

REMARQUES PATRIOTIQUES,

Par la CITOYENNE, *Auteur de la Lettre au Peuple.*

Patriotic Observations, by the Citizeness, Author of the Letter to the People.¹

My *Letter to the People, or Patriotic Purse Project*, moved lofty souls. It provoked criticism among ill-natured citizens. They have the audacity to suggest that the French character is extinct and that selfishness is now the dominating spirit of the Nation. Ah! If it has not yet caught fire on behalf of the Motherland maybe it will rise up out of her ashes.² Until now France may have flourished too much and provoked the envy of all other nations; must she now, through the violent shock that she is experiencing, lose herself? Oh France, France! Lift up your proud head; do not encourage your neighbours to feel pity for you. Let the People, the Parliaments and the King unite as one family then the Nation will soon regain her original splendour. And you, the enemies of your brothers, of your King and of civic harmony, stifle this spirit of discord that will only lead to your downfall and the collapse of the State. Your country is already so beset by poverty; be wary of lighting the fires of war lest you be the first to die in a villainous butchery. My advice is not capricious; I use the truth to form the opinions that allow me to point out what is dangerous, or worthy or useful. It is a woman who dares to show her strength and her courage on behalf of her King and her Motherland.

France is sunk in grief, the people are suffering and the Monarch cries out. Parliament is demanding the Estates-General and the Nation cannot come to an agreement. There is no consensus on electing these assemblies. All these alternations are hobbling the welfare that the State expects from these lights. The Third Estate, with reason, claims a voice equal to that of the Clergy and Nobility; but the dignity of the latter will not allow that the representatives of the People have voices that are equally beneficial to the administration of the Finances or to finding prompt remedies for the problems that get worse every day. I feel as though I am seeing someone on their sickbed in need of an urgent operation. A good Doctor recommends immediate intervention; but the parents who frequently hold opposing views to those of the wise Doctor ask for a second opinion on the operation from the cream of the Faculty. The august Assembly of Asclepius cannot agree.³ Long discussions ensue; the illness becomes acute, or the patient dies: the good Doctor is the Third Estate. The gentlemen of the Nobility are the august Assembly of Doctors to whom I address, with the freedom that my sex permits me, the plea that they leave aside their rank, their titles and the pointless prejudices of their perfect dignity, to fly en masse to attend to the Kingdom, chasing away the bad and introducing the good.

These are the subjects we must discuss. Superciliousness must keep quiet and allow reason to take its place and in such a calamity Barons, Marquises, Counts, Dukes, Princes, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals, all must become citizens; all must set the example of patriotic love to the rest of the Nation, to work together for the good of the State and the glory of the country.

Is it really so hard to do good? Yes, undoubtedly, the Parliaments and the Sovereign are discovering this sad reality; but as I have already stated, the King and the Parliaments are of one mind, and the soul of the Motherland will distinguish itself. Powers, greater than the people, to better understand the truth consider the terrifying picture that I

1 Written in December 1788 this pamphlet set out de Gouges's ideas for social and agrarian reform and an equitable taxation system that includes a wealth tax ahead of its time by over a century. That a woman should address such unusual topics for the feminine mind drew attention to the author and apparently Necker expressed a desire to meet her. The text includes a utopian dream sequence in which the successful meeting of the Estates-General brings about great benefits for all.

2 I take this to refer to the French character and not selfishness.

3 Asclepius is the Greek god of medicine and healing.

will trace before your eyes depicting the greatest number of our citizens. Trade is suppressed, incalculable numbers of workers are unemployed and without bread. What becomes of them? Can you bear witness to this without trembling? All is in stasis while the heartless rich hoard their wealth, that vile instrument of their cupidity; can it prolong their lives, can it make them happier? These inactive treasures, what good do they do anyone? They must be offered, interest free, to the State, which is the same as when they stash them in the safe. By placing your money in the nation's fund your investment will reap benefits in excess of its value, your descendants will be pleased to find such dues attached to your fortune for you are leaving them glory and honour that will keep your memory alive forever.⁴ If such a beautiful victory fails to touch your abject souls then you must fear the desperation of the poor and their subsequent revolts. You cannot hide from yourselves that it is always the rich who are attacked by their murderous hands, and often in their fury they make no distinction between the good and the bad. In a Monarchical State like France the People can only be happy when the State is not bankrupt; its true constitution is founded on love of King and country; these are the true Franks, these are genuine virtues. If these no longer exist within the Nation, the Nation is lost, open to the pillage of brigands and perhaps subjugated by enemy Forces.

It is therefore up to you wise, great, good, citizens to deflect these problems that I fear will assail my Motherland.⁵ It is conceivable that my troubled heart has become over anxious and that these fears have enabled me to perceive an obvious danger. Ah! How many times have States destroyed themselves by failing to foresee great upheavals? These are controversies that involve everyone and the most powerful party must happily accept and hear the opinions of the weakest. You must pronounce on the concerns of the State and the public; but these pronouncements must unify and be agreeable to both for if you create divisions you will lose them both. I appreciate that in happier times the principles of the State differ from those of the public, and that the rules of government would not permit any observations to be made concerning its administration; however, having become more humane than political, more wise than futile, the government will listen with pleasure to the opinions of each and everyone when they concern the general good. The first impulsive ideas of the citizenry can cause the greatest setbacks but a salutary return to wisdom soon resolves those instants of turmoil. One can see this at present in the Decrees of Parliament. The harm was done through excessive zeal but this harm can be undone through the same zeal. Unite, Gentlemen, and do not lose sight of the voluntary tax for however feeble may be the lights of its Author France can, nonetheless, find them of use. Often the simplest remedies are the most effective; does one fear them because they are easy to implement? Does one fear putting them into practice because a woman proposes them? Must one fear tarnishing the glory of the crown by offering one's King an innocent, voluntary, gift when he can, at his behest, generate taxation? Is it more shameful to receive help from one's subjects than to force them to give it with a bayonet stuck in the end of a gun? It seems to me that taxes are collected in this way or I know nothing of political matters. It also seems to me that in times of war various maritime cities offered vessels to the King and he accepted these without blushing; I may not have a shadow of common sense but I see no difference between this and the national debt's Patriotic Purse Project. Is it feared that this tax may not be as effective as I promised? Yet once established one would, by this method, establish the true character of the French. This experience could be very useful to the State and the Nation, for this easy method, with no repercussion, would certainly offer points of view to those who are convening at this time.

⁴ These couple of sentences are typical of the syntax that de Gouges's critics found irritating. The 'treasures' and the people hoarding them become mixed up in the first sentence and in the second the hoarders are addressed directly. This is one of those examples where her enthusiasm got the better of her style, something she consistently claimed not to mind so long as her message was clear.

⁵ De Gouges is addressing the Estates General and not citizens in general.

A renowned Writer might present these ideas with more weight and energy but it would be impossible to imbue them with more importance, zeal or love than I do. All good Citizens have a right to offer their opinions at a time when their country is experiencing the deepest anxiety. Nothing should be hidden. The most honest Writers must say what they see, what they hear and what they feel. I belong to no party; I have no idea if any truly exists. May those who encourage any that are as harmful as they are excessive be punished: only the good of my country can excite my verve and enflame my spirits. And you, unhappy Citizens, unfortunate People, see how courageous I am in revealing myself in order to place under the eyes of the Monarch the terrifying images of your sad situation; yes, I dare hope that he will be moved by them, and that he will be enlightened with regard to your future by the pains his mistaken beliefs have created. Man can only learn from experience, and you, great King, allow me to show you what you understand so well, that the virtues of a true man make a good King, that you were born with these virtues, but that you were misled like all your predecessors. I am far from wishing to accuse your disgraced Ministers; maybe they were misled as you were, or they misled themselves, yet it is vital that their misfortunes enlighten today's Ministers who, no doubt better disposed, will not allow bad examples to influence their well-intentioned procedures. Public outcry presently pursues Ministers right into their sanctuaries; how satisfying, therefore, for an honest man to leave the ministry with the esteem of his Monarch and the goodwill of the Public! Nonetheless it has to be said that an honest Minister will often have merited both, and it is a contrary fate that deprives him of this advantage. It is not always possible to do good; anger one man and you make yourselves a hundred enemies. It is impossible for a Minister to please the many without displeasing the few; frequently deference and protectionism place and remove their protégés at will, or by default: Ministers are ceaselessly besieged by recommendations from Princes and Lords. Each man wants to keep his place, the favours are in the despatch boxes; each to his own and good luck to you. It is not always the wisest or most honest who succeed. The inducements of the Great and the Good have a considerable influence on Ministers. The Court should never ask favours from men in office given that it has no Regulators, no Inspectors to keep a track of their protégés. I would have liked permission to quote, with regard to this, a memorable event concerning the Queen that characterises the goodness and spirit of this Princess.

Sitting on the Throne, adored by the most virtuous man and the best of Kings, her generous compassion will allow her to come forward and succour the unfortunate; she will constantly support the elderly, deprived of strength, shelter and basic needs and console widows and orphans.

Oh all-powerful Queen! And you King of the French, you have been given a feeble account of the ills of your People; their pains, their sufferings, their miseries have been painted in favourable colours. People avoid burdening you yet, in order to ease the suffering of your subjects, you must be burdened by their troubles. You are facing a few difficulties because your Finances are disordered; you suffer because you know that your People are unhappy. Unhappy! Ah, Sire! There is a situation that is tenable between joy and misery and that is the one you believe your People to be in. But the one that exists, the one that I cannot describe without shuddering is the deplorable condition of one third of your People, the third with the most to recommend them, the masons, the men who till the soil, those whose only wealth is the manual labour they use to feed their wives and children. Since the onset of winter manifested itself so rigorously a month ago all work has ceased.⁶ The unfortunate labourers lack work and bread for their children; most of them can only shelter in appalling attics. Without fire, without help, what do they become?

⁶ Late November 1788 saw the start of an unprecedented cold snap (-18° recorded in Paris and 60cm thick ice on the Seine) that lasted until mid-January 1789. The effect of the 'grand froid' was particularly savage as a week earlier the weather was still unseasonably warm with summer flowers recorded in the hedgerows.

Unintentional outlaws that nature and destitution have forced into a life of crime. This tragic spectacle is on show at every moment of the day. There is another type of destitution; old age. Ah! How the fate of the elderly touches me. In the high season they can still do a bit work that will allow them to drag out the remainder of their miserable life: but in winter, in the frost, when the icicles of age have already frozen their exhausted vigour they want the strength to beg their daily bread and lack the most basic necessities of life. They wrap themselves up in their rags, lie on their pallets, and are found starved to death, frozen stiff.

An unfortunate elderly man, feeling his last moment upon him, used the last of his courage to leave the fleapit he was renting for no less than an 'ecu' a month. As he had lacked the wherewithal to pay for several months, the warden of his cubicle, an awful man a hundred times more ferocious than those of the prisons, chose this moment, when the poor old man had gone out to get a crust to eat, to go up and cruelly bar his door. On the man's return he barbarously told him: 'You'll only sleep here if you pay.' The unfortunate old man had found no succour and it was ten at night. In vain he begged hospitality for the night from his host; this tiger had the appalling audacity to refuse. The poor old man stole up the stairs towards his cubicle sat on the doorstep of his miserable fleapit where his cruel end awaited. Midnight had not yet struck when he was no longer of this world. Paris is full of similar situations; bread is dear, work is non-existent and the destitute lack everything. Meanwhile there are virtuous souls who do good work on behalf of the poor but their welfare always ends up in the wrong hands. Their gifts are always badly distributed and, in Paris, the genuinely needy are rarely adequately provided for. Ah! If only there could be homes, open in winter, for out of work labourers, the weak and elderly, and abandoned children.

Oh Queen! Oh honourable Monarch! May my narrative of suffering humanity influence you in favour of the unfortunate individuals whose deplorable fate I have outlined. Once the national debt is repaid your charitable nature will encourage this fine institution; all the pure and generous souls will send vast sums to this edifice. The gentlemen of the Church will be relieved of their work to help the poor, they will then have more time to devote themselves to their religion; a cult that gets weaker by the day.⁷ They

⁷ [Original footnote.] An incident that happened recently proves men capable of being virtuous and of recognising their faults through the benefits of a good religion and not of fanaticism.

Everyone is aware that M. le Conte de G. was dishonoured by Sir M. who dared accuse him of various crimes including that of swindling him out of a considerable sum. The strength and terrible skill of the accuser made his allegations appear genuine enough to convince the Judges that M. de G. was an embezzler. This last was crushed by the weight of the calumny; false witnesses were not a little responsible for his being condemned to an eternal shame. His worldly goods were confiscated and he was stripped of all rank and title. The unfortunate M. de G. wandering the world like a second Oedipus, having committed no crime either by default or mistake, dragged out a miserable existence. This name, once so famous in France, was disappearing under the weight of shame and infamy when an honourable God, guardian of victims, appeared in flesh at the bedside of the dying Mad. de M...She confessed to her Priest that she had been her husband's accomplice in all the crimes he had committed against M. le Conte de G., and told him: '...that she needed to admit her crimes in public in order to die happy and in so doing return to M. de G. what he was due.'

The Confessor was not going to discourage such a noble plan; an example of religion at its best. She called for a Lawyer and for her husband and in the presence of both the man of the cloth and the man of the law she said: 'Sir, I am about to leave you and this earthly world. A malevolent spirit filled me with the guilty desire to second you in your enterprise against M. de G.. Today a vengeful God inspires and orders me to unveil your crime and to restore to the innocent party what he is due. I called this Gentleman (looking at the Lawyer) to place my statement in his hands; you will sign it as proof of your attachment to me so that I may finally die in peace with a clear conscience.' No husband, however barbarous, could resist such a touching moment or refuse to pay religion and virtue their due. M. de M. had not the courage to refuse his wife. Penetrated, no doubt, by the terrible spectacle of mankind at its last delivering itself from the prejudices of the living, from the flamboyant efforts to hide criminal acts, seeing no shame in admitting these to men whose company will be eternally lost in favour of a Judge that no mortal can coerce, M. de M. confessed to everything and signed his wife's statement. She died a few hours later. M. le Comte de G. was rehabilitated. M. de M. was dishonourably discharged from the regiment he had served with for thirty years. Despite his adversary's misfortunes being rightly attested, will the rehabilitation offered by the justice system give him

would visit their destitute parishioners to give them tickets granting them access to these clean and hygienic homes, they would not ruin the State but, on the contrary, be its glory for they would be dedicated to preserving the lives of citizens. These establishments should even give opportunities for emulation and achievement; labourers would be employed in the harshest seasons and these homes could be responsible for many enterprises. These shelters could provide immediate relief for the widows and children of labourers who die unexpectedly. Over and over again one sees unfortunate women who have lost their means of survival on a building site, in a quarry or excavation: they are left with several children and no help, and often they are with child when their dead husbands are brought to them on stretchers. This spectacle moves a few souls at first but as everything in Paris is merely of the moment the unfortunate widows are soon left without any support, without bread just as their children, stretching out their arms, cry out for food. And in the harsh freezing winters these children die in the grip of appalling torments thereby adding yet more to those of their mothers.

Oh Sire! You who understands the duty of a King, through your beneficence, be a model to all Potentates on earth and show them how to relieve their People in these calamitous moments! Teach them again to rectify abuses and, in particular, to recover the love of their Subjects when they have lost it unjustly. Teach them to regulate their expenses according to their revenues, to parry the calamities that all too often overwhelm weak humanity, and to put several millions aside to support the destitute in times of crisis; times that desolate the Motherland such as epidemics, hail storms, frosts, famine. Teach them to make a terrifying example of those infamous Speculators.

Would six months incarcerated in a Dungeon where one usually places the enemies of the human race prove correction enough?

It is to the Queen that I dedicate and submit my patriotic thoughts; with her protection they will have the effect that I may anticipate. Trying to frighten me into believing that she will not receive this homage is pointless. My offering may wound her dignity but not her virtue. I am a simple commoner and have no voice with which to approach her Majesty; yet no doubt the laudable intentions of this work will reach her ears and I am sure I will see it printed with her name on the title page: this would prove the depth of her love for the French and show how much she encourages all those who strive for the common good.

And you, SIRE, would not condemn the useful ideas that this work offers and that will tell you, in its entirety, ideas similar to your own concerning the well-being of your People. You love order and sobriety; therefore in your wisdom you should undertake a yearly reckoning, courtesy of your Ministers, of your expenses and revenues, and, under no pretext whatsoever, allow the expenses to exceed the revenues. It is thanks to this rigour that you will uphold the glory of your unassailable throne at present so engulfed by brambles and thorns: but soon, SIRE, your virtues will stamp these underfoot and you will find lilies and roses arising in their place. There are no longer any fearful barriers to

back his goods? Will it allow his soul to forget the troubles he has suffered? [There follows three lines of full-stops.] Ah! Without a doubt...His name will become even better known than the catastrophe that had obscured it.

This is a remarkable fact. I could not fail to point it out in order to show that a good religion always leads men back to perform their duty. Some only subscribe to the cult of nature; they are no less honest for that. God clearly does not establish religion for those who are naturally good but as most are wicked, dogma becomes indispensable! Every nation has created its own unique religion; as I observe in my *Rêveries patriotiques* what difference does it make if the opinions of men differ as long as their differing opinions speak to a universal God.

It is therefore up to religious leaders to maintain the sacred character of God's will, to lead by example and to ceaselessly watch over the maintenance of His law: they must be barred from all other forms of administration.

surmount in order to reach you; Citizens are no longer obstructed, watched or locked up for speaking the truth. When this truth is the fruit of integrity you cast a benevolent eye on the admirable Author, and honest Ministers, who second your plans, no longer use their influence to harm others.

The calamitous situation in France has affected my soul, infused it with a noble plan to present enlightened ideas that could help enhance the well-being of the State without doing any harm. It may disclose the source of the harm and the impediments that have for too long prevented France from extricating herself from the pass she finds herself in. With audacity I will emphasise the first method I outlined in the *Patriotic Purse* for it conforms to the ideals expressed by the Author of *l'Etat libéré* with whom I am in agreement on this subject.⁸ I congratulate myself as this conformity proves that all French people think alike. I have the audacity to insist that this method is the only one of value, the only practicable one and the only one that will please everyone. I have the audacity to attest that the French spirit will be renewed following the opening of the Patriotic Purse. The King, the State, the Parliament and the People must, in this instance, unite to support its glory and its fame. Ah! What method could better shape this union than this voluntary tax that I continue to propose! Take the example of Quimper: this small Town has made itself illustrious. But it has to be said that its inhabitants are great, generous, in a word, true French people. To alleviate the national debt the great, the rich and the poor have united to offer a sum to their Prince: this offer is akin to that made by respectful children who come to the assistance of their father whose fortune is ruined. This is precisely how I envisage my project or that of the *Etat libéré*. Ah! No doubt all of France will emulate Quimper and no single hamlet will refuse to contribute to this Purse.

Muddle-headed people claim that egotism alone reigns in France. If this egotism were to save the kingdom from destruction then I would say that this spirit could reign for many a year but, as the destruction affects everyone, the spirit will disappear as soon as the Purse is launched. It will exterminate this appalling egotism that reduces the French to passivity and an awful acquiescence. Straightaway the love the French have for their nation will increase along with its glory. The wealth of the State is the foundation for the well-being of the people. The people, you will say, are crushed, how then can they rebuild the State? Also is it not the Monarch's intention to cease crushing it; he is gathering the Estates-General in order to support them. My voluntary tax is only aimed at the rich, these sovereigns of wealth to whom I show the perils of the Nation, their own particular perils. What would become of them if desperate people reacted with extreme hostility? Would it not be more attractive and more salutary to offer to the State the immense reserves that those favoured by fortune hide in the bottom of their safes? Add to this tax those that the King has a right to impose on all enterprises and favours accorded by his Majesty: all that is grace and favour, enterprise, privilege, belongs to the King and without ruining his people, he can redistribute as he sees fit in these areas. Take, for example, the regulation of Theatres where I may permit myself to express useful and profound opinions.

Having cast an eye, in my patriotic reveries, over the useful workings of men I cannot now, in the same text, refrain from mentioning the excesses, namely too many Theatres.

There should never be more than four Theatres in Paris, that is to say two French, two Italians and a Platform devoted to the public. However I would suggest, in this particular instance, that they be allowed to remain; indeed, if possible, their numbers should be allowed to increase. Profit could be made from their excess and used to limit the national debt. Never has the Theatre been so popular as now; people go without basic necessities to procure this pleasure. The State is ruined, the People are crushed: apart

⁸ Published in the spring of 1788 the opusculé *L'Etat libéré* was, according to the Montauban archivist Edouard Forestié, written by de Gouges's supposed uncle the Archbishop of Vienne, Jean-Georges Lefranc de Pompignan.

from the *Comédiens Français*, the Italians and Directors of smaller Theatres, all are plunged into misery.

Should an actress maintain a household and carriages like a Princess of royal blood? An Actor maintain an estate and huntsmen like a Prince? Ah! No doubt Molière would have saved himself from that ridicule yet although I criticize my contemporaries, I believe them to be too wise and too reasonable not to appreciate the fairness of my observations.

There are Actors whose conventional behaviour can edify even the most respectable people therefore no prejudice should attach itself to them for I dare say that when half of their profits are taken on a yearly basis to liquidate the national debt they will not complain.

Are the privileges of the *Comédiens* not the King's own favours? If he is in charge of reducing allowances is he not also in charge of using theatres to profit the State? All the Corporations will offer sums to the Government apart from those in charge of Actors, therefore they must be told to render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Should we feel sorry for the Performers of the *Comédie Française* and Italians if they are rated like those of the Opera? When the directors of small theatres have an allowance of a mere six or seven thousand francs, will they die of it? When the King reduces his expenditure, can Actors fear reducing theirs?...

The assembled Estates-General will illuminate with their wisdom all that can contribute to lessening the debts of the State. Can they stop themselves casting an eye on the theatres and the massive profits of the *Comédiens* and the utility of the contributions that it is proper to impose upon them? The Public would not resent this tax and might, on the contrary, applaud it with good heart. Visits to the theatre would be all the more pleasing.

I think that provincial theatres should have similar contributions imposed upon them, as those of the capital. The postal service, the messengers, coaches, leather and starch have all been administered in this way yet the *Comédiens* are allowed to enjoy an immense fortune, although the Authors' genius belongs essentially to the Nation, and can contribute to repairing its losses since the output of theatres is immense and the profit that could accrue, without damage to the actors, would amount to more than four million a year. I presume that this profit would be as great as that of the lotteries.

I am far from presuming that I alone merit the attention of the Government or of my compatriots in these patriotic observations. Men far better instructed than I in the politics of government can make more pertinent statements yet I make my case. In my patriotic dreams I have encountered, in big cities, so many idle men who do nothing but encourage weakness and vice. Why not use this mass of men to work barren land, given that they are unproductive in the cities. Let the Government give all the Kingdom's uncultivated land to societies or individuals in parcels that they can farm. It is the best way to save a third of the population from the edge of the precipice that is continually at its feet, and to rid society of a mass of useless men who, through weakness and poverty, become beggars. Most of this land would be devoted to rearing the livestock that has been lacking in France for several years and that deprives the disadvantaged of broth when they most need it, meat having become so exorbitantly expensive.

But the generous King, aided by his Estates-General, will soon resolve the problems that have besieged his Kingdom. Yes, ill-fated People, the virtues of your Monarch are inexhaustible and as a result you will rediscover your innate joy thus making his name forever dear in France. Leading our Nation he promises that he will 'consider all the necessary strategies to consolidate forever public order and the prosperity of the State'.

[New page]

TAXATION PLAN

New to the People and fit to destroy the excesses of luxury while augmenting the reserves of the treasury set aside to clear the national debt.

Luxury: it is one of those ailments that should by rights be self-healing. Take, for example, exquisite taste that rushes about knocking over and flattening all it meets in its path. A decent tax on such runaway luxury. Ah! How humanity would applaud such a thing. Would the dandy care if he had to pay twenty-five louis a year to break his neck or shatter a few limbs? This tax would not stop the exquisite taste, and if it did, how the poor pedestrians would bless this good revolution. The more modest, but equally pernicious, cabriolets would only pay half the forfeit.

A tax on the vehicles of the fashionable ladies would do them no harm and they would be no less triumphant for it. I would like to see a useful tax on, for example, jewellery; likewise one on fashion that multiplies from morning to night and night to morning.

Another tax, as wise as it is useful, could be imposed on servitude; the more valets a master keeps the more he will be taxed.

A tax should be imposed on the number of horses kept, vehicles, monograms and coats of arms; a simple vehicle would symbolise a man who only keeps what is indispensable: monograms, luxury and coats of arms symbolise pride and thus should pay more than the modest and indispensable.

An obvious tax, and one that has not yet been realised, is one that could be imposed on all the gambling in Paris, whether in Gaming Houses, private Residences or the Palaces of Lords and Princes.

If another tax were required it would not be out of place to impose one on paintings and sculptures.

Ordinary people do not have themselves painted or sculpted, nor do they decorate their apartments. A tax of this type cannot harm them nor can any of the others that I call to the attention of the King and the Nation. Despite my lack of Geometry or Finance I dare guarantee that this plan would clear the national debt within five years and as a result the ideas put forward by me here would be recognised. Perhaps I will be lucky enough to see my wishes come to fruition for my taxes are of a nature that can revolt no one apart from the dandies and fashionable ladies but their grudges are not murderous and the Public will applaud my plans.

Let the voluntary tax head those that I have indicated and I will have given my era a four-year advance. We will then join to sing: long live France, long live her King and long live the Motherland.

It is recognised amongst all Peoples and at all times that luxury has brought on the decline of States and sapped the courage and strength of men. France offers us, today, a terrible example of this. What system will the Government find to halt this unbridled luxury? Will it be a Law, an Edict? Will the prohibitions of the Parliament be able to bring about this wise revolution? No, these methods are impracticable so let the Government, in accord with the Parliaments, bring about taxes that correct these excesses of luxury. If these taxes failed to clear the national debt at least they would moderate the public's deregulated capriciousness; the great Lords would no doubt be the first to lead by example and what followed would prove how salutary taxes could be. The needs of France have multiplied since Henry IV but luxury has created a mass of useless ones. Have fortunes and revenues increased? Have the cultivated lands brought in enough to match expenditure? This is what must be reduced and it is not up to me, in my ignorance, to create a table of comparisons. I am only providing, in this work, a draft of my ideas; it is up

to the assembled Nation to know whether or not they merit being expanded and whether or not this sketch can be turned into a striking portrait of the good that might result. I had a dream and, as accurately as possible, I will recount it to the Nation. This dream, however strange, will show the Nation a heart that belongs to a true citizen and a spirit always seeking the common good. My imagination, full of these plans in favour of France, pursued me right into my sleep. Let not the French judge me according to my dream; let them not think that I want to send them to sleep with this form of writing, but the ideas that I have had are so particularly striking and patriotic that I could not refrain from reporting them at the end of these observations.

THE AUTHOR'S DREAM

Asleep in the arms of Morpheus I thought I was walking in the Tuilleries; I seemed to hear a martial tune; everyone started to run and, suddenly, I saw myself all alone in the middle of a vast garden. The sun was ending its course and the night was beginning to extend its shadows. Naturally fearful, in this isolated spot, I suddenly felt myself blessed with an intrepid courage. I sat at the foot of a tree and I seemed to fall into a second sleep. All at once I awoke to a delightful spectacle; the Tuilleries all lit up and a vision of men of an astonishing size all dressed alike. Their clothes, though simple, had the nobility of those worn at the time of Henri IV; they did not wear hats but rather a type of quartered red bonnet from which light shone all around. In their hands they held extraordinary torches on which they leaned, leaving the other hand free. Despite their procession being serious and of great consequence they received with pleasure all the *Mémoires* and Manuscripts that were handed to them.⁹ This kind of giant had an affable and appealing demeanour. I got up and followed the crowd. I admired the spectacle but as women are never satisfied with merely being onlookers and as curiosity always unmasks their sex, I could not prevent myself from asking who were these giants. Lunatics made fun of me; idiots bored me to death with their inane questions. Eventually these serious characters entered the Palace of the Tuilleries and the gates closed. What, cried I, can I not find out the identity of this august assembly? How so, replied a wise one, do you not recognise the Estates-General? Oh, Sir, I said to him, what is the meaning of the Manuscripts that were handed to them and that they accepted with such grace. Those, he replied, are everybody's ideas and they take care to refuse no one; they will try out the good ones and reject those that are of no use. Alas! I cried, for the second or third time, what about my *Letter to the People*, or my *Patriotic Observations*! What will happen to them? At the sound of these words the People encircled me and showed me, through their unfeigned and unaffected expressions, the regret we shared because I had not been able to present these writings in which their misery and problems were put forward. Despite the plethora of works these are the only writings in which the People are truly considered. My regret was inexpressible. I was turning away, sad and contemplative, when all at once [the sound of] a cannon struck my ear. A new ceremony was before my eyes; the Regiment of the French-Guards and the Swiss, the Body-Guards and the Constables all mounted on superb coursers but unarmed with only an olive branch for protection. In the centre of this escort I noticed a many-branched tree; I was intrigued and wanted to get closer to this tree that appeared to be weighed down with superb fruit. A band of People enveloped me and dragged me to the base of the wagon that carried this tree. O wonderful surprise! I see King Louis XVI, in person, who holds out his hand to me and graciously takes my *Letter to the People*. Beside him I notice a veiled woman who throws aside her veil and likewise holds out her hand to me. This additional surprise spreads a pure and enchanting satisfaction through my soul as I recognise the Queen. The amiable candour that spreads on her august brow,

⁹ A *mémoire* in French is generally an essay and not a work of autobiography as in English.

her affable and compassionate air persuaded me to present her with my *Patriotic Observations*. Hardly had she cast her eye over this writing than I saw her tears flow. She got up, shook the tree herself, and all the fruit fell into the hands of the people. The fruits that covered this tree had been hiding the King's crown which was attached to the treetop and now, uncovered, stood alone. The people knelt full of inexpressible joy at the gifts and generosity of the Queen. The King, glancing at his crown, spoke and said to the people: 'You see this crown, daughter of all ambition, this instrument that harmed the best of Kings. It was responsible for the death of Henry IV, my ancestor, who was acclaimed too late and regretted for so long; but following in his footsteps I only wish to keep it in order to defend you and make you happy'. Straightaway I heard a thousand cries of joy. This spectacle faded from my eyes and I found myself once again at the foot of my tree where I seemed to fall asleep again. It seemed to me that I slept for several days. Finally I awoke and sleepily tried to find my way home. I reached the Pont-Royal and saw everyone dressed differently. The clothes had become almost uniform; young men were no longer trussed up in their shrunken gilets nor in those ridiculous breeches that make them as rigid as bean-poles and as pleasing as puppets. All those I met had an honest and comfortable air but what struck me most were their manners for they doffed their hats to all the women they met. I walk down the rue du Bac; what a surprise, what astonishment; this street, despite it being winter and it having rained, was as clean as a well maintained courtyard; such was my pleasure in wandering down the street that I strolled to its very end and all around good manners were being observed with care; but what surprised me more, was the total absence of chaises, cabriolets, carriages, stonemason's delivery carts or dustcarts; meanwhile I noticed a few simple and modest vehicles moving at a slow pace and I observed that those inside were either elderly or infirm. I returned down the rue de Sève and wandered as far as the Croix-Rouge where I saw neither fiacre nor wheelbarrow. I came across the building site of a private residence yet this type of construction seemed to me to be as solid as it was beautiful. I stopped a moment in front of this town house and saw a man of mature years correcting a young lad. Several builders took up his defence and eventually the master mason relented. What, thought he, is my tormentor going to endlessly get me into trouble; three times now his actions have caused me to pay a fine and the profit from this project will not suffice to pay for his idiocy; he knows that it is forbidden, by order of the King and his Parliament, to deliver cartloads of rocks or stones after five in the morning in summer, or seven in winter; the days are now long and the naughty lad insists on loading the carts at seven on the dot. Well! That law, replied the lad, is nonsense, one can't always be precisely on time. What, rude fellow, took up the master mason in a fury, would you¹⁰ change the laws of the Kingdom that are now so reasonable and humane; do we no longer remember having our leg broken by an accursed chaise; do we no longer remember our own father being run over by a wagon delivering stones; do we no longer remember all those clashes at midday between fiacres, carts, wagons, carriages, chaises and cabriolets, with even the wheelbarrows being smashed to bits in these tumults; do we no longer remember the street taking four hours by the clock to become un-jammed and that everything was damaged in these frightful blockades and people on foot were at every moment mutilated or killed...In fact since the fortuitous Assembly of the Nation we no longer experience such tumultuous dangers, from two in the morning until five in summer, and seven in winter, the street cleaners are allowed to clean Paris, stone and rock deliveries can supply the capital at the same times. All heavy and dangerous carts are banned outside of these hours. The launderers' carts are the only ones allowed in at all hours as they only come twice a week; actually these trim carts are modest and lightly drawn. Surely, he added, you would not wish to upset this admirable arrangement for since Paris has received its supplies through the night there are far less criminals abroad. This benevolent vigilance guards Paris more than had been

10 The author uses 'tu' here instead of 'vous' to indicate familiarity.

envisioned when the plans were made. By merely seeking to remove the daytime dangers it has been possible to prevent those of the night for each cartload is well lit and accompanied by several soldiers. At every gates there are guards who supply as many men as are required. Could you wish for anything more admirable than these wise and humane laws?

I was stunned by such discourse and I recognised the changes that had occurred whilst I had been asleep; finally I reached the rue des Boucheries [Butchers']. This noxious street seemed quite altered. The sickening blood from the animals no longer ran in the gutters giving off foul odours that poisoned passers by. Instead the odour was sweet and succulent. All the butchers had been made to leave and where their trestles had been there were famous rotisseries and excellent caterers with M. Pothiez, whose taste in the culinary arts is exquisite, always at their head. The words rue des Friands [Delicacies] now replaced rue des Boucheries. In the rue de Condé I asked a pleasant enough apothecary how such tremendous changes had taken place. As he habitually spoke in monosyllables he did not reply as lucidly as I would have liked. I left in a fury telling him that he was exacerbating my impatience but the ill-humoured man suggested that I needed a few more drops of opium to send me back to sleep to dream again. At these words I woke up in a state of shock. I suddenly heard a horrendous noise coming from the street. I got up and found it was broad daylight. I ran to my window. Oh what a surprise, less attractive than my fiction! There was an appalling fight in my street. Wagons entangled with fiacres, a herd of cattle, climbing on the carriage wheels, were pressing their murderous heads in at the doors of these sorry vehicles terrifying those within. Herd of pigs and sheep fast approached and I understood that my pleasant dream was but a misleading illusion. No doubt I have stretched the truth a little but it is rooted in reality and as it is no more forbidden to have bad dreams than it is to write bad books I felt entitled to write this one. And if my Observations, along with my Dream, lack a little of that wit or depth that they might be capable of, at least I have shown all that I feel and all that I desire for the good of my Nation. This, my only goal, must afford me not only the indulgence of the critics but also the estimation of all lofty souls and all good Citizens for the matter is as thorny as it is difficult to consider, as arbitrary as it is politic, as fruitless as it is insipid in this frivolous century.