to the power residing in a settled majority of your National Assembly. Since the destruction of the orders—i.e. the coalescing of the separate assemblies of the three Estates—the National Assembly has no fundamental law, no strict convention, no respected usage to restrain it. Instead of finding themselves obliged to make their designs conform to a fixed constitution they have the power to make a constitution that conforms to their designs. Nothing in heaven or on earth can serve as a control on them. What ought to be the heads, hearts and dispositions that are qualified—or that *dare*—not only to make laws under a fixed constitution but in one operations to make a totally new constitution for a great kingdom and for every part of it from the monarch on the throne to the vestry of a parish? But 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. In such a state of unlimited power for undefinable purposes, the evil of a moral and almost physical unfittingness of the man to the function must be the greatest we can conceive to happen in the management of human affairs.

The First Estate: the clergy

Having considered the composition of the Third Estate in its original form, I looked at the representatives of the clergy. The principles of their election seemed to show just as little regard for the general security of property or for the aptitude of the deputies for public purposes. That election was so constructed that it sent a very large proportion of mere country curates to the great and arduous work of new-modeling a state: men who. . . .knew nothing of the world beyond the bounds of an obscure village; who, immersed in

hopeless poverty, could regard all *property*—whether secular or ecclesiastical—with no eye but that of envy; among whom must be many who, for the smallest hope of the smallest dividend in plunder, would readily join in any assaults on a body of wealth that they could hardly expect to have any share in except through a general scramble. Instead of balancing the power of the active tricksters in the other assembly, these curates are bound to become the active collaborators or at best the passive instruments of those they had habitually been guided by in their petty village concerns. And they could hardly be the most *conscientious* of their kind, these village priests who, presuming on their incompetent understanding, could intrigue to get a trust that led them from their natural relation to their flocks and their natural spheres of action to undertake the regeneration of kingdoms! When their great weight was added to the force of the body of trickery in the Third Estate, that completed a momentum of ignorance, rashness, presumption, and lust for plunder that nothing has been able to resist.

The Second Estate: the nobility

To observing men it must have seemed from the beginning that the majority of the Third Estate, in conjunction with a deputation from the clergy such as I have described, while it pursued the destruction of •the nobility would inevitably become subservient to the worst designs of individuals in •that class. In the spoil and humiliation of their own order, these individuals would possess a secure fund for the pay of their new followers. Squandering away the things that made the happiness of their fellows •in the nobility• would to them be no sacrifice at all. Turbulent, discontented men of high rank, in proportion as they are puffed up with personal pride and arrogance, generally despise their own order. One of

the first symptoms they reveal of a selfish and mischievous ambition is a profligate disregard of the dignity they share with others. To . . . love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle [see Glossary] (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the chain by which we move toward a love to our country and to mankind. The interests of that portion of social arrangement (•the ‘little platoon’ we belong to•) are a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and just as only bad men would justify it in abuse, only traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage.

At the time of our civil troubles in England (•the war between Cromwell’s forces and King Charles I’s•) there were several persons like the Earl of Holland who had brought hatred on the throne by the extravagance of its gifts to them or their families, and then joined in the rebellions arising from the discontents of which they were themselves the cause; men who helped to subvert the throne to which some of them owed their existence and others owed all the power that they used to ruin their benefactor. (I don’t know whether you have any such in your assembly in France.) If any limits are set to the rapacious demands of such people, or if others are permitted share in things *they* want the whole of, revenge and envy soon fill up the aching craving void that is left in their greed. Confused by the complication of sick passions, their reason is disturbed; their views become vast and perplexed; to others inexplicable, to themselves uncertain. In any fixed order of things they find limits to their unprincipled ambition; in the fog and haze of confusion everything is enlarged and appears to them to be without any limit.

When men of rank sacrifice all ideas of dignity to an ambition with no clear objective, and work with low instruments for low ends, the whole composition becomes low and base.

Does not something like this now appear in France? Doesn't it produce something ignoble and inglorious—a kind of meanness in all the prevalent policy, a tendency in everything that is done to lower, along with individuals, all the dignity and importance of the state? Other revolutions have been conducted by persons who, while they tried to make changes in the commonwealth, sanctified their ambition by advancing the dignity of the people whose peace they were disturbing. They took the long view. They aimed at the rule of their country, not at its destruction. They were men of great civil and great military talents—the terror of their age but also its ornament. . . . The compliment made to one of the great bad men of the old kind (Cromwell) by his kinsman, a favourite poet of that time, shows what it was that he proposed and indeed to a great degree accomplished in the success of his ambition:

Still as you rise, the state exalted too,
 Finds no distemper while 'tis changed by you;
 Changed like the world's great scene, when with-
 out noise
 The rising sun night's vulgar lights destroys.

These disturbers were less like men usurping power than like men asserting their natural place in society. Their rise was to illuminate and beautify the world. Their conquest over their competitors was by outshining them. The hand that struck the country like a destroying angel passed on to it the force and energy under which it suffered. I do not say (God forbid), I do *not* say that the virtues of such men outweighed their crimes, but they were some corrective to the effects of their crimes. Such was, as I said, our Cromwell. Such were your whole race of Guises, Condés, and Colignis. Such the Richelieus, who in quieter times

acted in the spirit of a civil war. Such—as better men and in a less dubious cause—were your Henry IV and your Sully, though nursed in civil confusions and not wholly untainted by them. It is a thing to be wondered at to see how very soon France, when she had a moment to catch her breath, recovered and emerged from the longest and most dreadful civil war that ever was known in any nation [this presumably refers to the French wars of religion, 1562–98]. Why? Because among all their massacres they hadn't *slain the mind* in their country. A conscious dignity, a noble pride, a generous sense of glory and emulation [= 'trying to do better'] was not extinguished. On the contrary, it was kindled and inflamed. And the organs of the state, however shattered, still existed. All the prizes of honour and virtue, all the rewards, all the distinctions remained. But your present confusion, like a palsy [= something like 'an epileptic fit'], has attacked the fountain of life itself. Every French person who is in a situation to be actuated by a principle of honour is disgraced and degraded, and can't look at life in anything but mortified and humiliated indignation. But this generation will quickly pass away. The next generation of the 'nobility' will resemble the artificers and clowns, and the money-jobbers and Jewish usurers, who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters.

The importance of property

Believe me, Sir, those who attempt to *level* never *equalise*. In all societies consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some description must be uppermost. So the levellers are only changing and perverting the natural order of things; they are loading the edifice of society by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground. The association of tailors and carpenters that the

republic (of Paris, for instance) is composed of cannot be equal to the situation into which you try to force them by the worst of usurpations, a usurpation on the prerogatives of nature.

The Chancellor of France, at the opening of the states, said in a tone of oratorical flourish that all occupations were honourable. If he meant only that no honest employment is disgraceful, he wouldn't have gone beyond the truth. But in asserting that something is 'honourable' we imply some distinction in its favour. The occupation of a hairdresser or of a working candle-maker can't be a matter of *honour* to anyone—not to mention a number of other more servile employments. Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression if the likes of them, either individually or collectively, are permitted to rule. In this you think you are combating *prejudice*, but actually you are at war with *nature*. . . .

I don't wish to confine power, authority, and distinction to blood and names and titles. There is no qualification for government but actual or presumed virtue and wisdom. Wherever they are actually found, in whatever state, condition, profession, or trade, they have the passport of Heaven to human position and honour. Woe to the country that would madly and impiously reject the service of the talents and virtues—civil, military, or religious—that are given to grace and service, and condemn to obscurity everything formed to spread lustre and glory around a state. Woe also to the country that goes to the opposite extreme and considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid, mercenary occupation as a preferable title to command. Everything ought to be open, but not equally, to every man. No rotation or appointment by lot or system of taking turns can be generally good in a government that has a wide range of things to do, because they have no tendency—direct

or indirect—to select the man with a view to the duty or adjust the duty to fit the man. I don't hesitate to say that the road to eminence and power ought not to be made too easy, or too much a matter of course. If rare merit is the rarest of all rare things, it ought to pass through some sort of testing period. The temple of honour ought to be seated on a high hill. If it is to be opened through virtue, let it be remembered that virtue is never tested except by some difficulty and some struggle.

An appropriate and adequate representation of a state must represent its ability as well as its property. But ability is a vigorous and active principle [see Glossary], whereas property is sluggish, inert, and timid; so property never can be safe from the invasion of ability unless it is—out of all proportion—predominant in the representation. And it won't be rightly protected unless it is represented in great masses of accumulation [i.e. unless the parliament includes people who are very wealthy]. The way property is acquired, combined with the way it is conserved, makes it an *essential* characteristic of property that it is not equally distributed. So the great masses that excite envy and tempt robbery must be put out reach of danger. Then they form a natural rampart surrounding and protecting lesser properties of all sizes. That could not be achieved by the same amount of property as the great fortunes have divided among many people. Its defensive power is weakened because it is diffused. In this diffusion each man's portion is less than what he optimistically hopes to obtain by dissipating the accumulations of others, specifically, of those who own very much more. Plundering the few and distributing their wealth among the many would in fact give each of them only an inconceivably small share. But the many are not capable of making this calculation; and those who lead them to robbery never intend this distribution.

The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue, it grafts benevolence even upon avarice. The possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction that goes with hereditary possession, are the natural securities for this transmission. Our House of Lords is formed on this principle. It is wholly composed of hereditary property and hereditary distinction; it is one third of the legislature, and in the last event the sole judge of all property in all its subdivisions. The House of Commons is also, in fact (though not necessarily), always mostly made up of wealthy people. Let those large proprietors be what they will—and they have their chance of being among the best—they are at the very worst the ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth. For though hereditary wealth and the rank that goes with it are too much idolised by creeping sycophants and the blind, abject admirers of power, they are too rashly slighted in the shallow theories of the petulant, presumptuous, short-sighted idiots of philosophy. To give some decent, regulated pre-eminence—some preference (not exclusive appropriation)—to *birth* is not unnatural, or unjust, or bad policy.

Dismembering a country

It is said that 24,000,000 ought to prevail over 200,000. True; if the constitution of a kingdom is a problem of arithmetic! This sort of discourse does well enough with the lamp-post for its second; but to men who reason calmly it is ridiculous. [This refers to the practice of French revolutionary mobs lynching people by hanging them from lamp-posts.] The •will of the many must very often differ from their •interests, and when they make an evil choice the difference will be

great. A government of 500 country attorneys and obscure curates is not good for 24,000,000 men, even if it were chosen by 48,000,000 voters, nor is it the better for being guided by a dozen persons of quality—of wealth and high birth—who have betrayed their trust in order to obtain that power. At present, you seem in everything to have strayed out of the high road of nature. The property of France does not govern it. Property is destroyed and rational liberty has no existence. All you have got for the present is paper money and a stock-jobbing constitution [i.e. one designed to support buying and selling for a quick profit]; and as to the future, do you seriously think that the territory of France, on the republican system of eighty-three independent municipalities (to say nothing of the parts that compose them), can ever be governed as one body or can ever be set in motion by the impulse of one mind? When the National Assembly has completed its work, it will have accomplished its ruin. These commonwealths will not for long put up with being subjected to the republic of Paris. They won't put up with this body's monopolising the captivity of the king and the dominion over the assembly calling itself 'national'. Each will keep to itself a portion of the spoils of the church, and it won't allow those spoils, or the more just fruits of their industry, or the natural produce of their soil, to be sent to swell the insolence or pamper the luxury of the mechanics of Paris. They won't see in this any of the promised *equality* that tempted them to throw off their allegiance to their sovereign as well as the ancient constitution of their country. There can be no capital city in a constitution such as the revolutionaries have recently made. They have forgotten that when they formed democratic governments they virtually dismembered their country. The person whom they persevere in calling 'king' doesn't have a hundredth part of the power needed to hold together this collection of republics. The republic of Paris

will indeed try •to complete the army's debauchery [here = the soldiers' refusal to obey their officers] and •to perpetuate the assembly illegally, without resort to its constituents, as the means of continuing its despotism. It will make efforts, by becoming the heart of a financial system based on paper money, to draw everything to itself; but in vain. All this policy will eventually appear as feeble as it is now violent.

If this is your actual situation, compared to the one you were called to by the voice of God and man (so to speak), I can't find it in my heart to congratulate you on the choice you have made or the success that your endeavours have had. Nor can I recommend to any other nation a conduct grounded on such principles and productive of such effects. I must leave that to those who can see further into your affairs than I can, and who best know how far your actions are favourable to their designs. The gentlemen of the Revolution Society who were so early in their congratulations appear to be convinced that there is some scheme of politics relating to *this* country in which your proceedings may somehow be useful. Your Dr Price seems to have theorised himself into no small degree of fervour on this subject, and addresses his audience in the following remarkable words:

'I cannot conclude without recalling particularly to your recollection a consideration that I have more than once alluded to, and that probably your thoughts have been all along anticipating; a consideration with which my mind is impressed more than I can express. I mean the consideration of the favourableness of the present times to all exertions in the cause of liberty.'

Clearly this political preacher's mind was at the time pregnant with some extraordinary design; and it is very probable that the thoughts of his audience, who understood him better than I do, did 'all along' run ahead of him in his reflection and in the whole sequence of inferences to which it led.

Before reading that sermon I really thought I lived in a free country; and it was an error that I cherished because it gave me a greater liking for the country I lived in. I was, indeed, aware that a jealous, ever-waking vigilance to guard the treasure of our liberty, not only from invasion but also from decay and corruption, was our best wisdom and our first duty. But I considered that treasure as a possession to be kept safe rather than as a prize to be contended for. I didn't see how the present time came to be so very favourable to 'all exertions in the cause of freedom'. The present time differs from any other only in what is happening in France. If *that* nation's example is to have an influence on *this*, I can easily understand why some of their doings—the ones that have an unpleasant aspect and are not quite reconcilable to humanity, generosity, good faith, and justice—are palliated with so much milky good-nature toward the actors, and borne with so much heroic fortitude toward the sufferers. It is certainly not prudent to discredit the authority of an example we mean to follow. But allowing this, we are led to a very natural question: What *is* that cause of liberty, and what *are* those exertions in its favour to which the example of France is so singularly favourable? Is our monarchy to be annihilated, along with all the laws, all the tribunals, and all the ancient corporations of the kingdom? Is every landmark of the country to be done away in favour of a geometrical and arithmetical constitution? Is the House of Lords to be voted useless? Is episcopacy to be abolished? Are the church lands to be sold to Jews and real-estate merchants or used to bribe newly-invented municipal republics into participating in the sacrilege? Are all the taxes to be voted grievances, and the revenue reduced to a patriotic contribution or patriotic presents? Are silver shoe-buckles to be substituted in the place of the land tax and the malt tax for the support of the naval strength of this kingdom? Are all orders, ranks, and

distinctions to be run together so that out of universal anarchy, joined to national bankruptcy, three or four thousand democracies should be formed into eighty-three, and that they may all be drawn together by some unknown attractive power into one?

For this great end, is the army to be seduced from its discipline and its fidelity, first by every kind of debauchery and then by the terrible precedent of a donative in the increase of pay? Are the curates to be seduced from their bishops by holding out to them the delusive hope of a pension out of the spoils of their own order? Are the citizens of London to be drawn from their allegiance by feeding them at the expense of their fellow subjects? Is compulsory paper money to be substituted for the legal coin of this kingdom? Is what remains of the plundered stock of public revenue to be used in the wild project of maintaining two armies to watch over and to fight with each other? If these are the ends and means of the Revolution Society, I admit that. . . France may provide them with relevant precedents.

How the Revolution Society views the British constitution

I see that your example is held out to shame us. I know that we British are supposed to be a dull, sluggish race, made passive by finding our situation tolerable, and prevented by our semi-freedom from ever attaining freedom in its full perfection. Your leaders in France began by claiming to admire, almost to adore, the British constitution; but as they advanced they came to look on it with lordly contempt. The friends of your National Assembly among us have just as low an opinion of what used to be thought the glory of their country. The Revolution Society has discovered that the English nation is not free. They are convinced

•that the inequality in our representation is a ‘defect in our constitution so gross and palpable as to make it excellent chiefly in form and theory and not in fact’. •That a representation in a kingdom’s legislature is the basis not only of all constitutional liberty in it but of ‘all legitimate government’; •that without it a government is ‘nothing but a usurpation’; •that ‘when the representation is partial, the kingdom has liberty only partially; and if it is extremely partial, it gives only a semblance of representation; and if it is corruptly chosen as well as extremely partial, it becomes a nuisance’ [= ‘becomes positively noxious’]. Dr Price regards this inadequacy of representation as our ‘fundamental grievance’; and. . . he fears that ‘nothing will be done towards gaining for us this essential blessing until some great abuse of power again provokes our resentment, or some great calamity again alarms our fears, or perhaps till the acquisition of a pure and equal representation by other countries, while we are mocked with the shadow of it, kindles our shame.’ To this adds a footnote: ‘A representation chosen chiefly by the treasury and a few thousands of the dregs of the people who are generally paid for their votes’.

You will smile at the *consistency* of those democrats who when they are not on their guard treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt, while claiming to make them the depositories of all power. It would require a long discourse to point out to you all the fallacies that lurk in the generality and ambiguity of the phrase ‘inadequate representation’. I shall only say here, in justice to the old-fashioned constitution under which we have long prospered, that our representation has been found perfectly adequate for all the purposes for which a representation of the people can be desired or devised. I defy the enemies of our constitution to show the contrary. To detail the ways in which it is found to promote its ends so well I would have

to write a book on our practical constitution. All that I'll do here is to state the doctrine of the Revolutionists, so that you and others may see what these gentlemen think about the constitution of their country, and why they seem to think they would feel much better if there were some great abuse of power or some great calamity, because that would provide a chance for the blessing of a constitution according to their ideas; you'll see why they are so much enamoured of *your* 'fair and equal' representation, which might bring the same benefits in Britain if we adopted it. You'll see they consider our House of Commons as only 'a semblance', 'a form', 'a theory', 'a shadow', 'a mockery', perhaps 'a nuisance'.

These gentlemen pride themselves on being systematic, and not without reason. So they must look on this gross and palpable defect of representation, this 'fundamental grievance', as not only being vicious in itself but also making our whole government absolutely illegitimate—no better than a downright usurpation. Another revolution to get rid of this illegitimate and usurped government would of course be perfectly justifiable, if not absolutely necessary. Indeed, their principle if taken seriously goes much further than merely altering the election of the House of Commons; if popular representation or choice is necessary for the legitimacy of all government then the House of Lords is at one stroke bastardised. . . . That House is not a representative of the people at all, even in 'semblance or in form'. And the situation of the crown is altogether as bad. In vain the crown may try to screen itself against these gentlemen by the authority of the establishment made through the Revolution of 1688. . . . because that was made by a House of Lords representing no-one but themselves, and by a House of Commons exactly like the present one—i.e. by a mere 'shadow and mockery' of representation.

They must destroy *something*, or they'll seem to themselves to exist for no purpose. One set favours destroying the civil power through the ecclesiastical; another wants to demolish the ecclesiastical through the civil. They're aware that this double ruin of church and state might bring the worst consequences to the public, but they are so heated with their theories that they indicate—giving more than *hints* of this—that this ruin, with all the mischiefs that must lead to it and come with it, would not be unacceptable to them or very far remote from their wishes. A man among them of great authority and certainly of great talents, speaking of a supposed alliance between church and state, says, 'perhaps we must wait for the fall of the civil powers before this most unnatural alliance be broken. Calamitous that time will no doubt be. But what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation if it brings such a desirable effect?' You see with what a steady eye these gentlemen are prepared to view the greatest calamities that can befall their country!

'The rights of men'

So it's no wonder. . . .that they look abroad with eager and passionate enthusiasm. While they're in the grip of these notions it is useless to talk to them of •the practice of their ancestors, •the fundamental laws of their country, •the fixed form of a constitution whose merits are confirmed by the solid test of long experience and an increasing public strength and national prosperity. They despise experience as the wisdom of unlettered men; and as for the rest, they have built and placed underground a mine that will blow up in one grand explosion all examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters, and acts of parliament. They have 'the rights of men'. Against these there can be no prescription [see Glossary],

against these no agreement is binding; these admit of no taming and no compromise; anything withheld from their full demand is mere fraud and injustice. Against these 'rights of men' of theirs let no government look for security in the length of its continuance, or in the justice and mildness of its administration. The objections of these theorists are as valid against an old and beneficent government (if its forms don't square with their theories) as against the most violent tyranny or the latest usurpation. They are always at issue with governments, not on a question of abuse but on a question of competency and a question of title. I have nothing to say to the clumsy subtlety of their political metaphysics. Let that be their pastime in the schools. . . . But let them not break prison to burst like a Levanter [a strong easterly wind in the Mediterranean] to sweep the earth with their hurricane and to stir up the fountains of the great deep to overwhelm us.

I am far from denying in theory the real rights of men, any more than I would want to withhold them in practice if I had the power to decide. In denying their false claims of right, I don't mean to injure those that are real and would be totally destroyed by their supposed rights. [In that sentence, 'their' (twice) refers to 'these gentlemen', the members of the Revolution Society.] If civil society is made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right. It is an institution of beneficence; and *law* itself is only *beneficence acting by a rule*. Men have a right to live by that rule; they have a right to do justice, as between their fellows, whether their fellows have public functions or are in ordinary occupations. They have a right to the fruits of their industry and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents, to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring, to instruction in life, and to consolation in death. Whatever each man can separately do without trespassing on others

he has a right to do for himself; and he has a right to a fair portion of all that society—with all its combinations of skill and force—can do in his favour. In this partnership all men have equal rights, but not to equal things. He that has only five shillings in the partnership has as good a right to it as he that has five hundred pounds in it has to his larger proportion. But he doesn't have a right to an equal dividend in the product of the partnership; and as for the share of power, authority, and direction that each individual ought to have in the management of the *state*, I deny that that is among the direct original rights of man in civil society; for I'm talking about the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention.

If civil society is the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law. That convention must limit and modify all the constitutional details that are formed under it. Every sort of legislative, judicial, or executive power is created by it. They can have no existence in any other state of things; and how can any man claim under the conventions of civil society rights that don't so much as suppose the existence of civil society—rights that are flatly inconsistent with it? One of the first pushes towards civil society, becoming one of its fundamental rules, is that *no man should be judge in his own cause*. By this rule each person has immediately given up the first fundamental right of pre-convention man, namely to judge for himself and to assert his own cause. He abdicates all right to be his own governor. To a large extent he abandons the right of self-defence, the first law of nature. Men can't enjoy the rights of an uncivil state and of a civil state together. To obtain justice a man gives up his right of determining *what* is just in the matters that are the most essential to him. To secure some liberty he puts the whole of his liberty in trust.

The empirical science of government

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which can and do exist in total independence of government and in that context exist in much greater clearness and in much more abstract perfection; but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything men want everything. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom. Among these wants is to be reckoned the want—needed for civil society—of a sufficient restraint on their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be held down but also that, even in the mass as well as in individuals, men's inclinations should often be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power other than themselves, a power that exercises its function without itself being subject to the will and passions that it is supposed to rein in and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances and admit of countless modifications, they can't be settled through any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them on that basis.

The moment you take anything from the full rights of men—the right of each to govern himself, and not allow any artificial, positive [see Glossary] limitation on those rights—from that moment the whole organisation of government depends on *convenience*. That is what makes the constitution of a state and the proper distribution of its powers a matter involving the most delicate and complicated skill. It requires a deep knowledge of human nature and human needs, and of the things that help or obstruct the various ends that

are to be pursued by the mechanism of civil institutions. . . . What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right to food or medicine? The question concerns how to procure and administer them. In that deliberation I shall always advise calling in the aid of the farmer and the physician rather than the professor of metaphysics.

The science of constructing or renovating or reforming a commonwealth is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*. And a short experience cannot instruct us in that practical science, because the real effects of moral causes [i.e. causes that operate through the feelings and attitudes of human beings] are not always immediate; and something that at first is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation, and its excellence may even *arise from* the bad effects it has at the start. The reverse also happens: plausible schemes with pleasing commencements often have shameful and lamentable conclusions. A great part of a state's prosperity or adversity may essentially depend on obscure and almost latent causes that appear at first view to be quite unimportant. The science of government being so practical in itself and intended for such practical purposes, a man should be infinitely cautious about pulling down an edifice that has for ages satisfied the common purposes of society to some tolerable degree, or building it up again without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes. Doing this requires *experience*, and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however intelligent and and observant he may be.

These metaphysical 'rights' entering into common life, like rays of light that pierce into a dense medium, are refracted from their straight line by the laws of nature. Indeed, in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns the primitive rights of men are refracted and reflected in so many ways that it becomes absurd to talk of them as

if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction. The nature of man is intricate; the aims of society are of the greatest possible complexity; so no *simple* disposition or direction of power can be suitable to man's nature or to the quality of his affairs. When I hear *simplicity of structure* aimed at and boasted of in any new political constitution I immediately conclude that the artificers are grossly ignorant of their trade or totally negligent of their duty. The simple governments are fundamentally defective, to say no worse of them. Looking at society from just one point of view, these simple modes of political arrangement are infinitely captivating; each satisfies its single purpose much more perfectly than any more complex arrangement is able to attain all its complex purposes. But it is better that the whole should be achieved imperfectly and not according to any rule than that some parts should be provided for with great exactness while others are totally neglected or even harmed. . . .

The rights these theorists lay claim to are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of middle, incapable of definition, but not impossible to discern. The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between varieties of good, sometimes in compromises between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil. Political reason is a computing principle: adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing true moral denominations—doing this morally and not metaphysically or mathematically.

These theorists of 'rights' almost always sophistically run together the people's right with their power. The body of the community, whenever it can come to act, can meet with no effective resistance; but until power and right are the same, the whole body of them has no right inconsistent with virtue,

the first of all virtues being prudence. Men have no right to what is not reasonable or not for their benefit. . . .

National sickness

[This refers to anniversaries of the 1688 revolution.] The kind of anniversary sermons to which much of what I write refers, if men are not shamed out of their present course in commemorating the fact, will cheat many people out of the principles—and deprive them of the benefits—of the revolution they commemorate. I confess to you, Sir, I never liked this continual talk of 'resistance' and 'revolution', or the practice of making the constitution's extreme medicine its daily bread. It renders the habit of society dangerously valetudinary [i.e. suitable to continuous severe illness]. It is taking periodical doses of mercury sublimate and swallowing down repeated stimulants of cantharides to our love of liberty.

This sickness of habitually taking medicines relaxes and wears out. . . .the mainspring of that spirit that is to be exerted on great occasions. It was in the most passive period of Roman servitude that themes of tyrannicide made the ordinary exercise of boys at school. . . . In the ordinary state of things it produces in a country like ours the worst effects, including effects on the cause of the liberty that it abuses with the dissoluteness of extravagant speculation. Almost all the high-bred *republicans* of my time have soon become the most decided, thorough-paced *courtiers*; they soon left the business of a tedious, moderate, but practical resistance to those of us whom they have, in the pride and intoxication of their theories, slighted as not much better than Tories. Hypocrisy, of course, delights in the most high-flown theories because it costs nothing to make your theory magnificent if you don't intend it to go from theory to practice. But even in cases where levity rather than fraud

was to be suspected in these ranting speculations, the issue has been much the same. These professors, finding that their extreme principles don't apply to cases that call only for a qualified resistance—a civil and legal resistance—in such cases employ no resistance at all. For them it is a war or a revolution, or it is nothing. Finding that their schemes of politics don't fit the state of the world they live in, they often come to think lightly of all public principle, and are ready to abandon for a very trivial interest what they find to be of very trivial value. Some do have more steady and persevering natures, but these are eager politicians out of parliament who have little to tempt them to abandon their favourite projects. They are constantly aiming at some change in the church or state, or both. When that is the case, they are always bad citizens and perfectly unsure connections [= can't be relied on for anything]. Regarding their speculative designs as of infinite value and the actual arrangement of the state as of no importance, they are at best indifferent about it. They see no merit in the good management of public affairs and no fault in the bad. Indeed, they rejoice in the latter, as more propitious to revolution. They see no merit or demerit in any man or action or political principle unless he or it advances or holds back their design for change; so at one time they take up the most violent and stretched prerogative, and at another time the wildest democratic ideas of freedom, passing from one to the other with no regard for cause, person, or party.

In France you are now in the crisis of a revolution and in the transit from one form of government to another; you cannot see that character of men exactly as we see it in this country. With us it is *militant*; with you it is *triumphant*; and you know how it can act when its power measures up to its will. Don't think that I confine these observations to any description of men or to apply them to

all men of any description. I am as incapable of that injustice as I am of keeping on good terms with those who profess principles of extremities and who, in the name of 'religion', teach little except wild and dangerous politics. The worst thing about the politics of revolution is that it tempers and harden the breast so as to prepare it for the desperate strokes that are sometimes used in extreme occasions. But these occasions may never arrive, so the mind needlessly receives a taint; and the moral sentiments suffer considerably when no political purpose is served by the tainting. People of this sort are so taken up with their theories about man's *rights* that they have totally forgotten his *nature*. Without opening any new avenue to the understanding, they have succeeded in blocking those that lead to the heart. They have perverted in themselves and in those who listen to them all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast.

Back to Price

This famous sermon of the Old Jewry breathes nothing but this spirit through all the political part. Plots, massacres, assassinations seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. Cheap, bloodless reformation, and guiltless liberty, are flat and vapid to their taste. There must be •a great change of scene, •a magnificent stage effect, •a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination grown slack with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years' security and the still un-animating repose of public prosperity. The preacher found all these in the French Revolution, which inspires a juvenile warmth through his whole frame [Price was 66 when he wrote the sermon]. His enthusiasm kindles as he advances; and when he arrives at his peroration it is in a full blaze. Then, viewing from the mountain-top of his pulpit the free, moral, happy, flourishing and glorious state of France as in a bird's-eye landscape of a

promised land, he breaks out into the following rapture:

What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to it; I could almost say, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. —I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error. —I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever; and nations panting for liberty that seemed to have lost the idea of it. —I have lived to see thirty million people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice. Their king led in triumph and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.

Before going on, I must remark that Dr Price seems to overvalue the great acquisitions of light that he has obtained and diffused in this age. The last century appears to me to have been quite as much ‘enlightened’. It had, though in a different place, a triumph as memorable as that of Dr Price; and some of the great preachers of that period partook of it as eagerly as he has done in the triumph of France. At the trial of the Rev. Hugh Peters for high treason it was deposed that when King Charles was brought to London for his trial the Apostle of Liberty led the triumph. The witness says: ‘I saw his Majesty in the coach with six horses, and Peters riding before the king, triumphing.’ Dr Price, when he talks as if he had made a discovery, only follows a precedent, for after the start of the king’s trial this precursor, the same Dr Peters, concluding a long prayer at the Royal Chapel at Whitehall, . . . said ‘I have prayed and preached these twenty years; and now I may say with old Simeon “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation”’. Peters did not get what he prayed for, because he didn’t depart as soon as he wished, nor did he depart in

peace [He was executed as a regicide]. He became what I heartily hope none of his followers will be in this country, namely a sacrifice to the triumph that he led as high priest. . . .

After this outburst of the preacher of the Old Jewry, which differs in place and time but agrees perfectly with the spirit and letter of the rapture of 1648, the Revolution Society—

- the fabricators of governments,
- the heroic band of dismissers of monarchs,
- electors of sovereigns, and
- leaders of kings in triumph

—strutting with a proud consciousness of the diffusion of knowledge of which every member had obtained so large a share, hastened to spread generously the knowledge they had thus freely received. For this purpose they adjourned from the church in the Old Jewry to the London Tavern, where the same Dr Price, in whom the fumes of his oracular tripod were not entirely evaporated, moved and carried the resolution or address of congratulation transmitted by Lord Stanhope to the National Assembly of France.

I find a preacher of the gospel •profaning the beautiful and prophetic exclamation commonly called ‘*nunc dimittis*’, made when our Saviour was first presented at the Temple, and •applying it with inhuman and unnatural rapture to what may be the most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle ever exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind. This ‘leading in triumph’ that fills our preacher with such unhallowed transports—a thing that at best is unmanly and irreligious—must shock, I believe, the moral taste of every well-born mind. Several Englishmen were the stupefied and indignant spectators of that triumph. Unless we have been strangely deceived, it was more like •a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga after some of their murders called victories and leading into hovels hung round with scalps their captives, overpowered with

the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves than like •the triumphal pomp of a civilised nation at war—if indeed a civilised nation, or any men who had a sense of generosity, were capable of a personal triumph over the fallen and afflicted.

The conduct of the French National Assembly

This, my dear Sir, was not the triumph of France. I must believe that you as a nation were overwhelmed with shame and horror. I must believe •that the National Assembly find themselves in a state of humiliation because they can't punish the authors of this triumph or those who took part in it, and •that they are in a situation where no inquiry they can make into this can even *seem* to be free and impartial. The assembly's excuse is found in their situation; but if we *approve* what they must *bear*, it is in us the degenerate choice of a corrupt mind.

With a compelled appearance of deliberation, they vote under the dominion of a stern necessity. They meet in the heart of a foreign republic, as it were: they have their residence in a city whose constitution didn't come either from the charter of their king or from their own legislative power. There they are surrounded by an army which wasn't raised by the authority of their crown or by their command—an army which, if they ordered its dissolution, would instantly dissolve them. There they sit, after a gang of assassins had driven away hundreds of their members, while others, who held the same moderate principles •as those who were driven away•, but held on because they had more patience or better hope, are daily exposed to outrageous insults and murderous threats. There a majority (sometimes real, sometimes pretended) that is itself captive compels a captive king to issue as royal edicts, at third hand, the polluted

nonsense of their most licentious and giddy coffeehouses. It is notorious that all their measures are decided before they are debated. It is beyond doubt that under the terror of the bayonet and the lamp-post and the torch to their houses they are obliged to adopt all the crude and desperate measures suggested by clubs composed of a monstrous jumble of people of all conditions, tongues, and nations. Among these are found persons of very low character. And it is not only in these clubs that public measures are deformed into monsters. They undergo a previous distortion in academies, intended as seminaries for these clubs, which are set up in all the places of public resort. In these meetings every counsel is taken for the mark of superior genius in proportion as it is daring and violent and treacherous. Humanity and compassion are ridiculed as the fruits of superstition and ignorance. Tenderness to individuals is considered as treason to the public. Liberty is always to be estimated perfect, as ownership is made insecure. Amidst assassination, massacre, and confiscation—perpetrated or meditated—they are forming plans for the good order of future society. Embracing in their arms the carcasses of base criminals and promoting their relatives on the title of their offences, they force hundreds of virtuous persons to survive by beggary or by crime.

The Assembly, their organ, presents them with the farce of *deliberation*—which is done with as little decency as liberty. They behave like actors before a riotous audience at a fair; they act amidst the tumultuous cries of a mixed mob of ferocious men and of women lost to shame, who. . . direct, control, applaud, explode them, and sometimes mix and take their seats among them, domineering over them with a strange mixture of •servile petulance and •proud, presumptuous authority. . . This assembly, which overthrows kings and kingdoms, doesn't even *look like* a grave legislative body. . . Like the evil principle [see Glossary], they have

a power to subvert and destroy, but none to construct anything except machines to create further subversion and destruction.

The situation of the French king

Who is it that admires national representative assemblies and from the heart is attached to them and doesn't turn with horror and disgust from such a profane burlesque, and abominable perversion of that sacred institute? Lovers of monarchy, lovers of republics must alike abhor it. The members of your assembly must themselves groan under the tyranny of which they have all the shame, none of the control, and little of the profit. I am sure that many—even a majority— of the members of that body must feel as I do, despite the applause of the Revolution Society. Miserable king! miserable assembly! How scandalised that assembly must (silently) be by those of their members who could call a day that seemed to blot the sun out of heaven '*un beau jour!*' How indignant they must (inwardly) be at hearing others who thought fit to declare to them 'that the vessel of the state would fly forward in her course toward regeneration with more speed than ever', from the stiff gale of treason and murder that preceded our preacher's triumph! What must they have felt when (with outward patience and inward indignation) they heard it said, regarding the slaughter of innocent gentlemen in their houses, that 'the blood spilled was not the most pure!' When they were besieged by complaints of disorders that shook their country to its foundations, what must they have felt at being compelled coolly to tell the complainants that they were under the protection of the law, and that they would address the king (the captive king) to cause the laws to be enforced for their protection; doing this when the enslaved ministers of that captive king had already

formally notified them that there was no law or authority or power left to protect? What must they have felt at being obliged, as a congratulation on the present new year, to request their captive king to forget the stormy period of the last year because of the great good he was likely to produce for his people? . . .

This address was made with much good nature and affection, to be sure. But the revolutions in France include a considerable revolution in their ideas of politeness. In England we are said to learn manners at second-hand from your side of the water, and that we dress our behaviour in the ornaments of France. If so, we are still in the old fashion and haven't adopted the new Parisian mode of good breeding sufficiently to think it a refined and delicate compliment (whether in condolence or congratulation) to tell the most humiliated creature that crawls on the earth that great public benefits are derived from the murder of his servants, the attempted assassination of himself and of his wife, and the mortification, disgrace, and degradation that he has personally suffered. Our prison chaplain at Newgate would be too humane to offer such a 'consolation' to a criminal at the foot of the gallows. I should have thought that the hangman of Paris, now that he is liberalised by the vote of the National Assembly and is allowed his rank and arms in the herald's college of the rights of men, would be too generous, too gallant a man, too full of the sense of his new dignity, to employ that cutting 'consolation' to anyone whom 'treachery to the nation' might bring under the administration of his executive power.

A man is fallen indeed when he is thus flattered. The anodyne draught of oblivion, thus drugged, is well calculated to preserve a galling wakefulness and to feed the living ulcer of a corroding memory. Thus to administer the opiate potion of amnesty, powdered with all the ingredients of scorn and

contempt, is to hold to his lips, instead of 'the balm of hurt minds' [a phrase that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* applies to sleep], the cup of human misery full to the brim and to force him to drink it to the dregs.

Yielding to reasons at least as forcible as those that were so delicately urged in the compliment on the new year, the king of France will probably try to forget these events and that compliment. But history, who keeps a durable record of all our acts and exercises her awful censure over the proceedings of all sorts of sovereigns, will not forget either those events or the era of this liberal refinement in the intercourse of mankind. History will record that on the morning of 6 October 1789 the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the promised security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite and troubled, melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight—that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give—that they were on him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed from which this persecuted woman had barely had time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband whose own life was not in the least secure.

This king, and this queen, and their infant children (who once would have been the pride and hope of a great and generous people) were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses. They were conducted from there into the capital of their kingdom.

Two had been selected from the unprovoked, unresisted, promiscuous slaughter that was made of the gentlemen of birth and family who composed the king's body guard. These two gentlemen, with all the parade of an execution of justice, were cruelly and publicly dragged to the block and beheaded in the great court of the palace. Their heads were stuck on spears and led the procession, while the royal captives who followed in the train procession were slowly moved along, amid the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous insults, and all the abominations of the furies of hell in the abused shape of the vilest of women. After they had been made to taste, drop by drop, more than the bitterness of death in the slow torture of a journey of twelve miles dragged out for six hours, they were lodged in one of the old palaces of Paris, now converted into a bastille for kings. Their guard there was composed of those very soldiers who had conducted them through this famous triumph,

Is this a triumph to be consecrated at altars? to be commemorated with grateful thanksgiving? to be offered to the divine humanity with fervent prayer and enthusiastic exclamation? I assure you that these Theban and Thracian orgies, enacted in France and applauded only in the Old Jewry, arouse prophetic enthusiasm in the minds of very few people in this kingdom, although a saint and apostle. . . [and then he winds his way into an elaborate sneer at Price].

'Hang the bishops!'

At first I was at a loss to account for this [i.e. Price's] fit of unguarded joy. I knew, indeed, that the sufferings of monarchs make a delicious meal for some palates. There were reflections that might keep this appetite within some bounds of temperance. But when I took one fact into account

I had to admit that much allowance ought to be made for the ·Revolution· Society, and that their temptation was too strong for common discretion. The fact I am talking about is that prominent in the people's triumph was the animating cry calling 'for all the bishops to be hanged on the lamp-posts'. This might well have brought forth a burst of enthusiasm on the foreseen consequences of this happy day. [This refers to the fact that Price and others were non-conformists, meaning that they didn't accept any form of church government that includes bishops.]. . . .

In the midst of this joy there was (as in all human affairs there is) something to exercise the patience of these worthy gentlemen and to try the long-suffering of their faith. The actual murder of the king and queen, and their child, was lacking from the other auspicious circumstances of this 'beautiful day'. The actual murder of the bishops, though called for by so many holy exclamations, was also lacking. A picture of regicide and sacrilegious slaughter was indeed boldly sketched, but it was only sketched. It was unfortunately left unfinished in this great history-piece of the massacre of innocents. We shall see in due course what hardy pencil of a great master from the school of the rights of man will finish it. The present age has not yet the complete benefit of that diffusion of knowledge that has undermined superstition and error [this of course is meant sarcastically]; and the king of France needs to consign one or two more things to oblivion, in consideration of all the good that is to arise from his own sufferings and the patriotic crimes of an enlightened age. [Burke then devotes a page to quoting (in French) from a letter in which the Marquis de Lally Tollendal explains to a friend why, after having played a part in the early stages of the French Revolution, he eventually left the National Assembly in horror and disgust.]

The treatment of the French queen

Although this work of our new 'light and knowledge' did not go as far as was probably intended, such treatment of *any* human creatures must be shocking to anyone who isn't made for accomplishing revolutions. But I cannot stop here. Influenced by the inborn feelings of my nature, and not being illuminated by a single ray of this new-sprung modern 'light', I confess to you, Sir, that

- the exalted rank of the persons suffering, and particularly
- the sex, the beauty, and the amiable qualities of ·the queen·, the descendant of so many kings and emperors, along with
- the tender age of the royal infants, protected only by infancy and innocence from being aware of the cruel outrages to which their parents were exposed,

instead of being a subject of rejoicing, adds greatly to one's sadness regarding that most melancholy occasion.

I hear that the august person who was the principal object of our preacher's triumph, ·namely, the king·, though he supported himself, felt much on that shameful occasion. As a man, it became him to feel for his wife and his children, and the faithful personal guards who were massacred in cold blood around him; as a prince, it was appropriate for him to feel for the strange and frightful transformation of his civilised subjects, and to be more grieved for them than solicitous for himself. This detracts little from his fortitude, while it adds infinitely to the honour of his humanity. I am very sorry to say it, very sorry indeed, that such personages are in a situation in which it is not unbecoming in us to praise the virtues of the great. [That last sentence is exactly as Burke wrote it.]

I hear that the great lady, the other object of the triumph, has borne that day and that she bears

- all the succeeding days,
- the imprisonment of her husband,
- her own captivity,
- the exile of her friends,
- the insulting mock-respectful way she is addressed,
- the whole weight of her accumulated wrongs

with serene patience, in a manner suited to her rank and race, and and to her being the offspring of a sovereign [Maria Theresa, monarch of the Holy Roman Empire] distinguished for her piety and courage. (I rejoice to hear this, because it is good that beings made for suffering should suffer *well*.) I also hear that she, like her mother, has lofty sentiments; that she feels with the dignity of a Roman matron; that in the last extremity she will save herself from the last disgrace and that, if she must fall, she will fall by no ignoble hand [meaning that she will die by her own hand].

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles. . . . [He rapturously sings her praises, and then:] Little did I dream that she would ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I would live to see such disasters fallen on her in a nation of gallant men, a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone.

The age of chivalry is gone

The age of logical tricksters, economists, and calculators has taken over, and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never more shall we see that generous loyalty to rank and

sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart that kept alive (even in servitude itself) the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, . . . the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, is gone! It is gone, that sense of principle, that chastity of honour that felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage while it lessened ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.

This mixed system of opinion and sentiment had its origin in the ancient chivalry; and the principle, though varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs, has survived and had an influence through a long series of generations right through to the present. If it should ever be totally extinguished, I fear that the loss will be great. This is what has given modern Europe its character. It is what has distinguished Europe under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia and possibly from the states that flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world. It is what has (without running the ranks together) produced a noble equality and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion that turned kings into companions and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power, it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft yoke of social esteem, and compelled stern authority to submit to elegance. . . .

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions that made power gentle and obedience liberal, that harmonised the different shades of life, and by a smooth assimilation brought into politics the sentiments that beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of 'light' and 'reason'. All the decent drapery of life is to be roughly torn off. All the super-added

ideas provided by the wardrobe of a moral imagination, ideas that the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

In this scheme of things, a king is only a man, a queen is only a woman; a woman is only an animal, and not an animal of the highest order. All homage paid to the female sex in general. . . . is to be regarded as romance and folly. Regicide, parricide, and sacrilege are merely fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father are only common *homicide*; and if the people happen in some way to gain from it, it is much the most pardonable sort of homicide, of which we ought not to make too severe a scrutiny.

On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy—the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and as void of solid wisdom as it is destitute of all taste and elegance—laws are to be supported only by their own terrors and by the concern that each individual may find in them from his own private speculations or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of their academy, at the end of every avenue you see nothing but the gallows. Nothing is left that engages our feelings on behalf of the commonwealth. On the principles of this mechanic philosophy, our institutions can never be embodied (so to speak) in *persons*, so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment. But the sort of reason that banishes feelings is incapable of taking their place. These public feelings, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law. The precept that a wise man who was also a great critic gave for the construction of poems is equally true of states: ‘It is not enough that they

be beautiful; they must also be persuasive’ [Burke gives this in the original Latin of the poet Horace]. Every nation should have a system of manners that a well-informed mind would be disposed to enjoy. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.

But power of one kind or another will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support. The usurpation that destroyed ancient principles in order to subvert ancient institutions will •hold power by devices similar to those by which it has •acquired it. The old feudal and chivalrous spirit of fealty—i.e. fidelity and allegiance to one’s lord—freed kings from fear and thereby freed both kings and subjects from the risk of tyranny. When it is extinct in the minds of men, plots and assassinations will be anticipated by preventive murder and preventive confiscation. . . .

Kings will be tyrants from policy when subjects are rebels from principle.

The loss of our compass

When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we clearly know what port we are steering to. On the day on which your revolution was completed, Europe as a whole was undoubtedly in a flourishing condition. How much of that prosperous state was due to the spirit of our old manners and opinions is not easy to say; but such causes cannot be indifferent [= ‘neither good nor bad’] in their operation, so we must presume that on the whole their operation was beneficial.

We are all too apt to consider things in the state in which we find them, without thinking enough about the causes that have produced them and possibly may uphold them. Nothing

is more certain than that our manners, our civilisation, and all the good things connected with manners and with civilisation have in this European world of ours depended for ages on two principles [see Glossary] and were indeed the result of the two combined: I mean the **spirit of a gentleman** and the **spirit of religion**. The nobility and the clergy, the one by patronage, the other by profession, kept learning in existence even in the midst of arms and confusions and at times when governments were not yet fully formed. What learning received from nobility and priesthood it paid back with interest, by enlarging their ideas and by furnishing their minds. Happy if they had all continued to know their indissoluble union and their proper place! Happy if learning, not depraved by ambition, had been satisfied to continue as the instructor and not aspired to be the master! Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will now be thrown into the mud and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.

I suspect that modern letters owe to ancient manners more than they are always willing to admit; and so do other interests that we value quite as much as they are worth. Even commerce and trade and manufacture, the gods of our economic politicians, are themselves perhaps mere creatures, are themselves merely effects that we choose to worship as first causes. They certainly grew under the same shade in which learning flourished. They may also decay with their natural protecting principles. With you in France, for the present at least, they are all threatening to disappear together. Where trade and manufactures are lacking to a people, and the spirit of nobility and religion remains, sentiment fills their place, and not always badly; but if commerce and the arts are lost in an experiment to try

how well a state can stand without these old fundamental principles of nobility and religion, what sort of a thing must a nation be if it is composed of gross, stupid, ferocious—and at the same time poor and sordid—barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter?

I hope you are not going fast, and by the shortest cut, to that horrible and disgusting situation. Already there appears a poverty of conception, a coarseness, and a vulgarity in all the proceedings of the Assembly and of all their instructors. Their liberty is not liberal. Their science is presumptuous ignorance. Their humanity is savage and brutal.

It is not clear whether we in England learned from you those grand and decorous principles and manners of which considerable traces still remain, or whether you took them from us. But I think it's more likely that you are the source. France has always more or less influenced manners in England; and when your fountain is choked up and polluted, the stream will not run long or clear, with us or perhaps with any nation. This, in my opinion, gives all Europe a concern—an all too close and connected one—with what is done in France. So please excuse me if I have dwelt too long on the atrocious spectacle of the 6 October 1789 [when the revolutionaries brought the royal family to Paris from Versailles], or have given too much scope to the reflections that have arisen in my mind on occasion of the most important of all revolutions, which may be dated from that day—I mean a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions. As things now stand, with everything respectable destroyed outside us and an attempt to destroy every principle of respect within us, one is almost forced to apologise for having common human feelings.

Part 2

Corrupt head versus natural heart

Why do I feel so differently from the Reverend Dr Price and those of his lay flock who will choose to adopt the sentiments of his discourse? For this plain reason: •because it is natural I should; •because we are so made as to be affected at such spectacles with melancholy sentiments regarding the unstable condition of mortal prosperity and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness; •because in those natural feelings we learn great lessons; •because in events like these our passions instruct our reason; •because when kings are hurled from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama and become the objects of insult to the base and of pity to the good, we behold disasters in the moral order of things like beholding a miracle in the physical order. We are alarmed into reflection; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity, our weak, unthinking pride is humbled under the dispensations of a mysterious wisdom. Some tears might be drawn from me if such a spectacle were exhibited on the stage. I would be truly ashamed of finding in myself that superficial, theatrical sense of painted distress if I could rejoice over it in real life. With such a perverted mind I could never venture to show my face at a theatrical tragedy. People would think the tears that fine actors have extorted from me were the tears of hypocrisy; I would know them to be the tears of folly. [He means: if he accepted what he takes to be the French revolutionaries' thoughts and feelings about human distress he would think it was simply *stupid* to weep at distress shown on the stage.]

Indeed, the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than churches, where the feelings of humanity are thus

outraged. Poets who have to deal with an audience not yet graduated from the school of the 'rights of men' and who must apply themselves to the moral constitution of the heart would not dare to produce such a 'triumph' as that of 6.x.1789 as a matter for rejoicing. In the theatre, where men follow their natural impulses, they would not bear the odious maxims of a Machiavellian policy, whether applied to the achievement of monarchic tyranny or democratic tyranny. They would reject them on the modern stage as they once did on the ancient one, where they could not bear even the hypothetical proposal of such wickedness in the mouth of someone acting a tyrant, even if it was suitable to the character he was portraying. No theatrical audience in Athens would bear what has been borne in the midst of the real tragedy of this triumphal day: a principal actor weighing (as it were) in scales hung in a shop of horrors so much actual crime against so much resultant advantage and, after putting in and out weights, declaring that the balance was on the side of the advantages. They would not bear to see the crimes of new democracy posted as in a ledger against the crimes of old despotism, and the book-keepers of politics finding democracy still in debt but by no means unable or unwilling to pay the balance. In the theatre the first intuitive glance, without any elaborate process of reasoning, will show that this method of political computation would justify every extent of crime. They would see that on these principles, even where the very worst acts were not perpetrated, this was because of the fortune of the conspirators rather than because of their parsimony in the expenditure of treachery and blood. They would soon see that criminal methods once •tolerated are soon •preferred. They present a short cut to

the objective instead of a longer route through the highway of the moral virtues. Justifying treachery and murder for public benefit, public benefit would soon become the excuse and treachery and murder the end, until rapacity, malice, revenge, and fear more dreadful than revenge could satiate their insatiable appetites. Such must be the consequences of losing, in the splendour of these triumphs of the 'rights of men', all natural sense of wrong and right.

'An arbitrary monarch'

But the reverend pastor rejoices in this 'leading in triumph', because truly Louis XVI was 'an arbitrary monarch'; which means neither more nor less than because he was Louis XVI and because he had the misfortune to be born king of France, with the prerogatives that had been put in his possession by a long line of ancestors and a long acquiescence of the people, without any act of his. It has indeed turned out to be a misfortune it for him that he was born king of France. But misfortune is not crime, nor is indiscretion always the greatest guilt. I shall never think that a prince

whose whole reign involved a series of concessions to his subjects, who was willing to relax his authority, to remit his prerogatives, to call his people to a share of freedom that their ancestors had not known and perhaps had not desired,

that such a prince,

even if he had the common frailties attached to men and to princes, and even if he once thought it necessary to provide force against the desperate designs obviously launched against his person and the remnants of his authority

—though all this should be taken into consideration—I cannot think that such a prince deserves the cruel and insulting

triumph of Paris and of Dr Price. I tremble for the cause of liberty when such an example is given to kings. I tremble for the cause of humanity in the unpunished outrages of the most wicked of mankind. But there are some people whose way of thinking is so low and degenerate that they look up with a sort of complacent awe and admiration to kings who know to keep firm in their seat, to hold a strict hand over their subjects, to assert their prerogative, and by the awakened vigilance of a severe despotism to guard against the very first approaches to freedom. They never raise their voice against such as these. Deserters from principle, enlisted with fortune, they never see any good in suffering virtue or any crime in prosperous usurpation.

If it could have been made clear to me that the king and queen of France (I mean those who were king and queen before the triumph) were inexorable and cruel tyrants, that they had formed a deliberate scheme for massacring the National Assembly (I think I have seen something like that insinuated in certain publications), I would think their captivity just. If this were true, much more ought to have been done, though in my opinion done in another manner. The punishment of real tyrants is a noble and awe-inspiring act of justice; and it has truly been said to be consolatory to the human mind. But if I were to punish a wicked king, I would have a concern for the dignity with which the crime was avenged. Justice is grave and decorous, and in its punishment seems to •submit to a necessity rather than to •make a choice. Had Nero, or Agrippina, or Louis XI, or Charles IX been the subject; if Charles XII of Sweden after the murder of Patkul, or his predecessor Christina after the murder of Monaldeschi had fallen into your hands, Sir, or into mine, I am sure our conduct would have been different.

If the French king, or king of the French (or whatever he is called in the new vocabulary of your constitution), has

in his own person and that of his queen really *deserved* these. . . .murderous attempts and those frequent indignities more cruel than murder, such a person would not deserve even the 'subordinate executive trust' that I understand is to be placed in him, nor is he fit to be called chief in a nation that he has outraged and oppressed. A worse choice for such an office in a new commonwealth than that of a deposed tyrant could not possibly be made. But to degrade and insult a man as the worst of criminals and afterwards to trust him in your highest concerns as a faithful, honest, and zealous servant is not consistent in reasoning, prudent in policy, or safe in practice. Those who could make such an appointment must be guilty of a more flagrant breach of trust than any they have yet committed against the people. As this is the only crime in which your leading politicians could have acted inconsistently, I conclude that there is no basis for these horrid insinuations against the king. . . .

Speaking on behalf of England

In England we give no credit to them. We are generous enemies; we are faithful allies. We kick away with disgust and indignation the slanders of those who bring us their anecdotes with the confirmation of the fleur-de-lys on their shoulder. We have Lord George Gordon locked up in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselytiser to Judaism, nor his having in his zeal against Catholic priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics raised a mob that pulled down all our prisons, have preserved for him a liberty that he did not make himself worthy of by using it virtuously. . . . We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastille for those who dare to libel the queens of France. In this spiritual retreat, let the noble libeller remain. Let him there meditate on his Talmud until he learns a conduct more suitable to his birth and abilities, and not so

disgraceful to the ancient religion for which he has become a proselytiser; or until some persons from your side of the water, to please your new Hebrew brethren, shall ransom him. [Burke now embarks on a complex joke about the compound interest over 1790 years on thirty pieces of silver. Then:] Send us your Popish archbishop of Paris, and we will send you our Protestant Rabbin [meaning Lord George Gordon]. We shall treat the person you send us like a gentleman and an honest man, as he is; but please let him bring with him the fund of his hospitality, bounty, and charity, and we shall never confiscate a shilling of that honourable and pious fund, nor think of enriching the treasury with the spoils of the poor-box.

To tell you the truth, my dear Sir, I think the honour of our nation is somewhat concerned in disclaiming the proceedings of this society of the Old Jewry and the London Tavern. I have not been appointed to speak. I speak only for myself when I disclaim, as I do with all possible earnestness, all connection with those who took part in that triumph or with those who admire it. When I assert anything regarding the people of England I speak from observation, not from authority, but I speak from the experience I have had in a pretty extensive and mixed communication with the inhabitants of this kingdom, of all descriptions and ranks, and after a series of attentive observations begun early in life and continued for nearly forty years [he was 61 when he wrote this]. Considering that we are divided from you only by a slender dyke of about twenty-four miles, and that the two-way contact between the two countries has recently been very great, I have often been astonished to find how little you seem to know of us. I suspect that this is because you form a judgment of this nation from certain publications that represent the opinions and dispositions generally prevalent in England either very erroneously or not at all. The vanity, restlessness, petulance,

and spirit of intrigue of several little cabals [see Glossary] who try to hide their total unimportance in bustle and noise, puffing, and mutual quotation of each other, makes you think that our contemptuous neglect of their abilities is a mark of general acceptance of their opinions. No such thing, I assure you. Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate *chink!*, while thousands of cattle lying beneath the shadow of the British oak chew the cud and are silent, don't think that those who make the noise are •the only inhabitants of the field, are •very numerous, or indeed are •anything but the little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour!

I almost venture to affirm that not one in a hundred among us shares in the 'triumph' of the Revolution Society. If the king and queen of France, and their children, were to fall into our hands by the chance of war, in the most acrimonious of all hostilities (I deplore such an event, I deplore such hostility), they would be treated with another sort of triumphal entry into London. We *have* had a king of France in that situation [John II, after the battle of Poitiers in 1356]; you have read how he was treated by the victor in the field, and how he was then received in England. Four hundred years have passed but I believe we are not significantly changed since that period. Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not (I think) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the 14th century, nor as yet have we subtilised [here = 'refined'] ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress among us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that we have made no discoveries in morality, and we think that

no discoveries are to be made there, nor many in the great principles of government or in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born quite as well as they will be after. . . .our death. In England our natural entrails have not yet been completely ripped out; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments that are the faithful guardians and active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been disemboweled and tied up so as to be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of men. We preserve the whole of our feelings still native and entire, not made tricky by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings, with affection to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds it is *natural* to have such feelings; because all other feelings are false and spurious and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals, to make us unfit for rational liberty, and, by teaching us a servile, licentious, and abandoned insolence, to be our low sport for a few holidays, to make us perfectly fit for, and justly deserving of, slavery through the whole course of our lives.

In defence of prejudices

You see, Sir, that in this 'enlightened' age I am bold enough to confess that we are generally men of untaught feelings, that instead of throwing away all our old prejudices [see Glossary] we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and—to increase our shame!—we cherish them *because* they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted and the more widespread they have been, the more we cherish them.

We are afraid to have men try to to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. Many of our thinkers, instead of exploding general prejudices, use their skill to discover the wisdom that lies hidden in them. If they find what they seek (which they usually do), they think it wiser to continue the prejudice with the reason nested in it than to throw away the coat of prejudice and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason and a feeling that will give it permanence. Prejudice is ready for application in an emergency; it has the mind already engaged in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and doesn't leave the man hesitating—sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved—at the moment of decision. Prejudice makes a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through *just* prejudice his duty becomes a part of his nature.

Your literary men and your politicians essentially differ in these points, and so do the whole clan of the 'enlightened' among us. They have no respect for the wisdom of others, but they pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own. A scheme of things being *old* is, for them, a sufficient motive to destroy it. As for the new, they have no fears about the duration of a building put up in haste, because duration is not a goal for those who think that little or nothing has been done before their time, and who place all their hopes in discovery. They conceive, very systematically, that all things that provide permanence are harmful, so they are at war—a war that can't be settled—with all establishments. They think that government can vary like fashions in dress, and with as little bad effect; that all we need to attach ourselves to any constitution of the state is a sense of present convenience.

They always speak as if they thought that there is a singular species of contract between them and their magistrates that binds the magistrate but has nothing reciprocal in it—the majesty of the people has a right to dissolve the government without any reason but its will. Their attachment to their country itself is conditional on its agreeing with some of their fleeting projects; it begins and ends with the political scheme that squares with their momentary opinion.

These doctrines, or rather these sentiments, seem prevalent with your new statesmen. But they are wholly different from the ones we have always acted on in this country.

If anyone tried to push England France's way. . .

I hear that it is sometimes said in France that what is going on among you follows the example of England. I beg leave to affirm that hardly anything done with you has originated from the practice or the prevalent opinions of this people, either •what you are doing or •the spirit in which you are doing it. Let me add that we are as unwilling to learn these lessons from France as we are sure that we never taught them to that nation. The cabals here who take a sort of share of your transactions still contain only a handful of people. If by their intrigues, their sermons, their publications, and by a confidence derived from an expected union with the counsels and forces of the French nation, they draw considerable numbers into their faction and then seriously attempt anything here in imitation of what has been done in France, I dare venture to prophesy that the outcome—causing some trouble to their country along the way—will be their own early destruction. The English people long ago refused to change their law out of respect for the infallibility of popes, and they will not now alter it from a pious implicit faith in the dogmatism of philosophers, though

the pope was armed with the anathema and crusade, and though the philosophers should act with pamphlets and lamp-posts [see note on page 29].

Formerly, your affairs were your own concern only. We felt for them as •men, but we kept apart from them because we were not citizens of France. But when we see the model held up to ourselves, we must feel as •Englishmen, and feeling in that way we must behave as Englishmen. We did not want this, but our own interests now involve your affairs, at least in having us keep your panacea or plague at a distance. If it is a panacea, we do not want it. We know the results of taking unnecessary medicines. If it is a plague, it is of such a kind that the most severe quarantine ought to be established against it.

I hear on all hands that a cabal [see Glossary] calling itself 'philosophic' receives the glory of many of the recent proceedings, and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them. I have heard of no literary or political party in England known by such a description. Is yours composed of men whom the vulgar in their blunt, homely style commonly call 'atheists' and 'infidels'? If so, I admit that we too have had writers of that description who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, Toland, Tindal, Chubb, or Morgan, or that whole race who called themselves 'freethinkers'? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who *ever* read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world! In as few years their few successors will also be buried and forgotten. But whatever they were or are, with us they were and are wholly unconnected individuals—they were not gregarious. They never acted as a body or were known as a faction in the state, or presumed under the label 'Freethinkers' to influence any

of our public concerns. Whether they ought so to exist and be permitted so to act is another question. Because such cabals have not existed in England, the cabal spirit had never had any influence in establishing the original structure of our constitution or in any of the various repairs and improvements it has undergone. The whole thing has been done under the auspices of religion and piety, and is confirmed by their sanctions. It has emanated from the simplicity of our national character and from a sort of native plainness and directness of understanding, which for a long time characterised the men who have successively obtained authority among us. This disposition still remains, at least in the great body of the people.

Religion as the basis of civil society

We know—and, what is better, we feel inwardly—that religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort. In England we are so convinced of this that there is no rust of superstition that the accumulated absurdity of the human mind might have crusted religion over with in the course of ages, that ninety-nine in a hundred of the people of England wouldn't prefer to impiety. We shall never be such fools as to call on an enemy to the *substance* of any system to remove its corruptions, to fill its gaps, or to complete its construction. If our religious tenets ever need further elucidation, we shall not call on atheism to explain them. . . . Violently condemning neither the Greek nor the Armenian nor (since heats have subsided) the Roman system of religion, we prefer the Protestant, not because we think it has less of the Christian religion in it but because we think it has more. We are Protestants not from indifference but from zeal.

We know, and are proud to know, that man is by his

constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against not only our reason but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long. But if, in the moment of riot and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell that is now so furiously boiling in France we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off the Christian religion that has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilisation among us and among many other nations, we fear (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take its place.

For that reason we don't want to deprive our establishment of the natural, human means of estimation and give it up to contempt, as you have done and thereby incurred the penalties you deserve to suffer, until we are shown something to put in its place. *Then* we shall form our judgment.

On the basis of these ideas, instead of quarrelling with establishments, as some do who have made a philosophy and a religion of their hostility to such institutions, we cling to them. We are resolved to keep an established •church, an established •monarchy, an established •aristocracy, and an established •democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater. I shall show you presently how much of each of these we possess. [On page 90 Burke announces a change of mind: he won't deal with three of those four in this 'letter'.]

It has been the misfortune (not, as these gentlemen think, the glory) of this age that everything is to be discussed as if the constitution of our country were to be always a subject of arguments rather than enjoyment. For this reason, as well as for the satisfaction of those among you (if there are any such among you) who may wish to profit from examples, I venture to trouble you with a few thoughts about each of these establishments. I do not think they were unwise in ancient Rome, when they wished to new-model their laws, to

set commissioners to examine the best constituted republics within their reach.

An established church

First, let me speak of our church establishment, which is the first of our prejudices, not a prejudice destitute of reason but containing profound and extensive wisdom. It is first and last and midst in our minds. For, taking ground on the religious system that we now have, we continue to act on the early-received and uniformly-continued sense of mankind. That sense has not only (like a wise architect) •built up the imposing structure of states, but—wanting like a provident proprietor to preserve the structure from profanation and ruin, as a sacred temple purged from all the impurities of fraud and violence and injustice and tyranny—has •solemnly and forever consecrated the commonwealth and all who officiate in it. This consecration is made so that all who administer the government of men, in which they stand in for God himself, should have high and worthy notions of their function and destination, that their hope should be full of immortality, that they should not look to the trivial gains of the moment or to the temporary and transient praise of the vulgar, but to a solid, permanent existence in the permanent part of their nature, and to a permanent fame and glory in the example they leave as a rich inheritance to the world.

Such high principles ought to be infused into persons in high places, and religious establishments should be provided that may continually revive and enforce them. Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, every sort of politic institution, aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine, are needed to build up that wonderful structure *Man*, whose prerogative it is to be to a large extent a creature of his own making,

and who (when made as he ought to be made) is destined to occupy a significant place in the creation. But whenever a man is put over men. . . ., it is especially important that he should be as near as possible to his perfection [here = 'to being completely finished'].

The consecration of the state by a state religious establishment is needed also to produce a wholesome awe in free citizens. To secure their freedom, they must have some determinate portion of power; so •for them a religion connected with the state and with their duty toward it becomes even more necessary than •for societies where the people are confined by the terms of their subjection to private sentiments and the management of their own family concerns. All persons having any power ought to be strongly impressed with the awesome idea that they act *in trust*, and that they will have to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great Master, Author, and Founder of society.

This principle ought to be even more strongly impressed on the minds of •those who compose the collective sovereignty than on the minds of •single princes. Without instruments, these princes can do nothing. Whoever uses instruments in finding helps also finds difficulties. So their power is far from complete, and they are not safe from extreme abuse. However elevated they are by flattery, arrogance, and self-opinion, princes must be aware that they are. . . .in some way or other accountable even here—and not only before God on the day of judgment—for any abuse of their trust. If they are not cut off by a rebellion of their people, they may be strangled by the very guards kept for their security against all other rebellion. Thus we have seen the king of France sold by his soldiers for an increase of pay. But where popular [see Glossary] authority is absolute and unrestrained, the people's confidence in their own power is infinitely greater because far better founded. To a consider-

able extent they are themselves their own instruments. They are nearer to their objects. Besides, they are less answerable to one of the greatest controlling powers on earth, namely the sense of fame and admiration. The share of infamy that comes to each individual in public acts is likely to be small indeed, because the operation of opinion is inversely proportional to the number of those who abuse power. Their own approval of their own acts appears to them as a public judgment in their favour. A perfect democracy is therefore the most shameless thing in the world—and also the most fearless: no man has a sense that he personally can be subjected to punishment. Certainly the people at large never ought to be, because all punishments are meant as *examples*, aimed at protecting the people at large; so the people at large can never become the subject of punishment by any human hand. It is therefore infinitely important that they should not be allowed to think that their will is the standard of right and wrong, any more than a king's is. They ought to be convinced that

- they are no more entitled •than a king is• to use any arbitrary power whatsoever, and that they are much less qualified than a king is to use arbitrary power in a way that doesn't threaten their own safety; and that therefore

- they are not (under a false show of liberty) to exercise an unnatural, inverted domination, tyrannically exacting from those who officiate in the state not an entire devotion to their **interest** (which is their right) but an abject submission to their **passing whims**, extinguishing in those who serve them all moral principle, all sense of dignity, all use of judgment, and all consistency of character; while by the very same process they turn themselves into a proper, a suitable, but a most contemptible prey to the servile ambition of popular rabble-rousers or courtly flatterers.

Caution in amending the state

When the people have emptied themselves of all the cravings of selfish will (which without religion they can't possibly do), when they are conscious that they exercise. . . .the power that can't be legitimate unless it squares with the eternal, immutable law in which will and reason are the same, they will be more careful about putting power into base and incompetent hands. In picking people to exercise authority, they won't treat this as though it were appoint them to a pitiful job [see Glossary], but as to a holy function. They won't select according to their sordid, selfish interest, or to their wild whims, or to their arbitrary will; rather, they will confer that power (which any man may well tremble to give or to receive) only on those in whom they can see that predominant proportion of active virtue and wisdom. . . .that can be found in the great mixed mass of human imperfections and infirmities.

When they are habitually convinced that to someone whose essence is good it is unacceptable to do evil or to permit it, they will be better able to sweep out of the minds of all magistrates—civil, ecclesiastical, or military—anything that has the least resemblance to proud and lawless domination.

But one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated is that power-holders. . . .should not have a right to cut off the entail [i.e. to block the inheriting of property] or commit waste on the inheritance by choosing to destroy the whole original fabric of their society, risking leaving a ruin instead of a habitation to those who come after them—and teaching these successors to respect their contrivances as little as *they* had respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this unprincipled readiness to change the state as often, as much, and as variously as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole

chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the next. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.

And first of all, the science of jurisprudence would be regarded as a heap of old exploded errors, and would be no longer studied. (Actually, it is the pride of the human intellect, which—with all its defects, redundancies, and errors—is the collected reason of ages, combining the principles of original justice with the infinite variety of human concerns.) Personal self-sufficiency and arrogance, which are always found in those who have never experienced a wisdom greater than their own, would usurp the tribunal. No certain laws establishing invariable grounds of hope and fear would keep men's actions on a certain course or direct them to a certain goal. Nothing stable in the ways of holding property or exercising functions could form a solid basis on which any parent could think through the education of his offspring or a choice for their future establishment in the world. No principles would be early worked into people's habits. As soon as the most able instructor had completed his laborious work, instead of sending forth his pupil, accomplished in a virtuous discipline and fitted to get attention and respect for him in his place in society, he would find that he had turned out a poor creature to the contempt and derision of a world that was ignorant of the true grounds of esteem. Who could ensure that a tender and delicate sense of honour would beat almost with the first pulses of the heart, when no man could know what would be the test of honour in a nation continually varying the standard of its coin? No part of life would retain its acquisitions. Barbarism with regard to science and literature, unskilfulness with regard to arts and manufactures, would inevitably follow the lack of a steady education and settled principle; and thus in a few generations the commonwealth itself would crumble away,

be broken up into the dust and powder of individuality, and at length dispersed to all the winds of heaven.

The evils of inconstancy and changeability are ten thousand times worse than those of obstinacy and the blindest prejudice. To avoid them, therefore, we have *consecrated* the state, so that no man should come close to look into its defects or corruptions except with due caution, that he should never dream of starting to reform it by subverting it, that he should come to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds and wild incantations they may regenerate the paternal constitution and renovate their father's life.

Society as a contract

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure; but *the state* ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico, or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest and dissolved at the wish of the parties. It is to be looked on with reverence, because it is not a partnership in temporary and perishable things that are subservient only to our gross animal existence. It is a partnership in

- all science,
- all art,
- every virtue, and
- all perfection.

The goals of such a partnership can be obtained only over many generations, so it becomes a partnership not only making connections among those who are living, but one connecting those who are living with those who are dead and those who are not yet born. Each contract of each particular state is only a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible with the invisible world, according to a fixed contract sanctioned by the inviolable oath that holds all physical and moral natures in their appointed places. This law is not subject to the will of those who—by an obligation infinitely superior to them—are bound to submit their will to that law. The municipal corporations of that universal kingdom are not morally free, at their pleasure and on their theories about a contingent improvement, to tear apart the bands of their subordinate community and to dissolve it into an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles. The only thing that can justify a resort to anarchy is the first and supreme necessity, a necessity that is not chosen but chooses, a necessity that is paramount to deliberation, admitting no discussion and demanding no evidence. This necessity is no exception to the rule, because this necessity is itself also a part of the moral and physical disposition of things to which man must be obedient by consent or force; but if something that is only *submission to necessity* is made the object of *choice*, the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast out and exiled from this world of reason, order, peace, virtue, and fruitful penitence into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow.

These, my dear Sir, are, were, and (I think) long will be the sentiments of people who are not the least learned and reflective part of this kingdom. They form their opinions on such grounds as such persons ought to form them. Less

inquiring people receive the opinions from an authority which those whom Providence dooms to live on trust need not be ashamed to rely on. These two sorts of men move in the same direction, though in a different place. They both move with the order of the universe.

They all know or feel this great ancient truth:

‘To the great and all-powerful God who rules this entire universe, nothing is more pleasing than the unions and gatherings of men bound together by laws that are called states.’ [Burke gives it in Cicero’s Latin]

They take this tenet of the head and heart not from the great name which it immediately bears, nor from the greater from which it is derived, but from the only thing that can give true weight and sanction to any learned opinion, the common nature and common relation of men. . . . They see themselves as bound to perform their national homage to the institutor and author and protector of civil society; without which civil society man could not possibly arrive at the perfection his nature is capable of, or even make a remote and faint approach to it. They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection. So He willed the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection. They who are convinced of this His will, which is the law of laws and the sovereign of sovereigns, cannot think it wrong that our ‘praise of the state’ should be performed as all solemn public acts are performed, in buildings, in music, in decoration, in speech, in the dignity of persons, according to the customs taught to mankind by their nature; that is, with modest splendour and unassuming state, with mild majesty and sober pomp. [In that sentence ‘praise of the state’ replaces a very flowery two-line noun phrase.] For those purposes they think some part of the wealth **of the country** is as usefully employed as it can be in promoting

the luxury of individuals. It is the public ornament. It is the public consolation. It nourishes the public hope. The poorest man finds his own importance and dignity in it, whereas the wealth and pride **of individuals** at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune aware of his low position and drags it even lower. It is to help the man in humble life, and to raise his nature and to put him in mind of a state in which the privileges of wealth will cease, when he will be equal by nature and may be more than equal by virtue, that this portion of the general wealth of his country is employed and sanctified.

I assure you I am not aiming at originality here. I give you opinions that have been accepted among us continuously from very early times until today, and that are ‘so thoroughly’ worked into my mind that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation.

English attitudes

It is on some such principles that the majority of the people of England, far from thinking a national religious establishment unlawful, hardly think it lawful *not* to have one. If you in France do not believe that we are attached to this above all other things and beyond all other nations, you are wholly mistaken; and when this people has acted unwisely and unjustifiably in its favour (as sometimes they most certainly have done), their very errors will at least show to you their zeal.

This principle runs through their whole political structure. They consider their church establishment not as ‘merely’ convenient but as ‘essential to their state—not as something heterogeneous and separable, an add-on that they may keep or lay aside according to their temporary ideas of

convenience. They regard it as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which (and with every part of which) it is indissolubly united. Church and state are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other.

Our education is formed in a way that confirms and fixes this impression. Our education is in a way wholly in the hands of ecclesiastics, at all stages from infancy to manhood. Even when our youth, leaving schools and universities, enter that most important period of life that begins to link study with experience, and when with that view they visit other countries, they are not accompanied by old domestics whom we see as governors to principal men from other lands; three-fourths of those who go abroad with our young nobility and gentlemen are ecclesiastics, and they go not as austere masters or mere followers, but as friends and companions of a graver character, and quite often persons as well-born as those whose companions they are. They stay closely connected to them through life. We think that by this connection we attach our gentlemen to the church, and we liberalise the church by conversation with the leading characters of the country.

We are so tenacious of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little alteration has been made in them since the 14th or 15th century; adhering in this as in everything to our old settled maxim *never entirely or suddenly depart from antiquity*. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favourable to morality and discipline, and we thought they could be amended without altering their foundations. We thought that they were capable of receiving and improving and (above all) preserving the gains in science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for that's what it is in the foundations) we may

claim that our share in the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature that have illuminated and adorned the modern world is as large and as early as that of any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge left to us by our forefathers.

It is because of our attachment to a church establishment that the English nation did not think it wise to entrust that great fundamental interest of the *whole* to what they don't trust with any *part* of their civil or military public service, that is, to the unsteady and precarious contribution of individuals. They go further. They never did and never will suffer the fixed estate of the church to be converted into a pension, to depend on the treasury and to be delayed, withheld, or perhaps even extinguished by fiscal difficulties. I mean both •supposed difficulties announced for political purposes and •real difficulties caused by the extravagance, negligence, and thievery of politicians. The people of England think that they have constitutional reasons as well as religious ones for rejecting any project of turning their independent clergy into ecclesiastical pensioners of state. They tremble for their liberty, from the influence of a clergy dependent on the crown; they tremble for the public tranquillity from the disorders of a factious clergy depending on anything other than the crown. So they made their church, like their king and their nobility, independent.

From the combined considerations of religion and constitutional policy, from their view about the duty to make sure provision for helping the feeble and instructing the ignorant, they have included the estate of the church in the great mass of *private property*, of which the state is in no way the proprietor but only the guardian and the regulator. They have ordained that the income of this establishment is to be as stable as the earth on which it stands, and should not

fluctuate with the come and go of funds and actions.

The men of England—I mean the men who provide light and leadership in England—whose wisdom (if they have any) is open and direct, would be ashamed to profess verbally any religion which by their actions they appear to contemn; they would regard this as a silly deceitful trick. They understand that if by their conduct (the only language that rarely lies) they seemed to regard the great ruling principle of the moral and the natural world as a mere invention to keep the vulgar in obedience, such conduct would defeat the political purpose they have in view. They would find it difficult to make others believe in a system which they obviously don't believe themselves. The Christian statesmen of this land would indeed first provide for the multitude, because it is the multitude and is therefore the first object in the ecclesiastical institution, and in all institutions. They have been taught that the gospel's being preached to the poor was one of the great tests of its true mission. So they think that those who do not take care to have it preached to the poor do not believe it. But as they know that charity is not confined to any one description, but ought to apply itself to *all* men who have wants, they also have a due and anxious sensation of pity for the miserable great who are in distress. They are not repelled through a fastidious delicacy at the stench of their arrogance and presumption, from a medicinal attention to their mental blotches and running sores. They are aware that religious instruction matters more to them than to any others, because of:

- the greatness of the temptation to which they are exposed;
- the important consequences that come with their faults;
- the contagion of the bad example they set;
- the need to bow down the stubborn neck of their pride

and ambition to the yoke of moderation and virtue;

- the facts about the fat stupidity and gross ignorance concerning what imports men most to know, which prevails at courts and at the head of armies and in senates, as much as at the loom and in the field.

[Burke now has a paragraph about religious 'consolation' needed by 'the great' when they are unhappy. And they very often are, he says, speaking of the need for something 'to fill the gloomy void that reigns in minds which have nothing on earth to hope or fear' and to 'relieve the languor and lassitude of those who have nothing to do'.]

The people of England know how little influence the teachers of religion are likely to have on the wealthy and powerful of long standing, and how much less on the newly fortunate, if they (the teachers) appear to be much lower in social rank than those with whom they must associate and over whom they must sometimes even exercise a kind of authority. What must the wealthy and powerful think of that body of teachers if they see it at the level of their domestic servants? If their poverty were voluntary, there might be some difference. Strong instances of self-denial operate powerfully on our minds, and a man who has no wants has obtained great freedom and firmness and even dignity. But the mass of any description of men are only men, and in most cases their poverty cannot be voluntary; so the disrespect that comes with all •lay poverty will also come with •ecclesiastical poverty. . . . For these reasons, we have not relegated religion (like something we were ashamed to show) to obscure municipalities or rustic villages. No! we will have her to exalt her mitred front in courts and parliaments. We will have her mixed throughout the whole mass of life and blended with all the classes of society. The people of England will show to the haughty potentates of the world, and to their talking logical tricksters, that a free, generous, and informed

nation honours the high magistrates of its church; that it will not allow the insolence of wealth and titles, or any other kind of proud pretension, to look down with scorn on what *they* looked up to with reverence. . . . They can see, without pain or grudging, an archbishop precede a duke. They can see a bishop of Durham or of Winchester in possession of £10,000 a year, and cannot see why this is worse than a similar estate in the hands of this earl or that squire, although it may be true that so many dogs and horses are not kept by the former and fed with the victuals that ought to nourish the children of the people. It is true that the whole church income is not always employed in charity, nor perhaps ought it to be, but something is generally employed. It is better to cherish virtue and humanity by leaving much to free will, even with some loss to the objective, than to try to make men mere machines and instruments of a political benevolence. The world on the whole will gain by a liberty without which virtue cannot exist.

Once the commonwealth has established the estates of the church as property, it can't in consistency hear anything of the more or the less. 'Too much' and 'too little' are treason against property. What evil can arise from the quantity in any hand while the supreme authority has the full, sovereign superintendence over this, as over all property, to prevent every kind of abuse and whenever it notably deviates to give it a direction agreeable to the purposes of its institution?

In England most of us think that when some people look disapprovingly at the distinctions, honours, and revenues that are not taken from anyone and are set apart for virtue, they are driven not by •love of the self-denial and mortification of the ancient church, but by •envy and malignity toward those who are often the beginners of their own fortune. The people of England have sharp ears. They hear these men speak in a vulgar and coarse way. Their tongue betrays them.

Their language is in the patois of fraud, in the cant and gibberish of hypocrisy. The people of England must think so when these idle talkers purport to carry the clergy back to [what follows is *their* account of it:]

the primitive, evangelic poverty which **in spirit** ought always to exist in them (and in us too, whether we like it or not), but **in reality** must be varied when the relation of the church to the state is altered—when manners, modes of life, indeed the whole order of human affairs has undergone a total revolution.

We shall believe these reformers to be honest extremists—rather than, as we now think them, cheats and deceivers—when we see them putting their own goods into the common pool and submitting their own persons to the austere discipline of the early church.

With these ideas rooted in their minds, the commons of Great Britain will never in national emergencies have recourse to the confiscation of the estates of the church and poor. . . . There is not one public man in this kingdom whom you would wish to quote—not one, of any party or description—who does not condemn the dishonest, perfidious, and cruel confiscation that the National Assembly has been compelled to make of property that it was their first duty to protect.

With the pleasure of a little national pride, I tell you that those among us who have wished to drink the health of the societies of Paris with the cup of their abominations have been disappointed. The robbery of your church has proved a security to the possession of ours. It has roused the people. They see with horror and alarm that enormous and shameless act of proscription. It has opened. . . .their eyes to the selfish enlargement of mind and the narrow liberality of sentiment of insidious men, which, starting in hypocrisy and fraud, have ended in open violence and theft. At home

we behold similar beginnings. We are on our guard against similar conclusions.

The confiscators

I hope we shall never be so totally lost to all sense of the duties imposed on us by the law of social union as to use the excuse of 'public service' to confiscate the goods of a single unoffending citizen. Who but a *tyrant*. . . could think of seizing the property of men unaccused, unheard, untried, by whole descriptions [see Glossary], by hundreds and thousands together? Who that hadn't lost every trace of humanity could think of casting down men of exalted rank and sacred function, some of them of an age to call for both reverence and compassion—casting them down from the highest situation in the commonwealth, where they were maintained by their own landed property, to a state of indigence, depression, and contempt?

The confiscators have indeed made some allowance to their victims from the scraps and fragments of their own tables from which they have been so harshly driven, tables that have been so bountifully spread for a feast to the greedy predators of usury. But to drive men from independence to live on alms is itself great cruelty. A condition that might be tolerable to men in one state of life who aren't habituated to other things may to others be a dreadful revolution—one to which a virtuous mind would feel pain in condemning any guilt except guilt that would demand the offender's life. But to many minds this punishment of degradation and infamy is worse than death. Undoubtedly it makes this cruel suffering infinitely worse that the persons who were taught a double prejudice in favour of religion, by education and by the place they held in the administration of its functions, are to receive the remnants of their property as alms from the profane

and impious hands of those who had robbed them of all the rest; to receive (if they are to receive anything) not from the charitable contributions of the faithful but from the insolent tenderness of known and avowed atheism, the maintenance of religion doled out to them by the measure of the contempt in which it is held, and for the purpose of making those who receive the allowance vile and of no estimation in the eyes of mankind.

But this act of seizure of property, it seems, is a judgment in law and not a confiscation. They have, it seems, found out in the academies of the Palais Royal and the Jacobins that certain men had no right to the possessions that they held under law, usage, the decisions of courts, and the accumulated prescription [see Glossary] of a thousand years. They say that ecclesiastics are fictitious persons, creatures of the state, whom at pleasure they may destroy, and of course limit and alter in every particular; that their possessions are not properly theirs but belong to the state, which created the fiction; and we are therefore not to trouble ourselves with what they may suffer in their •natural feelings and •natural persons on account of what is done toward them in this their •created-fiction character. What does it matter under what labels you injure men and deprive them of the just emoluments [see Glossary] of a profession that they were not only permitted but encouraged by the state to engage in—emoluments whose supposed certainty was the basis on which they had formed the plan of their lives, contracted debts, and led multitudes to an entire dependence on them?

You do not imagine, Sir, that I am going to compliment this miserable distinction of persons—the distinction between the fictional official and the natural man—with any long discussion. Tyranny's arguments are as contemptible as its force is dreadful. If your confiscators had not by their early crimes obtained a power that gives them indemnity for

all their later crimes, what would have refuted a logical trick that becomes an accomplice of theft and murder would have been not the syllogism of the logician but the lash of the executioner. . . .

This outrage on all the rights of property was at first covered with what, on the system of their conduct, was the most astonishing of all excuses—a regard for national faith. The enemies of property at first claimed to have a most tender, delicate, and scrupulous anxiety for keeping the king’s engagements with the public creditor [i.e. for paying the king’s debts to creditors other than private citizens]. These professors of the rights of men are so busy teaching others that they have no spare time in which to learn anything themselves; otherwise they would have known that the first and original faith of civil society is pledged to the property of the citizen, and not to the demands of the creditor of the state. The claim of the citizen is prior in time, paramount in title, superior in equity. The fortunes of individuals, whether possessed by acquisition or by descent or in virtue of a participation in the goods of some community, were not—explicitly or implicitly—any part of the creditor’s security [i.e. any part of the collateral for his loan]. They never entered his head when he made his bargain. He well knew that the public, whether represented by a monarch or by a senate, can pledge nothing but the public estate; and it can have no public estate except in what it derives from a *just and proportioned* imposition [here = ‘tax’] on the citizens at large. This was engaged, and nothing else could be engaged, to the public creditor. No man can mortgage his injustice as a pawn for his fidelity. [That brilliant last sentence unpacks into this: ‘No man can take out a loan on this basis: “I don’t have any collateral; but I promise that the loan will be repaid when it falls due because I can (and if necessary will) do X, which will bring me enough money to repay it”, where X is some kind of criminal activity.’]

Old nobility versus new money

I have to say something about the contradictions caused by the extreme rigor and the extreme laxity of this new ‘public faith’ that influenced this transaction, doing so not according to the nature of the obligation but to the description of the persons to whom it was engaged. No acts of the old government of the kings of France are held valid in the National Assembly except its pecuniary [see Glossary] engagements—which are in fact acts of the most ambiguous legality. The other acts of that royal government are considered in so odious a light that to have a claim under its authority is looked on as a sort of crime. A pension, given as a reward for service to the state, is surely as good a basis for ownership as any security for money advanced to the state. It is better; for money is paid, and well paid, to obtain that service. But we have seen multitudes of people under this description in France who had never been deprived of their allowances by the most arbitrary ministers in the most arbitrary times, robbed without mercy by this assembly of ‘the rights of men’. When they laid claim to the bread that had been earned by their labour, they were told that their services had not been rendered to the country that now exists.

This laxity of public faith is not confined to those unfortunate persons. The Assembly, with perfect consistency it must be admitted, is engaged in a respectable deliberation concerning how far it is bound by the treaties made with other nations under the former government, and their committee is to report which of them they ought to ratify, and which not. By this means they have put the external trustworthiness of this virgin state on a par with its internal trustworthiness.

It is not easy to conceive any rational principle according to which the royal government did not have

- the power of rewarding service and making treaties, in virtue of its prerogative,

rather than

- the power of pledging to creditors the actual and possible revenue of the state.

The treasure of the nation has been of all things the least allowed to the prerogative of the king of France or of any king in Europe. To mortgage the public revenue implies the sovereign dominion, in the fullest sense, over the public purse. It goes far beyond the trust of temporary and occasional taxation. The acts of that dangerous power—sovereign dominion over the public purse—are the distinctive mark of a boundless despotism; yet they alone have been held sacred! Where did it come from, this preference of a democratic assembly for a body of property rising from the most critical and obnoxious of all the exercises of monarchical authority? Reason can furnish nothing to reconcile inconsistency, nor can partial favour be accounted for on equitable principles. But though there is no *justification* for the contradiction or the partiality, they do have a *cause* which I do not think is hard to discover.

Through the vast debt of France a great moneyed interest had gradually grown up, and with it a great power. By the ancient usages that prevailed in that kingdom, the general circulation of property, and in particular the convertibility of land into money and vice versa, had always been difficult.

- Family settlements, rather more general and more strict than they are in England, . . .
- the great mass of landed property held by the crown and, by a maxim of the French law, held inalienably,
- the vast estates of the ecclesiastical corporations

—all these had kept the landed and moneyed interests more

separated in France, less miscible, and kept the owners of the two kinds of property less well disposed to each other, than they are in this country.

The moneyed property was long looked on with rather an evil eye by the people. They saw it as connected with their distresses and making them worse. It was no less envied by the old landed interests, partly for the same reasons that made it obnoxious to the people, but much more because it eclipsed, by the splendour of an ostentatious luxury, the unendowed pedigrees and naked titles of many of the nobility [i.e. nobles who had nothing but their titles as nobility]. Even when •the nobility that represented the more permanent landed interest united themselves by marriage (which sometimes was the case) with •the other description [see Glossary], the wealth that saved a noble family from ruin was thought to contaminate and degrade it. Thus the enmities and heart-burnings of these parties were increased even by the means by which discord is usually made to cease and quarrels are turned into friendship. In the meantime, the pride of the wealthy men, not noble or newly noble, increased with its cause. They felt with resentment an inferiority whose basis they did not acknowledge. There was nothing they were not willing to do to get revenge for the outrages of this rival pride and to exalt their wealth to what they regarded as its natural rank and esteem. They struck at the nobility through the crown and the church. They attacked them particularly on the side on which they thought them the most vulnerable, namely the possessions of the church, which through the patronage of the crown generally came to the nobility.

The bishoprics and the great land-owning abbeys were nearly all held by the nobility.

In this state of real (though not always perceived) warfare between the noble ancient landed interest and the new moneyed interest, the latter was stronger because its power

was easier to deploy. The moneyed interest is in its nature more ready for any adventure, and its possessors are more disposed to new enterprises of any kind. Being of recent acquisition, it goes along more naturally with any novelties. So it is the kind of wealth that will be resorted to by all who wish for change.

Political men of letters

Along with the moneyed interest, a new description of men had grown up with whom the moneyed interest soon formed a close and marked union—I mean the political men of letters. Men of letters like to stand out, so they are rarely averse to innovation. Since the decline of the life and greatness of Louis XIV they were not so much cultivated by him or the regent or the successors to the crown, and not bound to the court by favours and emoluments as systematically as during the splendid period of that ostentatious and not impolitic reign. What they lost in the old court protection they tried to make up by joining in a sort of incorporation of their own; to which the two academies of France, and afterwards the vast undertaking of the Encyclopedia carried on by a society of these gentlemen, contributed considerably.

Some years ago the literary cabal had formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion. They pursued this objective with a degree of zeal that until then had been exhibited only by the propagators of some system of piety. They were possessed with a spirit of proselytism in the most fanatical degree; and from that they easily slid into a spirit of persecution according to their means. What was not to be done toward their great end by any direct or immediate act could be brought about by a longer process through public opinion. To command that opinion, the first step is to get control of those who direct it.

With great method and perseverance they managed to get possession of all the avenues to literary fame. Many of them indeed stood high in the ranks of literature and science. The world had done them justice, and because of their general talents it forgave the evil tendency of their special principles. This was true liberality, which they returned by trying to confine the reputation for sense, learning, and taste to themselves or their followers. I venture to say that this narrow, exclusive spirit has been just as harmful to literature and taste as to morals and true philosophy. These atheistical fathers have a bigotry of their own, and they have learned to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk. But in some things they are men of the world. The resources of intrigue are called in to make up for the defects of argument and wit. This system of literary monopoly was combined with unremitting efforts to blacken and discredit—in every way and by every means—all those who did not belong to their faction. To those who have observed the spirit of their conduct it has been clear for years that all they lacked was the *power* to move from the intolerance of the tongue and pen to a persecution that would strike at property, liberty, and life.

The casual and faint persecution carried on against them, more from compliance with form and decency than from resentment, did not weaken their strength or relax their efforts. The outcome of the whole situation—including opposition and success—was that a violent and malignant zeal, of a previously unknown kind, took complete possession of their minds and made their whole conversation, which otherwise would have been pleasing and instructive, perfectly disgusting. A spirit of cabal, intrigue, and proselytism pervaded all their thoughts, words, and actions. And as controversial zeal soon turns its thoughts on force, they began to insinuate themselves into a correspondence with

foreign princes, hoping that through their authority, which at first they flattered, they might bring about the changes they had in view. They didn't care whether these changes were to be accomplished by •the thunderbolt of despotism or •the earthquake of popular commotion. . . . For that same purpose they conspicuously cultivated the moneyed interest of France; and partly through the means provided by those whose offices gave them the most extensive and certain means of communication, they carefully occupied all the avenues to opinion.

Writers, especially when they act in a body and with one direction, have great influence on the public mind; so the alliance of these writers with the moneyed interest had a big effect in removing the popular odium and envy evoked by that sort of wealth. These writers, like the propagators of all novelties, claimed to have a great zeal for the poor and the lower orders, while in their satires they used every exaggeration to make horrible the faults of courts, of nobility, and of priesthood. They became a sort of demagogues. They served as a link to unite obnoxious wealth with restless and desperate poverty, all in the service of one objective.

As these two kinds of men (•the wealthy and the writers•) appear to be principal leaders in all the recent doings, their combination and politics will serve to account—not on any principles of law or of policy but as a cause—for the general fury with which all the landed property of ecclesiastical corporations has been attacked; and the great care which, contrary to their pretended principles, has been taken of a moneyed interest originating from the authority of the crown. All the envy against wealth and power was skillfully directed against other descriptions of riches. How else can we account for an appearance so extraordinary and unnatural as that of the ecclesiastical possessions,

which had survived so many successions of ages and shocks of civil violences, and were protected at once by justice and by prejudice,

being applied to the payment of comparatively recent debts—invidious debts contracted by a decried and subverted government? [This hooks up with the paragraph starting 'This outrage. . . ' on page 60.]

Confiscation

Was the public estate a sufficient stake for the public debts? Assume that it was not, and that a loss must be incurred somewhere. When the only estate *lawfully* possessed—the only one the contracting parties had in mind at the time when their bargain was made—happens to fail, who according to the principles of natural and legal fairness ought to suffer the loss? Certainly it ought to be either the party who trusted or the party who persuaded him to trust, or both, and not third parties who had no concern with the transaction. When an insolvency occurs, the loss should be suffered by those who are weak enough to lend on bad security, or those who fraudulently held out a security that was not valid. Laws are acquainted with no other rules of decision. But by the new institute of the rights of men the only persons who in fairness ought to suffer the loss are the only persons who are to be protected from it; the debt is to be paid by those who were neither lenders nor borrowers, neither mortgagers nor mortgagees.

What had the clergy to do with these transactions? What had they to do with any public engagement other than their own debt? To *that* their estates were certainly bound to the last acre. Nothing can show better the true spirit of the •National• Assembly—which sits for public confiscation, with its new equity and its new morality—than their handling

of this debt of the clergy. The body of confiscators, true to the moneyed interest for the sake of which they were false to every other, have found the clergy competent to incur a legal debt. Of course, they declared them legally entitled to the property which their power of incurring the debt and mortgaging the estate implied, recognizing the rights of those persecuted citizens in the very act in which their rights were thus grossly violated.

If any persons are to make good deficiencies to the public creditor, other than the public at large, they must be those who managed the agreement. So why aren't the estates of all the comptrollers-general confiscated? Why not those of the long succession of ministers, financiers, and bankers who have been enriched while the nation was impoverished by their dealings and their advice? Why is not the estate of M. Laborde declared forfeited rather than of the archbishop of Paris, who had no part in the creation or in the jobbing of the public funds? And if you must confiscate old landed estates rather than those of the money-jobbers, why is the penalty confined to one description? I do not know whether the Duke de Choiseul's expenses have left anything of the infinite sums he had derived from the bounty of his master during the transactions of a reign which contributed largely—by every sort of extravagance in war and peace—to the present debt of France. If any of it does remain, why is it not confiscated? I remember being in Paris during the time of the old government. I was there just after the Duke d'Aiguillon had been (as it was generally thought) snatched from the block by the hand of a protecting despotism.

He was a minister and had some concern in the affairs of that spendthrift period. Why do I not see his estate delivered up to the municipalities in which it is situated? The noble family of Noailles have long been servants (meritorious servants I admit) to the crown of France, and have of course

had some share in its bounties. Why do I hear nothing of the application of *their* estates to the public debt? Why is the estate of the Duke de Rochefoucault more sacred than that of the Cardinal de Rochefoucault? The Duke is no doubt a worthy person, and he makes a good use of his revenues (though really it is a sort of profaneness to talk as though someone's ownership of his property was affected by how he uses it.) But it is no disrespect to the Duke to say, on the basis of authentic information, that the use by his brother the Cardinal of *his* property was far more laudable and far more public-spirited. Can one hear of the proscription of such persons and the confiscation of their effects without indignation and horror? Anyone who does not feel such emotions on such occasions is not a man. Anyone who won't express them does not deserve the name of a freeman.

Few barbarous conquerors have ever made so terrible a revolution in property. None of the heads of the Roman factions, when they auctioned off things they had acquired by violence, ever offered for sale such an enormous amount of the goods of the conquered citizen. It must be allowed in favour of those tyrants of antiquity that they can hardly be said to have acted in cold blood. Their passions were inflamed, their tempers soured, their understandings confused with the spirit of revenge, with the innumerable recent inflictions and retaliations of blood and plunder. They were driven beyond all bounds of moderation by fear of the return of power, with the return of property, to the families of those they had injured beyond all hope of forgiveness.

But these Roman confiscators, who were only at the early stages of tyranny and were not instructed in 'the rights of men' to practise all sorts of cruelties on each other without provocation, thought it necessary to spread a sort of colour over their injustice.

They considered the vanquished party as composed of

traitors who had borne arms against the commonwealth or otherwise acted with hostility towards it . They regarded them as having forfeited their property by their crimes. With you in contemporary France, in your improved state of the human mind, there was no such formality. You seized £5,000,000 sterling of annual rent and turned more than 40,000 human creatures out of their houses, because 'such was your pleasure'. The tyrant Henry VIII of England, being no more enlightened than the Roman Mariuses and Sullas and not having studied in your new schools, did not know what an effectual instrument of despotism was to be found in that grand magazine of offensive weapons, 'the rights of men'. When he decided to rob the abbeys, as the club of the Jacobins have robbed all the ecclesiastics, he began by setting up a commission to look into the crimes and abuses that prevailed in those communities. As might be expected, his commission reported truths, exaggerations, and falsehoods. But it did, whether truly or falsely, report abuses and offences. However, because

- abuses might be corrected,
- every crime of individuals does not imply a forfeiture with regard to communities, and
- property, in that dark age, was not revealed to be a creature of prejudice,

all those abuses (and there were enough of them) were hardly thought sufficient ground for such a complete confiscation as he proposed to make. [In the above list, the third item is of course meant sarcastically.] So he procured the *formal surrender* of these estates. All these laborious proceedings were adopted by one of the worst tyrants in history as necessary preliminaries before he could venture—by bribing the members of his two servile houses with a share of the spoils and holding out to them an eternal immunity from taxation—to demand an act of parliament that would confirm

his iniquitous proceedings. Had fate reserved him to our times, four technical terms would have done his business and saved him all this trouble; all he needed was one short form of incantation—'Philosophy, Light, Liberality, the Rights of Men'.

I can say nothing in praise of acts of tyranny that no voice has hitherto ever commended under any of their false colours, yet in these false colours homage was paid by despotism to justice. The power that was above all fear and all remorse was not set above all shame. While shame keeps its watch, virtue is not wholly extinguished in the heart and moderation will not be utterly exiled from the minds of tyrants.

I believe every honest man sympathises in his reflections with our political poet [Denham, "Cooper's Hill"] on that occasion, and will pray to avert the omen whenever these acts of rapacious despotism present themselves to his view or his imagination:

May no such storm
Fall on our times, where ruin must reform.
Tell me (my Muse) what monstrous dire offence,
What crimes could any Christian king incense
To such a rage? Was't luxury, or lust?
Was he so temperate, so chaste, so just?
Were these their crimes? they were his own much
more,
But wealth is crime enough to him that's poor.

This same wealth. . . was your temptation to violate property, law, and religion, united in one object. But was the state of France so wretched and undone that nothing but theft could preserve its existence? On this point I want information. When the states met, was the condition of the finances of France such that, after economising on principles of justice

and mercy through all departments [this term is explained on page 95], no fair sharing of burdens through all the orders could possibly restore them? If such an equal imposition would have been sufficient, you know very well that it could easily have been made.

M. Necker, in the budget which he laid before the orders assembled at Versailles, made a detailed exposition of the state of the French nation. According to him, it was not necessary to resort to any new impositions whatsoever to put France's receipts in balance with its expenses. [Details about this are given. Then:] He concludes with these emphatic words [Burke quotes the original French]:

'What a country this is, gentlemen, which can make disappear a deficit that has made such a noise in Europe, without compulsory fees and with simple procedures that no-one will notice.'

As for the •procedures indicated in M. Necker's speech, there can be no doubt that a very moderate and proportioned assessment on all the citizens, without distinction, would have provided for all of •them to the fullest extent of their demand. [He gives some details regarding how Necker proposed to do this. Then:]

If what M. Necker said was false, the Assembly are highly culpable for having forced the king to accept as his minister—and, since the king's deposition, for having employed as *their* minister—a man who could abuse so notoriously his master's confidence and theirs, in a matter of the highest importance and relating directly to his particular office. But like you I have a high degree of respect for M. Necker, and I have no doubt that what he said was exact; and in that case what can be said in favour of those who, instead of moderate, reasonable, and general contribution, have—in cold blood and with no necessity to do so—resorted to a partial and cruel confiscation?

Was that contribution refused on the excuse of 'privilege' by the clergy or the nobility? No, certainly. As for the clergy, they even went ahead of the wishes of the third order [= 'of the commons']. Before the meeting of the states, they had in all their instructions explicitly directed their deputies to renounce every immunity that put them on a different footing from that of their fellow subjects. In this renunciation the clergy were even more explicit than the nobility.

[Burke now has (i) a paragraph arguing that even if Necker's mild proposals for dealing with the debt had been rubbish, and even if it had been all right to lay the whole burden of the debt on the clergy, the imposition of the amount needed 'would not have been altogether ruinous to those on whom it was imposed'; and (ii) a paragraph maintaining that, contrary to what people might think, the clergy and the nobility of France had contributed considerably to the state, 'though not equally with each other, nor either of them equally with the commons'. He gives details. Then:]

When the terrors of this tremendous proscription hung over the clergy, they made an offer of a contribution through the archbishop of Aix; it was so extravagant that it ought not to have been accepted. But it was obviously more advantageous to the public creditor than anything that could rationally be promised by the confiscation. Why was it not accepted? The reason is plain: there was no desire that the church should be brought to **serve the state**. The service of the state was made a pretext to **destroy the church**. They had no scruples about destroying the church by means that would also destroy their country; and they have destroyed it. Another great aim of the project would have been defeated if the plan of extortion—e.g. accepting the offer from the archbishop of Aix—had been adopted instead of the scheme of confiscation. The new landed interest connected with the new republic, and connected with it for its very being, could

not have been created. This was among the reasons why that extravagant ransom was not accepted.

The effects of confiscation

The madness of the initial plan for confiscation soon became apparent. To bring into the market all at once this unwieldy mass of landed property, enlarged by the confiscation of all the crown's vast lands, was obviously to defeat the profits aimed at by the confiscation, because it would lower the value of those lands and indeed of all France's landed estates. Another drawback was the sudden diversion of all the country's circulating money from trade to land. What step was taken? Did the Assembly, on becoming aware of the inevitable ill effects of their projected sale, revert to the offers of the clergy? No distress could make them take a course that was disgraced by any appearance of justice! Giving over all hopes from a general immediate sale, another project seems to have taken the place of that one. [They soon dropped that, Burke says, because of other difficulties, and returned to the idea of *sale*, but with a difference.] Many municipalities had been reduced to the most deplorable poverty. Money was nowhere to be seen. They—the National Assembly—were therefore led to the point that was so ardently desired. They panted for a currency of any kind that could revive their perishing industry. The municipalities were to be admitted to a share in the spoils, which evidently made the original scheme. . . .altogether impracticable. Public needs pressed in on all sides. The minister of finance reiterated his call for revenue with a most urgent, anxious, and boding voice. Thus pressed on all sides, instead of the first plan of turning their bankers into bishops and abbots, instead of *paying the old debt*, they *contracted a new debt* at 3%, creating a new paper currency based on an eventual sale of the church

lands. They issued this paper currency to satisfy in the first instance chiefly the demands made on them by the Bank of discount, the great paper-mill of their fictitious wealth.

The spoil of the church had now become the only resource of all their operations in finance, the vital principle of all their politics, the sole security for the existence of their power. It was necessary by any means, even the most violent, to put every individual on the same footing, and to bind the nation in one guilty interest to uphold this act and the authority of those by whom it was done. In order to force the most reluctant into sharing in their pillage, they made their paper money compulsory in all payments. Those who consider the general tendency of their schemes to this one objective as a centre from which then all their measures radiate will not think I am spending too long on this part of the National Assembly's proceedings.

To cut off all appearance of connection between the crown and public justice, and to bring the whole under implicit obedience to the dictators in Paris, the old independent judicature of the *parlements* [see Glossary], with all its merits and all its faults, was wholly abolished. While the *parlements* existed, the people might sometimes resort to them and rally under the standard of their ancient laws. But thought had to be given to the fact that the magistrates and officers in the courts now abolished had purchased their places at a very high price, for which—as well as for the duty they performed—they received only a very low rate of return. Simple confiscation is a boon only for the clergy; for the lawyers some appearances of fairness are to be observed, and they are to receive compensation adding up to an immense amount. Their compensation becomes part of the national debt, for the liquidation of which there is the one inexhaustible fund. The lawyers are to get their compensation in the new church paper money,

which is in step with the new principles of judicature and legislature. The dismissed magistrates are to take their share of martyrdom with the ecclesiastics, meaning that they will receive their own property in a manner that must be looked on with horror by all those who have been seasoned with the ancient principles of jurisprudence and have been the sworn guardians of property. And the clergy must either •starve or •receive their miserable allowance out of the depreciated paper •money•, which is stamped with the indelible character of sacrilege and with the symbols of their own ruin. The alliance of bankruptcy and tyranny has seldom committed an outrage against credit, property, and liberty as violent as this compulsory paper currency.

In the course of all these operations it eventually comes to light that in reality, and in a fair sense, the lands of the church are not to be sold at all. By the recent resolutions of the National Assembly, they are indeed to be delivered to the highest bidder. But notice that only a certain portion of the purchase money is to be laid down, with a period of twelve years allowed for the payment of the rest. The philosophic purchasers are therefore, on payment of a sort of fine, to be put instantly into possession of the estate. It becomes in some respects a sort of gift to them—to be held on the feudal condition of zeal to the new establishment. This project is evidently to let in a body of purchasers without money. The consequence will be that •after twelve years• these purchasers, or rather grant-recipients, will pay •the remainder of the purchase price• from

- the rents as they accrue, which might as well be received by the state, and
- the spoil of the materials of buildings,
- waste in woods, and
- whatever money they can wring from the miserable peasant by hands practised in the gripings of usury.

The peasant is to be delivered over to the mercenary and arbitrary discretion of men who will be stimulated to every sort of extortion by the growing demands on the growing profits of an estate held under the precarious settlement of a new political system.

When all the frauds, impostures, violences, thefts, burnings, murders, confiscations, compulsory paper currencies, and every kind of tyranny and cruelty employed to create and uphold this Revolution have their natural effect—namely, to shock the moral sentiments of all virtuous and sober minds—the abettors of this philosophic system immediately strain their throats in a declamation against the old monarchical government of France. When they have blackened that deposed power sufficiently, they then proceed in argument as if •all those who disapprove of their new abuses must of course be partisans of the old, as if •those who criticise their crude and violent schemes of ‘liberty’ ought to be treated as advocates for servitude. Their needs do indeed compel them to this base and contemptible fraud. Nothing can reconcile men to their proceedings and projects but the supposition that there is no third option between •them and •some tyranny as odious as can be furnished by the records of history or the invention of poets. This prattling of theirs hardly deserves the name of sophistry [see Glossary]. It is nothing but plain impudence. Have these gentlemen never heard, in the whole circle of the worlds of theory and practice, of anything between the despotism of the monarch and the despotism of the multitude? Have they never heard of a monarchy directed by laws, controlled and balanced by the great hereditary wealth and hereditary dignity of a nation, and both again controlled by a judicious check from the reason and feeling of the people at large acting by a suitable and permanent organ •such as the English House of Commons•? Is it then impossible to find a man who (without

criminal ill intention or pitiable absurdity) •prefers such a mixed and tempered government to either of the extremes, and who •regards as destitute of all wisdom and all virtue any country which, having in its choice to obtain such a government with ease, or rather to confirm it when actually possessed, thought it proper to commit a thousand crimes and to subject their country to a thousand evils in order to avoid it? 'A pure democracy is the only tolerable form into which human society can be thrown'—is that a truth so universally acknowledged that a man is not permitted to hesitate about its merits without the suspicion of being a friend to tyranny, i.e. a foe to mankind?

What is wrong with absolute democracy

I do not know under what description to class the present ruling authority in France. It purports to be a pure democracy, though I think it is heading towards soon being a wicked and ignoble oligarchy. But for the present I admit it to be a contrivance with the nature and effect that it claims to have. I don't reject any form of government merely on abstract principles. There may be situations in which the purely democratic form will become necessary. There may be some (very few, and in very special circumstances) where it would be clearly desirable. I do not take this to be the case of France or of any other great country. Until now, we have seen no examples of considerable democracies. The ancients were better acquainted with them. Not being wholly unread in the authors who had seen the most of those constitutions, and who best understood them, I cannot help agreeing with their opinion that an absolute democracy is no more to be reckoned among the legitimate forms of government than absolute monarchy. They think it to be the corruption and degeneracy of a republic rather than a sound constitution.

If I recollect rightly, Aristotle observes that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny. Of this I am certain, that in a democracy, whenever strong divisions prevail (as they often must in that kind of polity), the majority of the citizens is capable of cruelly oppressing the minority, and that this oppression will extend to far greater numbers and will be carried on with much greater fury than can almost ever be feared from a monarchy. In such a popular persecution, individual sufferers are in a much more deplorable condition than in any other. Under a cruel prince they have the soothing compassion of mankind to lessen the sting of their wounds; they have the plaudits of the people to strengthen their good-hearted constancy under their sufferings; but those who are wronged by multitudes are deprived of all external consolation. They seem deserted by mankind, overpowered by a conspiracy of their whole species.

The faults of the French monarchy

But suppose that I am wrong and democracy does not have an inevitable tendency to party tyranny, and suppose it to have as much good in it when unmixed [= absolute] as I am sure it has when compounded with other forms, does monarchy contain nothing at all to recommend it? I do not often quote Bolingbroke, . . . but he has one observation which, in my opinion, is not without depth and solidity. He says that he prefers a monarchy to other governments because you can better graft any kind of republic onto a monarchy than graft anything of monarchy onto the republican forms. I think he is perfectly right. The fact is so historically, and it agrees well with political theory.

I know how easy it is to dwell on the faults of departed greatness. By a revolution in the state, the fawning flatterer

of yesterday is converted into the austere critic of the present hour. But steady, independent minds, when they are thinking about something as important to mankind as government, will disdain to join with the satirists and declaimers. They will judge human institutions as they do human characters. They will sort out the good from the evil that is mixed in mortal institutions as it is in mortal men.

Your government in France was usually (and I think justly) reputed to be the best of the unqualified or ill-qualified monarchies; but it was still full of abuses. [He means: absolute monarchies or ones that weren't quite absolute but whose other ingredients were unsatisfactory.] These abuses accumulated over time, as they must accumulate in every monarchy that is not under the constant inspection of a popular representative. I am no stranger to the faults and defects of the now-subverted government of France, and I am not inclined by nature or policy to sing the praises of anything that is a just and natural object of censure. But our present question concerns not the vices of that monarchy but its existence. So: was the French government so incapable or so undeserving of reform that it was absolutely necessary that the whole structure should be at once pulled down and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretical experimental edifice in its place? At the beginning of 1789 all France was of a different opinion. The instructions to the representatives to the States-General from every district in that kingdom were filled with projects for reforming that government without the remotest suggestion of a plan to destroy it. Had such a plan been even hinted at, I believe there would have been only one voice—a voice for rejecting it with scorn and horror. Men have sometimes been led gradually, and sometimes been hurried, into things they would never have come anywhere near to if they could have seen the whole together. When those instructions from the districts were given, there was no doubt that abuses

existed, and that they demanded reform; nor is there now. In the interval between the instructions and the revolution, things changed their shape. So the true question now is: who are in the right—those who would have reformed or those who have destroyed?

To hear some men speak of the late monarchy of France, you would imagine that they were talking of Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword of Tahmas Kouli Khan, or at least describing the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey,

- where the finest countries in the world's friendliest climates are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war,
- where arts are unknown,
- where manufactures languish,
- where science is extinguished,
- where agriculture decays,
- where the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer.

Was *this* the case of France? I have no way of answering the question except by reference to facts, and the facts answer No. Along with much evil there is some good in monarchy itself, and some corrective to its evil from religion, from laws, from manners, from opinions that the French monarchy must have received, which rendered it (though by no means a free, and therefore by no means a good, constitution) a despotism in appearance rather than in reality.

Population

Among the standards by which the effects of government on any country are to be estimated, I regard the state [here = 'size', apparently] of its population as not the least certain. No country in which population flourishes and is progressively improving can be under a very harmful government.

About sixty years ago the population of France was even at that period estimated to be 22,000,000 souls. (Or so I believe. The relevant documents are very voluminous, and I do not have them or know where to get them; so I have to speak from memory, and therefore less positively.) At the end of the last century it had been generally calculated at 18,000,000. On either of these estimations, France was not ill peopled. M. Necker, who is an authority for his own time. . . ., reckons the people of France in 1780 at 24,670,000, and his basis for this appears to be sound. [Then some complicated stuff about how much the French population increased between 1780 and 1789. Burke is doubtful about the highest estimate that had been made, and continues:] I have no doubt that the population of France did increase considerably during this later period; but supposing that it increased only enough to bring it up to 25,000,000, still a population of that size (and still growing) in a space of about 27,000 square leagues is immense. It is, for instance, a good deal more than the proportionable population of this island, or even than that of England, the best peopled part of the United Kingdom. . . .

I do not attribute this population to the deposed government, because I do not like to compliment the contrivances of men on what is due largely to the bounty of Providence. But that decried government could not have obstructed, and most probably it favoured, the operation of the causes—whether of nature in the soil or habits of industry among the people—that has produced such a large number of people throughout that whole kingdom and exhibited such prodigies of population in some places. I will never suppose to be the worst of all political institutions the fabric of a state which is found by experience to contain a principle that is favourable (however latent it may be) to the increase of mankind.

National wealth

The wealth of a country is another non-negligible standard by which we may judge whether a government is, on the whole, protecting or destructive. France far exceeds England in the size of its population, but I fear that her comparative wealth is much inferior to ours, not as evenly distributed as ours, and not as ready in the circulation. I believe that the difference in the form of the two governments is one cause of this advantage on the side of England. . . . But wealth that will not stand comparison with the riches of England may nevertheless constitute a very respectable degree of affluence. M. Necker's book on financial administration in France, published in 1785, contains an accurate and interesting collection of facts concerning public economy and political arithmetic; and his thoughts on the subject are in general wise and liberal. In that work he gives an idea of the state of France very remote from the portrait of a country whose government was a perfect grievance, an absolute evil, admitting no cure but through the violent and uncertain remedy of a total revolution. He affirms that between 1726 and 1784 the French mint coined gold and silver to the amount of about £100,000,000 sterling.

M. Necker couldn't be mistaken about the amount of bullion coined in the mint. It is a matter of official record. This able financier's reasonings concerning the quantity of gold and silver that remained for circulation when he wrote in 1785—i.e. about four years before the deposition and imprisonment of the French king—are not equally certain, but his grounds for them are so apparently solid that it is not easy to refuse a considerable degree of assent to his calculation. He calculates the coin money then actually existing in France at about £88,000,000 sterling. A great accumulation of wealth for one country, large as that country is! M. Necker

was so far from considering this influx of wealth as likely to cease, when he wrote in 1785, that he expected a future annual increase of 2% on the money brought into France during the periods from which he computed.

Some cause must have originally introduced all the money coined at its mint into that kingdom, and some equally operative cause must have kept at home, or returned into its bosom, such a vast flood of treasure as M. Necker calculates to remain for domestic circulation. Make any reasonable deductions from M. Necker's computation and the remainder must still amount to an immense sum. Causes with that much power to acquire and to retain cannot be found in discouraged industry, insecure property, and a positively destructive government. Indeed,

—when I consider the face of the kingdom of France, •the number and affluence of her cities, •the useful magnificence of her spacious high roads and bridges, •the opportunity of her artificial canals and navigations opening the conveniences of maritime communication through such an immense solid continent;

—when I turn my eyes to •the stupendous works of her ports and harbours, and to •her whole naval apparatus, whether for war or trade;

—when I bring before my view the number of her fortifications, designed with such bold and masterly skill and built and maintained at such a prodigious expense, presenting an armed front and impenetrable barrier to her enemies on every side;

—when I recollect •how very small a part of that extensive region is without cultivation, and •to what complete perfection the culture of many of the best productions of the earth have been brought in France;

—when I reflect on the excellence of her manufactures and

fabrics, second to none but ours, and in some particulars not second;

—when I contemplate the grand foundations of charity, public and private;

—when I survey the state of all the arts that beautify and polish life;

—when I reckon •the men she has bred for extending her fame in war, •her able statesmen, •the multitude of her profound lawyers and theologians, •her philosophers, •her critics, •her historians and antiquaries, •her poets and •her orators, sacred and profane

—I behold in all this something that awes and commands the imagination, checks the mind on the brink of precipitate and indiscriminate censure, and demands that we should very seriously examine what and how great are the latent vices that could authorise us at once to pull such a vast structure to the ground. I do not recognise in this view of things the despotism of Turkey. Nor do I discern the character of a government that has on the whole been so oppressive, corrupt or negligent as to be utterly unfit for all reformation. I must think such a government well deserved to have its excellence heightened, its faults corrected, and its capacities improved into a British constitution.

Anyone who examine the proceedings of that deposed government for several years back cannot fail to observe, amidst the inconstancy and fluctuation natural to •royal• courts, an earnest endeavour toward the prosperity and improvement of the country; he must admit that this endeavour had long been directed

•in some instances wholly to remove,

•in many instances considerably to correct

the abusive practices and usages that had prevailed in the state; and that even the unlimited power of the sovereign over

the persons of his subjects—inconsistent as it undoubtedly was with law and liberty—had been every day exercised more and more lightly. So far from refusing to reform, that government was open—somewhat too easily open—to all sorts of projects and projectors on the subject. Rather too much of a hearing was given to the spirit of innovation, which was soon turned against those who fostered it and ended in their ruin. To do justice to that fallen monarchy—a cold and unflattering justice—we should say that for many years it trespassed more by levity [see Glossary] and lack of judgment in many of its schemes than from any defect in diligence or in public spirit. To compare the government of France for the last fifteen years with wise and well-constituted establishments during that period (or during any other) is not fair. But if it is compared with any of the former reigns in France on the matter of extravagance with money or strictness in the exercise of power, I believe that candid judges will give little credit to the good intentions of those who dwell perpetually on the donations to favourites, or on the expenses of the court, or on the horrors of the Bastille in the reign of Louis XVI.

It is very doubtful that the system (if it deserves to be called a 'system') now built on the ruins of that ancient monarchy will be able to give a better account of the population and wealth of the country that it has taken under its care. Instead of improving by the change, I fear that many years must elapse before it can recover to any extent from the effects of this philosophic revolution, and before the nation can be replaced on its former footing. . . . I hear that there are considerable emigrations from France, and that many people, leaving that voluptuous climate and that seductive 'liberty', have taken refuge in Canada—in frozen territory under British despotism.

With the present disappearance of coin, no-one could

think France the same country as the one in which the present minister of the finances was able to find £80,000,000 in coinage. From its general aspect one would conclude that it had for some time been under the special direction of the learned academicians of Laputa and Balnibarbi [two fictional realms appallingly governed by philosophers and scientists, in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*]. Already the population of Paris has so declined that M. Necker told the National Assembly that the provision needed for its subsistence is 20% less than what had formerly been found to be required. It is said (and I have never heard it contradicted) that 100,000 people are unemployed in that city, although it has become the seat of the imprisoned court and National Assembly. Nothing, I am credibly informed, can exceed the shocking and disgusting spectacle of begging displayed in that capital. Indeed the votes of the National Assembly leave no doubt of the fact. They have lately appointed a standing committee to deal with begging.

They are contriving at once a vigorous policy on this subject and, for the first time, the imposition of a tax to maintain the poor, for whose present relief great sums appear in the public accounts of the year. In the meantime the leaders of the legislative clubs and coffee-houses are intoxicated with admiration at their own wisdom and ability. They speak with lordly contempt of the rest of the world. They tell the people, to comfort them in the rags they have clothed them in, that they are a nation of philosophers; and

- sometimes by all the arts of quackish parade, by show, tumult, and bustle,

- sometimes by the alarms of plots and invasions,

they try to drown the cries of poverty and to divert the eyes of the observer from the ruin and wretchedness of the state. A brave people will certainly prefer •liberty accompanied by virtuous poverty to •depraved and wealthy servitude. But

before the price of comfort and affluence is paid, one ought to be pretty sure that what one is buying is real liberty, and that it is to be purchased at no other price. But I shall always look suspiciously at any 'liberty' that does not have wisdom and justice for its companions and does not bring prosperity.

What is wrong with the French nobility?

The advocates for this Revolution, not satisfied with exaggerating the vices of their ancient government, strike at the fame of their country itself by painting almost all that could have attracted the attention of strangers, namely their nobility and their clergy, as objects of horror. If this were only a libel, it would not have mattered much.

—If your nobility and gentry, who constituted most of your landed men and the whole of your military officers, resembled those of Germany at the time when merchant cities had to confederate—as the Hanseatic League—against the nobles in defence of their property;

—had they been like the Orsini and Vitelli in Italy, who used to conduct raids from their fortified dens to rob the trader and traveller;

—had they been like the Mamelukes in Egypt or the Nayres on the coast of Malabar,

I do admit that too critical an inquiry might not be advisable into the means of freeing the world from such a nuisance. The statues of Equity and Mercy might be veiled for a moment. The tenderest minds, confused by the dreadful emergency in which morality submits to the suspension of its own rules in favour of its own principles, might turn aside while fraud and violence were being used to destroy a pretended nobility that disgraced human nature while persecuting human beings. The persons who most loathed

blood and treason and arbitrary confiscation might remain silent spectators of this civil war between the vices.

But *did* the privileged nobility who met under the king's command at Versailles in 1789, or their constituents, deserve to be looked on as the Nayres or Mamelukes of this age, or as the Orsini and Vitelli of earlier times? If I had asked the question *then* I would have been taken to be a madman. What have they done *since then* that they were to be driven into exile, their persons hunted down, mangled, and tortured, their families dispersed, their houses laid in ashes, and their order abolished and the memory of it, if possible, extinguished by ordering them to change the very names they were usually known by? Read their instructions to their representatives. They breathe the spirit of liberty as warmly and they recommend reformation as strongly as any other order. Their privileges relative to contribution were voluntarily surrendered, just as the king from the beginning surrendered all claims to a right of taxation. There was only one opinion in France regarding a free constitution. The absolute monarchy was at an end. It breathed its last without a groan, without struggle, without convulsion. All the struggle and dissension arose *afterwards*, with the preference for a **despotic democracy** rather than a **government of reciprocal control**. The triumph of the victorious party was over the principles of a British constitution.

I have observed the affectation which for many years has prevailed in Paris, to a perfectly childish degree, of idolising the memory of your Henry IV. If anything could put one out of humour with that ornament to the kingly character, it would be this overdone style of crafty panegyric. The persons who have worked this engine the most busily are those who have ended their panegyrics by dethroning his successor and descendant, a man at least as good-natured as Henry IV, altogether as fond of his people, who did infinitely

more to correct the previous vices of the state than that great monarch did or ever meant to do. It is as well for his panegyrists that they don't have him to deal with. For Henry IV was a resolute, active, and politic prince. He did indeed have great humanity and mildness, but these never stood in the way of his interests. He never sought to be loved without making himself feared. He used soft language with determined conduct. He asserted and maintained his authority on the large scale, and distributed his acts of concession only in the details. He spent the income of his prerogative nobly, but he took care not to break in upon the capital; he never abandoned for a moment any of the claims that he made under the fundamental laws; he was willing to shed the blood of those who opposed him, often on the battle-field, sometimes on the scaffold. Because he knew how to make his virtues respected by the ungrateful, he has earned the praises of people whom, if they had lived at his time, he would have shut up in the Bastille and brought to punishment along with the regicides whom he hanged after he had starved Paris into surrendering.

If these panegyrists are in earnest in their admiration of Henry IV, they must remember that they cannot think more highly of him than he did of the French nobility, whose virtue, honour, courage, patriotism, and loyalty were his constant theme.

But the nobility of France are said to have degenerated since the days of Henry the Fourth. This is possible, but I cannot think there is *much* truth in it. I do not claim to know France as correctly as some others, but I have tried throughout my life to acquaint myself with human nature, otherwise I would be unfit to take even my humble part in the service of mankind. In that study I could not ignore a vast portion of human nature in the form in which it appeared in a country only twenty-four miles from the English shore.

On my best observation, set alongside my best inquiries, I found your nobility to be mostly composed of men of high spirit and of a delicate sense of honour, both with regard to themselves individually and with regard to their whole corps, over whom they kept a censorial eye—beyond what is common in other countries. They were tolerably well bred, very officious [= 'active in doing their duty'], humane, and hospitable; in their conversation frank and open; with a good military tone, and reasonably tinctured with literature, particularly of the authors in their own language. I speak of those who were generally met with; many had claims far above this description.

As to their behaviour to the lower classes, they seemed to me to comport themselves toward them with good nature and with something nearer to *familiarity* than is generally practised with us in the intercourse between the higher and lower ranks of life. To strike any person, even one in the most abject condition, was unknown and would be highly disgraceful. Instances of other ill-treatment of the humble part of the community were rare; and as for attacks made on the property or the personal liberty of the commons, I never heard of their doing any such thing; and, while the laws were in force under the former government, such tyranny in subjects would not have been permitted. As for men with landed estates, I had no fault to find with their conduct, though much to disapprove of and much to wish changed in many of the old tenures. Where the letting of their land was by rent, I could not discover that their agreements with their farmers were oppressive; and when they were in partnership with the farmer, as they often were, I have not heard of their taking the lion's share. The proportions seemed fair enough. There might be exceptions, but that is what they were—*exceptions*. I have no reason to believe that in these respects the landed noblesse of France were worse than the

landed gentry of this country, certainly in no way worse than the non-noble landholders of their own nation. In cities the nobility had no power, in the country very little. . . .

I am quite entitled to deny that the nobility had any considerable share in the oppression of the people in cases where there was real oppression, but I admit that they were guilty of considerable faults and errors. A foolish imitation of the worst part of the manners of England, which impaired their natural character without replacing it by what they may have meant to copy, has certainly made them worse than they were. Habitual dissoluteness of manners, continued beyond the age at which it can be pardoned, was more common among them than it is with us; and it reigned with less hope of remedy than there is here, though possibly less harmfully through being covered with more external decorum. They gave too ready an ear to the licentious philosophy that has helped to bring on their ruin. And there was another more fatal error among them. Commoners who came to be about as wealthy as many of the nobility were not fully admitted to the rank and esteem that wealth ought—in reason and good policy—to confer in every country, though I think not equally with that of other nobility. The two kinds of aristocracy—the wealthy commoners and the ‘other nobility’—were too punctiliously kept apart, though not as much so as in Germany and some other nations.

I regard this separation as one principal cause of the destruction of the old nobility. The military in particular was too exclusively reserved for men of noble family. But this was a mere error of opinion, which a conflicting opinion would have rectified. A permanent assembly in which the commons had their share of power would soon have abolished whatever was too divisive and insulting in these distinctions, and even the faults in the morals of the nobility would probably have been corrected by the greater varieties

of occupation and activity to which a constitution by orders [i.e. a system of government equally involving the clergy, and the nobility and the common people] would have given rise.

All this violent cry against the nobility I take to be a mere work of art. To be honoured and even privileged by the laws, opinions, and age-old usages of our country, growing out of the prejudice of centuries, has nothing to provoke horror and indignation in any man. Even holding on to those privileges too tenaciously is not absolutely a crime. Every man’s strong struggle to keep possession of what belongs to him and distinguishes him is one of the securities against injustice and despotism implanted in our nature. It operates as an instinct to secure property and to preserve communities in a settled state. What is there to shock in this? Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order. It is the Corinthian capital of polished society. ‘All we who are good citizens favour noble birth’ was the saying of a wise and good man [Cicero; Burke quotes him in Latin]. Indeed one sign of a liberal and benevolent mind is a slight bias in favour of nobility. Someone who wishes to *level* all the institutions that have been created to give a body to opinion and to give permanence to fleeting esteem is someone who feels no ennobling principle in his own heart. It is a sour, malignant, envious disposition, without taste for virtue or for any image or representation of it, that sees with joy the undeserved fall of what had long flourished in splendour and in honour. I do not like to see anything destroyed, any void produced in society, any ruin on the face of the land. So I was not disappointed that my inquiries and observations did not present to me any incorrigible vices in the nobility of France, or any abuse that could not be removed by a reform much less drastic than abolition. Your noblesse did not deserve punishment; and degrading is punishing.

What is wrong with the French clergy?

It was with the same satisfaction that I found that the result of my inquiry concerning your clergy was not dissimilar. It is no soothing news to my ears that great bodies of men are incurably corrupt. I listen sceptically to people who speak evil of those whom they are going to plunder. I suspect that vices are invented or exaggerated when profit is expected from their punishment. An enemy is a bad witness; a robber is a worse. There undoubtedly were vices and abuses in the clergy. That was inevitable: it was an old establishment, and not frequently revised. But I saw no crimes in the individuals that merited confiscation of their substance, or the cruel insults and degradations and the unnatural persecution that have been substituted for regulation to make things better.

If there had been any just cause for this new religious persecution, the atheistic libellers who act as trumpeters to animate the populace to plunder would have trumpeted the vices of *today's* clergy. This they have not done. They find themselves obliged to rake into the histories of former ages (which they have ransacked with a malignant and profligate industry) for every instance of oppression and persecution that has been made by or on behalf of the clergy, in order to justify...their own persecutions and cruelties. After destroying all other genealogies and family distinctions, they invent a sort of pedigree of crimes. To

- chastise men for the offences of their natural ancestors

is not very just; but to

- take the fiction of ancestry in a corporate succession as reason for punishing men who have no relation to guilty acts except in names and general descriptions
- is a sort of refinement in injustice belonging to the philosophy of this 'enlightened' age. The Assembly punishes

men of whom many, perhaps most, hate the violent conduct of ecclesiastics in earlier times as much as their present persecutors can do, and who would be as loud and as strong in expressing their disapproval if they were not well aware of the purposes for which all this declamation is employed.

Corporate bodies are immortal for the •good of the members, but not for their •punishment. Nations themselves are such corporations. It's as though we in England waged endless war on all Frenchmen for the evils that they brought on us in the various periods of our mutual hostilities. Or as though you thought yourselves justified in falling upon all Englishmen because of the unparalleled calamities brought on the people of France by the unjust invasions of our Henrys and our Edwards. Indeed, we would be mutually justified in this exterminatory war on each other, as much as you are justified in the unprovoked persecution of your present countrymen because of the conduct of men of the same name in other times.

What we can learn from history

We do not draw the moral lessons we could from history. On the contrary, without care it may be used to vitiate our minds and to destroy our happiness. In history a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind. If it is perverted it can serve as a warehouse full of offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state, supplying the means of keeping alive or reviving dissensions and animosities and adding fuel to civil fury. History consists for the greater part of the miseries brought on the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites which shake the public with the same

— troublous storms that toss
The private state, and render life unsweet.
[Spenser, *Faery Queene*]

These vices are the *causes* of those storms. Religion, morals, laws, prerogatives, privileges, liberties, rights of men are the *excuses* for them. The excuses are always found in some specious appearance of a real good. You would not secure men from tyranny and sedition by rooting out of the mind the principles to which these fraudulent excuses apply? If you did, you would root out everything that is valuable in the human breast. And the usual actors and instruments in great public evils are kings, priests, magistrates, senates, parliaments, national assemblies, judges, and captains; but you would not cure the evil by deciding not to have any more monarchs, ministers of state or of the gospel, interpreters of law, general officers, public councils. You might change the names. The things in some shape must remain. A certain quantum of power must always exist in the community in some hands and under some label. Wise men apply their remedies to vices, not to names; to the causes of evil that are permanent, not to the occasional organs by which they act and the transitory forms that they take. Otherwise you will be wise historically, a fool in practice. It does not often happen that two ages have the same fashion in their excuses and the same ways of doing harm. Wickedness is a little more inventive! While you are discussing fashion, the fashion changes. The very same vice assumes a new body. The spirit transmigrates, and far from losing its energy by the change of its appearance it is renovated in its new organs with fresh vigour. . . . It walks abroad, it continues its ravages, while you are hanging out the carcass to rot or demolishing the tomb. You are terrifying yourselves with ghosts and apparitions, while your house is the haunt of robbers. That is how it is

with all those who, attending only to the shell and husk of history, think they are waging war with intolerance, pride, and cruelty, while under pretext of hating the bad principles of antiquated parties they are authorising and feeding the same odious vices in different factions that may be even worse.

Your citizens of Paris in 1572 let themselves be willing instruments to slaughter the followers of Calvin in the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew. What should we say to anyone who thought of retaliating against today's Parisians for the abominations and horrors of that time? They are indeed brought to abhor that massacre. Ferocious as they are, it is not difficult to make them dislike it, because the politicians and fashionable teachers have no interest in giving their passions exactly the same direction. Still, they find it their interest to keep the same savage dispositions alive in the populace. [He reports on a recent enactment of that massacre on a stage in Paris, showing 'the cardinal of Lorraine ordering general slaughter'. Then:] Not long after this exhibition, . . . the archbishop of Paris—whose function was known to his people only by his prayers and benedictions, and his wealth only by his alms—is forced to abandon his house and to fly from his flock as from ravenous wolves, because in the 16th century the cardinal of Lorraine was a rebel and a murderer.

Such is the effect of the perversion of history by those who have, for the same nefarious purposes, perverted every other branch of learning. But those whose view of history highlights. . . the spirit and moral quality of human actions will say to the teachers of the Palais Royal: 'The cardinal of Lorraine was the murderer of the 16th century, you have the glory of being the murderers in the 18th, and this is the only difference between you.' But I hope that history in the 19th century, better understood and better employed,

will teach a civilised posterity to abhor the misdeeds of both these barbarous ages. It will teach future priests and magistrates not to retaliate against the **theoretical and inactive** atheists of future times for the enormities committed by the present **practical** zealots and furious fanatics of that wretched error. . . . It will teach posterity not to make war on either religion or philosophy for the abuse that the hypocrites of both have made of the two most valuable blessings conferred on us by God. . . .

Again: how bad were the French clergy?

If any clergy should show themselves to be vicious beyond the fair bounds allowed to •human infirmity and to •the professional faults that can hardly be separated from professional virtues, . . . they would naturally have the effect of greatly reducing our indignation against the tyrants who exceed measure and justice in their punishment. I can allow in clergymen, through all their divisions, some tenacity about their own opinion, some overflowings of zeal for its propagation, some bias in favour of their own state and office, some attachment to the interests of their own corps, some tendency to prefer •those who listen with docility to their doctrines to •those who scorn and deride them. I allow all this because I am a man who has to deal with men, and who would not, through a violence of toleration, run into the greatest of all intolerance. I must put up with infirmities until they fester into crimes.

Undoubtedly, the natural progress of the passions, from frailty to vice, ought to be prevented by a watchful eye and a firm hand. But is it true that the body of your clergy had passed those limits of a just allowance? From the general style of your late publications of all sorts one would be led to believe that your clergy in France were a sort of monsters, a

horrible composition of superstition, ignorance, sloth, fraud, avarice, and tyranny. But is this true? Is it true that

the lapse of time,

•the cessation of conflicting interests,

•the sad experience of the evils caused by party rage

have not tended gradually to improve their minds? Is it true that they were daily renewing invasions on the civil power, troubling the domestic quiet of their country, and making the operations of its government feeble and precarious? Is it true that the clergy of our times have pressed down the laity with an iron hand and were everywhere lighting the fires of savage persecution? Did they try by every fraud to increase their estates? . . . When not possessed of power, were they filled with the vices of those who envy it? Were they inflamed with a violent, litigious spirit of controversy? Spurred on by an ambition for intellectual sovereignty, were they ready to fly in the face of all magistracy, to fire churches, to massacre the priests of other kinds, to pull down altars, and to make their way over the ruins of subverted governments to an empire of doctrine. . . . forcing the consciences of men from the jurisdiction of public institutions into submitting to their personal authority, beginning with a claim of liberty and ending with an abuse of power?

These, or some of these, were the vices charged against several of the churchmen of former times who belonged to the two great parties—catholics and protestants—which then divided and distracted Europe. The charges were not wholly without foundation.

If there was in France, as in other countries there visibly is, a great lessening rather than any increase of these vices, the present clergy ought in common fairness to be praised, encouraged, and supported in their departure from a spirit that disgraced their predecessors, and for having assumed a frame of mind and conduct more suitable to their sacred

function—not loaded with the crimes of other men and the odious character of other times.

When my affairs took me into France toward the close of the late reign, the clergy in all their forms engaged a considerable part of my curiosity. So far from finding (except from one set of men, not then very numerous, though very active) the complaints and discontents against them that some publications had given me reason to expect, I found little or no public or private uneasiness on their account. On further examination I found the clergy in general to be persons of moderate minds and decorous manners. . . . I did not have the good fortune to know many of the parochial clergy, but in general I received a perfectly good account of their morals and attention to their duties. I had a personal acquaintance with some of the higher clergy, and very good means of information concerning the rest. Almost all of them were persons of noble birth. They resembled others of their own rank; and where there was any difference it was in their favour. They were more fully educated than the military noblesse, so as not to disgrace their profession by ignorance or lack of fitness for the exercise of their authority. They struck me as liberal and open, with the hearts of gentlemen and men of honour, neither insolent nor servile in their manners and conduct. They seemed to me rather a superior class, a set of men among whom you would not be surprised to find a Fénelon. I saw among the clergy in Paris. . . . men of great learning and candour; and I had reason to believe that this description was not confined to Paris. What I found in other places I know was accidental, and therefore to be presumed a fair example. I spent a few days in a provincial town where, in the absence of the bishop, I passed my evenings with three clergymen, his vicars-general, persons who would have done honour to any church. They were all well informed; two of them of

deep, general, and extensive erudition, ancient and modern, oriental and western, particularly in their own profession. They had a more extensive knowledge of our English divines than I expected, and they entered into the genius of those writers with a critical accuracy. One of these gentlemen is since dead, the Abbé Morangis. I pay this tribute, without reluctance, to the memory of that noble, reverend, learned, and excellent person; and I would do the same with equal cheerfulness to the merits of the others who I believe are still living, if I did not fear to hurt those whom I am unable to serve. . . .

Before your Revolution you had about 120 bishops. A few of them were men of eminent sanctity, and charity without limit. . . . I believe the instances of eminent depravity may be as rare among them as those of transcendent goodness. Examples of avarice and of licentiousness can be found—I do not question it—by those who delight in looking for such discoveries. A man as old as I am will not be astonished that several, in every description [see Glossary], do not lead the life of perfect self-denial with regard to wealth or to pleasure that is

- wished for by all,
- expected by some, and
- demanded with most rigour by those who are the most attentive to their own interests, or the most indulgent to their own passions.

When I was in France, I am certain that the number of vicious prelates was not great. Some of them who were not noteworthy for the regularity of their lives made some amends for their lack of the •severe virtues by their possession of the •liberal ones, and had personal qualities that made them useful in the church and state. I am told that in his promotions to the rank of prelate Louis XVI had usually been more attentive to character than Louis XV; and I believe

this may be true, because some spirit of reform prevailed through the whole reign. But the present ruling power has shown a disposition only to plunder the church. [He goes on at length: the clergy will now be paid only what the state pays them, a pittance; no 'science or erudition' can now come from the church in France; clergymen will now be elected, which will bring 'licentious, bold, crafty, factious, flattering wretches' into their ranks; and so on.]

Abolishing Christianity

In short, Sir, it seems to me that this new ecclesiastical establishment is intended only to be temporary and preparatory to the utter abolition of every form of the Christian religion, as soon as the minds of men are prepared for this last stroke against it—through a plan to bring its ministers into universal contempt. Those who refuse to believe that the philosophical fanatics who guide in these matters have long had such a scheme in mind are utterly ignorant of their character and proceedings. These zealots do not scruple to express their opinion that a state can subsist without any religion better than with one, and that *they* can make up for any good there may be in religion by a project of their own—namely, by a sort of education they have imagined, based on knowledge of the physical wants of men, progressively carried to an enlightened self-interest which, when well understood, will (they tell us) coincide with the public interest. . . .

I hope their partisans in England (to whom I attribute thoughtlessness rather than support for this detestable design) will not succeed in the pillage of the ecclesiastics or in the introduction of a system of popular election to our bishoprics and parochial curacies. This, in the present condition of the world, would be the last corruption of the

church, the utter ruin of the clerical character, the most dangerous shock that the state ever received through a misunderstood arrangement of religion. I know well enough that the bishoprics and curacies under kingly and seignioral patronage, as they are now in England and were recently in France, are sometimes acquired by unworthy methods; but popular election subjects them much more surely and more generally to all the evil arts of low ambition, which, operating on and through greater numbers, will be proportionately more harmful.

Those of you who have robbed the clergy think they will easily reconcile their conduct to all Protestant nations, because the clergy they have thus plundered, degraded, and given over to mockery and scorn are Roman Catholics. I have no doubt that here and elsewhere some miserable bigots will be found who hate sects and parties different from their own more than they love the substance of religion, and who are more angry with those who differ from them in their particular plans and systems than displeased with those who attack the foundation of our common hope. These men will write and speak on the subject in the manner that is to be expected from their temperament and character. Burnet says that when he was in France in 1683 'the method that brought the ablest men to Popery was this: they brought themselves to doubt the whole Christian religion. Once that was done, it seemed not to matter which form of religion they continued outwardly.' If this was then the ecclesiastical policy of France, they have since had all too much reason to repent of it. They preferred atheism to a form of religion not agreeable to their ideas. They succeeded in destroying that form; and atheism has succeeded in destroying them. . . .

The teachers who reformed our religion in England bore no sort of resemblance to your present reforming doctors in Paris. Perhaps they were (like those whom they opposed)

rather more under the influence of a party spirit than could be wished, but they were sincere believers, men of the most fervent and exalted piety, ready to die (as some of them did die) like true heroes in defence of their particular ideas of Christianity, just as they would with equal fortitude and more cheerfully have died for the stock of general truth for the branches of which they contended with their blood. [That is, they were ready to die to protestantism, and even more ready to die for Christianity.] These men would have disavowed with horror the wretches who claimed a fellowship with them simply because they had pillaged the persons with whom they maintained controversies. . . . Many of their descendants have kept the same zeal, but (as less engaged in conflict) with more moderation. They do not forget that justice and mercy are substantial parts of religion. Impious men do not recommend themselves to their communion by iniquity and cruelty toward any description of their fellow creatures.

Two kinds of tolerance

We hear these new teachers continually boasting of their spirit of toleration. There is not much merit in tolerating all opinions if you don't think highly of any of them. Equal neglect is not impartial kindness. The kind of benevolence that arises from contempt is no true charity. There are in England plenty of men who tolerate in the true spirit of toleration. They think the dogmas of religion are all important, though in different degrees, and that among them there is, as with all things of value, a sound reason for preferring some to others. They favour, therefore, and they tolerate. They tolerate not because they despise opinions but because they respect justice. They would reverently and affectionately protect all religions because they love and venerate the great principle on which they all agree, and the great objective

to which they are all directed. They begin to see more and more clearly that we have all a common cause, as against a common enemy. They will not be so misled by the spirit of faction as not to distinguish what is done in favour of their subdivision [protestantism] from the acts of hostility which, through some particular description, are aimed at the whole corps [Christianity] in which they themselves are included. It is impossible for me to say what may be the character of every description of men among us. But I speak for the greater part; and for them I must tell you that sacrilege is no part of their doctrine of good works; that, so far from calling you into their fellowship on such a basis, your professors will not be admitted to their communion unless they carefully conceal their doctrine of the lawfulness of the condemnation of innocent men, and make restitution of all stolen goods whatsoever. Till then they are none of ours.

Confiscation again

You may suppose that we disapprove of your confiscation of the revenues of bishops, and deans, and chapters, and parochial clergy possessing independent estates arising from land, because we have the same sort of establishment in England. That objection (you will say) cannot hold regarding the confiscation of the goods of monks and nuns and the abolition of their order. It is true that this particular part of your general confiscation does not affect England; but the reason for objecting to it applies here too, and it goes a great way. The Long Parliament confiscated the lands of deans and chapters in England on the basis of the same ideas on which your Assembly arranged to sell the lands of the monastic orders. But what is objectionable is the principle of injustice, not the description of persons on whom it is first exercised. I see being pursued in a country very

near us a course of policy that defies justice, the common concern of all mankind. With the National Assembly of France possession is nothing, law and usage are nothing. I see the National Assembly openly condemning the doctrine of prescription [see Glossary], which one of the greatest of their own lawyers rightly tells us is a part of the *law of nature*. He tells us that the positive settling of its limits, and its security from invasion, were among the causes for which civil society itself was instituted. If prescription is once shaken, no kind of property is secure once it becomes large enough to tempt those who are poor but powerful. I see a practice perfectly in line with their contempt for this great fundamental part of natural law. I see the confiscators begin with bishops and chapters, and monasteries, but I do not see them end there. I see the princes of the blood, who by the oldest usages of that kingdom held large landed estates, being •deprived (with almost no debate) of their possessions and, in place of their stable independent property, •reduced to the hope of some precarious, charitable pension at the pleasure of an assembly which will not pay much regard to the rights of pensioners-at-pleasure when it despises those of legal proprietors. Flushed with the insolence of their first inglorious victories, and pressed by the distresses caused by their greed, disappointed but not discouraged, they have at length ventured completely to subvert all property of all descriptions throughout the extent of a great kingdom. They have compelled all men, in all transactions of commerce, in the disposal of lands, in civil dealing, and through the whole communion of life, to accept as perfect payment and good and lawful tender the paper money, which is a mere symbol of their speculations on a proposed sale of their plunder. What vestiges of liberty or property have they left? The tenant right of a cabbage garden, a year's interest in a hovel, the goodwill of an alehouse or a baker's

shop, the very shadow of a constructive property, are more ceremoniously treated in our parliament than you treat •the oldest and most valuable landed possessions in the hands of the most respectable personages, or •the whole body of the moneyed and commercial interest of your country. We have a high opinion of the legislative authority, but we have never dreamed that parliaments had any right whatever to violate property, to overrule prescription, or to force a currency of their own fiction in the place of that which is real and recognised by the law of nations. But you, who began by refusing to submit to the most moderate restraints, have ended by establishing an unheard-of despotism. Your confiscators evidently hold that indeed their proceedings could not be supported in a court of justice, but that the rules of prescription cannot bind a legislative assembly. So this legislative assembly of a free nation sits not for the security of property but for its destruction, and not only of property but of every rule and maxim that can give it stability, and of the only instruments—legitimate coinage—that can give it circulation. . . .

What terrifies wisdom most is epidemic fanaticism, because of all enemies this is the one against which wisdom is the least able to provide any kind of resource. We cannot be ignorant of the spirit of atheistic fanaticism that is inspired by a multitude of writings dispersed with incredible assiduity and expense, and by sermons delivered in all the streets and places of public resort in Paris. These writings and sermons have filled the populace with a black and savage atrocity of mind, which supersedes in them the common feelings of nature as well as all sentiments of morality and religion, to such an extent that these wretches are induced to bear with sullen patience the intolerable distresses brought on them by the violent convulsions and permutations that have been made in property. The spirit of proselytism accompanies

this spirit of fanaticism. They have societies to plot and correspond, at home and abroad, for the propagation of their tenets. The republic of Berne, one of the happiest, most prosperous, and best governed countries on earth, is one of the great objects whose destruction they aim at. I am told they have in some measure succeeded in sowing there the seeds of discontent. They are busy throughout Germany. Spain and Italy have not been untried. England is not left out of the comprehensive scheme of their malignant charity; and in England we find those

- who stretch out their arms to them,
- who recommend their example from more than one pulpit,
- who choose in more than one periodical meeting publicly to correspond with them, applaud them, and hold them up as objects for imitation;
- who receive from them tokens of confraternity, and standards consecrated in their rites and mysteries;
- who suggest to them leagues of perpetual amity. . .

. . . at the very time when the power to which our constitution has exclusively delegated the federative [here = 'international relations'] capacity of this kingdom may find it expedient to make war on them.

It is not the confiscation of our church property from this example in France that I dread, though I think this would be a considerable evil. The great source of my anxiety is the thought that it might come to be considered in England as the policy of a state to seek a resource in confiscations of any kind, or that any one description of citizens should be brought to regard any of the others as their proper prey. Nations are wading deeper and deeper into an ocean of boundless debt. Public debts, which at first were a security to •governments by giving many people an interest in public tranquillity, are likely in their excess to become the means

of •their subversion. If governments provide for these debts by heavy impositions, they perish by becoming odious to the people. If they do not provide for them, they will be undone by the efforts of the most dangerous of all parties—I mean an extensive and discontented moneyed interest that has been injured but not destroyed. The men who compose this interest look for their security first to the government's •fidelity and secondly to its •power. If they find the old governments to be effete, worn out, their mainsprings unwound, so as not to have enough vigour for their purposes, they may seek new ones that will have more energy; and the source of this energy will not be the acquisition of resources but a contempt for justice. Revolutions are favourable to confiscation; and it is impossible to know what obnoxious names the next confiscations will be given. I am sure that the principles predominant in France extend to very many persons and descriptions of persons, in all countries, who think their •harmless indolence to be their security. This kind of •innocence in proprietors may be argued to be •uselessness; and that may be argued to be •unfitness for their estates. Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow underground murmur; a confused movement is felt that threatens a general earthquake in the political world. Already confederacies and correspondencies of the most extraordinary nature are forming in several countries. In such a state of things we ought to be on our guard. In all changes (if there must be changes) the thing that will serve most to blunt the edge of their damage and promote what good may be in them is for us to keep our minds tenacious about justice and careful about property.

This may be said: 'This confiscation in France ought not to alarm other nations. It is not made from wanton rapacity; it is a great measure of national policy adopted to remove an extensive, inveterate, superstitious mischief.' I have the

greatest difficulty separating *policy* from *justice*. Justice itself is the great standing policy of civil society, and any conspicuous departure from it under any circumstances lies under the suspicion of being no policy at all.

When the existing laws encourage men to go into a certain way of life and protect them in it as in a lawful occupation; when they have adjusted all their ideas and habits to it; when the law had long made their adherence to its rules a ground of reputation, and their departure from them a ground of disgrace and even of penalty—I am sure it is unjust for the legislature by an arbitrary act to offer a sudden violence to their minds and their feelings, forcibly to degrade them from their state and condition and to stigmatize with shame and infamy the character and customs that previously had been made the measure of their happiness and honour. If to this is added expulsion from their homes and confiscation of all their goods, I am not clever enough to discover how this—this despotic sport made of the feelings, consciences, prejudices, and properties of men—can be distinguished from the rankest tyranny.

Justice and public benefit

If the injustice of the course pursued in France is clear, the policy behind it—i.e. the public benefit to be expected from it—ought to be at least as clear and at least as important. To a man who acts under the influence of no passion, who has nothing in view in his projects but the public good, a great difference will immediately strike him between

- what policy would dictate on the question of whether such institutions should be set up in the first place
- and
- what it would dictate on the question of whether they should be totally abolished after they have cast their

roots wide and deep, so that by long habit things more valuable than themselves are so adapted to them—in a way interwoven with them—that the one cannot be destroyed without notably impairing the other.

He might be embarrassed if the case were really such as the logical tricksters represent it in their paltry style of debating. But in this, as in most questions of state, there is a middle. There is something other than the mere alternative of •absolute destruction or •unreformed existence. ‘Sparta exists; be a credit to it’ [this is from Euripides, but Burke quotes it in Latin]. This is, in my opinion, a rule of profound sense and ought never to depart from the mind of an honest reformer. I cannot conceive how any man can have brought himself to such a level of presumption as to consider his country as nothing but *carte blanche* on which he may scribble whatever he pleases. A man full of warm, speculative benevolence may wish his society otherwise constituted than he finds it, but a good patriot and a true politician always considers how he shall make the most of the existing materials of his country. A disposition to preserve and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. Everything else is vulgar in the conception and perilous in the execution.

There are moments in the fortune of states when particular men are called to make improvements by great mental exertion. In those moments, even when they seem to have the confidence of their prince and country and to be invested with full authority, they don’t always have suitable instruments. A politician, to do great things, looks for a *power*—what our workmen call a *purchase* [something providing a grip, hand-hold, leverage, or the like]—and in politics as in mechanics if he finds that power he cannot be at a loss to apply it. I think that the monastic institutions were a great power for the mechanism of political benevolence. There were revenues with a public direction; there were men

- wholly set apart and dedicated to public purposes, without any other than public ties and public principles;
- without the possibility of converting the estate of the community into a private fortune;
- denied to self-interest, and acquisitive only on behalf of some community;
- to whom personal poverty is honour, and implicit obedience stands in the place of freedom.

It is hopeless for a man to try to *make* such things when he needs them. The winds blow as they wish. These institutions are the products of fanaticism; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials; they are the gifts of nature or of chance; wisdom's pride is in the use. The perennial existence of corporate bodies and their fortunes are things particularly suited to a man who has long views; who meditates designs that require time to develop and that are meant to be long-lasting when they are accomplished. Someone does not deserve to be mentioned among the great statesmen if, having obtained the command and direction of such a power as existed in the wealth, discipline and habits of corporations like the ones you have rashly destroyed, cannot find any way of converting it to the great *and lasting* benefit of his country. A thousand ways of doing this suggest themselves to a contriving mind. To destroy any power growing wild from the raw productive force of the human mind is something in the moral world that is almost tantamount to destroying the apparently active properties of bodies in the material world. It would be like trying to destroy (if we could) the expansive force of fixed air in nitre, or the power of steam or electricity or magnetism. These energies always existed in nature, and they were always detectible. Some of them seemed unserviceable,

some noxious, some no better than a sport for children; until intellectual ability combined with practical skill tamed their wild nature, subdued them to use, and made them at once the most powerful and the most tractable agents in subservience to the great views and designs of men. Did fifty thousand persons whose mental and bodily labour you might direct, and so many hundred thousand a year of revenue that was neither lazy nor superstitious, appear too big for your abilities to work with? Had you no way of using them other than by converting monks into pensioners? Had you no way of turning the revenue to account except through the improvident resource of a spendthrift sale? If you were as destitute as this of mental funds, the proceeding is on its natural course. Your politicians do not understand their trade, so they sell their tools.

You may say: 'But those institutions savour of superstition in their very principle, and they nourish it by a permanent and standing influence.' I do not mean to dispute this, but it ought not to hinder you from deriving from superstition itself any resources it can provide for the public advantage. You derive benefits from many dispositions and many passions of the human mind that are as suspect to the moral eye as superstition itself. It was your business to correct and mitigate everything that was noxious in this passion, as in all the passions. But is superstition the greatest of all possible vices? In its possible excess I think it becomes a very great evil. But it is a moral subject and as such admits of all degrees and all varieties. [Here 'a moral subject' means, approximately, 'a state of people's minds']. Superstition is the religion of feeble minds; and it must be tolerated in them—in some trifling or some fanatical shape or other—for otherwise you will deprive weak minds of a resource that the strongest find to be necessary. The body of all true religion consists, to be sure, in obedience to the will of the Sovereign of the

world, in confidence in his declarations, and in imitation of his perfections. The rest is our own. What we add may be prejudicial to the great goal; it may be helpful. Wise men, who as such are not admirers of the gifts of the earth, are not violently attached to these things, nor do they violently hate them. Wisdom is not the most severe corrector of folly. The most severe correctors are the rival follies that mutually wage such an unrelenting war; and that make such a cruel use of their advantages to bring the immoderate vulgar in on their side in their quarrels. Prudence would be neutral, but if, in the dispute between •simple-minded attachment and •fierce antipathy concerning things in their nature not made to produce such heats, a prudent man had to make a choice of what errors and excesses of enthusiasm he would condemn and which he would bear, perhaps he would think that

- the superstition that builds is more tolerable than the one that demolishes;
- that which adorns a country . . . than that which deforms it;
- that which endows. . . than that which plunders;
- that which disposes to mistaken beneficence. . . than that which stimulates to real injustice;
- that which leads a man to refuse himself lawful pleasures. . . than that which snatches from others the scanty subsistence of their self-denial.

That, I think, is very nearly the state of the question between the ancient founders of monkish superstition and the superstition of the self-proclaimed 'philosophers' of today.

The estates of monasteries

For the present I postpone consideration of the supposed public profit of the sale (which I think is perfectly delusive).

I shall consider it here only as a transfer of property. On the policy of that transfer I shall trouble you with a few thoughts.

In every prosperous community something more is produced than goes to the immediate support of the producer. This surplus forms the income of the landed capitalist. It will be spent by a proprietor who does not labour. But this idleness is itself the spring of labour, this repose the spur to industry. The only concern of the state is that the capital taken in rent from the land should be returned again to the industry it came from, and that its expenditure should be with the least possible detriment to the morals of those who spend it and those of the people to whom it is returned.

In all the views of receipt, expenditure, and personal employment, a sober legislator would carefully compare the possessor whom he was recommended to expel with the stranger who was proposed to fill his place. Before the inconveniences are incurred which must accompany all violent revolutions in property through extensive confiscation, we ought to have some rational assurance that the purchasers of the confiscated property will be

- considerably more laborious, more virtuous, more sober, less disposed to extort an unreasonable proportion of the gains of the labourer or consume more than is fit, or
- qualified to dispense the surplus in a more steady and equal way so as to satisfy the purposes of a politic expenditure,

than were the previous owners of the property, whether they are bishops, canons, commendatory abbots, or monks, or what you please. 'The monks are lazy.' Be it so. Suppose their only occupation is to sing in the choir. They are as usefully employed as those who neither sing nor say; as usefully even as those who sing on the stage. They are as usefully employed as if they worked from dawn to dark

in the innumerable servile, degrading, unseemly, unmanly, and often most unwholesome and pestiferous occupations to which the economic system dooms so many wretches. If it were not generally pernicious to disturb the natural course of things and to impede in any degree the great wheel of circulation which is turned by the strangely-directed labour of these unhappy people, I would be infinitely more inclined to •rescue them forcibly from their miserable industry than to •disturb violently the tranquil repose of monastic quietude. Humanity, and perhaps policy, might better justify me in the one than in the other. . . . Anyway, for this purpose of distribution, it seems to me that the idle expenses of monks are quite as well directed as the idle expenses of us lay-loiterers.

When the advantages of the possession and of the project are on a par, there is no motive for a change. But in the present case, perhaps, they are not on a par, and the difference is in favour of the possession. It does not appear to me that •the expenses of those whom you are going to expel do in fact take a course as directly and as generally leading to vitiate and degrade and render miserable those through whom they pass as do •the expenses of those favourites whom you are intruding into their houses. Why should the expenditure of a great landed property, which is a dispersion of the surplus product of the soil, appear intolerable to you or to me when it takes its course through

- the accumulation of vast libraries, which are the history of the force and weakness of the human mind;
- great collections of ancient records, medals, and coins, which attest and explain laws and customs;
- paintings and statues which, by imitating nature, seem to extend the limits of creation;
- grand monuments of the dead, which continue the regards and connections of life beyond the grave;

- collections of the specimens of nature which become a representative assembly of all the classes and families of the world that by disposition facilitate and by arousing curiosity open the avenues to science?

If by great permanent establishments all these objects of expense are better secured from the inconstant sport of personal caprice and personal extravagance, are they worse than if the same tastes prevailed in scattered individuals? Does not the sweat of the mason and carpenter, who toil in order to partake of the sweat of the peasant, flow as pleasantly and as salubriously in the construction and repair of the majestic edifices of religion as in the painted booths and sordid sties of vice and luxury; as honourably and profitably in repairing sacred works that grow hoary with innumerable years as on the momentary receptacles of transient voluptuousness; on opera houses, and brothels, and gaming houses, and clubhouses, and obelisks in the Champ de Mars? Is the surplus product of the olive and the vine worse employed •in the frugal sustenance of persons whom the fictions of a pious imagination raise to dignity by construing what they do as the service of God than •in pampering the innumerable multitude of those who are degraded by being made useless domestics, subservient to the pride of man? Are the decorations of temples an expenditure less worthy in the eyes of a wise man than ribbons, and laces, and national cockades, and. . . all the innumerable fopperies and follies in which affluence sports away the burden of its superfluity?

We tolerate these not from love of them but for fear of worse. We tolerate them because property and liberty up to a point require that toleration. But why proscribe the other use of estates—the one that is surely in every way more laudable? Why, through the violation of all property, through an outrage on every principle of liberty, forcibly

carry them from the better to the worse?

This comparison between the new individuals and the old corps is made on a supposition that no reform could be made in the latter. But in a question of reformation I always consider corporate bodies, whether sole or consisting of many, to be much more susceptible of a public direction by the power of the state, in the use of their property and in the regulation of habits of life in their members, than private citizens ever can be or perhaps ought to be; and this seems to me an important consideration for those who undertake anything that merits the name of a 'political enterprise'. —So much for the estates of monasteries.

The church's landed estates

With regard to the estates possessed by bishops and canons and commendatory abbots, I cannot discover any reason why some landed estates may not be held on some basis other than by inheritance. Can any philosophical spoiler undertake to demonstrate the absolute or comparative evil of having a large portion of landed property passing in succession through persons whose entitlement to it is—always in theory and often in fact—a notable degree of piety, morals, and learning; a property which. . . .gives to the noblest families renovation and support and to the lowest the means of dignity and

elevation; a property the tenure of which is the performance of some duty (whatever value you may choose to set on that duty), and the character of whose proprietors demands at least an external decorum and gravity of manners; who are to exercise a generous but temperate hospitality; part of whose income they are to consider as a trust for charity; and who, even when they fail in their trust and slide from their character and degenerate into a mere common secular nobleman or gentleman, are in no respect worse than those who may succeed them in their forfeited possessions?

Is it better that estates should be held by those who have no duty than by those who have one?—by those whose character and destination point to virtues than by those who have no rule and direction in the expenditure of their estates but their own will and appetite? Nor are these estates held together in the manner of mortmain [a legal arrangement in which a property owner such as an ecclesiastical institution is barred from transferring or selling its property] or with the evils supposed to be inherent in that. They pass from hand to hand with a more rapid circulation than any other. No excess is good; and, therefore, too great a proportion of landed property may be held officially for life; but it does not seem to me of material injury to any commonwealth that there should exist some estates that have a chance of being acquired by other means than the previous acquisition of money.

Part 3

This letter has grown to a great length, though it is short in relation to the infinite extent of the subject. Various occupations have from time to time called my mind from the subject. I was not sorry to give myself leisure to observe whether I might find in the National Assembly's proceedings reasons to change or to qualify some of my first sentiments. Everything has confirmed me more strongly in my first opinions. It was my original purpose to survey the principles of the National Assembly with regard to the great and fundamental establishments, and to compare the whole of what you have substituted in the place of what you have destroyed with the corresponding items in our British constitution [see page 51]. But this plan is of a greater extent than I at first calculated, and I find that you have little desire to learn from any examples. At present I must content myself with some remarks on your establishments, reserving for another time what I proposed to say about the spirit of our British monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. . . .

The incompetence of the National Assembly

I have taken a view of what has been done by the governing power in France. I have certainly spoken of it with freedom. Those whose principle it is to despise the ancient, permanent sense of mankind and to set up a scheme of society on new principles must naturally expect that such of us who think better of the human race's judgment than of theirs should consider both them and their devices as men and schemes upon their trial. They must take it for granted that we attend much to their reason but not at all to their authority. They have not one of the great influencing prejudices of mankind

in their favour. They avow their hostility to *opinion*. Of course they must expect no support from that influence which they have deposed from the seat of its jurisdiction, along with every other authority.

I can never regard this Assembly as anything but a voluntary association of men who have availed themselves of circumstances to seize the power of the state. They do not have the sanction and authority of the character under which they first met. They have assumed another very different character and have completely altered and inverted all the relations in which they originally stood. The authority they exercise is not backed by any constitutional law of the state. They have departed from the instructions of the people by whom they were sent, though those instructions were the sole source of their authority because the Assembly did not act in virtue of any ancient usage or settled law. Their most considerable acts have not been done by great majorities; and in this sort of near divisions, which carry only the notional authority of the whole, strangers will consider reasons as well as resolutions.

If they had set up this new experimental government as a necessary substitute for an expelled tyranny, mankind would look ahead to the time of prescription [see Glossary] which through long usage mellows into legality governments that started in violence. All those whose feelings lead them to the conservation of civil order would recognise as legitimate, even in its cradle, the child produced by that force of *necessity* to which all just governments owe their birth, and on which they justify their continuance. But they will be slow and reluctant in giving any sort of acceptance to the operations of a power that derived its birth from no law and no necessity,

but which on the contrary had its origin in the vices and sinister practices by which the social union is often disturbed and sometimes destroyed. This Assembly has hardly a year's prescription. We have their own word for it that they have made a revolution. To make a revolution is a measure which, on the face of it, requires an apology [here = 'a justification']. To make a revolution is to subvert the previous state of our country, and extraordinary reasons are called for to justify such a violent proceeding. The sense of mankind authorises us to examine the mode of acquiring new power, and to criticise the use that is made of it, with less awe and reverence than is usually conceded to a settled and recognised authority.

In •obtaining and •securing their power the Assembly proceeds on principles the most opposite to those that appear to direct them in the •use of it. An observation on this difference will let us into the true spirit of their conduct. Everything they have done or still do to obtain and keep their power is by the most common arts. They proceed exactly as their ancestors of ambition have done before them.—Trace them through all their artifices, frauds, and violences and you'll find nothing that is new. They follow precedents and examples with the punctilious exactness of an advocate in a law-court. They never depart an iota from the authentic formulas of tyranny and usurpation. But their spirit in all the regulations concerning the public good has been the very reverse of this. *There* they commit the whole •populace• to the mercy of untested speculations; they abandon the public's dearest interests to loose theories that none of them would trust the slightest of his private concerns to. Why this difference? Well, in obtaining and securing power they travel in the beaten road because they are thoroughly in earnest about that. They abandon the public interests wholly to chance because they do not really care about them. I say

'to chance' because there is no empirical evidence that their schemes are likely to be beneficial.

We must always see with a pity not unmixed with respect the errors of those who are timid and doubtful of themselves in matters concerning the happiness of mankind. But in these gentlemen there is nothing of the tender, parental solicitude that fears to cut up the infant for the sake of an experiment. In the vastness of their promises and the confidence of their predictions, they far outdo all the boasting of hucksters selling fake medicine. The arrogance of their claims provokes and challenges us to inquire into their foundation.

Learning from difficulties

I am convinced that there are men of considerable ability among the popular leaders in the National Assembly. Some of them display eloquence in their speeches and their writings, which is not possible without powerful and cultivated talents. But eloquence can exist without a corresponding degree of wisdom. When I speak of ability, I have to distinguish. What they have done toward the support of their system indicates that they are no ordinary men. In the system itself, taken as the plan for a republic constructed for procuring the prosperity and security of the citizen and for promoting the strength and grandeur of the state, I cannot find *anything* that displays in a single instance the work of a comprehensive and organising mind or even the provisions of mere everyday prudence. Their purpose everywhere seems to have been to evade and slip aside from difficulty. It has been the glory of the great masters in all the arts [here includes the sciences] to confront difficulties and overcome them; and when they had overcome the first difficulty, to turn it into an instrument for new conquests over new difficulties, thus

enabling them to extend the scope of their science and even to push forward, beyond the reach of their original thoughts, the landmarks of the human understanding itself. Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by the supreme ordinance of a parental Guardian and Legislator who knows us better than we know ourselves, as he loves us better too. 'The Father himself did not want the ploughman's way to be easy' [quoted in Latin from Virgil]. He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object and compels us to consider it in all its relations. It will not allow us to be superficial. It is the lack of nerves of understanding for such a task—the degenerate fondness for tricking shortcuts and little fallacious facilities—that has created governments with arbitrary powers in so many parts of the world.

They have created the recent arbitrary monarchy of France. They have created the arbitrary republic of Paris. With them defects in wisdom are to be made up for by an abundance of force. They get nothing by it. Commencing their labours on a principle of sloth, they have the common fortune of slothful men. The difficulties that they had dodged rather than escaped meet them again down the road; they multiply and thicken on them; they are involved, through a labyrinth of confused detail, in an industry without limit and without direction; and eventually the whole of their work becomes feeble, vicious, and insecure.

This inability to wrestle with difficulty is what has obliged the arbitrary Assembly of France to commence their schemes of reform with abolition and total destruction. But is it in destroying and pulling down that skill is displayed? Your mob can do this as well at least as your assemblies. The shallowest understanding, the roughest hand, is more than equal to that task. Rage and frenzy will pull down more in

half an hour than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years.

The errors and defects of old establishments are visible and palpable. It calls for little ability to point them out; and where absolute power is given, it requires only a word to *abolish* the vice and the establishment together. The same lazy but restless disposition which loves sloth and hates quiet directs the politicians when they come to work on filling the place of what they have destroyed. To make everything the reverse of what they have seen is—so they think—quite as easy as to destroy. No difficulties occur in what has never been tried. Criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed; and eager enthusiasm and cheating hope have all the wide field of imagination in which they can hold forth with little or no opposition.

Reform

Reforming something while keeping it in existence is quite another thing. When the useful parts of an old establishment are kept, and what is added is to be fitted to what is retained, this requires the use of

- a vigorous mind,
- steady, persevering attention,
- various powers of comparison and combination, and
- the resources of an understanding fruitful in expedients;

these are to be exercised in a continued conflict with the combined force of two opposite vices, •the obstinacy that rejects all improvement and •the levity [see Glossary] that is fatigued and disgusted with everything it has. You may object:

'A process of this kind is slow. It is not fit for an assembly that glories in performing in a few months

the work of ages. Such a mode of reforming ·as you recommend· might take up many years.'

Without question it might; and it ought. When a method has time as one of its assistants, one of its *excellences* is that its operation is slow and in some cases almost imperceptible. If circumspection and caution are a part of wisdom when we work on inanimate matter, surely they become a part of duty also when the subject of our demolition and construction is not brick and timber but multitudes of sentient beings who may be rendered miserable by the sudden alteration of their state, condition, and habits. But it seems as if the prevalent opinion in Paris is that the sole qualifications for a perfect legislator are an unfeeling heart and an undoubting confidence. My ideas of that high office are far different. The true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility. He ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself. It may be allowed to his temperament to catch his final goal with an intuitive glance, but his movements toward it ought to be deliberate. Political arrangement, being a work for social ends, is to be done only by social means. In it, mind must conspire with mind. Time is required to produce the union of minds required to produce all the good we aim at. Our patience will achieve more than our force. If I might venture to appeal to something that is so much out of fashion in Paris, I mean to *experience*, I should tell you that in the course of my life I have known and (to the best of my ability) co-operated with great men; and I have never yet seen any plan that has not been mended by the observation of people who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business. By a slow but well-sustained progress the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first step throws light on the second; and so, from light to light, we are safely conducted through the whole series. We see that the parts of the

system do not clash. The evils latent in the most promising contrivances are provided for as they arise. One advantage is as little as possible sacrificed to another. We compensate, we reconcile, we balance. We are enabled to unite into a consistent whole the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men. What arises from this is not excellence in simplicity but something far superior, excellence in composition. Where the great interests of mankind are concerned through a long series of generations, that series ought to be admitted into some share in the councils that are going to affect them so deeply. It's not merely that justice requires this; the work itself requires the aid of more minds than one age can provide. It is from this view of things that the best legislators have been often satisfied with the establishment of some sure, solid, and ruling principle [see Glossary] in government—a power like the one that some philosophers have called a 'plastic nature'—and having fixed the principle they have then left it to its own operation.

To proceed in this way, i.e. with a presiding principle and a prolific energy, is for me the criterion of profound wisdom. What your politicians take to be the marks of a bold, hardy genius are only proofs of a deplorable lack of ability. By their violent haste and their defiance of the process of nature, they are delivered over blindly to every projector and adventurer, to every alchemist and quack. They despair of turning to account anything that is common, such as the place of *diet* in preserving health. The worst of it is that their despair of curing common illnesses by regular methods arises not only from •defect of comprehension but also (I fear) from •malignity of disposition. Your legislators seem to have taken their opinions of all professions, ranks, and offices from the declamations and buffooneries of satirists; who would themselves be astonished if they were held to the letter of

their own descriptions. By listening only to these, your leaders regard all things only on the side of their vices and faults, and view those vices and faults under every colour of exaggeration. It may seem paradoxical but is undoubtedly true that

in general those who are habitually employed in finding and displaying faults are unqualified for the work of reform, because not only are their minds not furnished with patterns of the fair and good, but by habit they come to take no delight in the contemplation of such things.

By hating vices too much they come to love men too little. So it is no wonder that they should be indisposed to serve them and unable to do so. From this arises the disposition of some of your guides to pull everything in pieces. At this malicious game they display the whole of their four-handed activity. As for the others, the paradoxes that eloquent writers have brought forth purely as a sport of fancy to try their talents, to attract attention and excite surprise, are taken up by these gentlemen not

- in the spirit of the original authors, as means of cultivating their taste and improving their style, but
- as serious grounds of action on the basis of which they proceed in regulating the most important concerns of the state.

Cicero has fun describing Cato as trying to act in the commonwealth on the basis of school paradoxes that exercised the wits of the junior students in the Stoic philosophy. If this was true of Cato, these gentlemen copy him in the manner of some of his contemporaries. [Burke here throws in a three-word Latin phrase, which points to a passage in which Horace mocked people who thought they could match Cato by going barefoot and wearing a tattered toga.] Mr Hume told me that he had from Rousseau himself the secret of his principles of composition. That acute

though eccentric observer had perceived that to strike and interest the public something marvellous must be produced; that the marvellous of the heathen mythology had long since lost its effect; that the giants, magicians, fairies, and heroes of romance which followed had exhausted the portion of credulity that belonged to their age; that now nothing was left to the writer but that kind of marvel that might still be produced, and with as great an effect as ever, though in another way—namely the marvellous in life, in manners, in characters, and in extraordinary situations, giving rise to new and unlooked-for strokes in politics and morals. I believe that if Rousseau were alive and in one of his lucid intervals, he would be shocked at the practical frenzy of his scholars, who in their paradoxes are servile imitators, and even in their incredulity reveal an implicit faith.

Men who undertake considerable things, even in a regular way, ought to give us reason to think they are able. But the physician of the state who undertakes not only to cure illnesses but to regenerate constitutions ought to show uncommon powers. Some very unusual appearances of wisdom ought to display themselves on the face of the designs of those who make no appeal to past practice and do not copy any model. Has any such been manifested? I shall survey what the Assembly has done with regard **(i)** to the constitution of the legislature, **(ii)** to that of the executive power, **(iii)** to that of the judicature, **(iv)** to the model of the army, and finally **(v)** to the system of finance; to see whether we can discover in any part of their schemes the awesome ability that might justify these bold undertakers in the superiority they assume over mankind. Relative to the size of the subject the survey will be a very short one.

(i) The constitution of the legislature

[Burke's topic (i) will run to page 108.] It is in the model of the sovereign and presiding part of this new republic that we should expect their grand display. Here they were to prove their title to their proud demands. For the plan itself at large, and for the reasons on which it is grounded, I refer to the journals of the Assembly of 29.ix.1789 and such subsequent proceedings as made any alterations in the plan. So far as I can see light in a somewhat confused matter, the system remains substantially as it was originally formed. My few remarks will be addressed to its spirit, its tendency [= 'its probable effects'], and its fitness for forming a popular commonwealth (which they profess theirs to be) suited to the purposes for which any commonwealth, and particularly a popular one, is made. At the same time I mean to consider its consistency with itself and its own principles.

Old establishments are tested by their effects. If the people are happy, united, wealthy, and powerful, we presume the rest. We conclude something to be good if good comes from it. In old establishments various correctives have been found for their aberrations from theory. Indeed, they are the results of various necessities and expediencies. They are not often constructed on the basis of any theory; rather, theories are drawn from them. In them we often see that the best way to the goal is through means that seem not to be perfectly consistent with what we originally planned to be doing. The means taught by experience may be better suited to political ends than those contrived in the original project. They react back on the original constitution, and sometimes bring improvements to the design itself that they seem to have departed from. I think all this might be exemplified in the British constitution. At worst, the errors and deviations of every kind in reckoning are found

and computed, and the ship proceeds in her course. This is the case of old establishments; but in a new and merely theoretic system every contrivance is expected to appear, on the face of it, to be right for its purpose, especially when those who are launching it are in no way constrained by attempts to accommodate the new building to an old one, either in the walls or on the foundations.

The French builders, clearing away as mere rubbish whatever they found and (like their ornamental gardeners) putting everything onto an exact level, propose to rest the whole local and general legislature on bases of three different kinds:

- one geometrical, which they call the basis of **territory**,
- one arithmetical, the basis of **population** and
- one financial, the basis of **contribution**.

(1) For purposes of bringing in **territory**, they divide their country into (a) 83 pieces, each a square of 18 square leagues. These large divisions are called Departments. They subdivide these into (b) 1720 square districts called Communes, which they further subdivide into (c) 6400 square districts called Cantons.

At first view this geometrical basis of theirs presents nothing much to admire or to blame. It calls for no great legislative talents. For such a plan as this all that is needed is an accurate land surveyor, with his chain, sight, and theodolite. In the old divisions of the country, various accidents at various times and the ebb and flow of various properties and jurisdictions settled their boundaries. These boundaries were not made on any fixed system, undoubtedly. They involved inconveniences, but *use* had found remedies for these and *habit* had supplied accommodation and patience. In this new pavement of square within square, and this organisation and semi-organisation made on the system of Empedocles and Buffon and not on any political principle,

there are bound to be countless local inconveniences to which men are not habituated. But these I pass over, because to specify them requires an accurate knowledge of the country, which I do not have.

When these state surveyors came to take a view of their work of measurement, they soon found that in politics the most fallacious of all things was geometrical demonstration. They then had recourse to another basis (or rather buttress) to support the building that was tottering on that false foundation. It was evident that the goodness of the soil, the number of the people, their wealth, and the largeness of their contribution made such infinite variations between square and square as •to make sheer size a ridiculous standard of power in the commonwealth, and •to make geometrical equality the most unequal of all measures in the distribution of men. However, they could not give it up. Instead, they divided their political and civil representation into three parts and allotted one of those parts to the square measurement, without a single fact or calculation to ascertain whether this territorial proportion of representation was fairly assigned, whether on any principle it really ought to be one-third. Anyway, having given to geometry one-third as her dower—as a compliment, I suppose, to that sublime science—they left the other two-thirds to be scuffled for between the other parts, population and contribution.

(2) When they came to provide for **population**, they could not proceed quite as smoothly as they had done in the field of their geometry. Here their arithmetic came to bear on their juridical metaphysics. If they had stuck to their metaphysical principles, the arithmetical process would have been simple: they hold that all men are strictly equal and entitled to equal rights in their own government. Each head, on this system, would have its vote, and every man would vote directly for the person who was to represent him in the legislature.

‘But soft—by regular degrees, not yet.’ This metaphysical principle to which law, custom, usage, policy and reason were to yield is itself to yield to their pleasure. There must be many degrees, and some stages, before the representative can come into contact with his constituent. Indeed, as we shall soon see, these two persons are to have no sort of communication with each other. (c) First, the voters in the Canton, who compose what they call ‘primary assemblies’, are to have a qualification. What! a qualification on the indefeasible rights of men? Yes; but it will be a very small qualification. Our injustice will be very little oppressive: only the local valuation of three days’ labour paid to the public. [That is: to belong to a primary assembly a man must pay an amount equal to three days’ pay in his locality.] This is not much, I readily admit, for anything but the utter subversion of your equalizing principle. As a qualification it might as well be let alone, for it achieves no one purpose for which qualifications are established; and on your ideas it excludes from a vote the man of all others whose natural equality stands the most in need of protection and defence—I mean the man who cannot afford the qualifying payment, and so has nothing but his natural equality to guard him. You order him to *buy* the right of which you had earlier told him that nature had given it to him, free, at his birth, and that no authority on earth could lawfully deprive him of it. With regard to the person who cannot come up to your market price, a tyrannous aristocracy is established against him at the very outset by you who pretend to be its sworn foe.

The gradation proceeds. These primary assemblies of the Canton elect (b) deputies to the Commune; one for every two hundred qualified inhabitants. Here is the first intermediary between the primary elector and the representative legislator, and here a new toll-gate is fixed for taxing the rights of men with a second qualification: to be elected into the Commune

a person has to pay the amount of ten days' labour. And we are not done yet. There is still to be another gradation. These Communes, chosen by the Canton, choose to **(a)** the Department; and the deputies of the Department choose their deputies to the National Assembly. Here is a third barrier of a senseless qualification. Every deputy to the National Assembly must pay a direct contribution with the value of a mark of silver. All these qualifying barriers are powerless to secure independence, strong only in destroying the rights of men.

In all this process, which in its fundamental elements purports to consider only population on a principle of natural right, there is a manifest attention to *property*; and this, however just and reasonable on other schemes, is perfectly indefensible on theirs.

(3) When they come to their third basis, **contribution**, we find that they have more completely lost sight of their rights of men. This last basis rests entirely on property, thus admitting a principle totally different from the equality of men, and utterly irreconcilable to it. But no sooner is this principle admitted than (as usual) it is subverted; and it is not subverted (as we shall presently see) so as to get the inequality of riches to approximate to the level of nature. The additional share in the third portion of representation (a portion reserved exclusively for the higher contribution) is made with regard only to the district and not to the individuals in it who pay. The course of their reasonings make it easy to see how embarrassed by their contradictory ideas of the rights of men and the privileges of riches. The committee of constitution virtually admit that they are wholly irreconcilable. They say:

‘The relation with regard to the contributions is without doubt null when the question concerns the balance of the political rights as between individual

and individual, without which personal equality would be destroyed and an aristocracy of the rich would be established. But this inconvenience entirely disappears when the proportional relation of the contribution is only considered in the great masses, and is solely between province and province; it serves in that case only to form a just proportion between the cities without affecting the personal rights of the citizens.’

Here the principle of contribution, as taken between man and man, is rejected as null and destructive to equality, and also as pernicious because it leads to the establishment of an aristocracy of the rich. However, it must not be abandoned. And the way of getting rid of the difficulty is to establish the inequality as between department and department, leaving all the individuals in each department on an exact par. Notice that this equality between individuals had been before destroyed when the qualifications *within* the departments were settled; nor does it seem to matter much whether the equality of men is injured by masses or individually. An individual is not as important in a mass represented by a few as in a mass represented by many. It would be too much to tell a man who is touchy about his equality that the elector who votes for three members has the same franchise as the one who votes for ten.

Wealth and representation

Let us suppose that their principle of representation according to contribution—i.e. according to riches—is well thought-out and is a necessary basis for their republic. In this third basis of theirs they assume that •riches ought to be respected, and that justice and policy require that •they should entitle men to have in some way a larger share in the administration of public affairs; it is now to be seen

how the Assembly provides for the pre-eminence, or even for the security, of the rich by using their affluence as a basis for conferring on their district the larger measure of power that is denied to them personally. I readily admit (indeed I should lay it down as a fundamental principle) that in a republican government that has a democratic basis the rich do require more security than they need in monarchies. They are subject to envy, and through envy to oppression. On the present scheme it is impossible to see what advantage they get from the aristocratic preference on which the unequal representation of the masses is founded. The rich cannot feel it either as a support to their dignity or as security to their fortune, because the aristocratic mass is generated from purely democratic principles, and the preference given to it in the general representation has no reference to or connection with the persons on account of whose property this superiority of the mass is established. . . . The contest between the rich and the poor is not a struggle between corporation and corporation, but a contest between men and men—a competition not between districts but between descriptions [see Glossary]. It would answer its purpose better if the scheme were inverted: that the vote of the masses were rendered equal, and that the votes within each mass were proportioned to property.

Suppose one man in a district contributes as much as a hundred of his neighbours. Against these he has only one vote. If there were only one representative for the mass, his poor neighbours would outvote him 100:1 for that single representative. Bad enough. But amends are to be made to him. How? The district, in virtue of his wealth, is to choose (say) ten members instead of one; that is to say, by paying a very large contribution he has the happiness of being outvoted 100:1 by the poor for ten representatives, instead of being outvoted 100:1 for a single member. In fact

the rich man, instead of benefiting by this superior quantity of representation, is subjected to an additional hardship. The increase of representation within his province sets up nine persons more—and as many more than nine as there may be democratic candidates—to plot and intrigue and to flatter the people at his expense and to his oppression. An interest is by this means held out to multitudes of the inferior sort, in obtaining a salary of eighteen livres a day (to them a vast sum) besides the pleasure of a residence in Paris and their share in the government of the kingdom. The more the objects of ambition are multiplied and become democratic, the more the rich are endangered.

Thus it must fare between the poor and the rich in the province regarded as aristocratic, though internally it is the very reverse of that. As for its relation to the other provinces, I cannot see how the unequal representation that is given to masses on account of wealth becomes a means for preserving the balance and tranquillity of the commonwealth. If one of the objectives is to secure the weak from being crushed by the strong (as in all society it undoubtedly is), how are the smaller and poorer of these masses to be saved from the tyranny of the wealthier ones? Is it by adding to the wealthy further and more systematic means of oppressing them? When we come to a balance of representation between corporate bodies, provincial interests and emulations and jealousies are just as likely to arise among them as among individuals; and their divisions are likely to produce stronger dissension and something leading more nearly to a war.

[Burke now presents one extremely complex page presenting further defects in the system in which representation depends in part on contribution; followed by more than two pages of arithmetically detailed discussion of some fictional examples, showing that under the National Assembly's system one person may pay much *more* into the public purse

while having much *less* representation in the Assembly, for reasons having to do with how many people live in the same arbitrarily drawn square as he does, and with the average poverty or affluence of those people. An excuse for letting ourselves off all this comes from how he continues:]

I am afraid I have gone too far into their way of considering the formation of a constitution. They have much, but bad, metaphysics; much, but bad, geometry; much, but false, proportionate arithmetic; but if it were all as exact as metaphysics, geometry, and arithmetic ought to be, and if their schemes were perfectly consistent in all their parts, all that would produce is something that *looks* more elegant. It is remarkable that in this great arrangement of mankind *not one* reference is made to anything moral or anything political, nothing that relates to the concerns, actions, passions, and interests of men. . . .

You see I consider this constitution only as electoral, as leading by steps to the National Assembly. I do not enter into the internal government of the **(a)** departments and their genealogy through the **(b)** communes and **(c)** cantons. In the original plan these local governments are to be as nearly as possible composed in the same manner and on the same principles as the elective assemblies. Each of them is a body perfectly compact and rounded in itself.

Treating France like a conquered country

You cannot help seeing that this scheme has a direct and immediate tendency to cut France up into a variety of republics, making them totally independent of each other without any direct constitutional means of coherence, connection, or subordination, except what can come from their going along with the decisions of the general congress of the ambassadors from each independent republic. That is what the National

Assembly really is. I admit that such governments do exist in the world, though in forms infinitely more suitable to the local and habitual circumstances of their people. But such *associations* (not really political bodies) have generally been the effect of necessity, not choice; and I believe the present French power is the very first body of citizens who, having obtained full authority to do with their country what they pleased, have chosen to cut it up in this barbarous manner.

It is impossible not to observe that in the spirit of this geometrical distribution and arithmetical arrangement these pretended citizens treat France exactly like a conquered country. Acting as conquerors, they have imitated the policy of the harshest of that harsh race. The policy of such barbarous victors, who contemn a subdued people and insult their feelings, has always been as much as possible to destroy all vestiges of the ancient country, in religion, in polity, in laws, and in manners; to confound all territorial limits; to produce general poverty; to put up their properties to auction; to crush their princes, nobles, and pontiffs; to lay low everything that had lifted its head above the level or that could serve to combine or rally their distressed and disbanded people under the standard of old opinion. They have made France ‘free’ in the way the Romans, those sincere friends of the rights of mankind, ‘freed’ Greece, Macedon, and other nations. They destroyed the bonds of their union on the pretence of providing for the independence of each of their cities.

When the members who compose these new bodies of cantons, communes, and departments—arrangements purposely produced through the medium of confusion—begin to act, they will find themselves in a great measure strangers to one another. The electors and elected throughout, especially in the rural cantons, will be frequently without any civil habitudes or connections, or any of the natural discipline

that is the soul of a true republic. Magistrates and collectors of revenue are now no longer acquainted with their districts, bishops with their dioceses, or curates with their parishes. These new colonies of the rights of men bear a strong resemblance to the sort of military colonies that Tacitus commented on in the declining policy of Rome. In better and wiser days (whatever course they took with foreign nations) they were careful to make the elements of methodical subordination and settlement to be coeval, and even to lay the foundations of civil discipline in the military. But when all the good arts had fallen into ruin, they proceeded as your Assembly does on the equality of men, and with as little judgment or care for the things that make a republic tolerable or durable. But in this as in almost everything, your new commonwealth is born and bred and fed in the corruptions that mark degenerated and worn-out republics. Your child comes into the world with the symptoms of death: the *facies Hippocratica* forms the character of its facial appearance and the prognostic of its fate. [The *facies Hippocratica* is the face of someone who is starving, super-exhausted, dying, or the like.]

The legislators who formed the ancient republics knew that their business was too arduous to be accomplished with no better apparatus than the metaphysics of an undergraduate, and the mathematics and arithmetic of a tax-collector. They had to do with *men*, and were obliged to study human nature. They had to do with *citizens*, and were obliged to study the effects of the habits that are communicated by the circumstances of civil life. They were aware that the operation of this second nature on the first produced a new combination; and from that arose many diversities among men, according to their birth, their education, their professions, the periods of their lives, their residence in towns or in the country, their various ways of acquiring and of fixing property, and according to the quality of the

property itself—all of which made them so many different species of animals, as it were. From hence they thought themselves obliged to •sort their citizens into classes, and to place them in situations in the state, appropriate to their particular habits, and to •give them privileges

- that are needed to secure for them what their particular occasions require, and
- that might provide each description with force to protect itself in the conflicts caused by the diversity of interests that must exist and must quarrel in any complex society.

The legislator would have been ashamed if

the coarse husbandman knew how to sort and to use his sheep, horses, and oxen, and had enough common sense not to abstract and equalise them all into mere *animals in general* without providing for each kind an appropriate food, care, and employment,

while

he, the economist, disposer and shepherd of his own kindred, elevating himself into an airy metaphysician, was resolved to know nothing of his flocks except as *men in general*.

That is why Montesquieu remarked very justly that the great legislators of antiquity made the greatest display of their powers, and even soared above themselves, in their classification of the citizens. It is here that your modern legislators have gone deep into the negative series, and sunk even below their own *nothing*. As the first sort of legislators attended to the different kinds of citizens and combined them into one commonwealth, the others—the metaphysical and alchemistic legislators—have taken the directly opposite course. They have done their best to run all sorts of citizens together into one homogeneous mass; and then they divided this mass of theirs into a number of incoherent republics.

They reduce men to loose counters, merely for the sake of simple counting, and not to figures whose power is to arise from their place in the table. . . .

They have levelled and crushed together all the orders that they found, even under the coarse unartificial arrangement of the monarchy where the classifying of the citizens is less important than it is in a republic. But every such classification, if properly ordered, is good in all forms of government: it creates a strong barrier against the excesses of despotism, and is the necessary means of giving effect and permanence to a republic. For lack of something of this kind, if the present project of a republic should fail, all securities to a moderated freedom fail along with it; all the indirect restraints that mitigate despotism are removed, so that if monarchy ever again obtains an entire ascendancy in France, under this or under any other dynasty, if it is not voluntarily tempered from the outset by the wise and virtuous counsels of the prince, it will probably be the most completely arbitrary power ever seen on earth. This is to play a most desperate game.

They even declare that one of their objectives is the confusion that comes with all such proceedings: they hope to secure their constitution by a terror of a return of those evils that came with their making it. 'By this,' they say, 'its destruction will become difficult for any authority, which cannot break it up without the entire disorganisation of the whole state.' They presume that if this 'take-over' authority ever came to the same degree of power that they have acquired, it would make a more moderate and chastised use of it, and would piously tremble to entirely disorganise the state in the savage manner that they have done. They look to the virtues of returning despotism for the security that is to be enjoyed by the offspring of their popular vices.

Consequences of the fragmenting of France

I wish, Sir, that you and my readers would attend carefully to the work of M. de Calonne on this subject. It is an eloquent, able and instructive performance. I confine myself to what he says relating to the constitution of the new state and to the condition of the revenue. I do not wish to pronounce on this minister's disputes with his rivals. Nor do I mean to risk any opinion concerning his ways and means—financial or political—for taking his country out of its present deplorable situation of servitude, anarchy, bankruptcy, and beggary. I am less optimistic than he is; but he is a Frenchman, and has a closer duty relative to those topics than I can have, and better means of judging concerning them. I would like special attention to be paid to the explicit announcement that he refers to, made by one of the principal leaders in the Assembly, concerning the tendency of their scheme to bring France not only from a monarchy to a republic but from a republic to a mere confederacy. It adds new force to my observations, and indeed M. de Calonne's work makes up for my deficiencies by many new and striking arguments on most of the subjects of this letter.

This resolution to break their country into separate republics is what has driven them into the greatest number of their difficulties and contradictions. If it were not for this, all the questions of exact equality and these never-to-be-settled balances of

individual rights — population — contribution
would be wholly useless. The representation, though derived from parts, would be a duty that equally concerned the whole. Each deputy to the Assembly would be the representative of *France*, and of all its descriptions [see Glossary], of the many and the few, of the rich and the poor, of the great districts and the small. All these districts would themselves

be subordinate to some standing authority that existed independently of them, an authority in which their representation (and everything pertaining to it) originated and to which it was pointed. This government—standing, unalterable, and fundamental—is the only thing that could make that territory truly and properly a whole. In Great Britain when we elect popular representatives we send them to a council—the House of Commons—in which each man individually is a subject and submitted to a government that is complete in all its ordinary functions. With you the elective Assembly is the sovereign, the *sole* sovereign, so all its members are integral parts of this sole sovereignty. But with us it is totally different. With us the representative, separated from the other parts, can have no action and no existence. The government is the point of reference of the various members and districts of our representation. This is the centre of our unity. This government of reference is a trustee for •the whole and not for •the parts. So is the other branch of our public council, I mean the House of Lords. With us the king and the lords are several and joint securities for the equality of each district, each province, each city. When did you hear of any province in Great Britain suffering from the inequality of its representation or from having no representation at all? Not only our monarchy and our peerage secure the equality on which our unity depends, but it is the spirit of the House of Commons itself. The very inequality of representation that is so foolishly complained of is perhaps the very thing which prevents us from thinking or acting as members for districts. Cornwall elects as many members as all Scotland. But is Cornwall better taken care of than Scotland? Apart from the members of some giddy clubs, few here trouble their heads about any of your bases. . . .

Your new constitution is the very reverse of ours in its principle; and I am astonished that anyone could dream

of offering anything done in it as an example for Great Britain. With you there is little connection—actually, *no* connection—between the last representative and the first constituent. The member who goes to the National Assembly is not chosen by the people or accountable to them. There are three elections before he is chosen; two sets of magistracy intervene between him and the primary assembly, so as to make him (I repeat) •an ambassador of a state and not •a representative of the people within a state. The whole spirit of the election is changed by this, and no corrective devised by your constitution-mongers can make him anything but what he is. The very attempt to do it would inevitably introduce a more horrid confusion than the present, if such a thing is possible. The only way to connect the original constituent with the representative is by circuitous means which lead the candidate to apply in the first instance to the primary electors, in order that by their authoritative instructions (and something more perhaps) these primary electors may force the two succeeding bodies of electors to make a choice agreeable to their wishes. But this would plainly subvert the whole scheme. It would •plunge them back into the tumult and confusion of popular election which they mean to avoid by their interposed gradation of elections, and at length •put the whole fortune of the state in the hands of those who have the least knowledge of it and the least interest in it. This is a perpetual dilemma into which they are thrown by the vicious, weak, and contradictory principles they have chosen. Unless the people break up and flatten this gradation they obviously do not *really* elect to the Assembly—indeed, they don't even *appear* to do so.

What are we all looking for in an election? To meet its real purposes, you must first be able to know the fitness of your man, and then you must retain some hold on him by personal obligation or dependence. What can the primary

electors in your system be looking for? They can never know anything of the qualities of the person who is to serve them, nor has he any obligation whatsoever to them. Of all the powers unfit to be delegated by those who have any real means of judging, the most unfit is anything that relates to a personal choice. In case of abuse, your body of primary electors never can call the representative to an account for his conduct: he is too distant from them in the chain of representation. If he acts improperly at the end of his two years' term, it does not concern him for two years more. By the new French constitution the best and the wisest representatives go equally with the worst into this set-aside status. Their hulls are supposed to have barnacles, so they must go into dock to be refitted. Every man who has served in an assembly is ineligible for two years after. Just as these magistrates begin to learn their trade, like chimney sweepers, they are disqualified for exercising it. . . . Your constitution has too much jealousy to have much sense in it. You consider the breach of trust in the representative so principally that you do not at all regard the question of his fitness to execute it.

This set-aside interval is not unfavourable to a faithless representative, who may be as good a canvasser as he was a bad governor. In this time he may plot his way into a superiority over the wisest and most virtuous. All the members of this elective constitution are equally fleeting and exist only for the election, so the persons who originally chose him may be quite different from the ones to whom he is to be responsible when he asks for a renewal of his trust. To call all the secondary electors of the Commune to account is ridiculous, impracticable, and unjust; they may themselves have been deceived in their choice, as the third set of electors, those of the Department, may be in theirs. In your elections responsibility cannot exist.

Cement 1: paper money

Finding no sort of principle [see Glossary] of coherence with each other in the nature and constitution of the many new republics of France, I considered what cement the legislators had provided for them from any extraneous materials. I take no notice of their confederations, their spectacles, their civic feasts, and their fanatical excitement; those are mere tricks. But tracing their policy through their actions, I think I can pick out the arrangements by which they propose to hold these republics together. The first is the confiscation, with the accompanying paper currency; the second is the supreme power of the city of Paris; the third is the general army of the state, which I shan't discuss until page 114, when I come to consider the army as a separate topic.

I cannot deny that the operation of the confiscation and the paper currency—one depending on the other—may for some time constitute some sort of cement, unless the madness and folly in their management and in the adjusting of the parts to make them fit produces a repulsion at the very outset. But admitting the scheme to have some coherence and some duration, I think that if after a while the confiscation turns out not to be sufficient to support the paper currency (as I am morally certain it will not), then instead of cementing these confederate republics together it will add infinitely to their dissociation, distraction, and confusion. . . . And if the confiscation sinks the paper currency, the cement is gone with the circulation. In the meantime its binding force will be uncertain, tightening or loosening with every variation in the credit of the paper.

The only thing that is certain in this scheme is its effect in producing an oligarchy in every one of the republics. (This looks like a side-effect, but I have no doubt that in the minds of those who conduct this business it is directly aimed at.)

A paper circulation

- not backed by any real money deposited or promised,
- amounting now to £44,000,000 of English money, and
- compulsorily** substituted for the coin of the kingdom, thus becoming the substance of its revenue as well as the medium of all its commercial and civil business,

must put into the hands of the managers and conductors of this circulation the whole of whatever power, authority, and influence is left.

In England we feel the influence of the Bank, though it is only the centre of a **voluntary** dealing. You would have to know little indeed of the influence of money on mankind if you did not see the force of the management of a moneyed concern that is •so much more extensive and •so much more dependent on the managers than any of ours are. But this is not merely a money concern. Another working part of the system is inseparably connected with this money management, namely the means of drawing out at discretion portions of the confiscated lands for sale, and carrying on a process of continual change of paper into land, and of land into paper. When we follow this process in its effects we can conceive something of the intensity of the force with which this system must operate. By this means the spirit of money-jobbing and speculation goes into the mass of land itself and incorporates with it. By this kind of operation that sort of property becomes (as it were) volatilised; it assumes an unnatural and monstrous activity, and thereby throws into the hands of the various managers—principal and subordinate, Parisian and provincial—all the ‘money’ and perhaps a full 10% of all the land in France, which has now acquired the worst and most pernicious part of the evil of a paper circulation, namely great uncertainty in its value. . . .

The new dealers, being all habitually adventurers and

without any fixed habits or local biases, will purchase so as to re-sell, as the market of paper or of money or of land presents an advantage. A holy bishop—Talleyrand, bishop of Autun—thinks that agriculture will derive great advantages from the ‘enlightened’ usurers who are to purchase the church confiscations. Well, I am an old farmer if not a good one; and with great humility I beg leave to tell his late lordship that usury is not a tutor to agriculture; and if the word ‘enlightened’ is understood according to the new dictionary, as it always is in your new schools, I cannot conceive how a man’s not believing in God can teach him to cultivate the earth with the slightest additional skill or encouragement. ‘I sow to the immortal gods’, said an old Roman, when he held one handle of the plough while Death held the other. You could bring together •all the directors of the two academies and •the directors of the *Caisse d’Escompte*, and one old experienced peasant is worth them all. I have learned more about a curious and interesting branch of husbandry in one short conversation with an old Carthusian monk than I have derived from all the Bank directors I ever talked with. But there is no cause for anxiety about money dealers meddling with the rural economy. These gentlemen are too wise in their generation. At first, perhaps, their tender and susceptible imaginations may be captivated by the innocent and unprofitable delights of a pastoral life; but they will soon find that agriculture is a more laborious and less lucrative trade than the one they had left. After making its panegyric, they will turn their backs on it. . . . They will cultivate the *Caisse d’Eglise*, under the sacred auspices of this prelate, with much more profit than its vineyards and its cornfields. They will employ their talents according to their habits and their interests. They will not follow the plough while they can direct treasuries and govern provinces.

A nation of gamblers

Your legislators, in everything new, are the first to found a commonwealth on gaming [= 'gambling'], infusing this spirit into it as its vital breath. The great aim in these politics is to change France from a great kingdom into a great play-table; to turn its inhabitants into a nation of gamesters; to make speculation as extensive as life; to mix it with all its concerns and to divert the whole of the hopes and fears of the people from their usual channels into the impulses, passions, and superstitions of those who live on chances. They loudly proclaim that their present system of a republic cannot possibly exist without this kind of gaming fund, and that the very thread of its life is spun out of the raw materials of these speculations. The old gaming in funds was harmful enough, undoubtedly, but only to individuals. Even when it had its greatest extent, in the Mississippi and South Sea, it affected comparatively few. . . . But where the law, which in most circumstances forbids gaming and in none countenances it, is itself debauched so as to reverse its nature and policy and openly *force* the subject to this destructive table by bringing the spirit and symbols of gaming into the minutest matters and engaging everybody in it, a more dreadful epidemic illness of that kind is spread than yet has appeared in the world. With you a man can neither earn nor buy his dinner without a speculation. What he receives in the morning will not have the same value at night. What he is compelled to take as payment for an old debt will not be received as the same when he comes to pay a debt contracted by himself, nor will it be the same when by prompt payment he would avoid contracting any debt at all. Industry must wither away. Economy must be driven from your country. Careful provision will have no existence. Who will labour without knowing the amount of his pay? Who will study to increase

what none can estimate? Who will accumulate, when he does not know the value of what he saves? If you abstract it from its uses in gaming, to accumulate your paper wealth would be not the providence of a man but the crazy instinct of a jackdaw.

The truly melancholy part of the policy of systematically making a nation of gamesters is this: all are forced to play but few can understand the game, and fewer still are in a position to make use of the knowledge. The many must be the dupes of the few who conduct the machine of these speculations. What effect it must have on the country people is visible. The townsman can calculate from day to day, not so the inhabitant of the country. When the peasant first brings his corn to market, the magistrate in the towns obliges him to take the *assignat* [see Glossary] at par; when he goes to the shop with his money he finds it 7% the worse for crossing the street. He will not readily go to this market again. The townspeople will be inflamed; they will force the country people to bring their corn. Resistance will begin, and the murders of Paris and St. Denis may be renewed through all France.

In your theory of representation the country is perhaps given more than its share. What does this empty compliment signify? Where have you placed the real power over moneyed and landed circulation? Where have you placed the means of raising and lowering the value of every man's freehold? Those whose operations can take from or add 10% to the possessions of every man in France must be the masters of every man in France. The whole of the power obtained by this revolution will settle in the towns among the burghers and the moneyed directors who lead them. The landed gentleman, the yeoman, and the peasant do not, any of them, have habits or inclinations or experience that can lead them to any share in this, which is the sole source of power and

influence now left in France. The very nature of a country life, the very nature of landed property, in all the occupations and pleasures they provide, render combination and arrangement (the sole way of getting and exerting influence) impossible among country people. Combine them by all the art you can, and all the industry, they are always dissolving into individuality. Anything in the nature of incorporation is almost impracticable among them. Hope, fear, alarm, jealousy, the ephemeral rumour that does its business and dies in a day—these are the reins and spurs by which leaders check or urge the minds of followers, and they are not easily employed among scattered people. They assemble, they arm, they act with the utmost difficulty and at the greatest charge. Their efforts, if ever they can be started, cannot be sustained. They cannot proceed systematically. If the country gentlemen attempt an influence through the mere income of their property, what can they do against those who have ten times their income to sell and who can ruin their property by bringing their plunder to meet it at the market? If the landed man takes out a mortgage, he lowers the value of his land and raises the value of *assignats* [see Glossary]. He increases his enemy's power by the very means he must take to contend with him. So the country gentleman, the man of liberal views and habits, attached to no profession, will be as completely excluded from the government of his country as if he were an outlaw. It is obvious that in the towns all the things that conspire against the country gentleman combine in favour of the money manager and director. In towns combination is natural. The habits of burghers, their occupations, their diversion, their business, their idleness continually bring them into mutual contact. Their virtues and their vices are sociable; they are always in garrison; and they come embodied and half disciplined into the hands of those who plan to use them for civil or military action.

All these considerations leave no doubt in my mind that if this monster of a constitution can continue France will be wholly governed by the agitators in corporations, by societies in the towns formed of directors of *assignats*, and trustees for the sale of church lands, attorneys, agents, money jobbers, speculators, and adventurers, composing an ignoble oligarchy based on the destruction of the crown, the church, the nobility, and the people. Here end all the deceitful dreams and visions of the equality and rights of men. In the Serbonian bog [look it up in Wikipedia] of this base oligarchy they are all absorbed, sunk, and lost forever.

One might be tempted to think that some great offences in France must cry to heaven, which has thought fit to punish it by subjecting it to a vile and inglorious domination in which no comfort or compensation is to be found in any of those false 'splendours' that prevent mankind from feeling themselves dishonoured even while they are oppressed. I must confess I am touched with a sorrow, mixed with some indignation, at the conduct of a few men—once of great rank and still of great character—who . . . have engaged in a business too deep for the lead-line of their understanding to fathom; who have lent their fair reputation and the authority of their high-sounding titles to the designs of men with whom they could not be acquainted, and have thereby made their very virtues operate to the ruin of their country.

So much for the first cementing principle.

Cement 2: the power of Paris

The second material of cement for their new republic is the superiority of the city of Paris, which is indeed strongly connected with the other cementing principle of paper circulation and confiscation. It is in this part of the project that we must look for the cause of the destruction of all the

old boundaries of provinces and jurisdictions, ecclesiastical and secular, and the dissolution of all ancient combinations of things, as well as the formation of so many small unconnected republics. The power of the city of Paris is evidently one great spring of all their politics. It is through the power of Paris, now become the centre and focus of jobbing, that the leaders of this faction command the whole legislative and the whole executive government. Everything, therefore, must be done that can confirm the authority of that city over the other republics. Paris is compact; she has an enormous strength, vastly greater than that of any of the square republics; and this strength is collected and condensed within a small area. [To understand the phrase 'square republics' see paragraph (1) on page 95.] Paris has a natural and easy connection among its parts, which will not be affected by any scheme of a geometrical constitution; and it does not matter much whether its proportion of representation is more or less, because it has the whole draft of fishes in its dragnet, .i.e. in the National Assembly. The other divisions of the kingdom, being hacked and torn to pieces and separated from all their habitual means and principles of union, cannot in the mean time unite against her. Nothing was to be left in all the subordinate divisions but weakness, disconnection, and confusion. To confirm this part of the plan the Assembly has recently resolved that no two of their republics shall have the same commander-in-chief.

To a person who takes a view of the whole, this 'strength' that Paris has will appear to be a system of general weakness. It is boasted that the geometrical policy has been adopted, that all *local* ideas should be sunk, and that the people should no longer be Gascons, Picards, Bretons, Normans, but *Frenchmen* with one country, one heart, and one Assembly. But instead of being all Frenchmen, the inhabitants of that region are more likely soon to have no country. No

man was ever attached by a sense of pride, partiality, or real affection to a description of square measurement. He never will glory in belonging to 'Chequer no. 71' or to any other badge-ticket. We begin our public affections in our families. (No-one who is cold in his family relationships is a zealous citizen.) We pass on to our neighbourhoods and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something it could fill. Love for the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality. Perhaps it is a sort of elemental training for those higher and broader concerns that men come to have for the prosperity of a kingdom as extensive as France. Citizens' *caring* about that general territory itself, as about former provinces, comes from old prejudices and unreasoned habits and not from the geometric properties of its shape! The power and pre-eminence of Paris does certainly press down and hold these republics together as long as it lasts. But, for the reasons I have already given you, I think it cannot last very long.

Passing from the civil-creating and civil-cementing principles of this constitution to the National Assembly, which is to appear and act as sovereign, we see a body in its constitution with every possible power and no possible external control. We see a body that has no fundamental laws, no established maxims, no respected rules of proceeding, a body that nothing can keep firm to any system whatsoever. Their idea of their powers is always taken at the utmost stretch of legislative competence, and their examples for ordinary cases come from the exceptions of the most urgent necessity. The future is to be in most respects like the present Assembly; but. . . it will soon be purged of the small degree of internal control existing in a minority chosen originally from various

interests, and preserving something of their spirit. If possible, the next Assembly must be worse than the present one. The latter, by destroying and altering everything, will leave to their successors apparently nothing popular to do. They will be roused by emulation and example to bold and absurd enterprises. To suppose such an Assembly sitting in perfect quietude is ridiculous.

Your all-sufficient legislators, in their hurry to do everything at once, have forgotten one thing that seems essential, and which I believe never has been before, in the theory or the practice, omitted by any projector of a republic. They have forgotten to constitute a *senate* or something of that nature and character. Never before this time was heard of a body politic composed of one legislative and active assembly, and its executive officers, without such a council, without something to which foreign states might connect themselves; something to which, in the ordinary detail of government, the people could look up; something which might give a bias and steadiness, and preserve something like consistency in the proceedings of state. Kings generally have such a body as a council. A monarchy may exist without it, but it seems to be in the very essence of a republican government. It holds a sort of middle place between the supreme power exercised by the people, or immediately delegated from them, and the mere executive. Of this there are no traces in your constitution, and in providing nothing of this kind your Solons and Numas have, as much as in anything else, revealed a sovereign incapacity.

(ii) Forming an executive power

[The '(ii)' in that heading refers back to the numbered list of topics on page 94]. Let us now turn our eyes to what they have done toward the formation of an executive power. For this they

have chosen a downgraded king. This first executive officer of theirs is to be a machine without any sort of deliberative discretion in any one act of his function. At best he is but a channel to convey to the National Assembly such facts as that body may need to know. If he had been made the exclusive channel, the power would have had some importance, though it would have been infinitely perilous to those who chose to exercise it. But public intelligence and statements of facts can reach the Assembly with equal authenticity by any other route. So the king's office of providing intelligence is insignificant.

I shall consider the French scheme of an executive officer in its two natural divisions—**(a)** civil and **(b)** political.

(a) According to the new constitution, the higher parts of judicature. . . . are not in the king. The king of France is not the fountain of justice. He does not nominate either the lower-court or the appellate judges. He neither proposes the candidates, nor has a negative on the choice. He is not even the public prosecutor. He serves only as a notary to authenticate the choice made of the judges in the several districts. By his officers he is to carry out their sentence. When we look into the true nature of his authority, he appears to be nothing more than a chief of debt-collectors, sergeants at mace, tax-collectors, gaolers, and hangmen. It is impossible to place anything called 'royalty' in a more degrading position. It would have been a thousand times better for the dignity of this unhappy prince if he had nothing at all to do with the administration of justice, given that he is deprived of all that is venerable and all that is consolatory in that function, without power of originating any process, without a power of suspension, mitigation, or pardon. Everything in justice that is vile and odious is thrown upon him. . . . It would be unnatural for the king of the French, situated as he now is, to respect himself or be respected by others.

(b) Consider this new executive officer on the side of his political capacity, as he acts under the orders of the National Assembly. To apply *laws* is a royal office; to carry out *orders* is not to be a king. Still, a political executive magistracy—even if that is all it is—is a great trust. It is a trust indeed that has much depending on its faithful and diligent performance, both in the person presiding in it and in all his subordinates. Means of performing this duty ought to be given by regulation; and dispositions toward it ought to be infused by the circumstances attendant on the trust. It ought to be environed with dignity, authority, and consideration, and it ought to lead to glory. . . . What sort of person is a king to command executive service when he has no means to reward it? Not in a permanent office; not in a grant of land; no, not in a pension of £50 a year; not in the vainest and most trivial title. In France, the king is no more the fountain of honour than he is the fountain of justice. All rewards, all distinctions are in other hands. Those who serve the king can be driven by no natural motive except fear—by a fear of everything except their master. His functions of internal coercion are as odious as the ones he exercises in the department of justice. If relief is to be given to any municipality, the Assembly gives it. If troops are to be sent to reduce them to obedience to the Assembly, the king is to carry out the order; and on every occasion he is to be spattered with the blood of his people. He has no negative; yet his name and authority is used to enforce every harsh decree. He must even concur in the butchery of anyone who tries to free him from his imprisonment or show the slightest attachment to his person or to his former authority.

Executive magistracy ought to be constituted in such a way that those who compose it should be disposed to love and to venerate those whom they are bound to obey. The wisest counsels ·or commands· can be ruined by deliberate

neglect or (worse) by literal obedience that is perverse and malignant. In vain will the law attempt to anticipate or to follow such studied neglects and fraudulent attentions. To make subordinates act zealously is not in the competence of law. Kings, even ones who really *are* kings, can and ought to bear the •freedom of subjects who are obnoxious to them. They can even, without derogating from themselves, bear the •authority of such persons if it promotes their service. Louis XIII had a mortal hatred of the Cardinal de Richelieu, but his support of that minister against his rivals was the source of all the glory of his reign and the solid foundation of his throne itself. Louis XIV did not love the Cardinal Mazarin, but for his interests he preserved him in power. . . . But these ministers, who were chosen by affairs and not by affections, acted in the name of kings and in trust for them, not as their avowed, constitutional, and ostensible masters. I think it impossible that any king, when he has recovered his first terrors, can cordially infuse vivacity and vigour into measures that he knows to be dictated by people who (he must be sure) are in the highest degree antagonistic to his person. Will any ministers who serve such a king (or whatever he may be called) with merely a decent appearance of respect happily obey the orders of people whom they had recently committed to the Bastille in his name?. . . . If you expect such obedience among your other innovations and regenerations, you ought to make a revolution in nature and provide a new constitution for the human mind! Otherwise, your supreme government cannot harmonise with its executive system. There are cases in which we cannot take up with names and abstractions. You may call half a dozen leading individuals whom we have reason to fear and hate ‘the nation’. It makes no difference except to make us fear and hate them more. If it had been thought justifiable and expedient to make such a revolution

by such means and through such persons as you have made yours, it would have been wiser to complete the business of the fifth and sixth of October by removing the King from the picture entirely. The new executive officer would then owe his situation to those who are his creators as well as his masters, and he might be bound in . . . in gratitude to serve those who had promoted him to a place of great wealth and great sensual indulgence. . . .

A king in circumstances like those of the present king of France, if he is so totally stupefied by his misfortunes that he thinks it the premium and privilege of life to eat and sleep without any regard to glory, can never be fit for the office. If he feels as men commonly feel, he must be aware that an office in such circumstances is one in which he can obtain no fame or reputation. He has no warm-hearted interest that can excite him to action. At best, his conduct will be passive and defensive. To inferior people such an office might be matter of honour. But being raised to it is different from descending to it, and suggests different sentiments. If he really names the ministers, they will have a sympathy with him. If they are forced on him, the whole business between them and the nominal king will be mutual counteraction. In all other countries, the office of ministers of state is of the highest dignity. In France it is full of peril and incapable of glory. Yet ministers in France will have rivals in their nothingness, while shallow ambition exists in the world or the desire for a miserable salary is an incentive to short-sighted avarice. Your constitution enables those competitors of the ministers to attack them in their vital parts, while they have no means of repelling their charges except in the degrading character of culprits. The ministers of state in France are the only persons in that country who cannot have a share in the national councils. What ministers! What councils! What a nation! —'But they are

responsible.' It is a poor service that is to be had from responsibility. The elevation of mind to be derived from fear will never make a nation glorious. Responsibility prevents crimes. It makes all attempts against the laws dangerous. But only idiots could think of responsibility as a principle [see Glossary] of active and zealous service. Is the conduct of a war to be entrusted to a man who may abhor its principle, whose every step to make it successful confirms the power of those by whom he is oppressed? Will foreign states seriously treat with him who has no prerogative of peace or war? No, not so much as in a single vote by himself or his ministers, or by anyone he can possibly influence. A state of contempt is not a state for a prince; better get rid of him at once.

I know it will be said that these feelings and attitudes in the court and executive government will continue only through this generation, and that the king has been brought to declare the dauphin [his oldest son] will be educated in conformity to his situation. If he is made to conform to his situation, he will have no education at all! His training will be even worse than that of an arbitrary monarch. If he reads, some good or evil genius will tell him his ancestors were kings, and from then on his objective must be to assert himself and to avenge his parents. This you will say is not his duty. That may be; but it is nature; and while you turn nature against you, you do unwisely to trust to duty. In this futile scheme of polity, the state now nurses in its bosom a source of weakness, perplexity, counteraction, inefficiency, and decay; and it prepares the means of its final ruin. In short, I see nothing in the executive *force* (I cannot call it 'authority') that has even an appearance of vigour, or that has the smallest degree of suitable correspondence or symmetry or amicable relation with the supreme power, either as it now exists or as it is planned for the future government.

You have settled, by an economy as perverted as the policy, two establishments of government—one real, one fictitious. Both maintained at a vast expense, the cost of the fictitious one being greater, I think. Such a machine as the latter is not worth the grease of its wheels. The expense is exorbitant, and neither the •show nor the •use deserve a tenth part of the charge.

‘Oh! but you don’t do justice to the talents of the legislators; you don’t allow, as you should, for necessity. Their scheme of executive force was not their choice. This pageant must be kept. The people would not consent to part with it.’

Right; I understand you. In spite of your grand theories, to which you would have heaven and earth to bend, you *do* know how to conform yourselves to the nature and circumstances of things. But when you were obliged to conform thus far to circumstances, you ought to have carried your submission further and to have made a proper instrument that would be useful for its purposes. That was in your power. For instance, among many other options, it was in your power to leave to your king the right of peace and war. What! to leave to the executive magistrate the most dangerous of all prerogatives? I know of none more dangerous, nor any more necessary to be so trusted. I do not say that this prerogative ought to be trusted to your king unless he enjoyed other auxiliary trusts along with it, which he does not now have. But if he did possess them, hazardous as they undoubtedly are, such a constitution would have advantages more than compensating for the risk. There is no other way of keeping the various potentates of Europe from intriguing separately and personally with the members of your Assembly, intermeddling in all your concerns, and fomenting in the heart of your country the most pernicious of all factions—ones serving the interests and under the

direction of foreign powers. From that worst of evils, thank God, we in Great Britain are still free. Your skill, if you had any, would be well employed finding indirect correctives and controls upon this perilous trust. If you did not like the ones we in England have chosen, your leaders might have exercised their abilities in designing something better. . . .

I hear that the persons who are called ministers have signified an intention of resigning their places. I am astonished that they did not resign long ago. The situation they have been in for the past year is one I wouldn’t have stood in for all the world. They wished well, I take it for granted, to the revolution. Be that as it may, they were placed on a height—though a height of humiliation—from which they *must* have seen. . . .the evils that have been produced by that revolution. In every step they took or forbore to take they must have felt the degraded situation of their country and their utter inability to serve it. They are in a kind of subordinate servitude that has no precedent in history. Without confidence from their sovereign, on whom they were forced, or from the Assembly, who forced them on him, all the noble functions of their office are performed by committees of the Assembly without any regard for their personal or their official authority. They are to execute, without power; they are to be responsible, without discretion; they are to deliberate, without choice. In their puzzled situations, under two sovereigns with no influence on either, they must act in such a way that (whatever they may intend) they sometimes betray the one, sometimes the other, and always betray themselves. Such has been their situation, such must be the situation of those who follow them. . . .

The abolition of the *parlements*

I can see as little genius and talent in the plan of judicature formed by the National Assembly ·as I see in its other plans·. According to their invariable course, the framers of your constitution began by utterly abolishing the *parlements*. These venerable bodies, like the rest of the old government, needed to be reformed whether or not there was any change in the monarchy. . . . But a good many features of their constitution deserved approval from the wise. They had one fundamental excellence: they were independent. The most doubtful feature of their office, namely its being something that could be bought and sold, contributed to this independence of character. They held for life. Indeed, they may be said to have held by inheritance. Appointed by the monarch, they were considered as nearly out of his power. The most determined exertions of the monarch against them only showed their radical independence. They composed permanent political bodies, constituted to resist arbitrary innovation; and from that corporate constitution, and from most of their forms, they were well calculated to afford both certainty and stability to the laws. They were a safe asylum to secure these laws in all the ups and downs of mood and opinion. They saved that sacred deposit of the country—its laws—during the reigns of arbitrary princes and the struggles of arbitrary factions. They kept alive the memory and record of the constitution. They were the great security to private property which might be said (when personal liberty had no existence) to be as well guarded in France as in any other country. Whatever is supreme in a state ought to have, as far as possible, its judicial authority so constituted as not only not to depend on it but in some way to balance it. It ought to give a security to its justice against its power. It ought to make its judicature, as it were, something exterior to the state.

These *parlements* had provided (not the best, but) some corrective to the monarchy's excesses and vices. Such an independent judicature was much more necessary when a democracy became the absolute power of the country. In that constitution what you have contrived—elective, temporary, local judges, exercising their dependent functions in a narrow society—is the worst of all tribunals. It will be vain to look to them for any appearance of justice toward strangers, toward the obnoxious rich, toward the minority of routed parties, toward all those who in the election have supported unsuccessful candidates. It will be impossible to keep the new tribunals clear of the worst spirit of faction. All contrivances by ballot we know from experience to be vain and childish to prevent a discovery of inclinations. Where they do produce concealment they also produce suspicion, and this is a still more harmful cause of partiality.

If the *parlements* had been preserved, instead of being dissolved at such a ruinous cost to the nation, they could have served in this new commonwealth in roughly the same way that the court and senate of Areopagus served in Athens; namely as one of the balances and correctives to the evils of a light and unjust democracy. Everyone knows that this tribunal was the great stay of that state; everyone knows how carefully it was upheld, and with what a religious awe it was consecrated. The *parlements* ·in France· were not wholly free from faction, I admit; but this evil was exterior and accidental, not an inevitable result of their constitution, which is what it must be in your new contrivance of elected tribunals with six-year terms. Several English writers commend the abolition of the old tribunals, supposing that they determined everything by bribery and corruption. But they have stood the test of monarchic and republican scrutiny. The court was well disposed to prove them to be corrupt when they were dissolved in 1771. Those who have again

dissolved them would have done the same if they could, but both inquisitions having failed, I conclude that gross pecuniary corruption must have been rare among them.

It would have been prudent, along with the *parlements*, to preserve their ancient power of critical commentary on all the decrees of the National Assembly, as they did upon those that passed in the time of the monarchy. This would be a means of squaring •the occasional decrees of a democracy to •some principles of general jurisprudence. The vice of the ancient democracies, and one cause of their ruin, was that they (like you) ruled by occasional decrees. This practice soon broke in on the tenor and consistency of the laws; it lessened the people's respect for them, and totally destroyed them in the end.

You have given the power of critical commentary—which in the time of the monarchy existed in the parliament of Paris—to your principal executive officer, whom you nonsensically insist on calling 'king'. This is the height of absurdity. You ought never to permit critical commentary from him who is to execute. This is to understand neither council nor execution, neither authority nor obedience. The person whom you call 'king' ought not to have this power, or he ought to have more. [In the preceding two paragraphs 'critical commentary' replaces Burke's 'remonstrance'.]

(iii) The judicature

[The '(iii)' in that heading refers back to the numbered list of topics on page 94]. Your present arrangement is strictly judicial. Instead of imitating your monarchy and seating your judges on a bench of independence, you aim to reduce them to the most blind obedience. As you have changed all things, you have invented new principles of order. You first appoint judges who (I suppose) are to determine according to law,

and then you let them know that you will eventually give them some law by which to determine. Any studies they have made (if they have made any) will be useless to them. But to fill the place of these studies they are to be sworn to obey all the rules, orders, and instructions they receive from the National Assembly. If they submit to these they leave no ground of law to the subject. They become complete and most dangerous instruments in the hands of the governing power which can wholly change the rules in the middle of a cause or in preparation for one. If these orders of the National Assembly come to be contrary to the will of the people, who locally choose judges, dreadful confusion must occur. For the judges owe their places to the local authority, and the commands they are sworn to obey come from those who have no share in their appointment. . . .

The Assembly promises to create a body of law that will be short, simple, clear, and so forth. That is, by their short laws they will leave much to the discretion of the judge, while they have exploded the authority of all the learning which could make judicial discretion (a perilous thing at best!) deserve to count as *sound* discretion.

Oddly, the administrative bodies are carefully exempted from the jurisdiction of these new tribunals. That is, the persons who ought to be the most entirely submitted to the laws are exempted from their power. Those who carry out public pecuniary trusts ought of all men to be the most strictly held to their duty. Given that you did not mean those administrative bodies to be real, sovereign, independent states, one would have thought that it must have been one of your first concerns to form an awe-inspiring tribunal—like your late *parlements*, or like our King's Bench—where all corporate officers could •obtain protection in the legal exercise of their functions, and would •find coercion if they trespassed against their legal duty. But the cause of the exemption is

plain. These administrative bodies are the great instruments of the present leaders in their march through democracy to oligarchy, so they must be put above the law. . . .

This establishment of judges still lacks something for its completion. It is to be crowned by a new tribunal. This is to be a grand state judicature, and it is to judge crimes committed against the nation, i.e. against the power of the Assembly. They seem to have been aiming at something like the high court of justice erected in England during the time of the great usurpation by Cromwell. As they have not yet finished this part of the scheme, it is impossible to form a right judgment on it. But if they don't take care to form it in a spirit very different from what has guided them in their proceedings relative to state offences, this tribunal—subservient to their inquisition, the 'Committee of Research'—will extinguish the last sparks of liberty in France and establish the most dreadful and arbitrary tyranny ever known in any nation. If they want to give this tribunal any appearance of liberty and justice, they must not send to it causes involving their own members; and they must move the seat of that tribunal out of the republic of Paris.

(iv) The army

Has more wisdom been displayed in the constitution of your army than what we find in your plan of judicature? The able arrangement of this part is harder and more demanding of skill and attention, not only as of great concern in itself but also—referring back to page 103—as the third cementing principle in the new body of republics that you call the French nation. It is not easy to foresee what that army may eventually become. You have voted a very large one, well equipped, at least fully equal to your apparent means of payment. But what is the principle of its discipline? or

whom is it to obey? You have got the wolf by the ears, and I wish you joy of the happy position in which you have chosen to place yourselves, and in which you are well positioned for a free deliberation concerning that army or concerning anything else.

The minister and secretary of state for the war department is M. de la Tour du Pin. This gentleman, like his colleagues in administration, is a most zealous assertor of the revolution, and an optimistic admirer of the new constitution that originated in that event. His statement of facts about the military of France is important not only because of his official and personal authority, but also because it clearly displays the actual condition of the army in France, and it throws light on the principles on which the Assembly proceeds in the administration of this critical object. It may enable us to form some judgment about how far we in Great Britain should imitate the military policy of France.

M. de la Tour du Pin, on the fourth of last June, comes to give an account of the state of his department as it exists under the auspices of the National Assembly. No man knows it so well; no man can express it better. Addressing himself to the National Assembly, he says:

'His Majesty has *this day* sent me to inform you of the multiplied disorders of which *every day* he receives the most distressing intelligence. The army threatens to fall into the most turbulent anarchy. Entire regiments have dared to violate the respect due to •the laws, •the king, •the order established by your decrees, and •the oaths they have taken with the most awful solemnity. Compelled by my duty to inform you of these excesses, my heart bleeds when I consider who they are that have committed them. Those against whom it is not in my power to withhold the most grievous complaints are a part of that very soldiery

which to this day have been so full of honour and loyalty, and with whom I have lived as comrade and friend for fifty years.

‘What incomprehensible spirit of delirium and delusion has all at once led them astray? While you are tirelessly establishing uniformity in the empire, and molding the whole into one coherent and consistent body, while the French are taught by you the respect that the laws owe to the rights of man and that the citizens owe to the laws, the administration of the army presents nothing but disturbance and confusion. I see in more than one corps the bonds of discipline relaxed or broken; the most unheard-of pretensions avowed directly and without any disguise; the ordinances without force; the chiefs without authority; the military chest and the colours carried off; the authority of the king himself proudly defied; the officers despised, degraded, threatened, driven away, and some of them prisoners in the midst of their corps, dragging on a precarious life in the bosom of disgust and humiliation. . . . The commandants of places have had their throats cut, under the eyes and almost in the arms of their own soldiers.

‘These evils are great; but they are not the worst consequences that can come from such military insurrections. Sooner or later they may menace the nation itself. *The nature of things requires* that the army should never act but as *an instrument*. The moment it sets itself up as a deliberative and acts according to its own resolutions, *the government, be it what it may, will immediately degenerate into a military democracy*—a species of political monster that has always ended by devouring those who produced it.

‘After all this, who can not be alarmed at the irregular consultations and turbulent committees formed in some regiments by the common soldiers and non-commissioned officers without the knowledge of their superiors and even in contempt of their authority. Not that the agreement of those superiors could give authority to such monstrous democratic assemblies.’

It is not necessary to add much to this finished picture—finished as far as its canvas admits, but not (I think) taking in the whole of the nature and complexity of the disorders of this military democracy which, as the minister of war truly and wisely observes, must be the true constitution of the state, whatever official label it is given. For though he informs the Assembly that the more considerable part of the army have not cast off their obedience and are still attached to their duty, travellers who have seen the corps whose conduct is the best observe in them •the absence of mutiny rather than •the existence of discipline.

I cannot help pausing here to reflect on this minister’s surprise which over the excesses he relates. To him it seems quite inconceivable that the troops should depart from their ancient principles of loyalty and honour. Surely those he is speaking to know the causes of this only too well. They know the doctrines they have preached, the decrees they have passed, the practices they have permitted. The soldiers remember 6 October. They recollect the French guards. They have not forgotten the taking of the king’s castles in Paris and Marseilles, or the fact that the governors in both places were murdered with impunity. They do not abandon the principles of ‘the equality of men’ laid down so ostentatiously and laboriously. They cannot shut their eyes to the degradation of the whole nobility of France and the suppression of the very idea of a gentleman. The total abolition of titles and distinctions is not lost on them. But

M. de la Tour du Pin is astonished at their disloyalty when the doctors of the Assembly have taught them—along with all this—the respect due to laws. It is easy to judge which of the two sorts of lessons men with weapons in their hands are likely to learn! As for the authority of the king, we can learn from the minister himself that it is of no more consideration with these troops than it is with anyone else. ‘The king’, says he, ‘has over and over again repeated his orders to put a stop to these excesses; but in so terrible a crisis your (the Assembly’s) concurrence has become necessary to prevent the evils that menace the state. You unite to the force of the legislative power that of *opinion*, still more important.’ To be sure the army can have no opinion of the power or authority of the king. Perhaps the soldier has by this time learned that the Assembly itself does not enjoy much more liberty than that royal figure.

It is now to be seen what has been proposed in this exigency, one of the greatest that can happen in a state. The minister asks the Assembly to array itself in all its terrors and to call forth all its majesty. He desires that the grave and severe principles announced by them may give vigour to the king’s proclamation. [In the next sentence, ‘decimating’ a military unit is executing one tenth of its members, chosen at random.] After this we should have looked for civil and military courts, the breaking of some corps, the decimating of others, and all the terrible means which necessity has employed in such cases to stop the progress of the most terrible of all evils; particularly, one might expect that a serious inquiry would be made into the murder of commandants in the view of their soldiers. Not one word of all this or of anything like it! After being told that the soldiery trampled on the decrees of the Assembly promulgated by the king, the Assembly pass new decrees and authorise the king to make new proclamations. After the secretary at war had stated that the regiments

had paid no regard to oaths ‘taken with the most imposing solemnity’, they propose—what? More oaths! . . .

The means that have been used to prevent the mischiefs arising from conspiracies, irregular consultations, seditious committees, and monstrous democratic assemblies of the soldiers, and all the disorders arising from idleness, luxury, dissipation, and insubordination, are (I believe) the most astonishing that ever occurred to men, even in all the inventions of this prolific age. It is no less than this: the king has promulgated in circular letters to all the regiments his direct authority and encouragement that the various corps should join themselves with the clubs and confederations in the several municipalities, and mix with them in their feasts and civic entertainments! This jolly discipline, it seems, is to soften the ferocity of their minds, to reconcile them to their bottle companions of other descriptions, and to merge particular conspiracies in more general associations. That this remedy would be pleasing to the soldiers, as they are described by M. de la Tour du Pin, I can readily believe; and however mutinous they are otherwise I am sure they will dutifully submit themselves to *these* royal proclamations. But I question whether all this civic swearing, clubbing, and feasting would make them more disposed than they are at present to obey their officers, or teach them better to submit to the austere rules of military discipline. It will make them admirable citizens in the French manner, but not quite so good soldiers in any manner. We may well doubt whether the conversations at these good tables would improve their fitness for the role of mere ‘instruments’, which this veteran officer and statesman rightly says the nature of things always requires an army to be.

Concerning the likelihood of this improvement in discipline by the free conversation of the soldiers with municipal festive societies we may judge by the state of the

municipalities themselves, provided to us by the war minister in this very speech. The good disposition of certain regiments gives him good hopes of the success of his endeavours to restore order for the present, but he finds something cloudy with regard to the future. As to preventing the return of confusion, the administration (says he) cannot be answerable to you (the Assembly) for this as long as they see the municipalities claim for themselves an authority over the troops that your institutions have reserved wholly to the monarch. You have fixed the limits of the military authority and the municipal authority. You have limited the action you have permitted to the latter over the former to the right of requisition; neither the letter nor the spirit of your decrees ever authorised the commons in these municipalities to break the officers, to try them, to give orders to the soldiers, to drive them from the posts they had been ordered to guard, to stop them in their marches ordered by the king, or, in a word, to enslave the troops to the whims of each of the cities or even market towns through which they are to pass.

[Burke now attacks the dismissive attitude of the Assembly ('juvenile politicians') to age and experience ('a man of fifty years' wear and tear among mankind'). Then:]

The imbecility of any part of the puerile and pedantic system that they call a 'constitution' cannot be laid open without revealing the utter insufficiency and harmfulness of every other part that bears even the remotest relation to it. You cannot propose a remedy for the incompetence of the crown without displaying the feebleness of the Assembly. You cannot deliberate on the confusion of the army of the state without disclosing the worse disorders of the armed municipalities. . . . Read carefully the eloquent speech (such it is) of M. de la Tour du Pin. He attributes the salvation of the municipalities to the good behaviour of some of the troops. These troops are to preserve the well-disposed part of those

municipalities, which is confessed to be the weakest, from the pillage of the worst-disposed, which is the strongest. But the municipalities claim sovereignty and want to command the troops needed for their protection. Indeed they must command them or court them. Because of the demands of their situation and the republican powers they have obtained, the municipalities must relate to the military as

- masters, or
- servants, or
- confederates, or
- each in turn,

or they must make a jumble of all together, according to circumstances. What government is there to coerce the army except the municipality, or to coerce the municipality except the army? To preserve concord where authority is extinguished, at the risk of all consequences, the Assembly tries to cure the illnesses by the illnesses themselves: they hope to preserve themselves from a purely military democracy by giving the military a debauched interest in the municipal democracy.

Once the soldiers come to mix for any time in the municipal clubs, cabals, and confederacies, a magnetic attraction will draw them to the lowest and most desperate part, bringing with them their habits, affections, and sympathies. The military conspiracies, which are to be remedied by civic confederacies; the rebellious municipalities, which are to be made obedient by providing them with the means of seducing the very armies of the state that are to keep them in order; all these chimeras of a monstrous and portentous policy must worsen the confusion from which they have arisen. There must be blood. The lack of common judgment manifested in the construction of all their descriptions [see Glossary] of forces and in all their kinds of civil and judicial authorities will make it flow. Disorders may be quieted in one time

and in one part. They will break out in others, because the evil is radical and intrinsic. All these schemes of mixing mutinous soldiers with seditious citizens must further •weaken the military connection of soldiers with their officers, while •adding military and mutinous audacity to turbulent craftsmen and peasants. To secure a *real* army, the officer should be first and last in the eye of the soldier; first and last in his attention, observance, and esteem. ·In your ‘army’· it seems there are to be officers whose chief qualification is calmness and patience. They are to manage their troops by electioneering arts. They must conduct themselves as candidates, not as commanders. By such means power may be occasionally in their hands, so the authority by which they are to be nominated becomes of high importance.

Control of the army

It is not clear what you will finally do; and it does not matter much while the strange and contradictory relation between your army and all the parts of your republic, as well as the puzzled relation of those parts to each other and to the whole, remain as they are. You seem to have given the provisional nomination of the officers in the first instance to the king, subject to approval by the National Assembly. Men who have an interest to pursue are extremely good at discovering the true seat of power. They must soon perceive that those who can block appointments indefinitely are really appointing. So the officers must look to their intrigues in that Assembly as the only sure road to promotion. Yet by by your new constitution they must *begin* their solicitation at court. This double negotiation for military rank seems to me likely to promote faction in the Assembly itself relating to this vast military patronage, and then to poison the corps of officers with factions of a nature still more dangerous to the safety

of government. . . .and destructive in the end to the efficiency of the army itself. If the system were designed for just that purpose it couldn't have been better done. Officers who lose the promotions intended for them by the crown must become of a faction opposed to that of the Assembly that has rejected their claims, and must nourish in the heart of the army discontents against the ruling powers. On the other hand, officers who, by carrying their point through an interest in the Assembly feel themselves to be at best only second in the good will of the crown though first in that of the Assembly, must slight an authority that would not advance and could not retard their promotion. If to avoid these evils you decide that command and promotion are to be decided purely by seniority, you will have an army of formality; at the same time it will become more independent ·of any external control· and more of a military republic. . . . A king is not to be deposed by halves. If he is not everything in the command of an army, he is nothing. What is the effect of a power placed nominally in the hands of a ‘head’ of the army whom that army is not grateful to or afraid of? Such a figurehead is not fit for the administration of something that is of all things the most delicate, namely the supreme command of military men. They must be constrained. . . .by a real, vigorous, effective, decided, personal authority. The authority of the Assembly itself suffers by passing through such a debilitating channel as they have chosen. The army will not long look to an assembly that acts through false show and palpable imposition. They will not seriously yield obedience to a prisoner. They will either despise the pageant or pity the captive king. This relation of your army to the crown will, I think, become a serious dilemma in your politics.

There is also the question of whether an assembly like yours, even if it did have another sort of organ through

which to pass its orders, is fit for promoting the obedience and discipline of an army. It is known that armies have always given a very precarious and uncertain obedience to any senate or popular authority; and least of all will they yield it to an assembly that is to continue for only two years. The officers must totally lose the characteristic disposition of military men if they see with perfect submission and due admiration the dominance of orators; especially when they find that they have to pay court repeatedly to an endless series of those orators, whose military policy and command skills (if they have any) must be as uncertain as their duration is short. In the weakness of one kind of authority (·the king·) and the fluctuation of the other (·the Assembly·), the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and quarrelsome until some popular general who •understands the art of conciliating the soldiery and •possesses the true spirit of command draws the eyes of all men onto himself. Armies will obey him because of his personal qualities. There is no other way of securing military obedience in this state of things. But the moment that event happens, this person who really commands the army is your master—the master of your king, your Assembly, your whole republic. [This event did happen nine years later with the ascendancy of Napoleon Bonaparte.]

How did the Assembly get their present power over the army? Chiefly by seducing the soldiers away from their officers. They have begun by a most terrible operation. . . . They have destroyed the principle of obedience in the great, essential, critical link between the officer and the soldier, just where the chain of military subordination starts and on which the whole of that system depends. The soldier is told he is a citizen and has the rights of man and citizen. The right of a man, he is told, is to be his own governor and to be ruled only by those to whom he delegates that self-government. It is very natural for him to think that he ought most of all to

have his choice where he is to yield the greatest degree of obedience. So he will probably do systematically what he now does occasionally, namely exercise at least a negative in the choice of his officers. At present the officers are only *permitted* to have their positions, and only conditionally on their good behaviour. In fact there have been many cases where they were dismissed by their corps. Here is a second negative on the king's choice—one that is at least as effective as the Assembly's negative. The soldiers know already that the National Assembly has seriously considered whether they (the soldiers) ought to have the direct choice of all or some proportion of their officers. When such matters are under discussion it is not unreasonable to expect them to favour the opinion that is most favourable to their claims. They will not bear to be seen as the army of an imprisoned king while another army in the same country—one with whom they are to feast and confederate—is to be considered as the free army of a free constitution. They will cast their eyes on the other and more permanent army; I mean the municipal army. *That* corps, they well know, does actually elect its own officers. They may not be able to see the reason why they are not allowed to elect a Marquis de la Fayette (or whatever his new name is) of their own. If this election of a commander-in-chief is a part of 'the rights of men', why not of theirs? They see elective justices of peace, elective judges, elective curates, elective bishops, elective municipalities, and elective commanders of the Parisian army—why should they alone be excluded? Are the brave troops of France the only men in that nation who are not the fit judges of military merit and of the qualifications necessary for a commander-in-chief? Do they, because they are paid by the state, lose the rights of men? They are a part of that nation themselves and contribute to that pay. And is not the king, is not the National Assembly, and are not all who elect

the National Assembly, likewise paid? Instead of seeing all these forfeit their rights because they receive a salary, they see that in all these cases a salary is given for the exercise of those rights. . . .

Coercing the peasants

With a government such as yours everything depends on the army, for you have industriously destroyed all the opinions and prejudices and (as far as you could) all the instincts that support government. The moment any difference arises between your National Assembly and any part of the nation, you must resort to force, because nothing else is left to you—or rather you have left nothing else to yourselves. The report of your war minister tells you that the distribution of the army is in a great measure made with a view of internal coercion. You must rule by an army; and you have infused into that army, as well as into the whole body of the nation, principles which in time must disable you in the use you plan to make of it. The king is to call out troops to act against his people, when the world has been told—and the assertion still rings in our ears—that *troops ought not to fire on citizens*. The colonies claim for themselves an independent constitution and free trade; they must be constrained by troops. In what chapter of your code of the rights of men can they read that it is a part of the rights of men to have their commerce monopolised and restrained for the benefit of others? As the colonists rise on you, the Negroes rise on them. Troops again—massacre, torture, hanging! These are your rights of men! These are the fruits of metaphysical declarations wantonly made and shamefully retracted! Only the other day the farmers of land in one of your provinces refused to pay some sort of rent to the lord of the soil. In consequence of this, you decree

that the country people shall pay all rents and dues except the ones you have abolished as grievances; and you order the king to march troops against them if they refuse. You lay down metaphysical propositions which imply universal consequences, and then you try to limit logic by despotism. The leaders of the present system tell them of their rights, as men, to take fortresses, to murder guards, to seize kings without the least appearance of authority even from the Assembly. . . ., and yet these leaders order out the troops that have acted in these very disorders, to coerce those who judge by the principles and follow the examples that have been guaranteed by the leaders' own approval.

The leaders teach the people to abhor and reject all feudality as the barbarism of tyranny, and they tell them afterwards how much of that barbarous tyranny they are to put up with patiently. They are extravagant in throwing light on grievances, but the people find them to be extremely sparing when it comes to redress. [He goes into details in support of his claim that the revolution's system of 'land rents' is thoroughly unjust.]

The peasants are probably descendants of ancient proprietors, Romans or Gauls. But if they fail in any way in the titles they claim on the principles of antiquaries and lawyers, they retreat into the citadel of 'the rights of men'. There they find that men are equal; and the earth—the kind and even-handed mother of all—ought not to be monopolised to support the pride and luxury of men who by nature are •no better than themselves, and who if they don't labour for their bread are •worse. They find that by the laws of nature the occupant and subduer of the soil is its true proprietor; that there is no prescription [see Glossary] against nature; that any agreements made with the landlords during the time of 'slavery' are only the effect of duress and force; and that when the people re-entered into the rights of men those

agreements became as void as everything else that had been settled under the prevalence of the old feudal and aristocratic tyranny. They will tell you that they do not see how an idler with a hat and a national cockade is any different from an idler in a cowl or in a surplice. If you base the entitlement to rents on succession and **prescription**, they will tell you—from the speech of M. Camus, published for their information by the National Assembly—that things that are wrong at the outset cannot avail themselves of prescription; that the title of these lords was vicious in its origin; and that force is at least as bad as fraud. As for title by **succession**, they will tell you that the succession of those who have cultivated the soil is the true pedigree of property, and not rotten parchments and silly substitutions; and that the lords have enjoyed their usurpation too long. . . .

When the peasants give you back that coin of sophistical reasoning on which you have set your image and superscription, you dismiss it as counterfeit money and tell them in future you will pay them with French guards, and dragoons, and hussars. To punish them, you wield the second-hand authority of a king who is only the instrument of destroying, with no power to protect the people or himself. Through him it seems you will make yourselves obeyed. They answer:

'You have taught us that there are no gentlemen; which of your principles teach us to bow to kings whom we have not elected? We know without your teaching that lands were given for the support of feudal dignities, feudal titles, and feudal offices. When you took down the cause as a grievance, why should the more grievous effect remain? As there are now no hereditary honours and no distinguished families, why are we taxed to maintain what you tell us ought not to exist? You have sent down our old aristocratic landlords as nothing but *extractors* under your authority. Have you tried to make these your rent-gatherers worthy of our respect?

No. You have sent them to us with their arms reversed, their shields broken, their impresses defaced—so unfeathered, degraded, and metamorphosed that we no longer know them. They are strangers to us. They do not even go by the names of our former lords. Physically they may be the same men, though we are not quite sure of that, on your new philosophical doctrines of personal identity. In all other respects they are totally changed. We do not see why we don't have as much right to refuse them their rents as you have to cancel all their honours, titles, and distinctions. We never commissioned you to do that; it is one of the many instances of your assumption of undelegated power. We see the burghers of Paris—through their clubs, mobs, and national guards—directing you at their pleasure, and giving to you as law something which under your authority is passed on as law to us. Through you these burghers dispose of the lives and fortunes of us all. Why should not you attend as much to the desires of the working farmer with regard to our rent (by which we are seriously affected) as you do to the demands of these insolent townspeople with regard to distinctions and titles of honour (by which neither they nor we are affected at all)? But we find you paying more regard to their fancies than to our necessities. Paying tribute to his equals—is *that* among the rights of man? Before this measure of yours, we might have thought we were not perfectly equal. We might have entertained some old, habitual, unmeaning bias in favour of those landlords; but you have wanted to destroy all respect to them—why else would you have made the law that degrades them? You have forbidden us to treat them with any of the old formalities of respect, and now you send troops to sabre and bayonet us into a submission to fear and force, which you did not allow us to yield to the mild authority of opinion.'

The basis for some of these arguments is horrid and ridiculous to all rational ears, but to the politicians of metaphysics who have opened schools for sophistry and made establishments for anarchy it is solid and conclusive. It is obvious that the leaders in the Assembly would not on moral grounds have had the least scruple about cancelling the rents along with the title and family ensigns. Doing that would be following the principle of their reasonings and completing the analogy of their conduct. But they had newly acquired by confiscation a great body of landed property. They had this commodity at market; and the market would have been wholly destroyed if they were to permit •the farmers to riot in the speculations with which they so freely intoxicated •themselves. The only security which property enjoys in any one of its descriptions is from the interests of their rapacity with regard to some other. [That sentence is exactly as Burke wrote it.] They have left nothing but their own arbitrary pleasure to determine what property is to be protected and what subverted.

Nor have they left any principle by which any of their municipalities can be bound to obedience, or even conscientiously obliged not to separate from the whole to •become independent or •connect itself with some other state. The people of Lyons, it seems, recently refused to pay taxes. Why should they not? What lawful authority is there left to demand them? The king imposed some of them. The old states, methodised by orders, settled the more ancient taxes. They may say to the Assembly:

‘Who are you, who are not our kings or states that we have elected, and do not proceed on the basis of principles on which we have elected you?
And who are we, who see the taxes that you have ordered to be paid, wholly rejected and that act of disobedience afterwards ratified by yourselves—who

are we to •have no say in what taxes we ought or ought not to pay, and to •be refused the powers whose validity you have approved in others?’

To this the answer is *We will send troops!* This last reason of kings is always the first with your Assembly. This military aid may serve for a time, while the impression of the increase of pay remains and the vanity of being umpires in all disputes is flattered. But this weapon—the army—will snap short, unfaithful to the hand that employs it. The Assembly keep a school where, systematically and with unremitting perseverance, they teach principles and form regulations destructive to all spirit of subordination, civil and military—and then they expect to hold an anarchic people in obedience by means of an anarchic army.

This national army, according to the new policy, is to be counter-balanced by the municipal army. The latter, considered purely in itself, has a constitution that is much simpler and in every respect less objectionable than that of the national army. It is a mere democratic body, unconnected with the crown or the kingdom; armed and trained and officered at the pleasure of the districts to which the corps severally belong; and the personal service of the individuals who compose it, or the payment in lieu of personal service, is directed by the same authority. Nothing is more uniform. But if it is considered in any relation to the crown, to the National Assembly, to the public tribunals, or to the national army, or considered in a view to any coherence or connection between its parts, it seems a monster that can hardly fail to terminate its confused movements in some great national calamity. . . .

(v) The revolution's handling of revenue

Having concluded my few remarks on the constitution of **(i)** the supreme power, **(ii)** the executive, **(iii)** the judicature, **(iv)** the military, and on the reciprocal relations of all these establishments, I shall say something about the ability shown by your legislators with regard to **(v)** the revenue.

The proceedings in relation to this matter show even fewer traces of political judgment or financial resource. When the states [see Glossary] met, it seemed that the great objective was to improve the system of revenue, to enlarge its collection, to cleanse it of oppression and vexation, and to establish it on the most solid footing. There were great expectations about that throughout Europe. It was by this grand arrangement that France was to stand or fall; and it became (very properly, in my opinion) the test by which the skill and patriotism of those who ruled in that Assembly would be tried. The revenue of the state is the state. In effect, everything depends on it, whether for support or for reformation. The dignity of every occupation wholly depends on the quantity and kind of virtue that can be exerted in it. All great qualities of the mind that operate in public, and are not merely suffering and passive, require force for their display; . . .so the revenue, which is the spring of all power, becomes in its administration the sphere of every active virtue. Public virtue is of a magnificent and splendid nature, instituted for great things and dealing with great concerns; so it requires abundant scope and room, and cannot spread and grow under confinement and in tightened, narrow, and sordid circumstances. It is only through the revenue that the body politic can act in its true genius and character, and therefore it will display just as much of •its collective virtue, and of the virtue of those who move it and are (as it were) its life and guiding principle, as it has •a just revenue. It is

from the revenue that magnanimity, liberality, beneficence, fortitude, providence, and the tutelary protection of all good arts derive their food and the growth of their organs. And continence, self-denial, labour, vigilance, frugality, and whatever else there is in which the mind shows itself above mere appetite, are nowhere more in their proper element than in the provision and distribution of public wealth. So it is not without reason that the science of theoretical and practical finance, which must call upon so many auxiliary branches of knowledge, stands high in the estimation not only of the ordinary sort but of the wisest and best men; and as this science has grown with the progress of its object, the prosperity and improvement of nations has generally increased with the increase of their revenues; and they will both continue to grow and flourish as long as the balance between •what is left to strengthen the efforts of individuals and •what is collected for the common efforts of the state is properly maintained, with the two being closely related to one another. And perhaps it may be owing to the size of revenues and the urgency of state necessities that old abuses in the constitution of finances are discovered and their true nature and rational theory comes to be more perfectly understood; because a smaller revenue might have been more distressing in one period than a far greater one is found to be in another, even if the public/private proportion remained the same. In this state of things, the French Assembly found something in their revenues to preserve, secure, and wisely administer, as well as something to cancel and alter. Though their proud assumption might justify the severest tests, I shan't hold them to models of ideal perfection, and will judge them only on the basis of what is the plain obvious duty of a common finance minister.

The objects of a financier are, then, to secure an ample revenue, to impose it with judgment and equality, to employ

it economically, and when necessary to make use of credit, to secure its foundations in that instance and always by the clearness and candour of his proceedings, the exactness of his calculations and the solidity of his funds. With this in mind let us take a short and distinct view of the merits and abilities of those in the National Assembly who have undertaken the management of this arduous concern. I find in a report by M. Vernier from the committee of finances dated 2 August of last year that the amount of the national revenue as compared with its product before the Revolution, far from having increased in their hands, was lessened by a sum equal to £8,000,000 sterling, a reduction of considerably more than 30%.

If this is the result of great ability, never surely was ability displayed in a more distinguished manner or with so powerful an effect. No common folly, no everyday incapacity, no ordinary official negligence, even no official crime, no corruption, no peculation, hardly any direct hostility which we have seen in the modern world could in so short a time have made so complete an overthrow of the finances and, with them, of the strength of a great kingdom. . . .

The salt monopoly

As soon as the Assembly met, the sophisters and declaimers began by decrying the previous constitution of the revenue in many of its most essential branches, such as the public monopoly of salt. They accused this, as truly as unwisely [Burke's phrase], with being badly designed, oppressive, and partial. They were not satisfied with saying this in speeches introducing some plan of reform; they declared it in a solemn resolution, as it were judicially passing sentence on the monopoly; and they dispersed this sentence throughout the nation. At the time of this decree, they equally solemnly

ordered the same absurd, oppressive, and partial tax to be paid until they could find a revenue to replace it. The consequence was inevitable. The provinces that had always been exempted from this salt monopoly—some of them charged with other perhaps equivalent contributions—were totally disinclined to bear any part of the burden. . . . As for the Assembly, occupied as it was with declaring and violating the rights of men, and arranging for general confusion, it had neither leisure nor capacity to contrive, nor authority to enforce, any plan of any kind for replacing the tax or equalising it, or compensating the provinces, or conducting their minds to any scheme of accommodation with districts that were to be relieved.

The people of the salt provinces, impatient under taxes, damned by the authority that had directed their payment, very soon found their patience exhausted. They thought themselves to be as skillful in demolition as the Assembly could be. They relieved themselves by throwing off the whole burden. Animated by this example, each district, or part of a district—judging of its own grievance by its own feeling, and of its remedy by its own opinion—did as it pleased with other taxes.

Other revenue attempts

[In this paragraph '(un)equal(ity)' means '(un)fair(ness)'.] Now let us see how they have conducted themselves in designing equal impositions that are •proportioned to the means of the citizens and •the least likely to lean heavily on the active capital at work in generating the private wealth from which the public fortune must be derived. In allowing various districts, and various individuals in each district, to decide what part of the old revenue to withhold, they were introducing—instead of better principles of equality—a new inequality

of the most oppressive kind. Payments were regulated by dispositions. The parts of the kingdom that were the most submissive, the most orderly, or the most well-disposed towards the commonwealth bore the whole burden of the state. Nothing turns out to be as oppressive and unjust as a feeble government. To fill up all the deficiencies in the old impositions and the new deficiencies of every kind that were to be expected—what remained to a state without authority? The National Assembly called for *voluntary benevolence*: for a quarter of each citizen's income, to be estimated on the honour of the paying citizen. What they obtained in this way. . . . was far from enough to meet their real needs, and even further from their foolish expectations. Rational people would have hoped for little from this *tax disguised as benevolence*— a tax weak, ineffective, and unequal; a tax by which luxury, avarice, and selfishness were screened, and the load thrown on productive capital, on integrity, generosity, and public spirit; a tax of regulation on virtue. At length the mask is thrown off, and they are now trying (with little success) to exact their benevolence by force.

This benevolence, the rickety offspring of weakness, was to be supported by another resource, the twin brother of the same prolific imbecility: the failure of the patriotic •contribution was to be made up for by patriotic •donations. John Doe was to become security for Richard Roe. By this scheme they took things that were worth a lot to the giver and of comparatively small value to the receiver; they ruined a number of trades; they pillaged the crown of its ornaments, the churches of their plate, and the people of their personal decorations. The invention of these juvenile pretenders to liberty was really just a servile imitation of one of the poorest resources of senile despotism. [Burke refers to attempts by Louis XIV and then by Louis XV to get revenue by asking citizens to donate their silverware to be melted down to make

coins. Neither attempt had much success. After making elaborate fun of the Assembly's resorting to 'these toys and playthings of finance', he continues:] Whatever virtue there may be in these devices, it is obvious that neither the patriotic gifts nor the patriotic contribution can ever again be resorted to. The resources of public folly are soon exhausted. Indeed, their whole scheme of revenue is to make somehow an appearance of a full reservoir for the hour, while cutting off the springs and living fountains of permanent supply. M. Necker's recent account was clearly meant to be favourable. He gives a flattering view of the means of getting through the year, but he naturally expresses some anxiety concerning the following year. Instead of entering into the grounds of this anxiety in order to prevent the prognosticated evil by a proper foresight, the president of the Assembly gives M. Necker a sort of friendly reprimand.

It is impossible to say for sure anything about their other schemes of taxation, because they have not yet been implemented; but nobody could think that they will fill up any perceptible part of the hole that the Assembly's incompetence has made in their revenues. At present the state of their treasury sinks every day in cash [i.e. in metal money], and swells in fictitious representation [i.e. in paper money]. When so little within or without is now found but paper, which represents not affluence but poverty, and is the creature not of credit but of power, they imagine that our flourishing state in England is due to that bank-paper. In fact, the bank-paper is due to

- the flourishing condition of our commerce,
- the solidity of our credit, and
- the total exclusion of all idea of *power* from any part of the transaction.

•As regards the third of those•, they forget that in England not one shilling of paper money of any description is received

except by choice; that the whole mass of paper money has had its origin in cash actually deposited; and that if one wants to convert any of it back into cash, this can be done in an instant and without the smallest loss. Our paper is of value in commerce because it has no standing in law. . . . A creditor who is owed twenty shillings can legally refuse all the paper of the Bank of England. Nor is there among us any public security that is enforced by authority. It is in fact easy to show that our paper wealth, instead of lessening the real coin, has a tendency to increase it; that instead of being a substitute for money, it only facilitates its entry, its exit, and its circulation; that it is the symbol of prosperity and not the badge of distress. . . .

'Well! but a lessening of extravagant expenses, and the economy that has been introduced by the virtuous and intelligent Assembly, make up for the losses sustained in the receipt of revenue. In this at least they have fulfilled the duty of a financier.' Have those who say so looked at the expenses of the National Assembly itself, of the municipalities, of the city of Paris, of the increased pay of the two armies, of the new police, of the new judicatures? Have they even carefully compared the present pension list with the previous one? These politicians have been cruel, not economical. Comparing the expense of the former extravagant government in relation to its revenues with the expenses of this new system in relation to the state of its new treasury, I believe the present will be found to be incomparably more guilty.

Obtaining credit

It remains only to consider the proofs of financial ability provided by the present French managers when they have to raise supplies on credit. Here I am a little at a stand, because properly speaking they do not have any credit. The credit of

the previous government was indeed not the best, but they could always command money on some terms, not only in France but from most European countries where surplus capital had accumulated; and the credit of that government was improving daily. The establishment of a system of liberty would naturally be expected to give it new strength; and so it would have done if a system of liberty had been established. What offers has this government of so-called 'liberty' had from Holland, from Hamburg, from Switzerland, from Genoa, from England for a dealing in their paper? Why should these nations of commerce and economy enter into any pecuniary [see Glossary] dealings with a people who attempt to reverse the very nature of things, a people among whom they see the debtor prescribing at the point of the bayonet how he is to repay the creditor, discharging one of his engagements with another, turning his very poverty into his resource and paying his interest with his rags?

Their fanatical confidence in the omnipotence of church plunder has induced these philosophers to overlook all care of the public estate. . . . These philosophical financiers expect this universal medicine made of church-extract to cure all the evils of the state. These gentlemen perhaps do not believe much the miracles of piety, but they certainly have an undoubting faith in the prodigies of sacrilege.

- Is there a debt that presses them?—Issue *assignats*.
- Are compensations to be made. . . .to those whom they have robbed of their freehold in their office, or expelled from their profession?—*Assignats*.
- Is a fleet to be fitted out?—*Assignats*.

If £16,000,000 worth of these *assignats*, forced on the people, leave the state's needs as urgent as ever, 'Issue £30,000,000 of *assignats*', says one; 'Issue £80,000,000 more of *assignats*', says another. The only difference among their financial factions is on what quantity of *assignats* is to be imposed

on the suffering public. They are all professors of *assignats*. Even those whose natural good sense and knowledge of commerce, not obliterated by philosophy, provide decisive arguments against this delusion conclude their arguments by proposing the issuing of *assignats*. I suppose they must talk of '*assignats*', as no other language would be understood. All experience of their inefficiency does not in the least discourage them. Are the old *assignats* depreciated at market?—What is the remedy? Issue new *assignats*. . . .

Who but the most desperate adventurers in philosophy and finance could have thought of destroying the settled revenue of the state, the sole security for the public credit, in the hope of rebuilding it with the materials of confiscated property? If, however, an excessive zeal for the state should have led a pious and venerable prelate. . . .to pillage his own order and—for the good of the church and people—to take on himself the place of grand financier of confiscation and comptroller-general of sacrilege, he and his coadjutors were in my opinion obliged to show by their subsequent conduct that they knew something of the office they assumed. When they had resolved to appropriate to the public treasury a certain portion of the landed property of their conquered country, it was their business to render their bank a real fund of credit, as far as such a bank was capable of becoming so. [This paragraph is savagely sarcastic: 'a pious and venerable prelate' for Talleyrand, bishop of Autun; 'grand financier of confiscation and comptroller-general of sacrilege' for his official position in the government; 'their conquered country' for France]

Establishing a current circulating credit on any land-bank has always proved difficult and has commonly ended in bankruptcy. But when the Assembly were led through a contempt of moral principles to a defiance of economic ones, it might have been expected at least to do everything it could to lessen this difficulty, to lighten this bankruptcy. It might

be expected that to render your land-bank tolerable, every means would be adopted that could display openness and candour in the statement of the security—everything that could aid the recovery of the demand. The most favourable way of looking at your situation likens it to that of a man with a large landed estate that he wanted to dispose of for the discharge of a debt and the supply of certain services. Not being able instantly to sell, you wanted to mortgage. What would a man with fair intentions and a commonly clear understanding do in such circumstances? Ought he not first to ascertain the gross value of the estate, the costs of its management and disposition, the encumbrances (perpetual and temporary) of all kinds that affect it, and then—settling a net surplus—calculate the fair value of the security? When that surplus (the only security to the creditor) had been clearly ascertained and properly vested in the hands of trustees, then he would indicate the parcels of land to be sold, and the time and conditions of sale; after this he could if he chose admit the public creditor to subscribe his stock into this new fund, or he might receive proposals for an *assignat* from private individuals who would advance money to purchase this sort of security.

This would be to proceed like men of business, methodically and rationally, and on the only principles of public and private credit that there are. The dealer would then know exactly what he purchased; and the only doubt that could remain in his mind would be the dread of the resumption of the spoil, which one day might be made (perhaps with an addition of punishment) from the sacrilegious gripe of those execrable wretches who could become purchasers at the auction of their innocent fellow citizens.

An open and exact statement of the clear value of the property and of the time, the circumstances, and the place of sale were all necessary to efface as much as possible

the stigma that has hitherto been branded on every kind of land-bank. It was also necessary, on account of the pledge of faith they had given, that their future fidelity in a slippery concern might be established by their adherence to their first engagement. When they had finally determined on a state resource from church plunder, they came on 14.iv.1790 to a solemn resolution on the subject, and promised their country 'that in the statement of the public charges for each year, there should be brought to account a sum sufficient for defraying the expenses of the Roman Catholic religion, the support of the ministers at the altars, the relief of the poor, the pensions to the ecclesiastics of both sexes (secular as well as regular), so that the estates and goods that are at the disposal of the nation may be freed from all charges and employed by the legislative body to the great and most pressing needs of the state'. They further engaged, on the same day, that the sum necessary for the year 1791 would be forthwith determined.

In this resolution they admit it to be their duty to show clearly the expense of the above objects which they had earlier promised would be the first to be provided for. They admit that they ought to show the estate clear and disengaged from all charges, and that they should show it immediately. Have they done this immediately, or at any time? Have they ever provided a rent-roll of the immovable estates, or given in an inventory of the movable effects that they confiscate to their *assignats*? How can they fulfill their engagements of holding out to public service 'an estate freed from all charges' without authenticating the value of the estate or the amount of the charges? I leave it to their English admirers to answer! Instantly on this assurance, before taking a single step toward making it good, they issue. . . .£16,000,000. This was manly [see Glossary]. Who, after this masterly stroke, can doubt of their abilities in finance? 'But then, before any

other emission of these financial indulgences, they took care at least to make good their original promise!' —If such an estimate has been made either of the value of the estate or the amount of the encumbrances, it has escaped me.

At length they have spoken out, fully revealing their abominable fraud in holding out the church lands as a security for any debts or any service whatsoever. They rob only to enable them to cheat, but in a very short time they defeat the purposes of the robbery *and* the fraud by making out accounts for other purposes that blow up their whole apparatus of force and of deception. I am obliged to M. de Calonne for his reference to the document that proves this extraordinary fact; it had somehow escaped me. Indeed it was not necessary to make out my assertion as to the breach of faith on the declaration of the 14.iv.1790. By a report of their committee it now appears that the charge of keeping up the reduced ecclesiastical establishments and other expenses attendant on religion, and maintaining the religious of both sexes, retained or pensioned, and the other concomitant expenses of the same nature which they have brought on themselves by •this convulsion in property, is £2,000,000 sterling greater, annually, than the income of the estates acquired by •it; not to mention a debt of £7,000,000 and upwards. These are the calculating powers of imposture! This is the finance of philosophy! This is the result of all the delusions held out to engage a miserable people in rebellion, murder, and sacrilege, and to make them prompt and zealous instruments in the ruin of their country!. . . .

[Now a paragraph setting out some of the other expenses that the Assembly has not taken into account. Then:]

But it is unnecessary to dwell on these obvious kinds of indebtedness. Have they made any clear statement of how •the whole of the general and municipal establishments of all sorts compares with •the regular income by revenue? Every

deficiency in the former becomes a charge on the confiscated estate before the creditor can plant his cabbages on an acre of church property. This confiscation is the only prop to keep the whole state from tumbling to the ground. In this situation they have purposely covered with a thick fog everything that they ought to have industriously cleared; and then, blindfold themselves, they drive by the point of the bayonets their slaves, blindfolded indeed no worse than their lords, to take their fictions for currencies and to swallow down paper pills at the rate of £34,000,000 sterling per dose. Then they proudly lay claim to future credit on the basis of the failure of all their past engagements, and at a time when it is clear (if in such a matter anything can be clear) that the surplus estates will never answer even the first of their mortgages, I mean that of the £16,000,000 sterling of *assignats*. In all this procedure I can discern neither the solid sense of plain dealing nor the subtle dexterity of ingenious fraud. The objections within the Assembly to opening the floodgates to this inundation of fraud are unanswered, but they are thoroughly refuted by a hundred thousand financiers in the street. These—i.e. the numbers of people—are the numbers by which the metaphysical arithmeticians compute. These are the grand calculations on which a philosophical public credit is founded in France. They cannot raise •supplies, but they can raise •mobs. . . .

Early this year the Assembly issued paper to the amount of £16,000,000 sterling; what must have been the state the Assembly has brought your affairs into when the relief provided by such a vast supply has hardly been perceptible? This paper also underwent an almost immediate depreciation of 5%, which soon came to about 7%. The effect of these *assignats* on the receipt of the revenue is remarkable. M. Necker found that the collectors of the revenue who received in coin paid the treasury in *assignats*. The collectors

made 7% by thus receiving in money and accounting in depreciated paper. It was easy to foresee that this was inevitable, but still it was embarrassing. M. Necker was obliged to buy gold and silver for the mint, which amounted to about £12,000 above the value of the commodity gained. (I believe that a considerable part of this happened in the market of London.) That minister believed that the state could not live on *assignats* alone, whatever their secret nutritive virtue might be; that some real silver was necessary, particularly for the satisfaction of those who, being equipped with weapons, were not likely to be notably patient when they saw that while an increase of pay was held out to them in real money it was to be fraudulently drawn back by depreciated paper. The minister, in this very natural distress, asked the Assembly to order the collectors to pay in coins what they had received in coins. It could not escape him that if the treasury paid 3% for the use of a currency which should be returned 7% worse than the minister issued it, such a dealing could not do much to enrich the public! The Assembly took no notice of his recommendation. They were in this dilemma: if they continued to receive the *assignats*, cash would become an alien to their treasury; if the treasury refused those paper trinkets or discountenanced them to any degree, they would destroy the credit of their sole resource. They seem then to have made their option, and to have given some sort of credit to their paper by taking it themselves; at the same time in their speeches they made a swaggering declaration. . . .that there is no difference in value between metallic money and their *assignats*. This was a good, stout, proof article of faith, pronounced under an anathema by the venerable fathers of this philosophical synod. . . .

[Burke devotes about two more pages to details about the financial ruin of France, ending with some remarks about the bad state of affairs in Paris. Then:]

The cost of maintaining Paris

This is the Paris on whose nourishment such immense sums, drawn from the vitals of all France, have been spent during the past year. As long as Paris stands in the place of ancient Rome, so long she will be maintained by the subject provinces. It is an evil that inevitably accompanies the dominion of sovereign democratic republics. As it happened in Rome, it may survive the republican domination that gave rise to it. In that case despotism itself must submit to the vices of popularity.

Rome under her emperors combined the evils of both systems, and this unnatural combination was one great cause of her ruin.

It is a cruel and insolent imposition to tell the people that the dilapidation of their public estate is bringing them *relief*. Statesmen, before congratulating themselves on the 'relief' given to the people by the destruction of their revenue, ought first to have carefully thought about the answer to this:

Is it more advantageous to the people to **(i)** pay considerably and gain in proportion, or to **(ii)** be freed from all contributions and gain little or nothing?

My mind is made up to decide in favour of **(i)**. Experience is with me, and so are the best opinions, I believe. The fundamental part of the skill of a true politician is the ability to keep a balance between the subject's power of acquisition and what the state demands from him. The means of acquisition are prior in time and in arrangement. Good order is the foundation of all good things. To be enabled to acquire, the people must be tractable and obedient (not servile). The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not find the principles of natural subordination artificially rooted out of their minds. They must respect the property that they

cannot partake of. They must work to obtain what by work can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, that their success is not in proportion to the effort they have put in, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal [here = 'divine'] justice. Whoever deprives them of this consolation deadens their industry and strikes at the root of all acquisition as of all conservation. Someone who does this is the cruel oppressor, the merciless enemy of the poor and wretched, at the same time that by his wicked speculations he exposes the fruits of successful industry and the accumulations of fortune to the plunder of the negligent, the disappointed, and the unprosperous.

Too many professional financiers are apt to see nothing in revenue but banks, circulations, annuities on lives, tontines, perpetual rents, and all the small wares of the shop. In a settled order of the state these things are not to be slighted and skill in them is to be respected. They are good, but only when they are affected by that settled order and are built on it. But when men think that these beggarly contrivances can supply a resource for the evils that result from breaking up the foundations of public order and causing or allowing the principles of property to be subverted, they will leave in the ruin of their country a melancholy and lasting monument of the effect of preposterous politics and presumptuous, short-sighted, narrow-minded 'wisdom'.

The effects of the incompetence shown by the popular leaders in all the great organs of the commonwealth are to be covered with the 'all-atoning name' of *liberty*. In some people I see great liberty indeed; in many, if not in most, I see an oppressive and degrading servitude. But what is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, untutored and unrestrained. Those who know what virtuous liberty is cannot bear to see liberty disgraced by incompetent

heads on account of their having high-sounding words in their mouths. . . . To **make a government** requires no great prudence. Settle the seat of power, teach obedience, and the work is done. To **give freedom** is even easier: there is no need to guide; it only requires letting go the reins. But to **form a free government**, i.e. to bring these opposite elements of restraint and liberty together into one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind. I do not find this in those who take the lead in the National Assembly. Perhaps they are not as miserably deficient as they appear. I rather believe it. If they were, it would put them below the common level of human understanding. But when the leaders choose to make themselves bidders at an auction of popularity, their talents in state-construction will be of no service. They will become flatterers instead of legislators, instruments of the people, not their guides. If any of them proposes a scheme of liberty, soberly limited and defined with proper qualifications, he will immediately be outbid by his competitors who will produce something more splendidly popular. Suspicions will be raised about his fidelity to his cause. Moderation will be branded as the virtue of cowards, and compromise as the prudence of traitors, until—hoping to preserve the credit that may enable him to temper and moderate on some occasions—the popular leader is obliged to become active in propagating doctrines and establishing powers that will later defeat any sober purpose he might eventually have aimed at.

Conclusion

But am I so unreasonable as to see nothing at all that deserves commendation in the tireless labours of this Assembly? I do not deny that some good things may have been done among the countless acts of violence and folly. Those who

destroy everything are sure to remove some grievance. Those who make everything new have a chance that they may establish something beneficial. To give them credit for what they have done with the authority they have usurped—to excuse them for the crimes by which that authority was acquired—it must appear that the same things could not have been accomplished without producing such a revolution. Most assuredly they *could*, because almost every one of their regulations that is not very ambiguous was either •a part of what the king voluntarily conceded at the meeting of the states or •contained in the concurrent instructions to the orders. Some usages have been abolished on just grounds, but they were such that if they had stayed as they were for ever they would have detracted little from the happiness and prosperity of any state. The improvements of the National Assembly are superficial, their errors fundamental.

I would prefer my countrymen to recommend to our French neighbours the example of the British constitution rather than taking them as models for the improvement of our own. In their constitution they have an invaluable treasure. They are not, I think, without some causes of anxiety and complaint, but these are due not to their constitution but to their own conduct. I think our happy situation is due to our constitution, but due to the whole of it and not to any part singly, due in a great measure to what we have left standing in our several reviews and reformations as well as to what we have altered or added. Our people will find employment enough for a truly patriotic, free, and independent spirit in guarding what they possess from violation. I would not exclude alteration, but even when I changed the constitution I would be doing this so as to preserve it. I would be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In this I would follow the example of our ancestors: I would make the repairs as nearly as possible

in the style of the building. The ruling principles of our forefathers in their most decided conduct included •politic caution, •guarded circumspection, and •moral rather than temperamental timidity. Not being illuminated by the light of which the gentlemen of France tell us they have such an abundant share, they acted under a strong impression of the ignorance and fallibility of mankind. He who had made them thus fallible rewarded them for attending to their nature in their conduct. Let us imitate their caution if we wish to deserve their fortune or to retain their bequests. Let us add, if we please, but let us preserve what they have left; and, standing on the firm ground of the British constitution, let us be satisfied to *wonder at* the aeronauts of France [Burke's phrase] rather than trying to *follow* them in their desperate flights.

I have told you candidly my sentiments. I think they are not likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young; you cannot guide but must follow the fortune of your country. But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. It can hardly remain in its present form; but before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets [Addison] says, 'through great varieties of untried being', and

in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood.

I have little to recommend my opinions but long observation and much impartiality. They come from one who has been no tool of power, no flatterer of greatness; and who in his last acts does not wish to belie the tenor of his life. They come from one almost the whole of whose public exertion has been a struggle for the liberty of others; from one in whose breast no lasting or vigorous anger has ever been kindled except by what he considered as tyranny; and who snatches from his share in the endeavours that are used by good men to discredit opulent oppression the hours he has employed on your affairs; and who in so doing persuades himself he has not departed from his usual office; they come from one who has little desire for—and no expectation of—honours, distinctions, and wealth; who has no contempt for fame, and no fear of obloquy; who shuns quarrels though he will risk voicing an opinion; from one who wishes to preserve consistency, but who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure. . . .his end, and when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails is endangered by overloading it on one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to the other side so as to preserve its balance.