

PROBLEMS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY:  
A DOCUMENTARY COLLECTION

The Ninth of Thermidor:  
The Fall of Robespierre

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## FOREWORD

*Problems in European History: A Documentary Collection* has arisen out of a collective teaching experience. The series seeks to overcome a shortcoming which the authors believe persists in college history instruction. Certainly the restricting confines of the traditional textbook have been expanded as numerous collections of "readings" have appeared. But the undergraduate still remains at a distance from the historian's workshop. A compilation of heavily edited "significant documents" does not make for the sense of contact with the past that the study of history ought to promote. And the predigested selections from contending historians, neatly arrayed on either side of "classic" controversies, does not get the student to probe the underlying evidence; in fact, these academic disputations often leave him bewildered.

The conviction that students learned little of the way in which historians actually worked prompted a group of young Harvard historians five years ago to develop a new approach. The course that resulted — Social Sciences 3: Problems in Modern European History — represented an attempt to focus intensively on a small number of problems. Each problem would involve careful analysis of a wide variety of original source material. The student could develop the skills and understanding of historical explanation. In learning to compare evidence, make and test hypotheses, and judge critically earlier accounts, he would encounter some of

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morrow, I shall hasten to send you some copies, and if the circumstances require it I shall share with you any reflections it may inspire in me.

Our foreign enemies have certainly acted in concert with their vile agents here at home, but the energy of the Convention—whose great majority is still pure and can never be corrupted nor carried away—has nothing to fear from the terrors with which [the conspirators] wished to strike it down. The Mountain is not shaken; it is still well guarded and well defended. Therefore, rest assured, if anyone has tried to frighten you, you can resume your usual sense of security with confidence.

Besides, our victories are continuing, and the despots' satellites cannot make up their minds to face the troops of the Republic, which are in possession of the important town of Antwerp. The enemy—who well knew that they were incapable of fighting over it for long had the good sense to evacuate it very suddenly when they found that we intended to take it. There is a citadel essential to anyone who would control the city. This news will not be known in the Convention until two o'clock; in the *départements* not until tomorrow. I thought it would please you to know it twenty-four hours in advance. I give you my word that it is true.

I learned with great satisfaction that our dear fellow-citizen Sorbier had been acquitted by the revolutionary tribunal of Nîmes. Lantheyrès d'Alais was also, and I am equally delighted. Try to keep me informed of what goes on in that community. It is with regret that I see there domestic divisions whose development it is very important to check. Two distinct parties seem to be forming there and they will come to a show down if it is not possible to reconcile them. The Committee on General Security is besieged with conflicting demands, for and against Lantheyrès and Rovère. Let us avoid giving the enemy the spectacle of a tragic division in our ranks, which would only please them and lend them weapons to attack us.

I would not mention my father-in-law if I did not know that the steps justice and humanity inspired you to take in his behalf must have determined his fate.

I am waiting to hear the outcome with the impatience so natural to filial piety, which is a Republican virtue. I hope it will be as we all desire; whatever duty it demands of me I shall fulfill—I am a Republican.

A true Republican has as father and son only virtue, the gods, the Law, and his Country.

My father-in-law is not an enemy of the revolution, however. I believe that he will soon be restored to liberty, the first-fruit of the revolution.

Adieu, brothers and friends, I embrace you all from the bottom of my heart.

Salut et Fraternité

Voulland

### National Convention

8 Thermidor, Year II [26 July 1794]

#### ROBESPIERRE:

Citizens, let others present to you flattering pictures; I come to speak to you useful truths. I come not to realize the ridiculous alarms spread by perfidy, but to extinguish, if possible, the firebrands of discord, by the sole force of truth. I am about to defend before you your outraged authority and violated liberty. I will also defend myself. You will not be surprised; you resemble not the tyrants you combat against; your ears are not offended by the cries of outraged innocence; and well you know that this cause is no stranger to you.

The Revolutions which up to this time have changed the face of empires, have had for their object a change of dynasty, or the transfer of power from the hands of a single chief to those of several chiefs. The French Revolution is the first that shall have been founded on the theory of the rights of humanity, and on the principles of justice. Other Revolutions required only ambition; ours requires virtue. Ignorance and brute force have absorbed all former Revolutions in a new Despotism; ours, having emanated from justice, can repose but in the bosom of justice. The Republic insensibly led by the force of circumstances, and by the struggle of the friends of liberty against ever-reviving conspiracies, has glided along, as it were, through the midst of all the factions; but it found their power organized around it, and every means of influence in their hands; accordingly has it been incessantly persecuted, from its birth, in the person of every upright man that fought in its defence. The reason is this: to conserve the advan-

This translation is reprinted from a pamphlet entitled *The Last Discourse of Maximillian Robespierre* (London, 1867). The speech was "translated by the late James Bronterre O'Brien, B.A., while incarcerated in Lancaster Castle (for alleged political offences), during the year 1840-41." O'Brien's rhetorical embellishments are retained.

tages of their position, the chiefs of the factions and their agents have been forced to hide themselves beneath the form of the Republic. Thus Précý at Lyon, and Brissot at Paris, were crying "*Vive la République!*" whilst plotting its destruction. The same of all the conspirators; they have all adopted, even with more than ordinary forwardness and apparent zeal, all the formulas, all the rallying words of Patriotism. The Austrian, whose craft or profession it was to combat the Revolution—the partisan of Orleans, whose game it was to play the patriot—were to be met on the same line; neither the one nor the other could be distinguished from the genuine Republican. They did not combat our principles, but they corrupted them; they did not blaspheme against the Revolution, but they sought to dishonour it under the guise of serving it. They declaimed against the tyrants, and conspired for the tyranny; they glorified the Republic, and calumniated the Republicans. The friends of Liberty seek to overthrow the power of tyrants by the force of truth; the tyrants seek to destroy the defenders of Liberty by calumny; they give the name of tyranny to the ascendancy of even the principles of truth itself. Let but this system once prevail, and Liberty is no more! There is then nothing legitimate but perfidy, nothing criminal but virtue; for it is in the very nature of things that one or the other influence must exist wherever men are gathered together—the influence of tyranny or that of reason. Whenever the latter is proscribed as a crime, tyranny reigns; wheresoever good citizens are condemned to silence, the wicked must needs be in the ascendant, and the reigning Government was necessarily a Government of villains.

Here I have need to open and disburden my heart: you, too, have need to hear the truth. Believe not that I have come here to enter any accusation: a more pressing care engrosses me—and, besides, 'tis not for me to take charge of other men's duties. Indeed, we are beset by so many and such imminent dangers, that the business of accusation is now but of secondary importance in my eyes. I have come here in order, if possible, to dissipate cruel errors; I come to stifle the horrid fermentations of discord with which it is sought to fire this temple of Liberty and the entire Republic. I come to unveil abuses which menace the country with ruin, and which your probity alone can repress. If I say ought of the persecutions directed against myself, you will not, I hope, make it a crime. You have nothing in common with the tyrants who pursue me; the cries of oppressed innocence are not foreign to your hearts; you do not make a sport of justice and humanity, and you are well aware that the machinations I allude to are not irrelevant to your cause and to that of the country. Now, what foundation is there

for this odious system of terror and calumnies? To whom ought we to be objects of dread? Is it to the enemies or to the friends of the Republic? Is it for knaves and tyrants to fear us, or is it for honest men and patriots? What, *we*, objects of terror to patriots? *We*, who have rescued them from the hands of every faction that conspired against them!—*we*, who day after day are contesting and wrestling, as it were, for every inch of ground with the deep-designing hypocrites who still dare to oppress them!—*we*, who are in hot pursuit of the miscreants that seek to prolong their calamities by involving them and us in endless deceits and inextricable mazes of imposture!—*we*, objects of terror to the National Convention? And what, pray, are we without the Convention? And who is it that defended the National Convention at the peril of his life? Who devoted himself for its conservation, when execrable factions were conspiring its ruin, in the face of France? Who devoted himself for its glory when the vile agents of tyranny were preaching Atheism and immorality in its name—when so many others were culpably silent on the misdeeds of their accomplices, and seemed only to await the signal of carnage to imbrue their hands with the blood of the people's Representatives—when virtue herself stood mute, appalled at the horrible ascendancy of crime? And for whom did the conspirators destine their first blows? Against whom did Simon conspire in the Luxembourg? Who were the victims marked out for sacrifice by Chaumette and Ronsin? To what place was the troop of assassins to march, after opening the prisons? Is there no poignard for us in the cargoes which England is consigning to her accomplices in France and Paris? It is at *us* the assassin's dagger is aimed, yet *we* it is who are painted as objects of terror. And what, pray, are those great acts of severity we are reproached with? Who, and of what character, were the victims?—Hébert, Ronsin, Chabot, Danton, Delacroix, Fabre d'Églantine, and some few of their accomplices. Is it with *their* punishment we are reproached? Why, not a man would dare to defend them. But if we have only denounced monsters whose death has saved the Convention and the Republic, who can feel alarm at our principles—who can accuse us by anticipation of injustice and cruelty, if it be not those who resemble them? No, we have not been too severe. I call to witness the Republic which respires! I call to witness the National Representation, environed, as it is, with the respect due to the representation of a great people! I call to witness the patriots who are once more groaning in the dungeons which the miscreants have opened for them! I call to witness the fresh and repeated crimes of the enemies of our liberty, and the guilty perseverance of the tyrants in league against us! Talk of our

rigour, indeed, while the country is at this moment reproaching us with our weakness!

Is it we who have plunged the patriots into dungeons, and carried terror into all ranks and conditions? No! it is the monsters we have accused. Is it we who, conniving at the crimes of the aristocracy, and protecting known traitors, have declared war against peaceable citizens—erected into crimes what were only incurable prejudices, or matters of indifference, in order to find crimes and culprits everywhere, and thus render the Revolution odious to the very people who made it? No! it is the monsters we have accused. Is it we who, raking up old and long-abandoned opinions (the fruit of tyrannic influences), have waved the axe of the Revolution over the heads of the great majority of the National Convention, and in the popular societies have demanded the heads of *six hundred representatives* of the people? No! it is the monsters we have accused. Can it be forgotten that we it was who threw ourselves into the breach between them and their perfidious adversaries, at a time when . . . [Here occurs a gap or break in Robespierre's Manuscript, which leaves the sentence imperfect.]

You know the march of our enemies. They first attacked the National Convention in mass; that project failed. They next attacked the Committee of Public Safety in mass; that, too, has failed. Their plan now is to attack us one by one, in detail—to isolate us from one another, the more easily to overwhelm us. In this way they have for some time waged war against certain of the members of the Committee of Public Safety. Indeed, they would fain appear to attack only one member of it—the individual now before you. But, however they may vary their tactics, they always march towards the same end. That the tyrants of Europe should dare to proscribe a Representative of the French People is unquestionably the excess of insolence; but that Frenchmen calling themselves Republicans should labour to carry into execution the death-sentence pronounced by the tyrants, is the excess of scandal and opprobium. Is it true that odious lists have been hawked about, in which are noted down for victims a certain number of members of the Convention—lists which they pretend to be the work of the Committee of Public Safety, and to have been prepared by me in particular; for they refer the authorship to me? Is it true that our enemies have dared to invent sittings of the Committee which have never been held—to imagine rigorous resolves and warrants which have never existed, and attestations no less chimerical and false? Is it true they have tried to persuade a certain number of irreproachable members of this House that their destruction was resolved upon—to persuade all

who by some error had paid an inevitable tribute to the fatality of circumstances and to human weakness, that they were devoted to the doom of conspirators? Is it true that this game of imposture has been played with so much art and audacity, that a great number were actually afraid to pass the night in their own homes? Yes! the facts are authenticated, and the proofs of these two manœuvres are in the hands of the Committee of Public Safety. And you, too, Deputies who have just returned from mission in the Departments—you could disclose many similar facts. And you, Deputies who have just arrived to take the place of ex-members—you can tell us of the intrigues set on foot to deceive you, to sour and prejudice you, and that with a view to drag you into the fatal coalition of the conspirators. What was the language used—what were the acts done in those mysterious coteries, at those nocturnal cabals, at those repasts where perfidy distributed to the guests the poisons of hatred and calumny? What wished they for—the authors of these machinations? What did they desire? Was it the safety of the country—the dignity and unity of the National Convention? Who were they? What facts are there to justify the horrible idea they sought to convey of us—the horrible impression they sought to leave behind? What other persons have been accused by the Committees, besides the Chaumettes, the Héberts, the Dantons, the Chabots, the Delacroixs? Is it, then, the memory of conspirators they would defend? Is it the death of conspirators they would avenge? If they accuse us of having denounced some traitors, let them also accuse the Convention, which authorized their accusation; let them accuse Justice, which has smitten the traitors; let them accuse the people, who have applauded their punishment. Which is the more likely party to harbour guilty designs against the National Representation—the man who prosecutes its enemies, or the man who protects them? And how long is it since the punishment of crime began to terrify virtue?

Such is, however, the basis of those projects of Dictatorship, and treasonable designs against the National Representation, imputed, in the first instance, to the Committee of Public Safety in general, and subsequently to myself alone. By what fatality has this grave accusation been suddenly transferred to a single member of the Committee? Strange project, indeed! for a man to engage the National Representation to murder itself in detail with its own hands, in order to pave the way for himself to absolute power. I leave other people to perceive the ridiculous side of these inculpations; for myself I can see only their atrocity. Monsters! who would thus rob me of the esteem of the National Convention—the most glorious reward that mortal ever reaped from his

labours—a reward, too, which I have neither usurped or inveigled, but which I have been forced to conquer. I call upon you, monsters! to render account to public opinion of your frightful perseverance in following up your own bloody project—*your project to massacre all the friends of their country*. To appear an object of terror in the eyes of those we revere and love is, for a man of feeling and probity, the most frightful of tortures. To make such a man undergo it, is the most enormous of crimes. But let me call down the full weight of your indignation on the atrocious manœuvres resorted to, to prop up these extravagant calumnies.

Everywhere acts of oppression and tyranny had been multiplied to extend the system of terror and calumny; impure agents were prodigal of unjust arrestations; destructive projects of finance menaced every moderate fortune, and brought despair upon a countless multitude of families attached to the Revolution. The nobles and the priests were terrified by concerted motions; the payments due to the creditors of the state, and to public functionaries, were suspended; a resolution was surprised from the Committee of Public Safety, which renewed the prosecution (long since abandoned) against the members of the Committee of the 10th August, under the pretence of compelling them to tender their accounts. Within the Convention itself, it was pretended that the Mountain was menaced, because certain members sitting in that part of the hall thought themselves in danger; and in order to interest the entire National Convention in the same cause, the affair of the seventy-three imprisoned (Girondins) Deputies was, on a sudden revived; and mark!—*all these events were industriously imputed to me, who was an absolute stranger to them!* The conspirators gave out that I wished to immolate the Mountain; *they* gave out that I wished to destroy the other half of the Convention as well. On the right side of the House they painted me as the persecutor of the sixty-two Deputies in custody! On the opposite side, they accused me of defending them, and said that I supported the Marais. That was the expression of my calumniators. Let me remark, that the most potent argument employed by the Hébertist faction to prove me a *Moderate*, was the opposition I had given to the proscription of a great part of the National Convention, and more particularly my opinion on the proposition for putting the *sixty-two* Deputies on their trial without a previous report.

Ah! indeed, when at the risk of offending public opinion, and when consulting only the sacred interests of my Country, I saved from a hasty and fatal decision men whose opinions would have sent me to the scaffold, had their opinions triumphed—when, upon other occasions, I

had exposed myself to all the furies of a hypocritical faction, to insist upon having the principles of strict justice carried out in favour of men who had never shewn the like forbearance towards me—I was far, indeed, from supposing that the country would deem itself under any obligation to me for such conduct; mean, indeed, is the opinion I should have formed of a country in which such conduct would be thought remarkable, or in which pompous and laudatory names would be given to what an honest man regards only as indispensable duties. But still farther was I from supposing that the day would come when I should be accused of being the executioner of the very men in whose behalf I had fulfilled those duties, and of being the enemy of the National Convention, which I had served with devotion; least of all did I imagine that I should be at one and the same time accused of wishing to defend the Convention, and of wishing to murder it! But, be the consequences what they may, nothing shall ever change my principles or my sentiments. As to the Deputies under arrest, I declare that, so far from having participated in the decree concerning them, I considered it, to say the least, extraordinary under the circumstances; I declare that they have never for an instant formed the subject of my thoughts since I discharged, in their behalf, the full tribute of duty which my heart dictated, by opposing the proposition for sending them to the Revolutionary Tribunal. The rest is a tissue of atrocious impostures. As to the Convention, my first duty, as my first bias, is an unbounded respect for it, as being the Representative of the Nation. Without wishing to absolve crime, without wishing to justify in themselves the disastrous errors of several members, without wishing to tarnish the glory of the energetic defenders of liberty, nor to weaken the illusion of a name sacred in the annals of the Revolution, I declare that every Representative of the people, whose heart is pure, ought to resume the confidence and dignity which befits him. I know but two parties, that of *good*, and that of *bad*, citizens. I believe patriotism not to be an affair of party, but an affair of the heart; that it consists neither in insolence, nor in that flighty impetuosity which respects neither principles, nor good sense, nor morality; much less that it consists in devotedness to the interests of a faction. My heart seared by the experience of so many treasons, I believe more and more in the necessity, the permanent necessity, of invoking Probity, and every generous sentiment, to the relief of the Republic—but Probity before all. I feel that wherever an honest man is to be met with, wheresoever he be seated, we ought to extend to him the hand of fellowship, and press him to our heart. I believe in certain fatalities in the Revolution which have nothing in

common with criminal designs; I believe in the detestable influence of intrigue, and, above all, in the sinister power of calumny. I see the world peopled with dupes and knaves; but the knaves, though a small minority, cause all the evils. 'Tis the knaves, and the knaves only, that ought to be punished for the crimes and calamities of the world. I will not, therefore, impute the treasons of Brissot, or the Gironde, to the honest men of that party, whom they sometimes deceived. I will not impute those of Hébert to the citizens, whose sincere patriotism was at times betrayed beyond the bounds of reason. The real conspirators would not be conspirators if they had not the art of dissembling with sufficient address, to usurp for some time the confidence of honest men. But there are certain signs by which one may distinguish dupes from accomplices, and error from crime. How then is this distinction to be made? Good sense and justice will make it. Ah! how necessary are good sense and justice in human affairs! Perverse men call us men of blood, because we have made war on the oppressors of the world; therefore, to be humane in their eyes, we must join their sacrilegious league, to massacre the people, and ruin the country!—Shall we do so?

For the rest, if there be privileged conspirators—if there be certain inviolable enemies of the Republic, I consent to impose on myself an eternal silence; in respect of them I have discharged my own duty; I wish not to charge myself with the duties of others. A more pressing care agitates me at this moment. The grand question with me is to save public morals, and the Conservative principles of Liberty; it is to snatch from oppression all the generous friends of the country. For these are the parties accused of treasonable designs against the National Representation! And where are they to find support, if not with you—after having combated all your enemies, after having devoted themselves to the fury of all the factions, in order to defend both your existence and your dignity, where should they seek, or expect to find, an asylum, if not in the bosom of this assembly?—"But they aspire," it is said, "to supreme power, they already exercise it, &c., &c."—So the National Convention does not exist then!—the French people, too, is annihilated!—Stupid calumniators!—Perceive ye not that your ridiculous declamations are an insult not to a mere individual, but to an invincible nation, which subdues and punishes kings? For myself, I should feel an invincible repugnance to defend myself, personally, before you, against the meanest of all the tyrannies, were you not convinced that *you* are the veritable objects of the attacks of all the enemies of the Republic. For what am I, forsooth, to merit their persecutions, if they did not enter into the general system of their conspiracy against the National Con-

vention? Have you not remarked that, to isolate you from the nation, they have published to the world that you were Dictators, reigning by terror, and disavowed by the tacit vows of the French. Have they not called our armies "*Conventional hordes*," and the French Revolution, "*Jacobinism*"?—And whilst they affect to give to a feeble individual, exposed to the outrageous hatred of all the factions, a gigantic and ridiculous importance, what other end can they have in view but to divide us, and to degrade you, by denying your very existence, like the impious wretch who denies the existence of the Divinity he dreads. Nevertheless, this word *Dictatorship* has magical effects; it sears Liberty; it cheapens the Government; it uproots the Republic; it degrades all our revolutionary institutions, by presenting them as the work of a single man; it renders odious the National justice which it presents, as instituted by the ambition of a single man; it directs to a single point all the rancours, and all the poignards, of fanaticism and aristocracy.

What a terrible use have the enemies of the Republic made of the bare name of a Roman magistracy! And if their erudition is so fatal to us, what may we not expect from their treasures and their intrigues! I speak not of their armies; but let me be permitted to return to the Duke of York and to his Royalist scribes the patents of that ridiculous dignity which they were the first to despatch to me. But it is carrying insolence too far, for Kings, who are not sure of conserving their own crowns, to arrogate to themselves the right of distributing them to others; I can conceive how a frivolous priace—how that unclean and sacred species of animals, which still goes by the name of Kings, may find delight in their littleness, and honour in their ignomy; I can conceive how that son of George, for example, may feel regret for the French sceptre he so vehemently coveted, and I sincerely pity that modern Tantalus; I will even own, to the shame, not of my country, but of the traitors she has punished, that I have known unworthy Delegates of the people, who would have exchanged that glorious title for that of "*Valet de Chambre*" to George or Orleans, but that a Representative of the people, who feels the dignity of that character, that a French citizen conscious of his rank and worthy of the name, could stoop so low as to covet the guilty and despicable grandeurs he has helped to sweep away—that he should submit to civic degradation to descend to the infamy of the throne, this is what will appear probable only to those perverse beings who have not even the right to believe in virtue! Virtue, did I say? Virtue is no doubt a natural passion, but what can those venal souls know of it, which have never expanded themselves but to mean and ferocious passions; miserable intriguers who never associated patriotism with any

moral idea, who marched in the revolution in the train of some important and ambitious personage—of, mayhap, some despised prince, just as our lacqueys of old used to dance attendance on their masters. Nevertheless, it exists; that tender, imperious, irresistible passion, at once the torment and delight of magnanimous souls! that profound horror of tyranny, that compassionating zeal for the oppressed; that sacred love of country, that sublimest, holiest love of humanity, without which a great revolution is but a splendid crime which destroys another crime; yes, it exists! that generous ambition to found on the earth the first republic of the world! that egoism of non-degraded men which finds a celestial pleasure in the calm of a pure conscience, and in the ravishing spectacle of public happiness! you, men of pure purposes, feel it at this moment burning in your souls; I feel it in mine. But how should our vile calumniators divine it; how can the man blind from his birth have the idea of light? Nature has refused them a soul, so that, after all, they have some right to doubt not only its immorality, but its very existence.

They call me TYRANT! Oh, if I were a tyrant they would grovel at my feet; I would have only to gorge them with gold, and give them a license to commit all manner of crime, and they would bow to me in gratitude! Were I a tyrant, the Kings we have vanquished, so far from denouncing me as they do now (what a tender interest they take in our liberty!) would proffer me their guilty support, and we should soon come to terms. But is it to me they look? Why, what are those Kings expecting just now in their distress, but the succour of a faction protected by them, and which is actually at this moment selling to them the glory and liberty of our country? How do men arrive at tyranny? How else but by the aid of traitor-knaves. Yes, by the agency of knaves it is that men become tyrants. But whither speed those who combat them? To the tomb and immortality! Who is the tyrant that befriends me; what is the faction I belong to? Name it! 'Tis to yourselves: to you and you only do I belong. Which is the faction, that from the beginning of the Revolution, has overthrown all factions, and made so many accredited traitors disappear from the stage? 'Tis *you*—'tis the *people*—'tis our principles. Behold the faction to which alone I am devoted, and against which all crimes are in league.

Believe me, 'tis you—'tis the country—'tis the friends of liberty that this persecution strikes at; if; therefore, I continue to defend myself, consider that I am defending you. Think, oh! think, how many others have sunk under dark oppression! who will ever again dare to serve his country, when I am still obliged to answer such calumnies? They in-

stance as proofs of my ambitious designs, what are but the natural, unavoidable effects of civism and Liberty, to wit, my popularity and influence. Yes, the moral influence of the old Athletes of the revolution, is, nowadays, assimilated to tyranny by those calumniators! Wretches who thus calumniate the power of truth, you are, yourselves, the basest of all tyrants! What aim ye at; what is your purpose, ye slanderers, who want truth to be without force, and to fall powerless from the lips of the Representatives of the French People? Undoubtedly, truth has its power, it has its wrath, its despotism; it has its touching, animating, terrible accents, which vibrate with force, and which reverberate with force in pure hearts, as in guilty consciences, and which it is no more given to falsehood to imitate, than it was to Salomeus to imitate the thunder of heaven. But do not accuse me for it. Accuse nature of it, accuse the French people who fear and love it. There are two great powers on earth, that of reason and that of tyranny. Wherever the one reigns the other is banished. Those, therefore, who denounce as a crime the moral force of reason, can only want to bring back tyranny. And if you will not suffer the defenders of principles to obtain any influence in this arduous struggle of liberty against intrigue, must you not manifestly desire the victory to be on the side of the intriguers. If those representatives of the people who defend the public cause must not obtain the people's esteem without suffering for it, what else will be the consequence of such a system but *to render it impossible for the people to have any faithful servants at all?* to proscribe the Republic, and re-establish Despotism? And what tyranny more odious, more abhorrent, than that which punishes the people in the persons of their defenders? For, if ever a thing was held free and sacred in this world, beyond all things else—the thing freest and most sacred of all, even under the reign of Despotism—is not that thing friendship? But you make it a crime in me to have the people's friendship! Is it that you are jealous of it? That would be some excuse; but even that you have not, for you set no value on the people's friendship, your regards are only for gold and the perishable riches which tyrants lavish on those who serve them. And do ye not serve them who corrupt public morals, and protect all crimes: for does not the guarantee of conspirators lie in the oblivion of principles, and corruption; whilst that of the defenders lies altogether in the public conscience? Yes, ye serve the tyrants! ye, who ever above, or below the truth, alternately preach, at one time, the perfidious moderation of the aristocracy; at another, the outrageous fury of false democrats. Ye, too, serve them, obstinate preachers of Atheism and vice! Yes, ye seek to destroy the National



Representation, all who degrade it by your conduct, or factionize it by your intrigues. Which is the more culpable, he who strikes at its safety by violence, or at its justice by seduction and perfidy? To deceive the Representation is to betray it; to impel it to acts contrary to its intentions and principles, is to tend to its destruction; for its power is founded only in virtue and the national confidence. We, on the contrary, cherish the Representation; we, who after having battled for its physical safety, are at this moment defending its glory and its principles. Is it thus your would-be-tyrants go to work; is it by this road they march to despotism? But what cruel derision to erect into despots citizens who are continually under the ban of proscription! And what else are they who have remained faithful to the interests of the country? The Republic has triumphed! its defenders never! Whatever the country has gained, we, its defenders, have gained nothing. What, for example, am I that they should accuse me? A slave of liberty—a living martyr of the Republic, not less the victim than the enemy of crime! There is not a knave that does not openly insult me; actions the most indifferent, the most legitimate, when done by others, are crimes in me! nay, the instant a man makes my acquaintance he is calumniated! Other men are forgiven their misdeeds; my zeal is made an unpardonable crime! What sustains me? My conscience. Take away my conscience, and I am the most miserable of men. I have not even the rights of a common citizen; citizen, did I say, when I am not even suffered to discharge my duties as a Representative of the people.

Now is the time for me to let the truth appear, and to lay bare the veritable sores of the Republic. The public affairs are again proceeding in a perfidious and alarming train. The combined system of the Héberts and Fabre d'Églantine is, nowadays, pursued with unheard-of audacity; the counter-revolutionists are protected; those who dishonour the Revolution with the forms of Hébertism are openly protected; the others with more reserve; Patriotism and Probity are proscribed by both factions alike. It is sought to destroy the Revolutionary Government in order to immolate the country to the caitiffs who are tearing it to pieces; and to that odious end the agents of the caitiffs are marching by two different routes. By one faction (Dantonists) the revolutionary institutions are openly calumniated; by the other (Hébertists) it is sought to render them odious by excesses. For example, peaceable, unobtrusive men, and men of no account, are tormented; patriots are every day plunged into dungeons without cause, whilst the aristocracy is favoured by every means, direct and indirect. This, forsooth, they call *indulgence, humanity!* But is that the sort of Revolutionary Government we in-

tended, when we instituted it; is that the sort of Government? No! the Revolutionary Government, rightly understood, is the rapid and unerring march of justice; it is the thunderbolt of retribution launched by the hand of liberty against crime; but never did we intend it to subserve the aristocracy, or to be an instrument of despotism in the hands of knaves; much less to render crime independent of all laws, human and divine. Without the Revolutionary Government, the Republic cannot be established, for factions will smother it in its cradle; but, on the other hand, if it falls into perfidious hands, it becomes itself the instrument of the counter-revolution. At present the plan is to de-naturalize it, in order to destroy it, and both the men who calumniate it and those who compromise it are the same parties. I will not attempt to develop all the causes of these abuses, but I will point out to you a single cause, which will suffice to explain all the disastrous consequences referred to. It is the excessive perversity of the subaltern agents of a respectable authority composed of members of this House (Committee of General Security). There are on that committee individuals whose civic virtues one cannot but cherish and respect. Still that is but an additional reason for abolishing an abuse which has sprung up unknown to them, and which they will be the first to war against when they understand its effects. In vain would a fatal policy pretend to encompass the agents I speak of with a sort of superstitious sanctity. I can have no reverence for knaves; much less can I adopt the old royal maxim "*it is useful to employ them.*" The arms of liberty ought not to be touched but with pure hands. Let us, then, instead of tinkering and patching one vice with another, proceed at once to purify the National Surveillance, by purging the whole of the Police Department. Let us not fear truth. Truth is a stumbling-block only to corrupt governments; it is the bulwark of ours. For myself, I shudder when I think that notorious enemies of the Revolution—that quondam professors of Royalism—that ex-nobles, aye, even emigrants, have, all on a sudden, become revolutionists, and metamorphosed themselves into clerks of the Committee of General Security, with a view to revenge themselves on the friends of the country, for their loss of caste, and for the successes of the Republic! Yet, that such cases have actually occurred I entertain not the slightest doubt. Not that such gentry have not apparently earned for themselves some titles to patriotism, by occasionally arresting some noted aristocrat; but what care our foreign enemies to sacrifice a few French traitors, provided, by so doing, they may more easily immolate the patriots, and subvert the Republic.

To those powerful motives which had long since determined me to

denounce these men—though unavailingly, let me add another, which has relation to the plot I had begun to develop. We have received information that they are paid by the enemies of the Revolution to dishonour the Revolutionary Government itself, and to throw the odium of their own acts on such of the Representatives of the People as the tyrants have vowed the destruction of. For instance, when the victims of their perversity complain, they excuse themselves by saying—“*It is Robespierre's will and pleasure, we cannot dispense with him.*” The infamous disciples of Hébert held the same language in former times when I denounced them; they called themselves my friends, but they afterwards declared me convicted of *Moderatism*. The same species of counter-revolutionists it is that still persecute patriotism. How long will the honour of citizens and the dignity of the National Convention be at the mercy of such men? But the trait I have just instanced is but a branch of a more extended system of persecution, of which I am the object. By way of backing up their accusation of Dictatorship (made the order of the day by the tyrants), the conspirators have set to work to throw upon my shoulders all their own iniquities, all the untowardness of fortune, and all the severities commanded by the safety of the country. To the nobles they said, “*'Tis he alone who has proscribed you!!!*” At the same time they said to the patriots, “*He wishes to save the nobles!*” To the priests they said, “*'Tis only he that persecutes you, but for him you would be at peace and triumphant!*” To the fanatics they said, “*'Tis he that pulls down religion.*” And to the persecuted patriots, “*'Twas he ordered it, or would not prevent it.*” Thus have they saddled me with every complaint and grievance, the cause of which I had tried in vain to remove, saying—“*Your fate depends on him alone.*” Nay, men have been stationed in the public places, whose business was to propagate, day by day, this perfidious system. Some of them took their station in the place where the sittings of the Revolutionary Tribunal are held; others in the places of public execution, when enemies of the country were about to expiate their crimes. “*Look,*” said they, “*at these unhappy wretches, do you know who brought them here? why Robespierre, to be sure!*” They have been at particular pains to prove that the Revolutionary Tribunal was a *tribunal of blood created by me alone* (and of which I was complete master), with a view to massacre every honest man, and even the knaves too; for the object was to raise up against me enemies of every class and kind. This cry was echoed in all the prisons; this plan of proscription was executed simultaneously in all the departments by the emissaries of tyranny! This is not all. They lately proposed certain finance projects, which appeared to me calcu-

lated to ruin citizens of small fortune; I had often in vain called the attention of the Committee of Public Safety to this subject. Well, would you believe it? they have spread the report that these finance projects were my work! and in order to accredit that report, they gave out that there was a Commission of Finance on the Committee of Public Safety, and that I was its President! But as the main purpose was to ruin me in the good opinion of the National Convention, they pretended that I alone had dared to think that it comprised in its body some members unworthy of it; and they told each deputy on his return from his mission into the departments, that I alone had provoked and was the sole cause of his recall; in fact, I was accused by certain very active and insinuating persons, of all the good and of all the evil that had befallen—of the good, to excite the bad against me; of the evil, to excite the good against me. They reported to my colleagues both everything I had said, and especially what I had not said. They carefully set aside all suspicion that they themselves had had any share in any of the acts complained of. Oh, no! 'twas I that had done all, exacted all, commanded all; for you must not forget my title of Dictator! When they had brewed this tempest of hatred, vengeance, terror, and irritated self-love, “*Now,*” said they, “*is the time for its explosion.*” Those whose consciences gave them reason to dread me, flattered themselves openly that my destruction—now certain—was about to assure them their safety and triumph. Whilst English and German journals were announcing my arrestation, it was cried about the streets of Paris by the hawkers and newsvendors. My colleagues here present know the rest much better than I; they know all the manœuvres employed about them to prepare the success of a romance which would seem a new edition of that of Louvet. Several could render an account of unexpected visits made to them, to dispose them to proscribe me. In fine, I have been assured that, *by way of a feeler*, the National Convention, generally, was forewarned that an act of accusation was about to be preferred against me; the minds of the members have been sounded on this subject; and every thing proves that the probity of the National Convention has forced the calumniators to abandon, or, at least, adjourn their crime. But who were these calumniators? Let me first apprise you, by way of answer to the question, that in a Royalist manifesto, found among the papers of a known conspirator, who has already suffered the penalty due to his crimes, and which appears to be the text of all the calumnies, renewed at this moment, we read in proper terms this conclusion, addressed to all descriptions of the people's enemies—“*If that crafty demagogue (Robespierre) was cut off—if he had paid with his head for his ambi-*

*tious manœuvres, the nation would be free; every man might then reveal and publish his thoughts, and Paris would be spared that multitude of assassinations (vulgarly known by the false name of judgments) of the Revolutionary Tribunal."* I may add, that this passage is the analysis of the proclamations manufactured by the coalesced Princes and Foreign journals in the pay of the Kings, who in this way seem every day to give the signal or word of order to all the Conspirators of the Interior. I shall cite but this passage from one of the most accredited of those writers. I may reply, then, that the authors of this plan of calumny are primarily the Duke of York, Mr. Pitt, and all the tyrants armed against us. Who are the secondary authors? Ah! I dare not name them in this present time and place; I cannot come to the resolution to rend entirely the veil which covers this profound mystery of iniquities; but what I can affirm positively is, that amongst the authors of this plot are the agents of that system of corruption and extravagance so often denounced to you, and the most potent of all the means invented by foreign influence to destroy the Republic, are the impure apostles of Atheism and of immorality, of which it is the basis.

'Tis a very remarkable circumstance that your decree of the 18th Floréal, which gave strength and durability to the tottering bases of public morality, was the signal for a paroxysm of fury on the part of the enemies of the Republic; from that epoch it is that date the assassinations, and the new calumnies, more criminal than the assassinations; the tyrants felt that they had a decisive defeat to repair; the solemn proclamation of your veritable principles destroyed in a single day the fruits of several years of intrigues. The tyrants were on the point of triumphing; the French people were placed between famine and Atheism more odious than famine. The people can support hunger, but not crime; the people can sacrifice all except its virtues. Tyranny had not yet outraged human nature so far as to make it ashamed of morality, and to deem depravity a duty; this outrage of outrages was reserved by the vilest of conspirators of the French people in its glory and in its power. Tyranny had but demanded from men their possessions and their lives; these conspirators claimed from us our very consciences. With one hand they presented to us all evils, and with the other snatched from us all hope. Atheism, escorted by all crimes, was spreading over the people mourning and despair; and on the National Representation suspicious contempt and opprobrium. A just indignation, compressed by terror, was darkly fermenting in all hearts; an eruption terrible, inevitable, was heaving in the entrails of the volcano, whilst petty philosophers were stupidly playing the game of folly on its summit,

with consummate villains for their playmates. Such was the situation of the Republic, that whether the people consented to endure tyranny or should violently shake off the yoke, Liberty was equally lost; for by its reaction it would have given a death-blow to the Republic, and by their patience the people would have rendered themselves unworthy of it. Wherefore of all the prodigies of our Revolution, that which will most astonish posterity is, that we were able to escape this two-edged danger! Immortal thanks to you be rendered! you have saved the country; your decree of the 18th Floréal is itself a revolution; with one and the same blow you smote Atheism and Sacerdotal Despotism, you have anticipated by half-a-century the day of doom for tyrants. You have re-knit and re-wedded to the cause of the Revolution all pure and generous hearts; you have presented it to the world in all the lustre of its celestial beauty. Oh! day for ever blessed! when the whole of the French people arose, as one man, to render to the author of nature the only homage worthy of him! what an affecting congregation of every object that can enchant the regards and hearts of men! Honoured old age! Generous ardour of the children of the country! Pure and simple joy of the youthful citizens! Delicious tears of mothers melting with tender affection! Divine charms of innocence and beauty! Majesty of a great people made happy by the sole sentiment of its force, its glory, and its virtue! Being of Beings! did the day of Creation itself—the day the world issued from thy all-powerful hands, shine with a light more agreeable in thy sight than that day on which, bursting the yoke of crime and error, this nation appeared in thy sight in an attitude worthy thy regards, and its own destinies?

That day had left upon France a profound impression of calm, of happiness, of wisdom, and of goodness. In sight of this sublime reunion of the first people in the world, who would have believed that crime still existed on the Earth? But when the people, in whose presence all private cries disappear, have returned to their domestic fire-sides, the intriguers re-appear on the stage, and the play of charlatans re-commences. It is since that epoch we have seen them agitate and exert themselves with increased audacity, and seek vengeance on all those who had disconcerted the most dangerous of complots. Will it be believed that, in the very midst of public rejoicing, there were men to respond by bursts of fury to the touching acclamations of the people? Will it be believed that the President of the National Convention, while speaking to the assembled people, was insulted by them, and that those men were Representatives of the people? This single trait explains all that has occurred since. The first essay made by the evil-disposed was to try to degrade the

great principles you had proclaimed, and to efface the thrilling remembrance of the national fête. Such was the end or purport of the character, and of the solemnity, given to what has been called the *Affair of Catherine Théot*. Malevolence knew well how to turn to account the political conspiracy concealed under the name of some imbecile devotees, and, accordingly, did the conspirators present to public attention only mystic farce, and an inexhaustible subject of indecent or puerile sarcasms. While Paris, and all France, were made to ring with the name of the *Mother of God!* the real conspirators escaped. At the same moment were hatched, and seen to break forth (as if from a shell), a multitude of disgusting pamphlets worthy of *Père Duchêne*, the end of which was to degrade the National Convention, and the Revolutionary Tribunal, to renew religious dissensions, and to open a system of persecution as atrocious, as impolitic, against weak or credulous minds, imbued with some superstitious remembrances. In fact, a great number of peaceable citizens, and even known patriots, have been arrested on account of this affair, while the really guilty parties are still conspiring at large; for the plan is to save the guilty, to torment the people, and to multiply the discontented. What means have not been tried, what has been left undone, to arrive at this end? Open predictions of Atheism, sudden acts of violence against religious worship—exactions committed under forms the most indecent—persecutions directed against the people under the pretext of superstition—a system of famine, first through forestalling and monopoly, afterwards by exciting war against all licit commerce and under the pretext of monopoly—the incarceration of patriots—all tended to this end. At the same time the National Treasury suspended payments—the small creditors of the state were reduced to despair by Machiavellian projects; violence and craft were employed to make them subscribe engagements disastrous to their interests, and that in the name of law itself, which disavows the manœuvre. Every occasion to harrass a citizen was seized with avidity, and all vexations were disguised, according to custom, under pretences of the public good. The conspirators were serving the aristocracy, but, at the same time, they disturbed and alarmed it on purpose to swell the number of the disaffected, and to drive the aristocracy to some act of despair against the Revolutionary government. They published that Héroult de Séchelles, Danton, Hébert, &c., were victims of the Committee of Public Safety, and that they must be avenged by the destruction of that Committee. They wished to tamper with the chiefs of the armed force; they persecuted the magistrates of the Commune; and they spoke of recalling Pache to the functions of Mayor. Whilst representatives of the

people were openly holding this language—whilst they were persuading their colleagues that they could find no safety but in the destruction of the members of the Committee—whilst jurors of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who had caballed scandalously in favour of the conspirators accused by the Convention, were proclaiming everywhere that it was time to resist oppression, and that there were twenty-nine thousand patriots determined to overthrow the existing Government—whilst all this was going on, here is the language which was being held by the foreign journals, which, at every time of a crisis, have always faithfully announced every plot when just on the eve of its execution, and whose authors would seem to have relations with the conspirators. "*There must, necessarily, be an outbreak for the criminals; in consequence, they have congregated in Paris, at this moment, from all parts of the Republic, the miscreants who were making a desert of it in the times of Hébert and Chaumette*"—meaning those whom you have ordered by your decree to be sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal. They have rendered the Revolutionary government odious in order to prepare its destruction. After having gathered together all its orders, and thrown all the blame of them on the shoulders of those whose destruction they seek, through a dark and universal system of calumny, they were to abolish the Revolutionary Tribunal, or compose it of conspirators; invite the aristocracy to their side; proffer impunity to all the enemies of the country, and exhibit to the people its most zealous defenders as the authors of all the past calamities. "*If we succeed,*" said the conspirators, "*it will be necessary to present, by way of contrast to the present state of things, an extreme indulgence.*" This expression comprises the entire conspiracy. What were the crimes laid to the charge of Danton, Fabre, and Desmoulins?—Preaching indulgence for the enemies of the country, and conspiring to assure to them an amnesty fatal to liberty. Now, what would you say if the authors of the complot, I have just spoken of, were of the very party which led Danton, Fabre, and Desmoulins, to the Scaffold? What was the conduct of the first conspirators? Hébert, Ronsin, and Chaumette made it their study to render the Revolutionary government intolerable and ridiculous, whilst Camille Desmoulins attacked it in his satirical writings, and Fabre and Danton were intriguing to defend him. One faction calumniated, whilst the other was preparing pretences for the calumny. The same system is openly continued at this hour. By what fatality is it that those, who formerly disclaimed against Hébert, are now defending his accomplices? How is it that those who declared themselves the enemies of Danton have become his imitators? How comes it that those

who, whilom, were vehement accusers of certain members of the Convention, are found banded to-day, in league with those members, against the patriots whom it is sought to destroy? Base and cowardly miscreants!—not satisfied with taking my life then, they would send me to the tomb covered with ignominy!—and, to satiate them, I must leave behind me in the world only the memory of a tyrant! With what perfidy they have abused my honest confidence!—with what seeming sincerity did they adopt the principles of all good citizens!—with what simplicity of nature, and caressing eagerness, did they tender me their false friendship! But mark the change. All on a sudden their visages are covered with dark clouds; a ferocious joy shown in their eyes! it was the moment when they believed all their measures well taken to overpower and crush me. Disappointed for the moment, they again caress me anew to-day; their language is become more complaisant than ever—more the language of homage than ever before! Three days ago they were ready to denounce me as a Catiline; to-day they give me credit for all the virtues of Cato! Ah! a little more time was wanted to perfect their guilty machinations. How atrocious their purpose!—but how contemptible their means! Judge of them by a single trait. I was momentarily charged, in the absence of one of my colleagues, with the surveillance of an Office of General Police, recently and feebly organized, in the Committee of Public Safety. My brief administration has been limited to about thirty resolves, which I caused to be taken, either to set at liberty patriots suffering persecution, or to make sure of some enemies of the Revolution. Well! will it be believed that this word, General Police, has served as the sole pretext for throwing on my head the responsibility of all the operations of the Committee of General Security, the responsibility of the errors of all the constituted authorities, and of the crimes of all my enemies to boot? There has hardly, perhaps, been one individual arrested, hardly a single citizen vexed or harassed in any way, to whom they have not said of me, "*Behold the author of your calamities; you would be happy and free if he (Robespierre) were no more!*" How could I recount or divine all the species of impostures which have been clandestinely insinuated both in the National Convention and elsewhere, in order to render me an object of odium or terror? I will confine myself to the statement of one bare fact; it is that, for now upwards of six weeks, the action and the force of calumny, coupled with my state of utter impotence to effect good, and prevent evil, has forced me to abandon, absolutely and entirely, my functions of member of the Committee of Public Safety; and I swear that, even in that act, I have consulted only my reason, and the good

of my country. I prefer my rank or quality of representation of the people to that of member of the Committee of Public Safety; and I place my quality of *man* and *French Citizen* before all.

Well, whatever be the upshot, there is, at least, six weeks that my dictatorship has expired, and during which I have no species of influence whatever on the government. Now, has patriotism been more protected?—the factions more timid?—the country more prosperous and happy? I wish it were so. But my influence on the government! That influence has, at all times, been limited to pleading my country's cause before the Representatives of the Nation, and the Tribunal of Public Reason. I have been permitted to combat the factions which menaced you. I have sought to uproot the system of corruption and disorder they had established, and which I regard as the sole obstacle to the consolidation of the Republic, for I still consider that it can rest securely only on the eternal bases of morality. But all parties were in league against me, and against those who held the same principles; after having vanquished the disdain, the contumelies, and the contradictions, of several of them, I proposed, for your open adoption, the great principles engraven in your hearts, and which have scattered to the winds the complots of the counter-revolutionary Atheists. You consecrated them by your sanction. But it is the fate of principles to be proclaimed by honest men, and applied or thwarted by wicked men. On the very eve of the Festival in honour of the Supreme Being, it was sought to postpone it under a frivolous pretext. Since then, your enemies, and mine, have never ceased to cast ridicule and odium on everything appertaining to religious ideas, and to favour everything that might resuscitate the doctrine of the conspirators you have punished. Only the other day, they began to sweep away the traces of all the monuments made to commemorate certain grand epochs of the Revolution. Those in commemoration of the moral revolution, which avenged you of calumny, and which founded the Republic, are the only ones that have been destroyed. In several of my colleagues I have seen no inclination to observe fixed principles—no disposition to keep the path of justice, or pursue the course marked out between the two sunken rocks, which the enemies of the country have placed in our career. If I must dissemble these truths, bring me the hemlock (of Socrates); my reason, not my heart, is on the point of doubting (the possibility of) that virtuous Republic, of which I had sketched to myself the plan.

Methinks I divine the veritable end of this strange imputation of Dictatorship, I call to mind that Brissot and Roland had already filled Europe with it, at a time when they exercised a power almost without

bounds. In what hands are at present our armies, our finances, and the internal administration of the Republic. *In those of the Coalition which persecutes me.* All the friends of principles are without influence. But it is not enough for my enemies to have forced into retirement, through despair of doing good, a man whose surveillance incommoded them, but they must also bereave him of life; his bare existence is an object of terror to them, and they had meditated in darkness, unknown to their colleagues, the project of snatching from him the right of defending the people, by snatching his life. Oh! if my life will satisfy them, I will abandon it to them without regret, I have had experience of the past, I foresee the future. What friend of humanity can wish to survive the moment when he is no longer permitted to serve it or his country and defend oppressed innocence! Why seek to dwell in an order of things where intrigues eternally triumph over truth, where justice is a lie, where the vilest passions or the most ridiculous fears occupy in men's hearts the place of sacred interests of humanity? How endure the torture of seeing that horrible succession of traitors more or less expert in concealing their hideous souls under the veil of virtue, and even of friendship, but who will all leave to posterity the puzzle of deciding which of the enemies of my country was the basest and most atrocious. Seeing the multitude of vices which the torrent of the revolution has rolled up, pell-mell with civic virtues, I have sometimes feared, I confess, being sullied in the eyes of posterity by impure contact with the perverse men who introduced themselves amongst the sincere friends of humanity, and I glory in seeing the fury of the Verres and Catilines of my country draw a deep line of demarcation between themselves and all upright men. I have seen in history all the defenders of liberty, in past ages, overwhelmed by calumny; but their oppressors are dead also! The good and the wicked disappear from the earth, but in very different conditions. Frenchmen! suffer not your enemies to dare to abase your souls, and to enervate your virtues by their desolating doctrine! No, Chaumette, no! *Death is not an eternal sleep!*—Citizens efface from the tombs that maxim engraven by sacrilegious hands, which throws a funeral crape over nature, which disheartens oppressed innocence, and which insults death. Rather engrave upon them this maxim, "Death is the commencement of Immortality."

I promised some time ago to leave behind a will or testament, which should ever after strike terror into the oppressors of mankind. I am now about to publish it from this moment, with the independence which befits the situation I am placed in: *I bequeath to them dread truth and death!*

Representatives of the French people, it is time to resume the pride and loftiness of character which befits you. You are not made to be ruled, but to rule the depositaries of your confidence; the homage they owe you consists not in those vain adulations, in those flattering recitals, lavished on Kings by ambitious ministers, but in telling you the truth, and above all in profound respect for your principles. You have been told that all goes well with the Republic—I deny it. Why did those who, *the day before yesterday*, predicted to you so many and such frightful tempests, behold *yesterday* only a few light transient clouds? Why do those who lately said to you "*I declare to you we are marching over Volcanoes,*" believe to-day that we are marching only on roses? Yesterday they believed in conspiracies; to-day they do not!—Now I declare that I believe in one at this moment.

Those who tell you that the founding of a Republic is so easy an enterprise deceive you, or rather they can deceive nobody. Where are the sage Institutions, where is the plan of regeneration to justify that ambitious language? Have they been wholly and solely occupied with that grand object? What say I? Why have they not sought to proscribe the very man who had prepared them? They praise us to-day, because they think themselves weaker than we; they will accordingly proscribe us again tomorrow should they become the stronger party. In four days, say they, all injustices will be repaired, all wrongs redressed; why then have they been committed with impunity for months? And how are all the authors of our evils to be corrected or cashiered in four days? You are much complimented on your victories, and that with an academic flippancy which would lead one to suppose that they cost our soldiers neither blood nor labour; related in less pompous language they would appear greater. It is not by rhetorical phrases, nor even by the exploits of war, that we shall subdue all Europe; but by the wisdom of our laws, by the majesty of our deliberations, and by the grandeur of our character. What has there been done to turn our military successes to the profit of our principles, to prevent the dangers of victory, or to assure to us its fruits? I warn you to look sharp to Belgium—I warn you that your decree against the English has been constantly violated; and that England, so maltreated by our harangues, is spared by our arms: I warn you that the philanthropic comedies by Dumouriez in Belgium are repeated at the present time; that we are amusing ourselves in planting sterile trees of Liberty in an enemy's country, instead of reaping the fruits of victory, and that the vanquished slaves are favoured at the expense of the victorious Republic. Our enemies retreat, it is true, but it is only to leave us to our intestine divisions. Look, pray, to the end

of the Campaign, fear the factions of the interior; fear intrigues favoured by distance and absence in a foreign territory. Division has been sown amongst the generals; the military aristocracy is protected; the faithful generals are persecuted; the military administration is enveloped with a suspicious authority; your decrees have been violated in order to shake off the yoke of a necessary surveillance. These truths are well worth the epigrams you have heard. (*Alluding to Barère's report.*)

Our internal situation is still more critical. A reasonable system of finance is to be created; that which reigns now is mean, prodigal, shifting, intermeddling, devouring, and, in point of fact, absolutely independent of your supreme surveillance. Then, our external relations are absolutely neglected; almost all our agents employed in foreign states, after being decried for their incivism, have openly betrayed the Republic with an audacity unpunished to this hour.

The Revolutionary government merits all your attention. Let it be destroyed to-day, and to-morrow liberty is no more. We must not calumniate it, but restore it to its principle; we must simplify it, diminish the innumerable multitude of its agents—above all, purify them. We must render security to the people, but not to its enemies. Our business is not to impede the march of justice by new forms; the penal law must necessarily have some degree of vagueness; because the actual character of the reigning conspirators being dissimulation and hypocrisy, the justice of the country must be able to seize them under all forms. A single mode of conspiring being left unpunished would render it illusory, and compromise the safety of the country. The guarantee of patriotism lies, therefore, not in the *tardiness* nor in the weakness of the National Justice, but in the principles and integrity of those to whom it is confided, in the good faith of the government, in the frank protection it affords to patriots, and in the energy with which it crushes the aristocracy; in the public spirit, in certain moral and political institutions which, without obstructing the march of justice, offer a safeguard to all good citizens and compress the wicked by their influence on public opinion and on the direction of the revolutionary movement. *The institutions I allude to shall be proposed to you as soon as the conspiracies now impending will permit the friends of liberty to breathe freely.*

Let us guide the revolutionary movement by sage maxims firmly maintained; let us punish severely those who abuse revolutionary principles to the annoyance and persecution of our fellow-citizens. Let us be well convinced that every one of our agents charged with the national surveillance shall, disengaged from all party spirit, resolutely co-operate

with us for the triumph of patriotism and the punishment of the guilty. Thus will everything return to order; thus will all march forward to the veritable end of revolutionary institutions, and the terror impressed on crime will be the best guarantee for innocence. But if we have reason to believe that men of vast influence secretly desire the destruction of the revolutionary government—that they incline to indulgence rather than to justice; if they employ corrupt agents; if they calumniate to-day the only authority that imposes on the enemies of liberty, and retract their words to-morrow in order to intrigue *de novo*, as before; if, instead of rendering liberty to the patriots, they render it, without distinction, to conspirators—then all the intriguers league together to calumniate the patriots, and the patriots are oppressed. It is to all these causes we are to impute the abuses I complain of, and not to the revolutionary government; for there is no government which would not be insupportable under the same conditions. The revolutionary government has saved the country: we must save this government itself from all the sunken rocks which environ it. It would be most perverse reasoning to conclude that it ought to be destroyed, simply because the enemies of the public good have first paralysed, and now labour to corrupt it. 'Tis a strange mode of protecting the patriots, to set counter-revolutionists at liberty, and make knaves triumph! 'Tis the terror of crime that makes the security of innocence.

For the rest, I am far from imputing the abuses to the majority of those to whom you have given your confidence. The majority is itself paralysed and betrayed; intrigue and foreign influence triumph! There is concealment, there is dissimulation, there is deception; *there is, therefore, a conspiracy!* The parties were audacious; they meditated a grand act of oppression; they surrounded themselves with an armed force, to crush public opinion after having exasperated it; they now seek to seduce the public functionaries, whose fidelity they dread, and they incessantly persecute the friends of liberty. *There exists, therefore, a conspiracy!* They suddenly become supple, and even flattering; they spread dark and dangerous insinuations against Paris; they seek to lull public opinion asleep; they calumniate the people; they erect civic solicitude, or the natural apprehensions of patriotism, into a crime; they do not send away the deserters, the prisoners of war, the counter-revolutionists of all sorts, who are congregated in Paris; and they are sending away the cannoniers, they are disarming the citizens, they are intriguing in the army; in short, they are trying to seize and take possession of everything. *There is, therefore, a conspiracy!* Within the last few days, they sought to throw you on a false scent touching the conspiracy; to-day

they deny it, and 'tis even a crime to believe in it. One day they sound the note of alarm, the next they encourage you to repose and security! The same alternation of hopes and fears is repeated anew, and so the game goes on. *There you have the veritable conspiracy! It stands confessed!*

The counter-revolution reigns in the Finance department. It bears altogether on a system of counter-revolutionary innovation, disguised under the exterior of patriotism. It has for its end to foment stock-jobbing, to shake public credit by dishonouring French loyalty, to favour the rich creditors of the state, to ruin and drive to despair the poor ones, to multiply the discontented, *to despoil the people of the National property*, and to bring about by insensible degrees the ruin of the public fortune.

Who are the supreme Administrators of our Finances? Brissotins, Feuillants, Aristocrats, and notorious knaves; they are your Cambons, Mallarmés, Ramels—the companions and successors of Chabot, Fabre d'Églantine, and Julien (de Toulouse). To palliate their pernicious designs, they have taken it into their heads, of late, to secure the adhesion of the Committee of Public Safety to their acts, because they are pretty sure that this Committee, distracted by the multiplicity and magnitude of its labours, would adopt in confidence (without examination), as has sometimes happened, all the projects of Cambon. 'Tis a new stratagem hit upon, to multiply the number of the enemies of the Committee, whose destruction is the principal aim of all the conspiracies. The National Treasury, directed by a counter-revolutionary hypocrite named Lhermina, seconds their designs to a nicety by the plan it has adopted, by throwing impediments in the way of all urgent demands and disbursements, under pretext of a scrupulous adherence to forms, of not paying anybody, except aristocrats, and of tormenting and harassing the less easy class of citizens by refusals, by delays, and oftentimes by odious provocations.

The counter-revolution is in every department of our political economy. The conspirators have precipitated us, in despite of ourselves, into violent measures, which only their own crimes have rendered necessary, and reduced the Republic to the most frightful state of scarcity and famine—a famine which would have starved it to death, but for the concurrence of events the most providential and unexpected. This system was the work of Foreign influence, which proposed it, through the venal intermediary of the Chabots, Lulliers, Héberts, and so many other miscreants. Believe me, we need every effort of genius to restore the Republic to that mild and natural regime which alone can ensure

abundance; and this work is not yet begun. Just call to mind all the crimes lavished to realize the *Famine-compact*, engendered by the infernal genius of England. To save us from that scourge, we absolutely needed two miracles, equally unexpected. The first was the safe return of our Convoy, sold to England (by traitors) before its departure from America, and which the Cabinet of London counted as a sure prize; and the abundant and premature harvest spontaneously given us by nature: the other was the sublime patience of the people, who have endured starvation itself to conserve its liberty. There still remains for us to surmount the deficiency of hands, of horses, and vehicles (which will delay the harvesting of the crops, and the culture of the soil), and all the manœuvres set on foot last year by our enemies, and which they will not fail to renew.

The counter-revolutionists have flocked here in crowds to join their accomplices, and defend their patrons by dint of intrigues and crimes. They count upon the counter-revolutionary prisoners, on the gentry of the Vendée, and on the deserters and prisoners of war who, according to all accounts, have been for some time escaping in crowds to repair to Paris, as I have already repeatedly denounced in vain to the Committee of Public Safety; finally, they count upon the aristocracy, which is secretly conspiring around us and in the midst of us. Their plan of proceeding will be this:—*They will get up violent discussions in the National Convention; the traitors hitherto concealed under hypocritical outward appearances will fling off the mask; the conspirators will accuse their accusers, and make a lavish use of all the stratagens formerly put in practice by Brissot to smother the voice of truth. If they cannot master the Convention by this means, they will divide it into two parties; and thus a vast field will be opened to calumny and intrigue. If they master it (though but for a moment), they will accuse of despotism and of resistance to the national authority those who will combat with energy their criminal league; the cries of oppressed innocence—the many accents of outraged liberty—will be denounced as evidences of a dangerous influence or of personal ambition; you will fancy yourselves brought once more under the knife of the old conspirators. The people will be indignant; they will be called “a faction,” and the real guilty faction will continue to goad and exasperate them. It will strive to sever the Convention from the people; in fine, by dint of a combination of treasonable projects, they hope to involve the Republic in disorders, in the midst of which they will bring in the aristocracy, with all their accomplices, to massacre the patriots, and re-establish the old Tyranny!* There is *part the first* of their plan of conspiracy. And to whom must



these calamities be imputed? To ourselves; to our own base weakness and indulgence for crime, and to our culpable abandonment of the principles proclaimed by ourselves. Let us not deceive ourselves. To found an immense Republic on the basis of reason and equality—to bind together by an enduring chain all the parts of this immense empire—is not an enterprise which levity or fickleness can consummate: it is the masterpiece of virtue and human reason, and as such requires a master-hand. 'Tis in the very nature of a great revolution to vomit forth factions of all sorts. How are you to repress them, but by constantly keeping all the passions in subjection to justice? You have no other guarantee for liberty than the rigid observance of the principles and universal morality you have proclaimed. If reason does not reign, crime and ambition must reign. Without it, victory is but a means of ambition, and a danger to liberty itself,—a fatal pretext, of which intrigue makes use to lull patriotism to sleep on the brink of a precipice. Without it, what signifies victory itself? Of what use or value is victory at all? It only serves to arm ambition, lull patriotism to sleep, awaken pride, and to dig with glittering hands the tomb of the Republic. What boots it that our armies chase before them the armed satellites of Kings, if we recede before the vices which destroy public liberty? What boots it to conquer Kings, if we are vanquished by the vices which bring back King-craft and Tyranny? Then what steps have we taken of late to make head against them? We have proclaimed great prizes! What is there that has been left undone to protect them amongst us? What have we done for some time past to destroy them? Nothing! Do they not raise their heads in insolent contempt of us, and menace virtue with impunity? Nothing, I repeat; for the government has receded before the factions, and those factions find protectors among the very depositories of the public authority. Let us expect, therefore, all manner of evils, since we abandon to them the reigns of empire. In the career we have entered upon, to halt before its termination is to perish; and we have shamefully retrograded! You have ordained the punishment of some miscreants, the authors of our calamities; they dare to resist the justice of the nation, and we sacrifice to them the destinies of the country and of humanity! Let us, therefore, expect all the scourges and tribulations that those restless, because unpunished, factions can draw down upon us. In the midst of so many fiery passions, and in so vast an empire, the tyrants, whose armies I see fugitive, but not enveloped, not exterminated, are retiring to leave you a prey to your intestine dissensions, which they kindle themselves, and to an army of criminal agents whom you cannot even perceive. Let but the reins of the government

slacken a moment in your hands, and you will see them seized by military despotism; and you will see the chiefs of the rival factions overthrow the degraded National Representation. An age of civil war and calamities will desolate our country, and we shall perish for not having availed ourselves of a favourite moment marked in the history of man to found the temple of Liberty. We shall abandon our country to an age of calamities, and instead of blessings, the maledictions of posterity will attach to our memory, which might and ought to be dear to the human race! We shall not even have the merit of having undertaken great things from virtuous motives; we shall be confounded with the unworthy delegates of the people, who have dishonoured the National Representation, and we shall participate in their crimes for having suffered them to go unpunished. Immortality lay open before us—we shall perish with ignominy; The good citizens will perish; the wicked will perish likewise; for would an outraged and victorious people suffer them to enjoy in peace the fruits of their crimes? Would not the tyrants themselves break these vile instruments? What justice have we done to the oppressors of the people? What patriots have we avenged? Oppressed, though they have been, by the most odious abuses of the National Authority? Alas! where are the patriots that have even been able to make heard with impunity the voice of oppressed innocence? Have not the men of guilt established this frightful principle, that to denounce a faithless representative, is to conspire against the National Representation? The only answer of the oppressor to the oppressed men's complaints, is incarceration and fresh outrages! Are the departments, however, where these crimes have been committed, ignorant of them, because we forget, or neglect them? And do not the complaints which we refuse to hear reverberate with augmented force in the constrained hearts of the unhappy citizens? It is so easy and so sweet to be just! Why devote ourselves to the opprobrium of culprits by tolerating them? But can we stand still, if we would? Will not the abuses, if tolerated, go on increasing? Will not the culprits if left unpunished, hurry on from crimes to crimes? Are we willing to share in so much infamy, and doom ourselves to the fearful lot of oppressors of the people? What claims or titles have they to oppose to even the meanest tyrants? One faction would pardon another faction; the miscreants would soon avenge the world by cutting each other's throat, and if they escaped man's justice, or their own fury, would they escape eternal justice, which they have outraged by the most horrible of all offences?

For myself, whose existence appears to the enemies of my country an obstacle to their odious projects, I willingly consent to make them

the sacrifice of it, if their frightful empire is still to endure. Oh! who could desire any longer to behold that horrible succession of traitors more or less adroit in concealing their hideous souls under a mask of virtue, up to the very moment their crime seemed ripe for execution—and who will all leave to posterity the puzzle to decide which of the enemies of my country was the most base and atrocious? Were it to be proposed here to pronounce an amnesty in favour of the perfidious deputies, and to put every representative's crimes under the safe-guard of a decree, red blushes of shame would cover the face of every man of us; but to throw upon the shoulders of faithful representatives, the responsibility of denouncing the crimes, and, nevertheless to afterwards abandon those faithful representatives to the rage of an insolent league, for daring to do their duty! is not that a still more revolting disorder? *It is more than protecting crime, it is immolating virtue to it!*

Seeing the multitude of vices which the torrent of the revolution has rolled along pell-mell with the virtues of civism, I have sometimes shuddered with the fear of being sullied in the eyes of posterity, by the impure vicinage of those perverse men who have mixed themselves up, in our ranks, with the sincere champions of humanity. But the defeat of rival factions has, as it were, emancipated all the vices. They fancy they have no more to do now, than to divide the country amongst them, as so much booty, instead of rendering it free and prosperous; and I thank them in that their fury against all who oppose their projects, has drawn a deep line of demarcation between them, and all honest men. But the Verres and Catilines of France, already think themselves advanced far in the career of crime, to expose on *the tribune of harangues*, the head of their accuser. Well! I promised not long ago, to leave to my fellow-citizens a testament of dread import for the oppressors of the people. In fulfilment of that promise, *I bequeath to them* (the oppressors) *from this moment, opprobrium, and death!* I feel it is easy for the leagued tyrants of the world to overwhelm a single man; but I know also what are the duties of a man who can die in defending the cause of the human race. I have seen in history all the defenders of liberty overwhelmed by fortune or calumny; but soon after their oppressors and their assassins perished likewise. The good and the wicked, the tyrants and the friends of liberty, disappear alike from the earth, but on very different conditions. Frenchmen! suffer not your enemies to try to abase your souls and to enervate your virtues by a fatal doctrine. No! Chaumette, no! Fouché—death is not an eternal sleep! Citizens efface from the tombs that impious maxim, which casts a funeral crape over

nature, and which insults death; rather engrave upon them this, "*Death is the commencement of Immortality.*"

People! remember that if, in the Republic, justice does not reign with an absolute power, and if this word does not signify the love of equality, and of countries, liberty is but an empty sound! People! whom thy tyrants fear, whom they flatter, and whom they despise; thou, acknowledged to be sovereign, art always treated as slaves! bear in mind that, wherever justice does not reign, it is the passions of your magistrates (that *do reign*), and that the people has changed its chains, but not its destinies! Remember that there exists in thy bosom a leagued horde of knaves, which struggles against public virtue—which has more influence than thyself over thy own affairs—which dreads thee, and flatters thee, in mass, but proscribes thee, in detail, in the person of every public man faithful to thy interests, in the person of all good citizens! Call to mind that, far from sacrificing this handful of knaves to thy happiness, thy enemies wish to sacrifice thee to this handful of knaves, the authors of all our evils, and the sole obstacles to public prosperity!

Know that every man who will stand up to defend your cause, and public morals, will be overwhelmed with wanton insults, and proscribed by the knaves; know that every friend of Liberty will be ever placed between a duty and a calumny; that those who cannot be accused of having betrayed thee, will be accused of ambition; that the influence of probity and of principles will be compared to the force of tyranny, and to the violence of factions; that thy confidence and thy esteem will be titles, or warrants, of proscription for thy friends; that the cries of oppressed patriotism will be called cries of sedition; and that, not daring to attack thyself in mass, thou wilt be proscribed, in detail, in the persons of all good citizens, until men of ambition have organized their tyranny! Such is the empire of the tyrants armed against us, such is the influence of their league with all the men of corruption ever forward to serve them. Thus, then, the villains would impose it as law upon us, to betray the people, under pain of being dubbed Dictators. Shall we subscribe to this law? No! let us defend the people, at the risk of losing its esteem; let the villains speed to the scaffold by the road of crime, and we (if it must be) by that of virtue!

Shall we say that all is well? Shall we continue to praise, by habit or by practice, what is bad? Yes! if we would destroy our country! Shall we reveal the hidden abuses? Shall we denounce the traitors? If we do, we shall be told that we are shaking the constituted authorities, that we want to acquire influence for ourselves at their expense. What

shall we do then? Our *Duty*. What can be objected against him who wishes to speak the truth, and who consents to die for it (the truth). Let us declare then that there exists a conspiracy against public liberty; that it owes its force to a criminal coalition, which intrigues in the very bosom of the Convention; that this coalition has accomplices in the Committee on General Security, and in the offices of this Committee, which they control; that the enemies of the Republic have opposed this Committee to the Committee of Public Safety, and thus constituted two governments; that members of the Committee of Public Safety have entered into this complot; that the coalition thus formed seeks to destroy the Patriots and the country. What is the remedy for this evil? To punish the traitors, to renovate the offices of the Committee on General Security, to purify this Committee itself, and make it subordinate to the Committee of Public Safety; to purify the Committee of Public Safety itself; to constitute the unity of the Government under the supreme authority of the National Convention, which is the centre and the judge, and thus crush all factions under the weight of the National Authority, in order to raise upon their ruins the power of justice and Liberty. Such are the principles. If 'tis impossible to reclaim them without passing for an ambitious man, then must I conclude that principles are proscribed, and that Tyranny reigns amongst us, but not that I ought to be silent on the fact; for what can be objected to a man who has reason on his side, and who is ready to die for his country? I am made to combat crime, not to govern it. The time is not yet arrived for honest men to serve the country with impunity; the defenders of liberty will be no better than proscribed so long as the hordes of cheats and traitors shall be in the ascendant."

### Press Report

Robespierre delivered a long discourse on the villainous factions, heirs of the Héberts, the Chaumettes, *etc.*, that strain in every way to sow division among the representatives of the people. He uttered some strong truths on the present state of things and frankly unmasked the leaders of this new plot: we shall return to this interesting article. His discourse was loudly applauded and the majority of the assembly demanded that it be printed.

*Journal de la Montagne*, 9 Thermidor.

### National Convention

8 Thermidor [26 July]

*Collot d'Herbois presiding:*

*Robespierre, who has not appeared in the assembly for a long time, mounts the tribune and begins to speak.*

*He reads a long discourse in which he begins by vaunting his virtue. He complains of being slandered and singles out as enemies of the people all those who seem to him to be opposed to his projects. He then runs down all the government's operations; he declaims successively against the committees on Public Safety, on General Security, and on Finance. Without complaining specifically of the civic opposition raised by this last committee against his projects, he tries to include it in the proscription by accusing it of having "counter-revolutionized" the finances of the Republic.*

*He then claims that the patriots are oppressed. "Why these discourses," he says, "which are made to you about the success of the Armies? Dumouriez's system is followed in Belgium; sterile trees of liberty are planted; the gunners are being taken further away from Paris, a camp has been formed which could become dangerous," etc.*

*He adds that people have been trying to deceive us about the situation of the Republic; finally he adds that he will propose the only measures suitable for saving the fatherland.*

LECOINTRE DE VERSAILLES: I ask that the speech be printed.

BOURDON DE L'OISE: I oppose printing it. The speech contains matters serious enough to warrant being examined; there may be errors as well as truth in it and it would be prudent for the Convention to send it up to be examined by the two committees of Public Safety and General Security before ordering the printing.

BARÈRE: And I also esteem above all the quality of man and that of the French citizen; I speak here as an individual and not as a member of the Committee; I insist on the printing of the discourse because in a free country there is no truth which ought to be hidden; the light should not be placed under a bushel and there is no assertion which cannot be attacked and examined; it is for this reason that you are the National Convention, and I do not doubt that all our colleagues will insist on the printing.

COUTHON: I add to the proposal for the printing an amendment which seems very unimportant but which I think is very important; all of France, down to the tiniest commune, must know that there are

*Le Moniteur universel*, XXI, 329-31 (Edition of 11 Thermidor).