

A Portrait of Turgot

By PAVLOS GIANNELIA

IN its issue of April 18, the French magazine *L'Illustration* published a reproduction of a portrait of Turgot by Drouais, the painter of Mme. de Pompadour.

The general secretary of the mayoralty of Limoges, M. Daudet, had an old picture cleaned, which was left in the office of the mayor, and had the satisfaction of seeing emerge a beautiful portrait of Turgot, signed and dated, "Drouais, 1767." In the article accompanying the reproduction of the portrait, Robert Engerand wrote: "The painter expressed by his well lighted and skillfully portrayed face, where the art revives the life, all the intelligence, the nobility of soul and richness of heart of Turgot."

Of Turgot, Engerand says: "Before he became the great minister of Louis XVI, Turgot was *intendant* of Limousin. From 1761 to 1774 he exercised so brilliantly these functions that this region, up to that date known as one of the most miserable of provinces, became in these thirteen years, thanks to his activity, a very prosperous region. Besides, this wonderful success attracted the attention of the twenty-year-old monarch, who was anxious to reduce the expenses below the receipts at a time when the opposite formula was *à la mode*. Turgot was an encyclopedist, and won by his dauntless reforms the fury of the court and the thunder of Marie Antoinette. He was also the promoter and creator of municipalities, and about him the king said, 'Only Turgot and I love the people!'"

So writes the author of the article. But to understand the fury of the nobility, we must remember that Turgot persuaded the king to abolish the privilege of tax exemption of the nobility and to substitute a single tax on net land rent. It was thus an easy matter for the protesting noble to object: "Turgot begins by asking today that our properties be taxed; tomorrow he will require of us the *taille* and *corvée* (poll tax and duty service) as from the peasant."

As for Marie Antoinette, it is known that her brother, Emperor Joseph II, warned her not to rejoice at the dismissal of Turgot, which she would have to regret one day!

"Let us give thanks to Limousin," says Engerand in concluding his article, "for having redeemed from oblivion one of the greatest figures of our history. . . . *Que l'esprit domine la matière et que l'ange terrane enfin la bête!* (May the spirit conquer matter and the angel conquer at last the beast!)"

A fine tribute—but why not also pay tribute to the means by which Turgot realized his miracles of thrift—the propositions which, if they had been applied, would have saved the nobility the famous renunciations of August 4 and France from the bloody revolution? Why not mention the magical phrase, *single tax on net land rent*, at a time when only a new Physiocracy can give any hope to a stricken humanity?