Observations

on the

Reflections

of the

Right Hon. Edmund Burke,

on the

Revolution in France,

in a Letter to the

Right Hon. the Earl of Stanhope,

London,
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M,DCC,XC.
My Lord,

Your lordship’s character as a patriot, a philosopher and the firm friend of the general rights of man, encourages me to present to you the following Observations on Mr. Burke’s famous Reflections on the Revolution in France. They claim no popular attention for the ornaments of stile in which they are delivered; they can attract no admiration form the fascinating charms of eloquence; they are directed, not to captivate, but to convince; and it is on the presumption that your lordship attends more to the substance and end of literary compositions, than to the art of their arrangement, which induces me to flatter myself with your approbations.

It is not surprizing that an event, the most important to the dearest interests of mankind, the most singular in its nature, and the most astonishing in its means, should not only have attracted the curiosity of all civilized nations, but that it should have engaged the passions of all reflecting men.

Two parties are already formed in this country, who behold the French Revolution with a very opposite temper: to the one, it inspires the sentiments of exultation and rapture; and to the other, indignation and scorn. I shall not take upon me to consider what are the secret passions which have given birth to these last sentiments; and shall content myself with observing, that Mr. Burke
has undertaken to be the oracle of this last party. The abilities of this gentleman have been fully acknowledged by the impatience with which the public have waited for his observations; and when we consider that he has been in a manner educated in the great school of Parliament, that he has assisted in the public councils of the English nation for the greater part of his life, we must suppose him fully competent to the task he has undertaken, of censuring the politics of our neighbouring kingdom, and entering into an exact definition of those native rights which equally attach themselves to every description of men.

Is there a rational observation, or argument, in moral existence, which this gentleman (so highly favoured by nature and circumstances for political debate) could possibly have passed over, on a subject in which he has taken a full leisure to consider. When we find him then obliged to substitute a warm and passionate declamation to a cool investigation, and to address the passions instead of the reason of mankind, we shall be induced to give a fuller credit to our judgment and our feelings in the view we have taken of this interesting object, and the pleasure it has given us.

Mr. Burke sets out with throwing a great deal of contemptuous censure on two club societies in London, for a very harmless exertion of natural and constitutional liberty. They certainly had a right to compliment the French National Assembly on a matter of domestic government, and to express an approbation of their conduct, with a freedom equal to that which Mr. Burke has taken in his letter to express his abhorrence.

The National Assembly of France have taken no such supercilious state upon them, as would render such a communication of sentiment ridiculous or presumptuous. As the patrons of equal liberty, they have not disdained the addresses of the meanest individual: consequently the Revolution Society then might rationally expect that their address would have met with a civil reception, though not clothed with the “dignity of the whole representative majesty of the whole English nation.”

But Mr. Burke thinks that these gentlemen have so strong a predilection in favour of the democratic arrangements which have taken place in France, that they have been induced to with, if not
to indulge an hope, that some very important reformation may in
the process of time also take place in this country; and these harm-
less operations of the mind in a few obscure individuals (for such
are the members described who compose the offending clubs) have
produced in Mr. Burke apprehensions no ways consistent with
the high opinion he has formed of the English constitution, or of
the strong attachment which he supposes all that is great and good
in the nation have to it.

Dr. Price, whose animated love for mankind and the spread of
general happiness moved to express the effusion of his patriotic
sentiment, in a sermon preached the 4th of Nov. 1789, at the dis-
senting meeting-house in the Old Jewry, is censured by Mr. Burke
in severe, and even acrimonious terms. Among other parts of the
very offensive matter with which he charges this sermon, the have
asserted that the King of Great Britain owes his right to the Crown
by the choice of the people, is particularly selected, as worthy an
historical and argumentative confutation.

The liberty that was taken in the year 1688, by a convention
of Lords and Commons, to depose king James the reigning sover-
eign from the throne, and to vest the sovereignty of the realm in
his daughter Mary, and her husband the prince of Orange; and
afterwards by the legislature, to pass an act to settle the succes-
sion in queen Anne and her issue, and in default of these, in the
heirs of king William’s body, and in default of these, in the house
of Hanover, (the Protestant descendants of the house of Stuart in
the female line;) and this to the prejudice not only of king James,
but of his son, who had been acknowledged as the lawful heir of
his throne; and also to the prejudice of the house of Savoy, who
by lineal descent were the next in regular succession; are indeed
facts, which might warrant a plain thinking man in the opinion,
that the present reigning family owe their succession to the choice
or assent of the people. But in Mr. Burke’s opinion, these facts
are of no weight, ”because the whole family of the Stuarts were
not entirely left out of the succession, and a native of England
advanced to the throne; and because it was declared in the act of
succession, that the Protestant line drawn from James the first,
was absolutely necessary for the security of the realm.”
That those individuals of the family of the Stuarts, who had never committed any offence against the peace of the country, and whose mode of faith was not injurious to its welfare, should not be set aside, in favour of an absolute stranger to the blood, was certainly a just measure; and it was certainly wise to leave as few competitors to the crown as possible, whether on grounds founded in justice, or in mere plausibility. But there was a reason still more forcible for the conduct of the two Houses of Convention, and afterwards for the Parliament in their constitutional capacity; and the reason in this, that *without the prince of Orange, and the assistance of his Dutch army, there could have been no Revolution.* For the English nation at large was so little convinced of the severe and grave necessity which Mr. Burke talks of, that the people of themselves would never have been roused to have deposed king James; and they regarded all his innovations with such a constitutional phlegm, that had this unfortunate monarch possessed the qualities of firmness, perseverance, or patience, he must either have been killed by the dark means of assassination, or he would have continued on the throne.

That the friends of the Revolution knew they could not do without the assistance of king William is plain, by their laying aside the intention of vesting Mary singly with the sovereignty, on his declaring that if this event took place, he would return to Holland, and leave them to themselves.

However strongly the warm friends of freedom might with that this abstract right of the people, of chusing their own magistrates, and deposing them for ill conduct, had been laid open to the public by a formal declaration of such a right in the acts of succession, this certainly was not a period of time for carrying these wishes into execution. The whole body of the people had swallowed deeply of the poison of church policy; passive obedience, by the means, had so entirely supplanted the abstract notion of the rights of men, which prevailed in the opposition to Charles the first; and so desirous were the triumphant party to prevent the revival of such a principle, by which their interests had been affected, that they took care to confound the only just authority they had for their conduct, in as great a mist of words
and terms as possible. Besides, would William, who was the soul of the whole proceeding, have given way to a claim, by which, in the plainest terms, he was bound to his good behaviour?

Mr. Hume justly supposes, that if the revolution had happened one hundred years after it did, it would have been materially different in all its circumstances. Instead of thinking with Mr. Burke, that such a plain declaration of the rights of men would have tended to disturb the quiet of the nation, I firmly believe that it would have had a contrary effect; for, in this case, those endless disputes between the Nonjurors, Tories, and Whigs, would soon have had an end. For, the question not being involved in that obscurity, contradiction, and absurdity, in which it was enveloped by the revolutionists, truth and reason would have been resumed their sway; party jargon would have been exploded; the people would have given a cheerful obedience to the new government; and that dreadful necessity by which Sir Robert Walpole excused the introducing a settled system of corruption into the administration, would never have existed.

When the succession to a crown in one family, or even the possession of private property, owes its origin to the people, most undoubtedly the authority from whence it’s derived, attaches itself to the gift as equally in every individual of the family through the whole line of succession, as in the first possessor. And I can hardly believe, that there was one enlightened member who composed part of that legislative body who settled the succession to the throne, could possibly think that the body possessed of such a plenitude of power, as should give them a right, not only to set aside the regulations of their ancestors, but to bind their posterity, to all succeeding generations, in the permanent chains of an unalterable law. Should we once admit of a power so incompatible with the conditions of humanity, and only reserved for the dictates of divine wisdom, we have not, in these enlightened days, improved on the politics of the fanatic atheist Hobbes: For he supposes an original right in the people to chuse their governors; but, in exerting this right, the citizen and his posterity for ever lose their native privileges, and become bound through the whole series of generations to the service of a master’s will.
We will now take into consideration the nature and tendency of the two different compliments which have been paid by Dr. Price and Mr. Burke to his Majesty and his successors. Dr. Price, I think, puts their right to government on the most dignified, and perhaps, in the event of things, on the most permanent footing. But Mr. Burke would have done well to consider, whether such a compliment as he is willing to pay to royalty is at all proper, either for the subject to make, or the King to receive. To a weak prince, it would be apt to cancel in his mind all the obligations which he owes to the people, and, by flattering him in a vain conceit of a mere personal right, tempt him to break those sacred ties which ought to bind and direct his government. I am apt to believe, that almost all the vices of royal administration have principally been occasioned by a slavish adulation in the language of their subjects; and, to the shame of the English people it must be spoken, that none of the enslaved nations in the world address the throne in a more fulsome and hyperbolical stile of submissive flattery.

To a wise and a good prince, compliments of the same complexion, made and recommended by Mr. Burke, would be offensive. He would consider it as taking away the noblest and safest title by which he possesses this power; he would consider it as acknowledging a kind of latent right in other families; and the liberality of his sentiment would incline him to triumph in the opinion, that he was called to government, and continued in it, by the choice and confidence of a free nation.

Mr. Burke seems to adopt prejudice, opinion and the powers of the imagination, as the safest grounds on which wise and good statesmen can establish or continue the happiness of societies. These have always been imputed by philosophers (a tribe of men whom indeed Mr. Burke affects much to despise) as causes which have produced all that is vicious and foolish in man, and consequently have been the fruitful source of human misery.

Mr. Burke has certainly a fine imagination; but I would not advise either him, or any of his admirers, to give too much way to such direction; for if from the virtue of our nature it does not lead us into crimes, it always involves us in error.

The being put into a situation clearly to understand and to
obey the *principles of truth*, appears to be the basis of our happiness in this, and our perfection in another world; and the more truth is followed and pursued in this dark vale of human ignorance and misery, the more we shall *encrease* our mundane felicity, and *secure* the blessings of a future existence. Every opinion which deviates from truth, must ever be a *treacherous* guide; and the more it deviates from it, it becomes the *more dangerous*.

Though a false opinion of the rights and powers of citizens may *enslave* the ductile mind into a state of passive obedience, and thus secure the peace of government; yet in the same degree does it inflate the *pride* and *arrogance* of princes, until all considerations of *rectitude* give way to will, the barriers of personal security are flung down, and thence arises that *tremendous necessity* which must be followed by a state of *violence* and *anarchy*, which Mr. Burke so *justly* dreads. That this is the case, the experience of all societies of men who acknowledge a *power* in their princes *paramount* to all resistance, fully evinces. These societies are obliged often to have recourse to violence and massacre; not indeed to establish any popular rights, but in the way of force, to wreck their vengeance on their tyrants.

As to the right of *cashiering* or *deposing* monarchs for misgovernment, I cannot possibly agree with Mr. Burke, that in England it only existed in that Convention of the two Houses in 1688, which exercised this power over King James and his legal successors. But I am clearly of opinion, that it is a right that ought *never* to be exercised by a people who are satisfied with their form of government, and have spirit enough to correct its abuses; and so far from *condemning* the French nation for not deposing or executing their king, even though the *strongest presumptions* of the *most atrocious guilt* should have appeared against him, I think, had they elected any other person to that high office, they would have thrown difficulties in the way of their liberty, instead of improving it. But it is the *wisdom*, and not the *folly* of the National Assembly, which gives *offence* to their enemies; and *forces* even Mr. Burke to contradict, in this instance, the rule which he has laid down, “That monarchs should not be deposed for misconduct, but only when its criminality is of a kind to render their
government totally incompatible with the safety of the people.”

But before we leave the subject of Dr. Price’s patriotic effusions, we must take notice of a very heavy charge laid against him by Mr. Burke no less than that of *prophaning* the beautiful and prophetic ejaculation, commonly called, *Nunc dimittis!* made on the first proclamation of our Saviour in the Temple, and applying it, “with an inhuman and unnatural rapture, to the most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle, that perhaps was ever exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind.” That Mr. Burke’s imagination was greatly affected by a scene, which he describes in the highest glow of colouring, I can well believe; but Dr. Price, who classes with that description of man stiled by Mr. Burke abstract philosophers, had been used to carry his mind, in a long series of ideas, to the consequences of actions which arise in the passing scene. Dr. Price then, with full as much sympathy in him as even Mr. Burke can have, might not be greatly moved with the mortifications and sufferings of a very few persons, however highly distinguished for the splendour of their rank, when those mortifications led the way, or secured the present and future happiness of twenty-four millions of people, with their posterity, emancipated by their manly exertions, from all that is degrading and afflicting to the sensible mind; and let into the immediate blessings of personal security, and to the enjoyment of those advantages which above all others must be delightful to the feelings of an high-spirited people.

The *events* of human life, when properly considered, are but a series of benevolent providences: many of them, though very important in their consequences, are too much confounded with the common transactions of men, to be observed; but whenever the believer thinks he perceives the omnipotent will more immediately declaring itself in favour of the future perfection and happiness of the moral world, he is naturally led into the same extasies of hope and gratitude, with which Simeon was transported by the view of the infant Messiah. Has Mr. Burke never heard of any millenium, but that fanciful one which is supposed to exist in the kingdom of the saints? If this should be the case, I would recommend to him to read *Newton on the prophecies*. He will find that
this most respectable Bishop, who was no ranter, is of opinion, that some passages in the Revelations point out a period of time when the iron sceptre of arbitrary sway shall be broken; when righteousness shall prevail over the whole earth, and a correct system of equality take place in the conduct of man. Every providence, therefore, by which any insuperable object to the transcendent blessing appears to be taken away, must rationally draw forth ejaculations of gratitude from the benevolent Christian. What ideas do more naturally associate in the human mind, than those of the first appearance of the infant Jesus, and his future universal reign in the hearts of his people?

But Mr. Burke thinks, that there was at least a great impropriety in expressing an approbation of the spirited conduct of the French nation, before time and circumstances had manifested that the freedom they had gained, had been used with wisdom in the forming a new constitution of government, or in improving the old one. “When I see,” says Mr. Burke, “the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this for a while is all I can possibly know of it. The wild gas, the fixed air is plainly broke loose; but we ought to suspend our judgment until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface.”

The French Revolution was attended with something so new in the history of human affairs; there was something so singular, so unique, in that perfect unanimity in the people; in that firm spirit which baffled every hope in the interested, that they could possibly divided them into parties, and render them the instruments of a re-subjection to their old bondage; that it naturally excited the surprise and the admiration of all men. It appeared as a sudden spread of an enlightened spirit; which promised to act as an effectual and permanent barrier to the inlet of those usurpations which from the very beginning of social life the crafty have imposed on ignorance.

This was a triumph of a sufficient importance to call forth the exultation of individuals, and the approbation of societies. But the two clubs who have the misfortune to fall under Mr. Burke’s
severe censure, did not testify a formal approbation of the conduct of their neighbours, till the deputys they had chosen for the transaction of their affairs, had manifested a virtue equal to so high a trust; for no sooner was the power of the court sufficiently subdued to enable them to act with freedom and effect, that they gave an example of disinterested magnanimity, that has no parallel in the conduct of any preceding assembly of men, and which was never surpassed by any individual. That memorable day in which the members of the National Assembly, with a virtuous enthusiasm, vied with each other in the alacrity with which they surrendered to the people all their feudal privileges, will for ever stand in the records of time as a monument of their singular greatness. Such an instance of human virtue was surely a proper subject of applause and congratulation.

Men who have suffered in their personal interests by the new order of things in France, must naturally be inclined to exaggerate every blemish which appears in the conduct of a multitude, by whose spirit they have been deprived of many fond privileges. Their petulant observations, whilst their minds are heated by imaginary wrongs and injuries, is excusable; because it is a weakness almost inseparable from human frailty. It would, however, have become Englishmen, from whom might have been expected a more sympathising indulgence towards the friends and promoters of liberty, to have bee more candid in their censures; but in no part of Europe perhaps, have the evils which must necessarily attend all Revolutions, and especially a Revolution so complete and comprehensive as that which has taken place in France, been more exaggerated, and more affectedly lamented.

Had this great work been effected without the shedding one drop of innocent or even guilty blood, without doubt it would have better pleased the generous and benevolent mind. But, was it possible that such a pleasing circumstance could ever have had an existence? If we take into consideration that animosity which subsisted between the aristocrats and democrats on the eve of the Revolution, an animosity which was greatly heightened by the impudent insults which the Tier Etat had received from the first mentioned body, we shall rather wonder at the moderation with
which the people used their complete victory, than lament their cruelty. After the successful storming the king’s camp, and the flight or desertion of his janizaries, instead of that order and voluntary subjection to discipline which appeared in an armed mob, and which prevented all infringement on the rights of property, had the subdued party been delivered over to the outrage and the pillage of the rabble, the horrid scene might have been paralleled by examples drawn from the guilty violence of civilized nations, without calling our attention to Theban and Thracian orgies, or a procession of American savages entering into Onondaga. I do not indeed exactly know how much blood has been spilled in France, or how many individuals have fallen a sacrifice in the public commotions, but by all the general accounts which have been transmitted to us, the history of monarchies will point out as many sufferers who have fallen in one hour to the rage and outrageous pride of kingly despots.

The punishment of the lamp-post, it must be owned, strikes terror to the mind, and calls forth an immediate effusion of sympathy to the sufferer. But when candid reflection supercedes the first emotions of human tenderness, this truth will force itself on our consideration, that a people who had been used to such barbarous spectacles as that of beholding wretches, whose destitute poverty had in a manner compelled to the forlorn course of highway robbery, broken on a wheel, and lingering out the last hours of life under the agonising strokes of a stern executioner, would naturally regard hanging as a mild punishment on men whom they considered as the worst of criminals. Let us rejoice, then, that such dreadful legal executions, which must from their nature tend to barbarize men, are happily put an end to by the Revolution.

But Mr. Burke is now come to a scene which is calculated to draw forth all the energies of his imagination, and which consequently he describes with the highest possible colouring. This is no other than the 6th of October 1789, when the king and queen were led in triumph to Paris. I very much honour the king of France for that case of temper which has enabled him to go through all his personal mortifications with a manly dignity; but it must be confessed that he brought them on himself, by a conduct, which,
to say the best of it, was altogether impudent.

The first involuntary visit which he made to the capital, was absolutely necessary, to appease the fears and the resentment which had been raised by his ineffectual attempt to awe the deliberations and the resolutions of the National Assembly by an armed force. In the second, he was carried to Paris to prevent the execution of a design formed by the court cabal, which, had it succeeded, might have deluged the nation in blood, and furnished the fuel of civil discord for years.

The Parisians shewed no intention, or even desire, to deprive in any respect their king of his personal liberty; till, by a very suspicious conduct, he appeared to have manifested a design to corrupt the fidelity of his guards to their new government, and to set up the standard of arms in that quarter of the kingdom where the friends of despotism from every part of Europe might repair with safety. The great and unabating rage and indignation which the enemies to the new constitution have shewn for what they term the captivity of the king, plainly evinces the necessity that urged the measure.

Having endeavoured to shew the futility of Mr. Burke’s observations and censures on the Revolution and Constitutional Societies; and likewise, that his severe pointed reflections on the conduct of the French nation, for having, as he says, committed on the vanquished party the most unexampled acts of atrocious violence, are not founded either in truth or reason; I shall proceed with my critical reflections on the animadversions of my author, who goes on in a very free manner to censure every part of the French constitution, to draw a comparison between the British and the Gallic governments as they now exist, and to establish, in a way of reasoning, a superiority in favour of the government of his own country.

To shew that the National Assembly have committed an very gross and ruinous error, in the building a new structure, instead of improving an old one; Mr. Burke cites, in a triumphant manner, the conduct of the English nation. Our oldest reformation, he observes, is that of Magna Charta. “You will see, says he, addressing his correspondent, that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of
our law, and indeed all the great men who follow him to Blackstone, are industrious to prove the pedigree of our liberties. They endeavour to prove, that the ancient Charta, the Magna Charta of king John, was connected with another positive Charta from Henry the first, and that both the one and the other were nothing more than a re-affirmance of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom.” “In the famous law of the third of Charles the first, called the Petition of Right, the Parliament says to the king, Your subjects have inherited this freedom (claiming their franchises) not on abstract principles as the rights of men, but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.”

This language of the parliament, when pleading for the freedom of their countrymen at the tribunal of a prince’s throne, who was as little inclined to admit, and whose prejudices enabled him as little to understand the only reasonable grounds of the argument as any despot who every swayed an eastern sceptre, was well adapted to the character of the prince, and the ignorance of the multitude. But had the circumstances of Charles enabled him to speak and to enforce the sentiments of his mind, he would undoubtedly have made the following reply: You tell me upon your own authority, and the authority of your lawyers, that what you plead so strenuously for, is a patrimony derived from your forefathers, and grounded on the ancient law of the land. Be it so Was not this ancient law superseded by the authority of arms, and the entire submission of the people to the Norman code established by William the Conqueror? Magna Charta, then, and the other charters, must either have been extorted from the imbecillity of the princes who granted them, or they must have issued from the voluntary donations of monarchs; in either case, they only stand on a resumable right.

What the parliament could have answered to this plea, I know not, without calling in the aid of an abstract right; which they endeavoured to keep out of the view of the king, with as much care as Mr. Burke endeavours to keep it out of the view of all men. But certain it is, that the king, though he did not explicitly declare with all their force the above mentioned sentiments, yet he acted agreeable to their tenor the moment he got rid of this
troublesome assembly: For, considering the articles of the petition of right as a gift depending on his pleasure to fulfil or to resume, he broke them whenever they thwarted his system of administration, and imprisoned those who on the strength of this statute withstood his authority.

I have myself always considered the boasted birthright of an Englishman, as an arrogant pretension, built on a beggarly foundation. It is an arrogant pretension, because it intimates a kind of exclusion to the rest of mankind from the same privileges; and it is beggarly, because it rests our legitimate freedom on the alms of our princes.

I must own I was somewhat surprised to find a gentleman of polished manners, who has spent the best part of his life in the company of those who effect the nicest conformity to the rules of a refined civility, addressing the august representatives of the most gallant and respectable of the European nations, in terms which I should not use to a set of chimney-sweepers, though acting the most ridiculously out of their sphere. Neither do I chuse to repeat all those expressions of ineffable contempt, which the strong glow of Mr. Burke’s imagination has scattered through the whole of his reprehensions.

It is not my intention to make any formal comparison between the new constitution of France, and the present existing constitution of England; or to presume to censure a government, from which an industrious people receive protection, and with which they large majority of the nation are entirely satisfied. Yet it may not be inexpedient to observe, that we cannot with any grounds of reason or propriety, set up our own constitution, as the model which all other nations ought implicitly to follow, unless we are certain that it bestows the greatest possible happiness on the people which in the nature of things any government can bestow. We ought to be certain, that this model will bear the most nice and critical examination. It ought to be void of any of those obvious, or more concealed causes, which produce present evils, and carry the mind to apprehensions of future mischiefs. We ought not at least to have had a national debt, swelled to a magnitude which terrifies even the most sanguine for its consequences. Our parlia-
mments ought to have been *eminently* distinguished for their *integrity*, and a *total* independence of any corrupt influence; and no *necessity* ought to have *existed in our affairs*, which have obliged us to *endure imposts* which our ancestors would have *rejected with horror*, and *resisted*. If an Englishman sees any thing which is amiss in his own government, he ought not undoubtedly to look forward to any other remedy than those which the lenient hand of reformation will supply. But when the old vessel of a commonwealth is *torn to pieces* by the *shocks* it has sustained from *contending parties*; when the people, distained and rejecting all those fond opinions by which they have been *enslaved to misery*, assert their native right of forming a government for themselves; surely in such a case the builders are bound by no law of *duty* or *reason* to make use of these old materials in the structure of their new constitution, which they suppose to have been of an injurious tendency. The leaders of the French Revolution, and their followers, *see none of those striking beauties* in the old laws and rules of the Gothic institutions of Europe, which Mr. Burke does. They do not profess to have any of the spirit of antiquarians among them; and they have not perceived, in the experience of old or ancient times, a *perfect harmony* arising from *opposition* of interests; nor can they *understand* how such a combination can be formed as shall produce it. In such a view of things, they have chosen a simple rule for the model of their new structure, yet regulated with all that *art* and *design* which the experience of ages affords to the wisdom of man. They are accused of having entirely dismissed that useful guide *experience* from their councils, but they think they have made *the best use* of it; whether this opinion of theirs is founded in truth, time, and the future history of man, must evince.

Mr. Burke, reasoning from what I regard as a groundless supposition, very pathetically laments, and very severely reprehends the conduct of those, who, holding out false and treacherous lures to the king, led him into concessions fatal to his personal power, and the constitution of the monarchy. That the parliaments of France never intended to make any *alteration* in the old government, I am thoroughly persuaded; and I am equally persuaded,
that they fondly imagined the people would freely give their money for the redress of some of the most heavy of the grievances under which they laboured. They knew, by the experience of past times, that in voting by orders, the people had never gained any solid advantage from an assembly of the States General. Neither the court, nor the parliament of Paris, who made the king so many splendid promises, were aware of the consequences which must arise from the general spread of knowledge among the people; and in the event of things, they were both disappointed of their purposes; for the Tier Etat, reflecting on the old practices which the crown, the clergy, and the nobility had used against them, were determined to throw the whole weight of their natural scale into the balance, and to redress their own grievances, without waiting the effect of humble petitions and discordant councils. That neither the king, nor the parliaments of France, could long have prevented the full exertion of this power, (had they foreseen all the consequences which did arise from suffering the meeting of the States General), is to me very plain. A regeneration of the constitution would have been equally effected; but it would have been attended with a tremendous difference in its circumstances. It would have been ushered in by a general bankruptcy, and the waste of civil blood. “Our enemies,” says a popular Leader in the National Assembly, “may, by their machinations, make us buy our liberties dear, but they cannot deprive us of them.” “The breach of confidence,” as Mr. Burke terms it, “to an easy and condescending king, will have a dreadful effect on the interests of mankind, by sanctifying the dark suspicious maxims of tyrannous distrust; and will teach kings to tremble at what will be called the delusive plausibilities of moral politicians.” Be this as it may, the people of France had certainly a right to provided for their own security and welfare on those principles which they thought the most conducive to this great end, and to leave it to the wisdom of other nations to make suitable provisions for theirs. It behoves them, however, to be careful to cherish and preserve the liberty they have so nobly gained; to suffer no intemperate spirit to produce that licentiousness which must bring anarchy to its train; nor to indulge a capricious impatience, by which their enemies, in work-
ing on their passions and *misguiding* their reason, may reduce them to their old state of bondage; in which case it is *certain*, power will reap many advantages from past transactions, by which it will be enabled to *tie fast* those fetters the giddy people will so well deserve.

Though I have hitherto spared my readers a detail of all the severe invectives which Mr. Burke has used against the leading members who compose the Nation Assembly; yet, for the sake of those principles of moral *rectitude* which the torrent of his eloquence appears to *baffle* and *confound*, it will be necessary to notice his observations on the character and conduct of the nobles who have taken the lead in the French revolution, and who yet continue to support it. He accuses them with having assisted in the spoil and humiliation of their own order, to possess a sure fund for their new followers. “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society (says Mr. Burke) is the first principle, the germ as it were, of public affections: it is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of country and mankind.”

What splendid emoluments and what grand objects of personal ambition those noblemen could have in view, who, whilst they *generously* sacrificed those privileges which are the most fondly coveted by human vanity, shut out their entrance to the public offices of the state, by resolutions which rendered such promotions incompatible with their legislative trust, I know not; but I hope we shall not be so much *blinded* with the splendour of dazzling images, as to confound those *narrow affections* which bind small bodies together by the mutual ties of personal interest, to that *liberal benevolence*, which, disdaining the consideration of every selfish good, cheerfully sacrifices a *personal interest* to the *welfare* of the community.

Of the list of individuals whom Mr. Burke selects as examples of *true glory*, and as benefactors rather than destroyers of their country, some of them ought to have been for every stampt with *infamy*, as the *pests* and *tyrants* of their species; and they are all of them of doubtful fame, as to any honour derived to their country by their ambitious projects, unless a *nation of slaves* can receive
glory from a capacity of becoming the scourge of other societies.

Richlieu was the grand instrument by which the court of France, in the reign of Louis the fourteenth, was enabled to massacre the greater part of the French Hugonots, and to drive the remainder out of the kingdom. Cromwell, indeed, who deprived his sovereign of life, merely to usurp his power, has, with many people, paid the debt of his crimes, by having, through the general detestation which men conceived of his treachery and tyranny, rendered the Revolution and the Revolutionists odious, and thus paved the way for the restoration of the old government.

In the next argument presented to our attention, Mr. Burke has very strongly entrenched himself in the holds of the British constitution; and we will not attempt pursue him into his fortress; For, though a natural vanity might flatter us with a delusive hope of victory, arising from the subtle objections which may be urged to every political proposition; yet the victory would cost too dear, if it subjected us in the reproach of any design against the peace and quiet of the community. But it will not, I think, be deviated from the highest point of decency and prudence, to make our objections to his general assertions. His proposition, “that it is the great masses of property which form a natural rampart about the lesser properties in all their gradations,” is not in our opinion founded in truth; for every citizen who possesses ever so small a share of property, is equally as tenacious of it as the most opulent member of society; and this leads him to respect and to support all the laws by which property is protected. It is this sense of personal interest, which, running through every rank in society, and attaching itself to every one of its members who are not in the condition of a pauper, forms an impenetrable barrier to the security of wealth; for otherwise, as the members of the opulent must be very small in proportion to the number of those who form the great mass of the people, envy would operate so successfully against them as to destroy the force of artificial supports.

When the constitution of France is compleatly settled, and the commonwealth rests upon its basis, this disposition of the human mind, which operates so powerfully for the preservation of peace and order, will, as on former occasions, regain its natural force.
For the operations of power on the property of the citizen, is not an unexampled event in the histories of civil societies.

The manner in which the National Assembly of France have endeavoured to secure and to defend the liberty of the different towns and provinces which compose that vast empire, come next under Mr. Burke’s severe criticism. But his endeavour to bring men over to his sentiments on this subject, he is obliged to have recourse to all those unfair means which persons of genius think themselves entitled to use in the course of their argument; for what, indeed, but the delusive power of a subtle sophistry, can produce an apparent concord between propositions the most opposite in their nature? and what but an appeal to the passions of the reader, can prevent his assent to the most obvious truths?

The National Assembly of France are at one time accused by Mr. Burke of a scheme for perpetuating their power, at the expence of the rights of election; at another, of acting weakly and meanly in the having limited their sitting to the short space of two years. In one view of things, they are accused of drawing to themselves, and to the city of Paris, an exorbitance of power, which, if not resisted, must end in the total subjection of the provinces, whose natural productions and acquired wealth are to be exhausted to pamper the luxury and gratify the avarice of the capital. In another, their politics are arraigned, for having left no leading controuling power in the empire, of sufficient energy to support a necessary subordination of its parts. such palpable contradictions, such little arts of misrepresentation we have seen daily thrown out in the public papers by the hostile faction, who naturally endeavour to mislead the people into a distrust of their deputies, because they have guarded their liberties with too nice and to jealous a care. But we did not expect to see them collected together and set off with all the powers of literary composition, by one of the greatest orators of the age; and this in a work which the author holds out as an exact standard, by which the limits of power and of freedom are from henceforth to receive their bounds. Neither did we expect to find that the humane writer would have so far entered into the passions of the discontented party, as to envy the people of Paris that bread which is so necessary for their sub-
We were also greatly surprized to find Mr. Burke entering into such contractions, as at one time to represent the excellencies of the English constitution as obvious to every observer, and so sensibly felt by its subjects as unanimously to bind their affections to its principles, its rules, and its dictates; to the exception only of a few idle, insignificant, speculative individuals; and at another, trembling lest if the question of the abstract rights of men were brought before the eyes of the people, the most dreadful confusions might follow, and be attended with the utter downfall of every order in the church and state, of every exclusive privilege existing in its bodies corporate, and with the general pillage of the rich.

Such representations are certainly well adapted to rouse the selfish passions of the timid mind, and may serve the present purpose of the hour; but they will not stand the more candid and cool decisions which attend on time.

The legitimate power by which governments are made or altered, must either stand on the native rights of the species, or it must stand on an authority vested in an individual, or in a limited number of individuals, exalted to this authority, either by the positive law of a revealed will, or by some native superiority evidently attached to their persons. That this sacred trust has never been so formally vested in any individual, or in any given number of individuals, is in a manner acknowledged by the most strenuous advocates for passive obedience; for all their arguments are built on presumptive grounds.

The contrary proposition to this, viz. that native right in the social body to choose its own government, which Mr. Burke condemns under the description of a metaphysical foolery, is allowed with all its weight of authority by the greatest part of the English Revolutionists; nor can any other reasonable ground of persuasion be made use of, to bring the people to concur in any plan of salutary or necessary reformation. with what pretence then, can Mr. Burke charge Dr. Price, or any of his adherents or admirers, with advancing a novel or a mischievous doctrine, when they as-
sert that all legitimate power is founded on the rights of nature? “But government (says Mr. Burke) is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it; and exist in much greater degree of abstract perfection; but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to every thing, they want every thing. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom, to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom. Among these wants is to be reckoned the want out of a civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals; the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controuled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power out of themselves, and not in the exercise of its functions, subject to that will, and to those passions, which it is in its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense, the restraints of men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights.”

To this very ingenious reasoning, and these refined distinctions between natural and social rights, the people may possibly object, that in delivering themselves passively over to the unrestrained rule of others, on the plea of controuling their inordinate inclinations and passions, they deliver themselves over to men, who, as men, and partaking of the same nature as themselves, are as liable to be governed by the same principles and errors; and to men who, by the great superiority of their station, having no common interest with themselves which might lead them to preserve a salutary check over their vices, must be inclined to abuse in the grossest manner their trust. to proceed with Mr. Burke’s argument, should the rich and opulent in the nation plead their right to the predominant sway in society, from its being a necessary circumstance to guard their wealth from the gripe of poverty, the men in an inferior state of fortune might argue, that should they give way to this plea in all its extent, their moderate possessions would be exposed to the burden of unequal taxes; for the rich, when possessed of the whole authority of the state, would be sure to take the first care of themselves, if they should not be tempted
to secure an exoneration of all burthens, by dividing the spoils of the public; and that the abuse of such high trusts must necessarily arise, because to act by selfish considerations, is in the very constitution of our nature.

To such pleas, so plausibly urged on all sides, I know of no rational objections; nor can I think of any expedient to remove the well-grounded apprehensions of the different interests which compose a commonwealth; than a fair and equal representation of the whole people; a circumstance which appears very peculiarly necessary in a mixed form of government, where the democratic part of the constitution will ever be in danger of being overborne by the energy attending on its higher constituent parts.

On such grounds of reasoning, there will be found no insuperable objections to those propositions of Dr. Price, which are so highly censured by Mr. Burke, as containing principles of the most seditious and dangerous nature; even though we should allow that every government which accords with the opinions and the inclinations of the large majority of the people, is, in an high sense of the term, a legitimate government.

We shall now proceed with that course of the argument in which Mr. Burke endeavours to shew, that the unequal representation which he allows to have taken place in our government, is a perfection rather than a defect. With us, when we elect popular representatives, (says Mr. Burke, still addressing his French correspondent), we sent them to a council in which each man individually is a subject, and submitted to a government complete in all its ordinary functions. With you the elective assembly is the sovereign, and the sole sovereign; all the members therefore are integral parts of this sole sovereignty. But with us, it is totally different. With us, the representatives separated from the other parts, can have no action, and no existence. The government is the point of reference of the several members and districts of our representation. this is the centre of our unity. This government of reference is a trustee for the whole, and not for the parts. So is the other branch of our public council; I mean the House of Lords. With us, the King and the Lords are several and joint securities for the equality of each district, each province, each city.
did you hear in Great Britain, of any province suffering from the inequality of representation? what district from having no representation at all? Not only our monarchy and our peerage secure the equality on which our unity depends, but it is the spirit of the House of Commons itself. The very inequality of representation, which is so foolishly complained of, is perhaps the very thing which prevents us from thinking or acting as members for districts. Cornwall elects as many members as all Scotland; but is Cornwall better taken care of than Scotland?"

If your Lordship sees the result of this argument in the same light as I do, you will consider it as equally recommendatory to an election of the Lower House in the King and the Lords, as of an inadequate representation made by the election of the Commons. for if the King and the Lords are several and joint securities for the equality of each district, each province, and each city; why should we throw the country into a state of riot and confusion every seven years? Why should we put ourselves to electioneering expences? Would it not be a more convenient method to suffer the King and the House of Lords to chuse our representatives?

But this is not the point of view in which the friends of equal representation see the necessity of a reform; they do not alledge that Cornwall is better taken care of that any other district in Great Britain. The subject of their complaint is, that the important interests of the great body of the Commons is, by our present inadequate state of representation, sacrificed to the ambition of private individuals, who, by their command over boroughs, may make their market with government at the expence of the public. The strong and firm opposition which the ruling powers have given to every step towards this reasonable reformation, is not one of the happiest effects which arise from that continued war of interests so much admired by Mr. Burke and others. The jealousy is manifests of the people, is without all bounds of moderation; for the organ by which the democratic influence is exerted, has no very formidable energy. Its power is circumscribed and shut in by the immoveable barrier of laws, usages, positive rules of doctrine and practice, counterpoised by the House of Lords, and in a manner subjected to the Crown by the prerogative of calling and dissolv-
ing parliaments.

To proceed with the observations of my author After a torrent of the most pointed invective, Mr. Burke takes upon him to censure every part of the conduct of the French Revolutionists; and among other acts, one which I have always considered as founded in truth, religion, and the purest morality; it is that of annihilating, by the force of a bright example, those notions founded on false principles of honour, which fell so severely and so cruelly on every family who had the misfortune to have produced one real or pretended culprit. The infamy which families sustained for the misconduct of any of its individual members, was one of the strongest reasons which have been urged for personal imprisonment at pleasure; and when this dreadful engine of despotism was removed, it surely became expedient to emancipate the people from the terror of this impending evil. But when the most laudable transactions of men are represented as crimes, we ought to be cautious how we give ear to the suggestion of their accuser.

In the personal mortifications of the Queen of France, Mr. Burke finds great reason to lament that the age of chivalry is no more; for, had the same spirit existed in this, that existed in past ages, “ten thousand swords might have leaped from their scabbards, to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.” The high colouring given by Mr. Burke to those scenes of regal distress, will, I doubt not, captivate the imagination of the greater number of his readers, in a degree equal to the effects produced on the author by the charms of the Queen of France. But the delusions of fancy are apt to subside in men of cool minds, when any great object of public concern is held up to their view, to the prejudice even of beauty and dignity, and all those external objects, adapted rather to enslave our affections, than to lead our judgment.

The bringing the king and queen to Paris, and thus, by preventing their escape, to disable them from forming new troubles in the kingdom, was certainly regarded as a measure of the highest necessity; and in this view, must have been approved by the true friends of the revolution, although it was attended with tumult and disorder.
The age in which the spirit of chivalry was triumphantly prevalent, would indeed have been a very improper time to have attempted a regeneration of constitutions on a popular principle; but I have always regarded the necessity which gave birth to the orders of chivalry, as a mark of disgrace to the times in which they were formed. They were indeed a proper remedy to the evils arising from ferocity, slavery, barbarism, and ignorance; but now, when the causes no longer exist which rendered them useful, we should rather think of freeing society of all the evils inherent in those false notions of honour which they have given rise to, than endeavour to call back their spirit in its full force. That enthusiastic military fire, that methodical sentimental barbarism, which instigates men to deprive their fellow-citizens of life for supposed personal affronts, in defiance of the laws of religion and society, are the offsprings of chivalry, and unknown to all the nations of the ancient civilized world. But it is the simplicity of all abstract principles, against which Mr. Burke makes an eternal war; all the devices of pride, all the fond conceits of vanity, all the train of pompous ostentation, by which naked virtue is put out of her rank, to give way to the more imposing glare of external magnificence, are represented as useful ideas, “furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation.”

It is not, according to these ideas, recommended by Mr. Burke, that the scripture teaches us to respect ourselves; and although the maxims of the sacred writings are exploded by all politicians as incompatible with their views, yet certainly the excellency of their precepts consists in their being exactly fitted to a temporal as well as to a spiritual happiness. Neither in a moral view of things, can I perceive how the ornaments of artificial greatness, which is found to answer all the purposes of human pride, should assist us in acquiring that true dignity of character which alone ought to constitute distinction; nor how we can truly respect ourselves, by idolizing the mere phantom of greatness, whether it be attached to our own persons, or the persons of others.

As every act of the French National Assembly is to be con-
demned, not only in the gross, but in the detail, the address of congratulation to the king on the commencement of the present year, comes, among others, under Mr. Burke’s severe animadversion.

I have not indeed got this address by me; but if my memory does not deceive me, it contained a language the best adapted to soothe the personal afflictions of the king. Not the smallest hint was given, that any ill conduct in his Majesty had provoked the people to emancipate themselves from his power; it thanked him for his concurrence with their wishes; it represented their liberty as the necessary consequence of their enlightened spirit, not of their sufferings under his administration; and it promised as loyal an attachment to his person, and to the distinction he held as the first magistrate of the commonwealth, as could have been expected by the authority of which he was dispossessed.

Whatever might have been held out as the ostensible object of the people in their demand for the meeting of their representatives, it certainly was intended by them to use their power, when thus vested with a legitimate form, and endued with a capability of legislation, not only to the reformation of abuses, but to the regeneration of their constitution; and thus the National Assembly became vested with the trust of legislation, in the highest sense of the word; nor could this trust be limited or governed by any of those rules and practices, which, for reasons drawn from experience, the people condemned, and were determined to abolish.

Thus the preserving the state from the ruin of an impending bankruptcy, brought on by the prodigality of courts, and the regeneration of the constitution, were the important services which the National Assembly were expected to perform for their constituents. And when we consider that these important and difficult service were to be performed without that ready and effectual instrument of power, a standing army, (in whom implicit obedience is the only rule of action), we shall be obliged to confess, either that the men who undertook this great work were infected with a daring insanity, or that they were seconded by an unanimity in the sentiments of the people, which is unparalleled in the history of large empires, and which evidently destroys the force
of every accusation which can be brought against them, as having rendered themselves the instrument of a faction, rather than the faithful deputies of the people.

A total reformation in the ecclesiastical system, and the new modelling the system of jurisprudence, were the two leading points in which every member of the empire agreed, excepting those individuals whose interests were personally affected by a change. It was a point of union in which both the nobility and the people met; and several of those persons who have been the loudest in their exclamations against the conduct of the National Assembly, for having disappointed their body of the largest share of the spoils of the crown, and who have since united themselves in the malcontents among the lawyers and the clergy, were the most active in the first movements of these grand points of reformation.

To begin with the reformation of the ecclesiastical system It was thought by the French nation, that one hundred and four score millions of property, principally confined to the use of the higher orders of the clergy, and thus prevented from entering into the common circulation of other parts of property, was a nuisance in the treble sense. It was a nuisance, in the first instance, as a monopoly; in the second, it was a nuisance, as giving a dangerous power to those who possessed that monopoly; and in the third instance, as it tended, by the natural course of moral causes in this its excess, to corrupt rather than to increase and invigorate those qualities of the mind, and those spiritual endowments, which are to be desired in the teachers of religion. What real grounds there were for this opinion, so generally conceived by the French nation in the conduct of the clergy, I know not; neither shall I enquire, for I am as little inclined as Mr. Burke can be to insult the unfortunate; I shall only say, that as their temptations were great, and that their nature was not superior to human infirmity, it was probable they produced their due effects. But there is one sentiment in which I in some measure accord with Mr. Burke. I do most sincerely lament that the exigencies of the times would not suffer the National Assembly to indulge their clergy in a life-enjoyment of their possessions. But this sentiment of mine is not of so forcible a kind as to destroy all other sympathies. It would
not lead me, even if I possessed a similar portion of abilities with Mr. Burke, like him, to endeavour, by the animated power of declamation, so to condole with the sufferers as to combine all the energies of the worst passions of men in favour of my opinion. I should not attempt to rouse and inflame the resentment of the French clergy to a repetition of acts which have renewed scenes of violence, and by which, after the manner of old times, they have set up the standard of Christ crucified, to arm bigotry in favour of their pretensions. Neither should I, among the more peaceable members of that body, by representations the most touchingly affecting, open afresh those wounds on which it is to be hoped religion has poured here healing balm.

In the attempt to make the French National Assembly singularly odious, for the confiscations they have made of the church-lands, Mr. Burke asserts, that in many instances they have more violently outraged the principle, as well as the forms of public justice, than has been done by any other preceding power. The examples he brings in proof, are the confiscations made by the fury of triumphant factions in the Roman commonwealth; and an example more in point in the person of Henry the Eighth, for Mr. Burke does not chuse to extend his observations to the conduct of Denmark, Sweden, and other states, on their profession of the reformed religion. Mr. Burke considers the violences of Marius and Sylla to be much graced in the formalities of false accusations of treason against the most virtuous persons in the commonwealth; and that the tyrant of the clergy for his own private use, and the emoluments of his favourites, dignified these acts of violence, by assuming the character of the judge, and condemning the victims on false pretences. Surely the French clergy would not have thought themselves better used, if the National Assembly had set on foot a commission to examine into the crimes and abuses which prevailed among them, and then to have governed their proceedings by reported truths, mixed with exaggeration and falsehood; surely this mockery of justice, so much used in old times, and this covering to the deeds of power, by spoils torn from the only consolatory remains of the sufferer, his good fame, will not be thought an example proper to have been followed, rather than
the plain dealing of the French legislature.

But Mr. Burke has as great a dislike to the reform of the church police, as to the confiscations of the property of the most dignified part of the order. He is quite in a rage, that the poor curates should be taken out of the hopeless poverty into which they were plunged; and he cannot endure those regulations which took place in the best times of Christian societies. That bishops should be confined to their dioceses, and the care of their spiritual administrations, instead of attending courts, and lavishing their incomes in the pleasures of the capital; and that the people should assume their rights of election; “are solecisms in policy, which none but barbarous, ignorant, atheistical minds could dictate, and which no man of enlarged capacity and generous passions can obey.”

On that article of the French ecclesiastical policy which confines bishops to their episcopal administration, it may not be improper to observe, that Bishop Leighton, the most eminent of the Scotch prelates for his piety and his zeal for that order, ardently wished that such a regulation should take place on their re-establishment in Scotland under Charles the Second. I am far from saying that such a regulation is compatible with the state of things among us; and I think so well of the moderation of the clergy, and their regard to the constitution of the country, that I wish they were as independent a body as Mr. Burke represents them to be. But surely if gratitude for past favours, the hopes held out to ambition for the acquiring further preferments, and a very considerable number of church-livings in the disposal of the crown, can in any respect influence the minds of the clergy, they cannot be said to be totally independent.

I shall now take into consideration the second grand point of reformation, in which the nobles and people appear at first to have been in union, viz., the new modelling the system of jurisprudence; but that a system of jurisprudence, formed by ignorant barbarians, from codes of law adapted to support the despotic tyranny of the Roman Emperors, could not be in unison with the sentiments of an enlightened people, or capable of supporting the principles of a free government, was apparent to all parties; but personal interest, for reasons as apparent, at length produced an
union between the lawyers and nobles. The National Assembly *justly* thought, that laws dictated by the *humane* spirit of an enlightened age, would be but *ill* administered by a tribunal formed under the influence of the *rankest* prejudices; and they conceived it as a *solecism* in politics, that Parliaments, who had been especially appointed to see that the laws and regulations framed by the Assemblies of the States General, should receive no injury from the edicts of the monarch, should be kept as *control* over the standing authority of the nation. It was on this reason that the old independent Parliaments, with all their merits, and all their faults, were abolished. Nor is it a wonder that in the charge of the *prospect*, a charge in the *sentiments* of the nobles should have taken place; for when they perceived that the system of the ancient tyranny was better adapted to their *personal* greatness than the *new order* of things, they, with Mr. Burke, looked on the Parliaments as a convenient power, under which they might rally. What a *ready* convenience for the play of a *delusive* policy would it have afforded, if the Parliaments, exerting their *old* authority under the crown, had perniciously refused to register the edicts of the Assembly! What a display of eloquence in favour of the *privileges* of the *nobles* and the clergy, might have been seen in their remonstrances to the Assembly! and what *useful* delays would it have afforded for the president of the National Assembly, in the name of the Majesty of the people, to have been obliged to mount the Bed of *Justice*, after the example of the late monarchs of the realm; and in case of an *incurable* obstinacy, for the Assembly, through the means of the executive power, to have recourse to the *tedious* remedy of an imprisonment. With such advantages on their side, the *faction* in opposition would have had *reasonable* grounds of hope, that *centuries* might have elapsed before the constitution could have been in any sense of the word regenerated.

Before I leave this subject, it will be necessary to notice, that Mr. Burke condemns the conduct of the National Assembly for the distinction they have made in their treatment of the lawyers and their clergy, a distinction which I think every unprejudiced person will agree to be founded in justice, viz., the preference afforded the former by making them a suitable provision during
life, in consideration that the civil offices, of which they were de-
prived, had been purchased with private property (as Mr. Burke
observes) “at an high rate.”

The prevention of a national bankruptcy was thought an ob-
ject of the most momentous concern to the whole French nation.
It was in order to avert this impending evil, that the States Gen-
eral were permitted to assemble; and it was an object principally
recommended to the deputies of the people, by their united voice.
In this state of public opinion, the arguments so plausibly, and
indeed so forcibly urged by Mr. Burke against the right of the
monarch to mortgage the public revenue, will not render the As-
sembly culpable for endeavouring to keep faith with the creditors
of the crown. For though I never could perceive why on any good
grounds of reason, the people should quarrel with their new con-
stitution, because the prodigality of the old government had in-
volved them in distresses which were in their nature irremovable,
which did not proceed from any fraud or corruption in their new
servants, and which could not be mended by subjecting them-
selves to the old domination; yet certain it is, that the enemies
of the new constitution have beheld the arrival of a moment big with
that temporary distress and confusion which must ever attend a
national bankruptcy, with the utmost impatience, as of bringing
with it a sure prospect of victory. What an opportunity indeed,
would it present, of setting forth exaggerated descriptions of public
distresses, and of arraigning the members of the National Assem-
by as the sole authors of the nation’s wrongs! The anxious and
provident care which this Assembly has taken to ward off this
disaster, and also to avoid, in the present irritable state of the
public feelings, the imposing very heavy burthens on the people,
is certainly a mark of political sagacity, and, being such, is treated
with the utmost bitterness of disappointed rage by their oppo-
nents.

On the subject of the difficulties which the French Legislature
have encountered in the task of regenerating the constitution, it is
natural to turn our minds on the paper-currency they have estab-
lished, and especially as it is a subject on which Mr. Burke has
displayed the whole force of this ingenuity, to alarm the fears of
the French nation, and to depreciate, and to render odious in their eyes, the conduct of their representatives.

On the subject I do profess a total ignorance; I have no financiering abilities; and I wish with all my heart, that this art which Mr. Burke represents as a talent the *most highly* necessary in those who conduct the affairs of state, and which I consider as deriving its practical use from its *deceptions* address in picking the *pockets* of the people, was not so necessary an engine in the present modes of administration. A few observations however, which must occur to every thinking mind, I shall venture to make. They are as follows: That the difference which Mr. Burke makes between the paper-currency of this country, and that which now subsists in France, is not *so much* in favour of England as Mr. Burke represents; for, as the French legislature have not issued more paper than they appear to have a *solid fund to support*, and a fund that is *obvious* to every man’s eyes and understanding, its credit *ought not in reason* to have less stability than a paper currency founded on *confidence*. For, though every man believes, and on good grounds believes, that the bank of England has a sufficient property to answer for the payment of its notes; yet still although *this belief* should arise to a *moral certainty*, it cannot be *superior* to a credit founded on an *obvious* fact. And should the French legislature continue this *wise* caution, of not issuing more paper than the state revenue can obviously support whilst the revolution stands on its *present* bottom, this paper, *whatever may be* the exigencies of the times, must *always* be of *some value*; whereas a failure of our national credit would, it is generally thought, render the paper money of this country of *no more* worth than the *intrinsic value of the paper*.

The diffusion of a general spirit of gaming, and the destructive practice of stock-jobbing, *are evils* which I am afraid in a more or less degree must ever exist with national debts; and the larger the debt, the *greater* will be the *degree* of evil. That this spirit prevails in our capital to a very alarming height, the history of the *Bulls* and *Bears* in the alley will abundantly testify: That it has been the ruin of many a fair fortune, *thousands of sufferers* can also testify: That it has *enabled* and *tempted* several of those
who are in the secret of affairs, to pillage the public unmercifully, fame represents; and that the stocks have a great influence over the landed property of this country, which rises or falls according to their various fluctuations, the experience of the last American war evinces beyond a doubt.

All these evils, if evils they are, were prognosticated by those who stiled themselves the patriots of their country, from the first establishment of a funded debt, to almost the present period of time; and the reasons they urged to enforce the arguments they used against the measure, appear to me sufficiently convincing to have induced a cautious moderation in our councils. but they were not attended to; they were represented as the chimeras of discontented speculative men; the encrease of the national debt was set forth as both the cause and the effects of public prosperity; it was described as the enlivening principle of commerce, the grand panacea that was to keep us in an eternal vigour, the steady hold by which all the members of the community were to be bound in the bands of loyalty; and that there was no excess in the amount of the debt, that could be attended with any ruinous consequences.

If such representations, so repeatedly made by a large party in the kingdom, and at present so generally adopted, are founded in truth, I cannot see how causes which have a salutary effect among us, should operate as poison to our neighbors; and I have a better opinion of the policy of the National Assembly to issuing their assignats, from the strong and violent opposition which was made to the measure by the enemies.

It must not be forgot, that, among the other oeconomical regulations of the National Assembly, that which has taken place to their list of pensioners, falls equally with other of their acts, under the severity of Mr. Burke’s pen. The amount of the public money given to this description of people by the court, was indeed enormous; and if we may give credit to the Red Book, published by authority, there was little of the principles of reason or justice in the admeasurement of rewards to individuals, unless the state and the country are considered as separate interests in the account; and that the pleasing or gratifying to the prince and his favourites should be reckoned in the value of an hundred pounds to a penny,
when set in the balance of blood shed in defence of the nation.

What indeed can escape Mr. Burke’s censure, or what act of the French legislature can please him, but the dissolving themselves, and leaving the king and the nobles to form their own rules of power), when he finds subject for reproach even in their acts of sympathy to the indigent part of the citizens? That Paris was always crowded with a numerous herd of mendicants, even more numerous, if possible, than those who infest and disgrace our capital, is certain; and should their numbers have increased by the desertion of those opulent citizens who are out of temper with the government, it would neither be a surprising not an alarming circumstance: But it is an evil that time alone can cure, when the shock of so important a revolution has spent its force, and when the ill humour which at present rages in the breasts of the discontented shall subside, and lead them to return into the bosom of their country, and under the protecting laws of a regular government.

In a very elaborate defense of all the artificial modes of greatness which have taken place in society, Mr. Burke has used all the powers of eloquence and subtlety to prove, that the crimes which have been committed by our species, have not arisen from the imperfections of institutions, but from the vices of individuals. In one sense, his argument will be found to be just; in another, nugatory: For though it must be acknowledged, that the crimes committed by Nero proceeded from the depravity of his character, yet the opportunity of committing those crimes and perhaps that very depravity of sentiment from whence they proceeded, lay in the vice of the imperial institution.

With the same flow of eloquence, and the same subtlety, Mr. Burke recommends in all legislators, that tardy caution which suffers the spirit of reform to evaporate before their work is half finished; “for the evils latent in the most promising contrivances,” says Mr. Burke, “should be provided for as they arise; one advantage is as little as possible to be sacrificed to another; for thus we compensate, we reconcile, we balance, we are enabled to unite in a consistent whole, the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men.”
This finely imagined theory would undoubtedly be adopted by all wise and good legislators, did it in any manner suit with the nature of mankind, and that leaven of selfishness which taints every principle of human conduct. That perfect knowledge of human affairs, which Mr. Burke conceives, and justly conceives, ought to be inseparable from the office of legislation, will convince men, that when new constitutions are to be formed, it is necessary they should, in their formation, be regulated in all their circumstances by those principles which the legislators conceive to be the best; for if any thing which may be thought defective is left for the wisdom of future legislators to correct, the constitution must remain defective, as future reformers will find their difficulties increase, instead of being diminished, by time. The reason is plain; for that which constitutes the defects in all governments, are those principles in them which support a partial interest, to the injury of public one; and the prescription of time with the politic use of power, has been found an irresistible barrier to every important part of reformation in the ordinary course of things.

The French legislature, in order to extinguish those prejudices and provincial jealousies which formerly existed in the kingdom of France, arising from the different laws and customs which took place when the independent principalities were annexed to the crown; and also to regulate the rights of election in such a manner, as whilst it secured to the citizens at large this invaluable blessing, it should provide for the public tranquillity; conceived and executed a plan of dividing the kingdom into eighty-one departments. Each of these departments are divided into smaller districts, called Communes; and these again into smaller districts, called Cantons. The primary assemblies of the cantons elect deputies to the communes, one for every two hundred qualified inhabitants. The communes chosen by the cantons chuse to the departments, and the deputies of the departments chuse the deputies to the National Assembly. A qualification to the right of election in the first instance, is placed at the low rate of the price of three days labour; the qualification of being elected into the Commune, is the amount of ten days labour; and that of being elected a deputy
to the National Assembly, is only one mark of silver.

The plan, in theory at least, promises to unite the highest degree of freedom with the highest degree of order; it extends the right of election to every man who is not a pauper, and as such, by living on the alms of society, cannot reasonably have a right to enjoy its political privileges; and whilst it thus encourages industry, by rendering it a necessary quality to enjoy these privileges, it opens the door to every man of ability to obtain the highest honours of his country. But this plan, so plausible at least in its appearance, and so exactly agreeing with the rights of the citizens in the strictest sense of the word, is criticised by Mr. Burke in a manner highly unworthy of his great abilities, because he descends to the arts of a quibbling sophistry. He accuses the legislature of not attending to their avowed principles of the equal rights of men, in refusing their paupers a vote. He asserts that the right of election granted in the first instance, is no privilege at all; and he foresees, that the most fatal dissensions will arise from regulations which seemingly tend to harmonize every jarring principle in the state, to subdue every prejudice of the mind hostile to the public welfare, and to combine all its affections in the character of a loyal citizen.

In opposition to Mr. Burke’s accusation, that the legislature, in the qualifications they have annexed to the rights of election, have acted in contradiction to their avowed principles of the equal rights of men, I shall, without sheltering myself under the cover of a practical use, (which may be used to justify every mode of tyranny), assert, that the French legislature have, in those qualifications, adhered to the rights of men in the strictest sense, even as they exist in their abstract perfection in a state of nature; for, whoever conceived, that, in a state of nature, a man who was either not inclined, or by bodily infirmity not able, to till the ground, had a right to the fruits produced by the labour of others? In this case, either in a state of nature, or in a state of society, the right of maintenance depends alone on the laws of humanity, proceeding from that sympathy which the benevolent Author of our being has for the best purposes woven into the mental constitution of all his moral creatures. But these laws of humanity do not oblige men to
yield rights with the *donation of alms*, and to put those whom their charity has relieved, into a situation of *forcing* from them the fruits of their industry. It is on the basis of *industry* alone, the only principle which exactly squares with a native right, and not on *rent-rolls*, that the legislature has formed the rights of representation; and this on such liberal principles, that every man who has activity and industry, may qualify himself as to the matter of property, for a seat in the legislative assembly. As to the nature and operation of the privileges annexed to the first and second steps in the gradation, I conceive that the regular degrees, which directly point to the grant privilege of chusing the representatives, whilst they totally prevent *confusion*, and the errors of a *blind* choice, do not, in *any* respect, render nugatory the right of its more *abstract* principle. For every man in the Canton makes his *choice* of a deputy whom he thinks qualified by merit to represent him to the Commune, and every voter in the Commune has also his choice of a deputy to represent him in the department, who have a right to the choice of representatives.

As Mr. Burke has made it a point to object to every part of the French constitution as it now stands, and to every act of the legislature which respects this constitutions, and state those reasons which appear to me to have regulated their conduct. It is true that a senate, or an assembly of men who have had some controul over the voice of the people, some power of mitigating, regulating, or carrying into execution their laws, has always had a place in the ancient republics: But Mr. Burke himself seems to allow, that they are not *absolutely* necessary in monarichies, or rather in any government which admits of a *standing permanent* executive power. It is true they appear to have been a necessary institution in the ancient republics; yet history will shew us, that their tendency has ever been *hostile* to the principles of democracy, and often ended in the *ruin* of freedom. To the *pride*, the *avarice*, and *corruption* of the Roman Senate, was undoubtedly owing the subversion of the republic. It is, I think, very little to the purpose of enlightening men’s minds on the subject of modern government, to quote the reflections of ancient authors, or draw comparisons from ancient times, which were totally unacquainted with that
excellent policy, by which the people’s power is represented, and brought into regular action through the means of deputation. An assembly of men thus appointed, seems to unite in it all the energy and fitness to the affairs of government of the Roman Senate, in its most brilliant and perfect state, without the latent principles of corruption and destruction which lurked in this institution.

What Lord Bolingbroke could mean I know not, when he says, that he prefers a monarchy to other governments; because every description of a republic can be better engrafted on it, than any thing of a monarchy upon the republican forms; unless he refers to such a qualified monarchy as is confined to the mere office of an executive governor, with the stability that is annexed to hereditary descent; for sure it is impossible to engraft a democracy on any other description of monarchy. If this is his Lordship’s meaning, the French monarchy, as it now stands, will be found to agree perfectly with it; and should experience prove it to be defective for the want of such a member as a senate, the defect must be supplied with all those cautious preventatives which experience can alone afford.

The limitation of power, in which the executive magistrate is confined, affords Mr. Burke a subject for the exertion of all the powers of his oratory. He deplores the mortified state of the fallen monarch; he sees nothing but weakness in the government, and confusion in the affairs of the empire; from the want of a proper influencing power in the executive, and that cordiality which ought to subsist between it and the legislative. he conceives, that without such a controlling influence, the executive office is a state of degradation, to which no man of spirit would submit. And if the present King and his successors respect their true glory, they will take every opportunity which time may present, of shaking off the yoke of their imperious masters, and resuming their former independence.

To these animadversions of Mr. Burke, it may be observed, that most of the limitations of which he complains, are either inseparable to the security of the democracy, or they have their grounds in a just policy, suitting itself to the present state of things. It is necessary that a popular legislature should be informed through
other channels than the executive power, of such matters as may import that body to know: it is necessary that all the means by which a personal influence may be established by the grant of lands and large pensions, should be taken away; and for the same reasons of policy, it is necessary that the executive power should not be capable of deluding the imaginations of men, by creating artificial distinctions among them.

According to Mr. Burke’s political creed, Kings are only to respect those who serve their personal greatness; and it is his opinion, that the successors to the throne of France in the Bourbon line, must, unless they are illiterate men, act on a principle hostile to the constitution which they are sworn to preserve. It is true, as Mr. Burke observes this is nature; but are not those very inclinations, so inherent in man, the grounds for that jealousy which reflecting patriots entertain of all persons vested with the dangerous gift of permanent authority? And unless the present monarch of France, and his successors, shall conceive very different ideas of glory than they will learn from Mr. Burke; unless they shall conceive that the executing an office faithfully, reflects more honour upon them than any increase of personal greatness they can gain by treachery; there is very little probability that they will obtain from a popular legislature, that enlargement of power* [Such as the full exercise of the Veto] which may reasonably be given, when circumstances shall convince the public mind that there are no grounds for jealousy.

Mr. Burke extends his commiseration not only to the person of the King and his royal issue, but even to the ministers of the crown in their civil capacity. In this commiseration, he reprobates a principle which is held out to the people of Great Britain as the grand palladium of their liberties, I mean the principle of responsibility; though the reprobation is indeed qualified by a distinction of active and zealous service, and the restraint of crimes. But it is a distinction which I cannot well understand; for if responsibility does not go to every part of a minister’s conduct, in which he acts without due authority, it is indeed a very slight constitutional barrier against the vices of administration, especially when it is allowed among the prerogatives of our Kings, that they may chuse
their own servants, and retain them in their office at pleasure; but will any minister who serves such a King (says Mr. Burke, when speaking of the present King of France) with but a decent appearance of respect, cordially obey the orders of those whom but the other day in his name they had committed to the Bastille? Will they obey the orders of those whom, whilst they were exercising despotic justice upon them, they conceived they were treating with lenity, and for whom, in a prison, they thought they had provided an asylum.

This is saying very little, either for the disposition of the ministers, or for the spirit and principles of the ancient government. Nor can I see that these gentlemen have any reasonable complaints to make against the conduct of the French legislature. It is true they are denied a seat amongst them; but this exception is not made on any personal ground: they do not except against the abilities of these gentlemen, or their honesty as individuals; but they will not permit, either a real, or a supposed influence, to control their own actions. They will not permit that the sanctuary, in which the Majesty of the people of France resides, should be polluted or impeached by an suspicion of corruption; and they will not endanger the liberties of their country, by giving absolute power any motive, which, in the event of things, may possibly tend to an abuse of trust.

The opinion which Mr. Burke endeavours to establish in his elaborate Reflections on the French Revolution, is the incompatibility of a truly popular government with the human constitution: And the subject which affords him the most ample scope for the display of his argumentative powers, is found in the investment of that military force which is necessary to the support of all governments; for if that force is trusted to the people at large, they may be tempted to act in their natural capacity, and, by destroying or weakening the energy of those organs by which regular councils are held and enforced, induce a state of anarchy. And if the support of the government is made to subsist in a regular standing disciplined body, under the control of an individual, that individual will become the master of the people, and violate the government he was appointed to defend.
Either the establishment or the overthrow of an opinion so fatal to the proud hopes of man, must be left to time and experience; for I am sorry to say, that we have no notices on which we can attempt the construction of an opposite argument. We cannot venture to establish an opinion on the state of a country not yet recovered from the convulsive struggles which every important revolution must occasion. We can gain no light from history; for history furnishes no example of any government in a large empire, which, in the strictest sense of the word, has secured to the citizen the full enjoyment of his rights. Some attempts indeed have been made of this kind; but they have hitherto failed, through the treachery of leaders, or by the rash folly of the multitude. But though these circumstances will prevent cautious persons from giving a decided opinion on what may be the event of things, yet they do not so benight the understanding as to deprive the mind of hope. They do not prevent it from seeing that the present complexion of things in France has something of a different aspect from what history, or the state of other countries, presents to our view. Instead of that barbarous ignorance, or that depravity of principle, which are to be seen in other European States, and which might reasonably prevent the patriot from bestowing (if it were in his power) the full boon of liberty, we see a people firm and united in their efforts to support their rights, yet obedient [Mr. Burke acknowledges this obedience, and calls it fanaticism.] to the dictates of that government which they have appointed to defend them.

From what can this difference which subsists between the French nation and other societies arise, but in a more general diffusion of knowledge, and in a principle of action which consults the public good, as well as the gratifications of self? It is the business of knowledge to teach men their real interests; and it is to be hoped it will so far prevail over that mist which inordinate affections cast over the mind, as to enable the French municipalities to see, that if they so far abuse the power with which they have been invested for the defence of their rights, as to gratify a private passion at the expense of the public peace, they will induce a necessity which will lead to their utter destruction. It is to
be hoped also, that a true sense of interest will enable the army to perceive, that the moment they fling off the character of the citizen, and assume a controuling power over their country, from that moment they become individually slaves; for the very circumstance in their condition by which this power must subsist, is a discipline inseparable to the strictest subordination, and which in all respects must militate against their civil rights. When the Roman army was in the very height of their power; when it was enabled to depose and murder emperors, and raise private men to the imperial throne; when they were enabled to ravage the empire at their pleasure, and exact largesses from its spoils; they were, in an individual capacity, the greatest of slaves.

The patriot Frenchman has a prospect of hope which never yet offered itself to the view of society, and that is in the disinterestedness of those councils to which he has confided his right. The republican parliament of England, by their inordinate thirst after public offices, and by using their power to their own emolument, gave too much room for the suspicions of a divided people to act in their disfavour; and it must be acknowledged, that the interests of self have been observed to act as much in popular councils as in courts. But the French legislature have set, in this point, an example unparalleled in the history of man. To a bold and enterprising spirit, they have united a disinterestedness of principle which has deprived their enemies of every means of opposition, but vain declamation, groundless accusation, and impotent hope. Long may they continue the admiration of the world in these important particulars! Long may hey thus continue to aggrandize the character of man! And long may they continue to deserve a monument of esteem on the minds of their species, which neither time, nor accident, nor adverse fortune, shall be able to efface!

It cannot be denied that Mr. Burke has made a display of very uncommon abilities in his attack on the French Revolution; but why has he deigned to make use of the mean arts of abuse as an auxiliary in the contest? Why has he, by the most invidious comparisons, and groundless accusations, endeavoured to rouse all nations and all descriptions of men against them, and thus to crush
in their ruin all the rights of man? In the tendency of his publication a recommendation to the British government, to dragoon their neighbours into an adoption of their own system of policy? Would he recommend to the potentates of Europe, a renewal of that wicked conspiracy against the rights of men, which was planned by Henry the Fourth and his minister Sully, and which was only prevented from taking place by the timely death of that monarch? a plan, by which, through the combination of power, modes of government were to be arbitrarily imposed and supported, and the rights of conscience abolished. If such violent councils were indeed to take place of that moderation and equity which has hitherto been shewn, it would prove that the forming treaties and directing the force of nations were but ill trusted to the secrecy of cabinets. When we reflect that such dreadful purposes can never be effected without the effusion of oceans of blood, of such an invidious intention we must certainly exculpate Mr. Burke; unless, by a strange modification of sympathy, the lives of plebeians, and those vulgar characters which comprise the “swinish multitude,” is held at no value in the account. Some of Mr. Burke’s expressions, indeed, seem to warrant us in making such a supposition, though we must acknowledge, that, in others, he appears to have a concern for the spiritual, if not for the temporal happiness of those he despises: “whilst, says he, the wealth and pride of individuals at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune sensible of his inferiority, and degrades and viliﬁes his condition;”[this is a sad condition, indeed, for “naked shivering nature;”] But what is the remedy? why, let them respect property, and seek “their consolation in the ﬁnal proportions of eternal justice.” Vide Reflections, page 147 and 351.] it is for the man in humble life, and to raise his nature, and to put him in mind of a state in which the privileges of opulence will cease, when he will be equal by nature, and may be more than equal by virtue, that the portion of the general wealth of his country is employed, and sanctiﬁed.”

If Mr. Burke, in the management of his argument, could have descended from the lofty strain of a poetic imagination, to the drudgery of close reasoning, he would have perceived the error
of deviating from the line of expediency into the question of right; for when we once give up the point, that there is an inherent right attached to privileged persons to make laws for the community, we cannot fix on any other principle that will stand the test of argument, but the native and unalienable rights of man. For if we say that lawful governments are formed on the authority of conventions, it will be asked, who gave those conventions their authority? If we grant them that they derived their authority from the assent of the people, how came the people, it will be said, to exert such an authority at one period of society, and not at another? If we say it was necessity that recovered to the social man the full rights of his nature, it will be asked, who is to be the judge of this necessity? why certainly the people.

Thus, in every light in which we can place the argument, in every possible mode of reasoning, we shall be driven back to elect either the first or the second of these propositions; either that an individual, or some privileged persons, have an inherent and indefeasible right to make laws for the community, or that the authority rests in the unalienable and indefeasible rights of man.

That the people have often abused their power, it must be granted; for they have often sacrificed themselves and their posterity to the wanton will of an individual, and this is the foundation of all the regal tyrannies which have subsisted in society; but no abuse of their power can take away their right, because their rights exists in the very constitution of things. If the French people therefore should be so capricious as to fling off their new constitution, and subject themselves to more unequal forms of government, or even to tyranny, it will be agreeable to the course of past experience; but such an exertion of power cannot injure their right; and whatever form or complexion any future government in France may bear, it can have no legitimate source, but in the will of the people.

I am, My Lord,
With great esteem and respect,
Your Lordship’s Most obedient
Humble Servant
The AUTHOR