

**CONFESSIONS**  
OF A  
**REVOLUTIONARY**  
TO SERVE  
THE HISTORY OF THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION.

*Levabo ad coelum manum meam, and dicam:  
Vivo ego in aeternum.*

I will raise my hand to the sky, and I will say:  
My Idea is immortal.

*Deuteronomy , XXXII, 40.*

**I.**  
**CONFITEOR.**

Let the kings unite from one end of Europe to the other against the nations;

May the Vicar of Jesus Christ launch an anathema at liberty;

Let the republicans fall crushed under the walls of their cities:

The Republic remains the ideal of societies, and outraged liberty soon reappears, like the sun after the eclipse.

Yes, we are defeated and humiliated; yes, thanks to our lack of discipline, our revolutionary incapacity, we are all dispersed, imprisoned, disarmed, mute. The fate of European democracy has fallen from our civic hands into those of the praetorians.

But is the war of Rome more just and more constitutional?

But are Italy, Hungary, and Poland, because they protest in silence, erased from the catalog of nations?

But, socialist democrats, have we ceased to be the party of the future, a party that today accounts for half of France?

But you, desolate bourgeois, who are constantly irritated against us, and whose ruin is consummated by our disaster, are you more dynastic, more Jesuit, more Cossack?...

For four months I have been watching them in their triumph, these charlatans of family and property; I follow them with my eyes in the staggering of their drunkenness; and with each gesture, each word that escapes them, I say to myself: They are lost!

Do not doubt it, friends: if the Revolution has been constantly postponed since February, it is because the education of our young democracy required it. We were not ripe for freedom; we were looking for it where it is not, where it can never be. Let us know how to understand it now, and, by the fact of our intellection, it will exist.

Republicans, do you want to shorten your ordeal, take up the helm again, soon become the arbiters of the world again? I only ask you to no longer touch, until further notice, the Revolution. You do not know it: study it. Leave it to Providence alone: never, by the council of mortals, was it on a better path. Stay still, whatever happens; collect yourselves in your faith, and look, with the smile of the soldier assured of victory, on your haughty victors.

The fools! They mourn what they have done for thirty years for liberty! They ask forgiveness from God and men for having fought corruption for eighteen years! We have seen the Head of State exclaim, beating his chest: *Peccavi!* Let him abdicate, then, if he has so much regret for the five and a half million votes that the Republic won him! Does he not know that *satisfaction*, as well as *firm intention*, is an essential part of PENITENCE?

Since everyone confesses, and since the breaking of our presses did not put the seal on our writing desks, I too want to speak to my fellow citizens in the bitterness of my soul. Hear the revelation of a man who was sometimes wrong, but was always faithful. Let my voice rise to you, like the confession of the condemned, like the conscience of the prison.

France was given as an example to the nations. In her abasement, as in her glories, she is still the queen of the world. If she rises, the peoples rise with her; if she goes down, they sink. No liberty can be conquered without her; no conspiracy of despotism will prevail against her. Let us therefore study the causes of our greatness and our decline, so that we may be firm in our resolutions in the future, and let the peoples, sure of our support, form with us, without fear, the holy alliance of Liberty and Equality.

I will seek the causes that have brought among us the misfortunes of democracy, which prevent us from realizing the promises that we had made for it. And, since the citizen is always the more or less complete expression of the thought of the parties, since circumstances have made me, puny and unknown, one of the originals of the democratic and social Revolution, I will say, without concealing anything, what ideas have guided my conduct, what hopes have sustained my courage. By making my confession, I will make that of all democracy. Schemers, enemies of any society that does not pay for their vices, of any morality that condemns their licentiousness, have accused us of anarchy and atheism; others, with their hands full of plunder, said we preached theft. I will compare our faith, the democratic and social faith, with that of these men of God; and we will see on which side is the true spirit of order and religion, on which side hypocrisy and revolt. I

will recall what we tried to do for the emancipation of the workers; and we will see on which side are the parasites and the looters. I will say, as far as I am concerned, the reasons for the policy that I would have preferred, if it had been given to me to make one prevail; I will lay out the reasons for all my acts; I will confess my faults; and if any lively word, if any outlandish thought escapes my burning pen, forgive me, O my brothers, as a humiliated sinner. Here, I neither urge nor advise, I make before you my examination of conscience. May it give to you, as to myself, the secret of your miseries and the hope of a better future!

## II

### PROFESSION OF FAITH.

#### NATURE AND DESTINATION OF THE PARTIES.

The believer says: The judgments of God are inscrutable. A sacrilegious philosophy, applying its wavering logic to events, can alone undertake, in its indomitable pride, to make them intelligible. Why, you say, these revolutions, with their deviations and their returns, their catastrophes and their crimes? Why these terrible crises, which seem to announce to societies their last hour; these tremors among the peoples, these great desolations of history? Listen to Bossuet, listen to all those whom faith bends under its salutary yoke; they will answer you that the views of Providence are inaccessible to the prudence of man, and that everything happens for the greater glory of God, *ad majorem Dei gloriam!*

Less modest than faith, philosophy tries to give some sense to the things of this world; it assigns them motives and causes; and when theology, its sovereign, is silent, the audacious follower speaks. Where supernatural revelation ends, rational revelation begins.

First of all, what is religion? Religion is the eternal love that delights souls beyond the sensible, and which maintains in societies an unalterable youth. It is not for her to give us science: dogma in religion only serves to extinguish charity. Why would so-called theologians want to turn the purest part of our consciousness into a phantasm of mysteries?...

God is the universal force, imbued with intelligence, that produces, by an endless information of itself, beings of all kingdoms, from the imponderable fluid to man, and which, in man alone, manages to know itself and to say *Me!* Far from being our master, God is the object of our study: the more we study him, the more, depending on the side from which we consider him, the nature of the attributes we attribute to him, he seems to

approach or move away from us, to such an extent that the essence of God can be considered either as the essence of man or as his antagonist.

How did the thaumaturges make of him a fixed and personal being, sometimes absolute king, like the god of the Jews and Christians, sometimes constitutional sovereign like that of the deists, whose incomprehensible Providence is only occupied, by its precepts as by its acts, with baffling our reason?

What is this order of *salvation*, which has nothing in common with the order of the *century*; this *spirituality* that annuls all other interest, this contemplation that debases all ideals, this so-called inspired science against all science? What do they want from us, with their dogmas without intelligible basis, with their symbols without a positive object, with their rites devoid of human significance? Either Catholicism is the allegory of society, or it is nothing. Now, the time has come when allegory must give way to reality, when theology is impiety and faith sacrilege. A God who governs and who cannot be explained, is a God whom I deny, whom I hate above all else...

Do you believe, when I ask him this question:

“How does it come about, O my God, that society is divided into hostile, intolerant fractions, each obstinate in its error, implacable in its revenge? Where is the necessity for the march of the world and the progress of civilization, that men hate each other and tear each other apart? What Destiny, what Satan has willed, for the order of cities and the improvement of individuals, that they could not think and act freely side by side, love each other when necessary, and, in any case, let each other in peace?”

And let this God, through the mouth of his ministers, cause me to hear this impious word:

"Man! Do you not see that your race is fallen, and your soul delivered from creation to infernal powers? Justice and peace are not of the place where you live. The Sovereign Arbiter, in expiation of the original defilement, delivered the humans to their own quarrels. Does the vase have the right to say to the potter: why did you make me like this?"

Do you believe, I say, that my heart is resigned and that my reason considers itself satisfied?

Let us respect, if you will, the secret of God; let us bow our will before his indisputable decrees. But since he has delivered the world and ourselves to our enterprising curiosity, he no doubt allows us to dispute even the origin and the cause of our disputes, should this controversy make us one day as learned as he. So let's argue; and may it please the bottomless and endless Being that we had never done anything else! Man would long have

been masters of the earth, and we, socialist democrats, would not have, from February 24, 1848 to June 13, 1849, ceaselessly abandoned the prey for the shadow.

As for me, I do not shrink from any investigation. And if the Supreme Revealer refuses to instruct me, I will instruct myself; I will descend into the depths of my soul; I will eat, like my father, the sacred fruit of science; and when in misfortune I should be mistaken, I would at least have the merit of my audacity, while *He* would not have the excuse of his silence.

Abandoned to my own lights, I seek to recognize myself on this terrain bristling with politics and history; and here is what at first glance I think I first understand.

Society, like Time, comes to mind in two dimensions, the *past* and the *future*. — The *present* is the imaginary line which separates them from each other, as the equator divides the globe into two hemispheres.

The past and the future, here are the two poles of the humanitarian current: the first, generator of the second; the second, a logical and necessary complement to the first.

Let us embrace in thought, in the same contemplation, the two dimensions of history; the whole together will form the *Social System*, complete, without solution of continuity, identical to itself in all its parts, and in which anomalies and accidents will serve to better bring out the historical thought, the order.

Thus the social system, in its truth and its entirety, cannot exist on such a day and in such a part of the globe. It can only be revealed to us at the end of time; it will only be known to the last mortal. For us, who hold the middle of the generations, we can represent it only on more and more approximate conjectures; the only thing that has devolved to us, in this philosophy of progressive humanity, is, according to the sound understanding of our past, to constantly prepare our future. Our fathers transmitted to us from Society a particular form; we will transmit another to our nephews. There our science ends, if it is one; there the exercise of our liberty is reduced. It is therefore on ourselves that we must act, if we wish to influence the destiny of the world;

Now, since humanity is progressive, and acts only on memories and forecasts, it is naturally divided into two great classes: one that, more affected by the experience of the ancients, is reluctant to walk forward into the uncertainties of the unknown; the other that, impatient with the present evil, inclines more to reform. To take equal account, either of traditions or of hypotheses, and to advance with a certain step in the road of progress, is something impossible to the reason of the first ages, which is naturally exclusive. We would not be men if from the outset we judged things with that simultaneity of apperception that is characteristic of science. The first condition of our

education, therefore, is discord. Now, since we already see the cause of our discussions, we can legitimately hope, without exorcism and without magic, to banish discord from our midst. Does Faith, when it mixed with reason, offer us a principle as simple as this?

Let us get down to business.

The party of the past, depending on whether we consider it in the order of religious, political, or economic facts, is called *Catholicism, Legitimacy, Property*. The generalization of these three terms is *Absolutism*.

All that we can do, all that we want, all that we are, from whatever point of view we place ourselves, derives, either as filiation or as opposition, from this past, that is, from feudal or patrimonial property, from royalty, from Catholicism.

We are no longer today what we were yesterday, precisely because we have been it; we will one day cease to be what we are, precisely because we are it.

But how is this evolution accomplished?

Catholicism, in order to emerge from the chaotic state and rise to unity, tends to rationalize itself more and more. By this rationalism it corrupts itself, it loses its mystical character, and becomes a philosophy of nature and of humanity. — The privileges of the Gallican Church in the Middle Ages, the influence of the Reformation in the sixteenth century; the apologetic works of Fénelon, Bossuet, Fleury, etc., etc., in the seventeenth century; the encyclopedist movement of the eighteenth century; the tolerance, or to put it better, the legal and constitutional indifference of the nineteenth century, express so many different phases of Catholicism.

On the other hand, royalty, absolute at its origin like the paternal power of which it is the increment, needs, as it extends its domain, to organize it, and this organization, which is nothing other than the application to politics of the principle of the division of labor, inevitably leads royalty to democracy. — The emancipation of the communes; the successive encroachments of royalty under Louis XI, Richelieu and Louis XIV; the constitutions of 1790, of the year ii, of the year iii, of the year viii, of 1814 and of 1830; the new constitution of 1848, are the manifestations, in the political order, of the revolutionary work.

Finally, property, by heredity, by equality of division, by mutations, by mortgages, by the division of labor, by circulation and by a host of other causes, also tends to change in nature and of form: economists all know this. — The abolition of masterships, mortmain, feudal rights, etc.; the sale, in the name of the State, of the property of the clergy; equality before the tax, have made property undergo, for sixty years, modifications that, for being less sensible, are no less profound and real.

Moreover, these three parallel movements, the Catholic movement, the monarchical movement, and the economic movement, express, as has been said, only one and the same thing, the conversion of the *absolutist* idea into its contrary, namely, the *democratic* and *social* idea. — Considered philosophically, royalty by divine right is an emanation of Catholicism, formed by the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal; property is an emanation of royalty, by the feudal institution. Socialism, or social democracy, the last term of Catholicism, is therefore also the last form of royalty and property. Socialism is the product of Catholicism and at the same time its adversary, both a child of Christ and an Anti-Christ. Faith will not agree, no doubt: it is enough for us that philosophy, that history, give evidence of it.

Catholicism, royalty, property, in a word, absolutism, therefore express for us the historical and social *past*; the socialist-democracy expresses the *future* .

As absolutism was, at another time, the legal and normal state of society, socialism aspires to become also the legal and normal state of this society.

As long as the two opposite terms of the movement, or the parties that represent them, do not understand each other, they will make war on each other; they will say to themselves, like Ajax to Ulysses: *Move me or I'll move you!* The day when their mutual recognition will take place, they will soon identify and merge.

Catholicism posed the problem: socialism claims to solve it. The first provided the symbolism of humanity; the second to give its exegesis. This evolution is inevitable, fatal.

But, as we have said, the revolutions of humanity are not accomplished with this philosophical placidity; the people receive science only reluctantly; and then, isn't humanity free? There arises therefore, with each attempt at progress, a storm of contradictions, oppositions and struggles that, under the impulse of a divine fury, instead of being resolved amicably by compromises, end in catastrophes.

It results from these agitations and tuggings that society does not traverse the series of its destinies on a regular plan and by a straight path; it deviates sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, as if attracted and repelled by contrary forces; and it is these oscillations, combined with the attacks of socialism and the resistances of absolutism, that produce the ups and downs of the social drama.

Thus, while the direct movement of society gives rise to two contrary parties, absolutism and socialism, the oscillatory movement produces in its turn two other parties, hostile to each other and to the two others, which I will call, from their historical names, the first, *juste-milieu* or *doctrinairism*, the second, *demagogy*, *Jacobinism* or *radicalism*.

The *juste-milieu*, happy medium, known to philosophers as eclecticism, comes from this selfish and lazy disposition of spirit, which prefers impossible accommodations to

straightforward solutions; which accepts religion, but made for its convenience; which wants philosophy, but with reservations; which supports monarchy, but complacent, democracy, but submissive; which proclaims freedom of trade, but covering itself with protections; which would arrange for free circulation and credit, but by stipulating an interest for its capital; which, finally, makes wisdom consist in keeping the balance as equal, as much as possible, between authority and freedom, the *status quo* and progress, private interest and general interest; without ever understanding that authority inevitably engenders liberty, that philosophy is the inevitable product of religion, that monarchy is continually transformed into democracy, and, consequently, that the last term of progress is that where, through the succession of reforms, individual interest is identical to the general interest, and freedom is synonymous with order.

Demagogy, so known in France for 60 years under the name of Jacobinism, is the happy medium disguised under a mask of violence and revolutionary affectations. Jacobinism is after places, not institutions; it accuses men, not principles, endeavoring to change names without touching ideas and things. Thus, while it presents kings and priests as tyrants and impostors, moderates as mystifiers and ambitious, it is careful to make every reservation for the maintenance of the authority it covets, and of the prejudice that it hopes to use. The *anarchists* and freethinkers are its greatest enemies. Robespierre sending to the scaffold at the same time the partisans of the old regime, the defenders of the Constitution, Hébert, Leclerc, Jacques Roux, Anacharsis Clootz, Danton and his friends, is the incarnation of Jacobinism.

The happy medium is the hypocrisy of conservation;

Demagogy is the hypocrisy of progress.

The happy medium is addressed by preference to the bourgeoisie, hostile to the nobility and the clergy, whose immobility it reproaches and of whose prerogatives it is jealous, but which rejects radical tendencies and stiffens against the egalitarian conclusions of progress.

Jacobinism better suits the multitude, more irritable than enlightened, for whom revolutions are hardly anything more than dismissals.

Thus demagogy and the happy medium are opposed to each other, as absolutism and socialism are opposed to each other: these four parties form, if I may say so, the four cardinal points of history. A necessary result of our perfectibility, they are contemporaneous in society as in reason, and indestructible. Under a thousand different names, Greek and barbarian, citizen and slave, Spartan and Helot, patrician and proletarian, Guelf and Ghibelline, cleric and layman, noble and serf, bourgeois and journeyman, capitalist and worker, you will find them, in all centuries and among all



peoples. All have had their crimes and their follies, as they have their share of truth and their usefulness in humanitarian evolution. Instigators of opinion, agents and moderators of progress, they personify in themselves the faculties of the collective being,

Absolutism is distinguished above all by its force of inertia: what is true about it is its spirit of conservation, without which progress itself, lacking a basis, would be but an empty word. This is why the absolutist party is also called the *conservative* party .

What distinguishes the happy medium, or doctrinairism, is a character of sophistry and arbitrariness: its true idea is that it is up to society to govern itself, to be its providence and its God. The law, for the doctrinaire, is the pure product of governmental thought, and therefore eminently *subjective* .

Jacobinism is recognized by its philosophical nullity and the emptiness of its speech. Addressing itself less to the reason of the people than to its passions, it agitates them, but it does not know how to make them act. But this very agitation is the useful side of Jacobinism: where the people fall into indifference, society is near perishing.

Socialism conceives the social order as the result of a positive and *objective* science; but, like all scientific development, it is liable to take its hypotheses for realities, its utopias for institutions.

Absolutism, strong in its priority, I almost said its birthright, but duped by its principle, the whole efficacy of which is to abrogate itself, always in the work of restoration, only serves to fuel revolutions; — the happy medium strives to stop the revolutionary chariot, and only succeeds in speeding it up; — Jacobinism claims to accelerate the movement and makes it react; — socialism, doing violence to traditions, often ends up excommunicating itself from society.

Moreover, it is with political parties as with systems of philosophy. They engender and contradict each other reciprocally, like all extreme terms, arouse each other, exclude each other, sometimes seem to die out only to reappear at long intervals. Any man who reasons and seeks to account for his opinions, whether in politics or in philosophy, immediately classifies himself, by the mere fact of the judgment he expresses, in any party or system whatsoever: he alone who does not think belongs to no party, no philosophy, no religion. And such is precisely the habitual state of the masses, who, apart from times of agitation, seem completely indifferent to political and religious speculations. But this calm, this superficial ataraxia of the people is not sterile. It is the people who, spontaneous creations, modify, reform and absorb the projects of politicians and the doctrines of philosophers, and who, constantly creating a new reality, incessantly change the basis of politics and philosophy.

Absolutism, dominant in France until the end of the last century, has been in continuous decline ever since; — doctrinairism, manifested with a certain brilliance following the revolution of July, passed away with the reign of eighteen years. As for Jacobinism and socialism, the first, warmed up by the revolutionary novelists, reappeared in February, to repress the revolution in the days of March 17, April 16, May 15, and sink into that of June 15; — the second, after dragging out its mystical existence for twenty years, is very close to dissolving. At the time of writing, there are no longer any parties in France; there remains, under the banner of the Republic, only a coalition of ruined bourgeois against a coalition of starving proletarians. Common misery will have produced what general reason could not do:

What I have just said of the parties that fundamentally divide all society is still only a definition: Well! That's already the whole story. It is the very philosophy of progress, the death of social mysticism, *finis theologiæ!* Let the skeptic and the visionary argue endlessly about the value and legitimacy of human reason, what does their doubt matter if reason fatefully imposes its formulas on us? What does it matter to us to know that we might not be men? It is the privilege of reason, it is its misery, if you will, to reduce to simple and lucid ideas the most gigantic, the most confused phenomena of civilization and nature. Just as the greatest rivers are but streams at their source, so, for the reason of the philosopher, the most terrible revolutions depend on naively simple causes. Faith does not teach us to judge things with this vulgar discernment: it is because faith, like God from whom it is a gift, does not reason.

The determination that I have just made of parties, of their principles and their tendencies, is true, because it is necessary and universal, common to all centuries and to all peoples, whatever the variety of parties, their origins, their interests, their goal: it is true, because it cannot not be true.

It is the expression of the most general aspects of the history and the primitive attractions of society. Society, a living and perfectible being, which develops over time, contrary to God, whom we assume to be immobile in eternity, necessarily has two poles, one that looks at the past, the other turned towards the future. In society, where ideas and opinions are divided and ranked like temperaments and interests, there are therefore also two main parties: the absolutist party, which strives to preserve and reconstruct the past, and the socialist party, which tends incessantly to free and produce the future.

But society, by virtue of the analytical reason with which man is endowed, oscillates and deviates continually to the right and to the left of the line of progress, following the diversity of the passions that serve as its motors. There are therefore also, between the

two extreme parties, two middle parties, in parliamentary terms, a center right and a center left, which incessantly push or keep the Revolution out of their way.

All of this is almost mathematically obvious, experimentally certain. Such is the exactness of this topography, that it suffices to glance at it to immediately have the key to all the evolutions and retrogradations of humanity.

### III.

#### NATURE AND DESTINATION OF GOVERNMENT.

It is necessary, says Holy Scripture, that there be parties: *Oportet hæreses esse*. — A terrible *It is necessary!* exclaims Bossuet in deep adoration, without daring to seek the reason for this *It is necessary!*

A little reflection has revealed to us the principle and meaning of the parties: it is a matter of knowing their aim and end.

All men are equal and free: society, by nature and destination, is therefore autonomous, as it were ungovernable. The sphere of activity of each citizen being determined by the natural division of labor and by his choice of profession, social functions so combined as to produce a harmonious effect, order results from the free action of all; there is no government. Whoever lays hands on me to govern me is a usurper and a tyrant; I declare him my enemy.

But social physiology does not at first include this egalitarian organization: the idea of Providence, which appears among the first ideas in society, rejects it. Equality comes to us by a succession of tyrannies and governments, in which Liberty is continually grappling with absolutism, as Israel grappled with Jehovah. Equality therefore arises continually for us from inequality; Liberty has as its point of departure Government

When the first men gathered at the edge of the forest to found society, they did not say to each other, as the shareholders of a limited partnership would: Let us organize our rights and our duties, so as to produce for each and for all the greatest sum of well-being, and at the same time bring about our equality and our independence. So much reason was beyond the reach of the first men, and in contradiction with the theory of the revelators. We had a completely different language: Let us constitute in our midst an AUTHORITY that watches over and governs us, *Constituamus super nos regem!* This is how our peasants understood it, on December 10, 1848, when they gave their votes to Louis

Bonaparte. The voice of the people is the voice of the power, until it becomes the voice of liberty. So all authority is by divine right: *Omnis potestas à Deo*, says Saint Paul.

Authority, then, was the first social idea of the human race.

And the second was to labor immediately for the abolition of authority, each wanting to make it serve as an instrument of his own liberty against the liberty of others: such is the destiny, such is the work of parties.

Authority was no sooner inaugurated in the world than it became the object of universal competition. Authority, Government, Power, State — these words all designate the same thing — everyone sees in them the means of oppressing and exploiting his fellows. Absolutists, doctrinaires, demagogues and socialists incessantly turned their gaze towards authority, as towards their unique pole.

Hence this aphorism of the Jacobin party, which the doctrinaires and the absolutists would certainly not disavow: *The social revolution is the goal; political revolution* (i.e. the displacement of authority) *is the means*. Which means: Give us the right of life and death over your persons and your property, and we will set you free!.... Kings and priests have been telling us this for more than six thousand years!

Thus, the Government and the Parties are reciprocally to on another Cause, End and Means. Their destiny is common: it is to call peoples to emancipation every day; is to energetically solicit their initiative by the hindrance of their faculties; it is to mold their minds and continually push them towards progress by prejudice, by restrictions, by a calculated resistance to all their ideas, to all their needs. You shall not do this; you will abstain from that: the Government, whatever party reigns, has never known how to say anything else. Since Eden, PROHIBITION has been the education system of the human race. But once man has reached the age of majority, the Government and the Parties must disappear. This conclusion arrives here with the same rigor of logic, with the same necessity of tendency as we have seen in socialism emerging from absolutism, philosophy born from religion, equality arising from inequality itself.

When, by philosophical analysis, we want to realize authority, its principle, its forms, its effects, we soon recognize that the constitution of authority, spiritual and temporal, is nothing other than a preparatory organism, essentially parasitic and corruptible, incapable by itself of producing anything, whatever its form, whatever its idea it represents, but tyranny and misery. Philosophy therefore affirms, contrary to faith, that the constitution of an authority over the people is only a transitional establishment; that power, not being a conclusion of science, but a product of spontaneity, vanishes as soon as it is discussed; that, far from becoming stronger and growing with time, as the rival parties who besiege it suppose, it must be reduced indefinitely and absorbed into industrial organization; that

consequently it should not be placed over, but under society; and, turning round the aphorism of the Jacobins, it concludes: *Political revolution*, that is to say, the abolition of authority among men, *is the end; social revolution is the means*.

This is why, adds the philosopher, all parties, without exception, as they affect the power, are varieties of absolutism, and why there will be freedom for citizens, order for societies, union among workers, only when the renunciation of authority will have replaced faith in authority in the political catechism.

*No more Parties;*

*No more authority;*

*Absolute freedom of man and citizen;*

In three phrases, this is our profession of political and social faith.

It is in this spirit of governmental negation that we said one day to a man of rare intelligence, but who had the weakness to want to be a minister:

“Conspire with us to tear down the government. Become a revolutionary for the transformation of Europe and the world, and remain a journalist.” (*Représentant du peuple*, June 5, 1848).

We were told:

“There are two ways of being revolutionary: *from above*, which is revolution by initiative, by intelligence, by progress, by ideas; — *from below*, which is revolution by insurrection, by force, by despair, by paving-stones.

I was, I still am a revolutionary *from above*; I have never been, I will never be a revolutionary *from below*.

So don't count on me ever to conspire for the demolition of any government, my mind would refuse to do so. It is accessible only to one thought: to improve the government. (*La Presse*, June 6, 1848.)

There is in this distinction: *from above, from below*, much clutter and very little truth. M. de Girardin, in expressing himself in this way, thought he was saying something as new as it was profound: he was only reproducing the eternal illusion of the demagogues who, thinking, with the help of the power, to advance the revolutions, have never known how to make them retreat. Let us examine closely the thought of M. de Girardin.

It pleases this ingenious publicist to call revolution by initiative, by intelligence, progress and ideas, *revolution from above*; he likes to call revolution by insurrection and despair, *revolution from below*, but it is just the opposite that is true.

*From above*, in the mind of the author whom I quote, obviously signifies the power; *from below*, means the people. On the one hand the action of the government; on the other the initiative of the masses.

It is therefore a question of knowing which of these two initiatives, that of the government or that of the people, is the more intelligent, the more progressive, the more peaceful.

Now, revolution from above is inevitably, and I will explain the reason for this later, revolution by the good pleasure of the prince, by the arbitrariness of a minister, by the trial and error of an assembly, by the violence of a club; it is revolution through dictatorship and despotism.

Thus it was practiced by Louis XIV, Robespierre, Napoleon, Charles X; so will it be practiced by MM. Guizot, Louis Blanc, Léon Faucher. The whites, the blues, the reds are all in agreement on this point.

Revolution through the initiative of the masses is the revolution through the concert of the citizens, through the experience of the workers, through the progress and the diffusion of knowledge, revolution through liberty. Condorcet, Turgot, Danton, sought revolution from below, true democracy. One of the men who revolutionized the most, and who governed the least, was Saint Louis. France, in the time of Saint Louis, had made herself; she had produced, as a vine grows her buds, her lords and her vassals: when the king published his famous regulations, he was only the recorder of public wishes.

Socialism has given way completely to the illusion of Jacobinism; the divine Plato, more than two thousand years ago, was a sad example. Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet, Louis Blanc, all partisans of the organization of labor by the State, by capital, by some authority, call, like M. de Girardin, for revolution *from above*. Instead of teaching the people to organize themselves, appealing to their experience and their reason, they ask them for power! How do they differ from despots? So they are utopians like all despots: these go away, those cannot take root.

It implies that the government can never be revolutionary, for the very simple reason that it is government. Society alone, the mass imbued with intelligence, can revolutionize itself, because it alone can rationally deploy its spontaneity, analyze, explain the mystery of its destiny and its origin, change its faith and its philosophy; because alone, finally, it is able to fight against its author, and to produce its fruit. Governments are the scourges of God, established to *discipline* the world; and you want them to destroy themselves, to create freedom, to make revolutions!

It cannot be so. All revolutions, from the coronation of the first king to the declaration of the rights of man, have been accomplished by the spontaneity of the people; if sometimes the rulers have followed the popular initiative, it has been as if forced and constrained. Almost always they prevented, compressed, struck; never, of their own accord, have they revolutionized anything. Their role is not to procure progress, but to

retain it. Even when, as they are loathe to do, they would have revolutionary science, social science, they could not apply it, and they would not have the right to do so. They would first have to pass their science on to the people, so they obtain the consent of the citizens, which is to misunderstand the nature of authority and power.

The facts here confirm the theory. The freest nations are those where the power has the least initiative, where its role is the most restricted: let us cite only the United States of America, Switzerland, England, Holland. On the contrary, the most enslaved nations are those where the power is the best organized and the strongest: witness our own. And yet, we constantly complain that we are not governed; we ask for a strong power, ever stronger!

The Church used to say, speaking like a tender mother: Everything for the people, but everything by the priests.

The monarchy came after the Church: Everything for the people, but everything by the prince.

The doctrinaires: Everything for the people, but everything by the bourgeoisie.

The Jacobins did not change the principle for having changed the formula: Everything for the people, but everything by the State.

It is still the same governmentalism, the same communism.

Who, then, will finally dare to say: Everything for the people, and everything by the people, even the government? — Everything for the people: Agriculture, commerce, industry, philosophy, religion, police, etc. Everything by the people: government and religion, as well as agriculture and commerce. Democracy is the abolition of all powers, spiritual and temporal; legislative, executive, judicial, proprietary. It is not the Bible, no doubt, that reveals it to us; it is the logic of societies, it is the sequence of revolutionary acts, it is all of modern philosophy.

According to M. de Lamartine, in agreement with M. de Genoude, it is up to the government to say: *I want*. The country has only to respond: *I agree*.

But the experience of centuries tells them that the best government is the one that best manages to render itself useless. Do we need parasites in order to labor and priests in order to talk to God? We have no more need of elected officials to govern us.

The exploitation of man by man, someone said, is theft. Well! The government of man by man is servitude; and all positive religion, leading to the dogma of papal infallibility, is itself nothing other than the worship of man by man, idolatry.

Absolutism, establishing at once the power of the altar, of the throne and of the strongbox, has multiplied, like a web, the chains over humanity. After the exploitation of

man by man, after the government of man by man, after the worship of man by man, we still have:

The judgment of man by man,  
The condemnation of man by man,  
And, to end the series, the punishment of man by man!

These religious, political, judicial institutions, of which we are so proud, which we must respect, which must be obeyed, until, through the process of time, they wither and fall, as the fruit falls in its season, are the instruments of our apprenticeship, visible signs of the government of instinct over humanity, weakened but not disfigured remnants of the bloodthirsty customs that signaled our earliest age. Anthropophagy disappeared a long time ago, but not without resistance from the authority, however, with its atrocious rites. It persists everywhere in the spirit of our institutions. I attest to this in the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Penal Code.

Philosophical reason repudiates this savage symbolism; it proscribes these exaggerated forms of *human respect*. And yet it does not intend, with the Jacobins and the doctrinaires, that one can proceed to this reform by legislative authority; it does not admit that anyone has the right to procure the good of the people in spite of the people, that it is lawful to set free a nation that wishes to be governed. Philosophy gives its confidence only to reforms arising from the free will of societies. The only revolutions it avows are those that proceed from the initiative of the masses: it denies, in the most absolute way, the revolutionary competence of governments.

In summary:

If we only question faith, the split in society appears as the terrible effect of the original decline of man. This is what Greek mythology expressed through the fable of the warriors born from the teeth of the serpent, who all killed each other after their birth. God, according to this myth, has left the government of humanity in the hands of antagonistic parties, so that discord may establish its reign on earth, and so that man may learn, under perpetual tyranny, to turn his thoughts towards another resting place.

Before reason, governments and parties are only the staging of the fundamental concepts of society, a realization of abstractions, a metaphysical pantomime, the meaning of which is LIBERTY.

This double definition of government and parties constitutes our profession of political faith. You know, reader, the allegorical characters who, in this account, will fill the leading roles; you know what the subject of the performance is: now pay attention to what I am about to tell you.

[working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]