Reflections on the Revolution in France

Edmund Burke

1790

[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.

Part 2

Corrupt head versus natural heart

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

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

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

'An arbitrary monarch'

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

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

that such a prince,

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

—though all this should be taken into consideration—I cannot think that such a prince deserves the cruel and insulting triumph of Paris and of Dr Price. I tremble for the cause of liberty when such an example is given to kings. I tremble for the cause of humanity in the unpunished outrages of the most wicked of mankind. But there are some people whose way of thinking is so low and degenerate that they look up with a sort of complacent awe and admiration to kings who know to keep firm in their seat, to hold a strict hand over their subjects, to assert their prerogative, and by the awakened vigilance of a severe despotism to guard against the very first approaches to freedom. They never raise their voice against such as these. Deserters from principle, enlisted with fortune, they never see any good in suffering virtue or any crime in prosperous usurpation.

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

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

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

Speaking on behalf of England

In England we give no credit to them. We are generous enemies; we are faithful allies. We kick away with disgust and indignation the slanders of those who bring us their anecdotes with the confirmation of the fleur-de-lys on their shoulder. We have Lord George Gordon locked up in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselytiser to Judaism, nor his having in his zeal against Catholic priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics raised a mob that pulled down all our prisons, have preserved for him a liberty that he did not make himself worthy of by using it virtuously. . . . We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastille for those who dare to libel the queens of France. In this spiritual retreat, let the noble libeller remain. Let him there meditate on his Talmud until he learns a conduct more suitable to his birth and abilities, and not so disgraceful to the ancient religion for which he has become a proselytiser; or until some persons from your side of the water, to please your new Hebrew brethren, shall ransom him. [Burke now embarks on a complex joke about the compound interest over 1790 years on thirty pieces of silver. Then:] Send us your Popish archbishop of Paris, and we will send you our Protestant Rabbin [meaning Lord George Gordon]. We shall treat the person you send us like a gentleman and an honest man, as he is; but please let him bring with him the fund of his hospitality, bounty, and charity, and we shall never confiscate a shilling of that honourable and pious fund, nor think of enriching the treasury with the spoils of the poor-box.

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

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

I almost venture to affirm that not one in a hundred among us shares in the 'triumph' of the Revolution Society. If the king and queen of France, and their children, were to fall into our hands by the chance of war, in the most acrimonious of all hostilities (I deplore such an event, I deplore such hostility), they would be treated with another sort of triumphal entry into London. We *have* had a king of France in that situation [John II, after the battle of Poitiers in 1356]; you have read how he was treated by the victor in the field, and how he was then received in England. Four hundred years have passed but I believe we are not significantly changed since that period. Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not (I think) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the 14th century, nor as yet have we subtilised [here = 'refined'] ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress among us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that we have made no discoveries in morality, and we think that no discoveries are to be made there, nor many in the great principles of government or in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born quite as well as they will be after. . . .·our death·. In England our natural entrails have not yet been completely ripped out; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments that are the faithful guardians and active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been disemboweled and tied up so as to be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of men. We preserve the whole of our feelings still native and entire, not made tricky by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings, with affection to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds it is *natural* to have such feelings; because all other feelings are false and spurious and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals, to make us unfit for rational liberty, and, by teaching us a servile, licentious, and abandoned insolence, to be our low sport for a few holidays, to make us perfectly fit for, and justly deserving of, slavery through the whole course of our lives.

In defence of prejudices

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

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

Your literary men and your politicians essentially differ in these points, and so do the whole clan of the 'enlightened' among us. They have no respect for the wisdom of others, but they pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own. A scheme of things being *old* is, for them, a sufficient motive to destroy it. As for the new, they have no fears about the duration of a building put up in haste, because duration is not a goal for those who think that little or nothing has been done before their time, and who place all their hopes in discovery. They conceive, very systematically, that all things that provide permanence are harmful, so they are at war—a war that can't be settled—with all establishments. They think that government can vary like fashions in dress, and with as little bad effect; that all we need to attach ourselves to any constitution of the state is a sense of present convenience. They always speak as if they thought that there is a singular species of contract between them and their magistrates that binds the magistrate but has nothing reciprocal in it—the majesty of the people has a right to dissolve the government without any reason but its will. Their attachment to their country itself is conditional on its agreeing with some of their fleeting projects; it begins and ends with the political scheme that squares with their momentary opinion.

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

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

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

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

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

I hear on all hands that a cabal [see Glossary] calling itself 'philosophic' receives the glory of many of the recent proceedings, and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them. I have heard of no literary or political party in England known by such a description. Is yours composed of men whom the vulgar in their blunt, homely style commonly call 'atheists' and 'infidels'? If so, I admit that we too have had writers of that description who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, Toland, Tindal, Chubb, or Morgan, or that whole race who called themselves 'freethinkers'? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who *ever* read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world! In as few years their few successors will also be buried and forgotten. But whatever they were or are, with us they were and are wholly unconnected individuals—they were not gregarious. They never acted as a body or were known as a faction in the state, or presumed under the label 'Freethinkers' to influence any of our public concerns. Whether they ought so to exist and be permitted so to act is another question. Because such cabals have not existed in England, the cabal spirit had never had any influence in establishing the original structure of our constitution or in any of the various repairs and improvements it has undergone. The whole thing has been done under the auspices of religion and piety, and is confirmed by their sanctions. It has emanated from the simplicity of our national character and from a sort of native plainness and directness of understanding, which for a long time characterised the men who have successively obtained authority among us. This disposition still remains, at least in the great body of the people.

Religion as the basis of civil society

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

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

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

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

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

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

An established church

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

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

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

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

This principle ought to be even more strongly impressed on the minds of •those who compose the collective sovereignty than on the minds of •single princes. Without instruments, these princes can do nothing. Whoever uses instruments in finding helps also finds difficulties. So their power is far from complete, and they are not safe from extreme abuse. However elevated they are by flattery, arrogance, and self-opinion, princes must be aware that they are. . . .in some way or other accountable even here—·and not only before God on the day of judgment·—for any abuse of their trust. If they are not cut off by a rebellion of their people, they may be strangled by the very guards kept for their security against all other rebellion. Thus we have seen the king of France sold by his soldiers for an increase of pay. But where popular [see Glossary] authority is absolute and unrestrained, the people's confidence in their own power is infinitely greater because far better founded. To a considerable extent they are themselves their own instruments. They are nearer to their objects. Besides, they are less answerable to one of the greatest controlling powers on earth, namely the sense of fame and admiration. The share of infamy that comes to each individual in public acts is likely to be small indeed, because the operation of opinion is inversely proportional to the number of those who abuse power. Their own approval of their own acts appears to them as a public judgment in their favour. A perfect democracy is therefore the most shameless thing in the world—and also the most fearless: no man has a sense that he personally can be subjected to punishment. Certainly the people at large never ought to be, because all punishments are meant as *examples*, aimed at protecting the people at large; so the people at large can never become the subject of punishment by any human hand. It is therefore infinitely important that they should not be allowed to think that their will is the standard of right and wrong, any more than a king's is. They ought to be convinced that

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

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

Caution in amending the state

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

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

But one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated is that power-holders. . . .should not have a right to cut off the entail [i.e. to block the inheriting of property] or commit waste on the inheritance by choosing to destroy the whole original fabric of their society, risking leaving a ruin instead of a habitation to those who come after them—and teaching these successors to respect their contrivances as little as *they* had respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this unprincipled readiness to change the state as often, as much, and as variously as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the next. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.

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

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

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

Society as a contract

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

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

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

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

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

They all know or feel this great ancient truth:

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

They take this tenet of the head and heart not from the great name which it immediately bears, nor from the greater from which it is derived, but from the only thing that can give true weight and sanction to any learned opinion, the common nature and common relation of men. . . . They see themselves as bound to perform their national homage to the institutor and author and protector of civil society; without which civil society man could not possibly arrive at the perfection his nature is capable of, or even make a remote and faint approach to it. They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection. So He willed the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection. They who are convinced of this His will, which is the law of laws and the sovereign of sovereigns, cannot think it wrong that our ·praise of the state· should be performed as all solemn public acts are performed, in buildings, in music, in decoration, in speech, in the dignity of persons, according to the customs taught to mankind by their nature; that is, with modest splendour and unassuming state, with mild majesty and sober pomp. [In that sentence 'praise of the state' replaces a very flowery two-line noun phrase.] For those purposes they think some part of the wealth **of the country** is as usefully employed as it can be in promoting the luxury of individuals. It is the public ornament. It is the public consolation. It nourishes the public hope. The poorest man finds his own importance and dignity in it, whereas the wealth and pride **of individuals** at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune aware of his low position and drags it even lower. It is to help the man in humble life, and to raise his nature and to put him in mind of a state in which the privileges of wealth will cease, when he will be equal by nature and may be more than equal by virtue, that this portion of the general wealth of his country is employed and sanctified.

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

English attitudes

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

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

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

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

We are so tenacious of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little alteration has been made in them since the 14th or 15th century; adhering in this as in everything to our old settled maxim *never entirely or suddenly depart from antiquity*. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favourable to morality and discipline, and we thought they could be amended without altering their foundations. We thought that they were capable of receiving and improving and (above all) preserving the gains in science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for that's what it is in the foundations) we may claim that our share in the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature that have illuminated and adorned the modern world is as large and as early as that of any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge left to us by our forefathers.

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

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

fluctuate with the come and go of funds and actions.

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

- the greatness of the temptation to which they are exposed;
- the important consequences that come with their faults;
- the contagion of the bad example they set;
- the need to bow down the stubborn neck of their pride and ambition to the yoke of moderation and virtue;
- the facts about the fat stupidity and gross ignorance concerning what imports men most to know, which prevails at courts and at the head of armies and in senates, as much as at the loom and in the field.

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

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

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

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

In England most of us think that when some people look disapprovingly at the distinctions, honours, and revenues that are not taken from anyone and are set apart for virtue, they are driven not by •love of the self-denial and mortification of the ancient church, but by •envy and malignity toward those who are often the beginners of their own fortune. The people of England have sharp ears. They hear these men speak in a vulgar and coarse way. Their tongue betrays them. Their language is in the patois of fraud, in the cant and gibberish of hypocrisy. The people of England must think so when these idle talkers purport to carry the clergy back to [what follows is *their* account of it:]

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

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

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

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

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

The confiscators

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

The confiscators have indeed made some allowance to their victims from the scraps and fragments of their own tables from which they have been so harshly driven, tables that have been so bountifully spread for a feast to the greedy predators of usury. But to drive men from independence to live on alms is itself great cruelty. A condition that might be tolerable to men in one state of life who aren't habituated to other things may to others be a dreadful revolution—one to which a virtuous mind would feel pain in condemning any guilt except guilt that would demand the offender's life. But to many minds this punishment of degradation and infamy is worse than death. Undoubtedly it makes this cruel suffering infinitely worse that the persons who were taught a double prejudice in favour of religion, by education and by the place they held in the administration of its functions, are to receive the remnants of their property as alms from the profane and impious hands of those who had robbed them of all the rest; to receive (if they are to receive anything) not from the charitable contributions of the faithful but from the insolent tenderness of known and avowed atheism, the maintenance of religion doled out to them by the measure of the contempt in which it is held, and for the purpose of making those who receive the allowance vile and of no estimation in the eyes of mankind.

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

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

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

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

Old nobility versus new money

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

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

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

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

rather than

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

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

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

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

—all these had kept the landed and moneyed interests more separated in France, less miscible, and kept the owners of the two kinds of property less well disposed to each other, than they are in this country.

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

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

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

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

Political men of letters

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

Some years ago the literary cabal had formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion. They pursued this objective with a degree of zeal that until then had been exhibited only by the propagators of some system of piety. They were possessed with a spirit of proselytism in the most fanatical degree; and from that they easily slid into a spirit of persecution according to their means. What was not to be done toward their great end by any direct or immediate act could be brought about by a longer process through public opinion. To command that opinion, the first step is to get control of those who direct it. With great method and perseverance they managed to get possession of all the avenues to literary fame. Many of them indeed stood high in the ranks of literature and science. The world had done them justice, and because of their general talents it forgave the evil tendency of their special principles. This was true liberality, which they returned by trying to confine the reputation for sense, learning, and taste to themselves or their followers. I venture to say that this narrow, exclusive spirit has been just as harmful to literature and taste as to morals and true philosophy. These atheistical fathers have a bigotry of their own, and they have learned to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk. But in some things they are men of the world. The resources of intrigue are called in to make up for the defects of argument and wit. This system of literary monopoly was combined with unremitting efforts to blacken and discredit—in every way and by every means—all those who did not belong to their faction. To those who have observed the spirit of their conduct it has been clear for years that all they lacked was the *power* to move from the intolerance of the tongue and pen to a persecution that would strike at property, liberty, and life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Confiscation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They considered the vanquished party as composed of

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

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

all those abuses (and there were enough of them) were hardly thought sufficient ground for such a complete confiscation as he proposed to make. [In the above list, the third item is of course meant sarcastically.] So he procured the *formal surrender* of these estates. All these laborious proceedings were adopted by one of the worst tyrants in history as necessary preliminaries before he could venture—by bribing the members of his two servile houses with a share of the spoils and holding out to them an eternal immunity from taxation—to demand an act of parliament that would confirm his iniquitous proceedings. Had fate reserved him to our times, four technical terms would have done his business and saved him all this trouble; all he needed was one short form of incantation—'Philosophy, Light, Liberality, the Rights of Men'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The effects of confiscation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is wrong with absolute democracy

I do not know under what description to class the present ruling authority in France. It purports to be a pure democracy, though I think it is heading towards soon being a wicked and ignoble oligarchy. But for the present I admit it to be a contrivance with the nature and effect that it claims to have. I don't reject any form of government merely on abstract principles. There may be situations in which the purely democratic form will become necessary. There may be some (very few, and in very special circumstances) where it would be clearly desirable. I do not take this to be the case of France or of any other great country. Until now, we have seen no examples of considerable democracies. The ancients were better acquainted with them. Not being wholly unread in the authors who had seen the most of those constitutions, and who best understood them, I cannot help agreeing with their opinion that an absolute democracy is no more to be reckoned among the legitimate forms of government than absolute monarchy. They think it to be the corruption and degeneracy of a republic rather than a sound constitution. If I recollect rightly, Aristotle observes that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny. Of this I am certain, that in a democracy, whenever strong divisions prevail (as they often must in that kind of polity), the majority of the citizens is capable of cruelly oppressing the minority, and that this oppression will extend to far greater numbers and will be carried on with much greater fury than can almost ever be feared from a monarchy. In such a popular persecution, individual sufferers are in a much more deplorable condition than in any other. Under a cruel prince they have the soothing compassion of mankind to lessen the sting of their wounds; they have the plaudits of the people to strengthen their good-hearted constancy under their sufferings; but those who are wronged by multitudes are deprived of all external consolation. They seem deserted by mankind, overpowered by a conspiracy of their whole species.

The faults of the French monarchy

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

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

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

Your government in France was usually (and I think justly) reputed to be the best of the unqualified or ill-qualified monarchies; but it was still full of abuses. [He means: absolute monarchies or ones that weren't quite absolute but whose other ingredients were unsatisfactory.] These abuses accumulated over time, as they must accumulate in every monarchy that is not under the constant inspection of a popular representative. I am no stranger to the faults and defects of the now-subverted government of France, and I am not inclined by nature or policy to sing the praises of anything that is a just and natural object of censure. But our present question concerns not the vices of that monarchy but its existence. So: was the French government so incapable or so undeserving of reform that it was absolutely necessary that the whole structure should be at once pulled down and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretical experimental edifice in its place? At the beginning of 1789 all France was of a different opinion. The instructions to the representatives to the States-General from every district in that kingdom were filled with projects for reforming that government without the remotest suggestion of a plan to destroy it. Had such a plan been even hinted at, I believe there would have been only one voice—a voice for rejecting it with scorn and horror. Men have sometimes been led gradually, and sometimes been hurried, into things they would never have come anywhere near to if they could have seen the whole together. When those instructions ·from the districts· were given, there was no doubt that abuses existed, and that they demanded reform; nor is there now. In the interval between the instructions and the revolution, things changed their shape. So the true question now is: who are in the right—those who would have reformed or those who have destroyed?

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

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

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

Population

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

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

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

National wealth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—when I reflect on the excellence of her manufactures and fabrics, second to none but ours, and in some particulars not second;

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

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

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

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

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

•in some instances wholly to remove,

•in many instances considerably to correct

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is wrong with the French nobility?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the nobility of France are ·said to have· degenerated since the days of Henry the Fourth. This is possible, but I cannot think there is *much* truth in it. I do not claim to know France as correctly as some others, but I have tried throughout my life to acquaint myself with human nature, otherwise I would be unfit to take even my humble part in the service of mankind. In that study I could not ignore a vast portion of human nature in the form in which it appeared in a country only twenty-four miles from the English shore. On my best observation, set alongside my best inquiries, I found your nobility to be mostly composed of men of high spirit and of a delicate sense of honour, both with regard to themselves individually and with regard to their whole corps, over whom they kept a censorial eye—beyond what is common in other countries. They were tolerably well bred, very officious [= 'active in doing their duty'], humane, and hospitable; in their conversation frank and open; with a good military tone, and reasonably tinctured with literature, particularly of the authors in their own language. I speak of those who were generally met with; many had claims far above this description.

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

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

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

I regard this separation as one principal cause of the destruction of the old nobility. The military in particular was too exclusively reserved for men of ·noble· family. But this was a mere error of opinion, which a conflicting opinion would have rectified. A permanent assembly in which the commons had their share of power would soon have abolished whatever was too divisive and insulting in these distinctions, and even the faults in the morals of the nobility would probably have been corrected by the greater varieties of occupation and activity to which a constitution by orders [i.e. a system of government equally involving the clergy, and the nobility and the common people] would have given rise.

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

What is wrong with the French clergy?

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

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

> •chastise men for the offences of their natural ancestors

is not very just; but to

> •take the fiction of ancestry in a corporate succession as reason for punishing men who have no relation to guilty acts except in names and general descriptions

is a sort of refinement in injustice belonging to the philosophy of this 'enlightened' age. The Assembly punishes men of whom many, perhaps most, hate the violent conduct of ecclesiastics in earlier times as much as their present persecutors can do, and who would be as loud and as strong in expressing their disapproval if they were not well aware of the purposes for which all this declamation is employed.

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

What we can learn from history

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

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

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

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

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

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

Again: how bad were the French clergy?

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

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

the lapse of time,

•the cessation of conflicting interests,

•the sad experience of the evils caused by party rage

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

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

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

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

When my affairs took me into France toward the close of the late reign, the clergy in all their forms engaged a considerable part of my curiosity. So far from finding (except from one set of men, not then very numerous, though very active) the complaints and discontents against them that some publications had given me reason to expect, I found little or no public or private uneasiness on their account. On further examination I found the clergy in general to be persons of moderate minds and decorous manners. . . . I did not have the good fortune to know many of the parochial clergy, but in general I received a perfectly good account of their morals and attention to their duties. I had a personal acquaintance with some of the higher clergy, and very good means of information concerning the rest. Almost all of them were persons of noble birth. They resembled others of their own rank; and where there was any difference it was in their favour. They were more fully educated than the military noblesse, so as not to disgrace their profession by ignorance or lack of fitness for the exercise of their authority. They struck me as liberal and open, with the hearts of gentlemen and men of honour, neither insolent nor servile in their manners and conduct. They seemed to me rather a superior class, a set of men among whom you would not be surprised to find a Fénelon. I saw among the clergy in Paris. . . .men of great learning and candour; and I had reason to believe that this description was not confined to Paris. What I found in other places I know was accidental, and therefore to be presumed a fair example. I spent a few days in a provincial town where, in the absence of the bishop, I passed my evenings with three clergymen, his vicars-general, persons who would have done honour to any church. They were all well informed; two of them of deep, general, and extensive erudition, ancient and modern, oriental and western, particularly in their own profession. They had a more extensive knowledge of our English divines than I expected, and they entered into the genius of those writers with a critical accuracy. One of these gentlemen is since dead, the Abbé Morangis. I pay this tribute, without reluctance, to the memory of that noble, reverend, learned, and excellent person; and I would do the same with equal cheerfulness to the merits of the others who I believe are still living, if I did not fear to hurt those whom I am unable to serve. . . .

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

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

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

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

Abolishing Christianity

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

I hope their partisans in England (to whom I attribute thoughtlessness rather than support for this detestable design) will not succeed in the pillage of the ecclesiastics or in the introduction of a system of popular election to our bishoprics and parochial curacies. This, in the present condition of the world, would be the last corruption of the church, the utter ruin of the clerical character, the most dangerous shock that the state ever received through a misunderstood arrangement of religion. I know well enough that the bishoprics and curacies under kingly and seignioral patronage, as they are now in England and were recently in France, are sometimes acquired by unworthy methods; but popular election subjects them much more surely and more generally to all the evil arts of low ambition, which, operating on and through greater numbers, will be proportionately more harmful.

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

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

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

Two kinds of tolerance

We hear these new teachers continually boasting of their spirit of toleration. There is not much merit in tolerating all opinions if you don't think highly of any of them. Equal neglect is not impartial kindness. The kind of benevolence that arises from contempt is no true charity. There are in England plenty of men who tolerate in the true spirit of toleration. They think the dogmas of religion are all important, though in different degrees, and that among them there is, as with all things of value, a sound reason for preferring some to others. They favour, therefore, and they tolerate. They tolerate not because they despise opinions but because they respect justice. They would reverently and affectionately protect all religions because they love and venerate the great principle on which they all agree, and the great objective to which they are all directed. They begin to see more and more clearly that we have all a common cause, as against a common enemy. They will not be so misled by the spirit of faction as not to distinguish •what is done in favour of their subdivision [protestantism] from •the acts of hostility which, through some particular description, are aimed at the whole corps [Christianity] in which they themselves are included. It is impossible for me to say what may be the character of every description of men among us. But I speak for the greater part; and for them I must tell you that sacrilege is no part of their doctrine of good works; that, so far from calling you into their fellowship on such a basis, your professors will not be admitted to their communion unless they carefully conceal their doctrine of the lawfulness of the condemnation of innocent men, and make restitution of all stolen goods whatsoever. Till then they are none of ours.

Confiscation again

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

near us a course of policy that defies justice, the common concern of all mankind. With the National Assembly of France possession is nothing, law and usage are nothing. I see the National Assembly openly condemning the doctrine of prescription [see Glossary], which one of the greatest of their own lawyers rightly tells us is a part of the *law of nature*. He tells us that the positive settling of its limits, and its security from invasion, were among the causes for which civil society itself was instituted. If prescription is once shaken, no kind of property is secure once it becomes large enough to tempt those who are poor but powerful. I see a practice perfectly in line with their contempt for this great fundamental part of natural law. I see the confiscators begin with bishops and chapters, and monasteries, but I do not see them end there. I see the princes of the blood, who by the oldest usages of that kingdom held large landed estates, being •deprived (with almost no debate) of their possessions and, in place of their stable independent property, •reduced to the hope of some precarious, charitable pension at the pleasure of an assembly which will not pay much regard to the rights of pensioners-at-pleasure when it despises those of legal proprietors. Flushed with the insolence of their first inglorious victories, and pressed by the distresses caused by their greed, disappointed but not discouraged, they have at length ventured completely to subvert all property of all descriptions throughout the extent of a great kingdom. They have compelled all men, in all transactions of commerce, in the disposal of lands, in civil dealing, and through the whole communion of life, to accept as perfect payment and good and lawful tender the ·paper money, which is a mere· symbol of their speculations on a proposed sale of their plunder. What vestiges of liberty or property have they left? The tenant right of a cabbage garden, a year's interest in a hovel, the goodwill of an alehouse or a baker's shop, the very shadow of a constructive property, are more ceremoniously treated in our parliament than you treat •the oldest and most valuable landed possessions in the hands of the most respectable personages, or •the whole body of the moneyed and commercial interest of your country. We have a high opinion of the legislative authority, but we have never dreamed that parliaments had any right whatever to violate property, to overrule prescription, or to force a currency of their own fiction in the place of that which is real and recognised by the law of nations. But you, who began by refusing to submit to the most moderate restraints, have ended by establishing an unheard-of despotism. Your confiscators evidently hold that indeed their proceedings could not be supported in a court of justice, but that the rules of prescription cannot bind a legislative assembly. So this legislative assembly of a free nation sits not for the security of property but for its destruction, and not only of property but of every rule and maxim that can give it stability, and of the only instruments—·legitimate coinage·—that can give it circulation. . . .

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

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

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

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

It is not the confiscation of our church property from this example in France that I dread, though I think this would be a considerable evil. The great source of my anxiety is the thought that it might come to be considered in England as the policy of a state to seek a resource in confiscations of any kind, or that any one description of citizens should be brought to regard any of the others as their proper prey. Nations are wading deeper and deeper into an ocean of boundless debt. Public debts, which at first were a security to •governments by giving many people an interest in public tranquillity, are likely in their excess to become the means of •their subversion. If governments provide for these debts by heavy impositions, they perish by becoming odious to the people. If they do not provide for them, they will be undone by the efforts of the most dangerous of all parties—I mean an extensive and discontented moneyed interest that has been injured but not destroyed. The men who compose this interest look for their security first to the government's •fidelity and secondly to its •power. If they find the old governments to be effete, worn out, their mainsprings unwound, so as not to have enough vigour for their purposes, they may seek new ones that will have more energy; and the source of this energy will not be the acquisition of resources but a contempt for justice. Revolutions are favourable to confiscation; and it is impossible to know what obnoxious names the next confiscations will be given. I am sure that the principles predominant in France extend to very many persons and descriptions of persons, in all countries, who think their •harmless indolence to be their security. This kind of •innocence in proprietors may be argued to be •uselessness; and that may be argued to be •unfitness for their estates. Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow underground murmur; a confused movement is felt that threatens a general earthquake in the political world. Already confederacies and correspondencies of the most extraordinary nature are forming in several countries. In such a state of things we ought to be on our guard. In all changes (if there must be changes) the thing that will serve most to blunt the edge of their damage and promote what good may be in them is for us to keep our minds tenacious about justice and careful about property.

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

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

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

Justice and public benefit

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

- what policy would dictate on the question of whether such institutions should be set up in the first place

and

- what it would dictate on the question of whether they should be totally abolished after they have cast their roots wide and deep, so that by long habit things more valuable than themselves are so adapted to them—in a way interwoven with them—that the one cannot be destroyed without notably impairing the other.

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

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

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

It is hopeless for a man to try to *make* such things when he needs them. The winds blow as they wish. These institutions are the products of fanaticism; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials; they are the gifts of nature or of chance; wisdom's pride is in the use. The perennial existence of corporate bodies and their fortunes are things particularly suited to a man who has long views; who meditates designs that require time to develop and that are meant to be long-lasting when they are accomplished. Someone does not deserve to be mentioned among the great statesmen if, having obtained the command and direction of such a power as existed in the wealth, discipline and habits of corporations like the ones you have rashly destroyed, cannot find any way of converting it to the great *and lasting* benefit of his country. A thousand ways of doing this suggest themselves to a contriving mind. To destroy any power growing wild from the raw productive force of the human mind is something in the moral world that is almost tantamount to destroying the apparently active properties of bodies in the material world. It would be like trying to destroy (if we could) the expansive force of fixed air in nitre, or the power of steam or electricity or magnetism. These energies always existed in nature, and they were always detectible. Some of them seemed unserviceable, some noxious, some no better than a sport for children; until intellectual ability combined with practical skill tamed their wild nature, subdued them to use, and made them at once the most powerful and the most tractable agents in subservience to the great views and designs of men. Did fifty thousand persons whose mental and bodily labour you might direct, and so many hundred thousand a year of revenue that was neither lazy nor superstitious, appear too big for your abilities to work with? Had you no way of using them other than by converting monks into pensioners? Had you no way of turning the revenue to account except through the improvident resource of a spendthrift sale? If you were as destitute as this of mental funds, the proceeding is on its natural course. Your politicians do not understand their trade, so they sell their tools.

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

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

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

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

The estates of monasteries

For the present I postpone consideration of the supposed public profit of the sale (which I think is perfectly delusive). I shall consider it here only as a transfer of property. On the policy of that transfer I shall trouble you with a few thoughts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- •the accumulation of vast libraries, which are the history of the force and weakness of the human mind;
- •great collections of ancient records, medals, and coins, which attest and explain laws and customs;
- •paintings and statues which, by imitating nature, seem to extend the limits of creation;
- •grand monuments of the dead, which continue the regards and connections of life beyond the grave;
- •collections of the specimens of nature which become a representative assembly of all the classes and families of the world that by disposition facilitate and by arousing curiosity open the avenues to science?

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

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

carry them from the better to the worse?

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

The church's landed estates

With regard to the estates possessed by bishops and canons and commendatory abbots, I cannot discover any reason why some landed estates may not be held on some basis other than by inheritance. Can any philosophical spoiler undertake to demonstrate the absolute or comparative evil of

> having a large portion of landed property passing in succession through persons whose entitlement to it is—always in theory and often in fact—a notable degree of piety, morals, and learning; a property which. . . .gives to the noblest families renovation and support and to the lowest the means of dignity and elevation; a property the tenure of which is the performance of some duty (whatever value you may choose to set on that duty), and the character of whose proprietors demands at least an external decorum and gravity of manners; who are to exercise a generous but temperate hospitality; part of whose income they are to consider as a trust for charity; and who, even when they fail in their trust and slide from their character and degenerate into a mere common secular nobleman or gentleman, are in no respect worse than those who may succeed them in their forfeited possessions?

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