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THE ESSENTIAL

FRÉDÉRIC BASTIAT

THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION

The Essential Frédéric Bastiat

The Foundation for Economic Education



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The Foundation for Economic Education is pleased to present this small book conveying the essence of Frédéric Bastiat's thought. All of the material included in this book are published on FEE.org under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). You are free to reprint all contents for any purpose, provided you credit the source. In addition, FEE would like to acknowledge the original source material as follows:

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Frédéric Bastiat (1801–1850) was a French economist, statesman, and author. He was the leader of the free-trade movement in France from its inception in 1840 until his untimely death in 1850. The first 45 years of his life were spent in preparation for five tremendously productive years writing in favor of freedom. Bastiat was the founder of the weekly newspaper, *Le Libre Échange*, a contributor to numerous periodicals, and the author of sundry pamphlets and speeches dealing with the pressing issues of his day. Most of his writing was done in the years directly before and after the Revolution of 1848—a time when France was rapidly embracing socialism. As a deputy in the Legislative Assembly, Bastiat fought valiantly for the private property order, but unfortunately the majority of his colleagues chose to ignore him. Frédéric Bastiat remains one of the great champions of freedom whose writings retain their relevance as we continue to confront the old adversary.

—Bastiat, Frédéric. *Economic Harmonies*. George B. de Huszar, trans. and W. Hayden Boyers, ed. (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1996)

To the Youth of France

Eagerness to learn, the need to believe in something, minds still immune to age-old prejudices, hearts untouched by hatred, zeal for worthy causes, ardent affections, unselfishness, loyalty, good faith, enthusiasm for all that is good, beautiful, sincere, great, wholesome, and spiritual—such are the priceless gifts of youth. That is why I dedicate this book to the youth of France. The seed that I now propose to sow must be sterile indeed if it fails to quicken into life upon soil as propitious as this.

My young friends, I had intended to present you with a finished painting; I give you instead only a rough sketch. Forgive me. For who in these times can complete a work of any great scope? Here is the outline. Seeing it, may some one of you exclaim, like the great artist: *Anch'io son pittore*,^[1] and, taking up the brush, impart to my unfinished canvas color and flesh, light and shade, feeling and life.

You will think that the title of this work, *Economic Harmonies*, is very ambitious. Have I been presumptuous enough to propose to reveal the providential plan within the social order and the mechanism of all the forces with which Providence has endowed humanity to assure its progress?

Certainly not; but I have proposed to put you on the road to this truth: *All men's impulses, when motivated by legitimate self-interest, fall into a harmonious social pattern*. This is the central idea of this work, and its importance cannot be overemphasized.

It was fashionable, at one time, to laugh at what is called the *social problem*; and, it must be admitted, certain of the proposed solutions were only too deserving of derision. But there is surely nothing laughable about the problem itself; it haunts us like Banquo's ghost at Macbeth's banquet, except that, far from being silent, it cries aloud to terror-stricken society: Find a solution or die!

Now the nature of this solution, as you readily understand, will depend greatly upon whether men's interests are, in fact, harmonious or antagonistic to one another.

If they are harmonious, the answer to our problem is to be found in liberty; if they are antagonistic, in coercion. In the first case, it is enough not to interfere; in the second, we must, inevitably, interfere.

But liberty can assume only one form. When we are certain that each one of the molecules composing a liquid has within it everything that is needed to determine the general level, we conclude that the simplest and surest way to obtain this level is not to interfere with the molecules. All those who accept as their starting point the thesis that *men's interests are harmonious* will agree that the practical solution to the social problem is simply not to thwart these interests or to try to redirect them.

Coercion, on the other hand, can assume countless forms in response to countless points of view. Therefore, those schools of thought that start with the assumption that *men's interests are antagonistic to one another* have never yet done anything to solve the problem except to eliminate liberty. They are still trying to ascertain which, out of all the infinite forms that coercion can assume, is the right one, or indeed if there is any right one. And, if they ever do reach any agreement as to which form of coercion they prefer, there will still remain the final difficulty of getting all men everywhere to accept it freely.

But, if we accept the hypothesis that men's interests are by their very nature inevitably bound to clash, that this conflict can be averted only by the capricious invention of an artificial social order, then the condition of mankind is indeed precarious, and we must fearfully ask ourselves:

1. Shall we be able to find someone who has invented a satisfactory form of coercion?
2. Will this man be able to win over to his plan the countless schools of thought that have conceived of other forms?
3. Will mankind submit to this form, which, according to our hypothesis, must run counter to every man's self-interest?
4. Assuming that humanity will consent to being triggered out in this garment, what will happen if another inventor arrives with a better garment? Are men to preserve a bad social order, knowing that it is bad; or are they to change their social order every morning, according to the whims of fashion and the ingeniousness of the inventors?
5. Will not all the inventors whose plans have been rejected now unite against the accepted plan with all the better chance of destroying it because,

by its very nature and design, it runs counter to every man's self-interest?

6. And, in the last analysis, is there any one human force capable of overcoming the fundamental antagonism which is assumed to be characteristic of all human forces?

I could go on indefinitely asking such questions and could, for example, bring up this difficulty: If you consider individual self-interest as antagonistic to the general interest, where do you propose to establish the acting principle of coercion? Where will you put its fulcrum? Will it be outside of humanity? It would have to be, in order to escape the consequences of your law. For if you entrust men with arbitrary power, you must first prove that these men are molded of a different clay from the rest of us; that they, unlike us, will never be moved by the inevitable principle of self-interest; and that when they are placed in a situation where there can be no possible restraint upon them or any resistance to them, their minds will be exempt from error, their hands from greed, and their hearts from covetousness.

What makes the various socialist schools (I mean here those schools that look to an artificial social order for the solution of the social problem) radically different from the economist^[2] school is not some minor detail in viewpoint or in preferred form of government; it is to be found in their respective points of departure, in their answers to this primary and central question: Are men's interests, when left to themselves, harmonious or antagonistic?

It is evident that the socialists set out in quest of an artificial social order only because they deemed the natural order to be either bad or inadequate; and they deemed it bad or inadequate only because they felt that men's interests are fundamentally antagonistic, for otherwise they would not have had recourse to coercion. It is not necessary to force into harmony things that are inherently harmonious.

Therefore they have found fundamental antagonisms everywhere:

Between the property owner and the worker.

Between capital and labor.

Between the common people and the bourgeoisie.

Between agriculture and industry.

Between the farmer and the city-dweller.

Between the native-born and the foreigner.

Between the producer and the consumer.

Between civilization and the social order.

And, to sum it all up in a single phrase:

Between personal liberty and a harmonious social order.

And this explains how it happens that, although they have a kind of sentimental love for humanity in their hearts, hate flows from their lips. Each of them reserves all his love for the society that he has dreamed up; but the natural society in which it is our lot to live cannot be destroyed soon enough to suit them, so that from its ruins may rise the New Jerusalem.

I have already stated that the economist school, on the contrary, starting from the assumption that there is a natural harmony among men's interests, reaches a conclusion in favor of personal liberty.

Still, I must admit, if economists, generally speaking, do advocate personal liberty, it is not, unfortunately, equally true that their principles firmly establish their initial premise that men's interests are harmonious.

Before going further, and in order to forewarn you against the conclusions that will inevitably be drawn from this admission, I must say a word regarding the respective positions of the socialists and the political economists.

It would be senseless for me to say that the socialists have never discovered truth, and that the political economists have never fallen into error.

What makes the great division between the two schools is the difference in their methods. Socialism, like astrology and alchemy, proceeds by way of the imagination; political economy, like astronomy and chemistry, proceeds by way of observation.

Two astronomers observing the same phenomenon may not reach the same conclusion. Despite this temporary disagreement they feel the bond of a common method that sooner or later will bring them together. They recognize that they belong to the same communion. But between the astronomer who observes and the astrologer who imagines, there stretches an unbridgeable gulf, although at times some common understanding may perchance be reached.

The same is true of political economy and socialism.

The economists observe man, the laws of his nature and the social relations that derive from these laws. The socialists conjure up a society out

of their imagination and then conceive of a human heart to fit this society.

Now, if science cannot be wrong, scientists can be. I therefore do not deny that the economists can make faulty observations, and I shall even add that in the beginning they inevitably did.

But note what happens. If men's interests are actually harmonious, it follows that any observation that would lead *logically* to the opposite conclusion—namely, that they are antagonistic—has been faulty. What then are the socialists' tactics? They collect a few faulty observations from the economists' works, deduce all the conclusions to be derived from them, and then prove that they are disastrous. Up to this point they are within their rights. Next, they raise their voices in protest against the observer—Malthus^[3] or Ricardo,^[4] for example. They are still within their rights. But they do not stop here. They turn against the science of political economy itself; they accuse it of being heartless and of desiring evil. In so doing, they go against reason and justice; for science is not responsible for the scientist's faulty observations. Finally, they go even farther yet. They even accuse society itself and threaten to destroy it and remake it. And why? Because, they say, science proves that our present society is on the road to disaster. In this they outrage good sense; for, either science is not mistaken—and in that case why attack it?—or else it is mistaken, and in that case they had best leave society alone, since it is in no danger.

But these tactics, however illogical, can nonetheless be most harmful to the science of political economy, particularly should those who espouse it give way to the understandable but unfortunate impulse of blindly supporting the opinions of one another and of their predecessors on all points. Science is a queen whose court etiquette should be based on a free and easy give-and-take. An atmosphere of bias and partisanship is fatal to it.

As I have already said, in political economy every erroneous proposition unfailingly leads to the conclusion that there are antagonistic elements in the social order. On the other hand, the numerous writings of the economists, including even the most eminent, cannot fail to contain a few false propositions. In the interest of our science and of society it is our duty to point these out and to correct them. To continue obstinately to defend them for the sake of preserving the prestige of the whole school

would mean exposing not only ourselves, which is unimportant, but the truth itself, which is of greater consequence, to the attacks of the socialists.

To continue, then: I state that the political economists advocate liberty. But for the idea of liberty to win men's minds and hearts, it must be firmly based on the premise that men's interests, when left to themselves, tend to form harmonious combinations and to work together for progress and the general good.

Now, some of the economists, and among them some who carry considerable authority, have advanced propositions that step by step lead logically to the opposite conclusion, that *absolute evil* exists, that injustice is inevitable, that inequality will necessarily increase, that pauperism is unavoidable, etc.

For example, there are, to my knowledge, very few political economists who have not attributed *value* to natural resources, to the gifts that God has lavished *without cost* on his creature, man. The word "value" implies that we surrender the things possessing it only in return for payment. Therefore, we see men, especially the landowners, selling God's bounty in return for other men's toil, and receiving payment for *utilities*, that is, for the means of satisfying human wants, without contributing any of their own labor in return—an obvious, but necessary, injustice, say these writers.

Then there is the famous theory of Ricardo. It can be summarized in this fashion: The price of foodstuffs is based on the amount of labor required to produce them on the poorest soils under cultivation. Now, as population increases, it is necessary to turn to less and less fertile soils. Hence, all humanity (except the landowner) is forced to exchange a constantly increasing amount of labor for the same quantity of foodstuffs; or, what comes to the same thing, to receive a constantly decreasing quantity of foodstuffs for the same amount of labor; whereas the owners of the soil see their income rising with each new acre of inferior land that is put into cultivation. Conclusion: increasing wealth for the leisure classes; increasing poverty for the laborers: or, inevitable inequality.

Then there is the even more famous theory of Malthus. Population tends to increase more rapidly than the means of subsistence, and this trend is to be observed at any given moment in the history of mankind. Now, men cannot live in peace and happiness unless they have enough to eat. There

are only two checks to this constant threat of excess population: a decrease in the birth rate or an increase in the mortality rate, with all its attendant horrors. Moral restraint, in order to be effective, must be observed everywhere, which is more than can be expected. There remains, then, only the positive check of vice, poverty, war, pestilence, famine, and death; that is, inevitable pauperism.

I shall not mention other systems of less general import that also lead to desperately discouraging conclusions. For example, M. de Tocqueville^[5] and many others like him declare that if we admit the right of primogeniture, we end with a very small and rigid aristocracy; if we do not admit it, we end with the country divided into tiny, unproductive individual holdings.

And the remarkable thing is that these four melancholy theories do not in any way come into direct conflict with one another. If they did, we could find consolation in the fact that they are mutually destructive. But such is not the case; they agree, they fit into the same general theory, which, supported by numerous and plausible facts, apparently explains the convulsive state of modern society and, since it is endorsed by a number of eminent authorities, presents itself to our discouraged and bewildered minds with terrifying conviction.

It remains to be seen how the exponents of this gloomy theory have at the same time been able to maintain the harmony of men's interests as their premise and deduce personal liberty as their conclusion. For certainly, if humanity is inevitably impelled toward injustice by the laws of value, toward inequality by the laws of rent, toward poverty by the laws of population, and toward sterilization by the laws of heredity, we cannot say that God's handiwork is harmonious in the social order, as it is in the physical universe; we must instead admit, with heads bowed in grief, that He has seen fit to establish His social order on revolting and irremediable discord.

You must not believe, my young friends, that the socialists have refuted and rejected the theory that, in order to avoid offending anyone, I shall call the theory of discord. On the contrary: despite their protests, they have accepted it as true; and, for the very reason that they accept it as true, they propose to substitute coercion for freedom, an artificial social order for the natural social order, and a work of their own contrivance for the

handiwork of God. They say to their opponents (than whom, in this respect, I am not sure that they are not more logical): If, as you have declared, men's interests when left to themselves did tend to combine harmoniously, we could only welcome and extol freedom as you do. But you have proved irrefutably that these interests, if allowed to develop freely, lead mankind toward injustice, inequality, pauperism, and sterility. Therefore, we react against your theory precisely because it is true. We wish to destroy society as it now is precisely because it does obey the inevitable laws that you have described; we wish to try what we can do, since God's power has failed.

Thus, there is agreement in regard to the premises. Only in regard to the conclusion is there disagreement.

The economists to whom I have referred say: *The great laws of Providence are hastening society along the road to disaster*; but we must be careful not to interfere with their action, for they are fortunately counteracted by other secondary laws that postpone the final catastrophe, and any arbitrary interference on our part would only weaken the dike without lowering the great tidal wave that will eventually engulf us.

The socialists say: *The great laws of Providence are hastening society along the road to disaster*; we must abolish them and choose in their place other laws from our inexhaustible arsenal.

The Catholics say: *The great laws of Providence are hastening society along the road to disaster*; we must escape them by renouncing worldly desires, taking refuge in self-abnegation, sacrifice, asceticism, and resignation.

And, amid the tumult, the cries of anguish and distress, the appeals to revolt or to the resignation of despair, I raise my voice to make men hear these words, which, if true, must silence all protesting voices: *It is not true that the great laws of Providence are hastening society along the road to disaster*.

Thus, while all schools stand divided on the conclusions they draw from their common premise, I deny their premise. Is not this the best means of ending the division and the controversy?

The central idea of this work, the harmony of men's interests, is a *simple* one. And is not simplicity the touchstone of truth? The laws governing light, sound, motion, seem to us all the more true because they

are simple. Why should the same thing not be true of the law of men's interests?

It is *conciliatory*. For what can be more conciliatory than to point out the ties that bind together industries, classes, nations, and even doctrines?

It is *reassuring*, since it exposes what is false in those systems that would have us believe that evil must spread and increase.

It is *religious*, for it tells us that it is not only the celestial but also the social mechanism that reveals the wisdom and declares the glory of God.

It is *practical*, for certainly no maxim is easier to put into practice than this: Let men labor, exchange, learn, band together, act, and react upon one another, since in this way, according to the laws of Providence, there can result from their free and intelligent activity only order, harmony, progress, and all things that are good, and increasingly good, and still better, and better yet, to infinite degree.

Now there, you will say, is the optimism of the economists for you! They are so completely the slaves of their own systems that they shut their eyes to the facts for fear of seeing them. In the face of all the poverty, injustice, and oppression that desolate the human race, they go on imperturbably denying the existence of evil. The smell of the gunpowder burned in insurrections does not reach their indifferent senses; for them the barricades in the streets are mute; and though society should crumble and fall, they will continue to repeat: "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

Certainly not. We do not think that all is for the best.

I have complete faith in the wisdom of the laws of Providence, and for that reason I have faith in liberty.

The question is whether or not we have liberty.

The question to determine is whether these laws act with full force, or whether their action is not profoundly disrupted by the contrary action of institutions of human origin.

Deny evil! Deny pain! Who could? We should have to forget that we are talking about mankind. We should have to forget that we ourselves are men. For the laws of Providence to be considered as *harmonious*, it is not necessary that they exclude evil. It is enough that evil have its explanation and purpose, that it be self-limiting, and that every pain be the means of preventing greater pain by eliminating whatever causes it.

Society is composed of men, and every man is a *free* agent. Since man is free, he can choose; since he can choose, he can err; since he can err, he can suffer.

I go further: He must err and he must suffer; for his starting point is ignorance, and in his ignorance he sees before him an infinite number of unknown roads, all of which save one lead to error.

Now, all error breeds suffering. And this suffering either falls upon the one who has erred, in which case it sets in operation the law of responsibility; or else it strikes innocent parties, in which case it sets in motion the marvelous reagent that is the law of solidarity.

The action of these laws, combined with the ability that has been given us of seeing the connection between cause and effect, must bring us back, by the very fact of suffering, to the path of righteousness and truth.

Thus, we not only do not deny that evil exists; we recognize that it has its purpose in the social order even as in the physical universe.

But if evil is to fulfill this purpose, the law of solidarity must not be made to encroach artificially upon the law of responsibility; in other words, the freedom of the individual must be respected.

Now, if man-made institutions intervene in these matters to nullify divine law, evil nonetheless follows upon error, but it falls upon the wrong person. It strikes him whom it should not strike; it no longer serves as a warning or a lesson; it is no longer self-limiting; it is no longer destroyed by its own action; it persists, it grows worse, as would happen in the biological world if the imprudent acts and excesses committed by the inhabitants of one hemisphere took their toll only upon the inhabitants of the other hemisphere.

Now, this is exactly the tendency not only of most of our governmental institutions but also and to an even greater degree of those institutions that are designed to serve as remedies for the evils that afflict us. Under the philanthropic pretext of fostering among men an artificial kind of solidarity, the individual's sense of responsibility becomes more and more apathetic and ineffectual. Through improper use of the public apparatus of law enforcement, the relation between labor and wages is impaired, the operation of the laws of industry and exchange is disturbed, the natural development of education is distorted, capital and manpower are misdirected, minds are warped, absurd demands are inflamed, wild hopes

are dangled before men's eyes, unheard of quantities of human energy are wasted, centers of population are relocated, experience itself is made ineffective; in brief, all interests are given artificial foundations, they clash, and the people cry: You see, all men's interests are antagonistic. Personal liberty causes all the trouble. Let us execrate and stifle personal liberty.

And so, since liberty is still a sacred word and still has the power to stir men's hearts, her enemies would strip her of her name and her prestige and, rechristening her *competition*, would lead her forth to sacrifice while the applauding multitudes extend their hands to receive their chains of slavery.

It is not enough, then, to set forth the natural laws of the social order in all their majestic harmony; it is also necessary to show the disturbing factors that nullify their action. That is the task I have undertaken in the second part of this work.

I have tried to avoid controversy. In so doing, I have undoubtedly missed the opportunity of presenting my principles with the comprehensiveness that comes from thorough discussion. But by drawing the reader's attention to the many details of my digressions, would I not have run the risk of confusing his view of the whole? If I present the edifice as it actually is, what does it matter how it has appeared to others, even to those who taught me how to view it?

And now I confidently appeal to those men of all persuasions who place justice, truth, and the general welfare above their own particular systems.

Economists, my conclusion, like yours, is in favor of individual liberty; and if I undermine some of the premises that have saddened your generous hearts, yet you will perhaps discover in my work additional reason for loving and serving our sacred cause.

Socialists,^[6] you place your faith in *association*. I call upon you, after you have read this work, to say whether the present social order, freed from its abuses and the obstacles that have been put in its way—enjoying, in other words, the condition of freedom—is not the most admirable, the most complete, the most lasting, the most universal, and the most equitable of all associations.

Egalitarians,^[7] you recognize only one principle, the *reciprocity of services*. Let human transactions once be free, and I declare that they are, or

can be, nothing more nor less than a reciprocal exchange of *services*, constantly decreasing in cost, or value, constantly increasing in *utility*.

Communists,^[8] you desire that men, as brothers, may enjoy in common the benefits that Providence has lavished upon them all. I propose to demonstrate that the present social order has only to achieve freedom in order to realize and go beyond your fondest hopes and prayers; for in this social order all things are common to all, provided only that every man either himself go to the trouble to gather in God's gifts (which is only natural), or else that he render equivalent service to those who go to this trouble for him (which is only just).

Christians of all communions, unless you alone of all mankind doubt the divine wisdom as manifested in the most magnificent of God's works that it is given us to know, you will not find one word in this book that contravenes the strictest tenet of your moral code or the most mystical of your dogmas.

Property owners, however vast may be your possessions, if I prove that your rights, which people today so vehemently contest, are confined, as are those of the simplest manual worker, to receiving services in return for real services performed by you or your forefathers, then these rights of yours will henceforth be beyond challenge.

Workers, I promise to prove that you do enjoy the fruits of the land that you do not own, and with less pain and effort on your part than you could cultivate them by your own labor on land given you in its original state, unimproved by other men's labor.

Capitalists and laborers, I believe that I can establish this law: "In proportion as capital accumulates, the *absolute* share of capital in the total returns of production increases, and its *relative* share decreases; labor also finds that its *relative* share increases and that its *absolute* share increases even more sharply. The opposite effect is observed when capital is frittered away."^[9] If this law can be established, it is clear that we may conclude that the interests of workers and employers are harmonious.

Disciples of Malthus, sincere but misjudged lovers of your fellow man, you whose only fault is your desire to protect humanity against the fatal effects of a law that you consider inevitable, I have a more reassuring law to offer you in its place: "Other things being equal, increased population means increased efficiency in the means of production." If such is the case,

you will certainly not be the ones to complain that the crown of thorns has dropped from the brow of our beloved science.

Predatory men, you who, by force or fraud, in spite of the law or through the agency of the law, grow fat on the people's substance; you who live by the errors you disseminate, by the ignorance you foster, by the wars you foment, by the restraints you impose on trade; you who tax the labor you have made unproductive, making it lose even more than you snatch away; you who charge for the obstacles you set up, so as to charge again for those you subsequently take down; you who are the living embodiment of selfishness in its bad sense; parasitical excrescences of faulty policies, prepare the corrosive ink of your critique: to you alone I can make no appeal, for the purpose of this book is to eliminate you, or rather to eliminate your unjust claims. However much we may admire compromise, there are two principles between which there can be no compromise: liberty and coercion.

If the laws of Providence are harmonious, they can be so only when they operate under conditions of freedom, for otherwise harmony is lacking. Therefore, when we perceive something inharmonious in the world, it cannot fail to correspond to some lack of freedom or justice. Oppressors, plunderers, you who hold justice in contempt, you cannot take your place in the universal harmony, for you are the ones who disrupt it.

Does this mean that the effect of this book would be to weaken the power of government, endanger its stability, lessen its authority? The goal I have in view is precisely the opposite. But let us understand one another.

The function of political science is to determine what should and what should not fall under government control; and in making this important distinction, we must not lose sight of the fact that the state always acts through the instrumentality of force. Both the services it renders us and those it makes us render in return are imposed upon us in the form of taxes.

The question then amounts to this: What are the things that men have the right to impose upon one another *by force*? Now, I know of only one, and that is *justice*. I have no right to force anyone to be religious, charitable, well educated, or industrious; but I have the right to *force* him to be *just*: this is a case of legitimate self-defense.

Now, there cannot exist for a group of individuals any new rights over and above those that they already possessed as individuals. If, therefore, the

use of force by the individual is justified solely on grounds of legitimate self-defense, we need only recognize that government action always takes the form of force to conclude that by its very nature it can be exerted solely for the maintenance of order, security, and justice.

All government action beyond this limit is an encroachment upon the individual's conscience, intelligence, and industry—in a word, upon human liberty.

Accordingly, we must set ourselves unceasingly and relentlessly to the task of freeing the whole domain of private activity from the encroachments of government. Only on this condition shall we succeed in winning our liberty or assuring the free play of the harmonious laws that God has decreed for the development and progress of the human race.

Will the power of government be weakened by these restrictions? Will it lose stability as it loses some of its vastness? Will it have less authority because it will have fewer functions? Will it be the object of less respect because it will be the object of fewer grievances? Will it become more the puppet of special interests when it has reduced the enormous budgets and the coveted patronage that are the special interests' lure? Will it be exposed to greater dangers when it has less responsibility?

On the contrary: it seems evident to me that to restrict the public police force to its one and only rightful function, but a function that is essential, unchallenged, constructive, desired and accepted by all, is the way to win it universal respect and cooperation. Once this is accomplished, I cannot see from what source could come all our present ills of systematic obstructionism, parliamentary bickering, street insurrections, revolutions, crises, factions, wild notions, demands advanced by all men to govern under all possible forms, new systems, as dangerous as they are absurd, which teach the people to look to the government for everything. We should have an end also to compromising diplomacy, to the constant threat of war, and the armed peace that is nearly as disastrous, to crushing and inevitably inequitable taxation, to the ever increasing and unnatural meddling of politics in all things, and to that large-scale and wholly artificial redistribution of capital and labor which is the source of needless irritation, of constant ups and downs, of economic crises and setbacks. All these and a thousand other causes of disturbances, friction, disaffection, envy, and disorder would no longer exist; and those entrusted with the responsibility

of governing would work together for, and not against, the universal harmony. Harmony does not exclude evil, but it reduces evil to the smaller and smaller area left open to it by the ignorance and perversity of our human frailty, which it is the function of harmony to prevent or chastise.

Young men, in these times when a lamentable skepticism appears to be the effect and the punishment of our intellectual anarchy, I should deem myself happy if the reading of this book would stir you to utter those reassuring words, so sweet to the lips, which are not only a refuge from despair but a positive force, strong enough, we are told, to remove mountains, those words that begin the Christian's profession of faith: *I believe*. I believe, not with blind and submissive faith, for we are not here concerned with the mysteries of revelation; but with reasoned scientific faith, as is proper in matters left to man's own inquiry and investigation. I believe that He who designed the physical world has not seen fit to remain a stranger to the social world. I believe that His wisdom extends to human agents possessed of free will, that He has been able to bring them together and cause them to move in harmony, even as He has done with inert molecules. I believe that His providence shines forth at least as clearly in the laws to which men's wills and men's interests are subject as in the laws that He has decreed for mass or velocity. I believe that everything in society, even that which inflicts pain, is a source of improvement and progress. I believe that evil ends in good and hastens its coming, whereas the good can never end in evil, and therefore must eventually triumph. I believe that the inevitable trend of society is toward a constantly rising physical, intellectual, and moral level shared by all mankind. I believe, if only man can win back his freedom of action and be allowed to follow his natural bent without interference, that his gradual, peaceful development is assured. I believe these things, not because I desire them or because they satisfy the longings of my heart, but because after mature reflection my intellect gives them its full consent.

Ah! if ever you utter these words, *I believe*, you will be eager to carry them to others, and the social problem will soon be solved, for despite all that is said, its solution is simple. Men's interests are harmonious; therefore, the answer lies entirely in this one word: *freedom*.

[1] [“I, too, am a painter,” supposedly the young Correggio’s words when he first saw Raphael’s painting of Saint Cecilia.—Translator.]

[2] [As the ensuing pages of this book make clear, Bastiat uses the words “political economy” and the “economists” to designate in a general way the “classical” school of economists to which he himself gave allegiance. These include the eighteenth-century “physiocrats”: Quesnay (*Tableau économique*, 1759), Mercier de la Rivière, Dupont de Nemours, Le Trôsne, Mirabeau, Condorcet, and Turgot; the “English School”: Adam Smith, Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Senior, Scrope, and Ricardo; and his own French contemporaries: Jean-Baptiste Say, Pellegrino Rossi, Garnier, and others less well known who held similar views on wealth and free exchange.—Translator.]

[3] [Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834), English economist. Cf. chapter 16 for Bastiat’s discussion of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*.—Translator.]

[4] [David Ricardo (1772–1823), English economist of the classical school.—Translator.]

[5] [Alexis Charles Henri Clérel de Tocqueville (1805–1859), statesman and author of numerous significant books.—Translator.]

[6] [“Socialists,” “egalitarians,” “communists”: In France, before the time of Karl Marx, of course, these terms were used, as Bastiat uses them, to refer generally to those political theorists advocating collectivism primarily as a means to advance equality. Before and during the Revolution they included Morelly (*Code de la nature*, 1755); Mably (*Doutes... sur l’ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 1768); Babeuf, founder of the society of “the Equals” (executed in 1797), and his later followers: Philippe Buonarroti, Armand Barbès, Martin Bernard, and Louis Auguste Blanqui. Bastiat also includes as sharers of these ideas his contemporary “planners of artificial social orders”: Fourier, Louis Blanc, Considérant, Cabet, Owen, and Saint-Simon. (Cf. notes on Fourier, Louis Blanc, Owen, and Cabet,

chapter 1, p. 11; on Proudhon, chapter 5, p. 128; on Considérant, p. 550.)—Translator.]

[7] See preceding footnote.

[8] See footnote *supra* on “socialists.”

[9] I can illustrate this law more clearly by figures. Let us take three periods during which capital increases while labor remains constant, and let us represent total production in each of the three periods as: 80-100-120. The distribution will be as follows:

	<i>Capital's Share</i>	<i>Labor's Share</i>	<i>Total</i>
First period	45	35	80
Second period	50	50	100
Third period	55	65	120

Of course, these ratios are intended to serve only as an illustration.

What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen

In the department of economy, an act, a habit, an institution, a law, gives birth not only to an effect, but to a series of effects. Of these effects, the first only is immediate; it manifests itself simultaneously with its cause—it is seen. The others unfold in succession—they are not seen: it is well for us, if they are foreseen. Between a good and a bad economist this constitutes the whole difference—the one takes account of the visible effect; the other takes account both of the effects which are seen, and also of those which it is necessary to foresee. Now this difference is enormous, for it almost always happens that when the immediate consequence is favourable, the ultimate consequences are fatal, and the converse. Hence it follows that the bad economist pursues a small present good, which will be followed by a great evil to come, while the true economist pursues a great good to come,—at the risk of a small present evil.

In fact, it is the same in the science of health, arts, and in that of morals. It often happens, that the sweeter the first fruit of a habit is, the more bitter are the consequences. Take, for example, debauchery, idleness, prodigality. When, therefore, a man absorbed in the effect which is seen has not yet learned to discern those which are not seen, he gives way to fatal habits, not only by inclination, but by calculation.

This explains the fatally grievous condition of mankind. Ignorance surrounds its cradle: then its actions are determined by their first consequences, the only ones which, in its first stage, it can see. It is only in the long run that it learns to take account of the others. It has to learn this lesson from two very different masters—experience and foresight. Experience teaches effectually, but brutally. It makes us acquainted with all the effects of an action, by causing us to feel them; and we cannot fail to finish by knowing that fire burns, if we have burned ourselves. For this rough teacher, I should like, if possible, to substitute a more gentle one. I mean Foresight. For this purpose I shall examine the consequences of

certain economical phenomena, by placing in opposition to each other those which are seen, and those which are not seen.

I. The Broken Window

Have you ever witnessed the anger of the good shopkeeper, James B., when his careless son happened to break a square of glass? If you have been present at such a scene, you will most assuredly bear witness to the fact, that every one of the spectators, were there even thirty of them, by common consent apparently, offered the unfortunate owner this invariable consolation—“It is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Everybody must live, and what would become of the glaziers if panes of glass were never broken?”

Now, this form of condolence contains an entire theory, which it will be well to show up in this simple case, seeing that it is precisely the same as that which, unhappily, regulates the greater part of our economical institutions.

Suppose it cost six francs to repair the damage, and you say that the accident brings six francs to the glazier’s trade—that it encourages that trade to the amount of six francs—I grant it; I have not a word to say against it; you reason justly. The glazier comes, performs his task, receives his six francs, rubs his hands, and, in his heart, blesses the careless child. All this is that which is seen.

But if, on the other hand, you come to the conclusion, as is too often the case, that it is a good thing to break windows, that it causes money to circulate, and that the encouragement of industry in general will be the result of it, you will oblige me to call out, “Stop there! your theory is confined to that which is seen; it takes no account of that which is not seen.”

It is not seen that as our shopkeeper has spent six francs upon one thing, he cannot spend them upon another. It is not seen that if he had not had a window to replace, he would, perhaps, have replaced his old shoes, or added another book to his library. In short, he would have employed his six francs in some way, which this accident has prevented.

Let us take a view of industry in general, as affected by this circumstance. The window being broken, the glazier’s trade is encouraged

to the amount of six francs; this is that which is seen. If the window had not been broken, the shoemaker's trade (or some other) would have been encouraged to the amount of six francs; this is that which is not seen.

And if that which is not seen is taken into consideration, because it is a negative fact, as well as that which is seen, because it is a positive fact, it will be understood that neither industry in general, nor the sum total of national labour, is affected, whether windows are broken or not.

Now let us consider James B. himself. In the former supposition, that of the window being broken, he spends six francs, and has neither more nor less than he had before, the enjoyment of a window.

In the second, where we suppose the window not to have been broken, he would have spent six francs on shoes, and would have had at the same time the enjoyment of a pair of shoes and of a window.

Now, as James B. forms a part of society, we must come to the conclusion, that, taking it altogether, and making an estimate of its enjoyments and its labours, it has lost the value of the broken window.

When we arrive at this unexpected conclusion: "Society loses the value of things which are uselessly destroyed;" and we must assent to a maxim which will make the hair of protectionists stand on end—To break, to spoil, to waste, is not to encourage national labour; or, more briefly, "destruction is not profit."

What will you say, Monsieur Industriel—what will you say, disciples of good M. F. Chamans, who has calculated with so much precision how much trade would gain by the burning of Paris, from the number of houses it would be necessary to rebuild?

I am sorry to disturb these ingenious calculations, as far as their spirit has been introduced into our legislation; but I beg him to begin them again, by taking into the account that which is not seen, and placing it alongside of that which is seen. The reader must take care to remember that there are not two persons only, but three concerned in the little scene which I have submitted to his attention. One of them, James B., represents the consumer, reduced, by an act of destruction, to one enjoyment instead of two. Another under the title of the glazier, shows us the producer, whose trade is encouraged by the accident. The third is the shoemaker (or some other tradesman), whose labour suffers proportionally by the same cause. It is this third person who is always kept in the shade, and who, personating that

which is not seen, is a necessary element of the problem. It is he who shows us how absurd it is to think we see a profit in an act of destruction. It is he who will soon teach us that it is not less absurd to see a profit in a restriction, which is, after all, nothing else than a partial destruction. Therefore, if you will only go to the root of all the arguments which are adduced in its favour, all you will find will be the paraphrase of this vulgar saying—What would become of the glaziers, if nobody ever broke windows?

II. The Disbanding of Troops

It is the same with a people as it is with a man. If it wishes to give itself some gratification, it naturally considers whether it is worth what it costs. To a nation, security is the greatest of advantages. If, in order to obtain it, it is necessary to have an army of a hundred thousand men, I have nothing to say against it. It is an enjoyment bought by a sacrifice. Let me not be misunderstood upon the extent of my position. A member of the assembly proposes to disband a hundred thousand men, for the sake of relieving the taxpayers of a hundred millions.

If we confine ourselves to this answer—“The hundred millions of men, and these hundred millions of money, are indispensable to the national security: it is a sacrifice; but without this sacrifice, France would be torn by factions, or invaded by some foreign power,”—I have nothing to object to this argument, which may be true or false in fact, but which theoretically contains nothing which militates against economy. The error begins when the sacrifice itself is said to be an advantage because it profits somebody.

Now I am very much mistaken if, the moment the author of the proposal has taken his seat, some orator will not rise and say—“Disband a hundred thousand men! do you know what you are saying? What will become of them? Where will they get a living? Don't you know that work is scarce everywhere? That every field is overstocked? Would you turn them out of doors to increase competition, and weigh upon the rate of wages? Just now, when it is a hard matter to live at all, it would be a pretty thing if the State must find bread for a hundred thousand individuals? Consider, besides, that the army consumes wine, clothing, arms—that it promotes the activity of manufactures in garrison towns—that it is, in short, the godsend

of innumerable purveyors. Why, any one must tremble at the bare idea of doing away with this immense industrial movement.”

This discourse, it is evident, concludes by voting the maintenance of a hundred thousand soldiers, for reasons drawn from the necessity of the service, and from economical considerations. It is these considerations only that I have to refute.

A hundred thousand men, costing the taxpayers a hundred millions of money, live and bring to the purveyors as much as a hundred millions can supply. This is that which is seen.

But, a hundred millions taken from the pockets of the taxpayers, cease to maintain these taxpayers and the purveyors, as far as a hundred millions reach. This is that which is not seen. Now make your calculations. Cast up, and tell me what profit there is for the masses?

I will tell you where the loss lies; and to simplify it, instead of speaking of a hundred thousand men and a million of money, it shall be of one man, and a thousand francs.

We will suppose that we are in the village of A. The recruiting sergeants go their round, and take off a man. The tax-gatherers go their round, and take off a thousand francs. The man and the sum of money are taken to Metz, and the latter is destined to support the former for a year without doing anything. If you consider Metz only, you are quite right; the measure is a very advantageous one: but if you look towards the village of A., you will judge very differently; for, unless you are very blind indeed, you will see that that village has lost a worker, and the thousand francs which would remunerate his labour, as well as the activity which, by the expenditure of those thousand francs, it would spread around it.

At first sight, there would seem to be some compensation. What took place at the village, now takes place at Metz, that is all. But the loss is to be estimated in this way:—At the village, a man dug and worked; he was a worker. At Metz, he turns to the right about, and to the left about; he is a soldier. The money and the circulation are the same in both cases; but in the one there were three hundred days of productive labour; in the other, there are three hundred days of unproductive labour, supposing, of course, that a part of the army is not indispensable to the public safety.

Now, suppose the disbanding to take place. You tell me there will be a surplus of a hundred thousand workers, that competition will be stimulated,

and it will reduce the rate of wages. This is what you see.

But what you do not see is this. You do not see that to dismiss a hundred thousand soldiers is not to do away with a million of money, but to return it to the taxpayers. You do not see that to throw a hundred thousand workers on the market, is to throw into it, at the same moment, the hundred millions of money needed to pay for their labour; that, consequently, the same act which increases the supply of hands, increases also the demand; from which it follows, that your fear of a reduction of wages is unfounded. You do not see that, before the disbanding as well as after it, there are in the country a hundred millions of money corresponding with the hundred thousand men. That the whole difference consists in this: before the disbanding, the country gave the hundred millions to the hundred thousand men for doing nothing; and that after it, it pays them the same sum for working. You do not see, in short, that when a tax-payer gives his money either to a soldier in exchange for nothing, or to a worker in exchange for something, all the ultimate consequences of the circulation of this money are the same in the two cases; only, in the second case, the tax-payer receives something, in the former he receives nothing. The result is—a dead loss to the nation.

The sophism which I am here combating will not stand the test of progression, which is the touchstone of principles. If, when every compensation is made, and all interests are satisfied, there is a national profit in increasing the army, why not enroll under its banners the entire male population of the country?

III. Taxes

Have you ever chanced to hear it said “There is no better investment than taxes. Only see what a number of families it maintains, and consider how it reacts on industry; it is an inexhaustible stream, it is life itself.”

In order-to combat this doctrine, I must refer to my preceding refutation. Political economy knew well enough that its arguments were not so amusing that it could be said of them, repetitions please. It has, therefore, turned the proverb to its own use, well convinced that, in its mouth, repetitions teach.

The advantages which officials advocate are those which are seen. The benefit which accrues to the providers is still that which is seen. This blinds all eyes.

But the disadvantages which the taxpayers have to get rid of are those which are not seen. And the injury which results from it to the providers, is still that which is not seen, although this ought to be self-evident.

When an official spends for his own profit an extra hundred sous, it implies that a tax-payer spends for his profit a hundred sous less. But the expense of the official is seen, because the act is performed, while that of the tax-payer is not seen, because, alas! he is prevented from performing it.

You compare the nation, perhaps, to a parched tract of land, and the tax to a fertilizing rain. Be it so. But you ought also to ask yourself where are the sources of this rain and whether it is not the tax itself which draws away the moisture from the ground and dries it up?

Again, you ought to ask yourself whether it is possible that the soil can receive as much of this precious water by rain as it loses by evaporation?

There is one thing very certain, that when James B. counts out a hundred sous for the tax-gatherer, he receives nothing in return. Afterwards, when an official spends these hundred sous and returns them to James B., it is for an equal value of corn or labour. The final result is a loss to James B. of five francs.

It is very true that often, perhaps very often, the official performs for James B. an equivalent service. In this case there is no loss on either side; there is merely in exchange. Therefore, my arguments do not at all apply to useful functionaries. All I say is,—if you wish to create an office, prove its utility. Show that its value to James B., by the services which it performs for him, is equal to what it costs him. But, apart from this intrinsic utility, do not bring forward as an argument the benefit which it confers upon the official, his family, and his providers; do not assert that it encourages labour.

When James B. gives a hundred pence to a Government officer, for a really useful service, it is exactly the same as when he gives a hundred sous to a shoemaker for a pair of shoes.

But when James B. gives a hundred sous to a Government officer, and receives nothing for them unless it be annoyances, he might as well give them to a thief. It is nonsense to say that the Government officer will spend

these hundred sous to the great profit of national labour; the thief would do the same; and so would James B., if he had not been stopped on the road by the extra-legal parasite, nor by the lawful sponger.

Let us accustom ourselves, then, to avoid judging of things by what is seen only, but to judge of them by that which is not seen.

Last year I was on the Committee of Finance, for under the constituency the members of the opposition were not systematically excluded from all the Commissions: in that the constituency acted wisely. We have heard M. Thiers say—"I have passed my life in opposing the legitimist party, and the priest party. Since the common danger has brought us together, now that I associate with them and know them, and now that we speak face to face, I have found out that they are not the monsters I used to imagine them."

Yes, distrust is exaggerated, hatred is fostered among parties who never mix; and if the majority would allow the minority to be present at the Commissions, it would perhaps be discovered that the ideas of the different sides are not so far removed from each other, and, above all, that their intentions are not so perverse as is supposed. However, last year I was on the Committee of Finance. Every time that one of our colleagues spoke of fixing at a moderate figure the maintenance of the President of the Republic, that of the ministers, and of the ambassadors, it was answered—

"For the good of the service, it is necessary to surround certain offices with splendour and dignity, as a means of attracting men of merit to them. A vast number of unfortunate persons apply to the President of the Republic, and it would be placing him in a very painful position to oblige him to be constantly refusing them. A certain style in the ministerial saloons is a part of the machinery of constitutional Governments."

Although such arguments may be controverted, they certainly deserve a serious examination. They are based upon the public interest, whether rightly estimated or not; and as far as I am concerned, I have much more respect for them than many of our Catos have, who are actuated by a narrow spirit of parsimony or of jealousy.

But what revolts the economical part of my conscience, and makes me blush for the intellectual resources of my country, is when this absurd relic of feudalism is brought forward, which it constantly is, and it is favourably received too:—

“Besides, the luxury of great Government officers encourages the arts, industry, and labour. The head of the State and his ministers cannot give banquets and soirees without causing life to circulate through all the veins of the social body. To reduce their means, would starve Parisian industry, and consequently that of the whole nation.”

I must beg you, gentlemen, to pay some little regard to arithmetic, at least; and not to say before the National Assembly in France, lest to its shame it should agree with you, that an addition gives a different sum, according to whether it is added up from the bottom to the top, or from the top to the bottom of the column.

For instance, I want to agree with a drainer to make a trench in my field for a hundred sous. Just as we have concluded our arrangement, the tax-gatherer comes, takes my hundred sous, and sends them to the Minister of the Interior; my bargain is at end, but the Minister will have another dish added to his table. Upon what ground will you dare to affirm that this official expense helps the national industry? Do you not see, that in this there is only a reversing of satisfaction and labour? A Minister has his table better covered, it is true, but it is just as true that an agriculturist has his field worse drained. A Parisian tavern-keeper has gained a hundred sous, I grant you; but then you must grant me that a drainer has been prevented from gaining five francs. It all comes to this,—that the official and the tavern-keeper being satisfied, is that which is seen; the field undrained, and the drainer deprived of his job, is that which is not seen. Dear me! how much trouble there is in proving that two and two make four; and if you succeed in proving it, it is said, “the thing is so plain it is quite tiresome,” and they vote as if you had proved nothing at all.

IV. Theatres and Fine Arts

Ought the State to support the arts?

There is certainly much to be said on both sides of this question. It may be said, in favor of the system of voting supplies for this purpose, that the arts enlarge, elevate, and harmonize the soul of a nation; that they divert it from too great an absorption in material occupations, encourage in it a love for the beautiful, and thus act favourably on its manners, customs, morals, and even on its industry. It may be asked, what would become of

music in France without her Italian theatre and her Conservatoire; of the dramatic art. without her Theatre-Francais; of painting and sculpture, without our collections, galleries, and museums? It might even be asked, whether, without centralization, and consequently the support of fine arts, that exquisite taste would be developed which is the noble appendage of French labour, and which introduces its productions to the whole world? In the face of such results, would it not be the height of imprudence to renounce this moderate contribution from all her citizens, which, in fact, in the eyes of Europe, realizes their superiority and their glory?

To these and many other reasons, whose force I do not dispute, arguments no less forcible may be opposed. It might, first of all, be said, that there is a question of distributive justice in it. Does the right of the legislator extend to abridging the wages of the artisan, for the sake of adding to the profits of the artist? M. Lamartine said, "If you cease to support the theatre, where will you stop? Will you not necessarily be led to withdraw your support from your colleges, your museums, your institutes, and your libraries?" It might be answered, if you desire to support everything which is good and useful, where will you stop? Will you not necessarily be led to form a civil list for agriculture, industry, commerce, benevolence, education? Then, is it certain that government aid favours the progress of art?

This question is far from being settled, and we see very well that the theatres which prosper are those which depend upon their own resources. Moreover, if we come to higher considerations, we may observe, that wants and desires arise, the one from the other, and originate in regions which are more and more refined in proportion as the public wealth allows of their being satisfied; that Government ought not to take part in this correspondence, because in a certain condition of present fortune it could not by taxation stimulate the arts of necessity, without checking those of luxury, and thus interrupting the natural course of civilization. I may observe, that these artificial transpositions of wants, tastes, labour, and population, place the people in a precarious and dangerous position, without any solid basis.

These are some of the reasons alleged by the adversaries of State intervention in what concerns the order in which citizens think their wants and desires should be satisfied, and to which, consequently, their activity

should be directed. I am, I confess, one of those who think that choice and impulse ought to come from below and not from above, from the citizen and not from the legislator; and the opposite doctrine appears to me to tend to the destruction of liberty and of human dignity.

But, by a deduction as false as it is unjust, do you know what economists are accused of? It is, that when we disapprove of Government support, we are supposed to disapprove of the thing itself whose support is discussed; and to be the enemies of every kind of activity, because we desire to see those activities, on the one hand free, and on the other seeking their own reward in themselves. Thus, if we think that the State should not interfere by taxation in religious affairs, we are atheists. If we think the State ought not to interfere by taxation in education, we are hostile to knowledge. If we say that the State ought not by taxation to give a fictitious value to land, or to any particular branch of industry, we are enemies to property and labour. If we think that the State ought not to support artists, we are barbarians who look upon the arts as useless.

Against such conclusions as these I protest with all my strength. Far from entertaining the absurd idea of doing away with religion, education, property, labour, and the arts, when we say that the State ought to protect the free development of all these kinds of human activity, without helping some of them at the expense of others,—we think, on the contrary, that all these living powers of society would develop themselves more harmoniously under the influence of liberty; and that, under such an influence no one of them would, as is now the case, be a source of trouble, of abuses, of tyranny, and disorder.

Our adversaries consider, that an activity which is neither aided by supplies, nor regulated by Government, is an activity destroyed. We think just the contrary. Their faith is in the legislator, not in mankind; ours is in mankind, not in the legislator.

Thus M. Lamartine said, “Upon this principle we must abolish the public exhibitions, which are the honour and the wealth of this country.” But I would say to M. Lamartine,—According to your way of thinking, not to support is to abolish; because, setting out upon the maxim that nothing exists independently of the will of the State, you conclude that nothing lives but what the State causes to live. But I oppose to this assertion the very example which you have chosen, and beg you to remark, that the grandest

and noblest of exhibitions, one which has been conceived in the most liberal and universal spirit—and I might even make use of the term humanitarian, for it is no exaggeration—is the exhibition now preparing in London; the only one in which no Government is taking any part, and which is being paid for by no tax.

To return to the fine arts:—there are, I repeat, many strong reasons to be brought, both for and against the system of Government assistance. The reader must see, that the especial object of this work leads me neither to explain these reasons, nor to decide in their favour, nor against them.

But M. Lamartine has advanced one argument which I cannot pass by in silence, for it is closely connected with this economic study. “The economical question, as regards theatres, is comprised in one word—labour. It matters little what is the nature of this labour; it is as fertile, as productive a labour as any other kind of labour in the nation. The theatres in France, you know, feed and salary no less than 80,000 workmen of different kinds; painters, masons, decorators, costumers, architects, &c., which constitute the very life and movement of several parts of this capital, and on this account they ought to have your sympathies.” Your sympathies! say, rather, your money.

And further on he says: “The pleasures of Paris are the labour and the consumption of the provinces, and the luxuries of the rich are the wages and bread of 200,000 workmen of every description, who live by the manifold industry of the theatres on the surface of the republic, and who receive from these noble pleasures, which render France illustrious, the sustenance of their lives and the necessaries of their families and children. It is to them that you will give 60,000 francs.” (Very well; very well. Great applause.) For my part I am constrained to say, “Very bad! Very bad!” Confining his opinion, of course, within the bounds of the economical question which we are discussing.

Yes, it is to the workmen of the theatres that a part, at least, of these 60,000 francs will go; a few bribes, perhaps, may be abstracted on the way. Perhaps, if we were to look a little more closely into the matter, we might find that the cake had gone another way, and that these workmen were fortunate who had come in for a few crumbs. But I will allow, for the sake of argument, that the entire sum does go to the painters, decorators, etc. This is that which is seen.

But whence does it come? This is the other side of the question, and quite as important as the former. Where do these 60,000 francs spring from? and where would they go if a vote of the Legislature did not direct them first towards the Rue Rivoli and thence towards the Rue Grenelle? This is what is not seen. Certainly, nobody will think of maintaining that the legislative vote has caused this sum to be hatched in a ballot urn; that it is a pure addition made to the national wealth; that but for this miraculous vote these 60,000 francs would have been for ever invisible and impalpable. It must be admitted that all that the majority can do, is to decide that they shall be taken from one place to be sent to another; and if they take one direction, it is only because they have been diverted from another.

This being the case, it is clear that the taxpayer, who has contributed one franc, will no longer have this franc at his own disposal. It is clear that he will be deprived of some gratification to the amount of one franc; and that the workman, whoever he may be, who would have received it from him, will be deprived of a benefit to that amount. Let us not, therefore, be led by a childish illusion into believing that the vote of the 60,000 francs may add any thing whatever to the well-being of the country, and to the national labour. It displaces enjoyments, it transposes wages—that is all.

Will it be said that for one kind of gratification, and one kind of labour, it substitutes more urgent, more moral, more reasonable gratifications and labour? I might dispute this; I might say, by taking 60,000 francs from the taxpayers, you diminish the wages of labourers, drainers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and increase in proportion those of the singers.

There is nothing to prove that this latter class calls for more sympathy than the former. M. Lamartine does not say that it is so. He himself says, that the labour of the theatres is as fertile, as productive as any other (not more so); and this may be doubted; for the best proof that the latter is not so fertile as the former lies in this, that the other is to be called upon to assist it.

But this comparison between the value and the intrinsic merit of different kinds of labour, forms no part of my present subject. All I have to do here is to show, that if M. Lamartine and those persons who commend his line of argument have seen on one side the salaries gained by the providers of the comedians, they ought on the other to have seen the salaries lost by the providers of the taxpayers; for want of this, they have

exposed themselves to ridicule by mistaking a displacement for a gain. If they were true to their doctrine, there would be no limits to their demands for Government aid; for that which is true of one franc and of 60,000 is true, under parallel circumstances, of a hundred millions of francs.

When taxes are the subject of discussion, Gentlemen, you ought to prove their utility by reasons from the root of the matter, but not by this unlucky assertion—"The public expenses support the working classes." This assertion disguises the important fact, that public expenses always supersede private expenses, and that therefore we bring a livelihood to one workman instead of another, but add nothing to the share of the working class as a whole. Your arguments are fashionable enough, but they are too absurd to be justified by anything like reason.

V. Public Works

Nothing is more natural than that a nation, after having assured itself that an enterprise will benefit the community, should have it executed by means of a general assessment. But I lose patience, I confess, when I hear this economic blunder advanced in support of such a project. "Besides, it will be a means of creating labour for the workmen."

The State opens a road, builds a palace, straightens a street, cuts a canal; and so gives work to certain workmen—this is what is seen: but it deprives certain other workmen of work, and this is what is not seen.

The road is begun. A thousand workmen come every morning, leave every evening, and take their wages—this is certain. If the road had not been decreed, if the supplies had not been voted, these good people would have had neither work nor salary there; this also is certain.

But is this all? does not the operation, as a whole, contain something else? At the moment when M. Dupin pronounces the emphatic words, "The Assembly has adopted," do the millions descend miraculously on a moon-beam into the coffers of MM. Fould and Bineau? In order that the evolution may be complete, as it is said, must not the State organise the receipts as well as the expenditure? must it not set its tax-gatherers and taxpayers to work, the former to gather, and the latter to pay? Study the question, now, in both its elements. While you state the destination given by the State to the millions voted, do not neglect to state also the destination which the

taxpayer would have given, but cannot now give, to the same. Then you will understand that a public enterprise is a coin with two sides. Upon one is engraved a labourer at work, with this device, that which is seen; on the other is a labourer out of work, with the device, that which is not seen.

The sophism which this work is intended to refute, is the more dangerous when applied to public works, inasmuch as it serves to justify the most wanton enterprises and extravagance. When a railroad or a bridge are of real utility, it is sufficient to mention this utility. But if it does not exist, what do they do? Recourse is had to this mystification: "We must find work for the workmen."

Accordingly, orders are given that the drains in the Champ-de-Mars be made and unmade. The great Napoleon, it is said, thought he was doing a very philanthropic work by causing ditches to be made and then filled up. He said, therefore, "What signifies the result? All we want is to see wealth spread among the labouring classes."

But let us go to the root of the matter. We are deceived by money. To demand the cooperation of all the citizens in a common work, in the form of money, is in reality to demand a concurrence in kind; for every one procures, by his own labour, the sum to which he is taxed. Now, if all the citizens were to be called together, and made to execute, in conjunction, a work useful to all, this would be easily understood; their reward would be found in the results of the work itself.

But after having called them together, if you force them to make roads which no one will pass through, palaces which no one will inhabit, and this under the pretext of finding them work, it would be absurd, and they would have a right to argue, "With this labour we have nothing to do; we prefer working on our own account."

A proceeding which consists in making the citizens cooperate in giving money but not labour, does not, in any way, alter the general results. The only thing is, that the loss would react upon all parties. By the former, those whom the State employs, escape their part of the loss, by adding it to that which their fellow-citizens have already suffered.

There is an article in our constitution which says:—"Society favours and encourages the development of labour—by the establishment of public works, by the State, the departments, and the parishes, as a means of employing persons who are in want of work."

As a temporary measure, on any emergency, during a hard winter, this interference with the taxpayers may have its use. It acts in the same way as securities. It adds nothing either to labour or to wages, but it takes labour and wages from ordinary times to give them, at a loss it is true, to times of difficulty.

As a permanent, general, systematic measure, it is nothing else than a ruinous mystification, an impossibility, which shows a little excited labour which is seen, and bides a great deal of prevented labour which is not seen.

VI. Intermediates

Society is the total of the forced or voluntary services which men perform for each other; that is to say, of public services and private services.

The former, imposed and regulated by the law, which it is not always easy to change, even when it is desirable, may survive with its own usefulness, and still preserve the name of public services, even when they are no longer services at all, but rather public annoyances. The latter belong to the sphere of the will, of individual responsibility. Every one gives and receives what he wishes, and what he can, after a debate. They have always the presumption of real utility, in exact proportion to their comparative value.

This is the reason why the former description of services so often become stationary, while the latter obey the law of progress.

While the exaggerated development of public services, by the waste of strength which it involves, fastens upon society a fatal sycophancy, it is a singular thing that several modern sects, attributing this character to free and private services, are endeavouring to transform professions into functions.

These sects violently oppose what they call *intermediates*. They would gladly suppress the capitalist, the banker, the speculator, the projector, the merchant, and the trader, accusing them of interposing between production and consumption, to extort from both, without giving either anything in return. Or rather, they would transfer to the State the work which they accomplish, for this work cannot be suppressed.

The sophism of the Socialists on this point is showing to the public what it pays to the intermediates in exchange for their services, and

concealing from it what is necessary to be paid to the State. Here is the usual conflict between what is before our eyes, and what is perceptible to the mind only, between what is seen, and what is not seen.

It was at the time of the scarcity, in 1847, that the Socialist schools attempted and succeeded in popularizing their fatal theory. They knew very well that the most absurd notions have always a chance with people who are suffering; *malesuada fames*.

Therefore, by the help of the fine words, “trafficking in men by men, speculation on hunger, monopoly,” they began to blacken commerce, and to cast a veil over its benefits.

“What can be the use,” they say, “of leaving to the merchants the care of importing food from the United States and the Crimea? Why do not the State, the departments, and the towns, organize a service for provisions, and a magazine for stores? They would sell at a return price, and the people, poor things, would be exempted from the tribute which they pay to free, that is, to egotistical, individual, and anarchical commerce.”

The tribute paid by the people to commerce, is that which is seen. The tribute which the people would pay to the State, or to its agents, in the Socialist system, is what is not seen.

In what does this pretended tribute, which the people pay to commerce, consist? In this: that two men render each other a mutual service, in all freedom, and under the pressure of competition and reduced prices.

When the hungry stomach is at Paris, and corn which can satisfy it is at Odessa, the suffering cannot cease till the corn is brought into contact with the stomach. There are three means by which this contact may be effected. 1st. The famished men may go themselves and fetch the corn. 2nd. They may leave this task to those to whose trade it belongs. 3rd. They may club together, and give the office in charge to public functionaries. Which of these three methods possesses the greatest advantages? In every time, in all countries, and the more free, enlightened, and experienced they are, men have voluntarily chosen the second. I confess that this is sufficient, in my opinion, to justify this choice. I cannot believe that mankind, as a whole, is deceiving itself upon a point which touches it so nearly. But let us consider the subject.

For thirty-six millions of citizens to go and fetch the corn they want from Odessa, is a manifest impossibility. The first means, then, goes for nothing. The consumers cannot act for themselves. They must, of necessity, have recourse to intermediates, officials or agents.

But, observe, that the first of these three means would be the most natural. In reality, the hungry man has to fetch his corn. It is a task which concerns himself; a service due to himself. If another person, on whatever ground, performs this service for him, takes the task upon himself, this latter has a claim upon him for a compensation. I mean by this to say that intermediates contain in themselves the principle of remuneration.

However that may be, since we must refer to what the Socialists call a parasite, I would ask, which of the two is the most exacting parasite, the merchant or the official?

Commerce (free, of course, otherwise I could not reason upon it), commerce, I say, is led by its own interests to study the seasons, to give daily statements of the state of the crops, to receive information from every part of the globe, to foresee wants, to take precautions beforehand. It has vessels always ready, correspondents everywhere; and it is its immediate interest to buy at the lowest possible price, to economize in all the details of its operations, and to attain the greatest results by the smallest efforts. It is not the French merchants only who are occupied in procuring provisions for France in time of need, and if their interest leads them irresistibly to accomplish their task at the smallest possible cost, the competition which they create amongst each other leads them no less irresistibly to cause the consumers to partake of the profits of those realized savings. The corn arrives; it is to the interest of commerce to sell it as soon as possible, so as to avoid risks, to realize its funds, and begin again the first opportunity.

Directed by the comparison of prices, it distributes food over the whole surface of the country, beginning always at the highest price, that is, where the demand is the greatest. It is impossible to imagine an organization more completely calculated to meet the interest of those who are in want; and the beauty of this organization, unperceived as it is by the Socialists, results from the very fact that it is free. It is true, the consumer is obliged to reimburse commerce for the expenses of conveyance, freight, store-room, commission, &c.; but can any system be devised, in which he who eats corn is not obliged to defray the expenses, whatever they may be,

of bringing it within his reach? The remuneration for the service performed has to be paid also: but as regards its amount, this is reduced to the smallest possible sum by competition; and as regards its justice, it would be very strange if the artisans of Paris would not work for the merchants of Marseilles, when the merchants of Marseilles work for the artisans of Paris.

If, according to the Socialist invention, the State were to stand in the stead of commerce, what would happen? I should like to be informed where the saving would be to the public? Would it be in the price of purchase? Imagine the delegates of 40,000 parishes arriving at Odessa on a given day, and on the day of need; imagine the effect upon prices. Would the saving be in the expenses? Would fewer vessels be required, fewer sailors, fewer transports, fewer sloops, or would you be exempt from the payment of all these things? Would it be in the profits of the merchants? Would your officials go to Odessa for nothing? Would they travel and work on the principle of fraternity? Must they not live? must not they be paid for their time? And do you believe that these expenses would not exceed a thousand times the two or three per cent which the merchant gains, at the rate at which he is ready to treat?

And then consider the difficulty of levying so many taxes, and of dividing so much food. Think of the injustice, of the abuses inseparable for such an enterprise. Think of the responsibility which would weigh upon the Government.

The Socialists who have invented these follies, and who, in the days of distress, have introduced them into the minds of the masses, take to themselves literally the title of advanced men; and it is not without some danger that custom, that tyrant of tongues, authorizes the term, and the sentiment which it involves. Advanced! This supposes that these gentlemen can see further than the common people; that their only fault is, that they are too much in advance of their age, and if the time is not yet come for suppressing certain free services, pretended parasites, the fault is to be attributed to the public, which is in the rear of socialism. I say, from my soul and my conscience, the reverse is the truth; and I know not to what barbarous age we should have to go back, if we would find the level of Socialist knowledge on this subject. These modern sectarians incessantly oppose association to actual society. They overlook the fact, that society,

under a free regulation, is a true association, far superior to any of those which proceed from their fertile imaginations.

Let me illustrate this by an example. Before a man, when he gets up in the morning, can put on a coat, ground must have been enclosed, broken up, drained, tilled, and sown with a particular kind of plant; flocks must have been fed, and have given their wool; this wool must have been spun, woven, dyed, and converted into cloth; this cloth must have been cut, sewed, and made into a garment. And this series of operations implies a number of others; it supposes the employment of instruments for ploughing, &c., sheepfolds, sheds, coal, machines, carriages, &c.

If society were not a perfectly real association, a person who wanted a coat would be reduced to the necessity of working in solitude; that is, of performing for himself the innumerable parts of this series, from the first stroke of the pickaxe to the last stitch which concludes the work. But, thanks to the sociability which is the distinguishing character of our race, these operations are distributed amongst a multitude of workers; and they are further subdivided, for the common good, to an extent that, as the consumption becomes more active, one single operation is able to support a new trade.

Then comes the division of the profits, which operates according to the contingent value which each has brought to the entire work. If this is not association, I should like to know what is.

Observe, that as no one of these workers has obtained the smallest particle of matter from nothingness, they are confined to performing for each other mutual services, and to helping each other in a common object, and that all may be considered, with respect to others, intermediates. If, for instance, in the course of the operation, the conveyance becomes important enough to occupy one person, the spinning another, the weaving another, why should the first be considered a parasite more than the other two? The conveyance must be made, must it not? Does not he who performs it, devote to it his time and trouble? and by so doing does he not spare that of his colleagues? Do these do more or other than this for him? Are they not equally dependent for remuneration, that is, for the division of the produce, upon the law of reduced price? Is it not in all liberty, for the common good, that these arrangements are entered into? What do we want with a Socialist then, who, under pretence of organizing for us, comes despotically to break

up our voluntary arrangements, to check the division of labour, to substitute isolated efforts for combined ones, and to send civilization back? Is association, as I describe it here, in itself less association, because every one enters and leaves it freely, chooses his place in it, judges and bargains for himself on his own responsibility, and brings with him the spring and warrant of personal interest? That it may deserve this name, is it necessary that a pretended reformer should come and impose upon us his plan and his will, and as it were, to concentrate mankind in himself?

The more we examine these advanced schools, the more do we become convinced that there is but one thing at the root of them: ignorance proclaiming itself infallible, and claiming despotism in the name of this infallibility.

I hope the reader will excuse this digression. It may not be altogether useless, at a time when declamations, springing from St. Simonian, Phalansterian, and Icarian books, are invoking the press and the tribune, and which seriously threaten the liberty of labour and commercial transactions.

VII. Restrictions

M. Prohibant (it was not I who gave him this name, but M. Charles Dupin) devoted his time and capital to converting the ore found on his land into iron. As nature had been more lavish towards the Belgians, they furnished the French with iron cheaper than M. Prohibant, which means, that all the French, or France, could obtain a given quantity of iron with less labour by buying it of the honest Flemings; therefore, guided by their own interest, they did not fail to do so, and every day there might be seen a multitude of nailsmiths, blacksmiths, cartwrights, machinists, farriers, and labourers, going themselves, or sending intermediates, to supply themselves in Belgium. This displeased M. Prohibant exceedingly.

At first, it occurred to him to put an end to this abuse by his own efforts; it was the least he could do, for he was the only sufferer. "I will take my carbine," said he; "I will put four pistols into my belt; I will fill my cartridge box; I will gird on my sword, and go thus equipped to the frontier. There, the first blacksmith, nailsmith, farrier, machinist, or locksmith, who presents himself to do his own business and not mine, I will kill, to teach him how to live." At the moment of starting, M. Prohibant made a few

reflections which calmed down his warlike ardour a little. He said to himself, "In the first place, it is not absolutely impossible that the purchasers of iron, my countrymen and enemies, should take the thing ill, and, instead of letting me kill them, should kill me instead; and then, even were I to call out all my servants, we should not be able to defend the passages. In short, this proceeding would cost me very dear; much more so than the result would be worth."

M. Prohibant was on the point of resigning himself to his sad fate, that of being only as free as the rest of the world, when a ray of light darted across his brain. He recollected that at Paris there is a great manufactory of laws. "What is a law?" said he to himself. "It is a measure to which, when once it is decreed, be it good or bad, everybody is bound to conform. For the execution of the same a public force is organized, and to constitute the said public force, men and money are drawn from the nation. If, then, I could only get the great Parisian manufactory to pass a little law, 'Belgian iron is prohibited,' I should obtain the following results: The Government would replace the few valets that I was going to send to the frontier by 20,000 of the sons of those refractory blacksmiths, farmers, artisans, machinists, locksmiths, nailsmiths, and labourers. Then, to keep these 20,000 custom-house officers in health and good humour, it would distribute amongst them 25,000,000 of francs, taken from these blacksmiths, nailsmiths, artisans, and labourers. They would guard the frontier much better; would cost me nothing; I should not be exposed to the brutality of the brokers, should sell the iron at my own price, and have the sweet satisfaction of seeing our great people shamefully mystified. That would teach them to proclaim themselves perpetually the harbingers and promoters of progress in Europe. Oh! it would be a capital joke, and deserves to be tried."

So M. Prohibant went to the law manufactory. Another time, perhaps, I shall relate the story of his underhand dealings, but now I shall merely mention his visible proceedings. He brought the following consideration before the view of the legislating gentlemen:—

"Belgian iron is sold in France at ten francs, which obliges me to sell mine at the same price. I should like to sell at fifteen, but cannot do so on account of this Belgian iron, which I wish was at the bottom of the Red Sea.

I beg you will make a law that no more Belgian iron shall enter France. Immediately I raise my price five francs, and these are the consequences:

“For every hundred-weight of iron that I shall deliver to the public, I shall receive fifteen francs instead of ten; I shall grow rich more rapidly, extend my traffic, and employ more workmen. My workmen and I shall spend much more freely to the great advantage of our tradesmen for miles around. These latter, having more custom, will furnish more employment to trade, and activity on both sides will increase in the country. This fortunate piece of money, which you will drop into my strong-box, will, like a stone thrown into a lake, give birth to an infinite number of concentric circles.”

Charmed with his discourse, delighted to learn that it is so easy to promote, by legislating, the prosperity of a people, the law-makers voted the restriction. “Talk of labour and economy,” they said, “what is the use of these painful means of increasing the national wealth, when all that is wanted for this object is a Decree?”

And, in fact, the law produced all the consequences announced by M. Prohibant; the only thing was, it produced others which he had not foreseen. To do him justice, his reasoning was not false, but only incomplete. In endeavouring to obtain a privilege, he had taken cognizance of the effects which are seen, leaving in the background those which are not seen. He had pointed out only two personages, whereas there are three concerned in the affair. It is for us to supply this involuntary or premeditated omission.

It is true, the crownpiece, thus directed by law into M. Prohibant’s strong-box, is advantageous to him and to those whose labour it would encourage; and if the Act had caused the crownpiece to descend from the moon, these good effects would not have been counterbalanced by any corresponding evils. Unfortunately, the mysterious piece of money does not come from the moon, but from the pocket of a blacksmith, or a nailsmith, or a cartwright, or a farrier, or a labourer, or a shipwright; in a word, from James B., who gives it now without receiving a grain more of iron than when he was paying ten francs. Thus, we can see at a glance that this very much alters the state of the case; for it is very evident that M. Prohibant’s profit is compensated by James B.’s loss, and all that M. Prohibant can do with the crownpiece, for the encouragement of national labour, James B. might have done himself. The stone has only been thrown upon one part of the lake, because the law has prevented it from being thrown upon another.

Therefore, that which is not seen supersedes that which is seen, and at this point there remains, as the residue of the operation, a piece of injustice, and, sad to say, a piece of injustice perpetrated by the law!

This is not all. I have said that there is always a third person left in the background. I must now bring him forward, that he may reveal to us a second loss of five francs. Then we shall have the entire results of the transaction.

James B. is the possessor of fifteen francs, the fruit of his labour. He is now free. What does he do with his fifteen francs? He purchases some article of fashion for ten francs, and with it he pays (or the intermediate pay for him) for the hundred-weight of Belgian iron. After this he has five francs left. He does not throw them into the river, but (and this is what is not seen) he gives them to some tradesman in exchange for some enjoyment; to a bookseller, for instance, for Bossuet's "Discourse on Universal History."

Thus, as far as national labour is concerned, it is encouraged to the amount of fifteen francs, viz.:—ten francs for the Paris article; five francs to the bookselling trade.

As to James B., he obtains for his fifteen francs two gratifications, viz.:

1st. A hundred-weight of iron.

2nd. A book.

The Decree is put in force. How does it affect the condition of James B.? How does it affect the national labour?

James B. pays every centime of his five francs to M. Prohibant, and therefore is deprived of the pleasure of a book, or of some other thing of equal value. He loses five francs. This must be admitted; it cannot fail to be admitted, that when the restriction raises the price of things, the consumer loses the difference.

But, then, it is said, national labour is the gainer.

No, it is not the gainer; for, since the Act, it is no more encouraged than it was before, to the amount of fifteen francs.

The only thing is that, since the Act, the fifteen francs of James B. go to the metal trade, while, before it was put in force, they were divided between the milliner and the bookseller.

The violence used by M. Prohibant on the frontier, or that which he causes to be used by the law, may be judged very differently in a moral

point of view. Some persons consider that plunder is perfectly justifiable, if only sanctioned by law. But, for myself, I cannot imagine anything more aggravating. However it may be, the economical results are the same in both cases.

Look at the thing as you will; but if you are impartial, you will see that no good can come of legal or illegal plunder. We do not deny that it affords M. Prohibant, or his trade, or, if you will, national industry, a profit of five francs. But we affirm that it causes two losses, one to James B., who pays fifteen francs where he otherwise would have paid ten; the other to national industry, which does not receive the difference. Take your choice of these two losses, and compensate with it the profit which we allow. The other will prove not the less a dead loss. Here is the moral: To take by violence is not to produce, but to destroy. Truly, if taking by violence was producing, this country of ours would be a little richer than she is.

VIII. Machinery

“A curse on machines! Every year, their increasing power devotes millions of workmen to pauperism, by depriving them of work, and therefore of wages and bread. A curse on machines!”

This is the cry which is raised by vulgar prejudice, and echoed in the journals.

But to curse machines, is to curse the spirit of humanity!

It puzzles me to conceive how any man can feel any satisfaction in such a doctrine.

For, if true, what is its inevitable consequence? That there is no activity, prosperity, wealth, or happiness possible for any people, except for those who are stupid and inert, and to whom God has not granted the fatal gift of knowing how to think, to observe, to combine, to invent, and to obtain the greatest results with the smallest means. On the contrary, rags, mean huts, poverty, and inanition, are the inevitable lot of every nation which seeks and finds in iron, fire, wind, electricity, magnetism, the laws of chemistry and mechanics, in a word, in the powers of nature, an assistance to its natural powers. We might as well say with Rousseau—“Every man that thinks is a depraved animal.”

This is not all; if this doctrine is true, since all men think and invent, since all, from first to last, and at every moment of their existence, seek the cooperation of the powers of nature, and try to make the most of a little, by reducing either the work of their hands, or their expenses, so as to obtain the greatest possible amount of gratification with the smallest possible amount of labour, it must follow, as a matter of course, that the whole of mankind is rushing towards its decline, by the same mental aspiration towards progress, which torments each of its members.

Hence, it ought to be made known, by statistics, that the inhabitants of Lancashire, abandoning that land of machines, seek for work in Ireland, where they are unknown; and, by history, that barbarism darkens the epochs of civilization, and that civilization shines in times of ignorance and barbarism.

There is evidently in this mass of contradictions something which revolts us, and which leads us to suspect that the problem contains within it an element of solution which has not been sufficiently disengaged.

Here is the whole mystery: behind that which is seen, lies something which is not seen. I will endeavour to bring it to light. The demonstration I shall give will only be a repetition of the preceding one, for the problems are one and the same.

Men have a natural propensity to make the best bargain they can, when not prevented by an opposing force; that is, they like to obtain as much as they possibly can for their labour, whether the advantage is obtained from a foreign producer, or a skillful mechanical producer.

The theoretical objection which is made to this propensity is the same in both cases. In each case it is reproached with the apparent inactivity which it causes to labour. Now, labour rendered available, not inactive, is the very thing which determines it. And, therefore, in both cases, the same practical obstacle—force, is opposed to it also. The legislator prohibits foreign competition, and forbids mechanical competition. For what other means can exist for arresting a propensity which is natural to all men, but that of depriving them of their liberty?

In many countries, it is true, the legislator strikes at only one of these competitions, and confines himself to grumbling at the other. This only proves one thing, that is, that the legislator is inconsistent.

Harm Of False Premise

We need not be surprised at this. On a wrong road, inconsistency is inevitable; if it were not so, mankind would be sacrificed. A false principle never has been, and never will be, carried out to the end.

Now for our demonstration, which shall not be a long one.

James B. had two francs which he had gained by two workmen; but it occurs to him, that an arrangement of ropes and weights might be made which would diminish the labour by half. Thus he obtains the same advantage, saves a franc, and discharges a workman.

He discharges a workman: this is that which is seen.

And seeing this only, it is said, "See how misery attends civilization; this is the way that liberty is fatal to equality. The human mind has made a conquest, and immediately a workman is cast into the gulf of pauperism. James B. may possibly employ the two workmen, but then he will give them only half their wages for they will compete with each other, and offer themselves at the lowest price. Thus the rich are always growing richer, and the poor, poorer. Society wants remodelling." A very fine conclusion, and worthy of the preamble.

Happily, preamble and conclusion are both false, because, behind the half of the phenomenon which is seen, lies the other half which is not seen.

The franc saved by James B. is not seen, no more are the necessary effects of this saving.

Since, in consequence of his invention, James B. spends only one franc on hand labour in the pursuit of a determined advantage, another franc remains to him.

If, then, there is in the world a workman with unemployed arms, there is also in the world a capitalist with an unemployed franc. These two elements meet and combine, and it is as clear as daylight, that between the supply and demand of labour, and between the supply and demand of wages, the relation is in no way changed.

The invention and the workman paid with the first franc, now perform the work which was formerly accomplished by two workmen. The second workman, paid with the second franc, realizes a new kind of work.

What is the change, then, which has taken place? An additional national advantage has been gained; in other words, the invention is a gratuitous triumph—a gratuitous profit for mankind.

From the form which I have given to my demonstration, the following inference might be drawn:—"It is the capitalist who reaps all the advantage from machinery. The working class, if it suffers only temporarily, never profits by it, since, by your own showing, they displace a portion of the national labour, without diminishing it, it is true, but also without increasing it."

I do not pretend, in this slight treatise, to answer every objection; the only end I have in view, is to combat a vulgar, widely spread, and dangerous prejudice. I want to prove, that a new machine only causes the discharge of a certain number of hands, when the remuneration which pays them is abstracted by force. These hands, and this remuneration, would combine to produce what it was impossible to produce before the invention; whence it follows that the final result is an increase of advantages for equal labour.

Who is the gainer by these additional advantages?

First, it is true, the capitalist, the inventor; the first who succeeds in using the machine; and this is the reward of his genius and his courage. In this case, as we have just seen, he effects a saving upon the expense of production, which, in whatever way it may be spent (and it always is spent), employs exactly as many hands as the machine caused to be dismissed.

But soon competition obliges him to lower his prices in proportion to the saving itself; and then it is no longer the inventor who reaps the benefit of the invention—it is the purchaser of what is produced, the consumer, the public, including the workmen; in a word, mankind.

And that which is not seen is, that the saving thus procured for all consumers creates a fund whence wages may be supplied, and which replaces that which the machine has exhausted.

Thus, to recur to the aforementioned example, James B. obtains a profit by spending two francs in wages. Thanks to his invention, the hand labour costs him only one franc. So long as he sells the thing produced at the same price, he employs one workman less in producing this particular thing, and that is what is seen; but there is an additional workman employed by the franc which James B. has saved. This is that which is not seen.

When, by the natural progress of things, James B. is obliged to lower the price of the thing produced by one franc, then he no longer realizes a saving; then he has no longer a franc to dispose of, to procure for the

national labour a new production; but then another gainer takes his place, and this gainer is mankind. Whoever buys the thing he has produced, pays a franc less, and necessarily adds this saving to the fund of wages; and this, again, is what is not seen.

Another solution, founded upon facts, has been given of this problem of machinery.

It was said, machinery reduces the expense of production, and lowers the price of the thing produced. The reduction of the profit causes an increase of consumption, which necessitates an increase of production, and, finally, the introduction of as many workmen, or more, after the invention as were necessary before it. As a proof of this, printing, weaving, &c., are instanced.

This demonstration is not a scientific one. It would lead us to conclude, that if the consumption of the particular production of which we are speaking remains stationary, or nearly so, machinery must injure labour. This is not the case.

Suppose that in a certain country all the people wore hats; if, by machinery, the price could be reduced half, it would not necessarily follow that the consumption would be doubled.

Would you say, that in this case a portion of the national labour had been paralyzed? Yes, according to the vulgar demonstration; but, according to mine, No; for even if not a single hat more should be bought in the country, the entire fund of wages would not be the less secure. That which failed to go to the hat-making trade would be found to have gone to the economy realized by all the consumers, and would thence serve to pay for all the labour which the machine had rendered useless, and to excite a new development of all the trades. And thus it is that things go on. I have known newspapers to cost eighty francs, now we pay forty-eight: here is a saving of thirty-two francs to the subscribers. It is not certain, or, at least, necessary, that the thirty-two francs should take the direction of the journalist trade; but it is certain, and necessary too, that if they do not take this direction they will take another. One makes use of them for taking in more newspapers; another, to get better living; another, better clothes; another, better furniture. It is thus that the trades are bound together. They form a vast whole, whose different parts communicate by secret canals;

what is saved by one, profits all. It is very important for us to understand, that savings never take place at the expense of labour and wares.

IX. Credit

In all times, but more especially of late years, attempts have been made to extend wealth by the extension of credit.

I believe it is no exaggeration to say, that since the revolution of February, the Parisian presses have issued more than 10,000 pamphlets, crying up this solution of the social problem. The only basis, alas! of this solution, is an optical delusion—if, indeed, an optical delusion can be called a basis at all.

The first thing done is to confuse cash with produce, then paper money with cash; and from these two confusions it is pretended that a reality can be drawn.

It is absolutely necessary in this question to forget money, coin, bills, and the other instruments by means of which productions pass from hand to hand; our business is with the productions themselves, which are the real objects of the loan; for when a farmer borrows fifty francs to buy a plough, it is not, in reality, the fifty francs which are lent to him, but the plough: and when a merchant borrows 20,000 francs to purchase a house, it is not the 20,000 francs which he owes, but the house. Money only appears for the sake of facilitating the arrangements between the parties.

Peter may not be disposed to lend his plough, but James may be willing to lend his money. What does William do in this case? He borrows money of James, and with this money he buys the plough of Peter.

But, in point of fact, no one borrows money for the sake of the money itself; money is only the medium by which to obtain possession of productions. Now, it is impossible in any country to transmit from one person to another more productions than that country contains.

Whatever may be the amount of cash and of paper which is in circulation, the whole of the borrowers cannot receive more ploughs, houses, tools, and supplies of raw material, than the lenders altogether can furnish; for we must take care not to forget, that every borrower supposes a lender, and that what is once borrowed implies a loan.

This granted, what advantage is there in institutions of credit? It is, that they facilitate, between borrowers and lenders, the means of finding and treating with each other; but it is not in their power to cause an instantaneous increase of the things to be borrowed and lent. And yet they ought to be able to do so, if the aim of the reformers is to be attained, since they aspire to nothing less than to place ploughs, houses, tools, and provisions in the hands of all those who desire them.

And how do they intend to effect this?

By making the State security for the loan.

Let us try and fathom the subject, for it contains something which is seen, and also something which is not seen. We must endeavour to look at both.

We will suppose that there is but one plough in the world, and that two farmers apply for it.

Peter is the possessor of the only plough which is to be had in France; John and James wish to borrow it. John, by his honesty, his property, and good reputation, offers security. He inspires confidence; he has credit. James inspires little or no confidence. It naturally happens that Peter lends his plough to John.

But now, according to the Socialist plan, the State interferes, and says to Peter, "Lend your plough to James, I will be security for its return, and this security will be better than that of John, for he has no one to be responsible for him but himself; and I, although it is true that I have nothing, dispose of the fortune of the taxpayers, and it is with their money that, in case of need, I shall pay you the principal and interest." Consequently, Peter lends his plough to James: this is what is seen.

And the Socialists rub their hands, and say, "See how well our plan has answered. Thanks to the intervention of the State, poor James has a plough. He will no longer be obliged to dig the ground; he is on the road to make a fortune. It is a good thing for him, and an advantage to the nation as a whole."

Indeed, gentlemen, it is no such thing; it is no advantage to the nation, for there is something behind which is not seen.

It is not seen, that the plough is in the hands of James, only because it is not in those of John.

It is not seen, that if James farms instead of digging, John will be reduced to the necessity of digging instead of farming.

That, consequently, what was considered an increase of loan, is nothing but a displacement of loan. Besides, it is not seen that this displacement implies two acts of deep injustice.

It is an injustice to John, who, after having deserved and obtained credit by his honesty and activity, sees himself robbed of it.

It is an injustice to the taxpayers, who are made to pay a debt which is no concern of theirs.

Will any one say, that Government offers the same facilities to John as it does to James? But as there is only one plough to be had, two cannot be lent. The argument always maintains that, thanks to the intervention of the State, more will be borrowed than there are things to be lent; for the plough represents here the bulk of available capitals.

It is true, I have reduced the operation to the most simple expression of it, but if you submit the most complicated Government institutions of credit to the same test, you will be convinced that they can have but one result; viz., to displace credit, not to augment it. In one country, and in a given time, there is only a certain amount of capital available, and all are employed. In guaranteeing the non-payers, the State may, indeed, increase the number of borrowers, and thus raise the rate of interest (always to the prejudice of the taxpayer), but it has no power to increase the number of lenders, and the importance of the total of the loans.

There is one conclusion, however, which I would not for the world be suspected of drawing. I say, that the law ought not to favour, artificially, the power of borrowing, but I do not say that it ought not to restrain them artificially. If, in our system of mortgage, or in any other, there be obstacles to the diffusion of the application of credit, let them be got rid of; nothing can be better or more just than this. But this is all which is consistent with liberty, and it is all that any who are worthy of the name of reformers will ask.

X. Algeria

Here are four orators disputing for the platform. First, all the four speak at once; then they speak one after the other. What have they said? Some very

fine things, certainly, about the power and the grandeur of France; about the necessity of sowing, if we would reap; about the brilliant future of our gigantic colony; about the advantage of diverting to a distance the surplus of our population, &c. &c. Magnificent pieces of eloquence, and always adorned with this conclusion:—"Vote fifty millions, more or less, for making ports and roads in Algeria; for sending emigrants hither; for building houses and breaking up land. By so doing, you will relieve the French workman, encourage African labour, and give a stimulus to the commerce of Marseilles. It would be profitable every way."

Yes, it is all very true, if you take no account of the fifty millions until the moment when the State begins to spend them; if you only see where they go, and not whence they come; if you look only at the good they are to do when they come out of the tax-gatherer's bag, and not at the harm which has been done, and the good which has been prevented, by putting them into it. Yes, at this limited point of view, all is profit. The house which is built in Barbary is that which is seen; the harbour made in Barbary is that which is seen; the work caused in Barbary is what is seen; a few less hands in France is what is seen; a great stir with goods at Marseilles is still that which is seen.

But, besides all this, there is something which is not seen. The fifty millions expended by the State cannot be spent, as they otherwise would have been, by the taxpayers. It is necessary to deduct, from all the good attributed to the public expenditure which has been effected, all the harm caused by the prevention of private expense, unless we say that James B. would have done nothing with the crown that he had gained, and of which the tax had deprived him; an absurd assertion, for if he took the trouble to earn it, it was because he expected the satisfaction of using it. He would have repaired the palings in his garden, which he cannot now do, and this is that which is not seen. He would have manured his field, which now he cannot do, and this is what is not seen. He would have added another story to his cottage, which he cannot do now, and this is what is not seen. He might have increased the number of his tools, which he cannot do now, and this is what is not seen. He would have been better fed, better clothed, have given a better education to his children, and increased his daughter's marriage portion; this is what is not seen. He would have become a member of the Mutual Assistance Society, but now he cannot; this is what is not

seen. On one hand, are the enjoyments of which he has been deprived, and the means of action which have been destroyed in his hands; on the other, are the labour of the drainer, the carpenter, the smith, the tailor, the village-schoolmaster, which he would have encouraged, and which are now prevented—all this is what is not seen.

Much is hoped from the future prosperity of Algeria; be it so. But the drain to which France is being subjected ought not to be kept entirely out of sight. The commerce of Marseilles is pointed out to me; but if this is to be brought about by means of taxation, I shall always show that an equal commerce is destroyed thereby in other parts of the country. It is said, “There is an emigrant transported into Barbary; this is a relief to the population which remains in the country.” I answer, “How can that be, if, in transporting this emigrant to Algiers, you also transport two or three times the capital which would have served to maintain him in France?”

The Minister of War has lately asserted, that every individual transported to Algeria has cost the State 8,000 francs. Now it is certain that these poor creatures could have lived very well in France on a capital of 4,000 francs. I ask, how the French population is relieved, when it is deprived of a man, and of the means of subsistence of two men?

The only object I have in view is to make it evident to the reader, that in every public expense, behind the apparent benefit, there is an evil which it is not so easy to discern. As far as in me lies, I would make him form a habit of seeing both, and taking account of both.

When a public expense is proposed, it ought to be examined in itself, separately from the pretended encouragement of labour which results from it, for this encouragement is a delusion. Whatever is done in this way at the public expense, private expense would have done all the same; therefore, the interest of labour is always out of the question.

It is not the object of this treatise to criticize the intrinsic merit of the public expenditure as applied to Algeria, but I cannot withhold a general observation. It is, that the presumption is always unfavourable to collective expenses by way of tax. Why? For this reason:—First, justice always suffers from it in some degree. Since James B. had laboured to gain his crown, in the hope of receiving a gratification from it, it is to be regretted that the exchequer should interpose, and take from James B. this gratification, to bestow it upon another. Certainly, it behooves the

exchequer, or those who regulate it, to give good reasons for this. It has been shown that the State gives a very provoking one, when it says, "With this crown I shall employ workmen"; for James B. (as soon as he sees it) will be sure to answer, "It is all very fine, but with this crown I might employ them myself."

Apart from this reason, others present themselves without disguise, by which the debate between the exchequer and poor James becomes much simplified. If the State says to him, "I take your crown to pay the gendarme, who saves you the trouble of providing for your own personal safety; for paving the street which you are passing through every day; for paying the magistrate who causes your property and your liberty to be respected; to maintain the soldier who maintains our frontiers,"—James B., unless I am much mistaken, will pay for all this without hesitation. But if the State were to say to him, "I take this crown that I may give you a little prize in case you cultivate your field well; or that I may teach your son something that you have no wish that he should learn; or that the Minister may add another to his score of dishes at dinner; I take it to build a cottage in Algeria, in which case I must take another crown every year to keep an emigrant in it, and another hundred to maintain a soldier to guard this emigrant, and another crown to maintain a general to guard this soldier," &c., &c.,—I think I hear poor James exclaim, "This system of law is very much like a system of cheat!" The State foresees the objection, and what does it do? It jumbles all things together, and brings forward just that provoking reason which ought to have nothing whatever to do with the question. It talks of the effect of this crown upon labour; it points to the cook and purveyor of the Minister; it shows an emigrant, a soldier, and a general, living upon the crown; it shows, in fact, what is seen, and if James B. has not learned to take into the account what is not seen, James B. will be duped. And this is why I want to do all I can to impress it upon his mind, by repeating it over and over again.

As the public expenses displace labour without increasing it, a second serious presumption presents itself against them. To displace labour is to displace labourers, and to disturb the natural laws which regulate the distribution of the population over the country. If 50,000,000 fr. are allowed to remain in the possession of the taxpayers, since the taxpayers are everywhere, they encourage labour in the 40,000 parishes in France. They

act like a natural tie, which keeps every one upon his native soil; they distribute themselves amongst all imaginable labourers and trades. If the State, by drawing off these 50,000,000 fr. from the citizens, accumulates them, and expends them on some given point, it attracts to this point a proportional quantity of displaced labour, a corresponding number of labourers, belonging to other parts; a fluctuating population, which is out of its place, and, I venture to say, dangerous when the fund is exhausted. Now here is the consequence (and this confirms all I have said): this feverish activity is, as it were, forced into a narrow space; it attracts the attention of all; it is what is seen. The people applaud; they are astonished at the beauty and facility of the plan, and expect to have it continued and extended. That which they do not see is, that an equal quantity of labour, which would probably be more valuable, has been paralyzed over the rest of France.

XI. Frugality and Luxury

It is not only in the public expenditure that what is seen eclipses what is not seen. Setting aside what relates to political economy, this phenomenon leads to false reasoning. It causes nations to consider their moral and their material interests as contradictory to each other. What can be more discouraging, or more dismal?

For instance, there is not a father of a family who does not think it his duty to teach his children order, system, the habits of carefulness, of economy, and of moderation in spending money.

There is no religion which does not thunder against pomp and luxury. This is as it should be; but, on the other hand, how frequently do we hear the following remarks:—

“To hoard, is to drain the veins of the people.”

“The luxury of the great is the comfort of the little.”

“Prodigals ruin themselves, but they enrich the State.”

“It is the superfluity of the rich which makes bread for the poor.”

Here, certainly, is a striking contradiction between the moral and the social idea.

How many eminent spirits, after having made the assertion, repose in peace. It is a thing I never could understand, for it seems to me that nothing can be more distressing than to discover two opposite tendencies in

mankind. Why, it comes to degradation at each of the extremes: economy brings it to misery; prodigality plunges it into moral degradation. Happily, these vulgar maxims exhibit economy and luxury in a false light, taking account, as they do, of those immediate consequences which are seen, and not of the remote ones, which are not seen. Let us see if we can rectify this incomplete view of the case.

Mondor and his brother Aristus, after dividing the paternal inheritance, have each an income of 50,000 francs. Mondor practises the fashionable philanthropy. He is what is called a squanderer of money. He renews his furniture several times a year; changes his equipages every month. People talk of his ingenious contrivances to bring them sooner to an end: in short, he surpasses the fast livers of Balzac and Alexander Dumas.

Thus, everybody is singing his praises. It is, "Tell us about Mondor? Mondor forever! He is the benefactor of the workman; a blessing to the people. It is true, he revels in dissipation; he splashes the passers-by; his own dignity and that of human nature are lowered a little; but what of that? He does good with his fortune, if not with himself. He causes money to circulate; he always sends the tradespeople away satisfied. Is not money made round that it may roll?"

Aristus has adopted a very different plan of life. If he is not an egotist, he is, at any rate, an individualist, for he considers expense, seeks only moderate and reasonable enjoyments, thinks of his children's prospects, and, in fact, he economises.

And what do people say of him? "What is the good of a rich fellow like him? He is a skinflint. There is something imposing, perhaps, in the simplicity of his life; and he is humane, too, and benevolent, and generous, but he calculates. He does not spend his income; his house is neither brilliant nor bustling. What good does he do to the paper hangers, the carriage makers, the horse dealers, and the confectioners?"

These opinions, which are fatal to morality, are founded upon what strikes the eye:—the expenditure of the prodigal; and another, which is out of sight, the equal and even superior expenditure of the economist.

But things have been so admirably arranged by the Divine inventor of social order, that in this, as in everything else, political economy and morality, far from clashing, agree; and the wisdom of Aristus is not only more dignified, but still more profitable, than the folly of Mondor. And

when I say profitable, I do not mean only profitable to Aristus, or even to society in general, but more profitable to the workmen themselves—to the trade of the time.

To prove it, it is only necessary to turn the mind's eye to those hidden consequences of human actions, which the bodily eye does not see.

Yes, the prodigality of Mondor has visible effects in every point of view. Everybody can see his landaus, his phaetons, his berlins, the delicate paintings on his ceilings, his rich carpets, the brilliant effects of his house. Every one knows that his horses run upon the turf. The dinners which he gives at the Hotel de Paris attract the attention of the crowds on the Boulevards; and it is said, "That is a generous man; far from saving his income, he is very likely breaking into his capital." This is what is seen.

It is not easy to see, with regard to the interest of workers, what becomes of the income of Aristus. If we were to trace it carefully, however, we should see that the whole of it, down to the last farthing, affords work to the labourers, as certainly as the fortune of Mondor. Only there is this difference: the wanton extravagance of Mondor is doomed to be constantly decreasing, and to come to an end without fail; whilst the wise expenditure of Aristus will go on increasing from year to year. And if this is the case, then, most assuredly, the public interest will be in unison with morality.

Aristus spends upon himself and his household 20,000 francs a year. If that is not sufficient to content him, he does not deserve to be called a wise man. He is touched by the miseries which oppress the poorer classes; he thinks he is bound in conscience to afford them some relief, and therefore he devotes 10,000 francs to acts of benevolence. Amongst the merchants, the manufacturers, and the agriculturists, he has friends who are suffering under temporary difficulties; he makes himself acquainted with their situation, that he may assist them with prudence and efficiency, and to this work he devotes 10,000 francs more. Then he does not forget that he has daughters to portion, and sons for whose prospects it is his duty to provide, and therefore he considers it a duty to lay by and put out to interest 10,000 francs every year.

The following is a list of his expenses:—

1st, Personal expenses	20,000 fr.

2nd, Benevolent objects	10,000
3rd, Offices of friendship	10,000
4th, Saving	10,000

Let us examine each of these items, and we shall see that not a single farthing escapes the national labour.

1st. Personal expenses.—These, as far as work-people and tradesmen are concerned, have precisely the same effect as an equal sum spent by Mondor. This is self-evident, therefore we shall say no more about it.

2nd. Benevolent objects.—The 10,000 francs devoted to this purpose benefit trade in an equal degree; they reach the butcher, the baker, the tailor, and the carpenter. The only thing is, that the bread, the meat, and the clothing are not used by Aristus, but by those whom he has made his substitutes. Now, this simple substitution of one consumer for another, in no way affects trade in general. It is all one, whether Aristus spends a crown, or desires some unfortunate person to spend it instead.

3rd. Offices of friendship.—The friend to whom Aristus lends or gives 10,000 francs, does not receive them to bury them; that would be against the hypothesis. He uses them to pay for goods, or to discharge debts. In the first case, trade is encouraged. Will any one pretend to say that it gains more by Mondor's purchase of a thoroughbred horse for 10,000 francs, than by the purchase of 10,000 francs' worth of stuffs by Aristus or his friend? For, if this sum serves to pay a debt, a third person appears, viz. the creditor, who will certainly employ them upon something in his trade, his household, or his farm. He forms another medium between Aristus and the workmen. The names only are changed, the expense remains, and also the encouragement to trade.

4th. Saving.—There remains now the 10,000 francs saved; and it is here, as regards the encouragement to the arts, to trade, labour, and the workmen, that Mondor appears far superior to Aristus, although, in a moral point of view, Aristus shows himself, in some degree, superior to Mondor.

I can never look at these apparent contradictions between the great laws of nature, without a feeling of physical uneasiness which amounts to suffering. Were mankind reduced to the necessity of choosing between two parties, one of whom injures his interest, and the other his conscience, we

should have nothing to hope from the future. Happily, this is not the case; and to see Aristus regain his economical superiority, as well as his moral superiority, it is sufficient to understand this consoling maxim, which is no less true from having a paradoxical appearance, "To save, is to spend."

What is Aristus's object in saving 10,000 francs? Is it to bury them in his garden? No, certainly; he intends to increase his capital and his income; consequently, this money, instead of being employed upon his own personal gratification, is used for buying land, a house, &c., or it is placed in the hands of a merchant or a banker. Follow the progress of this money in any one of these cases, and you will be convinced, that through the medium of vendors or lenders, it is encouraging labour quite as certainly as if Aristus, following the example of his brother, had exchanged it for furniture, jewels, and horses.

For when Aristus buys lands or rents for 10,000 francs, he is determined by the consideration that he does not want to spend this money. This is why you complain of him.

But, at the same time, the man who sells the land or the rent, is determined by the consideration that he does want to spend the 10,000 francs in some way; so that the money is spent in any case, either by Aristus, or by others in his stead.

With respect to the working class, to the encouragement of labour, there is only one difference between the conduct of Aristus and that of Mondor. Mondor spends the money himself and therefore the effect is seen. Aristus, spending it partly through intermediate parties, and at a distance, the effect is not seen. But, in fact, those who know how to attribute effects to their proper causes, will perceive, that what is not seen is as certain as what is seen. This is proved by the fact, that in both cases the money circulates, and does not lie in the iron chest of the wise man, any more than it does in that of the spendthrift. It is, therefore, false to say that economy does actual harm to trade; as described above, it is equally beneficial with luxury.

But how far superior is it, if, instead of confining our thoughts to the present moment, we let them embrace a longer period!

Ten years pass away. What is become of Mondor and his fortune, and his great popularity? Mondor is ruined. Instead of spending 60,000 francs every year in the social body, he is, perhaps, a burden to it. In any case, he

is no longer the delight of shopkeepers; he is no longer the patron of the arts and of trade; he is no longer of any use to the workmen, nor are his successors, whom he has brought to want.

At the end of the same ten years, Aristus not only continues to throw his income into circulation, but he adds an increasing sum from year to year to his expenses. He enlarges the national capital, that is, the fund which supplies wages, and as it is upon the extent of this fund that the demand for hands depends, he assists in progressively increasing the remuneration of the working class; and if he dies, he leaves children whom he has taught to succeed him in this work of progress and civilization.

In a moral point of view, the superiority of frugality over luxury is indisputable. It is consoling to think that it is so in political economy, to every one who, not confining his views to the immediate effects of phenomena, knows how to extend his investigations to their final effects.

XII. Having a Right to Work, Having a Right to Profit

“Brethren, you must club together to find me work at your own price.” This is the right to work; i.e., elementary socialism of the first degree.

“Brethren, you must club together to find me work at my own price.” This is the right to profit; i.e., refined socialism, or socialism of the second degree.

Both of these live upon such of their effects as are seen. They will die by means of those effects which are not seen.

That which is seen, is the labour and the profit excited by social combination. That which is not seen, is the labour and the profit to which this same combination would give rise, if it were left to the taxpayers.

In 1848, the right to labour for a moment showed two faces. This was sufficient to ruin it in public opinion.

One of these faces was called national workshops. The other, forty-five centimes. Millions of francs went daily from the Rue Rivoli to the national workshops. This was the fair side of the medal.

And this is the reverse. If millions are taken out of a cash-box, they must first have been put into it. This is why the organizers of the right to public labour apply to the taxpayers.

Now, the peasants said, "I must pay forty-five centimes; then I must deprive myself of some clothing. I cannot manure my field; I cannot repair my house."

And the country workmen said, "As our townsman deprives himself of some clothing, there will be less work for the tailor; as he does not improve his field, there will be less work for the drainer; as he does not repair his house, there will be less work for the carpenter and mason."

It was then proved that two kinds of meal cannot come out of one sack, and that the work furnished by the Government was done at the expense of labour, paid for by the tax-payer. This was the death of the right to labour, which showed itself as much a chimera as an injustice. And yet, the right to profit, which is only an exaggeration of the right to labour, is still alive and flourishing.

Ought not the protectionist to blush at the part he would make society play?

He says to it, "You must give me work, and, more than that, lucrative work. I have foolishly fixed upon a trade by which I lose ten per cent. If you impose a tax of twenty francs upon my countrymen, and give it to me, I shall be a gainer instead of a loser. Now, profit is my right; you owe it me." Now, any society which would listen to this sophist, burden itself with taxes to satisfy him, and not perceive that the loss to which any trade is exposed is no less a loss when others are forced to make up for it, such a society, I say, would deserve the burden inflicted upon it.

Thus we learn, by the numerous subjects which I have treated, that, to be ignorant of political economy is to allow ourselves to be dazzled by the immediate effect of a phenomenon; to be acquainted with it is to embrace in thought and in forethought the whole compass of effects.

I might subject a host of other questions to the same test; but I shrink from the monotony of a constantly uniform demonstration, and I conclude by applying to political economy what Chateaubriand says of history:—

"There are," he says, "two consequences in history; an immediate one, which is instantly recognized, and one in the distance, which is not at first perceived. These consequences often contradict each other; the former are the results of our own limited wisdom, the latter, those of that wisdom which endures. The providential event appears after the human event. God rises up behind men. Deny, if you will, the supreme counsel; disown its

action; dispute about words; designate, by the term, force of circumstances, or reason, what the vulgar call Providence; but look to the end of an accomplished fact, and you will see that it has always produced the contrary of what was expected from it, if it was not established at first upon morality and justice.”

A Petition

We candlemakers are suffering from the unfair competition of a foreign rival. This foreign manufacturer of light has such an advantage over us that he floods our domestic markets with his product. And he offers it at a fantastically low price. The moment this foreigner appears in our country, all our customers desert us and turn to him. As a result, an entire domestic industry is rendered completely stagnant. And even more, since the lighting industry has countless ramifications with other native industries, they, too, are injured. This foreign manufacturer who competes against us without mercy is none other than the sun itself!

Here is our petition: Please pass a law ordering the closing of all windows, skylights, shutters, curtains, and blinds—that is, all openings, holes, and cracks through which the light of the sun is able to enter houses. This free sunlight is hurting the business of us deserving manufacturers of candles. Since we have always served our country well, gratitude demands that our country ought not to abandon us now to this unequal competition.

We hope that you gentlemen will not regard our petition as mere satire, or refuse it without at least hearing our reasons in support of it.

First, if you make it as difficult as possible for the people to have access to natural light, and thus create an increased demand for artificial light, will not all domestic manufacturers be stimulated thereby?

For example, if more tallow is consumed, naturally there must be more cattle and sheep. As a result, there will also be more meat, wool, and hides. There will even be more manure, which is the basis of agriculture.

Next, if more oil is consumed for lighting, we shall have extensive olive groves and rape fields.

Also, our wastelands will be covered with pines and other resinous trees and plants. As a result of this, there will be numerous swarms of bees to increase the production of honey. In fact, all branches of agriculture will show an increased development.

The same applies to the shipping industry. The increased demand for whale oil will then require thousands of ships for whale fishing. In a short time, this will result in a navy capable of upholding the honor of our country and gratifying the patriotic sentiments of the candlemakers and other persons in related industries.

The manufacturers of lighting fixtures—candlesticks, lamps, candelabra, chandeliers, crystals, bronzes, and so on—will be especially stimulated. The resulting warehouses and display rooms will make our present-day shops look poor indeed.

The resin collectors on the heights along the seacoast, as well as the coal miners in the depths of the earth, will rejoice at their higher wages and increased prosperity. In fact, gentlemen, the condition of every citizen of our country—from the wealthiest owner of coal mines to the poorest seller of matches—will be improved by the success of our petition.

A Negative Railroad

I have said that as long as one has regard, as unfortunately happens, only to the interest of the producer, it is impossible to avoid running counter to the general interest, since the producer, as such, demands nothing but the multiplication of obstacles, wants, and efforts.

I find a remarkable illustration of this in a Bordeaux newspaper.

M. Simiot raises the following question:

Should there be a break in the tracks at Bordeaux on the railroad from Paris to Spain?

He answers the question in the affirmative and offers a number of reasons, of which I propose to examine only this:

There should be a break in the railroad from Paris to Bayonne at Bordeaux; for, if goods and passengers are forced to stop at that city, this will be profitable for boatmen, porters, owners of hotels, etc.

Here again we see clearly how the interests of those who perform services are given priority over the interests of the consumers.

But if Bordeaux has a right to profit from a break in the tracks, and if this profit is consistent with the public interest, then Angoulême, Poitiers, Tours, Orléans, and, in fact, all the intermediate points, including Ruffec, Châtellerault, etc., etc., ought also to demand breaks in the tracks, on the ground of the general interest—in the interest, that is, of domestic industry—for the more there are of these breaks in the line, the greater will be the amount paid for storage, porters, and cartage at every point along the way. By this means, we shall end by having a railroad composed of a whole series of breaks in the tracks, i.e., a *negative railroad*.

Whatever the protectionists may say, it is no less certain that the *basic principle of restriction* is the same as the *basic principle of breaks in the tracks*: the sacrifice of the consumer to the producer, of the end to the means.

The Law

The Law The law perverted! And the police powers of the state perverted along with it! The law, I say, not only turned from its proper purpose but made to follow an entirely contrary purpose! The law become the weapon of every kind of greed! Instead of checking crime, the law itself guilty of the evils it is supposed to punish!

If this is true, it is a serious fact, and moral duty requires me to call the attention of my fellow-citizens to it.

Life Is a Gift from God

We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life—physical, intellectual, and moral life.

But life cannot maintain itself alone. The Creator of life has entrusted us with the responsibility of preserving, developing, and perfecting it. In order that we may accomplish this, He has provided us with a collection of marvelous faculties. And He has put us in the midst of a variety of natural resources. By the application of our faculties to these natural resources we convert them into products, and use them. This process is necessary in order that life may run its appointed course.

Life, faculties, production—in other words, individuality, liberty, property—this is man. And in spite of the cunning of artful political leaders, these three gifts from God precede all human legislation, and are superior to it.

Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place.

What Is Law?

What, then, is law? It is the collective organization of the individual right to lawful defense.

Each of us has a natural right—from God—to defend his person, his liberty, and his property. These are the three basic requirements of life, and the preservation of any one of them is completely dependent upon the preservation of the other two. For what are our faculties but the extension of our individuality? And what is property but an extension of our faculties?

If every person has the right to defend—even by force—his person, his liberty, and his property, then it follows that a group of men have the right to organize and support a common force to protect these rights constantly. Thus the principle of collective right—its reason for existing, its lawfulness—is based on individual right. And the common force that protects this collective right cannot logically have any other purpose or any other mission than that for which it acts as a substitute. Thus, since an individual cannot lawfully use force against the person, liberty, or property of another individual, then the common force—for the same reason—cannot lawfully be used to destroy the person, liberty, or property of individuals or groups.

Such a perversion of force would be, in both cases, contrary to our premise. Force has been given to us to defend our own individual rights. Who will dare to say that force has been given to us to destroy the equal rights of our brothers? Since no individual acting separately can lawfully use force to destroy the rights of others, does it not logically follow that the same principle also applies to the common force that is nothing more than the organized combination of the individual forces?

If this is true, then nothing can be more evident than this: The law is the organization of the natural right of lawful defense. It is the substitution of a common force for individual forces. And this common force is to do only what the individual forces have a natural and lawful right to do: to protect persons, liberties, and properties; to maintain the right of each, and to cause *justice* to reign over us all.

A Just and Enduring Government

If a nation were founded on this basis, it seems to me that order would prevail among the people, in thought as well as in deed. It seems to me that such a nation would have the most simple, easy to accept, economical,

limited, non-oppressive, just, and enduring government imaginable—whatever its political form might be.

Under such an administration, everyone would understand that he possessed all the privileges as well as all the responsibilities of his existence. No one would have any argument with government, provided that his person was respected, his labor was free, and the fruits of his labor were protected against all unjust attack. When successful, we would not have to thank the state for our success. And, conversely, when unsuccessful, we would no more think of blaming the state for our misfortune than would the farmers blame the state because of hail or frost. The state would be felt only by the invaluable blessings of safety provided by this concept of government.

It can be further stated that, thanks to the non-intervention of the state in private affairs, our wants and their satisfactions would develop themselves in a logical manner. We would not see poor families seeking literary instruction before they have bread. We would not see cities populated at the expense of rural districts, nor rural districts at the expense of cities. We would not see the great displacements of capital, labor, and population that are caused by legislative decisions.

The sources of our existence are made uncertain and precarious by these state-created displacements. And, furthermore, these acts burden the government with increased responsibilities.

The Complete Perversion of the Law

But, unfortunately, law by no means confines itself to its proper functions. And when it has exceeded its proper functions, it has not done so merely in some inconsequential and debatable matters. The law has gone further than this; it has acted in direct opposition to its own purpose. The law has been used to destroy its own objective: It has been applied to annihilating the justice that it was supposed to maintain; to limiting and destroying rights which its real purpose was to respect. The law has placed the collective force at the disposal of the unscrupulous who wish, without risk, to exploit the person, liberty, and property of others. It has converted plunder into a right, in order to protect plunder. And it has converted lawful defense into a crime, in order to punish lawful defense.

How has this perversion of the law been accomplished? And what have been the results?

The law has been perverted by the influence of two entirely different causes: stupid greed and false philanthropy. Let us speak of the first.

A Fatal Tendency of Mankind

Self-preservation and self-development are common aspirations among all people. And if everyone enjoyed the unrestricted use of his faculties and the free disposition of the fruits of his labor, social progress would be ceaseless, uninterrupted, and unailing.

But there is also another tendency that is common among people. When they can, they wish to live and prosper at the expense of others. This is no rash accusation. Nor does it come from a gloomy and uncharitable spirit. The annals of history bear witness to the truth of it: the incessant wars, mass migrations, religious persecutions, universal slavery, dishonesty in commerce, and monopolies. This fatal desire has its origin in the very nature of man—in that primitive, universal, and insuppressible instinct that impels him to satisfy his desires with the least possible pain.

Property and Plunder

Man can live and satisfy his wants only by ceaseless labor; by the ceaseless application of his faculties to natural resources. This process is the origin of property.

But it is also true that a man may live and satisfy his wants by seizing and consuming the products of the labor of others. This process is the origin of plunder.

Now since man is naturally inclined to avoid pain—and since labor is pain in itself—it follows that men will resort to plunder whenever plunder is easier than work. History shows this quite clearly. And under these conditions, neither religion nor morality can stop it.

When, then, does plunder stop? It stops when it becomes more painful and more dangerous than labor. It is evident, then, that the proper purpose of law is to use the power of its collective force to stop this fatal tendency

to plunder instead of to work. All the measures of the law should protect property and punish plunder.

But, generally, the law is made by one man or one class of men. And since law cannot operate without the sanction and support of a dominating force, this force must be entrusted to those who make the laws.

This fact, combined with the fatal tendency that exists in the heart of man to satisfy his wants with the least possible effort, explains the almost universal perversion of the law. Thus it is easy to understand how law, instead of checking injustice, becomes the invincible weapon of injustice. It is easy to understand why the law is used by the legislator to destroy in varying degrees among the rest of the people, their personal independence by slavery, their liberty by oppression, and their property by plunder. This is done for the benefit of the person who makes the law, and in proportion to the power that he holds.

Victims of Lawful Plunder

Men naturally rebel against the injustice of which they are victims. Thus, when plunder is organized by law for the profit of those who make the law, all the plundered classes try somehow to enter—by peaceful or revolutionary means—into the making of laws. According to their degree of enlightenment, these plundered classes may propose one of two entirely different purposes when they attempt to attain political power: Either they may wish to stop lawful plunder, or they may wish to share in it.

Woe to the nation when this latter purpose prevails among the mass victims of lawful plunder when they, in turn, seize the power to make laws!

Until that happens, the few practice lawful plunder upon the many, a common practice where the right to participate in the making of law is limited to a few persons. But then, participation in the making of law becomes universal. And then, men seek to balance their conflicting interests by universal plunder. Instead of rooting out the injustices found in society, they make these injustices general. As soon as the plundered classes gain political power, they establish a system of reprisals against other classes. They do not abolish legal plunder. (This objective would demand more enlightenment than they possess.) Instead, they emulate their evil

predecessors by participating in this legal plunder, even though it is against their own interests.

It is as if it were necessary, before a reign of justice appears, for everyone to suffer a cruel retribution—some for their evilness, and some for their lack of understanding.

The Results of Legal Plunder

It is impossible to introduce into society a greater change and a greater evil than this: the conversion of the law into an instrument of plunder.

What are the consequences of such a perversion? It would require volumes to describe them all. Thus we must content ourselves with pointing out the most striking.

In the first place, it erases from everyone's conscience the distinction between justice and injustice.

No society can exist unless the laws are respected to a certain degree. The safest way to make laws respected is to make them respectable. When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law. These two evils are of equal consequence, and it would be difficult for a person to choose between them.

The nature of law is to maintain justice. This is so much the case that, in the minds of the people, law and justice are one and the same thing. There is in all of us a strong disposition to believe that anything lawful is also legitimate. This belief is so widespread that many persons have erroneously held that things are "just" because law makes them so. Thus, in order to make plunder appear just and sacred to many consciences, it is only necessary for the law to decree and sanction it. Slavery, restrictions, and monopoly find defenders not only among those who profit from them but also among those who suffer from them.

The Fate of Non-Conformists

If you suggest a doubt as to the morality of these institutions, it is boldly said that "You are a dangerous innovator, a utopian, a theorist, a subversive; you would shatter the foundation upon which society rests."

If you lecture upon morality or upon political science, there will be found official organizations petitioning the government in this vein of thought: “That science no longer be taught exclusively from the point of view of free trade (of liberty, of property, and of justice) as has been the case until now, but also, in the future, science is to be especially taught from the viewpoint of the facts and laws that regulate French industry (facts and laws which are contrary to liberty, to property, and to justice). That, in government-endowed teaching positions, the professor rigorously refrain from endangering in the slightest degree the respect due to the laws now in force.”[\[10\]](#)

Thus, if there exists a law which sanctions slavery or monopoly, oppression or robbery, in any form whatever, it must not ever be mentioned. For how can it be mentioned without damaging the respect which it inspires? Still further, morality and political economy must be taught from the point of view of this law; from the supposition that it must be a just law merely because it is a law.

Another effect of this tragic perversion of the law is that it gives an exaggerated importance to political passions and conflicts, and to politics in general. I could prove this assertion in a thousand ways. But, by way of illustration, I shall limit myself to a subject that has lately occupied the minds of everyone: universal suffrage.

Who Shall Judge?

The followers of Rousseau’s school of thought—who consider themselves far advanced, but whom I consider twenty centuries behind the times—will not agree with me on this. But universal suffrage—using the word in its strictest sense—is not one of those sacred dogmas which it is a crime to examine or doubt. In fact, serious objections may be made to universal suffrage.

In the first place, the word *universal* conceals a gross fallacy. For example, there are 36 million people in France. Thus, to make the right of suffrage universal, there should be 36 million voters. But the most extended system permits only 9 million people to vote. Three persons out of four are excluded. And more than this, they are excluded by the fourth. This fourth person advances the principle of *incapacity* as his reason for excluding the

others. Universal suffrage means, then, universal suffrage for those who are capable. But there remains this question of fact: Who is capable? Are minors, females, insane persons, and persons who have committed certain major crimes the only ones to be determined incapable?

The Reason Why Voting Is Restricted

A closer examination of the subject shows us the motive which causes the right of suffrage to be based upon the supposition of incapacity. The motive is that the elector or voter does not exercise this right for himself alone, but for everybody.

The most extended elective system and the most restricted elective system are alike in this respect. They differ only in respect to what constitutes incapacity. It is not a difference of principle, but merely a difference of degree.

If, as the republicans of our present-day Greek and Roman schools of thought pretend, the right of suffrage arrives with one's birth, it would be an injustice for adults to prevent women and children from voting. Why are they prevented? Because they are presumed to be incapable. And why is incapacity a motive for exclusion? Because it is not the voter alone who suffers the consequences of his vote; because each vote touches and affects everyone in the entire community; because the people in the community have a right to demand some safeguards concerning the acts upon which their welfare and existence depend.

The Answer Is to Restrict the Law

I know what might be said in answer to this; what the objections might be. But this is not the place to exhaust a controversy of this nature. I wish merely to observe here that this controversy over universal suffrage (as well as most other political questions) which agitates, excites, and overthrows nations, would lose nearly all of its importance if the law had always been what it ought to be.

In fact, if law were restricted to protecting all persons, all liberties, and all properties; if law were nothing more than the organized combination of the individual's right to self defense; if law were the obstacle, the check, the

punisher of all oppression and plunder—is it likely that we citizens would then argue much about the extent of the franchise?

Under these circumstances, is it likely that the extent of the right to vote would endanger that supreme good, the public peace? Is it likely that the excluded classes would refuse to peaceably await the coming of their right to vote? Is it likely that those who had the right to vote would jealously defend their privilege?

If the law were confined to its proper functions, everyone's interest in the law would be the same. Is it not clear that, under these circumstances, those who voted could not inconvenience those who did not vote?

The Fatal Idea of Legal Plunder

But on the other hand, imagine that this fatal principle has been introduced: Under the pretense of organization, regulation, protection, or encouragement, the law takes property from one person and gives it to another; the law takes the wealth of all and gives it to a few—whether farmers, manufacturers, shipowners, artists, or comedians. Under these circumstances, then certainly every class will aspire to grasp the law, and logically so.

The excluded classes will furiously demand their right to vote—and will overthrow society rather than not to obtain it. Even beggars and vagabonds will then prove to you that they also have an incontestable title to vote. They will say to you:

“We cannot buy wine, tobacco, or salt without paying the tax. And a part of the tax that we pay is given by law—in privileges and subsidies—to men who are richer than we are. Others use the law to raise the prices of bread, meat, iron, or cloth. Thus, since everyone else uses the law for his own profit, we also would like to use the law for our own profit. We demand from the law the *right to relief*, which is the poor man's plunder. To obtain this right, we also should be voters and legislators in order that we may organize Beggary on a grand scale for our own class, as you have organized Protection on a grand scale for your class. Now don't tell us beggars that you will act for us, and then toss us, as Mr. Mimerel proposes, 600,000 francs to keep us quiet, like throwing us a bone to gnaw. We have

other claims. And anyway, we wish to bargain for ourselves as other classes have bargained for themselves!”

And what can you say to answer that argument!

Perverted Law Causes Conflict

As long as it is admitted that the law may be diverted from its true purpose—that it may violate property instead of protecting it—then everyone will want to participate in making the law, either to protect himself against plunder or to use it for plunder. Political questions will always be prejudicial, dominant, and all absorbing. There will be fighting at the door of the Legislative Palace, and the struggle within will be no less furious. To know this, it is hardly necessary to examine what transpires in the French and English legislatures; merely to understand the issue is to know the answer.

Is there any need to offer proof that this odious perversion of the law is a perpetual source of hatred and discord; that it tends to destroy society itself? If such proof is needed, look at the United States [in 1850]. There is no country in the world where the law is kept more within its proper domain: the protection of every person’s liberty and property. As a consequence of this, there appears to be no country in the world where the social order rests on a firmer foundation. But even in the United States, there are two issues—and only two—that have always endangered the public peace.

Slavery and Tariffs Are Plunder

What are these two issues? They are slavery and tariffs. These are the only two issues where, contrary to the general spirit of the republic of the United States, law has assumed the character of a plunderer.

Slavery is a violation, by law, of liberty. The protective tariff is a violation, by law, of property.

It is a most remarkable fact that this double *legal crime*—a sorrowful inheritance from the Old World—should be the only issue which can, and perhaps will, lead to the ruin of the Union. It is indeed impossible to imagine, at the very heart of a society, a more astounding fact than this: *The*

law has come to be an instrument of injustice. And if this fact brings terrible consequences to the United States—where the proper purpose of the law has been perverted only in the instances of slavery and tariffs—what must be the consequences in Europe, where the perversion of the law is a principle; a system?

Two Kinds of Plunder

Mr. de Montalembert [politician and writer] adopting the thought contained in a famous proclamation by Mr. Carlier, has said: “We must make war against socialism.” According to the definition of socialism advanced by Mr. Charles Dupin, he meant: “We must make war against plunder.”

But of what plunder was he speaking? For there are two kinds of plunder: legal and illegal.

I do not think that illegal plunder, such as theft or swindling—which the penal code defines, anticipates, and punishes—can be called socialism. It is not this kind of plunder that systematically threatens the foundations of society. Anyway, the war against this kind of plunder has not waited for the command of these gentlemen. The war against illegal plunder has been fought since the beginning of the world. Long before the Revolution of February 1848—long before the appearance even of socialism itself—France had provided police, judges, gendarmes, prisons, dungeons, and scaffolds for the purpose of fighting illegal plunder. The law itself conducts this war, and it is my wish and opinion that the law should always maintain this attitude toward plunder.

The Law Defends Plunder

But it does not always do this. Sometimes the law defends plunder and participates in it. Thus the beneficiaries are spared the shame, danger, and scruple which their acts would otherwise involve. Sometimes the law places the whole apparatus of judges, police, prisons, and gendarmes at the service of the plunderers, and treats the victim—when he defends himself—as a criminal. In short, there is a *legal plunder*, and it is of this, no doubt, that Mr. de Montalembert speaks. This legal plunder may be only an isolated stain among the legislative measures of the people. If so, it is best to wipe it

out with a minimum of speeches and denunciations—and in spite of the uproar of the vested interests.

How to Identify Legal Plunder

But how is this legal plunder to be identified? Quite simply. See if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime.

Then abolish this law without delay, for it is not only an evil itself, but also it is a fertile source for further evils because it invites reprisals. If such a law—which may be an isolated case—is not abolished immediately, it will spread, multiply, and develop into a system.

The person who profits from this law will complain bitterly, defending his *acquired rights*. He will claim that the state is obligated to protect and encourage his particular industry; that this procedure enriches the state because the protected industry is thus able to spend more and to pay higher wages to the poor workingmen.

Do not listen to this sophistry by vested interests. The acceptance of these arguments will build legal plunder into a whole system. In fact, this has already occurred. The present day delusion is an attempt to enrich everyone at the expense of everyone else; to make plunder universal under the pretense of organizing it.

Legal Plunder Has Many Names

Now, legal plunder can be committed in an infinite number of ways. Thus we have an infinite number of plans for organizing it: tariffs, protection, benefits, subsidies, encouragements, progressive taxation, public schools, guaranteed jobs, guaranteed profits, minimum wages, a right to relief, a right to the tools of labor, free credit, and so on, and so on. All these plans as a whole—with their common aim of legal plunder—constitute socialism.

Now, since under this definition socialism is a body of doctrine, what attack can be made against it other than a war of doctrine? If you find this socialistic doctrine to be false, absurd, and evil, then refute it. And the more

false, the more absurd, and the more evil it is, the easier it will be to refute. Above all, if you wish to be strong, begin by rooting out every particle of socialism that may have crept into your legislation. This will be no light task.

Socialism Is Legal Plunder

Mr. de Montalembert has been accused of desiring to fight socialism by the use of brute force. He ought to be exonerated from this accusation, for he has plainly said: “The war that we must fight against socialism must be in harmony with law, honor, and justice.”

But why does not Mr. de Montalembert see that he has placed himself in a vicious circle? You would use the law to oppose socialism? But it is upon the law that socialism itself relies. Socialists desire to practice legal plunder, not illegal plunder. Socialists, like all other monopolists, desire to make the law their own weapon. And when once the law is on the side of socialism, how can it be used against socialism? For when plunder is abetted by the law, it does not fear your courts, your gendarmes, and your prisons. Rather, it may call upon them for help.

To prevent this, you would exclude socialism from entering into the making of laws? You would prevent socialists from entering the Legislative Palace? You shall not succeed, I predict, so long as legal plunder continues to be the main business of the legislature. It is illogical—in fact, absurd—to assume otherwise.

The Choice Before Us

This question of legal plunder must be settled once and for all, and there are only three ways to settle it:

1. The few plunder the many.
2. Everybody plunders everybody.
3. Nobody plunders anybody.

We must make our choice among limited plunder, universal plunder, and no plunder. The law can follow only one of these three.

Limited legal plunder: This system prevailed when the right to vote was restricted. One would turn back to this system to prevent the invasion

of socialism.

Universal legal plunder: We have been threatened with this system since the franchise was made universal. The newly enfranchised majority has decided to formulate law on the same principle of legal plunder that was used by their predecessors when the vote was limited.

No legal plunder: This is the principle of justice, peace, order, stability, harmony, and logic. Until the day of my death, I shall proclaim this principle with all the force of my lungs (which alas! is all too inadequate).

[\[11\]](#)

The Proper Function of the Law

And, in all sincerity, can anything more than the absence of plunder be required of the law? Can the law—which necessarily requires the use of force—rationally be used for anything except protecting the rights of everyone? I defy anyone to extend it beyond this purpose without perverting it and, consequently, turning might against right. This is the most fatal and most illogical social perversion that can possibly be imagined. It must be admitted that the true solution—so long searched for in the area of social relationships—is contained in these simple words: *Law is organized justice.*

Now this must be said: When justice is organized by law—that is, by force—this excludes the idea of using law (force) to organize any human activity whatever, whether it be labor, charity, agriculture, commerce, industry, education, art, or religion. The organizing by law of any one of these would inevitably destroy the essential organization—justice. For truly, how can we imagine force being used against the liberty of citizens without it also being used against justice, and thus acting against its proper purpose?

The Seductive Lure of Socialism

Here I encounter the most popular fallacy of our times. It is not considered sufficient that the law should be just; it must be philanthropic. Nor is it sufficient that the law should guarantee to every citizen the free and inoffensive use of his faculties for physical, intellectual, and moral self-

improvement. Instead, it is demanded that the law should directly extend welfare, education, and morality throughout the nation.

This is the seductive lure of socialism. And I repeat again: These two uses of the law are in direct contradiction to each other. We must choose between them. A citizen cannot at the same time be free and not free.

Enforced Fraternity Destroys Liberty

Mr. de Lamartine once wrote to me thusly: “Your doctrine is only the half of my program. You have stopped at liberty; I go on to fraternity.” I answered him: “The second half of your program will destroy the first.” In fact, it is impossible for me to separate the word *fraternity* from the word *voluntary*. I cannot possibly understand how fraternity can be *legally* enforced without liberty being *legally* destroyed, and thus justice being *legally* trampled underfoot.

Legal plunder has two roots: One of them, as I have said before, is in human greed; the other is in false philanthropy.

At this point, I think that I should explain exactly what I mean by the word *plunder*.[\[12\]](#)

Plunder Violates Ownership

I do not, as is often done, use the word in any vague, uncertain, approximate, or metaphorical sense. I use it in its scientific acceptance—as expressing the idea opposite to that of property [wages, land, money, or whatever]. When a portion of wealth is transferred from the person who owns it—without his consent and without compensation, and whether by force or by fraud—to anyone who does not own it, then I say that property is violated; that an act of plunder is committed.

I say that this act is exactly what the law is supposed to suppress, always and everywhere. When the law itself commits this act that it is supposed to suppress, I say that plunder is still committed, and I add that from the point of view of society and welfare, this aggression against rights is even worse. In this case of legal plunder, however, the person who receives the benefits is not responsible for the act of plundering. The

responsibility for this legal plunder rests with the law, the legislator, and society itself. Therein lies the political danger.

It is to be regretted that the word *plunder* is offensive. I have tried in vain to find an inoffensive word, for I would not at any time—especially now—wish to add an irritating word to our dissensions. Thus, whether I am believed or not, I declare that I do not mean to attack the intentions or the morality of anyone. Rather, I am attacking an *idea* which I believe to be false; a *system* which appears to me to be unjust; an injustice so independent of personal intentions that each of us profits from it without wishing to do so, and suffers from it without knowing the cause of the suffering.

Three Systems of Plunder

The sincerity of those who advocate protectionism, socialism, and communism is not here questioned. Any writer who would do that must be influenced by a political spirit or a political fear. It is to be pointed out, however, that protectionism, socialism, and communism are basically the same plant in three different stages of its growth. All that can be said is that legal plunder is more visible in communism because it is complete plunder; and in protectionism because the plunder is limited to specific groups and industries.[\[13\]](#) Thus it follows that, of the three systems, socialism is the vaguest, the most indecisive, and, consequently, the most sincere stage of development.

But sincere or insincere, the intentions of persons are not here under question. In fact, I have already said that legal plunder is based partially on philanthropy, even though it is a false philanthropy.

With this explanation, let us examine the value—the origin and the tendency—of this popular aspiration which claims to accomplish the general welfare by general plunder.

Law Is Force

Since the law organizes justice, the socialists ask why the law should not also organize labor, education, and religion.

Why should not law be used for these purposes? Because it could not organize labor, education, and religion without destroying justice. We must remember that law is force, and that, consequently, the proper functions of the law cannot lawfully extend beyond the proper functions of force.

When law and force keep a person within the bounds of justice, they impose nothing but a mere negation. They oblige him only to abstain from harming others. They violate neither his personality, his liberty, nor his property. They safeguard all of these. They are *defensive*; they defend equally the rights of all.

Law Is a Negative Concept

The harmlessness of the mission performed by law and lawful defense is self-evident; the usefulness is obvious; and the legitimacy cannot be disputed.

As a friend of mine once remarked, this negative concept of law is so true that the statement, *the purpose of the law is to cause justice to reign*, is not a rigorously accurate statement. It ought to be stated that *the purpose of the law is to prevent injustice from reigning*. In fact, it is injustice, instead of justice, that has an existence of its own. Justice is achieved only when injustice is absent.

But when the law, by means of its necessary agent, force, imposes upon men a regulation of labor, a method or a subject of education, a religious faith or creed—then the law is no longer negative; it acts positively upon people. It substitutes the will of the legislator for their own wills; the initiative of the legislator for their own initiatives. When this happens, the people no longer need to discuss, to compare, to plan ahead; the law does all this for them. Intelligence becomes a useless prop for the people; they cease to be men; they lose their personality, their liberty, their property.

Try to imagine a regulation of labor imposed by force that is not a violation of liberty; a transfer of wealth imposed by force that is not a violation of property. If you cannot reconcile these contradictions, then you must conclude that the law cannot organize labor and industry without organizing injustice.

The Political Approach

When a politician views society from the seclusion of his office, he is struck by the spectacle of the inequality that he sees. He deplores the deprivations which are the lot of so many of our brothers, deprivations which appear to be even sadder when contrasted with luxury and wealth.

Perhaps the politician should ask himself whether this state of affairs has not been caused by old conquests and lootings, and by more recent legal plunder. Perhaps he should consider this proposition: Since all persons seek well-being and perfection, would not a condition of justice be sufficient to cause the greatest efforts toward progress, and the greatest possible equality that is compatible with individual responsibility? Would not this be in accord with the concept of individual responsibility which God has willed in order that mankind may have the choice between vice and virtue, and the resulting punishment and reward?

But the politician never gives this a thought. His mind turns to organizations, combinations, and arrangements—legal or apparently legal. He attempts to remedy the evil by increasing and perpetuating the very thing that caused the evil in the first place: legal plunder. We have seen that justice is a negative concept. Is there even one of these positive legal actions that does not contain the principle of plunder?

The Law and Charity

You say: “There are persons who have no money,” and you turn to the law. But the law is not a breast that fills itself with milk. Nor are the lacteal veins of the law supplied with milk from a source outside the society. Nothing can enter the public treasury for the benefit of one citizen or one class unless other citizens and other classes have been forced to send it in. If every person draws from the treasury the amount that he has put in it, it is true that the law then plunders nobody. But this procedure does nothing for the persons who have no money. It does not promote equality of income. The law can be an instrument of equalization only as it takes from some persons and gives to other persons. When the law does this, it is an instrument of plunder.

With this in mind, examine the protective tariffs, subsidies, guaranteed profits, guaranteed jobs, relief and welfare schemes, public education, progressive taxation, free credit, and public works. You will find that they are always based on legal plunder, organized injustice.

The Law and Education

You say: “There are persons who lack education” and you turn to the law. But the law is not, in itself, a torch of learning which shines its light abroad. The law extends over a society where some persons have knowledge and others do not; where some citizens need to learn, and others can teach. In this matter of education, the law has only two alternatives: It can permit this transaction of teaching-and-learning to operate freely and without the use of force, or it can force human wills in this matter by taking from some of them enough to pay the teachers who are appointed by government to instruct others, without charge. But in this second case, the law commits legal plunder by violating liberty and property.

The Law and Morals

You say: “Here are persons who are lacking in morality or religion,” and you turn to the law. But law is force. And need I point out what a violent and futile effort it is to use force in the matters of morality and religion?

It would seem that socialists, however self-complacent, could not avoid seeing this monstrous legal plunder that results from such systems and such efforts. But what do the socialists do? They cleverly disguise this legal plunder from others—and even from themselves—under the seductive names of fraternity, unity, organization, and association. Because we ask so little from the law—only justice—the socialists thereby assume that we reject fraternity, unity, organization, and association. The socialists brand us with the name *individualist*.

But we assure the socialists that we repudiate only *forced* organization, not natural organization. We repudiate the forms of association that are *forced* upon us, not free association. We repudiate *forced* fraternity, not true fraternity. We repudiate the *artificial* unity that does nothing more than

deprive persons of individual responsibility. We do not repudiate the natural unity of mankind under Providence.

A Confusion of Terms

Socialism, like the ancient ideas from which it springs, confuses the distinction between government and society. As a result of this, every time we object to a thing being done by government, the socialists conclude that we object to its being done at all.

We disapprove of state education. Then the socialists say that we are opposed to any education. We object to a state religion. Then the socialists say that we want no religion at all. We object to a state-enforced equality. Then they say that we are against equality. And so on, and so on. It is as if the socialists were to accuse us of not wanting persons to eat because we do not want the state to raise grain.

The Influence of Socialist Writers

How did politicians ever come to believe this weird idea that the law could be made to produce what it does not contain—the wealth, science, and religion that, in a positive sense, constitute prosperity? Is it due to the influence of our modern writers on public affairs?

Present-day writers—especially those of the socialist school of thought—base their various theories upon one common hypothesis: They divide mankind into two parts. People in general—with the exception of the writer himself—form the first group. The writer, all alone, forms the second and most important group. Surely this is the weirdest and most conceited notion that ever entered a human brain!

In fact, these writers on public affairs begin by supposing that people have within themselves no means of discernment; no motivation to action. The writers assume that people are inert matter, passive particles, motionless atoms, at best a kind of vegetation indifferent to its own manner of existence. They assume that people are susceptible to being shaped—by the will and hand of another person—into an infinite variety of forms, more or less symmetrical, artistic, and perfected.

Moreover, not one of these writers on governmental affairs hesitates to imagine that he himself—under the title of organizer, discoverer, legislator, or founder—is this will and hand, this universal motivating force, this creative power whose sublime mission is to mold these scattered materials—persons—into a society.

These socialist writers look upon people in the same manner that the gardener views his trees. Just as the gardener capriciously shapes the trees into pyramids, parasols, cubes, vases, fans, and other forms, just so does the socialist writer whimsically shape human beings into groups, series, centers, sub-centers, honeycombs, labor-corps, and other variations. And just as the gardener needs axes, pruning hooks, saws, and shears to shape his trees, just so does the socialist writer need the force that he can find only in law to shape human beings. For this purpose, he devises tariff laws, tax laws, relief laws, and school laws.

The Socialists Want to Play God

Socialists look upon people as raw material to be formed into social combinations. This is so true that, if by chance, the socialists have any doubts about the success of these combinations, they will demand that a small portion of mankind be set aside to experiment upon. The popular idea of trying all systems is well known. And one socialist leader has been known seriously to demand that the Constituent Assembly give him a small district with all its inhabitants, to try his experiments upon.

In the same manner, an inventor makes a model before he constructs the full-sized machine; the chemist wastes some chemicals—the farmer wastes some seeds and land—to try out an idea.

But what a difference there is between the gardener and his trees, between the inventor and his machine, between the chemist and his elements, between the farmer and his seeds! And in all sincerity, the socialist thinks that there is the same difference between him and mankind!

It is no wonder that the writers of the nineteenth century look upon society as an artificial creation of the legislator's genius. This idea—the fruit of classical education—has taken possession of all the intellectuals and famous writers of our country. To these intellectuals and writers, the

relationship between persons and the legislator appears to be the same as the relationship between the clay and the potter.

Moreover, even where they have consented to recognize a principle of action in the heart of man—and a principle of discernment in man's intellect—they have considered these gifts from God to be fatal gifts. They have thought that persons, under the impulse of these two gifts, would fatally tend to ruin themselves. They assume that if the legislators left persons free to follow their own inclinations, they would arrive at atheism instead of religion, ignorance instead of knowledge, poverty instead of production and exchange.

The Socialists Despise Mankind

According to these writers, it is indeed fortunate that Heaven has bestowed upon certain men—governors and legislators—the exact opposite inclinations, not only for their own sake but also for the sake of the rest of the world! While mankind tends toward evil, the legislators yearn for good; while mankind advances toward darkness, the legislators aspire for enlightenment; while mankind is drawn toward vice, the legislators are attracted toward virtue. Since they have decided that this is the true state of affairs, they then demand the use of force in order to substitute their own inclinations for those of the human race.

Open at random any book on philosophy, politics, or history, and you will probably see how deeply rooted in our country is this idea—the child of classical studies, the mother of socialism. In all of them, you will probably find this idea that mankind is merely inert matter, receiving life, organization, morality, and prosperity from the power of the state. And even worse, it will be stated that mankind tends toward degeneration, and is stopped from this downward course only by the mysterious hand of the legislator. Conventional classical thought everywhere says that behind passive society there is a concealed power called law or legislator (or called by some other terminology that designates some unnamed person or persons of undisputed influence and authority) which moves, controls, benefits, and improves mankind.

A Defense of Compulsory Labor

Let us first consider a quotation from Bossuet [tutor to the Dauphin in the Court of Louis XIV]:

One of the things most strongly impressed (by whom?) upon the minds of the Egyptians was patriotism.... No one was permitted to be useless to the state. The law assigned to each one his work, which was handed down from father to son. No one was permitted to have two professions. Nor could a person change from one job to another.... But there was one task to which all were forced to conform: the study of the laws and of wisdom. Ignorance of religion and of the political regulations of the country was not excused under any circumstances. Moreover each occupation was assigned (by whom?) to a certain district.... Among the good laws, one of the best was that everyone was trained (by whom?) to obey them. As a result of this, Egypt was filled with wonderful inventions, and nothing was neglected that could make life easy and quiet.

Thus, according to Bossuet, persons derive nothing from themselves. Patriotism, prosperity, inventions, husbandry, science—all of these are given to the people by the operation of the laws, the rulers. All that the people have to do is to bow to leadership.

A Defense of Paternal Government

Bossuet carries this idea of the state as the source of all progress even so far as to defend the Egyptians against the charge that they rejected wrestling and music. He said:

How is that possible? These arts were invented by Trismegistus [who was alleged to have been Chancellor to the Egyptian god Osiris].

And again among the Persians, Bossuet claims that all comes from above:

One of the first responsibilities *of the prince* was to encourage agriculture.... Just as there were offices established for the regulation of armies, just so were there offices for the direction of farm work.... The Persian people *were inspired* with an overwhelming respect for royal authority.

And according to Bossuet, the Greek people, although exceedingly intelligent, had no sense of personal responsibility; like dogs and horses, they themselves could not have invented the most simple games:

The Greeks, naturally intelligent and courageous, *had been early cultivated* by the kings and settlers who had come from Egypt. From these Egyptian rulers, the Greek people had learned bodily exercises, *foot races*, and horse and chariot races.... But the best thing that the Egyptians had taught the Greeks was to become docile, and to permit themselves to be formed by the law for the public good.

The Idea of Passive Mankind

It cannot be disputed that these classical theories [advanced by these latter-day teachers, writers, legislators, economists, and philosophers] held that everything came to the people from a source outside themselves. As another example, take Fenelon [archbishop, author, and instructor to the Duke of Burgundy].

He was a witness to the power of Louis XIV. This, plus the fact that he was nurtured in the classical studies and the admiration of antiquity, naturally caused Fenelon to accept the idea that mankind should be passive; that the misfortunes and the prosperity—vices and virtues—of people are caused by the external influence exercised upon them by the law and the legislators. Thus, in his *Utopia of Salentum*, he puts men—with all their interests, faculties, desires, and possessions—under the absolute discretion

of the legislator. Whatever the issue may be, persons do not decide it for themselves; the prince decides for them. The prince is depicted as the *soul* of this shapeless mass of people who form the nation. In the prince resides the thought, the foresight, all progress, and the principle of all organization. Thus all responsibility rests with him.

The whole of the tenth book of Fenelon's *Telemachus* proves this. I refer the reader to it, and content myself with quoting at random from this celebrated work to which, in every other respect, I am the first to pay homage.

Socialists Ignore Reason and Facts

With the amazing credulity which is typical of the classicists, Fenelon ignores the authority of reason and facts when he attributes the general happiness of the Egyptians, not to their own wisdom but to the wisdom of their kings:

We could not turn our eyes to either shore without seeing rich towns and country estates most agreeably located; fields, never fallowed, covered with golden crops every year; meadows full of flocks; workers bending under the weight of the fruit which the earth lavished upon its cultivators; shepherds who made the echoes resound with the soft notes from their pipes and flutes. "Happy," said Mentor, "is the people governed by a wise king...."

Later, Mentor desired that I observe the contentment and abundance which covered all Egypt, where twenty-two thousand cities could be counted. He admired the good police regulations in the cities; the justice rendered in favor of the poor *against* the rich; the sound education of the children in obedience, labor, sobriety, and the love of the arts and letters; the exactness with which all religious ceremonies were performed; the unselfishness, the high regard for honor, the faithfulness to men, and the fear of the gods which every father taught his children. He never

stopped admiring the prosperity of the country. “Happy,” said he, “is the people ruled by a wise king in such a manner.”

Socialists Want to Regiment People

Fenelon’s idyll on Crete is even more alluring. Mentor is made to say:

All that you see in this wonderful island results from the laws of Minos. The education which he ordained for the children makes their bodies strong and robust. From the very beginning, one accustoms the children to a life of frugality and labor, because one assumes that all pleasures of the senses weaken both body and mind. Thus one allows them no pleasure except that of becoming invincible by virtue, and of acquiring glory.... Here one punishes three vices that go unpunished among other people: ingratitude, hypocrisy, and greed. There is no need to punish persons for pomp and dissipation, for they are unknown in Crete.... No costly furniture, no magnificent clothing, no delicious feasts, no gilded palaces are permitted.

Thus does Mentor prepare his student to mold and to manipulate—doubtless with the best of intentions—the people of Ithaca. And to convince the student of the wisdom of these ideas, Mentor recites to him the example of Salentum.

It is from this sort of philosophy that we receive our first political ideas! We are taught to treat persons much as an instructor in agriculture teaches farmers to prepare and tend the soil.

A Famous Name and an Evil Idea

Now listen to the great Montesquieu on this same subject:

To maintain the spirit of commerce, it is necessary that all the laws must favor it. These laws, by proportionately

dividing up the fortunes as they are made in commerce, should provide every poor citizen with sufficiently easy circumstances to enable him to work like the others. These same laws should put every rich citizen in such lowered circumstances as to force him to work in order to keep or to gain.

Thus the laws are to dispose of all fortunes!

Although real equality is the soul of the state in a democracy, yet this is so difficult to establish that an extreme precision in this matter would not always be desirable. It is sufficient that here be established a census to reduce or fix these differences in wealth within a certain limit. After this is done, it remains for specific laws to equalize inequality by imposing burdens upon the rich and granting relief to the poor.

Here again we find the idea of equalizing fortunes by law, by force.

In Greece, there were two kinds of republics, One, Sparta, was military; the other, Athens, was commercial. In the former, *it was desired* that the citizens be idle; in the latter, love of labor *was encouraged*.

Note the marvelous genius of these legislators: By debasing all established customs—by mixing the usual concepts of all virtues—they knew in advance that the world would admire their wisdom.

Lycurgus gave stability to his city of Sparta by combining petty thievery with the soul of justice; by combining the most complete bondage with the most extreme liberty; by combining the most atrocious beliefs with the greatest moderation. He appeared to deprive his city of all its resources, arts, commerce, money, and defenses. In Sparta, ambition went without the hope of material reward. Natural

affection found no outlet because a man was neither son, husband, nor father. Even chastity was no longer considered becoming. *By this road, Lycurgus led Sparta on to greatness and glory.*

This boldness which was to be found in the institutions of Greece has been repeated in the midst of *the degeneracy and corruption of our modern times*. An occasional honest legislator has molded a people in whom integrity appears as natural as courage in the Spartans.

Mr. William Penn, for example, is a true Lycurgus. Even though Mr. Penn had peace as his objective—while Lycurgus had war as his objective—they resemble each other in that their moral prestige over free men allowed them to overcome prejudices, to subdue passions, and to lead *their* respective peoples into new paths.

The country of Paraguay furnishes us with another example [of a people who, for their own good, are molded by their legislators].[\[14\]](#)

Now it is true that if one considers the sheer pleasure of commanding to be the greatest joy in life, he contemplates a crime against society; it will, however, always be a noble ideal to govern men in a manner that will make them happier.

Those who desire to establish similar institutions must do as follows: Establish common ownership of property as in the republic of Plato; revere the gods as Plato commanded; prevent foreigners from mingling with the people, in order to preserve the customs; let the state, instead of the citizens, establish commerce. The legislators should supply arts instead of luxuries; they should satisfy needs instead of desires.

A Frightful Idea

Those who are subject to vulgar infatuation may exclaim: “Montesquieu has said this! So it’s magnificent! It’s sublime!” As for me, I have the courage of my own opinion. I say: What! You have the nerve to call that fine? It is frightful! It is abominable! These random selections from the writings of Montesquieu show that he considers persons, liberties, property—mankind itself—to be nothing but materials for legislators to exercise their wisdom upon.

The Leader of the Democrats

Now let us examine Rousseau on this subject. This writer on public affairs is the supreme authority of the democrats. And although he bases the social structure upon the *will of the people*, he has, to a greater extent than anyone else, completely accepted the theory of the total inertness of mankind in the presence of the legislators:

If it is true that a great prince is rare, then is it not true that a great legislator is even more rare? The prince has only to follow the pattern that the legislator creates. *The legislator is the mechanic who invents the machine*; the prince is merely the workman who sets it in motion.

And what part do persons play in all this? They are merely the machine that is set in motion. In fact, are they not merely considered to be the raw material of which the machine is made?

Thus the same relationship exists between the legislator and the prince as exists between the agricultural expert and the farmer; and the relationship between the prince and his subjects is the same as that between the farmer and his land. How high above mankind, then, has this writer on public affairs been placed? Rousseau rules over legislators themselves, and teaches them their trade in these imperious terms:

Would you give stability to the state? Then bring the extremes as closely together as possible. Tolerate neither

wealthy persons nor beggars.

If the soil is poor or barren, or the country too small for its inhabitants, then turn to industry and arts, and trade these products for the foods that you need.... On a fertile soil—if *you are short* of inhabitants—devote all your attention to agriculture, because this multiplies people; *banish* the arts, because they only serve to depopulate the nation....

If you have extensive and accessible coastlines, then *cover the sea* with merchant ships; you will have a brilliant but short existence. If your seas wash only inaccessible cliffs, let the people *be barbarous* and eat fish; they will live more quietly—perhaps better—and, most certainly, they will live more happily.

In short, and in addition to the maxims that are common to all, every people has its own particular circumstances. And this fact in itself will cause legislation appropriate to the circumstances.

This is the reason why the Hebrews formerly—and, more recently, the *Arabs*—had religion as their principle objective. The objective of the Athenians was literature; of Carthage and Tyre, commerce; of Rhodes, naval affairs; of Sparta, war; and of Rome, virtue. The author of *The Spirit of Laws* has shown by what art *the legislator should direct his institutions toward each of these objectives....* But suppose that the legislator mistakes his proper objective, and acts on a principle different from that indicated by the nature of things? Suppose that the selected principle sometimes creates slavery, and sometimes liberty; sometimes wealth, and sometimes population; sometimes peace, and sometimes conquest? This confusion of objective will slowly enfeeble the law and impair the constitution. The state will be

subjected to ceaseless agitations until it is destroyed or changed, and invincible nature regains her empire.

But if nature is sufficiently invincible to *regain* its empire, why does not Rousseau admit that it did not need the legislator to *gain* it in the first place? Why does he not see that men, by obeying their own instincts, would turn to farming on fertile soil, and to commerce on an extensive and easily accessible coast, without the interference of a Lycurgus or a Solon or a Rousseau *who might easily be mistaken*.

Socialists Want Forced Conformity

Be that as it may, Rousseau invests the creators, organizers, directors, legislators, and controllers of society with a terrible responsibility. He is, therefore, most exacting with them:

He who would dare to undertake the political creation of a people ought to believe that he can, in a manner of speaking, transform human nature; transform each individual—who, by himself, is a solitary and perfect whole—into a mere part of a greater whole from which the individual will henceforth receive his life and being. Thus the person who would undertake the political creation of a people should believe in his ability to alter man's constitution; to strengthen it; to substitute for the physical and independent existence received from nature, an existence which is partial and moral.[\[15\]](#) In short, the would-be creator of political man must remove man's own forces and endow him with others that are naturally alien to him.

Poor human nature! What would become of a person's dignity if it were entrusted to the followers of Rousseau?

Legislators Desire to Mold Mankind

Now let us examine Raynal on this subject of mankind being molded by the legislator:

The legislator must first consider the climate, the air, and the soil. The resources at *his* disposal determine his duties. He must first consider *his* locality. A population living on maritime shores must have laws designed for navigation.... If it is an inland settlement, the legislator must make his plans according to the nature and fertility of the soil...

It is especially in the distribution of property that the genius of the legislator will be found. As a general rule, when a new colony is established in any country, sufficient land should be given to each man to support his family....

On an uncultivated island that *you* are populating with children, you need do nothing but let the seeds of truth germinate along with the development of reason.... But when *you* resettle a nation with a past into a new country, the skill of the legislator rests in the policy of *permitting the people* to retain no injurious opinions and customs which can possibly be cured and corrected. If *you* desire to prevent these opinions and customs from becoming permanent, you will secure the second generation by a general system of public education for the children. A prince or a legislator should never establish a colony without first arranging to send wise men along to instruct the youth....

In a new colony, ample opportunity is open to the careful legislator who desires to *purify the customs and manners of the people*. If he has virtue and genius, the land and the people *at his disposal* will inspire his soul with a plan for society. A writer can only vaguely trace the plan in advance because it is necessarily subject to the instability of all hypotheses; the problem has many forms, complications,

and circumstances that are difficult to foresee and settle in detail.

Legislators Told How to Manage Men

Raynal's instructions to the legislators on how to manage people may be compared to a professor of agriculture lecturing his students: "The climate is the first rule for the farmer. *His* resources determine his procedure. He must first consider his locality. If his soil is clay, he must do so and so. If his soil is sand, he must act in another manner. Every facility is open to the farmer who wishes to clear and improve his soil. If he is skillful enough, the manure *at his disposal* will suggest to him a plan of operation. A professor can only vaguely trace this plan in advance because it is necessarily subject to the instability of all hypotheses; the problem has many forms, complications, and circumstances that are difficult to foresee and settle in detail."

Oh, sublime writers! Please remember sometimes that this clay, this sand, and this manure which you so arbitrarily dispose of, are men! They are your equals! They are intelligent and free human beings like yourselves! As you have, they too have received from God the faculty to observe, to plan ahead, to think, and to judge for themselves!

A Temporary Dictatorship

Here is Mably on this subject of the law and the legislator. In the passages preceding the one here quoted, Mably has supposed the laws, due to a neglect of security, to be worn out. He continues to address the reader thusly:

Under these circumstances, it is obvious that the springs of government are slack. *Give them* a new tension, and the evil will be cured.... Think less of punishing faults, and more of rewarding *that which you need*. In this manner you will restore to *your republic* the vigor of youth. Because free people have been ignorant of this procedure, they have lost their liberty! But if the evil has made such headway that

ordinary governmental procedures are unable to cure it, then resort to an extraordinary tribunal with considerable powers for a short time. The imagination of the citizens needs to be struck a hard blow.

In this manner, Mably continues through twenty volumes. Under the influence of teaching like this—which stems from classical education—there came a time when everyone wished to place himself above mankind in order to arrange, organize, and regulate it in his own way.

Socialists Want Equality of Wealth

Next let us examine Condillac on this subject of the legislators and mankind:

My Lord, assume the character of Lycurgus or of Solon. And before you finish reading this essay, amuse yourself by giving laws to some savages in America or Africa. Confine these nomads to fixed dwellings; teach them to tend flocks.... Attempt to develop the social consciousness that nature has planted in them.... Force them to begin to practice the duties of humanity.... Use punishment to cause sensual pleasures to become distasteful to them. Then you will see that every point of your legislation will cause these savages to lose a vice and gain a virtue.

All people have had laws. But few people have been happy. Why is this so? Because the legislators themselves have almost always been ignorant of the purpose of society, which is the uniting of families by a common interest.

Impartiality in law consists of two things: the establishing of equality in wealth and equality in dignity among the citizens.... As the laws establish greater equality, they become proportionately more precarious to every citizen.... When all men are equal in wealth and dignity—and when

the laws leave no hope of disturbing this equality—how can men then be agitated by greed, ambition, dissipation, idleness, sloth, envy, hatred, or jealousy?

What you have learned about the republic of Sparta should enlighten you on this question. No other state has ever had laws more in accord with the order of nature; of equality.

The Error of the Socialist Writers

Actually, it is *not* strange that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the human race was regarded as inert matter, ready to receive everything—form, face, energy, movement, life—from a great prince or great legislator or a great genius. These centuries were nourished on the study of antiquity. And antiquity presents everywhere—in Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome—the spectacle of a few men molding mankind according to their whims, thanks to the prestige of force and fraud. But this does not prove that this situation is desirable. It proves only that since men and society are capable of improvement, it is naturally to be expected that error, ignorance, despotism, slavery, and superstition should be greatest towards the origins of history. The writers quoted above were not in error when they found ancient institutions to be such, but they were in error when they offered them for the admiration and imitation of future generations. Uncritical and childish conformists, they took for granted the grandeur, dignity, morality, and happiness of the artificial societies of the ancient world. They did not understand that knowledge appears and grows with the passage of time; and that in proportion to this growth of knowledge, *might* takes the side of *right*, and society regains possession of itself

What Is Liberty?

Actually, what is the political struggle that we witness? It is the instinctive struggle of all people toward liberty. And what is this liberty, whose very name makes the heart beat faster and shakes the world? Is it not the union of all liberties—liberty of conscience, of education, of association, of the press, of travel, of labor, of trade? In short, is not liberty the freedom of

every person to make full use of his faculties, so long as he does not harm other persons while doing so? Is not liberty the destruction of all despotism—including, of course, legal despotism? Finally, is not liberty the restricting of the law only to its rational sphere of organizing the right of the individual to lawful self-defense; of punishing injustice?

It must be admitted that the tendency of the human race toward liberty is largely thwarted, especially in France. This is greatly due to a fatal desire—learned from the teachings of antiquity—that our writers on public affairs have in common: They desire to set themselves above mankind in order to arrange, organize, and regulate it according to their fancy.

Philanthropic Tyranny

While society is struggling toward liberty, these famous men who put themselves at its head are filled with the spirit of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They think only of subjecting mankind to the philanthropic tyranny of their own social inventions. Like Rousseau, they desire to force mankind docilely to bear this yoke of the public welfare that they have dreamed up in their own imaginations.

This was especially true in 1789. No sooner was the old regime destroyed than society was subjected to still other artificial arrangements, always starting from the same point: the omnipotence of the law.

Listen to the ideas of a few of the writers and politicians during that period:

SAINT-JUST: The legislator commands the future. It is for him to *will* the good of mankind. It is for him to make men what *he wills* them to be.

ROBESPIERRE: The function of government is to direct the physical and moral powers of the nation toward the end for which the commonwealth has come into being.

BILLAUD-VARENNE: A people who are to be returned to liberty must be formed anew. A strong force and vigorous action are necessary to destroy old prejudices, to change old

customs, to correct depraved affections, to restrict superfluous wants, and to destroy ingrained vices... Citizens, the inflexible austerity of Lycurgus created the firm foundation of the Spartan republic. The weak and trusting character of Solon plunged Athens into slavery. This parallel embraces the whole science of government.

LE PELLETIER: Considering the extent of human degradation, I am convinced that it is necessary to effect a total regeneration and, if I may so express myself, of creating a new people.

The Socialists Want Dictatorship

Again, it is claimed that persons are nothing but raw material. It is not for them to *will their own improvement*; they are incapable of it. According to Saint-Just, only the legislator is capable of doing this. Persons are merely to be what the legislator *wills* them to be. According to Robespierre, who copies Rousseau literally, the legislator begins by decreeing the *end for which the commonwealth has come into being*. Once this is determined, the government has only to direct *the physical and moral forces of the nation* toward that end. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the nation are to remain completely passive. And according to the teachings of Billaud-Varennes, the people should have no prejudices, no affections, and no desires except those authorized by the legislator. He even goes so far as to say that the inflexible austerity of one man is the foundation of a republic.

In cases where the alleged evil is so great that ordinary governmental procedures cannot cure it, Mably recommends a dictatorship to promote virtue: "Resort," he says, "to an extraordinary tribunal with considerable powers for a short time. The imagination of the citizens needs to be struck a hard blow." This doctrine has not been forgotten. Listen to Robespierre:

The principle of the republican government is virtue, and the means required to establish virtue is terror. In our country we desire to substitute morality for selfishness, honesty for honor, principles for customs, duties for manners, the empire

of reason for the tyranny of fashion, contempt of vice for contempt of poverty, pride for insolence, greatness of soul for vanity, love of glory for love of money, good people for good companions, merit for intrigue, genius for wit, truth for glitter, the charm of happiness for the boredom of pleasure, the greatness of man for the littleness of the great, a generous, strong, happy people for a good-natured, frivolous, degraded people; in short, we desire to substitute all the virtues and miracles of a republic for all the vices and absurdities of a monarchy.

Dictatorial Arrogance

At what a tremendous height above the rest of mankind does Robespierre here place himself! And note the arrogance with which he speaks. He is not content to pray for a great reawakening of the human spirit. Nor does he expect such a result from a well-ordered government. No, he himself will remake mankind, and by means of terror.

This mass of rotten and contradictory statements is extracted from a discourse by Robespierre in which he aims to explain the *principles of morality which ought to guide a revolutionary government*. Note that Robespierre's request for dictatorship is not made merely for the purpose of repelling a foreign invasion or putting down the opposing groups. Rather he wants a dictatorship in order that he may use terror to force upon the country his own principles of morality. He says that this act is only to be a temporary measure preceding a new constitution. But in reality, he desires nothing short of using terror to extinguish from France *selfishness, honor, customs, manners, fashion, vanity, love of money, good companionship, intrigue, wit, sensuousness, and poverty*. Not until he, Robespierre, shall have accomplished these *miracles*, as he so rightly calls them, will he permit the law to reign again.[\[16\]](#)

The Indirect Approach to Despotism

Usually, however, these gentlemen—the reformers, the legislators, and the writers on public affairs do not desire to impose direct despotism upon

mankind. Oh no, they are too moderate and philanthropic for such direct action. Instead, they turn to the law for this despotism, this absolutism, this omnipotence. They desire only to make the laws.

To show the prevalence of this queer idea in France, I would need to copy not only the entire works of Mably, Raynal, Rousseau, and Fenelon—plus long extracts from Bossuet and Montesquieu—but also the entire proceedings of the Convention. I shall do no such thing; I merely refer the reader to them.

Napoleon Wanted Passive Mankind

It is, of course, not at all surprising that this same idea should have greatly appealed to Napoleon. He embraced it ardently and used it with vigor. Like a chemist, Napoleon considered all Europe to be material for his experiments. But, in due course, this material reacted against him.

At St. Helena, Napoleon—greatly disillusioned—seemed to recognize some initiative in mankind. Recognizing this, he became less hostile to liberty. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from leaving this lesson to his son in his will: “To govern is to increase and spread morality, education, and happiness.”

After all this, it is hardly necessary to quote the same opinions from Morelly, Babeuf, Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier. Here are, however, a few extracts from Louis Blanc’s book on the organization of labor: “In our plan, society receives its momentum from power.”

Now consider this: The impulse behind this momentum is to be supplied by the *plan* of Louis Blanc; his plan is to be forced upon society; the Society referred to is the human race. Thus the human race is to receive its momentum from Louis Blanc.

Now it will be said that the people are free to accept or to reject this plan. Admittedly, people are free to accept or to reject *advice* from whomever they wish. But this is not the way in which Mr. Louis Blanc understands the matter. He expects that his plan will be legalized, and thus forcibly imposed upon the people by the power of the law:

In our plan, the state has only to pass labor laws (nothing else?) by means of which industrial progress can and must proceed *in complete liberty*. The state merely places society on an incline (that is all?). Then

society will slide down this incline by the mere force of things, and by the natural workings of the *established mechanism*.

But what is this incline that is indicated by Mr. Louis Blanc? Does it not lead to an abyss? (No, it leads to happiness.) If this is true, then why does not society go there of its own choice? (Because society does not know what it wants; it must be propelled.) What is to propel it? (Power.) And who is to supply the impulse for this power? (Why, the inventor of the machine—in this instance, Mr. Louis Blanc.)

The Vicious Circle of Socialism

We shall never escape from this circle: the idea of passive mankind, and the power of the law being used by a great man to propel the people.

Once on this incline, will society enjoy some liberty? (Certainly.) And what is liberty, Mr. Louis Blanc?

Once and for all, liberty is not only a mere granted right; it is also the power granted to a person to use and to develop his faculties under a reign of justice and under the protection of the law.

And this is no pointless distinction; its meaning is deep and its consequences are difficult to estimate. For once it is agreed that a person, to be truly free, must have the power to use and develop his faculties, then it follows that every person has a claim on society for such education as will *permit him* to develop himself. It also follows that every person has a claim on society for tools of production, without which human activity cannot be fully effective. Now by what action can society give to every person the necessary education and the necessary tools of production, if not by the action of the state?

Thus, again, liberty is power. Of what does this power consist? (Of being educated and of being given the tools of production.) Who is to give the education and the tools of production? (Society, *which owes them to everyone.*) By what action is society to give tools of production to those who do not own them? (Why, *by the action of the state.*) And from whom will the state take them?

Let the reader answer that question. Let him also notice the direction in which this is taking us.

The Doctrine of the Democrats

The strange phenomenon of our times—one which will probably astound our descendants—is the doctrine based on this triple hypothesis: the total inertness of mankind, the omnipotence of the law, and the infallibility of the legislator. These three ideas form the sacred symbol of those who proclaim themselves totally democratic.

The advocates of this doctrine also profess to be *social*. So far as they are democratic, they place unlimited faith in mankind. But so far as they are social, they regard mankind as little better than mud. Let us examine this contrast in greater detail.

What is the attitude of the democrat when political rights are under discussion? How does he regard the people when a legislator is to be chosen? Ah, then it is claimed that the people have an instinctive wisdom; they are gifted with the finest perception; *their will is always right*; the general will *cannot err*; voting cannot be too universal.

When it is time to vote, apparently the voter is not to be asked for any guarantee of his wisdom. His will and capacity to choose wisely are taken for granted. Can the people be mistaken? Are we not living in an age of enlightenment? What! are the people always to be kept on leashes? Have they not won their rights by great effort and sacrifice? Have they not given ample proof of their intelligence and wisdom? Are they not adults? Are they not capable of judging for themselves? Do they not know what is best for themselves? Is there a class or a man who would be so bold as to set himself above the people, and judge and act for them? No, no, the people

are and should be *free*. They desire to manage their own affairs, and they shall do so.

But when the legislator is finally elected—ah! then indeed does the tone of his speech undergo a radical change. The people are returned to passiveness, inertness, and unconsciousness; the legislator enters into omnipotence. Now it is for him to initiate, to direct, to propel, and to organize. Mankind has only to submit; the hour of despotism has struck. We now observe this fatal idea: The people who, during the election, were so wise, so moral, and so perfect, now have no tendencies whatever; or if they have any, they are tendencies that lead downward into degradation

The Socialist Concept of Liberty

But ought not the people be given a little liberty?

But Mr. Considerant has assured us that *liberty leads inevitably to monopoly!*

We understand that liberty means competition. But according to Mr. Louis Blanc, competition is a system that ruins the businessmen and exterminates the people. It is for this reason that free people are ruined and exterminated in proportion to their degree of freedom. (Possibly Mr. Louis Blanc should observe the results of competition in, for example, Switzerland, Holland, England, and the United States.)

Mr. Louis Blanc also tells us that *competition leads to monopoly*. And by the same reasoning, he thus informs us that *low prices lead to high prices*; that *competition drives production to destructive activity*; that *competition drains away the sources of purchasing power*; that *competition forces an increase in production while, at the same time, it forces a decrease in consumption*. From this, it follows that free people produce for the sake of not consuming; that liberty means *oppression and madness* among the people; and that Mr. Louis Blanc absolutely must attend to it.

Socialists Fear All Liberties

Well, what liberty should the legislators permit people to have? Liberty of conscience? (But if this were permitted, we would see the people taking this opportunity to become atheists.)

Then liberty of education? (But parents would pay professors to teach their children immorality and falsehoods; besides, according to Mr. Thiers, if education were left to national liberty, it would cease to be national, and we would be teaching our children the ideas of the Turks or Hindus; whereas, thanks to this legal despotism over education, our children now have the good fortune to be taught the noble ideas of the Romans.)

Then liberty of labor? (But that would mean competition which, in turn, leaves production unconsumed, ruins businessmen, and exterminates the people.)

Perhaps liberty of trade? (But everyone knows—and the advocates of protective tariffs have proved over and over again—that freedom of trade ruins every person who engages in it, and that it is necessary to suppress freedom of trade in order to prosper.)

Possibly then, liberty of association? (But, according to socialist doctrine, true liberty and voluntary association are in contradiction to each other, and the purpose of the socialists is to suppress liberty of association precisely in order to force people to associate together in true liberty.)

Clearly then, the conscience of the social democrats cannot permit persons to have any liberty because they believe that the nature of mankind tends always toward every kind of degradation and disaster. Thus, of course, the legislators must make plans for the people in order to save them from themselves.

This line of reasoning brings us to a challenging question: If people are as incapable, as immoral, and as ignorant as the politicians indicate, then why is the right of these same people to vote defended with such passionate insistence?

The Superman Idea

The claims of these organizers of humanity raise another question which I have often asked them and which, so far as I know, they have never answered: If the natural tendencies of mankind are so bad that it is not safe to permit people to be free, how is it that the tendencies of these organizers are always good? Do not the legislators and their appointed agents also belong to the human race? Or do they believe that they themselves are made of a finer clay than the rest of mankind? The organizers maintain that

society, when left undirected, rushes headlong to its inevitable destruction because the instincts of the people are so perverse. The legislators claim to stop this suicidal course and to give it a saner direction. Apparently, then, the legislators and the organizers have received from Heaven an intelligence and virtue that place them beyond and above mankind; if so, let them show their titles to this superiority.

They would be the shepherds over us, their sheep. Certainly such an arrangement presupposes that they are naturally superior to the rest of us. And certainly we are fully justified in demanding from the legislators and organizers proof of this natural superiority.

The Socialists Reject Free Choice

Please understand that I do not dispute their right to invent social combinations, to advertise them, to advocate them, and to try them upon themselves, at their own expense and risk. But I do dispute their right to impose these plans upon us by law—by force—and to compel us to pay for them with our taxes.

I do not insist that the supporters of these various social schools of thought—the Proudhonists, the Cabetists, the Fourierists, the Universitarists, and the Protectionists—renounce their various ideas. I insist only that they renounce this one idea that they have in common: They need only to give up the idea of forcing us to acquiesce to their groups and series, their socialized projects, their free-credit banks, their Graeco-Roman concept of morality, and their commercial regulations. I ask only that we be permitted to decide upon these plans for ourselves; that we not be forced to accept them, directly or indirectly, if we find them to be contrary to our best interests or repugnant to our consciences.

But these organizers desire access to the tax funds and to the power of the law in order to carry out their plans. In addition to being oppressive and unjust, this desire also implies the fatal supposition that the organizer is infallible and mankind is incompetent. But, again, if persons are incompetent to judge for themselves, then why all this talk about universal suffrage?

The Cause of French Revolutions

This contradiction in ideas is, unfortunately but logically, reflected in events in France. For example, Frenchmen have led all other Europeans in obtaining their rights—or, more accurately, their political demands. Yet this fact has in no respect prevented us from becoming the most governed, the most regulated, the most imposed upon, the most harnessed, and the most exploited people in Europe. France also leads all other nations as the one where revolutions are constantly to be anticipated. And under the circumstances, it is quite natural that this should be the case.

And this will remain the case so long as our politicians continue to accept this idea that has been so well expressed by Mr. Louis Blanc: “Society receives its momentum from power.” This will remain the case so long as human beings with feelings continue to remain passive; so long as they consider themselves incapable of bettering their prosperity and happiness by their own intelligence and their own energy; so long as they expect everything from the law; in short, so long as they imagine that their relationship to the state is the same as that of the sheep to the shepherd.

The Enormous Power of Government

As long as these ideas prevail, it is clear that the responsibility of government is enormous. Good fortune and bad fortune, wealth and destitution, equality and inequality, virtue and vice—all then depend upon political administration. It is burdened with everything, it undertakes everything, it does everything; therefore it is responsible for everything.

If we are fortunate, then government has a claim to our gratitude; but if we are unfortunate, then government must bear the blame. For are not our persons and property now at the disposal of government? Is not the law omnipotent?

In creating a monopoly of education, the government must answer to the hopes of the fathers of families who have thus been deprived of their liberty; and if these hopes are shattered, whose fault is it?

In regulating industry, the government has contracted to make it prosper; otherwise it is absurd to deprive industry of its liberty. And if

industry now suffers, whose fault is it?

In meddling with the balance of trade by playing with tariffs, the government thereby contracts to make trade prosper; and if this results in destruction instead of prosperity, whose fault is it?

In giving the maritime industries protection in exchange for their liberty, the government undertakes to make them profitable; and if they become a burden to the taxpayers, whose fault is it?

Thus there is not a grievance in the nation for which the government does not voluntarily make itself responsible. Is it surprising, then, that every failure increases the threat of another revolution in France?

And what remedy is proposed for this? To extend indefinitely the domain of the law; that is, the responsibility of government.

But if the government undertakes to control and to raise wages, and cannot do it; if the government undertakes to care for all who may be in want, and cannot do it; if the government undertakes to support all unemployed workers, and cannot do it; if the government undertakes to lend interest-free money to all borrowers, and cannot do it; if, in these words that we regret to say escaped from the pen of Mr. de Lamartine, “The state considers that its purpose is to enlighten, to develop, to enlarge, to strengthen, to spiritualize, and to sanctify the soul of the people”—and if the government cannot do all of these things, what then? Is it not certain that after every government failure—which, alas! is more than probable—there will be an equally inevitable revolution?

Politics and Economics

[Now let us return to a subject that was briefly discussed in the opening pages of this thesis: the relationship of economics and of politics—political economy.[\[17\]](#)]

A science of economics must be developed before a science of politics can be logically formulated. Essentially, economics is the science of determining whether the interests of human beings are harmonious or antagonistic. This must be known before a science of politics can be formulated to determine the proper functions of government.

Immediately following the development of a science of economics, and at the very beginning of the formulation of a science of politics, this all-

important question must be answered: What is law? What ought it to be? What is its scope; its limits? Logically, at what point do the just powers of the legislator stop?

I do not hesitate to answer: *Law is the common force organized to act as an obstacle to injustice.* In short, *law is justice.*

Proper Legislative Functions

It is not true that the legislator has absolute power over our persons and property. The existence of persons and property preceded the existence of the legislator, and his function is only to guarantee their safety.

It is not true that the function of law is to regulate our consciences, our ideas, our wills, our education, our opinions, our work, our trade, our talents, or our pleasures. The function of law is to protect the free exercise of these rights, and to prevent any person from interfering with the free exercise of these same rights by any other person.

Since law necessarily requires the support of force, its lawful domain is only in the areas where the use of force is necessary. This is justice.

Every individual has the right to use force for lawful self-defense. It is for this reason that the collective force—which is only the organized combination of the individual forces—may lawfully be used for the same purpose; and it cannot be used legitimately for any other purpose.

Law is solely the organization of the individual right of self-defense which existed before law was formalized. Law is justice.

Law and Charity Are Not the Same

The mission of the law is *not* to oppress persons and plunder them of their property, even though the law may be acting in a philanthropic spirit. Its mission is to protect persons and property.

Furthermore, it must not be said that the law may be philanthropic if, in the process, it refrains from oppressing persons and plundering them of their property; this would be a contradiction. The law cannot avoid having an effect upon persons and property; and if the law acts in any manner except to protect them, its actions then necessarily violate the liberty of persons and their right to own property.

The law is justice—simple and clear, precise and bounded. Every eye can see it, and every mind can grasp it; for justice is measurable, immutable, and unchangeable. Justice is neither more than this nor less than this.

If you exceed this proper limit—if you attempt to make the law religious, fraternal, equalizing, philanthropic, industrial, literary, or artistic—you will then be lost in an uncharted territory, in vagueness and uncertainty, in a forced utopia or, even worse, in a multitude of utopias, each striving to seize the law and impose it upon you. This is true because fraternity and philanthropy, unlike justice, do not have precise limits. Once started, where will you stop? And where will the law stop itself?

The High Road to Communism

Mr. de Saint-Cricq would extend his philanthropy only to some of the industrial groups; he would demand that the law *control the consumers to benefit the producers*.

Mr. Considerant would sponsor the cause of the labor groups; he would use the law to secure for them *a guaranteed minimum of clothing, housing, food, and all other necessities of life*.

Mr. Louis Blanc would say—and with reason—that these minimum guarantees are merely the beginning of complete fraternity; he would say that the law should give tools of production and free education to all working people.

Another person would observe that this arrangement would still leave room for inequality; he would claim that the law should give to everyone—even in the most inaccessible hamlet—luxury, literature, and art.

All of these proposals are the high road to communism; legislation will then be—in fact, it already is—the battlefield for the fantasies and greed of everyone.

The Basis for Stable Government

Law is justice. In this proposition a simple and enduring government can be conceived. And I defy anyone to say how even the thought of revolution, of

insurrection, of the slightest uprising could arise against a government whose organized force was confined only to suppressing injustice.

Under such a regime, there would be the most prosperity—and it would be the most equally distributed. As for the sufferings that are inseparable from humanity, none would even think of blaming the government for them. This is true because, if the force of government were limited to suppressing injustice, then government would be as innocent of these sufferings as it is now innocent of changes in the temperature.

As proof of this statement, consider this question: Have the people ever been known to rise against the Court of Appeals, or mob a Justice of the Peace, in order to get higher wages, free credit, tools of production, favorable tariffs, or government-created jobs? Everyone knows perfectly well that such matters are not within the jurisdiction of the Court of Appeals or a Justice of the Peace. And if government were limited to its proper functions, everyone would soon learn that these matters are not within the jurisdiction of the law itself.

But make the laws upon the principle of fraternity—proclaim that all good, and all bad, stem from the law; that the law is responsible for all individual misfortunes and all social inequalities—then the door is open to an endless succession of complaints, irritations, troubles, and revolutions.

Justice Means Equal Rights

Law is justice. And it would indeed be strange if law could properly be anything else! Is not justice right? Are not rights equal? By what right does the law force me to conform to the social plans of Mr. Mimerel, Mr. de Melun, Mr. Thiers, or Mr. Louis Blanc? If the law has a moral right to do this, why does it not, then, force these gentlemen to submit to *my plans*? Is it logical to suppose that nature has not given me sufficient imagination to dream up a utopia also? Should the law choose one fantasy among many, and put the organized force of government at its service only?

Law is justice. And let it not be said—as it continually is said—that under this concept, the law would be atheistic, individualistic, and heartless; that it would make mankind in its own image. This is an absurd conclusion, worthy only of those worshippers of government who believe that the law *is* mankind.

Nonsense! Do those worshippers of government believe that free persons will cease to act? Does it follow that if we receive no energy from the law, we shall receive no energy at all? Does it follow that if the law is restricted to the function of protecting the free use of our faculties, we will be unable to use our faculties? Suppose that the law does not force us to follow certain forms of religion, or systems of association, or methods of education, or regulations of labor, or regulations of trade, or plans for charity; does it then follow that we shall eagerly plunge into atheism, hermitary, ignorance, misery, and greed? If we are free, does it follow that we shall no longer recognize the power and goodness of God? Does it follow that we shall then cease to associate with each other, to help each other, to love and succor our unfortunate brothers, to study the secrets of nature, and to strive to improve ourselves to the best of our abilities?

The Path to Dignity and Progress

Law is Justice. And it is under the law of justice—under the reign of right; under the influence of liberty, safety, stability, and responsibility—that every person will attain his real worth and the true dignity of his being. It is only under this law of justice that mankind will achieve slowly, no doubt, but certainly—God’s design for the orderly and peaceful progress of humanity.

It seems to me that this is theoretically right, for whatever the question under discussion—whether religious, philosophical, political, or economic; whether it concerns prosperity, morality, equality, right, justice, progress, responsibility, cooperation, property, labor, trade, capital, wages, taxes, population, finance, or government—at whatever point on the scientific horizon I begin my researches, I invariably reach this one conclusion: The solution to the problems of human relationships is to be found in liberty.

Proof of an Idea

And does not experience prove this? Look at the entire world. Which countries contain the most peaceful, the most moral, and the happiest people? Those people are found in the countries where the law least interferes with private affairs; where government is least felt; where the

individual has the greatest scope, and free opinion the greatest influence; where administrative powers are fewest and simplest; where taxes are lightest and most nearly equal, and popular discontent the least excited and the least justifiable; where individuals and groups most actively assume their responsibilities, and, consequently, where the morals of admittedly imperfect human beings are constantly improving; where trade, assemblies, and associations are the least restricted; where labor, capital, and populations suffer the fewest forced displacements; where mankind most nearly follows its own natural inclinations; where the inventions of men are most nearly in harmony with the laws of God; in short, the happiest, most moral, and most peaceful people are those who most nearly follow this principle: Although mankind is not perfect, still, all hope rests upon the free and voluntary actions of persons within the limits of right; law or force is to be used for nothing except the administration of universal justice.

The Desire to Rule over Others

This must be said: There are too many “great” men in the world—legislators, organizers, do-gooders, leaders of the people, fathers of nations, and so on, and so on. Too many persons place themselves above mankind; they make a career of organizing it, patronizing it, and ruling it.

Now someone will say: “You yourself are doing this very thing.”

True. But it must be admitted that I act in an entirely different sense; if I have joined the ranks of the reformers, it is solely for the purpose of persuading them to leave people alone. I do not look upon people as Vancauson looked upon his automaton. Rather, just as the physiologist accepts the human body as it is, so do I accept people as they are. I desire only to study and admire.

My attitude toward all other persons is well illustrated by this story from a celebrated traveler: He arrived one day in the midst of a tribe of savages, where a child had just been born. A crowd of soothsayers, magicians, and quacks—armed with rings, hooks, and cords—surrounded it. One said: “This child will never smell the perfume of a peace-pipe unless I stretch his nostrils.” Another said: “He will never be able to hear unless I draw his ear-lobes down to his shoulders.” A third said: “He will never see the sunshine unless I slant his eyes.” Another said: “He will never stand

upright unless I bend his legs.” A fifth said: “He will never learn to think unless I flatten his skull.”

“Stop,” cried the traveler. “What God does is well done. Do not claim to know more than He. God has given organs to this frail creature; let them develop and grow strong by exercise, use, experience, and liberty.”

Let Us Now Try Liberty

God has given to men all that is necessary for them to accomplish their destinies. He has provided a social form as well as a human form. And these social organs of persons are so constituted that they will develop themselves harmoniously in the clean air of liberty. Away, then, with quacks and organizers! Away with their rings, chains, hooks, and pincers! Away with their artificial systems! Away with the whims of governmental administrators, their socialized projects, their centralization, their tariffs, their government schools, their state religions, their free credit, their bank monopolies, their regulations, their restrictions, their equalization by taxation, and their pious moralizations!

And now that the legislators and do-gooders have so futilely inflicted so many systems upon society, may they finally end where they should have begun: May they reject all systems, and try liberty; for liberty is an acknowledgment of faith in God and His works.

[10] General Council of Manufacturers, Agriculture, and Commerce, May 6, 1850.

[11] Translator’s note: At the time this was written, Mr. Bastiat knew that he was dying of tuberculosis. Within a year, he was dead.

[12] Translator’s note: The French word used by Mr. Bastiat is spoliation.

[13] If the special privilege of government protection against competition—a monopoly—were granted only to one group in France, the iron workers, for instance, this act would so obviously be legal plunder that it could not last for long. It is for this reason that we see all the protected trades combined into a common cause. They even organize themselves in such a

manner as to appear to represent all persons who labor. Instinctively, they feel that legal plunder is concealed by generalizing it.

[14] Translator's note: What was then known as Paraguay was a much larger area than it is today. It was colonized by the Jesuits who settled the Indians into villages, and generally saved them from further brutalities by the avid conquerors.

[15] Translator's note: According to Rousseau, the existence of social man is partial in the sense that he is henceforth merely a part of society. Knowing himself as such—and thinking and feeling from the point of view of the whole—he thereby becomes moral.

[16] At this point in the original French text, Mr. Bastiat pauses and speaks thusly to all do-gooders and would-be rulers of mankind: “Ah, you miserable creatures! You who think that you are so great! You who judge humanity to be so small! You who wish to reform everything! Why don't you reform yourselves? That task would be sufficient enough.”

[17] Translator's note: Mr. Bastiat has devoted three other books and several articles to the development of the ideas contained in the three sentences of the following paragraph.

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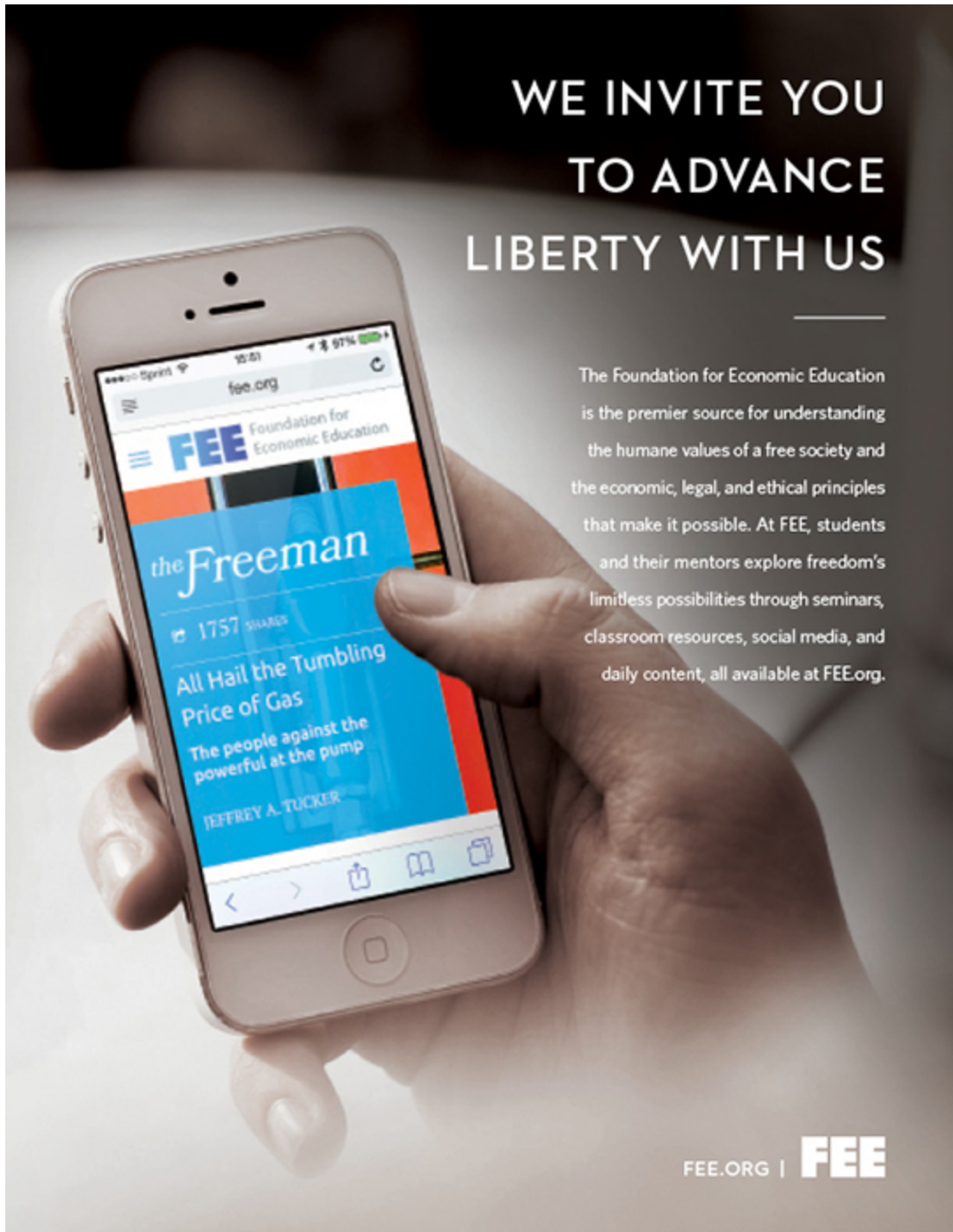
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