


DANTON

EORGES JACQUES DANTON, French orator, and one of the chief leaders of the Revolution, was born at Arcis-sur-Aube, Oct. 28, 1759, and died by the guillotine, April 5, 1794. His career opened as a lawyer, for which he possessed the gifts of eloquence and a sonorous voice, with the energy and figure of a Hercules, but was soon drawn into the vortex of the French Revolution. In this tragic outbreak he played the part of the "Mirabeau of the Sans Culottes," led the attack on the Tuileries and voted for the death of Louis XVI, and sanctioned the hideous massacres of September, 1792, in which, in Paris alone, 1,100 were slaughtered. He became for a time minister of justice, but resigned the post to enter the National Convention, which with practically absolute power passed a law ordaining domiciliary visits, and led to a veritable "reign of terror" and to the inciting of every passion known to humanity. In the tumult of war with Austria, he undertook various missions to the Netherlands, and urged the levy of fresh troops for the defeat within and without the country of the foes of France. He created the Revolutionary Tribunal, and after the fall of the Girondists, became a member of the Committee of Public Safety, April to September, 1793, where he sided with Robespierre against the Girondins, though he sought to save the latter from violent harm. On the fall of the Hébertists, he became obnoxious to Robespierre, who sent him with Desmoulins and others before the Revolutionary Tribunal, which consigned him to the axe, to be followed by Robespierre himself and those of his consorts who had decreed the era of the Terror. His last words to the headsman were: "Thou wilt show my head to the people; it is worth showing." A reflection of his in prison has also been recorded: "Oh, it were better to be a poor fisherman than to meddle with the governing of men."

TO DARE, TO DARE AGAIN; ALWAYS TO DARE

DELIVERED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1792, ON THE
DEFENCE OF THE REPUBLIC

IT SEEMS a satisfaction for the ministers of a free people to announce to them that their country will be saved. All are stirred, all are enthused, all burn to enter the combat.

You know that Verdun is not yet in the power of our
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enemies and that its garrison swears to immolate the first who breathes a proposition of surrender.

One portion of our people will guard our frontiers, another will dig and arm the intrenchments, the third with pikes will defend the interior of our cities. Paris will second these great efforts. The commissioners of the Commune will solemnly proclaim to the citizens the invitation to arm and march to the defence of the country. At such a moment you can proclaim that the capital deserves the esteem of all France. At such a moment this National Assembly becomes a veritable committee of war. We ask that you concur with us in directing this sublime movement of the people, by naming commissioners to second and assist all these great measures. We ask that any one refusing to give personal service or to furnish arms shall meet the punishment of death. We ask that proper instructions be given to the citizens to direct their movements. We ask that carriers be sent to all the departments to notify them of the decrees that you proclaim here. The tocsin we shall sound is not the alarm signal of danger, it orders the charge on the enemies of France. (Applause.) To conquer we have need to dare, to dare again, always to dare! And France will be saved!

(Pour les vaincre, il nous faut de l'audace; encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace; et la France est sauvée.)

AGAINST IMPRISONMENT FOR DEBT

DELIVERED IN CONVENTION, MARCH 9, 1793

BYOND a doubt, citizens, the hopes of your commissioners will not be deceived. Yes, your enemies, the enemies of liberty, shall be exterminated, for your efforts shall be relentless. You are worthy the dignity of regulating and controlling the nation's energy. Your commissioners, disseminated in all parts of the Republic, will repeat to Frenchmen that the great quarrel between despotism and liberty shall soon terminate. The people of France shall be avenged, it becomes us then to put the political world in harmony, to make laws in accord with such harmony. But before we too deeply entertain these grander objects, I shall ask you to make a declaration of a principle too long ignored; to abolish a baneful error, to destroy the tyranny of wealth upon misery.

If the measures I propose be adopted, then Pitt, the Breteuil of English diplomacy, and Burke, the Abbé Maury of the British Parliament, who are impelling the English people to-day against liberty, may be touched.

What do you ask? You would have every Frenchman armed in the common defence. And yet there is a class of men sullied by no crime, who have stout arms, but no liberty. They are the unfortunates detained for debt. It is a shame for humanity, it is against all philosophy, that a man in receiving money can pawn his person as security. I can readily prove that this principle is favorable to cupidity, since experience proves that the lender takes

no pecuniary security, since he has the disposition of the body of his debtor. But of what importance are these mercantile considerations? They should not influence a great nation. Principles are eternal, and no Frenchman can be rightly deprived of his liberty unless he has forfeited it to society. The possessing and owning class need not be alarmed. Doubtless, some individuals go to extremes, but the nation, always just, will respect all the proprieties. Respect misery, and misery will respect opulence. (Applause.) Never wrong the unfortunate, and the unfortunate, who have more soul than the rich, will remain guiltless. (Loud applause.)

I ask that this National Convention declare that every French citizen imprisoned for debt shall be liberated, because such imprisonment is contrary to moral health, contrary to the rights of man, and to the true principles of liberty.

EDUCATION, FREE AND COMPULSORY

FROM A SPEECH DELIVERED IN THE CONVENTION, AUGUST 13, 1793

CITIZENS—After having given liberty to France, after having vanquished her enemies, there can be no honor greater than to prepare for future generations an education in keeping with that liberty. This is the object which Lepeletier proposes: that all that is good for society shall be adopted by those who live under its social contract. . . . It has been said that paternal affection opposes the execution of such plans. Certainly we must respect natural rights even in their perversion. But even if we do not fully sustain

compulsory schooling, we must not deprive the children of the poor of an education.

The greatest objection has been that of finding the means; but I have already said there is no real extravagance where the good result to the public is so great, and I add the principle that the child of the poor can be taught at the expense of the superfluities of the scandalous fortunes erected among us. It is to you who are celebrated among our Republicans that I appeal; bring to this subject the fire of your imagination, the energy of your character. It is the people who must endow national education.

When you commence to sow this seed of education in the vast field of the Republic, you must not count the expense of reaping the harvest. After bread, education is the first need of a people. (Applause.) I ask that the question be submitted, that there be founded, at the expense of the nation, establishments where each citizen can have the right to send his children for free public instruction. It is to the monks—it is to the age of Louis XIV., when men were great by their acquirements, that we owe the age of philosophy, that is to say, of reason, brought to the knowledge of the people. To the Jesuits, lost by the political ambitions, we owe an impetus in education evoking our admiration. But the Republic has been in the souls of our people, twenty years ahead of its proclamation. Corneille wrote dedications to Montauron, but Corneille made the "Cid," "Cinna"; Corneille spoke like a Roman, and he who said: "For being more than a king you think you are something," was a true Republican.

Now for public instruction; everything shrinks in domestic teaching, everything enlarges and ennobles in public communal instruction. A mistake is made in presenting a

tableau of paternal affections. I, too, am a father, and more so than the aristocrats who oppose public education, for they are never sure of their paternities. (Laughter.) When I consider my rights relatively to the general good I feel elevated; my son is not mine. He belongs to the Republic. Let her dictate his duties that he can best serve her. It has been said it is repugnant to the heart of our peasantry to make such sacrifice of their children. Well, do not constrain them too much. Let there be classes, if necessary, that only meet on the Sabbath. Begin the system by a gradual adaptation to the manners of the people. If you expect the State to make an instant and absolute regeneration, you will never get public instruction. It is necessary that each man develop the moral means and methods he received from nature. Have for them all communal houses and faculties for instruction, and do not stop at any secondary considerations. The rich man will pay, and will lose nothing if he will profit for the instruction of his son.

I ask, then, that under suitable and necessary modifications you decree the erection of national establishments where children can be instructed, fed, and lodged gratuitously, and the citizens who desire to retain their children at home can send them there for instruction.

Convention, December 12, 1793.—It is a proper time to establish the principle which seems understood, that the youth belong to the Republic before they belong to their parents. No one more than myself respects nature, but of what avail the reasoning of the individual against the reason of the nation? In the national schools the child will suck the milk of Republicanism. The Republic is one and indivisible. Public instruction produces such a

centre of unity. To none, then, can we accord the privilege of isolation from such benefits.

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

DELIVERED IN THE CONVENTION, APRIL 18, 1793

WE HAVE appeared divided in counsel, but the instant we seek the good of mankind we are in accord. Vergniaud has told us grand and immortal truths. The Constitutional Assembly, embarrassed by a king, by the prejudices which still enchain the nation, and by deep-rooted intolerance, has not uprooted accepted principles, but has done much for liberty in consecrating the doctrine of tolerance. To-day the ground of liberty is prepared and we owe to the French people a government founded on bases pure and eternal! Yes! we shall say to them: Frenchmen you have the right to adore the divinity you deem entitled to your worship: "The liberty of worship, which it is the object of law to establish, means only the right of individuals to assemble to render in their way homage to the Deity." Such a form of liberty is enforceable only by legal regulations and the police, but you do not wish to insert regulating laws in your declaration of rights. The right of freedom of worship, a sacred right, will be protected by laws in harmony with its principles. We will have only to guarantee these rights. Human reason cannot retrograde; we have advanced too far for the people ever to believe they are not absolutely free in religious thought, merely because you have failed to engrave the principle of

this liberty on the table of your laws. If superstition still seem to inhere in the movements of the Republic, it is because our political enemies always employ it. But look! everywhere the people, freed from malevolent espionage, recognize that any one assuming to interpose between them and their God is an impostor.

"SQUEEZING THE SPONGE"

ON TAXING THE RICH—DELIVERED IN THE CONVENTION, APRIL 27, 1793

YOU have decreed "honorable mention" of what has been done for the public benefit by the Department De L'Hevault. In this decree you authorize the whole Republic to adopt the same measures, for your decree ratifies all the acts which have just been brought to your knowledge.

If everywhere the same measures be taken, the Republic is saved. No more shall we treat as agitators and anarchists the ardent friends of liberty who set the nation in motion, but we shall say: "Honor to the agitators who turn the vigor of the people against its enemies!" When the Temple of Liberty shall be reared, the people will know how to decorate it. Rather perish France than to return to our hard slavery. Let it not be believed we shall become barbarians after we shall have founded liberty. We shall embellish France until the despots shall envy us; but while the ship of state is in the stress of storm, beaten by the tempest, that which belongs to each belongs to all.

No longer are Agrarian Laws spoken of! The people