

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 our reformations 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 operation 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 to share in things *they* want the whole of, revenge and envy soon fill up the aching 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 of 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 of 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 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 sublimite 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 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.