

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Among the new objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck my eye more vividly than the equality of conditions. I discovered without difficulty the enormous influence that this primary fact exerts on the course of society; it gives a certain direction to public spirit, a certain turn to the laws, new maxims to those who govern, and particular habits to the governed.

Soon I recognized that this same fact extends its influence well beyond political mores and laws, and that it gains no less dominion over civil society than over government: it creates opinions, gives birth to sentiments, suggests usages, and modifies everything it does not produce.

So, therefore, as I studied American society, more and more I saw in equality of conditions the generative fact from which each particular fact seemed to issue, and I found it before me constantly as a central point at which all my observations came to an end.

Then I brought my thinking back to our hemisphere, and it seemed to me I distinguished something in it analogous to the spectacle the New World offered me. I saw the equality of conditions that, without having reached its extreme limits as it had in the United States, was approaching them more each day; and the same democracy reigning in American societies appeared to me to be advancing rapidly toward power in Europe.

At that moment I conceived the idea of the book you are going to read.

A great democratic revolution is taking place among us: all see it, but all do not judge it in the same manner. Some consider it a new thing; and taking it for an accident, they still hope to be able to stop it; whereas others judge it irresistible because to them it seems the most continuous, the oldest, and the most permanent fact known in history.

For a moment I take myself back to what France was seven hundred years

ago: I find it divided among a few families who possess the land and govern the inhabitants; at that time right of command passes from generation to generation by inheritance; men have only one means of acting upon one another—by force; only one origin of power is to be discovered—landed property.

But then the political power of the clergy comes to be founded and soon spreads. The clergy opens its ranks to all, to the poor and to the rich, to the commoner and to the lord; equality begins to penetrate through the church to the heart of government, and he who would have vegetated as a serf in eternal slavery takes his place as a priest in the midst of nobles, and will often take a seat above kings.

As society becomes in time more civilized and stable, the different relations among men become more complicated and numerous. The need for civil laws makes itself keenly felt. Then jurists are born; they leave the dark precincts of the courts and the dusty recesses of the registries and go to sit at the court of the prince beside the feudal barons covered with ermine and mail.

The kings ruin themselves in great undertakings; the nobles exhaust themselves in private wars; the commoners enrich themselves in commerce. The influence of money begins to make itself felt in the affairs of the state. Trade becomes a new source opening the way to power, and financiers become a political power that is scorned and flattered.*

Little by little enlightenment spreads; one sees the taste for literature and the arts awaken; then the mind becomes an element in success; science is a means of government, intelligence a social force; the lettered take a place in affairs.

Meanwhile, as new routes for coming to power are discovered, the value of birth is seen to decline. In the eleventh century, nobility had an inestimable price; in the thirteenth it is bought; the first ennobling takes place in 1270,¹ and equality is finally introduced into government by the aristocracy itself. During the seven hundred years that have since elapsed, it sometimes happened that the nobles, in order to struggle against royal authority or to take power from their rivals, gave political power to the people.

Even more often one saw the kings have the lower classes of the state participate in the government in order to bring down the aristocracy.

In France, the kings showed themselves to be the most active and constant

*In this sentence, *AI* uses two different words for "power," *puissance* and *puissance*. *Puissance* used in the first instance, has a connotation of physical strength; *puissance*, of formal authority as well as capacity.

¹Louis IX (d. 1270) first asserted the exclusive right of the king to confer knighthood; Philip IV issued the first "letter of ennoblement" in about 1290.

levelers. When they were ambitious and strong, they worked to elevate the people to the level of the nobles; and when they were moderate and weak, they permitted the people to be placed above themselves. Some aided democracy by their talents, others by their vices. Louis XI* and Louis XIV* took care to equalize everything beneath the throne, and finally Louis XV* himself descended with his court into the dust.

As soon as citizens began to own land other than by feudal tenure, and transferable wealth was recognized, and could in its turn create influence and give power, discoveries in the arts could not be made, nor improvements in commerce and industry be introduced, without creating almost as many new elements of equality among men. From that moment on, all processes discovered, all needs that arise, all desires that demand satisfaction bring progress toward universal leveling. The taste for luxury, the love of war, the empire of fashion, the most superficial passions of the human heart as well as the most profound, seem to work in concert to impoverish the rich and enrich the poor.

Once works of the intellect had become sources of force and wealth, each development of science, each new piece of knowledge, each new idea had to be considered as a seed of power put within reach of the people. Poetry, eloquence, memory, the graces of the mind, the fires of the imagination, depth of thought, all the gifts that Heaven distributed haphazardly, profited democracy, and even if they were found in the possession of its adversaries, they still served its cause by putting into relief the natural greatness of man; its conquests therefore spread with those of civilization and enlightenment, and literature was an arsenal open to all, from which the weak and the poor came each day to seek arms.

When one runs through the pages of our history, one finds so to speak no great events in seven hundred years that have not turned to the profit of equality.

The Crusades⁵ and the wars with the English⁶ decimate the nobles and divide their lands; the institution of townships introduces democratic freedom into the heart of the feudal monarchy; the discovery of firearms⁷ equalizes the vlllein and the noble on the battlefield; printing⁸ offers equal resources to their intelligence; the mail comes to deposit enlightenment on the

*King of France, 1461-1483.

⁵King of France, 1643-1715.

⁶King of France, 1715-1774.

⁷1095-1291.

⁸The Hundred Years' War, 1337-1453.

⁹Firearms were developed in the fourteenth century.

¹⁰The printing press was invented around 1450.

doorstep of the poor man's hut as at the portal of the palace; Protestantism asserts that all men are equally in a state to find the path to Heaven.* America, once discovered, presents a thousand new routes to fortune and delivers wealth and power to the obscure adventurer.

If you examine what is happening in France every fifty years from the eleventh century on, at the end of each of these periods you cannot fail to perceive that a double revolution has operated on the state of society. The noble has fallen on the social ladder, and the commoner has risen; the one descends, the other climbs. Each half century brings them nearer, and soon they are going to touch.

And this is not peculiar to France. In whichever direction we cast a glance, we perceive the same revolution continuing in all the Christian universe.

Everywhere the various incidents in the lives of peoples are seen to turn to the profit of democracy; all men have aided it by their efforts: those who had in view cooperating for its success and those who did not dream of serving it; those who fought for it and even those who declared themselves its enemies; all have been driven pell-mell on the same track, and all have worked in common, some despite themselves, others without knowing it, as blind instruments in the hands of God.

The gradual development of equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact, and it has the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, it is enduring, each day it escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development.

Would it be wise to believe that a social movement coming from so far can be suspended by the efforts of one generation? Does one think that after having destroyed feudalism and vanquished kings, democracy will recoil before the bourgeoisie and the rich? Will it be stopped now that it has become so strong and its adversaries so weak?

Where then are we going? No one can say; for we already lack terms for comparison: conditions are more equal among Christians in our day than they have ever been in any time or any country in the world; thus the greatness of what has already been done prevents us from foreseeing what can still be done.

The entire book that you are going to read was written under the pressure of a sort of religious terror in the author's soul, produced by the sight of this irresistible revolution that for so many centuries has marched over all obstacles, and that one sees still advancing today amid the ruins it has made.

It is not necessary that God himself speak in order for us to discover sure signs of his will; it suffices to examine the usual course of nature and the

*Martin Luther published his 95 Theses in 1517.

continuous tendency of events; I know without the Creator's raising his voice that the stars follow the arcs in space that his finger has traced.

If long observation and sincere meditation led men in our day to recognize that the gradual and progressive development of equality is at the same time the past and the future of their history, this discovery alone would give that development the sacred character of the sovereign master's will. To wish to stop democracy would then appear to be to struggle against God himself, and it would only remain for nations to accommodate themselves to the social state that Providence imposes on them.

Christian peoples in our day appear to me to offer a frightening spectacle; the movement that carries them along is already strong enough that it cannot be suspended, and it is not yet rapid enough to despair of directing it: their fate is in their hands, but soon it will escape them.

To instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate its beliefs, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for its inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to time and place; to modify it according to circumstances and men: such is the first duty imposed on those who direct society in our day.

A new political science is needed for a world altogether new.

But that is what we hardly dream of: placed in the middle of a rapid river, we obstinately fix our eyes on some debris that we still perceive on the bank, while the current carries us away and takes us backward toward the abyss.

Among no people of Europe has the great social revolution I have just described made more rapid progress than among us; but here it has always proceeded haphazardly.

Never have heads of state thought at all to prepare for it in advance; it is made despite them or without their knowing it. The most powerful, most intelligent, and most moral classes of the nation have not sought to take hold of it so as to direct it. Democracy has therefore been abandoned to its savage instincts; it has grown up like those children who, deprived of paternal care, rear themselves in the streets of our towns and know only society's vices and miseries. One still seemed ignorant of its existence when it unexpectedly took power. Each then submitted with servility to its least desires; it was adored as the image of force; when afterwards it was weakened by its own excesses, legislators conceived the imprudent project of destroying it instead of seeking to instruct and correct it; and since they did not want to teach it to govern, they thought only of driving it from government.

As a result, the democratic revolution has taken place in the material of society without making the change in laws, ideas, habits, and mores that would have been necessary to make this revolution useful. Thus we have de-

mocracy without anything to attenuate its vices and make its natural advantages emerge; and while we already see the evils it brings, we are still ignorant of the goods it can bestow.

When royal power, leaning on the aristocracy, peacefully governed the peoples of Europe, society, amid its miseries, enjoyed several kinds of happiness one can conceive and appreciate only with difficulty in our day.

The power of some subjects raised insurmountable barriers against the tyranny of the prince; moreover, the kings, feeling themselves vested in the eyes of the crowd with an almost divine character, drew from the very respect they generated the will not to abuse their power.

The nobles, placed at an immense distance from the people, nevertheless took the sort of benevolent and tranquil interest in the lot of the people that the shepherd accords to his flock; and without seeing in the poor man their equal, they watched over his destiny as a trust placed by Providence in their hands.

The people, not having conceived the idea of a social state other than their own nor imagining that they could ever be equal to their chiefs, received their benefits and did not discuss their rights. They loved their chiefs when the chiefs were lenient and just, and they submitted to their rigors without trouble and without baseness, as they would to inevitable evils sent by the arm of God. Moreover, usage and mores had established boundaries for tyranny and had founded a sort of right in the very midst of force.

As the noble had no thought that anyone wanted to wrest from him privileges that he believed legitimate, and the serf regarded his inferiority as an effect of the immutable order of nature, one conceives a sort of reciprocal benevolence that could have been established between two classes sharing such different fates. One would see inequality and misery in society at that time, but souls were not degraded.

It is not the use of power or the habit of obedience that depraves men, but the use of power that they consider illegitimate, and obedience to a power they regard as usurped and oppressive.

On one side were [material] goods, force, leisure, and with these, pursuits of luxury, refinements of taste, pleasures of the mind, and cultivation of the arts; on the other side, work, coarseness, and ignorance.

But in the hearts of this ignorant and coarse crowd were energetic passions, generous sentiments, profound beliefs, and savage virtues.

Thus organized, the social body could have stability, power, and above all, glory.

But now ranks are confused; the barriers raised among men are lowered; estates are divided, power is partitioned, enlightenment spreads, intelligence

is equalized; the social state becomes democratic, and finally the empire of democracy is peacefully established over institutions and mores.

I conceive a society, then, which all, regarding the law as their work, would love and submit to without trouble; in which the authority of government is respected as necessary, not divine, and the love one would bear for a head of state would not be a passion, but a reasoned and tranquil sentiment. Each having rights and being assured of preserving his rights, a manly confidence and a sort of reciprocal condensation between the classes would be established, as far from haughtiness as from baseness.

The people, instructed in their true interests, would understand that to profit from society's benefits, one must submit to its burdens. The free association of citizens could then replace the individual power of nobles, and the state would be sheltered from both tyranny and license.

I understand that in a democratic state constituted in this manner, society will not be immobile; but the movements of the social body can be regular and progressive; if one encounters less brilliance than within an aristocracy, one will find less misery; enjoyments will be less extreme and well-being more general; sciences less great and ignorance rarer; sentiments less energetic and habits milder; one will note more vices and fewer crimes.

In the absence of enthusiasm and ardent beliefs, enlightenment and experience will sometimes obtain great sacrifices from citizens; each man, equally weak, will feel an equal need of those like him; and knowing that he can obtain their support only on condition of his lending them his cooperation, he will discover without difficulty that his particular interest merges with the general interest.

The nation, taken as a body, will be less brilliant, less glorious, less strong, perhaps; but the majority of its citizens will enjoy a more prosperous lot, and the people will show themselves to be peaceful, not because they despair of being better-off, but because they know how to be well-off.

If everything were not good and useful in an order of things like this, society would at least have appropriated all the useful and good that it can present; and men, abandoning forever the social advantages that aristocracy can furnish, would have taken from democracy all the goods it can offer them.

But we, leaving the social state of our forebears, throwing their institutions, their ideas, and their mores pell-mell behind us—what have we gained in its place?

The prestige of royal power has vanished without being replaced by the majesty of the laws; in our day the people scorn authority, but they fear it, and fear extracts more from them than was formerly given out of respect and love.

I perceive that we have destroyed the individual entities that were able to struggle separately against tyranny; but I see that it is government alone that inherits all the prerogatives extracted from families, from corporations, or from men: the force of a small number of citizens, sometimes oppressive, but often protective, has therefore been succeeded by the weakness of all.

The division of fortunes has diminished the distance separating the poor from the rich; but in coming closer they seem to have found new reasons for hating each other, and casting glances full of terror and envy, they mutually repel each other from power; for the one as for the other, the idea of rights does not exist, and force appears to both as the sole argument in the present and the only guarantee of the future.

The poor man has kept most of the prejudices of his fathers without their beliefs; their ignorance without their virtues; he has taken the doctrine of interest as the rule of his actions without knowing the science of it, and his selfishness is as lacking in enlightenment as was formerly his devotion.

Society is tranquil not because it is conscious of its force and well-being, but on the contrary, because it believes itself weak and infirm; it fears it will die if it makes an effort: each feels the ill, but no one has the courage and energy needed to seek something better; like the passions of old men that end only in impotence, desires, regrets, sorrows, and joys produce nothing visible or lasting.

Thus we have abandoned what goods our former state could present without acquiring what useful things the current state could offer; we have destroyed an aristocratic society, and having stopped complacently amid the debris of the former edifice, we seem to want to settle there forever.

What is happening in the intellectual world is no less deplorable.

Hindered in its advance or abandoned without any support against its disordered passions, French democracy has overturned all that it has encountered in its way, shaking whatever it has not destroyed. We did not see it as it took hold of society little by little so as to establish its empire peacefully; it has not ceased its advance in the midst of the disorders and agitation of combat. Animated by the heat of the struggle, pushed beyond the natural limits of his opinion by the opinions and excesses of his adversaries, each loses sight of the very object of his pursuits and takes up a language that corresponds poorly to his true sentiments and secret instincts.

Hence the strange confusion we are forced to witness. I search my memories in vain, and I find nothing that should evoke more sadness and more pity than what is passing before our eyes; it seems that in our day the natural bond that unites opinions to tastes and actions to beliefs has been broken; the sympathy that has been noticeable in all times between

the sentiments and ideas of men appears destroyed; one would say that all the laws of moral analogy have been abolished.

One still encounters Christians among us, full of zeal, whose religious souls love to nourish themselves from the truths of the other life; doubtless they are going to be moved to favor human freedom, the source of all moral greatness. Christianity, which has rendered all men equal before God, will not be loath to see all citizens equal before the law. But by a strange concurrence of events, religion finds itself enlisted for the moment among the powers democracy is overturning; and it is often brought to reject the equality it loves and to curse freedom as an adversary, whereas by taking it by the hand, it could sanctify its efforts.

Alongside these men of religion I discover others whose regard is turned toward earth rather than Heaven; partisans of freedom not only because they see in it the origin of the noblest virtues, but above all because they consider it the source of the greatest goods, they sincerely desire to assure its empire and to have men taste its benefits: I understand that they are going to hasten to call religion to their aid, for they must know that the reign of freedom cannot be established without that of mores; nor mores founded without beliefs; but they have perceived religion in the ranks of their adversaries; and this is enough for them: some attack it, and others do not dare to defend it.

Past centuries have seen base and venal souls extol slavery, while independent minds and generous hearts were struggling without hope to save human freedom. But in our day one often encounters naturally noble and proud men whose opinions are in direct opposition to their tastes, and who want the servility and baseness they have never known for themselves. There are others, on the contrary, who speak of freedom as if they could feel what is holy and great in it, and who noisily claim for humanity the rights they have always misunderstood.

I perceive virtuous and peaceful men whose pure mores, tranquil habits, ease, and enlightenment naturally place them at the head of the populations that surround them. Full of a sincere love of their native country, they are ready to make great sacrifices for it; nevertheless they are often found to be adversaries of civilization; they confuse its abuses with its benefits, and in their minds the idea of evil is indissolubly united with the idea of the new.

Nearly I see others who, in the name of progress, striving to make man into matter, want to find the useful without occupying themselves with the just, to find science far from beliefs, and well-being separated from virtue: these persons are said to be the champions of modern civilization, and they insolently put themselves at its head, usurping a place that has been abandoned to them, but from which they are held off by their unworthiness.

Where are we then?

Men of religion combat freedom, and the friends of freedom attack religions; noble and generous spirits vaunt slavery, and base and servile souls extol independence; honest and enlightened citizens are enemies of all progress, while men without patriotism and morality make themselves apostles of civilization and enlightenment!

Have all centuries, then, resembled ours? Has man, as in our day, always had before his eyes a world where nothing is linked, where virtue is without genius and genius without honor; where love of order is confused with a taste for tyrants and the holy cult of freedom with contempt for laws; where conscience casts only a dubious light on human actions; where nothing seems any longer to be forbidden or permitted, or honest or shameful, or true or false?

Shall I think that the Creator has made man so as to leave him to debate endlessly in the midst of the intellectual miseries that surround us? I cannot believe this: God prepares a firmer and calmer future for European societies; I am ignorant of his designs, but I will not cease to believe in them [merely] because I cannot penetrate them, and I would rather doubt my enlightenment than his justice.

There is one country in the world where the great social revolution I am speaking of seems nearly to have attained its natural limits; there it has operated in a simple and easy manner, or rather one can say that this country sees the results of the democratic revolution operating among us without having had the revolution itself.

The emigrants who came to settle in America at the beginning of the seventeenth century in some fashion disengaged the democratic principle from all those against which it struggled within the old societies of Europe, and they transplanted it alone on the shores of the New World. There it could grow in freedom, and advancing along with mores, develop peacefully in laws.

It appears to me beyond doubt that sooner or later we shall arrive, like the Americans, at an almost complete equality of conditions. I do not conclude from this that we are destined one day necessarily to draw the political consequences the Americans have drawn from a similar social state. I am very far from believing that they have found the only form of government that democracy can give itself; but it is enough that in the two countries the generative cause of laws and mores be the same, for us to have an immense interest in knowing what it has produced in each of them.

Therefore it is not only to satisfy a curiosity, otherwise legitimate, that I have examined America; I wanted to find lessons there from which we could profit. One would be strangely mistaken to think that I wanted to make a

panegyric; whoever reads this book will be well convinced that such was not my design; nor was my goal to advocate such a form of government in general; for I number among those who believe that there is almost never any absolute good in the laws; I have not even claimed to judge whether the social revolution, whose advance seems to me irresistible, was advantageous or fatal to humanity; I have accepted this revolution as an accomplished fact or one about to be accomplished; and among the peoples who have seen it operating in their midst, I have sought the one in whom it has attained the most complete and peaceful development, in order to discern clearly its natural consequences, and to perceive, if possible, the means of rendering it profitable to men. I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there an image of democracy itself, of its penchants, its character, its prejudices, its passions; I wanted to become acquainted with it if only to know at least what we ought to hope or fear from it.

In the first part of this work I have therefore tried to show the direction that democracy, left in America to its penchants and abandoned almost without restraint to its instincts, has naturally given to the laws, the course it has imposed on the government, and in general, the power it has obtained over affairs. I wanted to know what have been the goods and ills produced by it. I searched for the precautions the Americans had made use of to direct it, and others they had omitted, and I undertook to distinguish the causes that permit it to govern society.

My goal was, in a second part, to paint the influence that equality of conditions and government by democracy in America exert on civil society; on habits, ideas, and mores; but I am beginning to feel less ardent to achieve this design. Before I could provide for the task I had proposed for myself, my work will have become almost useless. Another will soon show readers the principal features of the American character, and hiding the gravity of the portraits under a light veil, lend to truth charms with which I would not be able to adorn it.¹

I do not know if I have succeeded in making known what I saw in America, but I am sure of sincerely having had the desire to do so and of

¹ At the time I published the first edition of this work, M. Gustave de Beaumont [1803-1861], my traveling companion in America, was still working on his book, entitled *Marie or Slavery in the United States*, which has since appeared [published in 1835 as *Marie; ou, L'esclavage aux Etats-Unis. Tableau de moeurs americaines*, in the form of a novel with extensive notes and appendices]. Beaumont's principal goal was to put into relief and make known the situation of Negroes in the midst of Anglo-American society. His work will throw a vivid new light on the question of slavery, a vital question for the united republics. I do not know if I am mistaken, but it seems to me that Beaumont's book, after having keenly interested those who want to draw on its emotion and to find portraits there, will attain a still more solid and lasting success among readers who first of all desire real insights and profound truths.

never having knowingly succumbed to the need to adapt facts to ideas instead of submitting ideas to the facts.

When a point could be established with the aid of written documents, I took care to recur to original texts and to the most authentic and esteemed works.² I have indicated my sources in notes, and everyone can verify them. When it was a question of opinions, political usages, or observations of mores I sought the most enlightened men to consult. If it happened that the thing was important or dubious, I did not content myself with one witness, but made my determination only on the basis of all the testimonies together.

Here the reader must necessarily take me at my word. Often I could have cited as support for what I advance the authority of names known to him, or at least worthy of being known; but I have kept myself from doing so. The stranger often learns important truths in the home of his host that the latter would perhaps conceal from a friend; with a stranger one is relieved of obligatory silence; one does not fear his indiscretion because he is passing through. I recorded each of these confidences as soon as I received it, but they will never leave my portfolio.* I would rather diminish the success of my account than add my name to the list of those travelers who send back sorrows and embarrassments in return for the generous hospitality they have received.

I know that, despite my care, nothing will be easier than to criticize this book if anyone ever thinks of criticizing it.

I think those who want to regard it closely will find, in the entire work, a mother thought that so to speak links all its parts. But the diversity of the objects I had to treat is very great, and whoever undertakes to oppose an isolated fact to the sum of facts I cite or a detached idea to the sum of ideas will succeed without difficulty. I should therefore wish that one do me the favor of reading me in the same spirit that presided over my work, and that

*Some of these confidences did leave AT's portfolio after his death. His travel notebooks have been published under the title *Journey to America*.

2. Legislative and administrative documents were furnished to me with a kindness whose memory still prompts my gratitude. Among the American officials who thus favored my researches I shall cite above all Mr. Edward Livingston [1764-1836], then Secretary of State [under Andrew Jackson, 1829-1833] (now Minister Plenipotentiary at Paris [1833-1835]). During my visit to Congress, Mr. Livingston was very willing to hand over to me most of the documents I possess relative to the federal government. Mr. Livingston is one of those rare men whom one likes from having read their writings, whom one admires and honors even before having met them, and to whom one is happy to owe gratitude. [As a member of the state legislature of Louisiana, Livingston wrote his *Civil Code of the State of Louisiana* (1805); although not adopted by the legislature, it gained wide influence in Europe and the United States.]

one judge this book by the general impression it leaves, just as I myself decided, not by such and such a reason, but by the mass of reasons.

Nor must it be forgotten that the author who wants to make himself understood is obliged to push each of his ideas to all its theoretical consequences and often to the limits of the false and impractical; for if it is sometimes necessary to deviate from the rules of logic in actions, one cannot do so in discourse, and a man finds it almost as difficult to be inconsistent in his words as he does ordinarily to be consistent in his actions.

I end by pointing out myself what a great number of readers will consider the capital defect in the work. This book is not precisely in anyone's camp; in writing it I did not mean either to serve or to contest any party; I undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties; and while they are occupied with the next day, I wanted to ponder the future.

of family or corporation is allowed to be perceived; often one cannot even discover any individual influence however little lasting.

America therefore presents the strangest phenomenon in its social state. Men show themselves to be more equal in their fortunes and in their intelligence or, in other terms, more equally strong than they are in any country in the world and than they have been in any century of which history keeps a memory.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SOCIAL STATE OF THE ANGLO-AMERICANS

The political consequences of such a social state are easy to deduce.

It is impossible to understand how equality will not in the end penetrate the political world as elsewhere. One cannot conceive of men eternally unequal among themselves on one point alone, equal on all others; they will therefore arrive in a given time at being equal on all.

Now I know only two manners of making equality reign in the political world: rights must be given to each citizen or to no one.

For peoples who have reached the same social state as the Anglo-Americans it is therefore very difficult to perceive a middle term between the sovereignty of all and the absolute power of one alone.

One must not dissimulate the fact that the social state I have just described lends itself almost as readily to the one as to the other of its two consequences.

There is in fact a manly and legitimate passion for equality that incites men to want all to be strong and esteemed. This passion tends to elevate the small to the rank of the great; but one also encounters a depraved taste for equality in the human heart that brings the weak to want to draw the strong to their level and that reduces men to preferring equality in servitude to inequality in freedom. It is not that peoples whose social state is democratic naturally scorn freedom; on the contrary, they have an instinctive taste for it. But freedom is not the principal and continuous object of their desire; what they love with an eternal love is equality; they dash toward freedom with a rapid impulse and sudden efforts, and if they miss the goal they resign themselves; but nothing can satisfy them without equality, and they would sooner consent to perish than to lose it.

On the other hand, when citizens are all nearly equal, it becomes difficult for them to defend their independence against the aggressions of power. Since no one among them is strong enough then to struggle alone to advance, it is only the combination of the forces of all that can guarantee freedom. Now, such a combination is not always met with.

Peoples can therefore draw two great political consequences from the same social state: these consequences differ prodigiously between themselves, but they both issue from the same fact.

The first to be submitted to the formidable alternative that I have just described, the Anglo-Americans have been happy enough to escape absolute power. Circumstances, origin, enlightenment, and above all mores have permitted them to found and maintain the sovereignty of the people.

Chapter 4 ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE IN AMERICA

It dominates all of American society.—Application that the Americans already made of this principle before their revolution.—Development that their revolution gave to it.—Gradual and irresistible lowering of the property qualification.

When one wants to speak of the political laws of the United States, it is always with the dogma of the sovereignty of the people that one must begin.

The principle of the sovereignty of the people, which is always more or less at the foundation of almost all human institutions, ordinarily dwells there almost buried. One obeys it without recognizing it, or if sometimes it happens to be brought out in broad daylight for a moment, one soon hastens to plunge it back into the darkness of the sanctuary.

National will is one of the terms that intriguers in all times and despots in all ages have most largely abused. Some have seen its expression in the bought suffrage of a few agents of power; others in the votes of an interested or fearful minority; there are even some who have discovered it fully expressed in the silence of peoples, and who have thought that from the fact of obedience arises the right for them to command.

In America, the principle of the sovereignty of the people is not hidden or sterile as in certain nations; it is recognized by mores, proclaimed by the laws; it spreads with freedom and reaches its final consequences without obstacle.

If there is a single country in the world where one can hope to appreciate the dogma of the sovereignty of the people at its just value, to study it in its application to the affairs of society, and to judge its advantages and its dangers, that country is surely America.

Suppose on the contrary a legislative body composed in such a manner that it represents the majority without necessarily being the slave of its passions; an executive power with a force that is its own and a judicial power independent of the other two powers; you will still have democratic government, but there will be almost no more chance of tyranny.

I do not say that at the present time frequent use is made of tyranny in America, I say that no guarantee against it may be discovered, and that one must seek the causes of the mildness of government in circumstances and mores rather than in the laws.

EFFECTS OF THE OMNIPOTENCE OF THE MAJORITY ON THE ARBITRARINESS OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS

*Freedom that American law leaves to officials within the circle that it has drawn—
Their power.*

One must distinguish well arbitrariness from tyranny. Tyranny can be exercised by means of law itself, and then it is not arbitrariness; arbitrariness can be exercised in the interest of the governed, and then it is not tyrannical.

Tyranny ordinarily makes use of arbitrariness, but in case of need it knows how to do without it.

In the United States, at the same time that the omnipotence of the majority newspaper that showed itself strongly opposed excited the indignation of the inhabitants by this conduct. The people assembled, broke the presses, and attacked the homes of the journalists. They wanted to call up the militia, but it did not respond to the appeal. In order to save the unfortunate ones whom the public furor threatened, they opted for conducting them to prison like criminals. This precaution was useless: during the night, the people assembled again, the magistrates having failed to call up the militia, the prison was forced, one of the journalists was killed on the spot, the others left for dead; the guilty referred to the jury were acquitted.

I said one day to an inhabitant of Pennsylvania: "Explain to me, I pray you, how in a state founded by Quakers and renowned for its tolerance, freed Negroes are not allowed to exercise the rights of citizens. They pay tax, is it not just that they vote?"—"Do not do us the injury," he responded to me, "of believing that our legislators have committed so gross an act of injustice and intolerance."—"So, among you, blacks have the right to vote?"—"Without any doubt."—"Then how is it that in the electoral college this morning I did not perceive a single one of them in the assembly?"—"This is not the fault of the law," the American said to me; "It is true, Negroes have the right to be present at elections, but they abstain voluntarily from appearing there."—"That indeed is modesty on their part."—"Oh! It is not that they refuse to go there, but they fear that they will be mistreated there. It sometimes happens that the law lacks force among us when the majority does not support it. Now, the majority is imbued with the greatest prejudices against Negroes, and the magistrates do not feel they have the force to guarantee them the rights that the legislator has conferred on them."—"What! The majority that has the privilege of making the law still wants to have that of disobeying the law?"

it favors the legal despotism of the legislator, it favors the arbitrariness of the magistrate as well. The majority, being an absolute master in making the law and in overseeing its execution, having equal control over those who govern and over those who are governed, regards public officials as its passive agents and willingly deposits in them the care of serving its designs. It therefore does not enter in advance into the details of their duties and hardly takes the trouble to define their rights. It treats them as a master could do to his servants if, always seeing them act under his eye, he could direct or correct their conduct at each instant.

In general, the law leaves American officials much freer than ours within the circle that it draws around them. It sometimes even happens that the majority permits them to leave it. Guaranteed by the opinion of the greatest number and made strong by its concurrence, they then dare things that a European, habituated to the sight of arbitrariness, is still astonished at. Thus are formed, in the bosom of freedom, habits that can one day become fatal to it.

ON THE POWER THAT THE MAJORITY IN AMERICA EXERCISES OVER THOUGHT

In the United States, when the majority has irrevocably settled on a question, there is no more discussion.—Why.—Moral power that the majority exercises over thought.—Democratic republics make despotism immaterial.

When one comes to examine what the exercise of thought is in the United States, then one perceives very clearly to what point the power of the majority surpasses all the powers that we know in Europe.

Thought is an invisible and almost intangible power that makes sport of all tyrannies. In our day the most absolute sovereigns of Europe cannot prevent certain thoughts hostile to their authority from ruthlessly circulating in their states and even in the heart of their courts. It is not the same in America: as long as the majority is doubtful, one speaks; but when it has irrevocably pronounced, everyone becomes silent and friends and enemies alike then seem to hitch themselves together to its wagon. The reason for this is simple: there is no monarch so absolute that he can gather in his hands all the strength of society and defeat resistance, as can a majority vested with the right to make the laws and execute them.

A king, moreover, has only a material power that acts on actions and cannot reach wills; but the majority is vested with a force, at once material and moral, that acts on the will as much as on actions, and which at the same time prevents the deed and the desire to do it.

I do not know any country where, in general, less independence of mind and genuine freedom of discussion reign than in America.

There is no religious or political theory that cannot be preached freely in the constitutional states of Europe and that does not penetrate the others; for there is no country in Europe so subject to one single power that he who wants to speak the truth does not find support capable of assuring him against the consequences of his independence. If he has the misfortune to live under an absolute government, he often has the people for him; if he inhabits a free country, he can take shelter behind royal authority if need be. The aristocratic fraction of the society sustains him in democratic regions, and the democracy in the others. But in the heart of a democracy organized as that of the United States, one encounters only a single power, a single element of force and success, and nothing outside it.

In America the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Inside those limits, the writer is free; but unhappiness awaits him if he dares to leave them. It is not that he has to fear an *auto-da-fé*, but he is the butt of mortifications of all kinds and of persecutions every day. A political career is closed to him: he has offended the only power that has the capacity to open it up. Everything is refused him, even glory. Before publishing his opinions, he believed he had partisans; it seems to him that he no longer has any now that he has uncovered himself to all; for those who blame him express themselves openly, and those who think like him, without having his courage, keep silent and move away. He yields, he finally bends under the effort of each day and returns to silence as if he felt remorse for having spoken the truth.

Chains and executioners are the coarse instruments that tyranny formerly employed; but in our day civilization has perfected even despotism itself which seemed, indeed, to have nothing more to learn.

Princes had so to speak made violence material; democratic republics in our day have rendered it just as intellectual as the human will that it wants to constrain. Under the absolute government of one alone, despotism struck the body crudely, so as to reach the soul; and the soul, escaping from those blows, rose gloriously above it; but in democratic republics, tyranny does not proceed in this way; it leaves the body and goes straight for the soul. The master no longer says to it: You shall think as I do or you shall die; he says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains to you; but from this day on, you are a stranger among us. You shall keep your privileges in the city, but they will become useless to you; for if you crave the vote* of your fellow citizens, they will not grant it to you, and if you demand

*Lit.: "choice."

only their esteem, they will still pretend to refuse it to you. You shall remain among men, but you shall lose your rights of humanity. When you approach those like you, they shall flee you as being impure; and those who believe in your innocence, even they shall abandon you, for one would flee them in their turn. Go in peace, I leave you your life, but I leave it to you worse than death.

Absolute monarchies had dishonored despotism; let us be on guard that democratic republics do not rehabilitate it, and that in rendering it heavier for some, they do not remove its odious aspect and its demeaning character in the eyes of the greatest number.

In the proudest nations of the Old World, works destined to paint faithfully the vices and ridiculousness of contemporaries were published; La Bruyère lived at the palace of Louis XIV when he composed his chapter on the great, and Molière criticized the Court in plays that he had performed before courtiers.* But the power that dominates in the United States does not intend to be made sport of like this. The slightest reproach wounds it, the least prickly truth alarms it; and one must praise it from the forms of its language to its most solid virtues. No writer, whatever his renown may be, can escape the obligation of singing the praises of his fellow citizens. The majority, therefore, lives in perpetual adoration of itself; only foreigners or experience can make certain truths reach the ears of the Americans.

If America has not yet had great writers, we ought not to seek the reasons for this elsewhere: no literary genius exists without freedom of mind, and there is no freedom of mind in America.

The Inquisition could never prevent books contrary to the religion of the greatest number from circulating in Spain. The empire of the majority does better in the United States: it has taken away even the thought of publishing them. One encounters nonbelievers in America, but disbelief finds so to speak no organ.

One sees governments that strive to protect mores by condemning the authors of licentious books. In the United States no one is condemned for these sorts of works; but no one is tempted to write them. It is not, however, that all the citizens have pure mores, but the majority is regular in its.

Here the use of power is doubtless good: so I speak only of the power in itself. This irresistible power is a continuous fact, and its good use is only an accident.

*Jean de la Bruyère (1645-1696) was a French satirist, whose "chapter on the great" is to be found in his book *Characters* (1688); Molière (Jean Baptiste Poquelin, 1622-1673) was a French comic playwright.

Chapter 8 ON WHAT TEMPERERS THE TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY IN THE UNITED STATES

ABSENCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRALIZATION

The national majority does not have any idea of doing everything.—It is obliged to make use of the magistrates of the township and the counties to execute its sovereign will.

Previously I distinguished two kinds of centralization; I called one governmental and the other administrative.* The first alone exists in America; the second is nearly unknown there.

If the power that directs American societies found these two means of government at its disposal, and added the capacity and the habit of executing everything by itself to the right of commanding everything; if, after having established the general principles of government, it entered into the details of application, and after having regulated the great interests of the country it could descend to the limit of individual interests, freedom would soon be banished from the New World.

But in the United States, the majority, which often has the tastes and instincts of a despot, still lacks the most perfected instruments of tyranny.

In none of the American republics has the central government ever been occupied but with a few objects, whose importance attracted its regard. It has not undertaken to regulate secondary things in society. Nothing indicates that it has even conceived the desire for it. The majority, in becoming more and more absolute, has not increased the prerogatives of the central power; it has only rendered itself all-powerful in its sphere. Thus despotism can be very heavy on one point, but it cannot extend to all.

Moreover, however carried away the national majority can be by its passions, however ardent it may be in its projects, it cannot make all citizens in all places, in the same manner, at the same moment, bend to its desires. When the central government that represents it has sovereignly ordained, it must rely for the execution of its commandment on agents who often do not depend on it, and whom it cannot direct at each instant. Municipal bodies and the administrations of counties therefore form so many hidden shoals that delay or divide the flood of the popular will. Were the law oppressive,

* DA11-5.

freedom would still find shelter in the manner in which the law was executed; and the majority could not descend into the details and, if I dare say it, into the puerilities of administrative tyranny. It does not even imagine that it can do it, for it does not have entire consciousness of its power. It still knows only its natural strength, and it is ignorant of where art could extend its bounds. This deserves to be thought about. If a democratic republic like that of the United States ever came to be founded in a country where the power of one alone would already have established administrative centralization and made it pass into habits as into laws, I do not fear to say, in a republic like this, despotism would become more intolerable than in any of the absolute monarchies of Europe. One would have to cross over to Asia to find something to compare to it.

ON THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWYER IN THE UNITED STATES AND HOW IT SERVES AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO DEMOCRACY

Utility of inquiring what are the natural instincts of the spirit of the lawyer.—Lawyers called to play a great role in the society seeking to be born.—How the kind of work lawyers engage in gives an aristocratic turn to their ideas.—Accidental causes that can oppose the development of these ideas.—Facility that an aristocracy has in uniting with lawyers.—How a despot could turn lawyers to account.—How lawyers form the sole aristocratic element that is of a nature to be combined with the natural elements of democracy.—Particular causes that tend to give an aristocratic turn to the spirit of the English and American lawyer.—The American aristocracy is at the attorney's bar and on the judges' bench.—Influence exerted by lawyers on American society.—How their spirit penetrates to the heart of legislators, into administration, and in the end gives to the people themselves something of the instincts of magistrates.

When one visits Americans and when one studies their laws, one sees that the authority they have given to lawyers and the influence that they have allowed them to have in the government form the most powerful barrier today against the lapses of democracy. This effect seems to me to have a general cause that is useful to inquire about, for it can be reproduced elsewhere.

Lawyers have been involved in all the movements of political society in Europe for five hundred years. Sometimes they have served as instruments of political power, sometimes they have taken political power as an instrument. In the Middle Ages lawyers cooperated marvelously in extending the domination of the kings; since that time, they have worked powerfully to restrict this same power. In England, they have been seen to unite intimately with the aristocracy; in France, they have shown themselves to be its most dangerous enemies. Do lawyers therefore only yield to sudden, momentary

Chapter 1 ON THE PHILOSOPHIC METHOD OF THE AMERICANS

I think there is no country in the civilized world where they are less occupied with philosophy than the United States.

The Americans have no philosophic school of their own, and they worry very little about all those that divide Europe; they hardly know their names.

It is easy to see, nevertheless, that almost all the inhabitants of the United States direct their minds in the same manner and conduct them by the same rules; that is to say, they possess a certain philosophic method, whose rules they have never taken the trouble to define, that is common to all of them.

To escape from the spirit of system, from the yoke of habits, from family maxims, from class opinions, and, up to a certain point, from national prejudices, to take tradition only as information, and current facts only as a useful study for doing otherwise and better; to seek the reason for things by themselves and in themselves alone, to strive for a result without letting themselves be chained to the means, and to see through the form to the foundation: these are the principal features that characterize what I shall call the philosophic method of the Americans.

If I go still further and seek among these diverse features the principal one that can sum up almost all the others, I discover that in most of the operations of the mind, each American calls only on the individual effort of his reason.

America is therefore the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes* are least studied and best followed. That should not be surprising.

Americans do not read Descartes's works because their social state turns them away from speculative studies, and they follow his maxims because this same social state naturally disposes their minds to adopt them.

Amidst the continual movement that reigns in the heart of a democratic society, the bond that unites generations is relaxed or broken; each man easily loses track of the ideas of his ancestors or scarcely worries about them.

Men who live in such a society can no longer draw their beliefs from the opinions of the class to which they belong, for there are, so to speak, no longer any classes, and those that still exist are composed of elements that

* René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher, founder of modern rationalism, and author of *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

move so much that the body can never exert a genuine power over its members.

As for the action that the intellect of one man can have on another, it is necessarily very restricted in a country where citizens, having become nearly the same, all see each other from very close, and, not perceiving in anyone among themselves incontestable signs of greatness and superiority, are constantly led back toward their own reason as the most visible and closest source of truth. Then not only is trust in such and such a man destroyed, but the taste for believing any man whomsoever on his word.

Each therefore withdraws narrowly into himself and claims to judge the world from there.

The American way of taking the rule of their judgment only from themselves leads to other habits of mind.

As they see that they manage to resolve unaided all the little difficulties that practical life presents, they easily conclude that everything in the world is explicable and that nothing exceeds the bounds of intelligence.

Thus they willingly deny what they cannot comprehend: that gives them little faith in the extraordinary and an almost invincible distaste for the supernatural.

Since they customarily rely on their own witness, they like to see the object that occupies them very clearly; so they take off its wrapping as far as they can; they put to the side all that separates them from it and remove all that hides it from their regard in order to see it more closely and in broad daylight. This disposition of their minds soon leads them to scorn forms, which they consider useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and the truth.

Thus Americans have not needed to draw their philosophic method from books; they have found it in themselves. I shall say as much for what has happened in Europe.

The same method was established and vulgarized in Europe only as conditions there became more equal and men more alike.

Let us consider for a moment the chain of events:

In the sixteenth century, the reformers submit to individual reason some of the dogmas of the ancient faith; but they continue to exclude all others from discussion. In the seventeenth, Bacon,* in the natural sciences, and Descartes, in philosophy properly so-called, abolish the received formulas, destroy the empire of traditions, and overturn the authority of the master.

The philosophers of the eighteenth century, finally generalizing the same

principle, undertake to submit the objects of all beliefs to the individual examination of each man.

Who does not see that Luther,* Descartes, and Voltaire[†] made use of the same method, and that they differ only in the greater or lesser use that they claimed one might make of it?

How is it that the reformers so narrowly confined themselves within the circle of religious ideas? Why did Descartes, wanting to make use of his method only in certain matters even though he had put it in such a way that it applied to all, declare that one must judge for oneself only philosophical, and not political, matters? How did it happen that in the eighteenth century all at once they derived from the same method general applications that Descartes and his predecessors had not perceived or had refused to uncover? How is it, finally, that only in that period did the method we are speaking of suddenly leave the schools to penetrate society and become the common rule of intelligence, and that, after having become popular with the French, it was either openly adopted or secretly followed by all the peoples of Europe?

The philosophic method in question could be born in the sixteenth century and be clarified and generalized in the seventeenth; but it could not be commonly adopted in either of the two. Political laws, the social state—the habits of mind that flow from these first causes—were opposed to it.

It had been discovered in a period when men were beginning to be equal and to resemble each other. It could only be generally followed in centuries when conditions had finally become nearly the same and men almost alike.

The philosophic method of the eighteenth century is therefore not only French, but democratic, which explains why it was so easily accepted in all of Europe, whose face it has contributed so much to changing. It is not because the French changed their ancient beliefs and modified their ancient mores that they turned the world upside down; it is because they were the first to generalize and to bring to light a philosophic method with whose aid one could readily attack all ancient things and open the way to all new ones. If someone were now to ask me why in our day this same method is followed more rigorously and applied more often by the French than by the Americans, among whom equality is nevertheless as complete and more ancient, I shall respond that it is partly due to two circumstances that it is necessary to make understood in the first place.

It is religion that gave birth to the Anglo-American societies: one must never forget this; in the United States religion is therefore intermingled with

* Martin Luther (1483-1546), German theologian and religious reformer who initiated the Protestant Reformation.

† Assumed name of François Marie Arout (1694-1778), French writer and Enlightenment philosopher.

* Francis Bacon (1561-1626), English philosopher and statesman, and author of *The Advancement of Learning* and *Novum Organum*.

all national habits and all the sentiments to which a native country gives birth; that gives it a particular strength.

To this powerful reason add another no less so: in America religion itself has so to speak set its own limits; the religious order there has remained entirely distinct from the political order; in such a way that ancient laws could easily be changed without shaking ancient beliefs.

Christianity has therefore preserved a great empire over the American mind, and what I especially want to note is that it reigns not only as a philosophy that is adopted after examination, but as a religion that is believed without discussion.

In the United States, Christian sects vary infinitely and are constantly modified, but Christianity itself is an established and irresistible fact that no one undertakes either to attack or defend.

The Americans, having accepted the principal dogmas of the Christian religion without examination, are obliged to receive in the same manner a great number of moral truths that flow from them and depend on them. That restricts the action of individual analysis within narrow limits and spares from it several of the most important human opinions.

The other circumstance I spoke of is this:

The Americans have a democratic social state and constitution, but they did not have a democratic revolution. They arrived on the soil they occupy nearly as we see them. That is very important.

There are no revolutions that do not disrupt ancient beliefs, weaken authority, and obscure common ideas. Therefore every revolution has the effect, more or less, of delivering men over to themselves and of opening a wide and almost limitless space before the mind of each.

When conditions become equal following a prolonged conflict between the different classes forming the old society, envy, hatred and scorn of one's neighbor, haughtiness, and exaggerated self-confidence invade, so to speak, the human heart and make their home there for a time. This, independent of equality, contributes powerfully to dividing men, to making them distrust the judgment of one another and seek enlightenment in themselves alone.

Each then undertakes to be self-sufficient and finds his glory in making for himself beliefs that are his own about all things. Men are no longer bound except by interests, not by ideas; and one could say that human opinions form no more than a sort of intellectual dust that is blown around on all sides and cannot gather and settle.

Thus the independence of mind that equality supposes is never so great, and never appears so excessive, as at the moment when equality begins to be established and during the painful work of founding it. One ought therefore to distinguish carefully the kind of intellectual freedom that equality can pro-

vide from the anarchy that revolution brings. One must consider each of these two things separately so as not to conceive exaggerated hopes and fears for the future.

I believe that the men who will live in the new societies will often make use of their individual reason; but I am far from believing that they will often abuse it.

This is due to a cause more generally applicable to all democratic countries and which in the long term will restrain individual independence of thought within fixed and sometimes narrow limits.

I am going to speak of it in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 2 ON THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF BELIEFS AMONG DEMOCRATIC PEOPLES

Dogmatic beliefs are more or less numerous according to the times. They are born in different manners and can change form and object; but one cannot make it so that there are no dogmatic beliefs, that is, opinions men receive on trust without discussing them. If each undertook himself to form all his opinions and to pursue the truth in isolation down paths cleared by him alone, it is not probable that a great number of men would ever unite in any common belief.

Now it is easy to see that there is no society that can prosper without such beliefs, or rather there is none that could survive this way; for without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action men still exist, but a social body does not. Thus in order that there be society, and all the more, that this society prosper, it is necessary that all the minds of the citizens always be brought and held together by some principal ideas; and that cannot happen unless each of them sometimes comes to draw his opinions from one and the same source and unless each consents to receive a certain number of ready-made beliefs.

If I now consider man separately, I find that dogmatic beliefs are no less indispensable to him for living alone than for acting in common with those like him.

If man were forced to prove to himself all the truths he makes use of every day, he would never finish; he would exhaust himself in preliminary

demonstrations without advancing; as he does not have the time because of the short span of life, nor the ability because of the limits of his mind, to act that way, he is reduced to accepting as given a host of facts and opinions that he has neither the leisure nor the power to examine and verify by himself, but that the more able have found or the crowd adopts. It is on this first foundation that he himself builds the edifice of his own thoughts. It is not his will that brings him to proceed in this manner; the inflexible law of his condition constrains him to do it.

There is no philosopher in the world so great that he does not believe a million things on faith in others or does not suppose many more truths than he establishes.

This is not only necessary, but desirable. A man who would undertake to examine everything by himself could accord but little time and attention to each thing; this work would keep his mind in a perpetual agitation that would prevent him from penetrating any truth deeply and from settling solidly on any certitude. His intellect would be at the same time independent and feeble. It is therefore necessary that he make a choice among the various objects of human opinions and that he adopt many beliefs without discussing them in order better to fathom a few he has reserved for examination.

It is true that every man who receives an opinion on the word of another puts his mind in slavery; but it is a salutary servitude that permits him to make good use of his freedom.

It is therefore always necessary, however it happens, that we encounter authority somewhere in the intellectual and moral world. Its place is variable, but it necessarily has a place. Individual independence can be more or less great; it cannot be boundless. Thus, the question is not that of knowing whether an intellectual authority exists in democratic centuries, but only where it is deposited and what its extent will be.

In the preceding chapter I showed how equality of conditions makes men conceive a sort of instinctive incredulity about the supernatural and a very high and often much exaggerated idea of human reason.

Men who live in times of equality are therefore only with difficulty led to place the intellectual authority to which they submit outside of and above humanity. It is in themselves or in those like themselves that they ordinarily seek the sources of truth. That would be enough to prove that a new religion cannot be established in these centuries, and that all attempts to cause one to be born would be not only impious, but ridiculous and unreasonable. One can foresee that democratic peoples will not readily believe in divine missions, that they will willingly laugh at new prophets, and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, not beyond it.

When conditions are unequal and men are not alike, there are some individuals who are very enlightened, very learned, and of very powerful intellect, and a multitude who are very ignorant and very limited. People who live in aristocratic times are therefore naturally brought to take the superior reason of one man or one class as a guide for their opinions, while they are little disposed to recognize the infallibility of the mass.

The opposite happens in centuries of equality.

As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world.

Not only is common opinion the sole guide that remains for individual reason among democratic peoples; but it has an infinitely greater power among these peoples than among any other. In times of equality, because of their similarity, men have no faith in one another; but this same similarity gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgment of the public; for it does not seem plausible to them that when all have the same enlightenment, truth is not found on the side of the greatest number.

When the man who lives in democratic countries compares himself individually to all those who surround him, he feels with pride that he is the equal of each of them; but when he comes to view the sum of those like him and places himself at the side of this great body, he is immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and his weakness.

The same equality that makes him independent of each of his fellow citizens in particular leaves him isolated and without defense against the action of the greatest number.

The public therefore has a singular power among democratic peoples, the very idea of which aristocratic nations could not conceive. It does not persuade [one] of its beliefs; it imposes them and makes them penetrate souls by a sort of immense pressure of the minds of all on the intellect of each.

In the United States, the majority takes charge of furnishing individuals with a host of ready-made opinions, and it thus relieves them of the obligation to form their own. There are a great number of theories on matters of philosophy, morality, or politics that everyone thus adopts without examination, on the faith of the public; and if one looks very closely, one will see that religion itself reigns there much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion.

I know that among Americans political laws are such that the majority reigns sovereign over society, which greatly increases the empire it naturally exercises over the intellect. For nothing is more familiar to man than to recognize superior wisdom in whoever oppresses him.

This political omnipotence of the majority in the United States in effect

augments the influence that the opinions of the public would otherwise obtain over the mind of each citizen; but it does not found it. It is in equality itself that one must seek the sources of that influence, and not in the more or less popular institutions that equal men can give themselves. It is to be believed that the intellectual empire of the greatest number would be less absolute in a democratic people subject to a king than in the heart of a pure democracy; but it will always be very absolute, and whatever political laws regulate men in centuries of equality, one can foresee that faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority.

Thus intellectual authority will be different, but it will not be less; and so far am I from believing that it will disappear that I augur that it might readily become too great, and that it could be that it might in the end confine the action of individual reason within narrower limits than befit the greatness and happiness of the human species. I see very clearly two tendencies in equality: one brings the mind of each man toward new thoughts, and the other would willingly induce it to give up thinking. And I perceive how, under the empire of certain laws, democracy would extinguish the intellectual freedom that the democratic social state favors, so that the human spirit, having broken all the shackles that classes or men formerly imposed on it, would be tightly chained to the general will of the greatest number.

If democratic peoples substituted the absolute power of a majority in place of all the diverse powers that hindered or retarded beyond measure the ascent of individual reason, the evil would have done nothing but change its character. Men would not have found the means of living independently; they would only have discovered—a difficult thing—a new face for servitude. That, I cannot repeat too often, is something to cause profound reflection by those who see in the freedom of the intellect something holy and who hate not only the despot but despotism. As for me, when I feel the hand of power weighing on my brow, it matters little to know who oppresses me, and I am no more disposed to put my head in the yoke because a million arms present it to me.

Chapter 3 WHY THE AMERICANS SHOW MORE APTITUDE AND TASTE FOR GENERAL IDEAS THAN THEIR ENGLISH FATHERS

God does not ponder the human race in general. At a single glance he sees separately all of the beings of which humanity is composed, and he perceives each of them with the similarities that bring [each one] closer to all and the differences that isolate [each one] from [everyone else].

God therefore has no need of general ideas; that is to say, he never feels the necessity of enclosing a very great number of analogous objects under the same form so as to think about them more conveniently.

It is not so with man. If the human mind undertook to examine and judge individually all the particular cases that strike it, it would soon be lost in the midst of the immensity of detail and would no longer see anything; in this extremity it has recourse to an imperfect but necessary process that both aids it in its weakness and proves its weakness.

After having superficially considered a certain number of objects and remarking that they resemble each other, he gives them all the same name, puts them aside, and continues on his route.

General ideas do not attest to the strength of human intelligence, but rather to its insufficiency, because there are no beings in nature exactly alike: no identical facts, no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once.

General ideas are admirable in that they permit the human mind to bring rapid judgments to a great number of objects at one time; but on the other hand, they never provide it with anything but incomplete notions, and they always make it lose in exactness what they give it in extent.

As societies age, they acquire knowledge of new facts and each day take hold, almost without knowing it, of some particular truths.

As man grasps more truths of this species, he is naturally led to conceive a greater number of general ideas. One cannot see a multitude of particular facts separately without finally discovering the common bond that brings them together. Several individuals make the notion of species perceptible; several species lead necessarily to that of genus. The habit of and taste for general ideas will therefore always be the greater in a people as its enlightenment is more ancient and more manifold.

But there are still other reasons that push men to generalize their ideas or that move them away from doing so.

Americans make use much more often than do the English of general ideas and take more pleasure in them; that appears very singular at first if one considers that these two peoples have the same origin, that they lived for centuries under the same laws, and that they still constantly pass their opinions and mores on to each other. The contrast appears much more striking when one focuses one's attention on our Europe and compares the two most enlightened peoples who inhabit it to one another.

One would say that for the English, the human mind is torn from the contemplation of particular facts only with regret and sorrow to ascend from there to causes and that it generalizes only despite itself.

It seems, on the contrary, that among us the taste for general ideas has become such a frenetic passion that one must satisfy it at every turn. Each morning on awakening I learn that someone has just discovered some general and eternal law that I had never heard spoken of until then. There is no writer so mediocre that it is enough for him to discover truths applicable to a great realm in his first attempt, and who does not remain discontented with himself if he has been unable to enclose the human race in the subject of his discourse.

Such a dissimilarity between two very enlightened peoples astonishes me. If finally I bring my mind back toward England and I remark what has taken place within it in the last half century, I believe I can affirm that the taste for general ideas is developing as the ancient constitution of the country weakens.

Therefore, the more or less advanced state of enlightenment alone is not enough to explain what suggests the love of general ideas to the human mind or averts it from them.

When conditions are very unequal and the inequalities are permanent individuals little by little become so unlike that one would say there are as many distinct humanities as there are classes; one always discovers only one of them at a time, and losing sight of the general bond that brings all together in the vast bosom of the human race, one ever views only some men, not man.

Those who live in these aristocratic societies, therefore, never conceive very general ideas relative to themselves, and that is enough to give them an habitual distrust of these ideas and an instinctive distaste for them.

On the contrary, the man who inhabits democratic countries finds near to him only beings who are almost the same; he therefore cannot consider any part whatsoever of the human species without having his thought enlarge

and dilate to embrace the sum. All the truths applicable to himself appear to him to apply equally and in the same manner to each of his fellow citizens and to those like him. Having contracted the habit of general ideas in the one study with which he most occupies himself and which most interests him, he carries this same habit over to all the others, and thus the need to discover common rules for all things, to enclose many objects within the same form, and to explain a collection of facts by a single cause becomes an ardent and often blind passion of the human mind.

Nothing shows better the truth of the preceding than the opinions of antiquity relative to slaves.

The most profound and vast geniuses of Rome and Greece were never able to arrive at the idea, so general but at the same time so simple, of the similarity of men and of the equal right to freedom that each bears from birth; and they did their utmost to prove that slavery was natural and that it would always exist. Even more, everything indicates that even those of the ancients who were slaves before becoming free, several of whom have left us beautiful writings,* themselves viewed servitude in the same light.

All the great writers of antiquity were a part of the aristocracy of masters, or at least they saw that aristocracy established without dispute before their eyes; their minds, after expanding in several directions, were therefore found limited in that one, and it was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal.

In centuries of equality all men are independent of one another, isolated and weak; one does not see anyone whose will directs the movements of the crowd in a permanent fashion; in these times, humanity always seems to run by itself. To explain what happens in the world, one is therefore reduced to searching for a few great causes which, acting in the same manner on each of those like us, thus bring all to follow the same route voluntarily. That also naturally leads the human mind to conceive general ideas and brings it to contract a taste for them.

Previously I showed how equality of conditions brought each to seek the truth by himself.¹ It is easy to see that such a method will imperceptibly make the human mind tend toward general ideas. When I repudiate the traditions of class, profession, and family, when I escape the empire of example to seek by the effort of my reason alone the path to follow, I am inclined to draw the

¹In DA I 2.10, AT mentions Aesop and Terence; another famous example is the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus (57-135?).

²DA II 11.

grounds of my opinions from the very nature of man, which necessarily leads me, almost without my knowing it, toward a great number of very general notions.

All that precedes serves to explain why the English show much less aptitude and taste for the generalization of ideas than their sons, the Americans, and above all their neighbors, the French, and why the English of our day show more of these than their fathers had done.

The English have long been a very enlightened people and at the same time very aristocratic; their enlightenment made them tend constantly toward very general ideas, and their aristocratic habits held them to very particular ideas. Hence the philosophy, at once audacious and timid, broad and narrow, that has dominated England until now and that still keeps so many minds confined and immobile.

Independent of the causes I have shown above, one encounters still others less apparent, but not less effective, that produce among almost all democratic peoples the taste and often the passion for general ideas.

One must carefully distinguish among these sorts of ideas. There are those that are products of a slow, detailed, conscientious work of intelligence; and they enlarge the sphere of human knowledge.

There are others that are readily born of a first rapid effort of the mind and lead only to very superficial and very uncertain notions.

Men who live in centuries of equality have much curiosity and little leisure; their life is so practical, so complicated, so agitated, so active that little time remains to them for thinking. Men of democratic centuries like general ideas because they exempt them from studying particular cases; they contain, if I can express myself so, many things in a small volume and give out a large product in a little time. When, therefore, after an inattentive and brief examination, they believe they perceive a common relation among certain objects, they do not push their research further, and without examining in detail how these various objects resemble each other or differ, they hasten to arrange them under the same formula in order to get past them.

One of the distinctive characteristics of democratic centuries is the taste all men experience for easy successes and present enjoyments. This is found in intellectual careers as well as all others. Most of those who live in times of equality are full of an ambition that is at once lively and soft; they want to obtain great success right away, but they would like to exempt themselves from great efforts. These contrary instincts lead them directly to the search for general ideas, with the aid of which they flatter themselves by painting very vast objects at small cost and attracting public attention without trouble. And I do not know if they are wrong to think like that; for their readers are as afraid of going into depth as they themselves can be, and they ordi-

narily seek in the works of the mind only easy pleasures and instruction without work.

If aristocratic nations do not make enough use of general ideas and often show them an inconsiderate scorn, it happens, on the contrary, that democratic peoples are always ready to abuse these sorts of ideas and indiscreetly to become inflamed over them.

Chapter 4 WHY THE AMERICANS HAVE NEVER BEEN AS PASSIONATE AS THE FRENCH FOR GENERAL IDEAS IN POLITICAL MATTERS

I said previously that Americans show a less lively taste than the French for general ideas. That is above all true of general ideas relative to politics.

Although Americans have infinitely more general ideas enter into legislation than the English, and although they are much more concerned with adjusting the practice of human affairs to theory, political bodies in the United States have never been as enarmored of general ideas as were our Constituent Assembly and Convention;* never has the whole American nation become passionate for these sorts of ideas in the same manner as the French people in the eighteenth century, nor has it displayed as blind a faith in the goodness and absolute truth of any theory.

This difference between the Americans and us arises from several causes, but from this one principally:

The Americans form a democratic people that has always directed public affairs by itself, and we are a democratic people who for a long time could only dream of a better manner of conducting them.

Our social state had already brought us to conceive very general ideas in matters of government while our political constitution still prevented us from rectifying these ideas through experience and from discovering their

*The Constituent Assembly ruled revolutionary France from 1789 to 1791, drew up a new constitution, and issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The Convention came to power in 1792, made a new constitution and suspended it immediately, ruled by means of the "terror" and revolutionary war, and came to an end in 1795.

work of literature but a spectacle, and provided that the author speaks the language of the country correctly enough to make himself understood, and that his characters excite curiosity and awaken sympathy, they are content without demanding anything more of the fiction, they immediately reenter the real world. Style is therefore less necessary; for on the stage these rules are even less observed.

As for plausibility, it is impossible often to be new, unexpected, and rapid while remaining faithful to it. Therefore one neglects it, and the public gives its pardon. One can reckon that [the public] will not become restive because of the paths by which you have conducted it if you finally bring it before an object that touches it. It will never reproach you for having moved it despite the rules.

The Americans bring the different instincts I have just depicted into broad daylight when they go to the theater. But one must recognize that there are still only a few of them who go there. Although spectators and spectacles have increased enormously in the United States in the last forty years, the population still indulges in this genre of amusement only with extreme restraint.

That is due to particular causes that the reader already knows, and it is enough to remind him in a few words.*

The Puritans who founded the American republics were not only enemies of pleasures; they further professed an altogether special horror of the theater. They considered it an abominable diversion, and as long as their spirit reigned undivided, dramatic performances were absolutely unknown among them. The opinions of the first fathers of the colony left profound marks on the spirit of their descendants.

Moreover, the extreme regularity of habit and great rigidity of mores seen in the United States have, up to now, hardly favored the development of the theatrical art.

There are no subjects for drama in a country that has not been witness to great political catastrophes and where love always leads by a direct and easy path to marriage. People who spend every day of the week making a fortune and Sundays praying to God do not lend themselves to the comic muse.

A single fact is enough to show that the theater is hardly popular in the United States.

Americans, whose laws authorize freedom and even license of speech in all things, have nonetheless subjected dramatic authors to a sort of censorship. Theatrical performances can only take place when the administrators of the township permit them. This shows well that peoples are like individuals.

*See DA I.12; II.11.

They indulge themselves unsparingly in their principal passions, and then they take good care not to yield too much to the attraction of tastes they do not have.

There is no portion of literature that is linked by stricter and more numerous bonds to the current state of society than the theater.

The theater of one period can never suit the following period if, between the two, an important revolution has changed mores and laws.

One still studies the great writers of another century. But one no longer goes to plays written for another public. Dramatic authors of a time past live only in books.

The traditional taste of some men, vanity, fashion, the genius of an actor can for a time sustain or revive an aristocratic theater within a democracy; but soon it falls by itself. It is not overturned, it is abandoned.

Chapter 20 ON SOME TENDENCIES PARTICULAR TO HISTORIANS IN DEMOCRATIC CENTURIES

Historians who write in aristocratic centuries ordinarily make all events depend on the particular wills and humors of certain men, and they willingly tie the most important revolutions to the least accidents. With sagacity they bring out the smallest causes, and often they do not perceive the greatest.

Historians who live in democratic centuries show altogether contrary tendencies.

Most of them attribute almost no influence to the individual over the destiny of the species or to citizens over the fate of the people. But, in reverse, they give great general causes to all the little particular facts. These opposed tendencies explain themselves.

When historians of aristocratic centuries cast their eyes on the theater of the world, they perceive first of all a very few principal actors who guide the whole play. These great personages, who are kept at the front of the stage, arrest their sight and fix it while they apply themselves to unveiling the secret motives that make them act and speak, they forget the rest.

The importance of the things they see done by some men gives them an exaggerated idea of the influence that a man can exert and naturally disposes

them to believe that one must always go back to the particular action of an individual to explain the movements of the crowd.

When, on the contrary, all citizens are independent of one another, and each of them is weak, one finds none who exert a very great or above all a very lasting power over the mass. At first sight, individuals seem absolutely powerless over it, and one would say that society advances all by itself—by the free and spontaneous concurrence of all the men who compose it.

That naturally brings the human mind to search for the general reason that could strike so many intellects at once and turn them simultaneously in the same direction.

I am very convinced that in democratic nations themselves, the genius, the vices, or the virtues of certain individuals slow or hasten the natural course of the destiny of the people; but these sorts of fortuitous and secondary causes are infinitely more varied, more hidden, more complicated, less powerful, and consequently more difficult to unravel and follow in times of equality than in centuries of aristocracy, when it is only a question of analyzing the particular action of a single man or of a few in the midst of the general facts.

The historian is soon fatigued by such work; his mind is lost in the middle of this labyrinth, and, as he is unable to perceive clearly individual influences and bring them sufficiently to light, he denies them. He pretends to speak to us of the nature of races, the physical constitution of the country, or the spirit of the civilization. That shortens his work and, at less cost, satisfies the reader better.

M. de La Fayette said somewhere in his *Mémoires* that the exaggerated system of general causes procures marvelous consolations for mediocre public men.* I add that it gives admirable ones to mediocre historians. It always furnishes them some great reasons that quickly pull them through the most difficult spot in their book and supports the weakness or laziness of their minds, all the while doing honor to their profundity.

As for me, I think that there is no period in which it is not necessary to attribute one part of the events of this world to very general facts and another to very particular influences. These two causes are always met with; only their relationship differs. General facts explain more things in democratic centuries than in aristocratic centuries, and particular influences fewer. In aristocratic times, it is the contrary: particular influences are stronger and

*Marquis de Lafayette, *Mémoires, correspondance et manuscrits du général Lafayette* (H. Fournier, 1837-1838), 6 vols. This remark is cited by Sainte-Beuve in his account of Lafayette's *Mémoires* (*Revue des deux mondes*, 4th series, vol. 15, 1838, pp. 355-381), p. 359. Lafayette (1757-1834) was a French military leader and statesman, called "the hero of two worlds," he fought on the side of the colonists in the American Revolution and played a prominent part in the French Revolution.

general causes are weaker, unless one considers as a general cause the very fact of inequality of conditions that permits some individuals to oppose the natural tendencies of all the others.

Historians who seek to depict what happens in democratic societies are therefore right to allow a large part to general causes, and to apply themselves principally to uncovering them; but they are wrong to deny the particular action of individuals entirely because it is not easy to find and follow it.

Not only are historians who live in democratic centuries drawn to assign a great cause to each fact, but they are also brought to link the facts among themselves and make a system issue from them.

In aristocratic centuries, when the attention of historians is diverted to individuals at every moment, the sequence of events eludes them, or rather they do not believe in a sequence like this. The thread of history seems to them broken at each instant by the passage of one man.

In democratic centuries, on the contrary, the historian, who sees the actors much less and the acts much more, can readily establish a relationship and a methodical order among them.

Ancient literature, which left us such beautiful histories, does not offer a single great historical system, whereas the most miserable modern literature swarms with them. It seems that ancient historians did not make enough use of the general theories that ours are always near to abusing.

Those who write in democratic centuries have another, more dangerous tendency.

When any trace of the action of individuals on nations is lost, it often happens that one sees the world moving without discovering its motor. As it becomes very difficult to perceive and analyze the reasons that, acting separately on the will of each citizen, in the end produce the movement of the people, one is tempted to believe that this movement is not voluntary and that, without knowing it, societies obey a superior, dominating force.

Even if one should discover on earth the general fact that directs the particular wills of all individuals, that does not save human freedom. A cause vast enough to be applied to millions of men at once and strong enough to incline all together in the same direction easily seems irresistible; after having seen that one yields to it, one is quite close to believing that one cannot resist it.

Historians who live in democratic times, therefore, not only deny to a few citizens the power to act on the destiny of a people, they also take away from peoples themselves the ability to modify their own fate, and they subject them either to an inflexible providence or to a sort of blind fatality. According to them, each nation is invincibly attached, by its position, its origin, its antecedents, its nature, to a certain destiny that all its efforts cannot change. They

render generations interdependent on one another, and thus going back from age to age and from necessary events to necessary events up to the origin of the world, they make a tight and immense chain that envelops the whole human race and binds it.

It is not enough for them to show how the facts have come about; they also take pleasure in making one see that it could not have happened otherwise. They consider a nation that has reached a certain place in its history and affirm that it was constrained to follow the path that led it there. That is easier than instructing us on how it could have acted to take a better route.

In reading the historians of aristocratic ages and particularly those of antiquity, it seems that to become master of his fate and to govern those like him, a man has only to know how to subdue himself. In running through the histories written in our time, one would say that man can do nothing either about himself or his surroundings. Historians of antiquity instruct on how to command, those of our day teach hardly anything other than how to obey. In their writings, the author often appears great, but humanity is always small.

If this doctrine of fatality, which has so many attractions for those who write history in democratic times, passed from writers to their readers, thus penetrating the entire mass of citizens and taking hold of the public mind, one can foresee that it would soon paralyze the movement of the new societies and reduce Christians to Turks.

I shall say, furthermore, that such a doctrine is particularly dangerous in the period we are in; our contemporaries are only too inclined to doubt free will because each of them feels himself limited on all sides by his weakness, but they still willingly grant force and independence to men united in a social body. One must guard against obscuring this idea, for it is a question of elevating souls and not completing their prostration.

Chapter 21 ON PARLIAMENTARY ELOQUENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

In aristocratic peoples all men are joined and depend on one another; a hierarchical bond exists among all with the aid of which one can keep each in his place and the entire body in obedience. Something analogous is always found within the political assemblies of these peoples. Their parties are naturally

arranged under certain chiefs, whom they obey by a sort of instinct that is only the result of habits contracted elsewhere. They bring into a small society the mores of the larger.

In democratic countries, it often happens that a great number of citizens are directed toward the same point; but each advances to it, or at least flatters himself that he advances to it, only by himself. Habituated to regulating his movements only by following his personal impulses, he bows uneasily when receiving regulation from the outside. This taste for and use of independence follow him into the national councils. If he consents to associate with others there for the pursuit of the same design, he at least wants to remain his own master in cooperating for the common success in his own manner.

Hence it is that parties in democratic lands tolerate direction with impatience and only prove to be subordinate when the peril is very great. Still, the authority of chiefs, which in these circumstances can go as far as making them act and speak, almost never extends to the power of making them keep silent.

Among aristocratic peoples, members of political assemblies are at the same time members of the aristocracy.

Each of them possesses an elevated and stable rank by himself, and the place he occupies in the assembly is often less important in his eyes than the one he fills in the country. That consoles him for not playing a role in the discussion of affairs there and disposes him not to search with too much ardor for a mediocre one.

In America it ordinarily happens that the deputy is nothing but for his position in the assembly. He is therefore constantly tormented by the need to acquire importance there, and he feels a peculiar desire to put forth his ideas in broad daylight at every moment.

He is driven in this direction not only by his own vanity, but by that of his electors and by the continual necessity of pleasing them.

In aristocratic peoples, the member of the legislature is rarely in a strict dependence on electors; often he is in some fashion a necessary representative for them; sometimes he keeps them in a strict dependence, and if they finally come to refuse him their vote, he easily gets himself named elsewhere; or, renouncing a public career, he withdraws into an idleness that still has splendor.

In a democratic country like the United States, the deputy almost never has a lasting hold on the minds of his electors. However small the electoral body is, democratic instability makes it change its face constantly. He must therefore captivate it every day. He is never sure of them; and if they abandon him, he is immediately without resources; for he does not naturally have a position elevated enough to be perceived easily by those who are not close to

*Chapter 1 WHY DEMOCRATIC PEOPLES
SHOW A MORE ARDENT AND MORE
LASTING LOVE FOR EQUALITY THAN
FOR FREEDOM*

The first and most lively of the passions to which equality of conditions gives birth, I have no need to say, is the love of this same equality. One will therefore not be astonished if I speak of that before all the others.

Everyone has remarked that in our time, and especially in France, this passion for equality holds a greater place in the human heart each day. It has been said a hundred times that our contemporaries have a much more ardent and tenacious love for equality than for freedom, but I do not find that anyone has yet gone back sufficiently to the causes of this fact. I am going to try. One can imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality touch each other and intermingle.

Let me suppose that all citizens concur in the government and that each has an equal right to concur in it.

Then with none differing from those like him, no one will be able to exercise a tyrannical power; men will be perfectly free because they will all be entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal because they will be entirely free. This is the ideal toward which democratic peoples tend.

That is the most complete form that equality can take on earth; but there are a thousand others, not as perfect, that are scarcely less dear to these peoples.

Equality can be established in civil society and not reign in the political world. One can have the right to indulge in the same pleasures, to enter the same professions, to meet in the same places; in a word, to live in the same manner and pursue wealth by the same means, without having all take the same part in government.

A sort of equality can even be established in the political world although there may be no political freedom. One might be equal to all those like him except the one who is, without any distinction, the master of all and who picks the agents of his power equally from among all.

It would be easy to make several other hypotheses by which a very great quantity [of equality] could easily be combined with more or less free institutions or even with institutions that were not free at all.

Although men cannot become absolutely equal without being entirely

free, and consequently equality in its most extreme degree becomes confused with freedom, yet there is a foundation for distinguishing one from the other.

The taste that men have for freedom and the one they feel for equality are in fact two distinct things, and I do not fear to add that among democratic peoples they are two unequal things.

If one wishes to pay attention to it, one will see that in each century one encounters a singular and dominating fact to which all the others are connected; this fact almost always gives rise to a mother idea, or a principal passion, that in the end attracts and carries along in its course all sentiments and all ideas. It is like a great river toward which each of the surrounding streams seems to run.

Freedom has manifested itself to men in different times and in different forms; it is not attached exclusively to one social state, and one encounters it elsewhere than in democracies. It therefore cannot form the distinctive characteristic of democratic centuries.

The particular and dominating fact that makes those centuries unique is equality of conditions; the principal passion that agitates men in those times is the love of this equality.

Do not ask what unique charm men in democratic ages find in living as equals, or the particular reasons that they can have for being so obstinately attached to equality rather than to the other goods that society presents to them: equality forms the distinctive characteristic of the period they live in; that alone is enough to explain why they prefer it to all the rest.

But independent of this reason, there are several others that will usually bring men in all times to prefer equality to freedom.

If a people could ever succeed by itself in destroying or even diminishing the equality that reigned within it, it would arrive at that only by long and painful efforts. It would have to modify its social state, abolish its laws, renew its ideas, change its habits, alter its mores. But to lose political freedom, it is enough not to hold on to it, and it escapes.

Men, therefore, do not hold to equality only because it is dear to them; they are also attached to it because they believe that it will last forever.

Political freedom in its excesses is able to compromise the tranquility, the patrimony, the lives of particular persons—and one encounters no men so limited and so flighty as not to realize this. On the contrary, only attentive and clairvoyant people perceive the perils with which equality threatens us, and ordinarily they avoid pointing them out. They know that the miseries they fear are remote, and flatter themselves that they will overtake only generations to come, which the present generation scarcely worries about. The evils that freedom brings are sometimes immediate; they are visible to all, and all more or less feel them. The evils that extreme equality can produce

become manifest only little by little; they insinuate themselves gradually into the social body; one sees them only now and then, and at the moment when they have become most violent, habit has already made them no longer felt.

The goods that freedom brings show themselves only in the long term, and it is always easy to fail to recognize the cause that gives birth to them.

The advantages of equality make themselves felt from now on, and each day one sees them flow from their source.

From time to time political freedom gives a certain number of citizens sublime pleasures.

Equality furnishes a multitude of little enjoyments daily to each man. The charms of equality are felt at all moments, and they are within reach of all; the noblest hearts are not insensitive to them, and the most vulgar souls get their delights from them. The passion to which equality gives birth will therefore be both energetic and general.

Men cannot enjoy political freedom unless they purchase it with some sacrifices, and they never get possession of it except with many efforts. But the pleasures brought by equality offer themselves. Each little incident of private life seems to give birth to them, and to taste them, one needs only to be alive.

Democratic peoples love equality at all times, but in certain periods, they press the passion they feel for it to delirium. This happens at the moment when the old social hierarchy, long threatened, is finally destroyed after a last internecine struggle, and the barriers that separated citizens are finally overturned. Then men rush at equality as at a conquest, and they become attached to it as to a precious good someone wants to rob them of. The passion for equality penetrates all parts of the human heart; there it spreads, and fills it entirely. Do not say to men that in giving themselves over so blindly to an exclusive passion, they compromise their dearest interests; they are deaf. Do not show them that freedom escapes from their hands while they are looking elsewhere; they are blind, or rather they perceive only one good in the whole universe worth longing for.

What precedes applies to all democratic nations. What follows regards only us.

In most modern nations and in particular in all the peoples of the continent of Europe, the taste for and idea of freedom began to arise and to develop only at the moment when conditions began to be equalized and as a consequence of that very equality. It was the absolute kings who worked the most at leveling the ranks among their subjects. In these peoples, equality preceded freedom; equality was therefore an old fact when freedom was still a new thing; the one had already created opinions, usages, laws proper to it when the other was produced alone and for the first time in broad daylight.

Thus the latter existed still only in ideas and tastes, whereas the former had already penetrated habits, taken hold of mores, and given a particular turn to the least acts of life. How was astonished if men of our day prefer the one to the other?

I think that democratic peoples have a natural taste for freedom, left to themselves they seek it, they love it, and they will see themselves parted from it only with sorrow. But for equality they have an ardent, insatiable, eternal, invincible passion; they want equality in freedom, and, if they cannot get it, they still want it in slavery. They will tolerate poverty, enslavement, barbarism, but they will not tolerate aristocracy.

This is true in all times, and above all in ours. All men and all powers that wish to struggle against this irresistible power will be overturned and destroyed by it. In our day freedom cannot be established without its support, and despotism itself cannot reign without it.

Chapter 2 ON INDIVIDUALISM IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES

I have brought out how, in centuries of equality, each man seeks his beliefs in himself;* I want to show how, in the same centuries, he turns all his sentiments toward himself alone.

Individualism is a recent expression¹ arising from a new idea. Our fathers knew only selfishness.

Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self that brings man to relate everything to himself alone and to prefer himself to everything.

Individualism is a reflective and peaceable sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and his friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself.

Selfishness is born of a blind instinct; individualism proceeds from an erroneous judgment rather than a depraved sentiment. It has its source in the defects of the mind as much as in the vices of the heart.

* DA II L1.

¹This is the first occurrence in DA of the word "individualism," a new word not coined by AI, but defined and developed by him. See Schabert, *The Making of Tocqueville's "Democracy in America,"* 251-259.

Selfishness withers the seed of all the virtues; individualism at first dries up only the source of public virtues; but in the long term it attacks and destroys all the others and will finally be absorbed in selfishness.

Selfishness is a vice as old as the world. It scarcely belongs more to one form of society than to another.

Individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become equal.

In aristocratic peoples, families remain in the same state for centuries, and often in the same place. That renders all generations so to speak contemporaries. A man almost always knows his ancestors and respects them; he believes he already perceives his great-grandsons and he loves them. He willingly does his duty by both, and he frequently comes to sacrifice his personal enjoyments for beings who no longer exist or who do not yet exist.

In addition, aristocratic institutions have the effect of binding each man tightly to several of his fellow citizens.

Classes being very distinct and immobile within an aristocratic people, each of them becomes for whoever makes up a part of it a sort of little native country, more visible and dearer than the big one.

As in aristocratic societies all citizens are placed at a fixed post, some above the others, it results also that each of them always perceives higher than himself a man whose protection is necessary to him, and below he finds another whom he can call upon for cooperation.

Men who live in aristocratic centuries are therefore almost always bound in a tight manner to something that is placed outside of them, and they are often disposed to forget themselves. It is true that in these same centuries the general notion of *those like oneself* is obscure and that one scarcely thinks of devoting oneself to the cause of humanity; but one often sacrifices oneself for certain men.

In democratic centuries, on the contrary, when the duties of each individual toward the species are much clearer, devotion toward one man becomes rarer: the bond of human affections is extended and loosened.

In democratic peoples, new families constantly issue from nothing, others constantly fall into it, and all those who stay on change face; the fabric of time is torn at every moment and the trace of generations is effaced. You easily forget those who have preceded you, and you have no idea of those who will follow you. Only those nearest have interest.

As each class comes closer to the others and mixes with them, its members become indifferent and almost like strangers among themselves. Aristocracy had made of all citizens a long chain that went from the peasant up to the king; democracy breaks the chain and sets each link apart.

As conditions are equalized, one finds a great number of individuals who,

der, and it is often difficult to know when listening to them if the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or well-being in this one.

Chapter 10 ON THE TASTE FOR MATERIAL WELL-BEING IN AMERICA

In America the passion for material well-being is not always exclusive, but it is general; if all do not experience it in the same manner, all do feel it. The care of satisfying the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life preoccupies minds universally.

Something like this is more and more to be seen in Europe.

Among the causes that produce these similar effects in the two worlds there are several that come close to my subject and that I will point out.

When wealth is settled by inheritance in the same families, one sees a great number of men who enjoy material well-being without feeling the exclusive taste for well-being.

What attaches the human heart most keenly is not the peaceful possession of a precious object, but the imperfectly satisfied desire to possess it and the incessant fear of losing it.

In aristocratic societies the rich, never having known a state different from their own, do not fear changing it; they hardly imagine another. Material well-being is therefore not the goal of life for them; it is a manner of living. They consider it in a way like existence and enjoy it without thinking about it.

The natural and instinctive taste that all men feel for well-being thus being satisfied without trouble and without fear, their souls transport themselves elsewhere and apply themselves to some more difficult and greater undertaking that animates them and carries them along.

Thus even in the midst of material enjoyments, the members of an aristocracy often display a haughty scorn of these same enjoyments and find singular strength when they must at last be deprived of them. All revolutions that have troubled or destroyed aristocracies have shown with what facility people accustomed to the superfluous can do without the necessary, whereas men who have laboriously arrived at ease can hardly live after having lost it.

If I pass from the superior ranks to the lower classes, I shall see analogous effects produced by different causes.

In nations where the aristocracy dominates society and holds it immobile, the people in the end become habituated to poverty like the rich to their opulence. The latter are not preoccupied with material well-being because they possess it without trouble; the former do not think about it because they despair of acquiring it and because they are not familiar enough with it to desire it.

In these sorts of societies the imagination of the poor is thrown back upon the other world; the miseries of real life repress it, but it escapes them and goes to seek its enjoyments outside of it.

When, on the contrary, ranks are confused and privileges destroyed, when patrimonies are divided and enlightenment and freedom are spread, the longing to acquire well-being presents itself to the imagination of the poor man, and the fear of losing it, to the mind of the rich. A multitude of mediocre fortunes is established. Those who possess them have enough material enjoyments to conceive the taste for these enjoyments and not enough to be content with them. They never get them except with effort, and they indulge in them only while trembling.

They therefore apply themselves constantly to pursuing or keeping these enjoyments that are so precious, so incomplete, and so fleeting.

I seek a passion that is natural to men who are excited and limited by the obscurity of their origin or the mediocrity of their fortune, and I find none more appropriate than the taste for well-being. The passion for material well-being is essentially a middle-class passion; it grows larger and spreads with this class; it becomes preponderant with it. From there it reaches the higher ranks of society and descends within the people.

I did not encounter a citizen in America so poor that he did not cast a glance of hope and longing on the enjoyments of the rich and whose imagination was not seized in advance by the goods that fate was obstinately refusing him.

On the other hand, I never perceived that high-minded disdain for material well-being among the rich of the United States that is sometimes shown even within the most opulent and most dissolute aristocracies.

Most of these rich have been poor; they have felt the sting of need; they have long combated adverse fortune, and, now that victory is gained, the passions that accompanied the struggle survive it; they stand as if intoxicated in the midst of the little enjoyments that they have pursued for forty years.

It is not that in the United States as elsewhere one does not encounter a great enough number of the rich who, holding their goods by inheritance, possess effortlessly an opulence that they have not acquired. But even they do not show themselves less attached to the enjoyments of material life. Love of well-being has become the national and dominant taste; the great current

of human passions bears from this direction; it carries everything along in its course.

Chapter II ON THE PARTICULAR EFFECTS THAT THE LOVE OF MATERIAL ENJOYMENTS PRODUCES IN DEMOCRATIC CENTURIES

One could believe, from what precedes, that the love of material enjoyments must constantly carry Americans along toward disorder in mores, trouble their families, and finally compromise the fate of society itself.

But it is not so: the passion for material enjoyments produces different effects within democracies than in aristocratic peoples.

It sometimes happens that the lassitude of affairs, the excess of wealth, the ruin of beliefs, the decadence of the state turn the heart of an aristocracy little by little toward material enjoyments alone. At other times, the power of the prince or the weakness of the people, without robbing the nobles of their fortune, forces them to turn away from power and, closing their way to great undertakings, abandons them to the restiveness of their desires; they then fall back heavily on themselves, and they seek forgetfulness of their past greatness in enjoyments of the body.

When the members of an aristocratic body thus turn exclusively toward love of material enjoyments, they ordinarily gather on this side alone all the energy that the long habit of power has given them.

For such men the search for well-being is not enough; they must have a sumptuous depravity and a brilliant corruption. They render magnificent worship to the material and they seem to want to vie with each other to excel in the art of besotting themselves.

The stronger, more glorious, and freer an aristocracy has been, the more it will then show itself depraved, and whatever the splendor of its virtues has been, I dare to predict that it will always be surpassed by the brilliance of its vices.

The taste for material enjoyments does not bring democratic peoples to similar excesses. There, the love of well-being shows itself to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but contained passion. It is not a question of building

vast palaces, of vanquishing and outwitting nature, of depleting the universe in order better to satiate the passions of a man; it is about adding a few toises to one's fields, planting an orchard, enlarging a residence, making life easier and more comfortable at each instant, preventing inconvenience, and satisfying the least needs without effort and almost without cost. These objects are small, but the soul clings to them; it considers them every day and from very close; in the end they hide the rest of the world from it, and they sometimes come to place themselves between it and God.

This, one will say, can only be applied to those citizens whose fortune is mediocre; the rich will show tastes analogous to those they used to display in aristocratic centuries. I contest that.

In the case of material enjoyments, the most opulent citizens of a democracy will not show tastes very different from those of the people, whether, having come from within the people, they really share them, or whether they believe they ought to submit to them. In democratic societies, the sensuality of the public has taken a certain moderate and tranquil style, to which all souls are held to conform. It is as difficult to escape the common rule by one's vices as by one's virtues.

The rich who live in the midst of democratic nations therefore aim at the satisfaction of their least needs rather than at extraordinary enjoyments; they gratify a multitude of small desires and do not give themselves over to any great disordered passion. They fall into softness rather than debauchery.

The particular taste that men of democratic centuries conceive for material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to be satisfied. Nor is it the enemy of regular mores; for good mores are useful to public tranquillity and favor industry. Often, indeed, it comes to be combined with a sort of religious morality; one wishes to be the best possible in this world without renouncing one's chances in the other.

Among material goods there are some whose possession is criminal; one takes care to abstain from them. There are others the use of which is permitted by religion and morality; to these one's heart, one's imagination, one's life are delivered without reserve; and in striving to seize them, one loses sight of the more precious goods that make the glory and the greatness of the human species.

What I reproach equally for is not that it carries men away in the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments; it is for absorbing them entirely in the search for permitted enjoyments.

Thus there could well be established in the world a sort of honest materialism that does not corrupt souls, but softens them and in the end quietly loosens all their tensions.

Chapter 12 WHY CERTAIN AMERICANS DISPLAY SUCH AN EXALTED SPIRITUALISM

Although the desire to acquire the goods of this world may be the dominant passion of Americans, there are moments of respite when their souls seem all at once to break the material bonds that restrain them and to escape impetuously toward Heaven.

In all the states of the Union, but principally in the half-populated regions of the West, one sometimes encounters itinerant preachers who peddle the divine word from place to place.

Entire families, the aged, women, and children cross difficult places and penetrate the woods of the wilderness, coming from very far to hear them; and when they have met them, while listening to them they forget for several days and nights the care of their affairs and even the most pressing needs of the body.

One finds here and there in the heart of American society souls altogether filled with an exalted and almost fierce spiritualism that one scarcely encounters in Europe. From time to time bizarre sects arise that strive to open extraordinary roads to eternal happiness. Religious follies are very common there.

This should not surprise us.

Man did not give himself the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal. These sublime instincts are not born of a caprice of his will: they have their immovable foundation in his nature; they exist despite his efforts. He can hinder and deform them, but not destroy them.

The soul has needs that must be satisfied; and whatever care one takes to distract it from itself, it soon becomes bored, restive, and agitated amid enjoyments of the senses.

If the minds of the great majority of the human race were ever concentrated on the search for material goods alone, one can expect that an enormous reaction would be produced in the souls of some men. The latter would throw themselves head over heels into the world of spirits for fear of remaining encumbered in the too narrow fetters that the body wants to impose on them.

One should therefore not be astonished if, in the heart of a society that thought only of the earth, one encountered a few individuals who wished to

regard only Heaven. I would be surprised if mysticism did not soon make progress in a people uniquely preoccupied with its own well-being.

It is said that the persecutions of the emperors and the tortures of the circus peopled the deserts of the Thebaïd;* but I think that it was rather the delights of Rome and the Epicurean philosophy of Greece.

If the social state, circumstances, and laws did not restrain the American spirit so closely in the search for well-being, one might believe that when it came to be occupied with immaterial things, it would show more reserve and more experience and would moderate itself without trouble. But it feels itself imprisoned within limits from which it is seemingly not allowed to leave. As soon as it passes these limits, it does not know where to settle, and it often runs without stopping beyond the bounds of common sense.

Chapter 13 WHY THE AMERICANS SHOW THEMSELVES SO RESTIVE IN THE MIDST OF THEIR WELL-BEING

One still sometimes encounters small populations in certain secluded districts of the Old World that have been almost forgotten in the midst of the universal tumult and that have remained immobile when everything around them was moving. Most of these peoples are very ignorant and very miserable; they do not meddle in the affairs of government and often governments oppress them. Nevertheless, they ordinarily show a serene countenance, and they often let a playful humor appear.

In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest condition that exists in the world; it seemed to me that a sort of cloud habitually covered their features; they appeared to me grave and almost sad even in their pleasures.

The principal reason for this is that the first do not think of the evils they endure, whereas the others dream constantly of the goods they do not have.

It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it.

* A region of Egypt, which was a province of the Roman Empire.

The inhabitant of the United States attaches himself to the goods of this world as if he were assured of not dying, and he rushes so precipitately to grasp those that pass within his reach that one would say he fears at each instant he will cease to live before he has enjoyed them. He grasps them all but without clutching them, and he soon allows them to escape from his hands so as to run after new enjoyments.

In the United States, a man carefully builds a dwelling in which to pass his declining years, and he sells it while the roof is being laid; he plants a garden and he rents it out just as he was going to taste its fruits; he clears a field and he leaves to others the care of harvesting its crops. He embraces a profession and quits it. He settles in a place from which he departs soon after so as to take his changing desires elsewhere. Should his private affairs give him some respite, he immediately plunges into the whirlwind of politics. And when toward the end of a year filled with work some leisure still remains to him, he carries his restive curiosity here and there within the vast limits of the United States. He will thus go five hundred leagues in a few days in order better to distract himself from his happiness.

Death finally comes, and it stops him before he has grown weary of this useless pursuit of a complete felicity that always flees from him.

One is at first astonished to contemplate the singular agitation displayed by so many happy men in the very midst of their abundance. This spectacle is, however, as old as the world; what is new is to see a whole people show it. The taste for material enjoyments must be considered as the first source of this secret restiveness revealed in the actions of Americans and of the inconstancy of which they give daily examples.

He who has confined his heart solely to the search for the goods of this world is always in a hurry, for he has only a limited time to find them, take hold of them, and enjoy them. His remembrance of the brevity of life constantly spurs him. In addition to the goods that he possesses, at each instant he imagines a thousand others that death will prevent him from enjoying if he does not hasten. This thought fills him with troubles, fears, and regrets, and keeps his soul in a sort of unceasing trepidation that brings him to change his designs and his place at every moment.

If a social state in which law or custom no longer keeps anyone in his place is joined to the taste for material well-being, this too greatly excites further restiveness of spirit: one will then see men change course continuously for fear of missing the shortest road that would lead them to happiness.

Besides, it is easy to conceive that if men who passionately search for material enjoyments desire keenly, they will be easily discouraged; the final object being to enjoy, the means of arriving at it must be prompt and easy,

without which the trouble of acquiring the enjoyment would surpass the enjoyment. Most souls are, therefore, at once ardent and soft, violent and enervated. Often one dreads death less than continuing efforts toward the same goal.

Equality leads men by a still more direct path to several of the effects that I have just described.

When all the prerogatives of birth and fortune are destroyed, when all professions are open to all, and when one can reach the summit of each of them by oneself, an immense and easy course seems to open before the ambition of men, and they willingly fancy that they have been called to great destinies. But that is an erroneous view corrected by experience every day. The same equality that permits each citizen to conceive vast hopes renders all citizens individually weak. It limits their strength in all regards at the same time that it permits their desires to expand.

Not only are they impotent by themselves, but at each step they find immense obstacles that they had not at first perceived.

They have destroyed the annoying privileges of some of those like them; they come up against the competition of all. The barrier has changed form rather than place. When men are nearly alike and follow the same route, it is difficult indeed for any one of them to advance quickly and to penetrate the uniform crowd that surrounds him and presses against him.

The constant opposition reigning between the instincts that equality gives birth to and the means that it furnishes to satisfy them is tormenting and fatiguing to souls.

One can conceive of men having arrived at a certain degree of freedom that satisfies them entirely. They then enjoy their independence without restiveness and without ardor. But men will never find an equality that is enough for them.

Whatever a people's efforts, it will not succeed in making conditions perfectly equal within itself, and if it had the misfortune to reach this absolute and complete leveling, the inequality of intellects would still remain, which, coming directly from God, will always escape the laws.

However democratic the social state and political constitution of a people may be, one can therefore count on the fact that each of its citizens will always perceive near to him several positions in which he is dominated, and one can foresee that he will obstinately keep looking at this side alone. When inequality is the common law of a society, the strongest inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on a level, the least of them wound it. That is why the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable as equality is greater.

In democratic peoples, men easily obtain a certain equality; they cannot

attain the equality they desire. It retreats before them daily but without ever evading their regard, and, when it withdraws, it attracts them in pursuit. They constantly believe they are going to seize it, and it constantly escapes their grasp. They see it from near enough to know its charms, they do not approach it close enough to enjoy it, and they die before having fully savored its sweetness.

It is to these causes that one must attribute the singular melancholy that the inhabitants of democratic lands often display amid their abundance, and the disgust with life that sometimes seizes them in the midst of an easy and tranquil existence.

In France one complains that the number of suicides is increasing; in America suicide is rare, but one is sure that madness is more common than everywhere else.

Those are different symptoms of the same malady. Americans do not kill themselves, however agitated they may be, because religion forbids them from doing so, and because materialism so to speak does not exist among them, although the passion for material well-being is general.

Their will resists, but often their reason gives way.

In democratic times, enjoyment is keener than in aristocratic centuries, and above all the number of those who taste it is infinitely greater; but on the other hand, one must recognize that hopes and desires are more often disappointed, souls more aroused and more restive, and cares more burning.

Chapter 14 HOW THE TASTE FOR MATERIAL ENJOYMENTS AMONG AMERICANS IS UNITED WITH LOVE OF FREEDOM AND WITH CARE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

When a democratic state turns to absolute monarchy, the activity previously directed to public and private affairs comes all at once to be concentrated on the latter, and for some time, great material prosperity results; but soon the movement slows and the development of production comes to a stop.

I do not know if one can cite a single manufacturing and commercial

people, from the Tyrians* to the Florentines to the English, that has not been a free people. There is therefore a tight bond and a necessary relation between these two things: freedom and industry.

That is generally true of all nations, but especially of democratic nations. I have brought out above how men who live in centuries of equality have a continuous need of association in order to procure for themselves almost all the goods they covet, and I have shown, on the other hand, how great political freedom perfects and popularizes the art of association within them.[†] In these centuries, therefore, freedom is particularly useful to the production of wealth. One can see, on the contrary, that despotism is its particular enemy.

The nature of absolute power in democratic centuries is neither cruel nor savage, but it is minute and vexatious. Although despotism of this kind does not ride roughshod over humanity, it is directly opposed to the genius of commerce and the instincts of industry.

Thus men of democratic times need to be free in order to procure more easily for themselves the material enjoyments for which they constantly sigh. It sometimes happens, however, that the excessive taste they conceive for these same enjoyments delivers them to the first master who presents himself. The passion for well-being is then turned against itself and, without perceiving it, drives away the object of its covetousness.

There is, in fact, a very perilous passage in the life of democratic peoples. When the taste for material enjoyments develops in one of these peoples more rapidly than enlightenment and the habits of freedom, there comes a moment when men are swept away and almost beside themselves at the sight of the new goods that they are ready to grasp. Preoccupied with the sole care of making a fortune, they no longer perceive the tight bond that unites the particular fortune of each of them to the prosperity of all. There is no need to tear from such citizens the rights they possess; they themselves willingly allow them to escape. The exercise of their political duties appears to them a distressing contrivance that distracts them from their industry. If it is a question of choosing their representatives, of giving assistance to authority, of treating the common thing in common, they lack the time; they cannot waste their precious time in useless work. These are games of the idle that do not suit grave men occupied with the serious interests of life. These people believe they are following the doctrine of interest, but they have only a coarse idea of it, and to watch better over what they call their affairs, they neglect the principal one, which is to remain masters of themselves.

*Inhabitants of Tyre, an ancient Phoenician city.

†DA II 2-5-7.

*Chapter 4 ON SOME PARTICULAR AND
ACCIDENTAL CAUSES THAT SERVE TO
BRING A DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE TO
CENTRALIZE POWER OR TURN IT
AWAY FROM THAT*

If all democratic peoples are instinctively drawn toward the centralization of powers, they tend to it in an unequal manner. That depends on particular circumstances that can develop or restrict the natural effects of the social state. These circumstances are very large in number; I shall speak only of some.

Among men who have lived free for a long time before becoming equal, the instincts given by freedom combat up to a certain point the penchants that equality suggests; and although the central power increases its privileges among them, particular persons never entirely lose their independence.

But when equality develops in a people that has never known freedom or that has not known it for a long time, as is seen on the continent of Europe, the old habits of the nation come to be combined suddenly and by a sort of natural attraction with the new habits and doctrines to which the social state has given birth, and all powers seem of themselves to rush toward the center; there they accumulate with surprising rapidity, and all at once the state attains the extreme limit of its force while particular persons let themselves sink in one moment to the last degree of weakness.

The English who came three centuries ago to found a democratic society in the wilderness of the New World had all been habituated in the mother country to take part in public affairs; they knew the jury; they had freedom of speech and of the press, individual freedom, the idea of right and the practice of resorting to it. They transported these free institutions and virtue mores to America, and these sustained them against the encroachments of the state.

Among the Americans, therefore, freedom is old; equality is comparatively new. The contrary obtains in Europe, where equality, introduced by absolute power and under the eye of the kings, had already penetrated the habits of peoples long before freedom had entered into their ideas.

I have said that in democratic peoples government is naturally presented to the human mind only in the form of a lone central power, and that the

notion of intermediate powers is not familiar to it. That is particularly applicable to democratic nations that have seen the principle of equality triumph with the aid of a violent revolution. Since the classes that directed local affairs disappear all at once in this storm and the confused mass that remains still has neither the organization nor the habits that permit it to take the administration of its own affairs in hand, one no longer perceives anything but the state itself that can take charge of all the details of government. Centralization becomes a sort of necessary fact.

One must neither praise nor blame Napoleon for having concentrated almost all administrative powers in his hands alone; for after the abrupt disappearance of the nobility and the haute bourgeoisie, these powers came to him of themselves; it would have been almost as difficult for him to repel them as to take them up. A necessity like this was never felt by the Americans, who, not having had a revolution and having governed themselves from their origin, never had to burden the state with serving them temporarily as their schoolmaster.

Thus centralization does not develop in a democratic people only according to the progress of equality, but also according to the manner in which that equality is founded.

At the beginning of a great democratic revolution, when the war between the different classes has only just arisen, the people strive to centralize public administration in the hands of the government in order to tear direction of local affairs from the aristocracy. Toward the end of this same revolution, on the contrary, it is ordinarily the defeated aristocracy that tries to deliver the direction of all affairs to the state because it dreads the petty tyranny of the people, which has become its equal and often its master.

Thus it is not always the same class of citizens that applies itself to increasing the prerogatives of power; but as long as the democratic revolution lasts, there will always be found in the nation one class, powerful by its number or by its wealth, whose special passions and particular interests bring it to centralize public administration, independently of the hatred for government by one's neighbor, which is a general and permanent sentiment in democratic peoples. One can remark that in our time it is the lower classes of England that work with all their strength to destroy local independence and to transfer administration from all points of the circumference to the center, whereas the upper classes strive to retain this same administration within its former limits. I dare predict that a day will come when an altogether contrary spectacle will be seen.

What precedes makes it well understood why social power will always be stronger and the individual weaker in a democratic people that has arrived at equality by long and painful social travail than in a democratic society

where citizens have always been equal from its origin. This is what the example of the Americans serves to prove.

Men who inhabit the United States have never been separated by any privilege; they have never known the reciprocal relation of inferior and master, and as they neither dread nor hate one another, they have never known the need to call in the sovereign to direct the details of their affairs. The destiny of the Americans is singular: they have taken from the English aristocracy the idea of individual rights and the taste for local freedoms; and they have been able to preserve both because they have not had to combat an aristocracy.

If in all times enlightenment serves men to defend their independence, that is above all true in democratic centuries. It is easy, when all men resemble each other, to found a single, all-powerful government; instinct suffices. But men must have much intelligence, science, and art, in the same circumstances, to organize and maintain secondary powers and in the midst of the independence and individual weakness of citizens to create free associations that are in a position to struggle against tyranny without destroying order.

Concentration of powers and individual servitude therefore grow in democratic nations not only in proportion to equality but owing to ignorance.

It is true that in barely enlightened centuries the government often lacks the enlightenment to perfect despotism, as do citizens to evade it. But the effect is not equal on both sides.

However coarse a democratic people is, the central power that directs it is never completely deprived of enlightenment, because it readily attracts to itself the little that is found in the country and because, if need be, it goes to seek it outside. In a nation that is ignorant as well as democratic, therefore, an enormous difference between the intellectual capacity of the sovereign and that of each of its subjects cannot fail to become manifest soon. That readily serves to concentrate all powers in its hands. The administrative power of the state constantly spreads because no one but it is skilled enough to administer.

Aristocratic nations, however little enlightened one supposes them, never present the same spectacle, because enlightenment there is equally enough distributed between the prince and the principal citizens.

The pasha who reigns over Egypt today found the population of that country composed of very ignorant and very equal men, and he appropriated the science and intelligence of Europe to govern it. The particular enlightenment of the sovereign thus coming to be combined with the ignorance and democratic weakness of the subjects, the furthest limit of centralization has been attained with no difficulty, and the prince has been able to make his country into his factory and its inhabitants into his workers.

I believe the extreme centralization of political power in the end enervates society and thus at length weakens the government itself. But I do not deny that a centralized social force is in a position to execute great undertakings easily at a given time and on a determined point. That is above all true in war, where success depends much more on the facility one has in bringing all one's resources rapidly upon a certain point than on the extent of those resources. It is therefore principally in war that peoples feel the desire and often the need to increase the prerogatives of the central power. All geniuses of war love centralization, which increases their strength, and all centralizing geniuses love war, which obliges nations to draw tight all powers in the hands of the state. Thus, the democratic tendency that brings men constantly to multiply the privileges of the state and to restrict the rights of particular persons is much more rapid and more continuous in democratic peoples subject by their position to great and frequent wars, and whose existence can often be put in peril, than in all others.

I have said how fear of disorder and love of well-being insensibly bring democratic peoples to augment the prerogatives of the central government, the sole power that appears to them in itself strong enough, intelligent enough, stable enough to protect them against anarchy. I hardly need to add that all the particular circumstances that tend to render the state of a democratic society troubled and precarious augment this general instinct and bring particular persons, more and more, to sacrifice their rights to their tranquility.

A people is therefore never so disposed to increase the prerogatives of the central power as on emerging from a long and bloody revolution which, after having torn the goods from the hands of their former owners, has shaken all beliefs and filled the nation with furious hatreds, opposed interests, and contrary factions. The taste for public tranquility then becomes a blind passion, and citizens are subject to being overcome with a very disordered love for order.

I have just examined several accidents that all combine to aid the centralization of power. I have not yet spoken of the principal one.

The first of the accidental causes that, in democratic peoples, can draw the direction of all affairs into the hands of the sovereign is the origin of this sovereign itself and its penchants.

Men who live in centuries of equality naturally love the central power and willingly extend its privileges; but if it happens that this same power faithfully represents their interests and exactly reproduces their instincts, the confidence they bring to it has almost no bounds, and they believe that all that they give they accord to themselves.

The attraction of administrative powers toward the center will always be

less easy and less rapid with kings who still hold on to some place in the old aristocratic order than with new princes, sons of their own works, whose birth, prejudices, instincts, and habits seem to be bound indissolubly to the cause of equality. I do not want to say that princes of aristocratic origin who live in centuries of democracy do not seek to centralize. I believe that they busy themselves at it as diligently as all others. For them, the sole advantages of equality are in this direction; but their opportunities are fewer, because citizens, instead of naturally anticipating their desires, often lend themselves to them only with difficulty. In democratic societies centralization will always be greater as the sovereign is less aristocratic: that is the rule.

When an old race of kings directs an aristocracy, since the natural prejudices of the sovereign are in perfect accord with the natural prejudices of the nobles, the vices inherent in aristocratic societies develop freely and do not find remedy. The contrary happens when the offshoot of feudal stock is placed at the head of a democratic people. Each day the prince inclines by his education, his habits, and his memories toward the sentiments that inequality of conditions suggests; and the people constantly tend by their social state toward the moves that equality gives birth to. Then it often happens that citizens seek to contain the central power, much less as it is tyrannical than as it is aristocratic; and they firmly maintain their independence, not only because they want to be free, but above all because they intend to remain equal.

A revolution that overturns an old family of kings to place new men at the head of a democratic people can weaken the central power momentarily; but however anarchic it appears at first, one ought not hesitate to predict that its final and necessary result will be to extend and secure the prerogatives of this same power.

The first, and in a way the only, necessary condition for arriving at centralizing public power in a democratic society is to love equality or to make it beloved [that one does]. Thus the science of despotism, formerly so complicated, is simplified: it is reduced, so to speak, to a single principle.

Chapter 5 THAT AMONG EUROPEAN NATIONS OF OUR DAY SOVEREIGN POWER INCREASES ALTHOUGH SOVEREIGNS ARE LESS STABLE

If one comes to reflect on what precedes, one will be surprised and frightened to see how in Europe everything seems to combine to increase the prerogatives of the central power indefinitely and each day to render individual existence weaker, more subordinate, and more precarious.

The democratic nations of Europe have all the same general and permanent tendencies that carry Americans toward the centralization of powers and, in addition, they are subject to a multitude of secondary and accidental causes that Americans do not know. One would say that each step they take toward equality brings them closer to despotism.

It is enough to cast a glance around us and at ourselves to be convinced of it.

During the aristocratic centuries that preceded ours the sovereigns of Europe had been deprived of or had relinquished several of the inherent rights of their power. It was not a hundred years ago that one still found in most European nations particular persons or almost independent bodies that administered justice, raised and maintained soldiers, collected taxes, and often even made or explained the law. Everywhere the state has retaken these natural attributes of sovereign power for itself alone; in all that has a relation to government, it no longer puts up with an intermediary between it and the citizens, and it directs them by itself in general affairs. I am very far from criticizing this concentration of powers; I limit myself to showing it.

In the same period there existed in Europe many secondary powers that represented local interests and administered local affairs. Most of these local authorities have already disappeared; all tend rapidly to disappear or to fall into the most complete dependence. From one end of Europe to the other, the privileges of lords, the freedoms of towns, the provincial administrations are, or are going to be, destroyed.

For a half century Europe has experienced many revolutions and counter-revolutions that have moved it in contrary directions. But all these movements resemble each other on one point: all have shaken or destroyed secondary powers. Local privileges that the French nation had not abolished in the countries conquered by it have finally succumbed under the efforts of the

I will not fear to repeat again for a final time what I have already said or indicated in several places in this book* one must beware of confusing the fact of equality itself with the revolution that serves to introduce it into the social state and the laws; it is there [in that confusion] that the reason is found for almost all the phenomena that astonish us.

All the old political powers of Europe, the greatest as well as the least, were founded in centuries of aristocracy, and they more or less represented or defended the principle of inequality and privilege. To make prevail in government the new needs and interests suggested by the growing equality, it was therefore necessary that men of our day overturn or constrain the old powers. That led them to make revolutions and inspired in many of them the savage taste for disorder and independence that all revolutions, whatever their object may be, always give birth to.

I do not believe that there is a single land in Europe where the development of equality was not preceded or followed by some violent changes in the state of property and of persons, and almost all these changes have been accompanied by much anarchy and license because they were made by the least well-ordered portion of the nation against that which was the most.

From there have emerged the two contrary tendencies that I previously showed. In the heat of the democratic revolution, men occupied with destroying the old aristocratic powers that were in combat against it showed they were animated by a great spirit of independence; and as the victory of equality became more complete, they abandoned themselves little by little to the natural instincts to which this same equality gives birth, and they re-inforced and centralized the social power. They had wanted to be free so as to be able to make themselves equal, and as equality, with the aid of freedom, established itself, it made freedom more difficult for them.

These two states did not always come in succession. Our fathers displayed just how a people could organize an immense tyranny within itself at the very moment when it was escaping the authority of the nobles and defying the power of all kings, teaching the world the way to win its independence and to lose it at the same time.

Men of our time perceive that the old powers are collapsing on all sides; they see all the old influences drying, all the old barriers falling down; this clouds the judgment of the dearest; they only pay attention to the prodigious revolution that is at work before their eyes, and they believe that the human race is going to fall into anarchy forever. If they pondered the final consequences of this revolution, perhaps they would conceive other fears.

As for me, I confess I do not trust the spirit of freedom that seems to

animate my contemporaries; I see well that the nations of our day are turbulent; but I do not clearly find that they are liberal, and I fear that sovereigns, at the end of these agitations that make all thrones tremble, will be found more powerful than ever.

Chapter 6 WHAT KIND OF DESPOTISM DEMOCRATIC NATIONS HAVE TO FEAR

During my stay in the United States I had remarked that a democratic social state like that of the Americans could singularly facilitate the establishment of despotism, and I had seen on my return to Europe how most of our princes had already made use of the ideas, sentiments, and needs to which this same social state had given birth to extend the sphere of their power.

That led me to believe that Christian nations would perhaps in the end come under an oppression similar to that which formerly weighed on several of the peoples of antiquity.

A more detailed examination of the subject and five years of new meditations have not diminished my fears, but they have changed their object.

In past centuries, one never saw a sovereign so absolute and so powerful that it undertook to administer all the parts of a great empire by itself without the assistance of secondary powers; there was none who attempted to subjugate all its subjects without distinction to the details of a uniform rule, nor one that descended to the side of each of them to lord it over him and lead him. The idea of such an underracking had never presented itself to the human mind, and if any man had happened to conceive of it, the insufficiency of enlightenment, the imperfection of administrative proceedings, and above all the natural obstacles that inequality of conditions gave rise to would soon have stopped him in the execution of such a vast design.

One sees that in the time of the greatest power of the Caesars, the different peoples who inhabited the Roman world still preserved diverse customs and mores; although subject to the same monarch, most of the provinces were administered separately; they were filled with powerful and active municipalities, and although all the government of the empire was concentrated in the hands of the emperor alone and he always remained the arbitrator of all things in case of need, the details of social life and of individual existence ordinarily escaped his control.

* DA I Intro: I, 51; I, 210; II, 11, 10; II, 2, 3; II, 3, 5, 11, 19, 21, 23; II, 4, 4.

It is true that the emperors possessed an immense power without counterweight, which permitted them to indulge the outlandishness of their penchants freely and to employ the entire force of the state in satisfying them; they often came to abuse this power so as to deprive a citizen of his goods or life arbitrarily; their tyranny weighed enormously on some, but it did not extend over many; it applied itself to a few great principal objects and neglected the rest; it was violent and restricted.

It seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them.*

I do not doubt that in centuries of enlightenment and equality like ours, sovereigns will come more easily to gather all public powers in their hands alone and to penetrate the sphere of private interests more habitually and more deeply than any of those in antiquity was ever able to do. But the same equality that facilitates despotism tempers it; we have seen how, as men are more alike and more equal, public moves become more humane and milder; when no citizen has either great power or great wealth, tyranny in a way lacks an occasion and a stage. All fortunes being mediocre, passions are naturally contained, imagination bounded, pleasures simple. This universal moderation moderates the sovereign itself and holds the disordered sparks of its desires within certain limits.

Independently of these reasons drawn from the very nature of the social state, I could add many others that I would take from outside my subject; but I want to stay within the bounds I have set for myself.

Democratic governments can become violent and even cruel at certain moments of great excitement and great peril; but these crises will be rare and transient.

When I think of the small passions of men of our day, the softness of their moves, the extent of their enlightenment, the purity of their religion, the mildness of their morality, their laborious and steady habits, the restraint that almost all preserve in vice as in virtue, I do not fear that in their chiefs they will find tyrants, but rather schoolmasters.

I think therefore that the kind of oppression with which democratic peoples are threatened will resemble nothing that has preceded it in the world; our contemporaries would not find its image in their memories. I myself seek in vain an expression that exactly reproduces the idea that I form of it for myself and that contains it; the old words despotism and tyranny are not suitable. The thing is new, therefore I must try to define it, since I cannot name it.

* See AT's note XXVI, page 703.

I want to imagine with what new features despotism could be produced in the world: I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others: his children and his particular friends form the whole human species for him; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone, and if a family still remains for him, one can at least say that he no longer has a native country.

Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is also-lure, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they think only of enjoying themselves. It willingly works for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that; it provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?

So it is that every day it renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen. Equality has prepared men for all these things: it has disposed them to tolerate them and often even to regard them as a benefit.

Thus, after taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes, the sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.

I have always believed that this sort of regulated, mild, and peaceful servitude, whose picture I have just painted, could be combined better than one imagines with some of the external forms of freedom, and that it would not

be impossible for it to be established in the very shadow of the sovereignty of the people.

Our contemporaries are incessantly racked by two iniraical passions: they feel the need to be led and the wish to remain free. Not being able to destroy either one of these contrary instincts, they strive to satisfy both at the same time. They imagine a unique power, tutelary, all powerful, but elected by citizens. They combine centralization and the sovereignty of the people. That gives them some respite. They console themselves for being in tutelage by thinking that they themselves have chosen their schoolmasters. Each individual allows himself to be attached because he sees that it is not a man or a class but the people themselves that hold the end of the chain.

In this system citizens leave their dependence for a moment to indicate their master, and then reenter it.

In our day there are many people who accommodate themselves very easily to this kind of compromise between administrative despotism and the sovereignty of the people, and who think they have guaranteed the freedom of individuals well enough when they deliver it to the national power. That does not suffice for me. The nature of the master is much less important to me than the obedience.

Nevertheless I shall not deny that such a constitution is infinitely preferable to one which, after having concentrated all powers, would deposit them in the hands of an irresponsible man or body. Of all the different forms that democratic despotism could take, this would surely be the worst.

When the sovereign is elected or closely overseen by a really elected and independent legislature, the oppression it makes individuals undergo is sometimes greater; but it is always less degrading, because each citizen, while he is hindered and reduced to impotence, can still fancy that in obeying he submits only to himself and that it is to one of his wills that he sacrifices all the others.

I understand as well that when the sovereign represents the nation and depends on it, the strength and rights that are taken away from each citizen serve not only the head of state but profit the state itself, and that particular persons get some fruit from the sacrifice of their independence that they have made to the public.

To create a national representation in a very centralized country is therefore to diminish the evil that extreme centralization can produce, but not to destroy it.

I see very well that in this manner one preserves individual intervention in the most important affairs; but one does not suppress it any less in small and particular ones. One forgets that it is above all in details that it is dangerous to enslave men. For my part, I would be brought to believe freedom less

necessary in great things than in lesser ones if I thought that one could ever be assured of the one without possessing the other.

Subjection in small affairs manifests itself every day and makes itself felt without distinction by all citizens. It does not make them desperate, but it constantly thwarts them and brings them to renounce the use of their wills. Thus little by little, it extinguishes their spirits and enervates their souls, whereas obedience, which is due only in a few very grave but very rare circumstances, shows servitude only now and then and makes it weigh only on certain men. In vain will you charge these same citizens, whom you have rendered so dependent on the central power, with choosing the representatives of this power from time to time; that use of their free will, so important but so brief and so rare, will not prevent them from losing little by little the faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting by themselves, and thus from gradually falling below the level of humanity.

I add that they will soon become incapable of exercising the great, unique privilege that remains to them. Democratic peoples who have introduced freedom into the political sphere at the same time that they have increased despotism in the administrative sphere have been led to very strange oddities. If one must conduct small affairs in which simple good sense can suffice, they determine that citizens are incapable of it; if it is a question of the government of the whole state, they entrust immense prerogatives in these citizens; they make them alternately the playthings of the sovereign and its masters, more than kings and less than men. After exhausting all the different systems of election without finding one that suits them, they are astonished and seek again, as if the evil they notice were not due much more to the constitution of the country than to that of the electoral body.

It is in fact difficult to conceive how men who have entirely renounced the habit of directing themselves could succeed at choosing well those who will lead them; and one will not make anyone believe that a liberal, energetic, and wise government can ever issue from the suffrage of a people of servants.

A constitution that was republican at the head and ultramonarchical in all other parts has always seemed to me to be an ephemeral monster. The vices of those who govern and the imbecility of the governed would not be slow to bring it to ruin; and the people, tired of their representatives and of themselves, would create freer institutions or soon return to jying at the feet of a single master.*

* See AT's note XXVII, page 704.

Chapter 7 CONTINUATION OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS

I believe that it is easier to establish an absolute and despotic government in a people where conditions are equal than in any other, and I think that if such a government were once established in a people like this, not only would it oppress men, but in the long term it would rob each of them of several of the principal attributes of humanity.

Despotism therefore appears to me particularly to be dreaded in democratic ages.

I would, I think, have loved freedom in all times; but I feel myself inclined to adore it in the time we are in.

I am convinced, on the other hand, that all those in the centuries we are now entering who try to base freedom on privilege and aristocracy will fail. All those who want to attract authority to a single class and retain it there will fail. In our day there is no sovereign clever enough and strong enough to found a despotism by reestablishing permanent distinctions among its subjects; nor is there a legislator so wise and so powerful as to be in a position to maintain free institutions if he does not take equality for his first principle and creed. All those of our contemporaries who want to create or secure the independence and dignity of those like themselves must therefore show themselves as friends of equality; and the only means worthy of them for showing themselves as such is to be such: the success of their holy enterprise depends on it.

Thus there is no question of reconstructing an aristocratic society, but of making freedom issue from the bosom of the democratic society in which God makes us live.

These two first truths seem to me simple, clear and fertile, and they naturally lead me to consider what kind of free government can be established in a people where conditions are equal.

It results from the very constitution of democratic nations and their needs that the power of the sovereign must be more uniform, more centralized, more extended, more penetrating, and more powerful in them than elsewhere. Society there is naturally more active and stronger; the individual more subordinated and weaker: the one does more, the other less; that is mandatory.

One must therefore not expect that the circle of individual independence will ever be as large in democratic lands as in aristocratic countries. But that

is not to be wished; for in aristocratic nations, society is often sacrificed to the individual and the prosperity of the greatest number to the greatness of a few.

It is at once necessary and desirable that the central power that directs a democratic people be active and powerful. There is no question of rendering it weak or indolent, but only of preventing it from abusing its agility and force.

What contributed most to securing the independence of particular persons in aristocratic centuries is that the sovereign alone did not take charge of governing and administering citizens; it was obliged to leave this care in part to members of the aristocracy, so that the social power, since it was always divided, never weighed as a whole and in the same manner on each man.

Not only did the sovereign not do everything by itself, but most of the officials who acted in its place, drawing their power from the fact of their birth and not from it, were not constantly in its hands. It could not create them or destroy them at each instant according to its caprices or bend them all uniformly to its least will. That also guaranteed the independence of particular persons.

I well understand that in our day one cannot have recourse to the same means; but I do see democratic procedures that replace them.

Instead of handing over to the sovereign alone all the administrative powers that one takes away from corporations or from the nobles, one can entrust a part of them to secondary bodies formed temporarily of plain citizens; in this manner the freedom of particular persons will be surer without lessening their equality.

Americans, who do not hold to words as much as we do, have preserved the name of county for the largest of their administrative districts; but they have replaced the county in part by a provincial assembly.

I shall admit without difficulty that in a period of equality like ours it would be unjust and unreasonable to institute hereditary officials; but nothing prevents their substitution, in a certain measure, by elective officials. Election is a democratic expedient that secures the independence of the official vis-à-vis the central power as much as and more than heredity can do in aristocratic peoples.

Aristocratic countries are filled with rich and influential particular persons who know how to be self-sufficient and whom one does not oppress easily or secretly; and they maintain power with their general habits of moderation and restraint.

I know well that democratic lands do not naturally present individuals like these; but one can artificially create something analogous there.

I firmly believe that one cannot found an aristocracy anew in the world; but I think that when plain citizens associate, they can constitute very opulent, very influential, very strong beings—in a word, aristocratic persons.

In this manner one would obtain several of the greatest political advantages of aristocracy without its injustices or dangers. A political, industrial, commercial, or even scientific and literary association is an enlightened and powerful citizen whom one can neither bend at will nor oppress in the dark and who, in defending its particular rights against the exigencies of power, saves common freedoms.

In times of aristocracy, each man is always bound in a very tight manner to several of his fellow citizens in such a way that one cannot attack him without having the others rush to his aid. In centuries of equality, each individual is naturally isolated; he has no hereditary friends from whom he can require cooperation, no class whose sympathies are assured him; one easily sets him apart and rides roughshod over him with impunity. In our day a citizen who is oppressed has therefore only one means of defending himself: it is to address the nation as a whole, and if it is deaf to him, the human race; he has only one means of doing it, which is the press. Thus freedom of the press is infinitely more precious in democratic nations than in all others; it alone cures most of the ills that equality can produce. Equality isolates and weakens men, but the press places at the side of each of them a very powerful arm that the weakest and most isolated can make use of. Equality takes away from each individual the support of his neighbors, but the press permits him to call to his aid all his fellow citizens and all who are like him. Printing hastened the progress of equality, and it is one of its best correctives.

I think that men who live in aristocracies can do without freedom of the press if they must; but those who inhabit democratic lands cannot do so. To guarantee the personal independence of the latter, I do not trust in great political assemblies, in parliamentary prerogatives, or in a proclamation of the sovereignty of the people.

All those things are reconcilable, up to a certain point, with individual servitude; but that servitude cannot be complete if the press is free. The press is the democratic instrument of freedom *par excellence*.

I would say something analogous of judicial power.

It is of the essence of judicial power to be occupied with particular interests and willingly to fix its regard on small objects that are exposed to its view; it is also of the essence of this power not to come of itself to the assistance of those who are oppressed, but to be constantly at the disposition of the most humble among them. However weak one supposes him, he can always force the judge to listen to his complaint and to respond to it: that is due to the very constitution of judicial power.

A power like this is therefore especially applicable to the needs of freedom in a time when the eye and hand of the sovereign are constantly introduced into the slightest details of human actions, and when particular persons, too weak to protect themselves, are too isolated to be able to count on the assistance of their peers. The force of the courts has in all times been the greatest guarantee that can be offered to individual independence, but that is above all true in democratic centuries; rights and particular interests are always in peril then if the judicial power does not grow and extend itself as conditions are equalized.

Equality suggests to men several penchants very dangerous for freedom to which the legislator ought always to keep his eye open. I shall recall only the principal ones.

Men who live in democratic centuries do not readily comprehend the utility of forms; they feel an instinctive disdain for them. I have spoken elsewhere of the reasons for this.* Forms excite their scorn and often their hatred. As they ordinarily aspire only to easy and present enjoyments, they throw themselves impetuously toward the object of each of their desires; the least delays make them despair. This temperament, which they carry into political life, disposes them against the forms that slow them down or stop them every day in some of their designs.

The inconvenience that men in democracies find in forms is, however, what renders them so useful to freedom, their principal merit being to serve as a barrier between strong and weak, he who governs and he who is governed, to slow down the one and to give the other time to recollect himself. Forms are more necessary as the sovereign is more active and more powerful and as particular persons become more indolent and debilitated. Thus democratic peoples naturally have more need of forms than other peoples, and they naturally respect them less. That merits very serious attention.

There is nothing more pathetic than the haughty disdain of most of our contemporaries for questions of form; for the smallest questions of form have acquired an importance in our day that they had not had up to now. Several of the greatest interests of humanity are linked to them.

I think that if statesmen who lived in aristocratic centuries could sometimes scorn forms with impunity and often rise above them, those who lead peoples today must consider the least of them with respect, neglecting it only when an imperious necessity obliges them to do so. In aristocracies, they had a superstition of forms; we must have an enlightened and reflective worship of them.

Another instinct very natural to democratic peoples and very dangerous

* DA II.1.

is the one that brings them to scorn individual rights and hold them of little account.

Men are generally attached to a right and show respect for it because of its importance or the long use they have made of it. The individual rights that are encountered in democratic peoples are ordinarily of little importance, very recent, and quite unstable; this makes one sacrifice them often without difficulty and violate them almost always without remorse.

Now, it happens that at the same time and in the same nations in which men conceive a natural scorn for the rights of individuals, the rights of society are naturally extended and strengthened; that is to say that men become less attached to particular rights at the moment when it would be most necessary to retain and defend the few that remain to them.

It is therefore above all in the democratic times we are in that the true friends of freedom and human greatness must constantly remain on their feet and ready to prevent the social power from lightly sacrificing the particular rights of some individuals to the general execution of its designs. In these times there is no citizen so obscure that it is not very dangerous to allow him to be oppressed, nor are there individual rights of so little importance that one can deliver them with impunity to arbitrariness. The reason for this is simple: when one violates the particular right of an individual in a time when the human spirit is pervaded by the importance and sanctity of rights of this kind, one does harm only to whomever one strips of it; but to violate a right like this in our day is to corrupt national mores profoundly and to put society as a whole in peril, because the very idea of these sorts of rights constantly tends to be distorted and lost among us.

There are certain habits, certain ideas, and certain vices that are proper to a state of revolution and to which a long revolution cannot fail to give birth and make general, whatever else its character, its object, and its theater may be.

When any nation whatever has changed chiefs, opinions, and laws several times in a short space of time, the men who compose it in the end contract a taste for movement and become habituated to the fact that all movements occur rapidly with the aid of force. They then naturally conceive a scorn for forms, whose impotence they see each day, and only with impatience do they tolerate the empire of a rule that has been evaded so many times before their eyes.

As ordinary notions of equity and morality no longer suffice to explain and justify all the novelties to which the revolution gives birth every day, one becomes attached to the principle of social utility, one creates the dogma of political necessity, and one willingly becomes accustomed to sacrificing

particular interests without scruple and to riding roughshod over individual rights in order to attain more promptly the general end that one proposes.

These habits and ideas, which I shall call revolutionary because all revolutions produce them, are displayed within aristocracies as well as in democratic peoples; but in the former, they are often less powerful and always less lasting, because there they encounter habits, ideas, faults, and foibles contrary to them. They therefore fade away by themselves when the revolution is ended, and the nation comes back from them to its former political aspect. It is not always so in democratic lands, where it is always to be feared that revolutionary instincts, mellowing and being regularized without being extinguished, will gradually be transformed into governmental mores and administrative habits.

I therefore do not know of any country in which revolutions are more dangerous than in democratic countries, because independent of the accidental and passing evils that they can never fail to do, they always risk creating permanent and so to speak eternal ones.

I believe that there are honest resistances and legitimate rebellions. I therefore do not say in an absolute manner that men in democratic times ought never to make revolutions; but I think that they have reason to hesitate more than all others before undertaking them and that it is better for them to suffer many discomforts in their present state than to recur to such a perilous remedy.

I shall finish with a general idea that includes within it not only all the particular ideas that have been expressed in this present chapter, but also most of those that this book has the goal of setting forth.

In the centuries of aristocracy that preceded ours, there were very powerful particular persons and a very feeble social authority. The very image of society was obscure and was constantly being lost in the midst of all the different powers that regulated citizens. The principal effort of men in those times should have been brought to enlarging and fortifying the social power, to increasing and securing its prerogatives, and, on the contrary, to compressing individual independence within the narrowest of bounds and subordinating particular interest to the general interest.

Other perils and other cares await men of our day. In most modern nations, the sovereign, whatever its origin, its constitution, and its name may be, has become almost all-powerful, and particular persons sink more and more into the last degree of weakness and dependence.

All was different in former societies. Unity and uniformity were encountered nowhere in them. In ours, everything threatens to become so alike that

the particular shape of each individual will soon be lost entirely in the common physiognomy. Our fathers were always ready to misuse the idea that particular rights are respectable, [whereas] we are naturally brought to exaggerate [the idea] that the interest of one individual ought always to bend before the interest of several.

The political world is changing; henceforth one must seek new remedies for new ills.

To fix extended, but visible and immovable, limits for social power; to give to particular persons certain rights and to guarantee them the uncontested enjoyment of these rights; to preserve for the individual the little independence, force, and originality that remain to him; to elevate him beside society and to sustain him before it: this appears to me to be the first object of the legislator in the age we are entering.

One might say that sovereigns in our time seek only to make great things with men. I should want them to think a little more of making great men; to attach less value to the work and more to the worker, and to remember constantly that a nation cannot long remain strong when each man in it is individually weak, and that neither social forms nor political schemes have yet been found that can make a people energetic by composing it of pusillanimous and soft citizens.

Among our contemporaries, I see two contrary but equally fatal ideas.

Some perceive in equality only the anarchic tendencies to which it gives birth. They dread their free will; they are afraid of themselves.

Others, fewer in number, but more enlightened, have another view. Next to the route that, departing from equality, leads to anarchy, they have finally discovered the path that seems to lead men invincibly toward servitude. They bend their souls in advance to this necessary servitude; and despairing of remaining free, at the bottom of their hearts they already adore the master who will soon come.

The first abandon freedom because they deem it dangerous; the second because they judge it impossible.

If I had had this latter belief, I would not have written the work you have just read; I would have limited myself to groaning in secret about the destiny of those like me.

I wished to expose to broad daylight the perils that equality brings to human independence because I firmly believe that these perils are the most formidable as well as the least foreseen of all those that the future holds. But I do not believe them insurmountable.

Men who live in the democratic centuries we are entering have the taste for independence naturally. They naturally tolerate rule with impatience: the permanence of the very state they prefer tires them. They love power; but

they are inclined to scorn and hate whoever exercises it, and they easily escape from its hands because of their very pettiness and mobility.

These instincts will always be found because they come from the foundation of the social state, which will not change. For a long time they will keep any despotism from being able to settle in, and they will furnish new arms to each new generation that wants to struggle in favor of men's freedom.

Let us therefore have that salutary fear of the future that makes one watchful and combative, and not that sort of soft and idle terror that wears hearts down and enervates them.

Chapter 8 GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT

I should wish, before leaving forever the course I have just traveled, to be able to embrace with one last regard all the diverse features that mark the face of the new world, and finally to judge the general influence that equality will exert on the lot of men; but the difficulty of such an undertaking arrests me; confronted with so great an object I feel my sight becoming blurred and my reason wavering.

The new society that I sought to depict and that I wish to judge is only being born. Time has not yet fixed its form; the great revolution that created it still endures, and in what is happening in our day it is almost impossible to discern what will pass away with the revolution itself and what will remain after it.

The world that is arising is still half entangled in the debris of the world that is falling; and in the midst of the immense confusion that human affairs presents, no one can say what will remain standing of aged institutions and old mores and what of them will in the end disappear.

Although the revolution operating in the social state, the laws, the ideas, the sentiments of men is still very far from being completed, already one cannot compare its works with anything previously seen in the world. I go back century by century to the furthest removed antiquity; I perceive nothing that resembles what is before my eyes. With the past no longer shedding light on the future, the mind advances in darkness.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this picture so vast, so new, so confused, I already glimpse some principal features being sketched and I point them out