

Source A

VERSAILLES, June 14, 1770

MY DEAREST MOTHER,---

...On Tuesday I had a fête which I shall never forget all my life. We made our entrance into Paris. As for honors, we received all that we could possibly imagine; but they, though very well in their way, were not what touched me most. What was really affecting was the tenderness and earnestness of the poor people, who, in spite of the taxes with which they are overwhelmed, were transported with joy at seeing us. When we went to walk in the Tuileries, there was so vast a crowd that we were three-quarters of an hour without being able to move either forward or backward. The dauphin and I gave repeated orders to the Guards not to beat any one, which had a very good effect. Such excellent order was kept the whole day that, in spite of the enormous crowd which followed us everywhere, not a person was hurt. When we returned from our walk we went up to an open terrace and stayed there half an hour. I cannot describe to you, my dear mamma, the transports of joy and affection which every one exhibited towards us. Before we withdrew we kissed our hands to the people, which gave them great pleasure. What a happy thing it is for persons in our rank to gain the love of a whole nation so cheaply. Yet there is nothing so precious; I felt it thoroughly, and shall never forget it.

Another circumstance, which gave great pleasure on that glorious day, was the behaviour of the dauphin. He made admirable replies to every address, and remarked everything that was done in his honour, and especially the earnestness and delight of the people, to whom he showed great kindness.

Source:

Letter by Marie Antoinette taken from Eva March Tappan, ed., The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art, 14 Vols., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), Vol. V: Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, pp. 279-280.

Source B



Source C

The occurrence which has just taken place has confirmed us more than ever in our plans. The very guards who surround us are the persons who threaten us most. Our very lives are not safe; but we must appear to submit to everything until the moment comes when we can act; and in the meantime our captivity proves that none of our actions are done by their own accord...our position is frightful, and we must absolutely put an end to it next month. The king desires it even more than I do.

Source:

Letter from Marie Antoinette to Count Mercy d'Argenteauon (the Austrian Ambassador in Paris) on 20th April 1791. Taken from Alfred Ritter von Arneth (ed.), Marie Antoinette, Joseph II und Leopold II., ihr briefwechsel (Vienna: 1856), pp. 155-156.

Source D

The King has charged me to inform you that it is his will that you make known his sentiments respecting the Revolution and the French Constitution to the Court at which you reside. The same orders are transmitted to the Ambassadors and Ministers of France, at all the Courts of Europe, to the end that no doubt may remain with regard to his Majesty's intentions, his free acceptance of the new form of government, or his irrevocable oath to maintain it.

Source:

Letter from Armand Marc, comte de Montmorin de Saint Herem (Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Navy under Louis XVI), to Louis-Guillaume Otto, comte de Mosloy (a French diplomat in America) on 23rd April 1791. Taken from Founders.archives.gov, (2015). Founders Online: Enclosure: Montmorin to Otto, [23 April 1791]. [online] Available at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-20-02-0309> [Accessed 28 Sep. 2015].

Source E

The motives of my departure were the insults and outrages I underwent on the 18th of April, when I wished to go to St. Cloud. These insults remained unpunished, and I thereupon believed that there was neither safety nor decorum in my staying any longer in Paris. Unable to quit publicly, I resolved to depart in the night, and without attendants; my intention was never to leave the kingdom. I had no concert with foreign powers, nor with the princes of my family who have emigrated. My residence would have been at Montmedy, a place I had chosen because it is fortified, and that being close to the frontier, I was more ready to oppose every kind of invasion. I have learnt during my journey that public opinion was decided in favour of the constitution, and so soon as I learnt the general wish I have not hesitated, as I never have hesitated, to make the sacrifice of what concerns myself for the public good."

Source:

Louis' testimony to the commissioners of the Assembly. Taken from Alphonse de Lamartine, History of the Girondists: Personal Memoirs of the Patriots of the French Revolution (London: 1848), pp. 155-156.

Source F

As long as the king could hope to see the kingdom's order and happiness restored by the means employed by the National Assembly and by his residence next to this Assembly in the capital city, no personal sacrifice mattered to him. If this hope had been fulfilled, he would not even have contested the deprivation of his liberty occasioned by the denial of an absolute veto without which all of his efforts since October 1789 have been null and void. But today, when the sole recompense of so many sacrifices is to see the kingdom destroyed, all powers disregarded, all property violated, personal safety endangered everywhere, crimes unpunished, and complete anarchy establishing itself above the law, and when the semblance of authority given him by the new Constitution is insufficient to repair a single one of the evils afflicting the realm: the king, after having solemnly protested all the acts emanating from him during his captivity, believes it his duty to place before the eyes of the French and of all the universe the picture of his conduct, and that of the government which has been established in the kingdom.

Source:

Archives parlementaires, vol. 27 (Paris, 1887), pp. 378-383, trans. Tracey Rizzo, in Laura Mason and Tracey Rizzo, eds., The French Revolution: A Document Collection (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 152-155.

Source G

You my King. You are no longer my King, no longer my King! You are nothing but a cowardly deserter; a king should be the father of the people, not its executioner. Now that the nation has resumed its rights it will not be so bloody stupid as to take back a coward like you. You, King? You are not even a citizen. You will be lucky to avoid leaving your head on a scaffold for having sought the slaughter of so many men. Ah, I don't doubt that once again you are going to pretend to be honest and that, supported by those scoundrels on the constitutional committee, you are going to promise miracles. They still want to stick the crown on the head of a stag; but no, damn it, that will not happen! From one end of France to the other, there is only an outcry against you, your debauched Messalina, and your whole bastard race.

No more Capet, this is what every citizen is shouting, and, besides, even if it were possible that they might want to pardon you all your crimes, what trust could now be placed in your remains? You vile perjurer, a man who has broken his oath again and again. We will stuff you into Charenton [an asylum] and your whore into the Hospital. When you are finally walled up, both of you, and above all when you no longer have a Civil List, I'll be stuffed with an ax if you get away.

Source:

Editorial from the newspaper Le Père Duchêsne no. 61 (June 1791) by Jacques-René Hébert. Hébert was a supporter of the king prior to the Flight to Varennes.

Source H



Source I

The condition of France is such that it may end up in total disintegration, and this result will come even more quickly if violent solutions are applied to all the overwhelming ills. The cause of all our problems is the partisanship that divides and destroys governmental authority. There are, however, only two ways to accomplish this: force or reconciliation.

Force can only be used by foreign armies and this means resorting to war. It will be horrible because it will be motivated by violence and despair. Can a king contemplate all these misfortunes with equanimity and bring them down upon his people?

One can never govern a people against its will. This maxim is as true in Constantinople as it is in a republic. Right now the will of this nation is for the Rights of Man, senseless though they be.

I believe then that I should join my will to the principles of the Constitution. I realize how difficult it will be to govern a large nation this way, I will even say that I believe it to be impossible. But the obstacles that I would have put in the way [by refusing to accept the Constitution] would have brought about the war I sought to avoid. I prefer to proceed towards a better order than that which would result from my refusal

Source:

A letter from Louis to his brothers. Félix-Sébastien Feuillet de Conches, ed., Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette et Madame Élisabeth, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1864), 366–75.

Source J

I have written to the Emperor of Austria, Empress of Russia, and the Kings of Spain and Sweden, suggesting the idea of a meeting of all the principal powers of Europe, backed up by armed force. This could control the revolutionaries here, and establish a better state of affairs and prevent the evil which torments us from overcoming the other states of Europe.

Source:

An extract from a letter from Louis to King Frederick William II of Prussia, 3^d December 1791. Timothy E. Gregory, ed., Exploring the European Past Texts & Images Second Edition (Mason: Cengage Learning, 2009)