can relieve their wants; not by giving money themselves (they are squeezed to the last drop) but by pressing it from the non-contributing orders. The king stands engaged to pretend no more to the power of laying, continuing or appropriating taxes, to call the States general periodically, to submit lettres de cachet to legal restrictions, to consent to freedom of the press, and that all this shall be fixed by a fundamental constitution which shall bind his successors. He has not offered a participation in the legislature, but it will surely be insisted on. The public mind is so ripened on all these subjects, that there seems to be now but one opinion. The clergy indeed think separately, & the old men among the Nobles. But their voice is suppressed by the general one of the nation. The writings published on this occasion are some of them very valuable: because, unfettered by the prejudices under which the English labour, they give a full scope to reason, and strike out truths as yet unperceived & unacknowledged on the other side the channel. An Englishman, dosing under a kind of half reformation, is not excited to think by such gross absurdities as stare a Frenchman in the face wherever he looks, whether it be towards the throne or the altar. In fine I believe this nation will in the course of the present year have as full a portion of liberty dealt out to them as the nation can bear at present, considering how uninformed the mass of their people is. This circumstance will prevent their immediate establishment of the trial by jury. The palsied state of the executive in England is a fortunate circumstance for France, as it will give them time to arrange their affairs internally. The consolidation & funding their debts will give them a credit which will enable them to do what they please. For the present year the war will be confined to the two empires & Denmark, against Turkey & Sweden. It is not yet evident whether Prussia will be engaged. If the disturbances of Poland break out into overt acts, it will be a power divided in itself, & so of no weight. Perhaps by the next year England & France may be ready to take the field. It will depend on the former principally, for the latter, tho she may be then able, must wish still a little time to see her new arrangements well under way. The English papers & English ministry say the king is well. He is better, but not well: no malady requires a longer time to ensure against its return, than insanity. Time alone can distinguish accidental insanity from habitual lunacy.
The operations which have taken place in America lately, fill me with pleasure. In the first place they realize the confidence I had that whenever our affairs go obviously wrong the good sense of the people will interpose and set them to rights. The example of changing a constitution by assembling the wise men of the State, instead of assembling armies, will be worth as much to the world as the former examples we had given them. The constitution too which was the result of our deliberations, is unquestionably the wisest ever yet presented to men, and some of the accommodations of interest which it has adopted are greatly pleasing to me who have before had occasions of seeing how difficult those interests were to accommodate. A general concurrence of opinion seems to authorize us to say it has some defects. I am one of those who think it a defect that the important rights, not placed in security by the frame of the constitution itself, were not explicitly secured by a supplementary declaration. There are rights which it is useless to surrender to the government, and which governments have yet always been fond to invade. These are the rights of thinking, and publishing our thoughts by speaking or writing; the right of free commerce; the right of personal freedom. There are instruments for administering the government, so peculiarly trust-worthy, that we should never leave the legislature at liberty to change them. The new constitution has secured these in the executive & legislative departments; but not in the judiciary. It should have established trials by the people themselves, that is to say by jury. There are instruments so dangerous to the rights of the nation, and which place them so totally at the mercy of their governors, that those governors, whether legislative or executive, should be restrained from keeping such instruments on foot, but in well-defined cases. Such an instrument is a standing army. We are now allowed to say such a declaration of rights, as a supplement to the constitution where that is silent, is wanting to secure us in these points. The general voice has legitimated this objection. It has not however authorized me to consider as a real defect what I thought and still think one, the perpetual re-eligibility of the president. But three states out of 11 having declared against this, we must suppose we are wrong according to the fundamental law of every society, the lex majoris partis, to which we are bound to submit. And should the majority change their opinion, & become sensible that this trait in their constitution is wrong,
I would wish it to remain uncorrected, as long as we can avail ourselves of the services of our great leader [George Washington], whose talents and whose weight of character I consider as peculiarly necessary to get the government so under way as that it may afterwards be carried on by subordinate characters.

I must give you sincere thanks for the details of small news contained in your letter. You know how precious that kind of information is to a person absent from his country, and how difficult it is to be procured. I hope to receive soon permission to visit America this summer, and to possess myself anew, by conversation with my countrymen, of their spirit & their ideas. I know only the Americans of the year 1784. They tell me this is to be much a stranger to those of 1789. This renewal of acquaintance is no indifferent matter to one acting at such a distance as that instructions cannot be received hot and hot. One of my pleasures too will be that of talking over the old & new with you.

Ford v: 86-91

II.11 From the Autobiography

On my return from Holland, I had found Paris still in high fermentation as I had left it. Had the Archbishop, on the close of the assembly of Notables, immediately carried into operation the measures contemplated, it was believed they would all have been registered by the parliament, but he was slow, presented his edicts, one after another, & at considerable intervals of time, which gave time for the feelings excited by the proceedings of the Notables to cool off, new claims to be advanced, and a pressure to arise for a fixed constitution, not subject to changes at the will of the King. Nor should we wonder at this pressure when we consider the monstrous abuses of power under which this people were ground to powder, when we pass in review the weight of their taxes, and inequality of their distribution; the oppressions of the tythes, of the tailles, the corvées, the gabelles, the farms & barriers; the shackles on Commerce by monopolies; on Industry by gilds & corporations; on the freedom of conscience, of thought, and of speech; on the Press by the Censure; and of person by lettres de Cachet. The cruelty of the criminal code generally, the atrocities of the Rack, the venality of judges,
and their partialities to the rich; the Monopoly of Military honors by the Noblesse; the enormous expenses of the Queen, the princes & the Court; the prodigalities of pensions; & the riches, luxury, indolence & immorality of the clergy. Surely under such a mass of misrule and oppression, a people might justly press for a thorough reformation, and might even dismount their rough-shod riders, & leave them to walk on their own legs. The edicts relative to the corvées & free circulation of grain, were first presented to the parliament and registered. But those for the impôt territorial, & stamp tax, offered some time after, were refused by the parliament, which proposed a call of the States General as alone competent to their authorization. Their refusal produced a Bed of justice, and their exile to Troyes. The advocates however refusing to attend them, a suspension in the administration of justice took place. The Parliament held out for awhile, but the ennui of their exile and absence from Paris begun at length to be felt, and some dispositions for compromise to appear. On their consent therefore to prolong some of the former taxes, they were recalled from exile, the King met them in session Nov. 19. 87. promised to call the States General in the year 92. and a majority expressed their assent to register an edict for successive and annual loans from 1788. to 92. But a protest being entered by the Duke of Orleans and this encouraging others in a disposition to retract, the King ordered peremptorily the registry of the edict, and left the assembly abruptly. The parliament immediately protested that the votes for the enregistry had not been legally taken, and that they gave no sanction to the loans proposed. This was enough to discredit and defeat them. Hereupon issued another edict for the establishment of a cour pleniêre, and the suspension of all the parliaments in the kingdom. This being opposed as might be expected by reclamation from all the parliaments & provinces, the King gave way and by an edict of July 5. 88 renounced his cour pleniêre, & promised the States General for the 1st. of May of the ensuing year: and the Archbishop finding the times beyond his faculties, accepted the promise of a Cardinal’s hat, was removed [Sept. 88] from the ministry, and Mr. Necker was called to the department of finance. The innocent rejoicings of the people of Paris on this change provoked the interference of an officer of the city guards, whose order for their dispersion not being obeyed, he charged them with fixed bayonets, killed two or three, and wounded many. This dispersed
them for the moment; but they collected the next day in great numbers, burnt 10 or 12 guard houses, killed two or three of the guards, & lost 6 or 8 more of their own number. The city was hereupon put under martial law, and after awhile the tumult subsided. The effect of this change of ministers, and the promise of the States General at an early day, tranquillized the nation. But two great questions now occurred. 1. What proportion shall the number of deputies of the tiers état bear to those of the Nobles and Clergy? And 2. shall they sit in the same, or in distinct apartments? Mr. Necker, desirous of avoiding himself these knotty questions, proposed a second call of the same Notables, and that their advice should be asked on the subject. They met Nov. 9. 88 and, by five bureaux against one, they recommended the forms of the States General of 1614 wherein the houses were separate, and voted by orders, not by persons. But the whole nation declaring at once against this, and that the tiers état should be, in numbers, equal to both the other orders, and the Parliament deciding for the same proportion, it was determined so to be, by a declaration of Dec. 27. 88. A Report of Mr. Necker to the King, of about the same date, contained other very important concessions. 1. That the King could neither lay a new tax, nor prolong an old one. 2. It expressed a readiness to agree on the periodical meeting of the States. 3. To consult on the necessary restriction on lettres de Cachet. And 4. how far the Press might be made free. 5. It admits that the States are to appropriate the public money; and 6. that Ministers shall be responsible for public expenditures. And these concessions came from the very heart of the King. He had not a wish but for the good of the nation, and for that object no personal sacrifice would ever have cost him a moment’s regret. But his mind was weakness itself, his constitution timid, his judgment null, and without sufficient firmness even to stand by the faith of his word. His Queen too, haughty and bearing no contradiction, had an absolute ascendancy over him; and around her were rallied the King’s brother d’Artois, the court generally, and the aristocratic part of his ministers, particularly Breteuil, Broglie, Vauguyon, Foulon, Luzerne, men whose principles of government were those of the age of Louis XIV. Against this host the good counsels of Necker, Montmorin, St. Priest, altho’ in unison with the wishes of the King himself, were of little avail. The resolutions of the morning formed under their advice, would be
reversed in the evening by the influence of the Queen & court. But
the hand of heaven weighed heavily indeed on the machinations of
this juncto, producing collateral incidents, not arising out of the case,
yet powerfully co-exciting the nation to force a regeneration of it’s
government, and overwhelming with accumulated difficulties this
liberticide resistance. For, while laboring under the want of money
for even ordinary purposes, in a government which required a
million of livres a day, and driven to the last ditch by the universal
call for liberty, there came on a winter of such severe cold, as was
without example in the memory of man, or in the written records
of history. The Mercury was at times 50° below the freezing point
of Fahrenheit and 22° below that of Reaumur. All out-door labor
was suspended, and the poor, without the wages of labor, were of
course without either bread or fuel. The government found it’s
necessities aggravated by that of procuring immense quantities of
fire-wood, and of keeping great fires at all the cross-streets, around
which the people gathered in crowds to avoid perishing with cold.
Bread too was to be bought, and distributed daily gratis, until a
relaxation of the season should enable the people to work: and the
slender stock of bread-stuff had for some time threatened famine,
and had raised that article to an enormous price. So great indeed
was the scarcity of bread that from the highest to the lowest citizen,
the bakers were permitted to deal but a scanty allowance per head,
even to those who paid for it; and in cards of invitation to dine in
the richest houses, the guest was notified to bring his own bread.
To eke out the existence of the people, every person who had the
means, was called on for a weekly subscription, which the Curés
collected and employed in providing messes for the nourishment of
the poor, and vied with each other in devising such economical
compositions of food as would subsist the greatest number with the
smallest means. This want of bread had been foreseen for some time
past and M. de Montmorin had desired me to notify it in America,
and that, in addition to the market price, a premium should be
given on what should be brought from the U.S. Notice was accord-
ingly given and produced considerable supplies. Subsequent infor-
mation made the importations from America, during the months of
March, April & May, into the Atlantic ports of France, amount to
about 21,000 barrels of flour, besides what went to other ports, and
in other months, while our supplies to their West-Indian islands
relieved them also from that drain. This distress for bread continued till July.

Hitherto no acts of popular violence had been produced by the struggle for political reformation. Little riots, on ordinary incidents, had taken place, as at other times, in different parts of the kingdom, in which some lives, perhaps a dozen or twenty, had been lost, but in the month of April a more serious one occurred in Paris, unconnected indeed with the revolutionary principle, but making part of the history of the day. The Fauxbourg St. Antoine is a quarter of the city inhabited entirely by the class of day-laborers and journey-men in every line. A rumor was spread among them that a great paper manufacturer, of the name of Reveillon, had proposed, on some occasion, that their wages should be lowered to 15 sous a day. Inflamed at once into rage, & without inquiring into it’s truth, they flew to his house in vast numbers, destroyed everything in it, and in his magazines & work shops, without secreting however a pin’s worth to themselves, and were continuing this work of devastation when the regular troops were called in. Admonitions being disregarded, they were of necessity fired on, and a regular action ensued, in which about 100. of them were killed, before the rest would disperse. There had rarely passed a year without such a riot in some part or other of the Kingdom; and this is distinguished only as cotemporary with the revolution, altho’ not produced by it.

The States General were opened on the 5th. of May 89 by speeches from the King, the Garde des Sceaux Lamoignon, and Mr. Necker. The last was thought to trip too lightly over the constitutional reformations which were expected. His notices of them in this speech were not as full as in his previous "Rapport au Roi." This was observed to his disadvantage. But much allowance should have been made for the situation in which he was placed between his own counsels, and those of the ministers and party of the court. Overruled in his own opinions, compelled to deliver, and to gloss over those of his opponents, and even to keep their secrets, he could not come forward in his own attitude.

The composition of the assembly, altho’ equivalent on the whole to what had been expected, was something different in it’s elements. It had been supposed that a superior education would carry into the scale of the Commons a respectable portion of the Noblesse. It did so as to those of Paris, of it’s vicinity and of the other considerable
cities, whose greater intercourse with enlightened society had liberalized their minds, and prepared them to advance up to the measure of the times. But the Noblesse of the country, which constituted two thirds of that body, were far in their rear. Residing constantly on their patrimonial feuds, and familiarized by daily habit with Seigneurial powers and practices, they had not yet learned to suspect their inconsistence with reason and right. They were willing to submit to equality of taxation, but not to descend from their rank and prerogatives to be incorporated in session with the tiers état. Among the clergy, on the other hand, it had been apprehended that the higher orders of the hierarchy, by their wealth and connections, would have carried the elections generally. But it proved that in most cases the lower clergy had obtained the popular majorities. These consisted of the Curés, sons of the peasantry who had been employed to do all the drudgery of parochial services for 10, 20, or 30 Louis a year; while their superiors were consuming their princely revenues in palaces of luxury & indolence.

The objects for which this body was convened being of the first order of importance, I felt it very interesting to understand the views of the parties of which it was composed, and especially the ideas prevalent as to the organization contemplated for their government. I went therefore daily from Paris to Versailles, and attended their debates, generally till the hour of adjournment. Those of the Noblesse were impassioned and tempestuous. They had some able men on both sides, and actuated by equal zeal. The debates of the Commons were temperate, rational and inflexibly firm. As preliminary to all other business, the awful questions came on, Shall the States sit in one, or in distinct apartments? And shall they vote by heads or houses? The opposition was soon found to consist of the Episcopal order among the clergy, and two thirds of the Noblesse; while the tiers état were, to a man, united and determined. After various propositions of compromise had failed, the Commons undertook to cut the Gordian knot. The Abbé Sieyès, the most logical head of the nation (author of the pamphlet Qu’est-ce que le tiers état? which had electrified that country, as Paine’s Common Sense did us), after an impressive speech on the 10th of June, moved that a last invitation should be sent to the Nobles and Clergy, to attend in the Hall of the States, collectively or individually for the verification of powers, to which the commons would proceed
immediately, either in their presence or absence. This verification being finished, a motion was made, on the 15th. that they should constitute themselves a National assembly; which was decided on the 17th. by a majority of four fifths. During the debates on this question, about twenty of the Curés had joined them, and a proposition was made in the chamber of the clergy that their whole body should join them. This was rejected at first by a small majority only; but, being afterwards somewhat modified, it was decided affirmatively, by a majority of eleven. While this was under debate and unknown to the court, to wit, on the 19th. a council was held in the afternoon at Marly, wherein it was proposed that the King should interpose by a declaration of his sentiments, in a séance royale. A form of declaration was proposed by Necker, which, while it censured in general the proceedings both of the Nobles and Commons, announced the King's views, such as substantially to coincide with the Commons. It was agreed to in council, the séance was fixed for the 22d, the meetings of the States were till then to be suspended, and everything, in the meantime, kept secret. The members the next morning (20th.) repairing to their house as usual, found the doors shut and guarded, a proclamation posted up for a séance royale on the 22d. and a suspension of their meetings in the meantime. Concluding that their dissolution was now to take place, they repaired to a building called the "Jeu de paume" (or Tennis court) and there bound themselves by oath to each other, never to separate of their own accord, till they had settled a constitution for the nation, on a solid basis, and if separated by force, that they would reassemble in some other place. The next day they met in the church of St. Louis, and were joined by a majority of the clergy. The heads of the Aristocracy saw that all was lost without some bold exertion. The King was still at Marly. Nobody was permitted to approach him but their friends. He was assailed by falsehoods in all shapes. He was made to believe that the Commons were about to absolve the army from their oath of fidelity to him, and to raise their pay. The court party were now all rage and desperate. They procured a committee to be held consisting of the King and his ministers, to which Monsieur & the Count d'Artois should be admitted. At this committee the latter attacked Mr. Necker personally, arraigned his declaration, and proposed one which some of his prompters had put into his hands. Mr. Necker was brow-beaten.
and intimidated, and the King shaken. He determined that the two plans should be deliberated on the next day and the séance royale put off a day longer. This encouraged a fiercer attack on Mr. Necker the next day. His draught of a declaration was entirely broken up, & that of the Count d’Artois inserted into it. Himself and Montmorin offered their resignation, which was refused, the Count d’Artois saying to Mr. Necker “No sir, you must be kept as the hostage; we hold you responsible for all the ill which shall happen.” This change of plan was immediately whispered without doors. The Noblesse were in triumph; the people in consternation. I was quite alarmed at this state of things. The soldiery had not yet indicated which side they should take, and that which they should support would be sure to prevail. I considered a successful reformation of government in France, as ensuring a general reformation thro Europe, and the resurrection, to a new life, of their people, now ground to dust by the abuses of the governing powers. I was much acquainted with the leading patriots of the assembly. Being from a country which had successfully passed thro' a similar reformation, they were disposed to my acquaintance, and had some confidence in me. I urged most strenuously an immediate compromise, to secure what the government was now ready to yield, and trust to future occasions for what might still be wanting. It was well understood that the King would grant at this time 1. Freedom of the person by habeas corpus. 2. Freedom of conscience. 3. Freedom of the press. 4. Trial by jury. 5. A representative legislature. 6. Annual meetings. 7. The origination of laws. 8. The exclusive right of taxation and appropriation. And 9. The responsibility of ministers; and with the exercise of these powers they would obtain in future whatever might be further necessary to improve and preserve their constitution. They thought otherwise however, and events have proved their lamentable error. For after 30 years of war, foreign and domestic, the loss of millions of lives, the prostration of private happiness, and foreign subjugation of their own country for a time, they have obtained no more, nor even that securely. They were unconscious of (for who could foresee?) the melancholy sequel of their well-meant perseverance; that their physical force would be usurped by a first tyrant to trample on the independance, and even the existence, of other nations: that this would afford fatal example for the atrocious conspiracy of Kings against their people; would generate their unholy
and homicide alliance to make common cause among themselves, and to crush, by the power of the whole, the efforts of any part, to moderate their abuses and oppressions.

When the King passed, the next day, thro' the lane formed from the Château to the Hôtel des états, there was a dead silence. He was about an hour in the House delivering his speech & declaration. On his coming out a feeble cry of "Vive le Roy" was raised by some children, but the people remained silent & sullen. In the close of his speech he had ordered that the members should follow him, & resume their deliberations the next day. The Noblesse followed him, and so did the clergy, except about thirty, who, with the tiers, remained in the room, and entered into deliberation. They protested against what the King had done, adhered to all their former proceedings, and resolved the inviolability of their own persons. An officer came to order them out of the room in the King's name. "Tell those who sent you," said Mirabeau, "that we shall not move hence but at our own will, or the point of the bayonet." In the afternoon the people, uneasy, began to assemble in great numbers in the courts, and vicinities of the palace. This produced alarm. The Queen sent for Mr. Necker. He was conducted amidst the shouts and acclamations of the multitude who filled all the apartments of the palace. He was a few minutes only with the queen, and what passed between them did not transpire. The King went out to ride. He passed thro' the crowd to his carriage and into it, without being in the least noticed. As Mr. Neckar followed him universal acclamations were raised of "vive Monsr. Neckar, vive le sauveur de la France opprimée." He was conducted back to his house with the same demonstrations of affection and anxiety. About 200. deputies of the Tiers, catching the enthusiasm of the moment, went to his house, and extorted from him a promise that he would not resign. On the 25th. 48 of the Nobles joined the tiers, & among them the D. of Orleans. There were then with them 164 members of the Clergy, altho' the minority of that body still sat apart & called themselves the chamber of the clergy. On the 26th. the Archbp. of Paris joined the tiers, as did some others of the clergy and of the Noblesse.

These proceedings had thrown the people into violent ferment. It gained the souldiery, first of the French guards, extended to those of every other denomination, except the Swiss, and even to the body
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guards of the King. They began to quit their barracks, to assemble in squads, to declare they would defend the life of the King, but would not be the murderers of their fellow-citizens. They called themselves the soldierys of the nation, and left now no doubt on which side they would be, in case of rupture. Similar accounts came in from the troops in other parts of the kingdom, giving good reason to believe they would side with their fathers and brothers rather than with their officers. The operation of this medicine at Versailles was as sudden as it was powerful. The alarm there was so compleat that in the afternoon of the 27th. the King wrote with his own hand letters to the Presidents of the clergy and Nobles, engaging them immediately to join the tiers. These two bodies were debating & hesitating when notes from the Ct. d'Artois decided their compliance. They went in a body and took their seats with the tiers, and thus rendered the union of the orders in one chamber compleat.

The Assembly now entered on the business of their mission, and first proceeded to arrange the order in which they would take up the heads of their constitution, as follows:

First, and as Preliminary to the whole a general Declaration of the Rights of Man. Then specifically the Principles of the Monarchy; rights of the Nation; rights of the King; rights of the citizens; organization & rights of the national assembly; forms necessary for the enactment of laws; organization & functions of the provincial & municipal assemblies; duties and limits of the Judiciary power; functions & duties of the military power.

A declaration of the rights of man, as the preliminary of their work, was accordingly prepared and proposed by the Marquis de la Fayette.

But the quiet of their march was soon disturbed by information that troops, and particularly the foreign troops, were advancing on Paris from various quarters. The King had been probably advised to this on the pretext of preserving peace in Paris. But his advisers were believed to have other things in contemplation. The Marshal de Broglio was appointed to their command, a high flying aristocrat, cool and capable of everything. Some of the French guards were soon arrested, under other pretexts, but really on account of their dispositions in favor of the National cause. The people of Paris forced their prison, liberated them, and sent a deputation to the Assembly to solicit a pardon. The Assembly recommended peace
and order to the people of Paris, the prisoners to the king, and asked from him the removal of the troops. His answer was negative and dry, saying they might remove themselves, if they pleased, to Noyons or Soissons. In the meantime these troops, to the number of twenty or thirty thousand, had arrived and were posted in, and between Paris and Versailles. The bridges and passes were guarded. At three o'clock in the afternoon of the 11th July the Count de la Luzerne was sent to notify Mr. Neckar of his dismissal, and to enjoin him to retire instantly without saying a word of it to anybody. He went home, dined, and proposed to his wife a visit to a friend, but went in fact to his country house at St. Ouen, and at midnight set out for Brussels. This was not known till the next day, 12th when the whole ministry was changed, except Villedeuil, of the Domestic department, and Barenton, Garde des sceaux. The changes were as follows.

The Baron de Breteuil, president of the council of finance; de la Galaisiere, Comptroller general in the room of Mr. Neckar; the Marshal de Broglio, minister of War, & Foulon under him in the room of Puy-Segur; the Duke de la Vauguyon, minister of foreign affairs instead of the Ct. de Montmorin; de La Porte, minister of Marine, in place of the Ct. de la Luzerne; St. Priest was also removed from the council. Luzerne and Puy-Segur had been strongly of the Aristocratic party in the Council, but they were not considered as equal to the work now to be done. The King was now compleatly in the hands of men, the principal among whom had been noted thro’ their lives for the Turkish despotism of their characters, and who were associated around the King as proper instruments for what was to be executed. The news of this change began to be known at Paris about 1. or 2. o’clock. In the afternoon a body of about 100 German cavalry were advanced and drawn up in the Place Louis XV. and about 200 Swiss posted at a little distance in their rear. This drew people to the spot, who thus accidentally found themselves in front of the troops, merely at first as spectators; but as their numbers increased, their indignation rose. They retired a few steps, and posted themselves on and behind large piles of stones, large and small, collected in that Place for a bridge which was to be built adjacent to it. In this position, happening to be in my carriage on a visit, I passed thro’ the lane they had formed, without interruption. But the moment after I had passed, the people
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attacked the cavalry with stones. They charged, but the advantageous position of the people, and the showers of stones obliged the horse to retire, and quit the field altogether, leaving one of their number on the ground, & the Swiss in their rear not moving to their aid. This was the signal for universal insurrection, and this body of cavalry, to avoid being massacred, retired towards Versailles. The people now armed themselves with such weapons as they could find in armorer's shops and private houses, and with bludgeons, and were roaming all night thro' all parts of the city, without any decided object. The next day (13th.) the assembly pressed on the king to send away the troops, to permit the Bourgeoisie of Paris to arm for the preservation of order in the city, and offer[ed] to send a deputation from their body to tranquillize them; but their propositions were refused. A committee of magistrates and electors of the city are appointed by those bodies to take upon them it's government. The people, now openly joined by the French guards, force the prison of St. Lazare, release all the prisoners, and take a great store of corn, which they carry to the Corn-market. Here they get some arms, and the French guards begin to form & train them. The City-committee determined to raise 48,000. Bourgeoisie, or rather to restrain their numbers to 48,000. On the 14th. they send one of their members (Mons. de Corny) to the Hôtel des Invalides, to ask arms for their Garde-Bourgeoise. He was followed by, and he found there a great collection of people. The Governor of the Invalids came out and represented the impossibility of his delivering arms without the orders of those from whom he received them. De Corny advised the people then to retire, and retired himself; but the people took possession of the arms. It was remarkable that not only the Invalids themselves made no opposition, but that a body of 5000 foreign troops, within 400 yards, never stirred. M. de Corny and five others were then sent to ask arms of M. de Launay, governor of the Bastile. They found a great collection of people already before the place, and they immediately planted a flag of truce, which was answered by a like flag hoisted on the Parapet. The deputation prevailed on the people to fall back a little, advanced themselves to make their demand of the Governor, and in that instant a discharge from the Bastile killed four persons, of those nearest to the deputies. The deputies retired. I happened to be at the house of M. de Corny when he returned to it, and received
from him a narrative of these transactions. On the retirement of the
deputies, the people rushed forward & almost in an instant were in
possession of a fortification defended by 100 men, of infinite
strength, which in other times had stood several regular sieges, and
had never been taken. How they forced their entrance has never
been explained. They took all the arms, discharged the prisoners,
and such of the garrison as were not killed in the first moment of
fury, carried the Governor and Lt. Governor to the Place de Grève
(the place of public execution), cut off their heads, and sent them
thro' the city in triumph to the Palais royal. About the same instant
a treacherous correspondence having been discovered in M. de
Flesselles, prévôt des marchands, they seized him in the Hotel de
Ville where he was in the execution of his office, and cut off his
head. These events carried imperfectly to Versailles were the sub-
ject of two successive deputations from the assembly to the king, to
both of which he gave dry and hard answers for nobody had as yet
been permitted to inform him truly and fully of what had passed at
Paris. But at night the Duke de Liancourt forced his way into the
king's bed chamber, and obliged him to hear a full and animated
detail of the disasters of the day in Paris. He went to bed fearfully
impressed. The decapitation of de Launai worked powerfully thro'
the night on the whole aristocratic party, insomuch that, in the
morning, those of the greatest influence on the Count d'Artois rep-
resented to him the absolute necessity that the king should give up
everything to the Assembly. This according with the dispositions
of the king, he went about 11. o'clock, accompanied only by his
brothers, to the Assembly, & there read to them a speech, in which
he asked their interposition to re-establish order. Altho' couched in
terms of some caution, yet the manner in which it was delivered
made it evident that it was meant as a surrender at discretion. He
returned to the Château afoot, accompanied by the assembly. They
sent off a deputation to quiet Paris, at the head of which was the
Marquis de la Fayette who had, the same morning, been named
Commandant en chef of the Milice Bourgeoise and Mons Bailly,
former President of the States General, was called for as Prévôt des
marchands. The demolition of the Bastile was now ordered and
begun. A body of the Swiss guards of the regiment of Ventimille,
and the city horse guards joined the people. The alarm at Versailles
increased. The foreign troops were ordered off instantly. Every
From the Autobiography

minister resigned. The king confirmed Bailly as Prévôt des Marchands, wrote to Mr. Neckar to recall him, sent his letter open to the assembly, to be forwarded by them, and invited them to go with him to Paris the next day, to satisfy the city of his dispositions; and that night, and the next morning the Count d'Artois and M. de Montesson a deputy connected with him, Madame de Polignac, Madame de Guiche, and the Count de Vaudreuil, favorites of the queen, the Abbé de Vermont her confessor, the Prince of Condé and Duke of Bourbon fled. The king came to Paris, leaving the queen in consternation for his return. Omitting the less important figures of the procession, the king's carriage was in the center, on each side of it the assembly, in two ranks afoot, at their head the M. de la Fayette, as Commander-in-chief, on horseback, and Bourgeois guards before and behind. About 60,000 citizens of all forms and conditions, armed with the muskets of the Bastile and Invalids, as far as they would go, the rest with pistols, swords, pikes, pruning hooks, scythes &c. lined all the streets thro' which the procession passed, and with the crowds of people in the streets, doors & windows, saluted them everywhere with cries of "vive la nation," but not a single "vive le roy" was heard. The King landed at the Hôtel de Ville. There M. Bailly presented and put into his hat the popular cockade, and addressed him. The King being unprepared, and unable to answer, Bailly went to him, gathered from him some scraps of sentences, and made out an answer, which he delivered to the audience as from the king. On their return the popular cries were "vive le roy et la nation." He was conducted by a garde bourgeoise to his palace at Versailles, & thus concluded an amende honorable as no sovereign ever made, and no people ever received.

And here again was lost another precious occasion of sparing to France the crimes and cruelties thro' which she has since passed, and to Europe, & finally America the evils which flowed on them also from this mortal source. The king was now become a passive machine in the hands of the National assembly, and had he been left to himself, he would have willingly acquiesced in whatever they should devise as best for the nation. A wise constitution would have been formed, hereditary in his line, himself placed at it's head, with powers so large as to enable him to do all the good of his station, and so limited as to restrain him from it's abuse. This he would have faithfully administered, and more than this I do not believe he
ever wished. But he had a Queen of absolute sway over his weak
mind, and timid virtue; and of a character the reverse of his in all
points. This angel, as gaudily painted in the rhapsodies of the
Rhetor [Edmund] Burke, with some smartness of fancy, but no
sound sense was proud, disdainful of restraint, indignant at all
obstacles to her will, eager in the pursuit of pleasure, and firm
enough to hold to her desires, or perish in their wreck. Her inordinate
amusements and dissipations, with those of the Count d'Artois
and others of her clique, had been a sensible item in the exhaustion
of the treasury, which called into action the reforming hand of the
nation; and her opposition to it, her inflexible perverseness, and
dauntless spirit, led herself to the Guillotine, drew the king on
with her, and plunged the world into crimes & calamities which
will forever stain the pages of modern history. I have ever believed
that had there been no queen, there would have been no revolution.
No force would have been provoked nor exercised. The king
would have gone hand in hand with the wisdom of his sounder counsellors,
who, guided by the increased lights of the age, wished only, with
the same pace, to advance the principles of their social institution.
The deed which closed the mortal course of these sovereigns, I shall
never approve nor condemn. I am not prepared to say that the first
magistrate of a nation cannot commit treason against his country, or
is unamenable to its punishment: nor yet that where there is no
written law, no regulated tribunal, there is not a law in our hearts,
and a power in our hands, given for righteous employment in main-
taining right, and redressing wrong. Of those who judged the king,
many thought him wilfully criminal, many that his existence would
keep the nation in perpetual conflict with the horde of kings, who
would war against a regeneration which might come home to them-
selves, and that it were better that one should die than all. I should
not have voted with this portion of the legislature. I should have
shut up the Queen in a Convent, putting harm out of her power,
and placed the king in his station, investing him with limited
powers, which I verily believe he would have honestly exercised,
according to the measure of his understanding. In this way no void
would have been created, courting the usurpation of a military
adventurer, nor occasion given for those enormities which demoral-
ized the nations of the world, and destroyed, and is yet to destroy
millions and millions of its inhabitants. There are three epochs in
history signalized by the total extinction of national morality. The first was of the successors of Alexander, not omitting himself. The next the successors of the first Caesar, the third our own age. This was begun by the partition of Poland, followed by that of the treaty of Pillnitz\(^1\) next the conflagration of Copenhagen; then the enormities of Bonaparte partitioning the earth at his will, and devastating it with fire and sword; now the conspiracy of kings, the successors of Bonaparte, blasphemously calling themselves the Holy Alliance, and treading in the footsteps of their incarcerated leader, not yet indeed usurping the government of other nations avowedly and in detail, but controlling by their armies the forms in which they will permit them to be governed; and reserving in petto the order and extent of the usurpations further meditated. But I will return from a digression, anticipated too in time, into which I have been led by reflection on the criminal passions which refused to the world a favorable occasion of saving it from the afflictions it has since suffered.

M. Necker had reached Basle before he was overtaken by the letter of the king, inviting him back to resume the office he had recently left. He returned immediately, and all the other ministers having resigned, a new administration was named, to wit St. Priest & Montmorin were restored; the Archbishop of Bordeaux was appointed Garde des sceaux; La Tour du Pin Minister of War; La Luzerne Minister of Marine. This last was believed to have been effected by the friendship of Montmorin; for altho' differing in politics, they continued firm in friendship, & Luzerne, altho' not an able man was thought an honest one. And the Prince of Bauvau was taken into the Council.

Seven princes of the blood royal, six ex-ministers, and many of the high Noblesse having fled, and the present ministers, except Luzerne, being all of the popular party, all the functionaries of government moved for the present in perfect harmony.

In the evening of Aug. 4. and on the motion of the Viscount de Noailles, brother in law of La Fayette, the assembly abolished all titles of rank, all the abusive privileges of feudalism, the tythes and casuals of the clergy, all provincial privileges, and, in fine, the

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\(^1\) The 1791 agreement between Prussia and Austria threatening to declare war on France if the king were harmed. – Eds.
Feudal regimen generally. To the suppression of tythes the Abbé Sieyès was vehemently opposed; but his learned and logical arguments were unheeded, and his estimation lessened by a contrast of his egoism (for he was benefited on them) with the generous abandonment of rights by the other members of the assembly. Many days were employed in putting into the form of laws the numerous demolitions of ancient abuses; which done, they proceeded to the preliminary work of a Declaration of rights. There being much concord of sentiment on the elements of this instrument, it was liberally framed, and passed with a very general approbation. They then appointed a Committee for the reduction of a projet of a Constitution, at the head of which was the Archbishop of Bordeaux. I received from him, as Chairman of the Committee, a letter of July 20. requesting me to attend and assist at their deliberations; but I excused myself on the obvious considerations that my mission was to the king as Chief Magistrate of the nation, that my duties were limited to the concerns of my own country, and forbade me to intermeddle with the internal transactions of that in which I had been received under a specific character only. Their plan of a constitution was discussed in sections, and so reported from time to time, as agreed to by the Committee. The first respected the general frame of the government; and that this should be formed into three departments, Executive, Legislative and Judiciary was generally agreed. But when they proceeded to subordinate developments, many and various shades of opinion came into conflict, and schism, strongly marked, broke the Patriots into fragments of very discordant principles. The first question Whether there should be a king, met with no open opposition, and it was readily agreed that the government of France should be monarchical & hereditary. Shall the king have a negative on the laws? shall that negative be absolute, or suspensive only? Shall there be two chambers of legislation? or one only? If two, shall one of them be hereditary? or for life? or for a fixed term? and named by the king? or elected by the people? These questions found strong differences of opinion, and produced repulsive combinations among the Patriots. The Aristocracy was cemented by a common principle of preserving the ancient regime, or whatever should be nearest to it. Making this their Polar star, they moved in phalanx, gave preponderance on every question to the minorities of the Patriots, and always to those who advocated
the least change. The features of the new constitution were thus assuming a fearful aspect, and great alarm was produced among the honest patriots by these dissensions in their ranks. In this uneasy state of things, I received one day a note from the Marquis de la Fayette, informing me that he should bring a party of six or eight friends to ask a dinner of me the next day. I assured him of their welcome. When they arrived, they were La Fayette himself, Duport, Barnave, Alexander La Meth, Blacon, Mounier, Mau-
bourg, and Dagout. These were leading patriots, of honest but differing opinions, sensible of the necessity of effecting a coalition by mutual sacrifices, knowing each other, and not afraid therefore to unbosom themselves mutually. This last was a material principle in the selection. With this view the Marquis had invited the conference and had fixed the time & place inadvertently as to the embarrassments under which it might place me. The cloth being removed and wine set on the table, after the American manner, the Marquis introduced the objects of the conference by summarily reminding them of the state of things in the Assembly, the course which the principles of the constitution were taking, and the inevitable result, unless checked by more concord among the Patriots themselves. He observed that altho' he also had his opinion, he was ready to sacrifice it to that of his brethren of the same cause: but that a common opinion must now be formed, or the Aristocracy would carry everything, and that whatever they should now agree on, he, at the head of the National force, would maintain. The discussions began at the hour of four, and were continued till ten o'clock in the evening; during which time I was a silent witness to a coolness and candor of argument unusual in the conflicts of political opinion; to a logical reasoning, and chaste eloquence, disfigured by no gaudy tinsel of rhetoric or declamation, and truly worthy of being placed in parallel with the finest dialogues of antiquity, as handed to us by Xenophon, by Plato and Cicero. The result was an agreement that the king should have a suspensive veto on the laws, that the legislature should be composed of a single body only, & that to be chosen by the people. This Concordate decided the fate of the constitution. The Patriots all rallied to the principles thus settled, carried every question agreeably to them, and reduced the Aristocracy to insignificance and impotence. But duties of exculpation were now incumbent on me. I waited on Count Montmorin the next morning,
and explained to him with truth and candor how it had happened that my house had been made the scene of conferences of such a character. He told me he already knew everything which had passed, that, so far from taking umbrage at the use made of my house on that occasion, he earnestly wished I would habitually assist at such conferences, being sure I should be useful in moderating the warmer spirits, and promoting a wholesome and practicable reformation only. I told him I knew too well the duties I owed to the king, to the nation, and to my own country to take any part in councils concerning their internal government, and that I should persevere with care in the character of a neutral and passive spectator, with wishes only and very sincere ones, that those measures might prevail which would be for the greatest good of the nation. I have no doubt indeed that this conference was previously known and approved by this honest minister, who was in confidence and communication with the patriots, and wished for a reasonable reform of the Constitution.

Here I discontinue my relation of the French revolution. The minuteness with which I have so far given its details is disproportioned to the general scale of my narrative. But I have thought it justified by the interest which the whole world must take in this revolution. As yet we are but in the first chapter of its history. The appeal to the rights of man, which had been made in the U.S., was taken up by France, first of the European nations. From her the spirit has spread over those of the South. The tyrants of the North have allied indeed against it, but it is irresistible. Their opposition will only multiply its millions of human victims; their own satellites will catch it, and the condition of man thro’ the civilized world will be finally and greatly ameliorated. This is a wonderful instance of great events from small causes. So inscrutable is the arrangement of causes & consequences in this world that a two-penny duty on tea, unjustly imposed in a sequestered part of it, changes the condition of all it’s inhabitant. I have been more minute in relating the early transactions of this regeneration because I was in circumstances peculiarly favorable for a knowledge of the truth. Possessing the confidence and intimacy of the leading patriots, & more than all of the Marquis Fayette, their head and Atlas, who had no secrets from me, I learnt with correctness the views & proceedings of that party; while my intercourse with the diplomatic missionaries of
Europe at Paris, all of them with the court, and eager in prying into it's councils and proceedings, gave me a knowlege of these also. My information was always and immediately committed to writing, in letters to Mr. Jay, and often to my friends, and a recurrence to these letters now insures me against errors of memory.

These opportunities of information ceased at this period, with my retirement from this interesting scene of action. I had been more than a year soliciting leave to go home with a view to place my daughters in the society & care of their friends, and to return for a short time to my station at Paris. But the metamorphosis thro' which our government was then passing from it's Chrysalid to it's Organic form suspended it's action in a great degree; and it was not till the last of August that I received the permission I had asked. – And here I cannot leave this great and good country without expressing my sense of it’s preeminence of character among the nations of the earth. A more benevolent people, I have never known, nor greater warmth & devotedness in their select friendships. Their kindness and accommodation to strangers is unparalleled, and the hospitality of Paris is beyond anything I had conceived practicable in a large city. Their eminence too in science, the communicative dispositions of their scientific men, the politeness of the general manners, the ease and vivacity of their conversation, give a charm to their society to be found nowhere else. In a comparison of this with other countries we have the proof of primacy, which was given to Themistocles after the battle of Salamis. Every general voted to himself the first reward of valor, and the second to Themistocles. So ask the travelled inhabitant of any nation. In what country on earth would you rather live? – Certainly in my own, where are all my friends, my relations, and the earliest & sweetest affections and recollections of my life. Which would be your second choice? France.

Ford I: 118–48

II.12 To William Short

Philadelphia, January 3, 1793

Dear Sir, – My last private letter to you was of Oct. 16. since which I have recieved your private one of Sep. 15. The tone of your letters
had for some time given me pain, on account of the extreme warmth
with which they censured the proceedings of the Jacobins of France.
I considered that sect as the same with the Republican patriots, and
the Feuillants as the Monarchical patriots, well known in the early
part of the revolution, and but little distant in their views, both
having in object the establishment of a free constitution, and dif-
fering only on the question whether their chief Executive should be
hereditary or not. The Jacobins (as since called) yeilded to the Feuil-
lants and tried the experiment of retaining their hereditary Execu-
tive. The experiment failed completely, and would have brought on
the reestablishment of despotism had it been pursued. The Jacobins
saw this, and that the expunging that officer was of absolute neces-
sity, and the Nation was with them in opinion, for however they
might have been formerly for the constitution framed by the first
assembly, they were come over from their hope in it, and were now
generally Jacobins. In the struggle which was necessary, many guilty
persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some inno-
cent. These I deplore as much as any body, and shall deplore some
of them to the day of my death. But I deplore them as I should
have done had they fallen in battle. It was necessary to use the arm
of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but
blind to a certain degree. A few of their cordial friends met at their
hands the fate of enemies. But time and truth will rescue and
embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that
very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up
their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the
issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little
innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by
some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have
failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but
an Adam and an Eve left in every country, and left free, it would
be better than as it now is. I have expressed to you my sentiments,
because they are really those of 99 in an hundred of our citizens.
The universal feasts, and rejoicings which have lately been had on
account of the successes of the French shewed the genuine effusions
of their hearts. You have been wounded by the sufferings of your
friends, and have by this circumstance been hurried into a temper
of mind which would be extremely disrelished if known to your
To William Short, Jan. 3, 1793

The reserve of the Prest. of the U.S. had never permitted me to discover the light in which he viewed it, and as I was more anxious that you should satisfy him than me, I had still avoided explanations with you on the subject. But [you] induced him to break silence and to notice the extreme acrimony of your expressions. He added that he had been informed the sentiments you expressed in your conversations were equally offensive to our allies, and that you should consider yourself as the representative of your country and that what you say might be imputed to your constituents. He desired me therefore to write to you on this subject. He added that he considered France as the sheet anchor of this country and its friendship as a first object. There are in the U.S. some characters of opposite principles; some of them are high in office, others possessing great wealth, and all of them hostile to France and fondly looking to England as the staff of their hope. These I named to you on a former occasion. Their prospects have certainly not brightened. Excepting them, this country is entirely republican, friends to the constitution, anxious to preserve it and to have it administered according to its own republican principles. The little party above mentioned have espoused it only as a stepping stone to monarchy, and have endeavored to approximate it to that in its administration, in order to render its final transition more easy. The successes of republicanism in France have given the coup de grâce to their prospects, and I hope to their projects – I have developed to you faithfully the sentiments of your country, that you may govern yourself accordingly. I know your republicanism to be pure, and that it is no decay of that which has embittered you against its votaries in France, but too great a sensibility at the partial evil by which its object has been accomplished there. I have written to you in the stile to which I have been always accustomed with you, and which perhaps it is time I should lay aside. But while old men feel sensibly enough their own advance in years, they do not sufficiently recollect it in those whom they have seen young. In writing too the last private letter which will probably be written under present circumstances, in contemplating that your correspondence will shortly be turned over to I know not whom, but certainly to some one not in the habit of considering your interests with the same fostering anxieties I do, I have presented things without
reserve, satisfied you will ascribe what I have said to it's true motive, use it for your own best interest, and in that fulfill completely what I had in view.

With respect to the subject of your letter of Sep. 15. you will be sensible that many considerations would prevent my undertaking the reformation of a system of which I am so soon to take leave. It is but common decency to leave to my successor the moulding of his own business. – Not knowing how otherwise to convey this letter to you with certainty, I shall appeal to the friendship and honour of the Spanish commissioners here, to give it the protection of their cover, as a letter of private nature altogether. We have no remarkeable event here lately, but the death of Dr. Lee: nor have I any thing new to communicate to you of your friends or affairs. I am with unalterable affection & wishes for your prosperity, my dear Sir, your sincere friend and servant.

Ford vi: 153-7

II.13 To Dr. Thomas Cooper
Monticello, September 10, 1814

Dear Sir, – I regret much that I was so late in consulting you on the subject of the academy we wish to establish here. The progress of that business has obliged me to prepare an address to the President of the Board of Trustees, – a plan for its organization. I send you a copy of it with a broad margin, that, if your answer to mine of August 25th be not on the way, you may be so good as to write your suggestions either in the margin or on a separate paper. We shall still be able to avail ourselves of them by way of amendments.

Your letter of August 17th is received. Mr. Ogilvie left us four days ago, on a tour of health, which is to terminate at New York, from whence he will take his passage to Britain to receive livery and seisin of his new dignities and fortunes. I am in the daily hope of seeing M. Corrica, and the more anxious as I must in two or three weeks commence a journey of long absence from home.

A comparison of the conditions of Great Britain and the United States, which is the subject of your letter of August 17th, would be

1 The University of Virginia – Eds.
an interesting theme indeed. To discuss it minutely and demonstratively would be far beyond the limits of a letter. I will give you, therefore, in brief only, the result of my reflections on the subject. I agree with you in your facts, and in many of your reflections. My conclusion is without doubt, as I am sure yours will be, when the appeal to your sound judgment is seriously made. The population of England is composed of three descriptions of persons (for those of minor note are too inconsiderable to affect a general estimate). These are, 1. The aristocracy, comprehending the nobility, the wealthy commoners, the high grades of priesthood, and the officers of government. 2. The laboring class. 3. The eleemosynary class, or paupers, who are about one-fifth of the whole. The aristocracy, which have the laws and government in their hands, have so managed them as to reduce the third description below the means of supporting life, even by labor; and to force the second, whether employed in agriculture or the arts, to the maximum of labor which the construction of the human body can endure, and to the minimum of food, and of the meanest kind, which will preserve it in life, and in strength sufficient to perform its functions. To obtain food enough, and clothing, not only their whole strength must be unremittingly exerted, but the utmost dexterity also which they can acquire; and those of great dexterity only can keep their ground, while those of less must sink into the class of paupers. Nor is it manual dexterity alone, but the acutest resources of the mind also which are impressed into this struggle for life; and such as have means a little above the rest, as the master-workmen, for instance, must strengthen themselves by acquiring as much of the philosophy of their trade as will enable them to compete with their rivals, and keep themselves above ground. Hence the industry and manual dexterity of their journeymen and day-laborers, and the science of their master-workmen, keep them in the foremost ranks of competition with those of other nations; and the less dexterous individuals, falling into the eleemosynary ranks, furnish materials for armies and navies to defend their country, exercise piracy on the ocean, and carry conflagration, plunder and devastation, on the shores of all those who endeavor to withstand their aggressions. A society thus constituted possesses certainly the means of defence. But what does it defend? The pauperism of the lowest class, the abject oppression of the laboring, and the luxury, the riot, the domination and the
vicious happiness of the aristocracy. In their hands, the paupers are used as tools to maintain their own wretchedness, and to keep down the laboring portion by shooting them whenever the desperation produced by the cravings of their stomachs drives them into riots. Such is the happiness of scientific England; now let us see the American side of the medal.

And, first, we have no paupers, the old and crippled among us, who possess nothing and have no families to take care of them, being too few to merit notice as a separate section of society, or to affect a general estimate. The great mass of our population is of laborers; our rich, who can live without labor, either manual or professional, being few, and of moderate wealth. Most of the laboring class possess property, cultivate their own lands, have families, and from the demand for their labor are enabled to exact from the rich and the competent such prices as enable them to be fed abundantly, clothed above mere decency, to labor moderately and raise their families. They are not driven to the ultimate resources of dexterity and skill, because their wares will sell although not quite so nice as those of England. The wealthy, on the other hand, and those at their ease, know nothing of what the Europeans call luxury. They have only somewhat more of the comforts and decencies of life than those who furnish them. Can any condition of society be more desirable than this? Nor in the class of laborers do I mean to withhold from the comparison that portion whose color has condemned them, in certain parts of our Union, to a subjection to the will of others. Even these are better fed in these States, warmer clothed, and labor less than the journeymen or day-laborers of England. They have the comfort, too, of numerous families, in the midst of whom they live without want, or fear of it; a solace which few of the laborers of England possess. They are subject, it is true, to bodily coercion; but are not the hundreds of thousands of British soldiers and seamen subject to the same, without seeing, at the end of their career, when age and accident shall have rendered them unequal to labor, the certainty, which the other has, that he will never want? And has not the British seaman, as much as the African, been reduced to this bondage by force, in flagrant violation of his own consent, and of his natural right in his own person? and with the laborers of England generally, does not the moral coercion of want subject their will as despotically to that of their employer,
to the soldier, the seaman, or the slave? But do not mistake me. I am not advocating slavery. I am not justifying the wrongs we have committed on a foreign people, by the example of another nation committing equal wrongs on their own subjects. On the contrary, there is nothing I would not sacrifice to a practicable plan of abolishing every vestige of this moral and political depravity. But I am at present comparing the condition and degree of suffering to which oppression has reduced the man of one color, with the condition and degree of suffering to which oppression has reduced the man of another color; equally condemning both. Now let us compute by numbers the sum of happiness of the two countries. In England, happiness is the lot of the aristocracy only; and the proportion they bear to the laborers and paupers, you know better than I do. Were I to guess that they are four in every hundred, then the happiness of the nation would be to its misery as one in twenty-five. In the United States it is as eight millions to zero, or as all to none. But it is said they possess the means of defence, and that we do not. How so? Are we not men? Yes; but our men are so happy at home that they will not hire themselves to be shot at for a shilling a day. Hence we can have no standing armies for defence, because we have no paupers to furnish the materials. The Greeks and Romans had no standing armies, yet they defended themselves. The Greeks by their laws, and the Romans by the spirit of their people, took care to put into the hands of their rulers no such engine of oppression as a standing army. Their system was to make every man a soldier, and oblige him to repair to the standard of his country whenever that was reared. This made them invincible; and the same remedy will make us so. In the beginning of our government we were willing to introduce the least coercion possible on the will of the citizen. Hence a system of military duty was established too indulgent to his indolence. This is the first opportunity we have had of trying it, and it has completely failed; an issue foreseen by many, and for which remedies have been proposed. That of classing the militia according to age, and allotting each age to the particular kind of service to which it was competent, was proposed to Congress in 1805, and subsequently; and, on the last trial was lost, I believe, by a single vote only. Had it prevailed, what has now happened would not have happened. Instead of burning our Capitol, we should have possessed theirs in Montreal and
Quebec. We must now adopt it, and all will be safe. We had in the United States in 1805, in round numbers of free, able-bodied men,

- 120,000 of the ages of 18 to 21 inclusive
- 200,000 of the ages of 22 to 26 inclusive
- 200,000 of the ages of 27 to 35 inclusive
- 200,000 of the ages of 35 to 45 inclusive

In all, 720,000 of the ages of 18 to 45 inclusive

With this force properly classed, organized, trained, armed and subject to tours of a year of military duty, we have no more to fear for the defence of our country than those who have the resources of despotism and pauperism.

But, you will say, we have been devastated in the meantime. True, some of our public buildings have been burnt, and some scores of individuals on the tide-water have lost their movable property and their houses. I pity them, and execrate the barbarians who delight in unavailing mischief. But these individuals have their lands and their hands left. They are not paupers, they have still better means of subsistence than \( \frac{2}{3} \) of the people of England. Again, the English have burnt our Capitol and President’s house by means of their force. We can burn their St. James’ and St. Paul’s by means of our money, offered to their own incendiaries, of whom there are thousands in London who would do it rather than starve. But it is against the laws of civilized warfare to employ secret incendiaries. Is it not equally so to destroy the works of art by armed incendiaries? Bonaparte, possessed at times of almost every capital of Europe, with all his despotism and power, injured no monument of art. If a nation, breaking through all the restraints of civilized character, uses its means of destruction (power, for example) without distinction of objects, may we not use our means (our money and their pauperism) to retaliate their barbarous ravages? Are we obliged to use for resistance exactly the weapons chosen by them for aggression? When they destroyed Copenhagen by superior force, against all the laws of God and man, would it have been unjustifiable for the Danes to have destroyed their ships by torpedoes? Clearly not; and they and we should now be justifiable in the conflagration of St. James’ and St. Paul’s. And if we do not carry it into execution, it is because we think it more moral and more honorable to set a good example, than follow a bad one.
To Dr. Thomas Cooper, Sept. 10, 1814

So much for the happiness of the people of England, and the morality of their government, in comparison with the happiness and the morality of America. Let us pass to another subject.

The crisis, then, of the abuses of banking is arrived. The banks have pronounced their own sentence of death. Between two and three hundred millions of dollars of their promissory notes are in the hands of the people, for solid produce and property sold, and they formally declare they will not pay them. This is an act of bankruptcy of course, and will be so pronounced by any court before which it shall be brought. But *cui bono?* The law can only uncover their insolvency, by opening to its suitors their empty vaults. Thus by the dupery of our citizens, and tame acquiescence of our legislators, the nation is plundered of two or three hundred millions of dollars, treble the amount of debt contracted in the Revolutionary war, and which, instead of redeeming our liberty, has been expended on sumptuous houses, carriages, and dinners. A fearful tax! if equalized on all; but overwhelming and convulsive by its partial fall. The crush will be tremendous; very different from that brought on by our paper money. That rose and fell gradually that it kept all on their guard, and affected severely only early or long-winded contracts. Here the contract of yesterday crushes in an instant the one or the other party. The banks stopping payment suddenly, all their mercantile and city debtors do the same; and all, in short, except those in the country, who, possessing property, will be good in the end. But this resource will not enable them to pay a cent on the dollar. From the establishment of the United States Bank, to this day, I have preached against this system, but have been sensible no cure could be hoped but in the catastrophe now happening. The remedy was to let banks drop gradation at the expiration of their charters, and for the State governments to relinquish the power of establishing others. This would not, as it should not, have given the power of establishing them to Congress. But Congress could then have issued treasury notes payable within a fixed period, and founded on a specific tax, the proceeds of which, as they came in, should be exchangeable for the notes of that particular emission only. This depended, it is true, on the will of the State legislatures, and would have brought on us the phalanx of paper interest. But that interest is now defunct. Their gossamer castles are dissolved, and they can no longer impede and overawe
the salutary measures of the government. Their paper was received on a belief that it was cash on demand. Themselves have declared it was nothing, and such scenes are now to take place as will open the eyes of credulity and of insanity itself, to the dangers of a paper medium abandoned to the discretion of avarice and of swindlers. It is impossible not to deplore our past follies, and their present consequences, but let them at least be warnings against like follies in future. The banks have discontinued themselves. We are now without any medium; and necessity, as well as patriotism and confidence, will make us all eager to receive treasury notes, if founded on specific taxes. Congress may now borrow of the public, and without interest, all the money they may want, to the amount of a competent circulation, by merely issuing their own promissory notes, of proper denominations for the larger purposes of circulation, but not for the small. Leave that door open for the entrance of metallic money. And, to give readier credit to their bills, without obliging themselves to give cash for them on demand, let their collectors be instructed to do so, when they have cash; thus, in some measure, performing the functions of a bank, as to their own notes. Providence seems, indeed, by a special dispensation, to have put down for us, without a struggle, that very paper enemy which the interest of our citizens long since required ourselves to put down, at whatever risk. The work is done. The moment is pregnant with futurity, and if not seized at once by Congress, I know not on what shoal our bark is next to be stranded. The State legislatures should be immediately urged to relinquish the right of establishing banks of discount. Most of them will comply, on patriotic principles, under the convictions of the moment; and the non-complying may be crowded into concurrence by legitimate devices. Vale, et me, ut amaris, ama.

L & B xiv: 179–90

To Francis W. Gilmer
Monticello, June 7, 1816

Dear Sir, — I received a few days ago from Mr. Dupont the enclosed manuscript, with permission to read it, and a request, when read,
to forward it to you, in expectation that you would translate it. It is well worthy of publication for the instruction of our citizens, being profound, sound, and short. Our legislators are not sufficiently apprised of the rightful limits of their power; that their true office is to declare and enforce only our natural rights and duties, and to take none of them from us. No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another: and this is all from which the laws ought to restrain him; every man is under the natural duty of contributing to the necessities of the society; and this is all the laws should enforce on him; and, no man having a natural right to be the judge between himself and another, it is his natural duty to submit to the umpirage of an impartial third. When the laws have declared and enforced all this, they have fulfilled their functions; and the idea is quite unfounded, that on entering into society we give up any natural right. The trial of every law by one of these texts, would lessen much the labors of our legislators, and lighten equally our municipal codes. There is a work of the first order of merit now in the press at Washington, by Destutt Tracy, on the subject of political economy, which he brings into the compass of three hundred pages, octavo. In a preliminary discourse on the origin of the right of property, he coincides much with the principles of the present manuscript; but is more developed, more demonstrative. He promises a future work on morals, in which I lament to see that he will adopt the principles of Hobbes, or humiliation to human nature; that the sense of justice and injustice is not derived from our natural organization, but founded on convention only. I lament this the more, as he is unquestionably the ablest writer living, on abstract subjects. Assuming the fact, that the earth has been created in time, and consequently the dogma of final causes, we yield, of course, to this short syllogism. Man was created for social intercourse; but social intercourse cannot be maintained without a sense of justice; then man must have been created with a sense of justice. There is an error into which most of the speculators on government have fallen, and which the well-known state of society of our Indians ought, before now, to have corrected. In their hypothesis of the origin of government, they suppose it to have

1 I.e. TJ's revised translation of Destutt de Tracy's A Treatise on Political Economy (Georgetown, D.C., 1817). – Eds.
Natural Law, Natural Right, and Revolution

commenced in the patriarchal or monarchical form. Our Indians are evidently in that state of nature which has passed the association of a single family; and not yet submitted to the authority of positive laws, or of any acknowledged magistrate. Every man, with them, is perfectly free to follow his own inclinations. But if, in doing this, he violates the rights of another, if the case be slight, he is punished by the disesteem of his society, or, as we say, by public opinion; if serious, he is tomahawked as a dangerous enemy. Their leaders conduct them by the influence of their character only; and they follow, or not, as they please, him of whose character for wisdom or war they have the highest opinion. Hence the origin of the parties among them adhering to different leaders, and governed by their advice, not by their command. The Cherokees, the only tribe I know to be contemplating the establishment of regular laws, magistrates, and government, propose a government of representatives, elected from every town. But of all things, they least think of subjecting themselves to the will of one man. This, the only instance of actual fact within our knowledge, will be then a beginning by republican, and not by patriarchal or monarchical government, as speculative writers have generally conjectured.

We have to join in mutual congratulations on the appointment of our friend Corrêa [da Serra], to be minister or envoy of Portugal, here. This, I hope, will give him to us for life. Nor will it at all interfere with his botanical rambles or journeys. The government of Portugal is so peaceable and inoffensive, that it has never any altercations with its friends. If their minister abroad writes them once a quarter that all is well, they desire no more. I learn, (though not from Corrêa himself,) that he thinks of paying us a visit as soon as he is through his course of lectures. Not to lose this happiness again by my absence, I have informed him I shall set out for Poplar Forest the 20th instant, and be back the first week of July. I wish you and he could concert your movements so as to meet here, and that you would make this your headquarters. It is a good central point from which to visit your connections; and you know our practice of placing our guests at their ease, by showing them we are so ourselves and that we follow our necessary vocations, instead of fatiguing them by hanging unremittingly on their shoulders. I salute you with affectionate esteem and respect.

L & B xv: 23-7
Dear Sir, — I received the enclosed letters from the President, with a request, that after perusal I would forward them to you, for perusal by yourself also and to be returned then to him.

You have doubtless seen Timothy Pickering's 4th. of July observations on the Declaration of Independence.¹ If his principles and prejudices personal and political, gave us no reason to doubt whether he had truly quoted the information he alleged to have received from Mr. Adams,² I should then say that, in some of the particulars, Mr. Adams' memory has led him into unquestionable error. At the age of 88, and 47 years after the transactions of Independence, this is not wonderful. Nor should I, at the age of 80, on the small advantage of that difference only, venture to oppose my memory to his, were it not supported by written notes, taken by myself at the moment and on the spot. He says, "the committee (of 5 to wit, Dr. Franklin, Sherman, Livingston, and ourselves) met, discussed the subject, and then appointed him and myself to make the draught; that we, as a subcommittee met, and after the urgencies of each on the other, I consented to undertake the task; that the draught being made, we, the subcommittee, met, and conned the paper over, and he does not remember that he made or suggested a single alteration." Now these details are quite incorrect. The committee of 5 met, no such thing as as a subcommittee was proposed, but they unanimously pressed on myself alone to undertake the draught. I consented; I drew it; but before I reported it to the committee, I communicated it separately to Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams, requesting their corrections, because they were the two members of whose judgments and amendments I wished most to have the benefit, before presenting it to the Committee; and you have seen the original paper now in my hands, with the corrections of Doctor Franklin and Mr. Adams interlined in their own handwritings. Their alterations were two or three only, and merely

¹ "Colonel Pickering's Observations Introductory to Reading the Declaration of Independence at Salem, July 4, 1823"; repr. as Appendix D in Charles W. Upham, The Life of Timothy Pickering (Boston, 1873), iv, pp. 463–9. — Eds.
² John Adams to Timothy Pickering, Aug. 22, 1822; repr. infra, Appendix B. — Eds.
I then wrote a fair copy, reported it to the Committee, and from them, unaltered to Congress. This personal communication and consultation with Mr. Adams, he has misremembered into the actings of a sub-committee. Pickering's observations, and Mr. Adams' in addition, "that it contained no new ideas, that it is a commonplace compilation, it's sentiments hackneyed in Congress for two years before, and its essence contained in Otis's pamphlet," may all be true. Of that I am not to be the judge. Richard Henry Lee charged it as copied from Locke's treatise on government. Otis's pamphlet I never saw, and whether I had gathered my ideas from reading or reflection I do not know. I know only that I turned to neither book or pamphlet while writing it. I did not consider it as any part of my charge to invent new ideas altogether and to offer no sentiment which had ever been expressed before. Had Mr. Adams been so restrained, Congress would have lost the benefit of his bold and impressive advocations of the rights of revolution. For no man's confident and fervid addresses, more than Mr. Adams's, encouraged and supported us thro' the difficulties surrounding us, which, like the ceaseless action of gravity, weighed on us by night and by day. Yet, on the same ground, we may ask what of these elevated thoughts was new, or can be affirmed never before to have entered the conceptions of man?

Whether also the sentiments of independence, and the reasons for declaring it which make so great a portion of the instrument, had been hackneyed in Congress for two years before the 4th. of July '76, or this dictum also of Mr. Adams be another slip of memory, let history say. This however I will say for Mr. Adams, that he supported the Declaration with zeal and ability, fighting fearlessly for every word of it. As to myself, I thought it a duty to be, on that occasion, a passive auditor of the opinions of others, more impartial judges than I could be, of its merits or demerits. During the debate I was sitting by Dr. Franklin, and he observed that I was writhing a little under the acrimonious criticisms on some of its parts; and it was on that occasion that, by way of comfort, he told me the story of John Thompson, the Hatter, and his new sign.

Timothy [Pickering] thinks the instrument the better for having a fourth of it expunged. He would have thought it still better had the other three-fourths gone out also, all but the single sentiment (the only one he approves), which recommends friendship to his
II.16 To Henry Lee, May 8, 1825

dear England, whenever she is willing to be at peace with us. His insinuations are that altho' "the high tone of the instrument was in unison with the warm feelings of the times, this sentiment of habitual friendship to England should never be forgotten, and that the duties it enjoins should especially be borne in mind on every celebration of this anniversary." In other words, that the Declaration, as being a libel on the government of England, composed in times of passion, should now be buried in utter oblivion to spare the feelings of our English friends and Angloman fellow citizens. But it is not to wound them that we wish to keep it in mind; but to cherish the principles of the instrument in the bosoms of our own citizens: and it is a heavenly comfort to see that these principles are yet so strongly felt, as to render a circumstance so trifling as this little lapse of memory of Mr. Adams worthy of being solemnly announced and supported at an anniversary assemblage of the nation on its birthday. In opposition however to Mr. Pickering, I pray God that these principles may be eternal and close the prayer with my affectionate wishes for yourself of long life, health and happiness.

L & B xv: 460–4

II.16 To Henry Lee

Monticello, May 8, 1825

Dear Sir, — That George Mason was author of the [Virginia] bill of rights, and of the constitution founded on it, the evidence of the day established fully in my mind. Of the paper you mention, purporting to be instructions of the Virginia delegation in Congress, I have no recollection. If it were anything more than a project of some private hand, that is to say, had any such instructions been ever given by the convention, they would appear in the journals, which we possess entire. But with respect to our rights, and the acts of the British government contravening those rights, there was but one opinion on this side of the water. All American whigs thought alike on these subjects. When forced, therefore, to resort to arms for redress, an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. This was the object of the
Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c. The historical documents which you mention as in your possession, ought all to be found, and I am persuaded you will find, to be corroborative of the facts and principles advanced in that Declaration. Be pleased to accept assurances of my great esteem and respect.

II.17 To Roger C. Weightman

Monticello, June 24, 1826

Respected Sir, – The kind invitation I receive from you, on the part of the citizens of the city of Washington, to be present with them at their celebration on the fiftieth anniversary of American Independence, as one of the surviving signers of an instrument pregnant with our own, and the fate of the world, is most flattering to myself, and heightened by the honorable accompaniment proposed for the comfort of such a journey. It adds sensibly to the sufferings of sickness, to be deprived by it of a personal participation in the rejoicings of that day. But acquiescence is a duty, under circumstances not placed among those we are permitted to control. I should, indeed, with peculiar delight, have met and exchanged there congratulations personally with the small band, the remnant of that host of worthies, who joined with us on that day, in the bold and doubtful election we were to make for our country, between submission or the sword; and to have enjoyed with them the consola-
tory fact, that our fellow citizens, after half a century of experience and prosperity, continue to approve the choice we made. May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.

I will ask permission here to express the pleasure with which I should have met my ancient neighbors of the city of Washington and its vicinities, with whom I passed so many years of a pleasing social intercourse; an intercourse which so much relieved the anxieties of the public cares, and left impressions so deeply engraved in my affections, as never to be forgotten. With my regret that ill health forbids me the gratification of an acceptance, be pleased to receive for yourself, and those for whom you write, the assurance of my highest respect and friendly attachments.