A PEOPLE WHO MEAN TO BE THEIR OWN GOVERNORS MUST ARM THEMSELVES WITH THE POWER WHICH KNOWLEDGE GIVES

THE ESSENTIAL
JOHN ADAMS

BY STEVE STRAUB
THE FEDERALIST PAPERS PROJECT
JOHN ADAMS QUOTES

Tis impossible to judge with much Præcision of the true Motives and Qualities of human Actions, or of the Propriety of Rules contrived to govern them, without considering with like Attention, all the Passions, Appetites, Affections in Nature from which they flow. An intimate Knowledge therefore of the intellectual and moral World is the sole foundation on which a stable structure of Knowledge can be erected. - Letter to Jonathan Sewall (October 1759)

Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence. - Argument in Defense of the British Soldiers in the Boston Massacre Trials (4 December 1770)

There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty. - Notes for an oration at Braintree (Spring 1772)

A Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever. - Letter to Abigail Adams (17 July 1775)

I agree with you that in politics the middle way is none at all. - Letter to Horatio Gates (23 March 1776)

Let them revere nothing but religion, morality and liberty. - Letter to Abigail Adams (15 April 1776) [1]

You bid me burn your letters. But I must forget you first. - Letter to Abigail Adams (28 April 1776)

There is something very unnatural and odious in a government a thousand leagues off. A whole government of our own choice, managed by persons whom we love, revere, and can confide in, has charms in it for which men will fight. - Letter to Abigail Adams (17 May 1776)

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People in a greater Measure than they have it now, They may change their Rulers and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty. They will only exchange Tyrants and Tyrannies. - Letter to Zabdiel Adams (21 June 1776)

I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States...

I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory. I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means. And that Posterity will triumph in that
The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore. - Letter to Abigail Adams (3 July 1776)

I long for rural and domestic scenes, for the warbling of Birds and the Prattle of my Children. Don't you think I am somewhat poetical this morning, for one of my Years, and considering the Gravity, and Insipidity of my Employment? — As much as I converse with Sages and Heroes, they have very little of my Love or Admiration. I should prefer the Delights of a Garden to the Dominion of a World. - Letter to Abigail Adams (16 March 1777)

I must study politics and war, that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. The science of government it is my duty to study, more than all other sciences; the arts of legislation and administration and negotiation ought to take the place of, indeed exclude, in a manner, all other arts. I must study politics and war, that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. Our sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain. - Letter to Abigail Adams (12 May 1780)

You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket. - Letter to John Quincy Adams (14 May 1781)

Thanks to God that he gave me stubbornness when I know I am right. - Letter to Edmund Jenings (1782)

All the perplexities, confusions, and distresses in America arise, not from defects in their constitution or confederation, not from a want of honor or virtue, so much as from downright ignorance of the nature of coin, credit, and circulation. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (23 August 1787)

The new Government has my best Wishes and most fervent Prayers, for its Success and Prosperity: but whether I shall have any Thing more to do with it, besides praying for it, depends on the future suffrages of Freemen. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (2 January 1789)

There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble
apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution. - Letter to Jonathan Jackson (2 October 1789)

The History of out Revolution will be one continued Lye from one end to the other. The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklins electrical Rod, smote the Earth and out sprung General Washington. That Franklin electrified him with his rod—and thence forward these two conducted all the Policy, Negotiations, Legislatures and War. - Letter to Benjamin Rush, 4 April 1790.

My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived; and as I can do neither good nor evil, I must be borne away by others and meet the common fate. - On the Vice-Presidency of the United States, in a letter to Abigail Adams (19 December 1793)

I read my eyes out and can't read half enough. ... The more one reads the more one sees we have to read. - Letter to Abigail Adams (28 December 1794)

The consequences arising from the continual accumulation of public debts in other countries ought to admonish us to be careful to prevent their growth in our own. - First Address to Congress (23 November 1797)

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a religious and moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other. - Letter to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts (11 October 1798)

I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof. - On the White House, in a letter to Abigail Adams (2 November 1800)

I had heard my father say that he never knew a piece of land run away or break. - Autobiography (1802–1807)

Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives. - Letter to Benjamin Rush (18 April 1808)

The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that; i.e. all the Glory of it. I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations. If I were an atheist of the other sect, who believe or pretend to believe that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme,
intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization. - Letter to François Adriaan van der Kemp (16 February 1809)

When I went home to my family in May, 1770, from the town meeting in Boston, which was the first I had ever attended, and where I had been chosen in my absence, without any solicitation, one of their representatives, I said to my wife, "I have accepted a seat in the House of Representatives, and thereby have consented to my own ruin, to your ruin, and to the ruin of our children. I give you this warning, that you may prepare your mind for your fate." She burst into tears, but instantly cried out in a transport of magnanimity, "Well, I am willing in this cause to run all risks with you, and be ruined with you, if you are ruined." These were times, my friend, in Boston, which tried women's souls as well as men's. - Letter to Benjamin Rush (12 April 1809)

You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other. The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that; i.e. all the Glory of it. - Letter to Benjamin Rush (21 June 1811)

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence, were ... the general principles of Christianity, in which all those sects were united, and the general principles of English and American liberty, in which all those young men united, and which had united all parties in America, in majorities sufficient to assert and maintain her independence. Now I will avow, that I then believed and now believe that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature and our terrestrial, mundane system. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson, 28 June 1813.

While all other Sciences have advanced, that of Government is at a stand; little better understood; little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (9 July 1813)

You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (13 July 1813)

Indeed, Mr. Jefferson, what could be invented to debase the ancient Christianism which Greeks, Romans, Hebrews and Christian factions, above all the Catholics, have not fraudulently imposed upon the public? Miracles after miracles have rolled down in torrents. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (3 December 1813)

What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760 - 1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington. If the Christian religion, as I understand it, or as you understand it, should maintain its ground, as I believe it will, yet
Platonic, Pythagoric, Hindoo, and cabalistic Christianity, which is Catholic Christianity, and which has prevailed for 1,500 years, has received a mortal wound, of which the monster must finally die. Yet so strong is his constitution, that he may endure for centuries before he expires. - John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson (July 16, 1814).

As long as Property exists, it will accumulate in Individuals and Families. As long as Marriage exists, Knowledge, Property and Influence will accumulate in Families. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (16 July 1814)

As to the history of the revolution, my ideas may be peculiar, perhaps singular. What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760–1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (24 August 1815)

We may appeal to every page of history we have hitherto turned over, for proofs irrefragable, that the people, when they have been unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous and cruel as any king or senate possessed of uncontrolable power ... All projects of government, formed upon a supposition of continual vigilance, sagacity, and virtue, firmness of the people, when possessed of the exercise of supreme power, are cheats and delusions ... The fundamental article of my political creed is that despotism, or unlimited sovereignty, or absolute power, is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratical council, an oligarchical junto, and a single emperor. Equally arbitrary, cruel, bloody, and in every respect diabolical. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (13 November 1815)

Power always sincerely, conscientiously, de très bon foi, believes itself right. Power always thinks it has a great soul and vast views, beyond the comprehension of the weak. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (2 February 1816)

I see in every Page, Something to recommend Christianity in its Purity and Something to discredit its Corruptions. I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved — the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced! With the rational respect that is due to it, knavish priests have added prostitutions of it, that fill or might fill the blackest and bloodiest pages of human history. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (3 September 1816)

Let the human mind loose. It must be loose. It will be loose. Superstition and dogmatism cannot confine it. We have now, it Seems a National Bible Society, to propagate King James's Bible, through all Nations. Would it not be better to apply these pious Subscriptions, to purify Christendom from the Corruptions of
Christianity; than to propagate those Corruptions in Europe Asia, Africa and America! ... Conclude not from all this, that I have renounced the Christian religion, or that I agree with Dupuis in all his Sentiments. Far from it. I see in every Page, Something to recommend Christianity in its Purity and Something to discredit its Corruptions. ... The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my Religion. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (4 November 1816)

Let the human mind loose. It must be loose. It will be loose. Superstition and dogmatism cannot confine it. - Letter to his son, John Quincy Adams (13 November 1816)

Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been on the point of breaking out, "This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!" But in this exclamation I would have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in polite company, I mean Hell. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (19 April 1817).

I really wish the Jews again in Judea, an independent nation, for, as I believe, the most enlightened men of it have participated in the amelioration of the philosophy of the age; once restored to an independent government, and no longer persecuted, they would soon wear away some of the asperities and peculiarities of their character, possibly in time become liberal Unitarian Christians, for your Jehovah is our Jehovah, and your God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is our God. - Letter to Mordecai Manuel Noah (1819)

Abuse of words has been the great instrument of sophistry and chicanery, of party, faction, and division of society. - Letter to J.H. Tiffany (31 March 1819)

When we say God is a spirit, we know what we mean, as well as we do when we say that the pyramids of Egypt are matter. Let us be content, therefore, to believe him to be a spirit, that is, an essence that we know nothing of, in which originally and necessarily reside all energy, all power, all capacity, all activity, all wisdom, all goodness. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (17 January 1820)

Can a free government possibly exist with the Roman Catholic religion? - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (19 May 1821)

The Europeans are all deeply tainted with prejudices, both ecclesiastical and temporal, which they can never get rid of. They are all infected with episcopal and presbyterian creeds, and confessions of faith. They all believe that great Principle which has produced this boundless universe, Newton’s universe and Herschell’s universe, came down to this little ball, to be spit upon by Jews. And until this awful blasphemy is got rid of, there never will be any liberal science in the world. - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (22 January 1825)
Old minds are like old horses; you must exercise them if you wish to keep them in working order. No man who ever held the office of president would congratulate a friend on obtaining it. He will make one man ungrateful, and a hundred men his enemies, for every office he can bestow. - Letter to Josiah Quincy III (14 February 1825)

My best wishes, in the joys, and festivities, and the solemn services of that day on which will be completed the fiftieth year from its birth, of the independence of the United States: a memorable epoch in the annals of the human race, destined in future history to form the brightest or the blackest page, according to the use or the abuse of those political institutions by which they shall, in time to come, be shaped by the human mind. - Reply to an invitation to 50th Independence Day celebrations from a committee of the citizens of Quincy, Massachusetts (7 June 1826)

Negro Slavery is an evil of Colossal magnitude and I am utterly averse to the admission of Slavery into the Missouri Territories. - Letter to William Tudor

Diaries

Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion incumbered with in these days? Major Greene this evening fell into some conversation with me about the Divinity and satisfaction of Jesus Christ. All the argument he advanced was, "that a mere creature or finite being could not make satisfaction to infinite justice for any crimes," and that "these things are very mysterious."

"17. Wednesday. A fine morning. Proceeded on my journey towards Braintree. Stopped to see Mr. Haven, of Dedham, who told me, very civilly, he supposed I took my faith on trust from Dr. Mayhew, and added, that he believed the doctrine of satisfaction of Jesus Christ to be essential to Christianity, and that he would not believe this satisfaction unless he believed the Divinity of Christ. Mr. Balch was there too, and observed, he would not be a Christian if he did not believe mysteries of the gospel; that he could bear with an Arminian, but when, Dr. Mayhew they denied the Divinity and satisfaction of Christ, he had no more to do with them; that he knew to make of Dr. Mayhew's two discourses upon the expected of all things. They gave him an idea of a cart whose wanted greasing; it rumbled on in a hoarse, rough manner; there was a good deal of ingenious talk in them, but it was thrown together in a jumbled, confused order. He believed the Doctor wrote them in a great panic. He added further that Arminians, however stiffly they maintain their opinions in health, always, he takes notice, retract when they come to die, and choose to die Calvinists. Set out for Braintree, and arrived about sunset."

Entry for 17 February 1756
Spent an hour in the beginning of the evening at Major Gardiner's, where it was thought that the design of Christianity was not to make men good riddle-solvers, or good mystery-mongers, but good men, good magistrates, and good subjects, good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants. The following questions may be answered some time or other, namely, — Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion incumbered with in these days?

(18 February 1756)

No man is entirely free from weakness and imperfection in this life. Men of the most exalted genius and active minds are generally most perfect slaves to the love of fame. They sometimes descend to as mean tricks and artifices in pursuit of honor or reputation as the miser descends to in pursuit of gold.

(19 February 1756)

A pen is certainly an excellent instrument to fix a man's attention and to inflame his ambition.

(14 November 1760)

This is the most magnificent movement of all! There is a dignity, a majesty, a sublimity, in this last effort of the patriots that I greatly admire. The people should never rise without doing something to be remembered — something notable and striking. This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences, and so lasting, that I can't but consider it as an epocha in history!

**On the Boston Tea Party (17 December 1773)**

Virtue is not always amiable.

(9 February 1779)

By my physical constitution I am but an ordinary man ... Yet some great events, some cutting expressions, some mean hypocracies, have at times thrown this assemblage of sloth, sleep, and littleness into rage like a lion.

(26 April 1779)

The Christian religion is, above all the religions that ever prevailed or existed in ancient or modern times, the religion of wisdom, virtue, equity, and humanity, let the blackguard Paine say what he will; it is resignation to God, it is goodness itself to man.
(26 July 1796)

Tacitus appears to have been as great an enthusiast as Petrarch for the revival of the republic and universal empire. He has exerted the vengeance of history upon the emperors, but has veiled the conspiracies against them, and the incorrigible corruption of the people which probably provoked their most atrocious cruelties. Tyranny can scarcely be practised upon a virtuous and wise people.

(31 July 1796)

It is folly to anticipate evils, and madness to create imaginary ones.

(4 August 1796)

Omnium rerum domina, virtus. Virtue is the mistress of all things. Virtue is the master of all things. Therefore a nation that should never do wrong must necessarily govern the world. The might of virtue, the power of virtue, is not a very common topic, not so common as it should be.

(6 August 1796)

**A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law (1765)**

Let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing.

The preservation of the means of knowledge among the lowest ranks is of more importance to the public than all the property of all the rich men in the country.

Always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in providence, for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.

The poor people, it is true, have been much less successful than the great. They have seldom found either leisure or opportunity to form a union and exert their strength; ignorant as they were of arts and letters, they have seldom been able to frame and support a regular opposition. This, however, has been known by the great to be the temper of mankind; and they have accordingly labored, in all ages, to wrest from the populace, as they are contemptuously called, the knowledge of their rights and wrongs, and the power to assert the former or redress the latter. I say RIGHTS, for such they have, undoubtedly, antecedent to all earthly government, — Rights, that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws — Rights, derived from the great Legislator of the universe.

Liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood.
Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right, from the frame of their nature, to knowledge, as their great Creator, who does nothing in vain, has given them understandings, and a desire to know; but besides this, they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible, divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean, of the characters and conduct of their rulers. Rulers are no more than attorneys, agents, and trustees, of the people; and if the cause, the interest, and trust, is insidiously betrayed, or wantonly trifled away, the people have a right to revoke the authority that they themselves have deputed, and to constitute other and better agents, attorneys and trustees.

The jaws of power are always open to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing.

Be not intimidated, therefore, by any terrors, from publishing with the utmost freedom, whatever can be warranted by the laws of your country; nor suffer yourselves to be wheedled out of your liberties by any pretenses of politeness, delicacy, or decency. These, as they are often used, are but three different names for hypocrisy, chicanery, and cowardice.

Let us tenderly and kindly cherish therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.

Let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing.

**Novanglus Essays (1774 - 1775)**

Nip the shoots of arbitrary power in the bud, is the only maxim which can ever preserve the liberties of any people.

No. 3

We are told: "It is a universal truth, that he that would excite a rebellion, is at heart as great a tyrant as ever wielded the iron rod of oppression." Be it so. We are not exciting a rebellion. Opposition, nay, open, avowed resistance by arms, against usurpation and lawless violence, is not rebellion by the law of God or the land. Resistance to lawful authority makes rebellion. ... Remember the frank Veteran acknowledges, that "the word rebel is a convertible term."

No. 5

A government of laws, and not of men.

No. 7; this was incorporated into the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780

Metaphysicians and politicians may dispute forever, but they will never find any other moral principle or foundation of rule or obedience, than the consent of governors and governed.

No. 7
Thoughts on Government (1776)

The form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best. We ought to consider what is the end of government, before we determine which is the best form. Upon this point all speculative politicians will agree, that the happiness of society is the end of government, as all Divines and moral Philosophers will agree that the happiness of the individual is the end of man. From this principle it will follow, that the form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best.

Fear is the foundation of most governments; but it is so sordid and brutal a passion, and renders men in whose breasts it predominates so stupid and miserable, that Americans will not be likely to approve of any political institution which is founded on it.

When annual elections end, there slavery begins.

Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

The judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that.

A Defence of the Constitutions of Government (1787)

The rich, the well-born, and the able, acquire an influence among the people that will soon be too much for simple honesty and plain sense, in a house of representatives. The most illustrious of them must, therefore, be separated from the mass, and placed by themselves in a senate; this is, to all honest and useful intents, an ostracism.

Vol. I, Preface, p. xi

Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom.

Ch. 3: Errors of Government and Rules of Policy

The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the law of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If "Thou shall not covet," and "Thou shall not steal," are not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.

Ch. 1: The Right Constitution of a Commonwealth Examined
Killing one tyrant only makes way for worse, unless the people have sense, spirit and honesty enough to establish and support a constitution guarded at all points against the tyranny of the one, the few, and the many.

The right of a nation to kill a tyrant, in cases of necessity, can no more be doubted, than to hang a robber, or kill a flea. But killing one tyrant only makes way for worse, unless the people have sense, spirit and honesty enough to establish and support a constitution guarded at all points against the tyranny of the one, the few, and the many. Let it be the study, therefore, of lawgivers and philosophers, to enlighten the people's understandings and improve their morals, by good and general education; to enable them to comprehend the scheme of government, and to know upon what points their liberties depend; to dissipate those vulgar prejudices and popular superstitions that oppose themselves to good government; and to teach them that obedience to the laws is as indispensable in them as in lords and kings.

Ch. 18

A single assembly will never be a steady guardian of the laws, if Machiavel is right, when he says, Men are never good but through necessity: on the contrary, when good and evil are left to their choice, they will not fail to throw everything into disorder and confusion. Hunger and poverty may make men industrious, but laws only can make them good; for, if men were so of themselves, there would be no occasion for laws; but, as the case is far otherwise, they are absolutely necessary.

Vol. I, letter XXVI Ch. 4 Opinions of Philosophers : Dr. Price

There never was yet a people who must not have somebody or something to represent the dignity of the state, the majesty of the people, call it what you will — a doge, an avoyer, an archon, a president, a consul, a syndic; this becomes at once an object of ambition and dispute, and, in time, of division, faction, sedition, and rebellion.

Letter LV: Conclusion

**Discourses on Davila (1790)**

The world grows more enlightened. Knowledge is more equally diffused. Newspapers, magazines, and circulating libraries have made mankind wiser. Titles and distinctions, ranks and orders, parade and ceremony, are all going out of fashion.

This is roundly and frequently asserted in the streets, and sometimes on theatres of higher rank. Some truth there is in it; and if the opportunity were temperately improved, to the reformation of abuses, the
rectification of errors, and the dissipation of pernicious prejudices, a great advantage it might be. But, on the other hand, false inferences may be drawn from it, which may make mankind wish for the age of dragons, giants, and fairies.

No. 13

Are riches, honors, and beauty going out of fashion? Is not the rage for them, on the contrary, increased faster than improvement in knowledge? As long as either of these are in vogue, will there not be emulations and rivalries? Does not the increase of knowledge in any man increase his emulation; and the diffusion of knowledge among men multiply rivalries? Has the progress of science, arts, and letters yet discovered that there are no passions in human nature? no ambition, avarice, or desire of fame? Are these passions cooled, diminished, or extinguished? Is the rage for admiration less ardent in men or women? Have these propensities less a tendency to divisions, controversies, seditions, mutinies, and civil wars than formerly? On the contrary, the more knowledge is diffused, the more the passions are extended, and the more furious they grow.

No. 13

Property must be secured, or liberty cannot exist. But if unlimited or unbalanced power of disposing property, be put into the hands of those who have no property, France will find, as we have found, the lamb committed to the custody of the wolf. In such a case, all the pathetic exhortations and addresses of the national assembly to the people, to respect property, will be regarded no more than the warbles of the songsters of the forest. The great art of law-giving consists in balancing the poor against the rich in the legislature, and in constituting the legislative a perfect balance against the executive power, at the same time that no individual or party can become its rival. The essence of a free government consists in an effectual control of rivalries. The executive and the legislative powers are natural rivals; and if each has not an effectual control over the other, the weaker will ever be the lamb in the paws of the wolf. The nation which will not adopt an equilibrium of power must adopt a despotism. There is no other alternative. Rivalries must be controlled, or they will throw all things into confusion; and there is nothing but despotism or a balance of power which can control them.

No. 13
Letters to John Taylor (1814)

Liberty, according to my metaphysics, is an intellectual quality; an attribute that belongs not to fate nor chance. Neither possesses it, neither is capable of it. There is nothing moral or immoral in the idea of it. The definition of it is a self-determining power in an intellectual agent. It implies thought and choice and power; it can elect between objects, indifferent in point of morality, neither morally good nor morally evil. If the substance in which this quality, attribute, adjective, call it what you will, exists, has a moral sense, a conscience, a moral faculty; if it can distinguish between moral good and moral evil, and has power to choose the former and refuse the latter, it can, if it will, choose the evil and reject the good, as we see in experience it very often does.

I, p. 448.

I do not say that democracy has been more pernicious on the whole, and in the long run, than monarchy or aristocracy. Democracy has never been and never can be so durable as aristocracy or monarchy; but while it lasts, it is more bloody than either.

XVIII, p. 483.

Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true, in fact, and nowhere appears in history. Those passions are the same in all men, under all forms of simple government, and when unchecked, produce the same effects of fraud, violence, and cruelty.

XVIII, p. 484.

The priesthood have, in all ancient nations, nearly monopolized learning. Read over again all the accounts we have of Hindoos, Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Celts, Teutons, we shall find that priests had all the knowledge, and really governed mankind. Examine Mahometanism, trace Christianity from its first promulgation; knowledge has been almost exclusively confined to the clergy. And, even since the Reformation, when or where has existed a Protestant or dissenting sect who would tolerate a free inquiry? The blackest billingsgate, most ungentlemanly insolence, the most yahooish brutality is patiently endured, countenanced, propagated and applauded. But touch a solemn truth in collision with a dogma of a sect, though capable of the clearest proof, and you will soon find you have disturbed a nest, and the hornets will swarm about your legs and hands, and fly into your face and eyes.

XXXI, p. 517.
What do we mean by the American Revolution?

But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations. ... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.

By what means this great and important alteration in the religious, moral, political, and social character of the people of thirteen colonies, all distinct, unconnected, and independent of each other, was begun, pursued, and accomplished, it is surely interesting to humanity to investigate, and perpetuate to posterity.

To this end, it is greatly to be desired, that young men of letters in all the States, especially in the thirteen original States, would undertake the laborious, but certainly interesting and amusing task, of searching and collecting all the records, pamphlets, newspapers, and even handbills, which in any way contributed to change the temper and views of the people, and compose them into an independent nation.

The colonies had grown up under constitutions of government so different, there was so great a variety of religions, they were composed of so many different nations, their customs, manners, and habits had so little resemblance, and their intercourse had been so rare, and their knowledge of each other so imperfect, that to unite them in the same principles in theory and the same system of action, was certainly a very difficult enterprise. The complete accomplishment of it, in so short a time and by such simple means, was perhaps a singular example in the history of mankind. Thirteen clocks were made to strike together — a perfection of mechanism, which no artist had ever before effected.

In this research, the gloriole of individual gentlemen, and of separate States, is of little consequence. The means and the measures are the proper objects of investigation. These may be of use to posterity, not only in this nation, but in South America and all other countries. They may teach mankind that revolutions are no trifles; that they ought never to be undertaken rashly; nor without deliberate consideration and sober reflection; nor without a solid, immutable, eternal foundation of justice and humanity; nor without a people possessed of intelligence, fortitude, and integrity sufficient to carry them with steadiness, patience, and perseverance, through all the vicissitudes of fortune, the fiery trials and melancholy disasters they may have to encounter.