

A Proposal for an English lottery circa 1767

The following is a transcription of a manuscript letter that was bound in a large scrapbook of material on English lotteries assembled by the publisher Andrew White Tuer (1838-1900) in the 1880s. The scrapbook gave no information at all about the letter's source; it was simply bound in without comment and was the only such piece in the book. Apparently it is a fair copy of a letter that was addressed to Lord North (1732-1792), later the British Prime Minister, with a likely date being the period in which he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, 7 October 1767 - January 1770. The lack of edits suggests this was not a draft but a copy, and a few errors toward English spelling suggest the writer - or a secretary copying the writer - was not French.

On propose au Ministere de sa Majeste Britttque une Operation de Commerce d'Etat, en forme de Loterie Nationale ou Royale, dont le Succes Susceptible de la demonstration mathematique, doit etre du plus grand avantage a l'Etat, aux Interessés, & a la Nation.

A l'Etat, soit a la Couronne, par un gain clair & legitime de Deux Millions de livres Sterlings, qui se repetra aussy souvent que l'Operation proposée sera elle même repetée.

Aux Interessés dans la Loterie, en ce que son Plan heureusement imaginé, a la singularité extraordinaire de satisfaire les desirs les plus illimités de fortune par ses Prix ou Lots considerables, en même tems que l'achat des Billets par son prix aisé, est mis a la portée de tout le monde, & que ceux que la fortune du Sort aura traité avec le plus de rigueurs, non seulement retireront la Valeur originaire de leurs Billets, mais auront de plus l'avantage vraisemblable de les vendre avec beaucoup de Profit, même apres le tirage, ou s'ils les gardent, ils deviennent pour eux sans ulterieurs debourses, de nouveaux Titres a Esperer les faveurs de la fortune dans une Loterie suivante.

A la Nation, Enfin, en ce que les termes avantageux de la dite Loterie, seront une Amorce puissante & irresistible pour tous les particuliers aisés de l'Europe a y prendre part, & a verser par la a grands flots en Angleterre l'argent Comptant de toutes les Nations voisines. Ce qui augmentant le Credit de l'Etat, rendra les Billets de cette Loterie, des Objects de Commerce plus solides & plus estimables que les Actions des fonds publics les plus accredités.

L'Autheur du Projet Sent tres bien, que les brillants avantages indiqués y dessus, paroîtront ou absurdes ou incroyables au premier abord: Il s'attend a etre tout aumoins soupçonné ou d'imposture ou de demence. Comment en effet concilier avec la raison & le bon sens, qu'il soit possible de former une Loterie dans laquelle tous les Billets sont gagnants, & ou tout au moins il n'en est point de perdants, tandis que ceux quelle aura favorisé auront des prix capables de satisfaire la soif la plus inalterable des richesses, que le Gouvernement y trouvera un profit clair & honnete de 2 Millions & que tous les fraix de regie seront defrayes?

Il n'en est pas moins Certain, cependant, que L'Operation est non seulement possible & practicable, mais de plus tres aisé & susceptible de la plus claire demonstration.

C'est donc à cette demonstration qu'il s'attend d'Etire invité. Il est pret a la fournir sur les premieres Ordres de son Excellence Mylord North, mais il s'attend de son coté avec justice que Son Excellence aura pour agreable, que l'autheur avant de livrer sa Clef demonstrative, prenne toutes les mesures que la prudence & l'interest personel lui prescrivent pour s'assurer les fruits de son travail. Travail penible, dont les Calculs combinés, malgré ce qui a été dit de la facilité de l'Execution, ont couté des Années de veilles & d'etudes a un homme qui sans etre ce qu'on appelle un faiseur de projects, a fait sa principale Occupation de la Science du Commerce.

[It is proposed to the Minister of his Majesty Britt^{que} : a State Commercial Operation, in the form of a National or Royal Lottery, whose success is susceptible to mathematical demonstration, and must be of the greatest advantage to the State, to all interested parties, and to the Nation.

To the State, or to the Crown, there will be a clear and legitimate gain of 2 million pounds Sterling, which will be as often repeated as the proposed Operation will itself be repeated.

To all Interested in the Lottery, in that its Plan is well designed and has the extraordinary uniqueness of satisfying the most unlimited desires of fortune by its considerable prizes, while at the same time, since the purchase of the tickets at a low price is within reach of everyone, those whom the luck of the draw will have treated most severely will not only recover the original value of their tickets, but will also have the probable advantage of selling them with much profit, even after the draw, or if they keep them, they become for them, without further expense, new tickets of hope for the favors of fortune in a following Lottery.

To the Nation, finally, because of the advantageous terms of said Lottery, this will be a powerful and irresistible lure for all the leisure class of Europe to take part, and bring great waves of money to England from all the neighboring nations. This will benefit the credit of the State from sale of the tickets of this Lottery: Objects of Trade more solid and more estimable than the Shares of most accredited public funds.

The author of this proposal is aware that the brilliant benefits indicated above will seem either absurd or incredible at first sight: He expects to be at least suspected of being deceitful or demented. How in fact to reconcile with reason and common sense, that it is possible to form a Lottery in which all the tickets are winners, or at least there are no losers, while those who are favored by chance will have prizes capable of satisfying the most unalterable thirst for riches, and that the Government will find a clear and honest profit of two millions, and that all the expenses of administration will be defrayed?

It is nonetheless certain, however, that this Operation is not only possible, but also very easy and susceptible to the clearest demonstration.

It is therefore for this demonstration that he expects to be invited. He is ready to furnish it on the first Orders of His Excellency Mylord North, but he expects on his side with justice that His Excellency will be agreeable that the author, before delivering his demonstrative Key, will take all the measures that the prudence and personal interest prescribe him to secure the fruits of his work. Painful work, whose combined Calculations, in spite of what has been said about the facility of the Execution, have cost years of vigils and studies to a man who, without being called a project developer, has made his main occupation the Science of Commerce.]