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REPUBLIC

This form of government is no more independent than the monarchical of the historical, geographical, ethnographical, and, above all, moral conditions, which seem to predestine a people to one or the other, by not leaving it the liberty of choice between them except within rather restricted limits. From this point of view, all abstract comparison of the intrinsic merits of monarchies and republics might seem superfluous, and there would be occasion to ask one's self whether the platonic love of a monarchy in countries with republican manners and customs, or of the republican enthusiasm which possesses some young minds or some generous imaginations in countries called by their inmost nature and their past to hereditary monarchy, are not chimeras which should be dispelled, and dangers which we should endeavor to avert.

—Without contesting whatever truth there may be in such a conclusion, we think that the forms of government may and should be compared with each other and considered in themselves, and that it is the task of the publicist, all due reservation being made in consideration of what is possible in time and place, to investigate their value, and to point out that which constitutes their merits and their defects. Thus the publicist, the least likely to be misled by deceptive appearances, and the most determined to settle, in the choice of his political opinions, upon what he judges to be actually practicable, will not scorn the enthusiasm which a republic awakens in noble minds, and he will examine whether it does not partake of an ideal beauty for which he should have some regard both as one of the elements of the judgment which he passes on the republic, and of the influence which it exercises. He will thus discover that elevated thought, lofty and powerful sentiments, are connected with the idea of a republic. In monarchies the devotion of man to man occupies a large place, and far be it from us to deny what it presents of the touching, and sometimes of the heroic, or to question what it has in it compatible with a love of the public welfare; but it is less pure and less sublime than that devotion which is directed to something superior to man himself, that is, to the fatherland, to the law, to the state. All selfish prejudice, all personal calculation, every fancy foreign to the general interest, seems to disappear in this generous sacrifice of each to all, and of the littleness of the individual to the greatness of justice. To the idea of devotedness, to that of an entirely stoical disinterestedness, is added another idea not less severe, and more attractive because it is more natural, that of equality united to liberty. Equality is to such an extent the passion of republican minds that the most aristocratic republics are no exception to it; only the practice and the worship of equality are concentrated within a limited circle, instead of extending to all the citizens. It is to equality that all, in a republican aristocracy, sacrifice themselves; it is to it that they do not hesitate to sacrifice the most illustrious heads; it is equality which impels, in spite of himself, in a manner, a Brutus to arm himself against a Cæsar. This shows us the nature and the end of the republic; it is a government founded upon general interest and equality, the motive power of which are disinterestedness, devotedness, and, let us add, popularity, with the honors which it confers. If all think they find their advantage in this form of government, it is on the supreme condition of defending, at the cost of the greatest struggles, a good, precious from the double point of view of individual dignity and of utility. This is why the most generous dreamers as well as the most rigorous logicians come, by some sort of instinct, to the idea of a republic. This is why it has produced so many virtues, of the sublimest kind, offered by history to the admiration of future generations.

—But what constitutes the greatness of this form of government is also the source of its difficulties and dangers, which no clearsighted republican can deny. Equality, which is the soul of republics, encounters two formidable enemies: ambition, which conspires against it, and envy, which exaggerates it. The former can not be resigned to accept the yoke of a law, the same for all; the latter rebels against the superiority of fortune and of merit; it tries to level the one, and devotes itself to railing at the other. Taxation directed against the rich, schemes of agrarian law, privileges in favor of the poor, suspicions of the well-to-do and enlightened part of the population—all these spring up in republics. "For," says the old publicist, Jean Bodin, with a severity which is not exaggerated if applied to the past, "the real natural disposition of a people is to have full liberty without any restraint or curb whatever, to have all equal in goods, in honors, in punishments, in rewards, without any regard to rank, or knowledge, or virtue." Who does not know that, up to the present time, great citizens in republics have always had to defend themselves (and sometimes without success) against calumny? If favor has its vicissitudes in a monarchy, how few reputations in republics withstand the exercise of power for however short a time. To what contumely in the most irreproachable of republics. the United States, so often cited as a model, were their Washingtons, Hamiltons and Madisons not exposed? What accusations against their generals in the ancient republics of Greece! What terrible changes of popularity and what bloody sacrifices to that capricious power, in the short and stormy attempt at a republic made by France in 1793; The moderate republic of 1848 did not sully herself with blood; she spilt it only in the arena of civil war, when that of the best citizens flowed voluntarily in the service of public order. But did any one's popularity last longer than three months? Was this the fault solely of the men who governed? Be that as it may, there is not a historian, not an enlightened publicist, who has not declared that jealousy, suspicion, and the spirit of change, are the especial dangers of republics, as favoritism and intrigue are those of monarchies. But the first-named vices are those of the majority; the second belong to only a small number. Thence comes the expression which is never applied to a monarchy, that a people is not ripe for a republic. In fact, equality requires customs and manners, a character and an education suited to it. The same may be said of liberty which every republic proclaims as being of its very essence, and without which there would be no equality but the sad and shameful equality of servitude. No doubt a form of government which constantly involves individual responsibility, and often subjects it to severe tests, presents especial difficulties. To govern one's self and to take part in public affairs, an amount of intelligence and a mixture of firmness and moderation are needed which are not everywhere distributed in sufficient quantity to establish a regular and stable state of affairs. Number being, in the name of equality, one of the essential elements of republican institutions, if the corrupt, the incapable, those who are easily reduced and led away, get the ascendency, all is lost. There must then be either anarchy or a master; there is no middle path. These are so fully understood to be the dangers of a republic that there is no republican constitution which does not undertake, to a greater or less degree, to foresee and in some measure guard against them. But republican constitutions do not always do this sufficiently, or else they are themselves but powerless dikes, swept away by the impetuous current of human passions.

—It is of the essence of a democratic republic to fill by election a portion of the offices which monarchy fills by hereditary transmission. It is reason alone which is regarded as governing in a republic. Now, reason excludes chance and those artificial privileges instituted in the interest of conservation. Monarchies, even constitutional monarchies, are full of fictions and conventions. A republic judges them unworthy of men arrived at political maturity, and useless to preserve society from revolution. Consequently it eliminates them, being replete with confidence in the upright will and enlightened capacity of the people. If this confidence is justified, the republican

form is maintained and prospers. If not, the republican form is impaired and destroyed, either by slow dissolution or by a violent downfall.

—Says Montesquieu, "Government is like all other things in the world: to preserve it, it must be loved. No one has ever heard it said that kings do not love monarchy, or that despots hate despotism." A republic can be no exception; to establish it in a country, it does not suffice that a minority desire it, or even wish to impose it; there must be a nation of republicans as willing to receive it as capable of upholding it.

—It has been sometimes said that the difficulty consists in reconciling a monarchy with liberty and a republic with order. There would be at least as much truth in the reverse proposition. A non-absolute monarchy, giving satisfaction by lifelong and hereditary power to the want of conservation, is less fearful of liberty, if liberty enters into and keeps its pledge to respect the royal establishment. That establishment has no interest to threaten liberty; it has, on the contrary, every interest to take care of it. This care is the price of the force of public opinion which sustains it. In republics, liberty, recognized as sovereign in principle, runs serious risks. The power, under the form which best represents order in the eyes of the nation, is temporary. Hence the necessity of arming it in an exceptional way, or of arming one's self against its possible encroachments, or by precautions which are embarrassing to all. The majority oppresses the minority, or else the minority governs through terror. If we can not see in this a fatal and inevitable law, it has at least been, up to the present time, the history of the greater number of republics. Another cause threatens liberty: its own excesses. Too frequently have we seen republics knowing no alternative but excessive or suspended liberty. Happy were they when this suspension of liberty did not end in its suppression, and when temporary dictatorships were not changed into a lasting tyranny!

—The error of the greater part of the republican schools has until now consisted in believing that a republic had not to solve the problem of equilibrium; that it is a government of absolute simplicity, and has no need of being tempered. This thought has led some to the idea of a direct government of the people, excluding even a representative government; an idea which caused the author of L' Esprit des lois to say: "There was one great defect in most of the ancient republics; that in them the people believed they had the right to make active resolutions requiring some sort of execution, a thing of which the people is utterly incapable. The people should not enter into the government except to choose their representatives, which is quite within their power. For, if there are but few people who know the precise degree of men's capacity each one is nevertheless capable of knowing in general if the one whom he choose is more enlightened than most others." The same opinion as to absolute simplicity has led other politicians to the idea of a civic assembly. Experience, as well as reason, teaches that republics can not, save at the risk of death, abandon themselves to the descending plane or declivity of a civic principle or element. There is no society which does not contain natural aristocracies of experience, learning, age, etc., within it. And, on the other hand, there is no society, however strongly organized its privileges may be, in which the masses are not important, and do not count for something in the state. Notwithstanding their inclination to exaggerate simplicity and to crush out whatever obstructed the full expansion of their principle, the constitutions of antiquity felt this. Aristocratic as was the Roman republic, it modified the power of the senate by means of the tribunes and popular suffrage. Democratic as was Athens, it had the Areopagus. It is true that the wise precautions taken by Solon did not prevent the country of Aristides and Socrates from succumbing to the propensities which hurried it on. The more and more exclusive predominance of the popular element produced disorders there, the undying remembrance of which is preserved by history, as a lesson to democracies, present or future, which choose not to recognize any restraint.

—The United States itself has endeavored to combine the different powers in such a manner as to secure respect for the law against the changeable will of the multitude. The president possesses extensive powers, and, in spite of pure ultra-republican theory, there is a moderating senate side by side with the popular assembly, or house of representatives. Any constitution, monarchical, republican, aristocratic or democratic, which does not distrust its own principle, at the same time that it does all it can to establish it on a solid basis, is a bad constitution.

—The excessively unitarian and centralizing propensities which govern in some countries, make this observation especially opportune. A republic which should have only a very centralized power, with no independent powers to act as a counterpoise, would run the risk of becoming more oppressive than a monarchy. If to this cause of oppression should be added the necessity of being on the defensive in order to resist either hostile parties within, or menaces from without, it is clear that liberty would be exposed to painful disappointment. Every liberal republic involves a certain amount of administration. What were the republics of Greece and the Italian republics of the middle ages? Brilliant municipalities. American federalism is not necessarily the form of a free republic, but a certain amount of decentralization seems to us to be an indispensable condition for such a republic. A free republic can be understood only where much is left to individuals and to associations. Otherwise, what result would have been obtained by so many revolutions? A change of name! But of what consequence is it to the world whether an omnipotent government call itself a monarchy or a republic?

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