

# The Confessions of a Revolutionary

P.-J. Proudhon

[working translations by Shawn P. Wilbur]

XXI.

JULY 8.

CONCLUSION .

And now, reader, of whatever opinion you were, if the facts that I have reported are true, and you cannot doubt them; — if the meaning that I assign to them is faithful, and it suffices, to assure you of this, to relate them to their causes and to compare them with each other; — if, finally, their evolution is providential and fatal, two terms that, applied to humanity, have exactly the same meaning; and you only need, to see the necessity of this evolution, to take it at its starting point, which is the very Reason of man: if, I say, you are allowed to believe your eyes, your memory, your judgment, consider where the February Revolution has led us in twenty months.

The July Monarchy, after having effected the dissolution of all the old principles, had left behind it a double work to accomplish. It was, on the one hand, the dissolution of parties, a consequence of the dissolution of ideas; on the other, the destitution of power, reduced by the successive elimination of all its principles to the *caput mortuum* of authority, to brute force.

On June 13, 1849, Jacobinism, resurrected in 1830 with the appearance of a monarchy that was itself only restoring the revolutionary idea of 1789, fell first, never to rise again. Last expression of the governmental democracy, agitator without goal, figure of ambition without intelligence, violence without heroism, not having four men and having no system, it perished, like doctrinairism, its precursor and its antagonist, of consumption and inanity.

At the same time, mystical, theogonic and transcendental socialism vanished like a ghost, giving way to social, traditional, practical and positive philosophy. The day when

Louis Blanc asked for his ministry of progress, and proposed to transfer and move the whole country; when Considerant solicited the advance of four million and a square league of land to build his model commune, when Cabet, leaving France like a cursed land, abandoning his school and his memory to his slanderers, went, if I dare say to use such an expression, to *faire pieds-neufs* in the United States; when Pierre Leroux, finally, since he insists on what I call him, formulating his Trinitarian constitution, wanted to bring ancient superstitions into modern Reason: on that day the governmental, phalansterian utopia, Icarian and Saint-Simonian utopia judged itself. It abdicated.

With this socialism, absolutism is also on the eve of disappearing. Forced to its last entrenchments by its indefatigable opponent, absolutism betrayed itself: it revealed to the world all the hatred it contained for liberty. By dint of retrograding into tradition, like socialism by dint of rushing into utopia, it has banished itself from the present, it has cut itself off from historical and social truth.

There are no more parties endowed with life force in French society; and, until new principles emerge from the inexhaustible fund of human practice; until other interests, other mores, a new philosophy, transforming the old world without breaking with it, and regenerating it, have opened up new outlets to Opinion, revealed other hypotheses, there will not exist parties among us. The first idea lacking, the diversity of opinions, flowing from this idea, is impossible.

For the same reason, there is no more government, there never will be. As there is no fact in the world that does not have a cause, so there is no principle or idea that remains without expression. The government, no longer having either an opinion or a party that it represents, expressing nothing, is nothing.

The men whom we see at this moment still carrying the banner of the parties, soliciting and galvanizing the power, pulling the Revolution right and left, are not the living: they are dead. They neither govern nor oppose the government: they celebrate, with a dance of gestures, their own funerals.

The Socialists, who, not daring to seize power when power was at its most audacious, wasted three months in club intrigues, in the gossip of cliques and sects, in wild demonstrations; who later tried to give themselves an official consecration, by having the right to work written into the Constitution, without indicating the means of guaranteeing it; who, not knowing what to do, still stir people's minds with ridiculous projects without good faith: would these socialists claim to govern the world? They are dead; they have, as the peasant says, swallowed their tongues. Let them sleep their sleep, and wait, in order to reappear, for a science, which is not theirs, to call them.

And the Jacobins, democrat-governmentalists, who, after spending eighteen years in conspiracies without studying a single problem of social economy, exercised dictatorship for four months and reaped no other fruit than a series of reactionary agitations, followed by a terrible civil war; who, at the last moment, always talking about liberty, always dreaming of dictatorship: would it be doing them an injury to say of them that they also are dead, and that the seal is on their tomb? When the people have remade a philosophy and a faith; when society knows where it comes from and where it is going, what it can do and what it wants, then only then can the demagogues return, not to govern the people, but to excite them again.

The Doctrinaires are also dead; the men of the insipid middle ground, the partisans of the so-called constitutional regime breathed their last at the session of October 20, after having, in that of April 16, had a republican assembly decree the experiment of a doctrinaire papacy. They still govern us! Their proofs are made. In politics, as in philosophy, there are not two ways of practicing eclecticism: the Charter of 1830 and the acts of Louis Bonaparte's government have exhausted the fecundity of the happy medium.

The absolutist party, finally, the first in logic and in history, will soon expire following the others, in the convulsions of its bloody and liberticidal agony. After the victories of Radetzki, Oudinot, and Haynau, the principle of authority, spiritual as well as temporal, is destroyed. It is no longer government that absolutism makes; it is assassination. What weighs on Europe at this moment is only the shadow of tyranny: soon there will rise, to set only with the last man, the Sun of Liberty. Like Christ, eighteen centuries ago, Liberty triumphs, she reigns, she governs. Her name is in every mouth, her faith in every heart. For absolutism to ever rise again, it is no longer enough for it to reduce men, it must also, as Montalembert wants, wage war on ideas. To lose souls with bodies, that is the meaning of the expedition of Rome, that is the spirit of the ecclesiastical government, to which the secular arm has come, but too late for their common salvation.

It is this confusion of parties, this death of power, that Louis Bonaparte has revealed to us. And, just like the high priest among the Jews, Louis Bonaparte was a prophet: *France elected me*, he said, *because I don't belong to any party!* Yes, France elected him, because she no longer wants to be governed. To make a man you need a body and a soul; likewise, to form a government, a party and a principle are necessary. Now, there are no longer either parties or principles: it is the end of the government.

This is what the people of February themselves denounced, when, uniting two denominations into one, they ordered, with their sovereign authority, the fusion of the two parties that expressed in a more specific way the movement and the revolutionary tendency, which they named the *democratic and social Republic*.

Now if, according to the wishes of the people, democracy of every shade and socialism of every school should disappear and become one, absolutism and constitutionalism should equally disappear and become one. This is what the organs of socialist democracy expressed when they said that there were only two parties left in France, the party of *Labor* and the party of *Capital*, a definition that was accepted immediately by the two reactionary parties, and served for all France as a watchword for the elections of May 13<sup>th</sup>.

The London refugees have acted on the same thought, when they made known their intention not to appear before the High Court. On June 13, one of the great revolutionary steps had been taken. The power had fallen with the last party that still had some vigor: what was the use of coming to give an account, before the new France, of the demonstrations of another time? The London declaration is the resignation of the Jacobin party. Shadows fighting against shadows for a shadow of authority! There you have, Ledru-Rollin and his friends have understood perfectly, all that the Versailles trial would have been through their presence. Let us beware, republicans, while making retrospective agitation, to still make counter-revolution!

And since I must give an account here of my least words, it is still the same idea, the same need for political and social transformation, that motivated my conduct during the last elections (July 1849).

I declined the candidacy that was offered to me, because the list on which my name appeared was no longer relevant to the situation; because the spirit that had dictated this list tended to perpetuate the old classifications, whereas it was necessary to protest against them; because the democratic routine, the old Jacobinism, of which the people have been the dupe and the victim for sixty years, having consummated its long suicide on June 13, I did not want to resuscitate it.

In agreement with my companions in captivity, I proposed a list, which, discarding the considerations of persons, taking no account of the nuances of opinions, faithful to the policy of fusion proclaimed by the people, even the day after February, better expressed, in my opinion, the thought of republican France and the need of the moment. Published on Tuesday, this list could, if desired, have rallied the whole democracy. It was reproached for arriving too late. The demagogic tail was still writhing; my advice was out of season. Summoned to withdraw *my* list, — I say mine, because it was attributed to me, although I was only its editor — in order, it was said, not to divide the votes of the *party*, I refused. I no longer recognized the *party*; I did not want it to live longer. My conduct towards the *party* was, on this occasion, the same as on December 10<sup>th</sup>. I protested against the general

error, so that the downfall would not be general, so that the Socialist Democracy, opening its ranks, might become, without inconsistency, the party of LIBERTY .

No, I did not want to promote the success of those who, from February 25, 1848 to June 13, 1849, never ceased to sacrifice the Revolution to their exclusive passions; who have constantly misunderstood its character; who were the first to react against it; who, by occupying themselves with the government for themselves, had ended, like those of 93, by forgetting both liberty and the people.

I didn't want to make the power last any longer through the parties, or the parties through the power. In this respect, the result of the demonstration of June 13, however outrageous it seemed to me to the Constitution and to liberty, served the Revolution too well for me to want to destroy it on July 8.

I refused to contribute to a monarchical restoration, preserving for the monarchy a *raison d'être* in Jacobinism. My readers must now be sufficiently enlightened on the workings of societies to know that one idea never works alone, and that one opposite always calls for another.

I have not consented to make myself the instrument of a coterie that, having been able on May 13, June 13, July 8, with a little conciliation, to rally to the socialist democracy all the republican nuances and become the expression of the country, preferred to remain a faction; which, taking its candidates for machines, its allies for dupes, its selfishness as its only rule, when the tribune assured the victory to its representatives, forced them again, out of impatience with the legality and mistrust of their patriotism, to take to the streets and commit suicide.

I admit, moreover, so that people know me and spare me useless calumnies in the future, that I do not have a character flexible enough, a spirit and a heart easy enough, to ever obey the orders of an occult power, to labor for the profit of my opponents, to devote myself to those who hate me, to bow before the dogmatism of a dozen fanatics, to become, I whom labor has endowed with some reason, the blind instrument of a thought that I distrust, and that only makes itself known through the revelations of the police.

I am of the party of Labor against the party of Capital; and I have labored all my life. Now, let it be well known: of all the parasites I know, the worst species is still the parasite that calls itself revolutionary.

I don't want to be either RULER or *Ruled!* Let those who, in connection with the July 8 elections, have accused me of *ambition, pride, indiscipline, venality, treason*, search their own hearts, and let them tell me if, when I attacked with such ardor the governmental reaction, when I solicited the initiative of the people, when I proposed the refusal of the tax, when I wanted to establish the socialist democracy in legality and constitutionality, it

was not by chance their ambition, their pride, their spirit of government, their economic utopias, against which I was waging war?...

Now, enough pain, enough ruin. We have wiped the slate clean of everything, parties and government. The legend is coming to an end: let the People open their eyes, they are free.

No power, divine or human, can stop the Revolution. What we have to do now is to no longer affirm it before the old world, and to inflame hearts for its holy cause. The people suffice for its propaganda. Our task, as publicists, is to preserve the Revolution from the perils with which its path is strewn, to direct it according to its eternal principle.

The perils that the Revolution runs, we know them now.

*Perils on the side of the power.* — The power, materialized by the very people who accused the new spirit of materialism, is no more than a word. Take away its bayonets, and you will know what I mean. Let us beware of bringing a soul into this corpse stirred by an infernal spirit. Let us not approach the vampire; he still thirsts for our blood. Let the exorcism of organized universal suffrage return it to its grave forever.

*Perils on the side of the parties.* — All the perils have remained behind the revolutionary idea; all have betrayed the people by affecting dictatorship; all have shown themselves to be resistant to liberty and progress. Let us not resuscitate them by rekindling their quarrels. Let us not let the people believe that it would be possible to assure them labor, well-being and liberty, if the government passed from the hand of this one to the hand of that one; if the right, after having oppressed the left, was in turn oppressed by it. As power is the instrument and the citadel of tyranny, the parties are its life and thought.

*Perils on the side of the reactions.* — In my life, I fought against a host of ideas: it was my right. I never did, I will never react against any. Philosophy and history prove that it is a thousand times easier, more human, more just, to convert ideas than to repress them. I will remain, whatever happens, faithful to these teachings. The Jesuits, the Janissaries of Catholicism, today the oppressors of the world, can fall when it pleases God: I will make no reaction to Catholicism. After the Jesuits, governmental and community democracy can give the world, if the world allows it, a last representation of authority: I will help it emerge from the chaos that it will have created for itself, I will labor to repair its ruins; I will make no reaction to communism.

The principle of the Revolution, we still know it, is Liberty.

LIBERTY! that is to say: — 1. political emancipation, by the organization of universal suffrage, by the independent centralization of social functions, by the perpetual, incessant

revision of the Constitution; — 2. industrial liberation, by the mutual guarantee of credit and outlet.

In other words:

No more government of man by man, by means of the accumulation of powers;

No more exploitation of man by man, through the accumulation of capital.

Liberty! This is the first and the last word of social philosophy. Is it strange that after so many oscillations and retreats along the rocky and complicated road of revolutions, we end up discovering that the remedy for so many miseries, the solution to so many problems, consists in giving freer rein to liberty, by lowering the barriers raised in front of it by public and proprietary AUTHORITY?

But what! It is in this way that humanity arrives at intelligence and at the realization of all its ideas.

Socialism appears: it evokes the fables of antiquity, the legends of barbarian peoples, all the daydreams of philosophers and revelators. It becomes Trinitarian, pantheistic, metamorphic, epicurean; it speaks of the body of God, of planetary generations, of unisexual loves, of phanerogamy, of omnigamy, of the community of children, gastrosophical diet, industrial harmonies, animal and plant analogies. It astonishes, it terrifies the world! So what does it want? What's is there? Nothing: it is the *product* that wants to make itself MONEY, the *Government* that tends to become ADMINISTRATION! This is the whole of reform.

What our generation lacks is neither a Mirabeau, nor a Robespierre, nor a Bonaparte: it is a Voltaire. We do not know how to appreciate anything with the gaze of an independent and mocking reason. Slaves to our opinions as well as our interests, by taking ourselves seriously, we become stupid. Science, the most precious fruit of which is to constantly add to freedom of thought, turns with us into pedantry; instead of emancipating intelligence, it dulls it. Entirely devoted to our loves and our hatreds, we do not laugh at others any more than at ourselves: by losing our spirit, we have lost our liberty.

Liberty produces everything in the world, everything, I say, even what it comes to destroy today, religions, governments, nobility, property.

Just as Reason, its sister, has no sooner constructed a system than it labors to extend and remake it; thus Liberty continually tends to convert its previous creations, to free itself from the organs it has given itself and to procure new ones, from which it will detach itself as the first, and which it will take in pity and aversion, until it has replaced them with others.

Liberty, like Reason, only exists and manifests itself through the incessant disdain of its own works; it perishes as soon as it worships itself. This is why irony has always been the characteristic of philosophical and liberal genius, the seal of the human spirit, the irresistible instrument of progress. Stationary peoples are all serious peoples: the man of the people who laughs is a thousand times closer to reason and to liberty, than the anchorite who prays or the philosopher who argues.

Irony, real liberty! It is you who deliver me from the ambition of power, from the servitude of parties, from the respect for routine, from the pedantry of science, from the admiration of great personages, from the mystifications of politics, from the fanaticism of reformers, from the superstition of this great universe and from the adoration of myself. You revealed yourself long ago to the Sage on the throne, when he cried out at the sight of this world where he appeared as a demigod: *Vanity of vanities!* You were the familiar demon of the Philosopher when he unmasked at the same time both the dogmatist and the sophist, the hypocrite and the atheist, and the epicurean and the cynic. You consoled the Just man, dying, when he prayed on the cross for his executioners: *Forgive them, O my Father, for they do not know what they are doing!*

Sweet irony! You alone are pure, chaste and discreet. You give grace to beauty and seasoning to love; you inspire charity through tolerance; you dissipate the homicidal prejudice; you teach modesty to the woman, audacity to the warrior, prudence to the statesman. You appease, with your smile, dissensions and civil wars; you make peace between brethren, you procure healing for the fanatic and the sectarian. You are mistress of Truth, you serve as a providence to Genius, and Virtue, O goddess, is still you.

Come, sovereign goddess: pour on my fellow citizens a ray of your light; kindle in their soul a spark of your spirit, so that my confession reconciles them, and so that this inevitable revolution is accomplished in serenity and in joy.

Sainte-Pélagie, October 1849.



## *POST SCRIPTUM.*

### **APOTHEOSIS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS.**

Two years ago I wrote the preceding pages: for the first time, at the request of the publisher, I have just reread them.

Apart from the stylistic corrections and clarifications that the observation of new facts must have suggested to me, but which in no way alter my first thought, I declare that I have nothing to retract, nothing to modify in the old text. All the assessments that I had made of men and things, events have confirmed them more and more: I only needed, in maintaining my conclusions, to point out here and there the reasons for them, and to reinforce the terms.

For two years the old parties, right and left, have been constantly discrediting each other,

The government to dissolve,

The Revolution to expand every day, as a direct result of the persecution.

Under its triple formula, Religion, State, Capital, the old society burns and is visibly consumed.

And what is strange in this universal dissolution is that the movement is accomplished, so to speak, by an occult pressure, outside of any human council, in spite of the energetic recall of the parties, and the protests from those who, until that moment, had prided themselves the most on the title of revolutionaries!...

A marvelous thing, the revolution is on the index of all opinions. Nobody admits it in its fullness. The democratic and socialist factions do not accept without reserve the rigorous proposals, any more than the absolutist and doctrinaire coteries. As soon as it arises in the truth and integrality of its nature, antithetical to all church, to all authority, to all capitalism, to every legal fiction, fear seizes intelligences: those who were once called radical and fanatical veil their faces, and one does not know who are the most hostile to it, the Jesuits or the Jacobins.

In fact, the revolution in the nineteenth century did not originate in the bosom of any sect; it is not the development of any speculative principle, the consecration of any corporate or class interest. The revolution is the inevitable synthesis of all previous movements, in religion, philosophy, politics, social economy, etc. It exists, like the elements it combines, by itself; it comes, to tell the truth, neither from *above* nor from *below*; it results from the exhaustion of principles, from the opposition of ideas, from the

conflict of interests, from the contradictions of politics, from the antagonism of prejudices, from everything that, in a word, seems most capable of giving the idea of moral and intellectual chaos. True spontaneous generation, a product of the dejection of the centuries, which everyone feels coming, but which no one affirms; which, by the very fact that that presents itself as a conciliation of opposites, a balance of forces, a union of interests, sees itself rejected by all, and already orphaned from birth, can apply the words of the Psalmist: *My father and my mother have forsaken me: but the Eternal has taken me under his protection!*

Yes, a God protects the new revolution. But which God? The heroism of the people? The devotion of the bourgeoisie? French fury? A sudden illumination of power? No. The power that presides over our destinies uses simpler means: you will see neither conversions nor miracles. The disappointment of politics, and the vanity of human wisdom! What ensures the triumph of the revolutionary cause is precisely what could be regarded as most capable of destroying it: the moderation proper to the French nation, the spirit of the happy medium that distinguishes it, the need for stability that is in it, the horror of agitation that it has always shown!...

This will doubtless appear, according to the disposition of the readers, paradoxical, contrary to the facts, flattering or derogatory to French self-esteem. Allow me therefore to give my thought some development. After having made my revolutionary confession, I may have acquired the right to make that of my country. I will not abuse the permission: *Turpitudinem patris tui et matris tuæ non revelabis!*

## I.

Historians have remarked on this, and this fact is one of the most interesting in the annals of humanity: for eighteen centuries, the Gallo-Frankish nation has almost constantly exercised a kind of moral dictatorship over the destinies of peoples and the march of civilization.

It was we who, first among the vanquished nations, caused the Roman domination to bend by wresting concession after concession from the Caesars, and forcing them to associate the Gallic nationality with the empire. After the fall of the empire and the seizure of the barbarians, it was in northern Gaul, on the Meuse and the Rhine, that the political center of the West was fixed. From Clovis to Louis-le-Débonnaire, the kingdom-empire of the Franks, always brought back to unity by the influence of the municipalities and the bishops, embraces the best part of Europe. It was in France that feudalism was

born, a preparatory regime; then, that she was attacked, and definitively vanquished. It was France that, through its kings Pepin and Charlemagne, brought about the Catholic centralization, necessary for the discipline of kings and peoples; who then, at the right time, pronounced through the mouth of Philippe-le-Bel the separation of Church and State, the condition of all progress, of all subsequent labor. It was France that gave the signal for the Crusades, and which, long after, under François I, preluded the regeneration of the Orient, by bringing the Turk into the European system. It was France, finally, that by its great revolution defeated absolute power, banished royalty from the peoples, and made civil liberty and equality before the law irrevocable. It is France today that assumes the responsibility and the initiative for a general overhaul of institutions, mores, ideas, fortunes, and which, in this painful elaboration of an unknown future, holds suspended the destinies of the human race.

Our part in the education of humanity is undoubtedly a fine one. We have given more than we have received: no people can claim over us the glory of having rendered more numerous and more signal services to progress.

Is it true, for that, as our mythologists and our flatterers say, that France received the high direction of humanity? That we are the chosen race, the evangelizing people par excellence, herald and monitor of revolutions?

Let's get rid of this *nationalism*, renewed by the Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Indians, Chinese, Mongols, of all peoples, civilized and barbarians, who played a role in history; nationalism whose ridicule we still share today with the Americans, the English, the Germans, the Slavs, the Magyars, and — what do I know? — the cossacks of the Don and the Black Sea. No, historically or providentially speaking, there is no precedence among peoples; and the proof is that there is no nation, however small, that in ancient ages or in modern times, had the right, at a given time, to regard itself as the focus of the movement and the pinnacle of society. If this messianic role, which so many races have in turn fulfilled, seems to fall to certain countries more often than to others, it is due solely to the necessities of circumstance and position, in which the national will and virtue cannot enter absolutely for nothing. I even dare to say that the involuntary and almost always unconscious determination of the initiating people is the surest guarantee of its infallibility, and the decisive reason for the assent of others. If the Romans, for example, subjugated the known world for a time, it was much less, as Montesquieu believed, by the power of their arms and the skill of their policy, than by the revolutionary law which demanded, for further progress, that vast centralization...

This is the case with the preponderance that the French nation has obtained on various occasions. This preponderance has always been the effect of a forced situation, in no way

of a mysterious vocation or of a special genius. Far from it, we can say that if, from the point of view that concerns us, we distinguish ourselves from other peoples, it is rather, as I was saying earlier, by our instinct for self-preservation, our deference to custom, our love of modest conditions, our antipathy to all that is exaggeration and affectation. In no country, as much as in France, does there reign respect for opinion, authority, custom, reason for habit. And I don't mean to make this a blame any more than a praise. No one can do violence to his inclination,

As in the events that are preparing, this love of average situations, peculiar to our country, is precisely what must, in the final analysis, be the force and ensure the success of the Revolution, we are going to study more closely that side of our character, which seems to me to have escaped observers up to now.

The French nation, although rebellious and restless, curious about novelties, incapable of exact discipline, rich in inventive minds and enterprising characters, is nonetheless, at bottom, and taken as a whole, the representative, in all things, of the middle ground and of stability. All qualities having their faults, this one also has its own, which I will not hide: in short, it attests to the loftiness and firmness of our judgment. It is the extreme liberty of our reason, not the inertia of our intelligence, that constantly brings us back to indifferentism, and deadens in us the passion that alone is capable of sustaining the will off the beaten track. Is this temperament, both restless and sheepish, this mood sarcastic and mobile, but soon returned, this sagacious, but skeptical and simple intelligence, not entirely revealed in the placidity, the regularity, the familiarity of our language?... To each idea that comes to us, to each proposal that is made to us, we end up, — all things considered, examined, criticized, — by responding: What's the point? What does it matter to us? Will we be better off? Will we be richer for it?... and a hundred other phrases that could be considered as rubrics of routine. Fatuity or reason, we find ourselves well: therefore, why torment ourselves and change? Let's stay at home! *Revenons à nos moutons!* Let's get back to business! It is our perpetual refrain.

All our faults, all our ridicule, as well as our defeats and our successes, come from this.

How often, as a result of this innate distrust of speculation and the unknown, have we failed in progress! In religion, we stubbornly rejected the Reformation: having already a Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, Gallican Church, what did it matter to us to add still more to these titles, *and reformed?* Would we be more advanced when we read the Bible in the vernacular? You might as well believe it as go and see it! And thereupon, without conviction or fervor, we keep our primogeniture in Catholicity.

In philosophy, we have abandoned Descartes, handed over to Germany the scepter of metaphysics. To the theory of ideas, we prefer, like M. Jourdain, common sense. If later

Mr. Cousin and his school obtain a moment of success, it is because they take care to call themselves *eclectics!*

..... A bit of everything:

Wine, love and play!

Such is our temperament; this is also our philosophy.

In politics, we have made a great revolution, it is true, but without foreseeing the consequences at all. What else are we doing, indeed, for 60 years, with our hermaphroditic systems of constitutional and parliamentary monarchy, than protesting against the irrevocable divorce of 89! Soon weary of the Greeks and the Romans, we did not even take the trouble to make ourselves a national constitution: we borrowed that of the English. After all, as much this one as any other. Does not the most profound study of political systems teach us today that all Constitutions, equally bad, are equally good?...

In the social economy, after having produced the so original, so innovative school of the physiocrats, we have fallen back, — *proh pudor!* — to Malthus. *Everyone at home, everyone for themselves! So much the worse for the clumsy ones who bear too many children to their wives!* Here, until further notice, is the summary of our morality and our science. Since Colbert, our trade, for a moment uplifted, fell in a continuous movement; and if, by the quantities exchanged, we still hold one of the first places, by the development of business and the consideration of peoples we are below our competitors. Ah! If the economic movement is really the character of the century, if it is through trade and industry that humanitarian unity must be constituted, it must be admitted that at this hour it is no longer France, it is England that is the great initiator of nations. Once, a great work is proposed to us, the French Company of the Mississippi, rival of the English Company of the Indies. It is a continent, the whole of North America, which offers itself to our industry and our language. But make French people take a colonial enterprise seriously! Let them live and die elsewhere than in the pentagon comprised between the Channel, the Ocean, the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean, the Alps and the Rhine! In Law's project, nobles and bourgeois have seen only an opportunity for speculation: a quarter of the habitable earth escapes our influence forever. After having wanted to seize everything, in Asia and America, we have, by dint of incapacity, lost everything. For twenty years, we have spent, in Algeria, two billion and two hundred thousand men, without having been able to take root. Our masterpieces shine in the crystal palace, but we don't know how to trade them; our mechanics and our engineers, despised by us, go abroad; our greatest enterprise, since the beginning of the century, is still the fortified belt of Paris; and when

the head of the city of London comes to visit our burgomasters, the only entertainment they know how to offer him is military maneuvers!...

Certainly superior intelligences are not lacking in our race, and Paris, the meeting place of exceptional individualities, is still the brain of the globe. But it is a question here of the people, of the French collectivity, and of its unitary action; and it is of this collectivity that one can say, without doing it any wrong, that despite the acts of universal interest that honor it, there is nowhere that innovation is more unwelcome, more refractory to progress.

Even in our boldness, we show ourselves mean and cowardly. How did the encyclopedic movement of the eighteenth century help us? The voluptuous incredulity of our philosophers amuses us, but does not prevent us, braggarts of impiety, from taking our passports at the last moment. Always confess, we don't know what can happen! This is our last word at the bed of the dying. Cowards before God, impertinent before men. In no country will you see so many strong minds boasting of priests and devotees, and keeping in the bottom of their hearts a serious fear of hell. It is here that we have told the best stories about the Eternal Father, so amusingly nicknamed *Monsieur de l'Etre* by Diderot, and that we have served him best. We produced *Pantagruel*, *Tartufe*, *Candide*, and the *Dieu des bonnes gens*; but the *A Kempis* is still for us the most beautiful book to come from the hand of men. We shouted with Voltaire, *Crush the infamous!* It was the sublime of impiety, and we seek emotions. But, by a shameful capitulation, which will no more save us from the eternal flames than from the jeers, we cling to the banal deism of Rousseau. An irresponsible God, who reigns and does not govern; about whom we said no harm, on condition that we could vilify his ministers and his cult with impunity; a good God for our catechisms, our novels and our harangues; a nanny, a servant to do everything: such is our conception of divinity; such is our faith. Our academics, playing on words like the sons of Escobar, believe, with this kitchen theology, to show proof of genius and audacity, and claim to be more religious, more Christian than the Pope. For the rest, it is out of tolerance, they say, (what greatness of soul!) and in order not to scandalize the weak, (what respect for consciences!) that they go to mass and frequent the sacraments. Ah! How well the Jesuits know us, and how right they are, while fortune authorizes them to do so, to give us the stirrup leathers!...

Where was the criticism of authority ever more lively, more malicious, than in this country of leagues, revolts, parliaments, cabals! But, like our unbelief, our opposition does not pass through consciousness; it stops at the surface of the mind. We alone could give the revolt this ferocious expression, of which there is no leader of brigands who dared to claim the idea:

And with the guts of the last priest  
Let's squeeze the neck of the last king.

Don't be scared though. These drinkers of monarchical blood, these eaters of sacerdotal guts are less wicked than artists, like schoolboys who sing obscene couplets and harden themselves against modesty, ready at forty to make the most stupid husbands in the world. What pleases them is the image: the execution would horrify them. What pain they had in condemning Louis XVI, a traitor to the country as king and as a man, and how much they wept for him! Constituted authority is the basis of their republicanism. It can be seen today that the democratic party, in prison, in exile, on the platform, retains only one concern, to protest, as in 93, in favor of order and government. As for liberty, which we put in all our programs, and which has no legend with us yet, we don't like it, as the little girls say, neither little, nor much, nor passionately, nor at all; we love it with esteem, moderately. Moderation, in matters of liberty, is our passion. License suits us better. Liberty, for us, is the chaste Virginia, whom we admire in the novel, in the theater! But the license is Lisette, who delights and intoxicates us in the garret.

Yes, we have, under Philippe-le-Bel, slapped the Papacy and decided its irrevocable fall. But this insolence, on our part without resentment, against the Holy See, had no other result than to make us Gallicans and Jansenists, the most silly of oppositions, the most inconsistent of middle ground!

Yes, we fought feudalism with Louis-le-Gros, Philippe-Auguste, Saint Louis, the Valois, Richelieu, and gave the signal for the emancipation of the communes. But this movement, imposed by the necessity of things, did not end with us, as in the United Provinces, in the Republic: it was equality in feudalism that our Third Estate demanded, not the abolition of feudalism itself.

Yes, in 89 we defeated the monarchy by divine right, and, pushed by circumstances, we regained for a moment the lead of civilization. But we stopped very quickly in constitutionalism; instead of putting an end to the Revolution through the organization of the industrial forces, we have put it aside by a vain patching-up of the political powers; the best of republics, after the Charter of 1814, was that of 1830; and the more the impulse acquired seemed to lead us to liberty, the more we regressed towards Government. On February 22 we rose en masse against royalty; on the 24<sup>th</sup> we began to wear mourning; we resemble the tyrant Periander, who after having killed his wife, suddenly changing his passion, satisfied his desires on the corpse.

This cowardice of character and of ideas, with which all our revolutionary boasting ends, was formulated in 1793 in Jacobinism, which became after 1814 doctrinairism:

ambiguously situated between authority and freedom, between monarchy and democracy, superficial philosophy and sentimental religiosity, which could be used *ad libitum* to motivate an insurrection and a *coup d'état*, a certificate of good citizenship and a title of proscription. This is why M. Royer-Collard, such a high intelligence, M. Cousin, M. Jouffroy, were only quasi-philosophers; M. Decaze, M. Guizot, M. Thiers, quasi-statesmen; MM. Considerant and Enfantin, quasi-reformers, like Petion and Robespierre had been only quasi-republicans.

Such is also the cause of the reverses that the Democracy has experienced for four years.

Why was the Democratic and Social Revolution unable to enter society and the power after the February Days, if it is not because the democratic party, then reigning, blocked the way to it; because the entire nation, led astray by this party, has begun to disavow the Revolution with all its consequences, near and far?

Why did the German emancipation, begun in the Parliament of Frankfurt, not come to fruition, if not because Germany believed in the French initiative; because it thought, on the strength of our examples, that the liberty of a great people could not be better guaranteed than by political centralization and a Constitution? The old Germanic despotism swept away this so-called unitary imbroglio; it did well. It is no longer in the nineteenth century that progress can be expressed by any constitutionality whatsoever, the so-called government of the middle classes, which until now has only been the government of mediocrities. Society is like poetry: mediocrity is fatal to it. The *continuous debasement*, so much reproached of Louis-Philippe, had no other cause than this phantasmagoria of government of the middle classes, serving to disguise the *prepotence* of undecided minds and mediocre men.

## II.

Will someone now ask me the cause of this innate love of the middle ground, of this cult of the happy medium and immobility, which manifests itself everywhere in our national tendencies, and makes us a conservative nation by temperament and by taste, revolutionary only by necessity and by exception?

I think I discover this cause in the organic and climatic conditions of our society, directed from time immemorial towards a kind of middle state, which betrays itself everywhere in our institutions and our habits. Let us indicate only:

1. The extreme division of properties and the multitude of small industries and small businesses, which, creating for each father of a family, farmer, shopkeeper, manufacturer,



an absorbing sphere of activity, makes us lose sight of the general action, and consequently the high initiative;

2. The municipal and departmental regime, the chambers of commerce, agricultural associations, etc., which, to the millions of domestic centers, add 50,000 centers of local and corporate interests, divide the action of the State *ad infinitum*, and, while living a life of their own, regulate their action by its own;

3. The 600,000 employees of the power and the municipalities, directly interested in the *status quo*, and compressing under their weight the explosive force of the country;

4. The ease, at least apparent, of realizing by labor and trade a small asset, which, in a temperate climate, in a fertile country, with habits taken from mediocre ease, suffices for the ambition of the great number;

5. The vinicultural production, which, by disposing the mind to gaiety, diverts it from dogmatism, chases away the seriousness of speculations, brings the carelessness of the masses, by making them, cheaply, satisfied with their lot.

France is the country of the *aurea mediocritas*, sung by utopians of all centuries. Ease of morals, security of life, equality and independence of fortunes, such is the dream of the French people. Also, despite all that has been written of their vanity and ambition, this conquering humor for which they are reproached is limited to remaining behind no other: with them the capital vice is not pride, it is envy. Is it astonishing that this people, enemy of all kinds of pomp, which always sees and believes itself so close to its ideal, shows itself indifferent to the ideas and inventions with which the innovative spirit overwhelms it, intractable to the reforms that it is offered; that it denigrates and thwarts everything that goes beyond acquired habits and established ideas; that it rises only for the defense of its small well-being, and that its constant tendency is to arrive, by the way, not the shortest, but the most united, at this balance of conditions that has been promised to it by middle-ground theorists, which is happiness for them?

All the times that the French nation has shown itself violent, either in reaction or in revolution, it has been solely because its well-being, as it is given to it to conceive and understand it, seemed to it compromised, sometimes by the policy of princes, sometimes by the fanaticism of parties and sects; it was because it felt the middle term, in interests, rights, ideas, slipping away from it. What, for example, made us repel the Huguenots so relentlessly and curse the League? Above all, the lack of warmth in matters of spirituality that makes all kinds of religionists odious to us, and which the vulgar translates as *the faith of the collier*. Then, if mistrust was great for the Huguenots, supported by the lords and suspected of feudal tendencies, it was no less for the leaguers, decried agents of ultramontane influence.... Who hurt us, exhausted in Louis XIV and Napoleon, disgusted

in Louis XVI, and later in Charles X and Louis-Philippe? Among the former, the exaggeration of authority, the abuse of dynastic and ultra-national wars; in others, the obstinate predilection for the aristocracy, mercantile or noble. Revolution has always arisen in France from the crumpled middle ground; and if for some years the popular masses are still agitated, if in the depths of our temperate society the revolutionary volcano rumbles and threatens a new eruption, it is because it is beginning to become manifest to all eyes that the middle class, which was to bring everything back to itself and become the common condition, is itself in danger; it is because with the ancient element of the Church, Capital and the State, the guarantee of labor and subsistence, liberty of conscience, the independence of industries, the modesty of fortunes, without which we cannot live, are decidedly unstable, impossible.

Thus, it is in order to save the material middle ground, the constant object of our efforts, that we are going to be forced to abandon the theoretical middle ground; it is to conquer and consolidate this gilded mediocrity, pledge of our political and religious indifference, that we must today take a decisive resolution against this carelessness of mind and conscience, which, under the name of eclecticism, *juste-milieu*, third party, etc., has hitherto obtained the privilege of our esteem. Bend your head, mocking Gaul; make yourself *extreme* in order to stay *average!* Remember that without the exactitude of principles, without the inflexibility of logic and the absolutism of doctrines, there is for a nation neither moderation, nor tolerance, nor equality, nor security.

Socialism, like all great ideas which, embracing the whole social order, can be considered from a multitude of different points of view, socialism is not only the extinction of misery, the abolition of capitalism and wage labor, the transformation of property, the decentralization of government, the organization of universal suffrage, the effective and direct sovereignty of the workers, the balance of economic forces, the substitution of the contractual regime for the legal regime, etc., etc. It is, in all the rigor of the terms, the constitution of mediocre fortunes, the universalization of the middle class. It is the application, in all its consequences, of the ancient axiom, *Suum quique*, to each his own, or as interpreted by the first socialist school, to each according to his capacity, to each capacity according to his works, which indicates a golden mean, natural and providential, in labors and rewards.

Who does not see that this need, which has become so poignant, for a balancing of economic forces and a more equitable distribution of the goods of nature and the products of industry is the result of the movement accomplished during the last 60 years?

The Constituent Assembly, by decreeing the sale of national property and the liberty of industry, by introducing into public right the principle of equality before the law, had

created, at least for a time, a certain equality in the fortunes. Under the Empire, the imperfection of the revolutionary work was barely perceptible: the distractions of glory left no time to reflect on the vices of public economy. But when the Restoration came to give impetus to the industrial faculties of the country, the capitalistic and agglomerative tendency was not long in revealing itself. It was then that the class of wage-earners, the proletariat, began to swell, at the same time as, on the basis of mercantile feudalism, landed feudalism, large property was being reformed. For anyone who has pondered the combined action of the banks, mortgages, industrial companies, to which must be added political centralization, which serves them as a coercive and penal sanction, it is obvious that the French nation is left defenseless, by law, to the exploitation of an oligarchy not foreseen by the revolutionaries of 89, which arose spontaneously from the misdirected interplay of economic forces. Let this regime, truly random, last another fifty years, and small industry, like small property, will be abolished little by little: there will only be an enormous mass of mercenaries, in the service of landlords, barons of the vine, rail, coal, iron, cotton, etc. Society will find itself divided into two castes, one of exploiters, the other of exploited: the entire middle class will have disappeared...

Will the nation accept, will it submit, contrary to its character and its tendencies, to the abnormal condition that the lack of foresight of its leaders prepares for it? Will it consent, for fear of communism, to return to the old feudal state? No, no. France does not want serfdom any more than it does communism: what she wants is a system of equilibrium in which each family is assured of obtaining, in return for work, a legitimate well-being. For everything else, complete liberty of opinion and ease of accommodation.

Already, some milestones have been laid on this line.

Thus, after rejecting the definition of property by Robespierre, which made it a concession of the State, we rejected in 1848 that of Roman right, which awarded it to the first occupant. For us, property comes neither from conquest nor from the State: it is the product of labor. In this respect, the Constitution of 1848 is diametrically opposed to the Civil Code: according to the latter, property deriving from quiritary right is the absolute right to use and abuse; according to this, property is no more than an attribution of the citizen, under the guarantee of labor and the ever-changing economic forces. Between these two definitions of property, there is infinity.

It is in the same spirit that the laws on the rate of interest, mine and railway concessions, patents of invention, literary property, child labor in factories, etc., etc. have been rendered. Laws of trial and error, no doubt, but laws that nonetheless testify to a remarkable spirit of temperance, and a firm will to snatch the social economy from the feudalism that invades it and from the anarchy that dishonors it.

Such, then, is the problem that the progress of the centuries commands us to solve, no longer by vain formulas of government and insufficient transactions, but by an exact discipline of industrial forces: To preserve, to regularize, to make more and more fruitful and comfortable the equality of fortunes, by creating, through an effort of genius, what the history of humanity offers no example of and what science alone can provide: economic equilibrium. Is it not, as far as well-being is concerned, the organization of the happy medium that must satisfy all legitimate ambition and kill envy; is this not the apotheosis of the middle class? A decisive problem, which marks the virility of nations, and could only arise once in the course of centuries, because the solution, embracing all possible progress, can only be absolute and eternal.

But, before this extraordinary situation is understood, before the question penetrates people's minds, and before the theoretical and practical solution is accepted, how many more contradictions and heartbreaks! What uncertainty and pain! France, obliged to preserve its domestic mores to fight against its national routine, to abjure its old policy and its official ideas, France can say with the poet:

My God! what a cruel war!

I find two men in me....

Yes, there are two Frances in present-day France. There is the France of the past, which knows itself and, royalist or democratic, religious or philosophical, lives in its traditions, clings to them with despair, protests against an unparalleled revolution; and the France of the future, which does not yet know itself, which is looking for itself, which already, in all its aspirations and views, feels itself in opposition to the old. The conflict is there. As long as we live, devotees and skeptics, royalists and republicans, as long as we reason according to received ideas and established interests, we are conservatives; insofar as we obey our secret instincts, the occult forces that urge us, the desires for general improvement that circumstances suggest to us, we are revolutionary. Moreover, and as to the final goal, these two Frances are only one: the double current that draws us, some to the left, some to the right, resolves into a single movement, namely the search for equality and stability, in short, for economic ponderation, by the renunciation of philosophical eclecticism and the doctrinaire happy medium.

A last glance at the state of our traditions and at the progress made over the past fifty years in this new metamorphosis will complete the demonstration that such is the inevitable outcome to which the destiny of humanity and our own inclinations push us.

### III.

#### *Religious tradition.*

In 1789, the condition of the clergy was manifestly incompatible with the welfare and security of the nation. The clergy possessed, in full ownership and free of taxes, a third of the land; the minister of the Gospel lived on his income; the peasant, established on the *latifundia* of the Church, to whom the priest said, "Dear brother!" was only a serf.

This state of things could not last: so, the first thought in 89, the universal thought, was the dispossession of the Church.

But this dispossession was not accomplished without compromise: it is not in our genius, except in the case of absolute necessity, to take an extreme position in anything. The pear, as they say, was cut in half. In taking over the property of the clergy, everyone agreed to assign it, as a form of compensation, a public and legal salary: as for the faith, no one thought of touching it. They contented themselves with declaring opinions free, which did not preclude having the Revolution consecrated by the Church, and calling the Catholic religion the religion of the State.

Those who made the civil constitution of the clergy, and those who signed it, were of equal good faith. The spiritual was believed to be duly safeguarded; they were far from thinking that a day would come, and soon, when it would no longer suffice for the liberty of the country, the security of consciences, the equality of fortunes, to have deprived the clergy of their landed privileges; that it would be necessary to deprive it of its salary again, — what am I saying? — to forbid it any interference in education, to subject it to election, to forbid it any communication with Rome, any traffic in indulgences, any acquisition of property; to destroy it, finally, by marriage, by schism, by disrepute and poverty.

This was demonstrated over time, on the one hand, by the series of consequences that the expropriation of the clergy entailed after it; on the other hand, by the implacable hostility of the clergy to the new institutions.

Indeed, the first result of the recovery of church property and the establishment of a budget for worship, was what has been called *the Civil Constitution of the Clergy* .

Since, by a measure of public necessity, the clergy ceased to be proprietors, in order to become salaried, how was its service not regularize? How were its constituencies not, as much as possible, equalized?... It was not, whatever one has said, the spirit of usurpation that dictated this reform; it was the needs of administration, the demands of accounting.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was therefore indispensable: this constitution established by vote, the ecclesiastical oath in turn became necessary. Much has been disputed about the political propriety of this oath: we know that Robespierre, inclined to

the priesthood and friend of the priests, fought it with all his might. An absurd tactic. By the constitution that governed him, and by his status as a wage-earner, the priest had become a public functionary; it was an integral part of the new state; he was, in a way, in solidarity with the Revolution. When all civil servants, from the King to the policeman, when all citizens, as National Guardsmen, took the civic oath, was it possible, just, logical, to except the priests?....

Moreover, the question was settled, in 1802, by an authority that the clergy must regard as sovereign: the pope, signing the Concordat, recognized the Constitution of the clergy. By this recognition, now irrevocable, a singular thing happened: it is that the constitutional priests and bishops, regarded until then as schismatics, suddenly found themselves older in truth and more orthodox than the refractories!

Things remained thus until the Restoration: the Church serving the State, more than the State served the Church, and, thanks to this compromise, tolerance, that is to say philosophical indifference, so dear to our hearts, always gaining.

But on the return of the king, the clergy tried to change their position, by combating the consequences of their revolutionary establishment, and by conjuring up the new spirit. The Abbé de Lamennais was the leader of this crusade against the secularization of the clergy and indifference in matters of religion. As a theologian, and even as a philosopher, M. de Lamennais was a hundred times right: one had to be one or the other, Christian or atheist. But M. de Lamennais had to deal with too strong a party: his dialectic converted no one. The kingdom, while remaining *very Christian*, wanted the authority of the pope no more than the tithe; and the people, half libertine, half believer, intended to live as they pleased. The zeal, quite medieval, of the preacher made people laugh; indifference increased; he himself was affected by it!... If there is a man who, questioned about his religion, is embarrassed to answer today, it is the Abbé de Lamennais.

From 1820 to 1825, it was the heyday of the missions, worthily crowned, in 1826, by a jubilee. There was a time when the people ran to the confessional, to the communion table in droves, as later, in 1848, we saw them rush to the polls. What was the result of this fervor? After having extracted, by this factitious excitement, the little that remained of religious feeling in souls, the clergy finally obtained, in 1828, as the price of their pains, what? the definitive expulsion of the Jesuits! An old sin, against the Church and against the Holy See, which the very Christian State came to aggravate, under the countersignature of a prelate! In 1829, I remember it like yesterday, those whom I had seen doing their mission, carrying the cross, displaying their zeal, no longer even went to mass; the pretty choristers, married or promised, deserted the vespers for the spectacle.

1830 arrives, which brings a new attack on the consideration of the cult. No more state religion; Catholicism disappears from the army, through the suppression of chaplains; in the colleges, religious instruction is only an outward practice, boring, supererogatory, preserved out of respect for the grandparents, and despised by the youth. From this time, the symptoms of decadence multiply; sects abound: we are not yet completely at the negation of the religious principle, but it is obvious that the old formula is no longer sufficient; from which the lovers of religions conclude on the necessity, some of a new effusion of the Holy Spirit, others of an exegesis that disguised Catholic dogma from top to bottom. After the Chateaubriands, the Bonalds, the Lamennais, appear the Bautains, the Buchezs, the Lacordaires. Christianity, in the hands of these clever manipulators, is by turns theocratic, royalist, progressive, philosophical, Jacobin. We can apply the epigram to it:

Chrysologue is everything and is nothing.

Is it therefore the elaboration of a new faith that takes place, or the dissolution of the old that is accomplished? The people do not worry about it; the middle class pays no heed to it; the high bourgeoisie, pursuing the course of its speculations, laughs and remains epicurean; the philosophers themselves do not seem to suspect that they are witnessing the death throes of a religion.

On the accession of Pius IX, who seemed for a moment disposed to lead the papacy into modern ideas, there was an immense concert of acclamations. The old liberals imagined that Catholicism was going to be reconciled with liberty, that it was itself, well interpreted, only a formula of liberty. M. Thiers spoke for all of France when he exclaimed from the tribune: Courage, Holy Father! We are Christians, if you are a revolutionary.

The illusion was short-lived. No sooner had the events of February posed the social question than the pope and clergy, who had already declared themselves in favor of the Sunderbund, turned against the revolution. Socialism, for its part, declared itself adversary of the Church: it placed in its program, in the first line, the abolition of the ecclesiastical budget and the abolition of the spiritual and temporal government of the popes, declaring all positive religion not only false, but hostile to science, liberty, progress and morals.

The split is therefore clearly marked. After 62 years of transactions, considerations, tolerances, legal fictions, France has come, out of self-respect and love of humanity, to gradually deny its faith and its God. What new accommodation, indeed, what bias would still be possible?

To break with Rome and take refuge in Gallicanism, as M. Dupin wants?

It is impractical. First, the Gallican Church only exists in name. As we pursue the course of our revolutions, Gallicans and Ultramontanes have come together, they are united. The vast majority of the French clergy belong to Rome and to the Jesuits. The worst of our priests are perhaps still those who affect a spirit of conciliation and an appearance of philosophy. The clergy is only occupied with one thing, to annihilate little by little the effects of the Civil Constitution and of the Concordat, by reestablishing the convents, seizing the schools, collecting inheritances, accumulating donations, legacies, offerings, subscriptions, etc., and thus returning, by pious commerce and voluntary donations, to its properties. The property reacquired by the clergy is estimated at more than 300 million. However, it is certainly not to exploit these goods that it wants them, nor to establish workers' companies there; it is to make rents out of them. Rents and tithes: it is the same thing! The clergy now know that the temporal and the spiritual are inseparable, that sooner or later one of the two must prevail over the other. It is no longer enough for it to direct consciences; it wants to reign over interests. Gallican or ultramontane, the Church aspires, and it says it loudly, to tame the revolution. Middle-class men, generation of 89 and 1830, are you ready to make this sacrifice to it?

Through ourselves into Protestantism? But a religious protest is an act of faith, I would almost say that it is a revelation. The nations that in the sixteenth century followed Luther were more religious than those that remained united to the pope: otherwise they would not have embraced the Reformation. Now, I ask you: what is it that the people of today believe about Catholicism, to make them think of reforming the rest?... It has been said a long time ago: *We we no longer have enough religion to make us Protestants.*

And who does not see that at the point we have reached, protest would be a contradiction on our part? What? There is no longer any state religion; and there would be, in matters of faith, a protest from the State! The State, which is atheistic since it admits all religions, the State would define a new spiritual power, to oppose it to the spiritual power of the pope! It would choose between Athanase Coquerel, Michel Vintras, Infantin, Pierre Leroux, in hatred of Father Roothau and Jean Mastai! No, no: our tradition is made, our line drawn.

In the name of the liberty of thought, which is the liberty to believe, there is no church, no worship, no clerical properties, no ecclesiastical budget. Separation, absolute opposition between scientific education and religious instruction, as is practiced among our neighbors the Dutch; and in less than a generation, the People, raised to the height of the century, will have pronounced its *Abrenuntio*. They will have understood that indifference in matters of religious faith is a betrayal of social faith; and, by pronouncing



against Catholicism, they will repudiate any kind of religion, because after Catholicism there is no longer any religion possible.

#### IV .

##### *Governmental tradition.*

Tolerant religion, temperate government: a double illusion, which the quickest examination suffices to dissipate.

In 89, the nation declared itself sovereign and took precedence over royalty. Divine right was abolished, the *veto* removed from the prince, for whom a precise Constitution outlines his rights and duties.

What does this all mean? It obviously means that the nation intends to govern itself, that it admits as authority only that of its own majority, which implies, as Bossuet and Rousseau have proven, and as history demonstrates , that by affirming the sovereignty of the People, it denies the very principle of sovereignty.

Thus, the incompatibility of the economic middle ground with the governmental principle was at the bottom of the declaration of 89. However, by this spirit of transaction to which we will always find it faithful, the legislative Nation does not at first sight suppress the authority. Starting from the generally accepted hypothesis of the necessity of a government to maintain order in society, it tries to reconcile the old monarchical form with the regime inaugurated by the revolution, royal pride with popular dignity .

But we soon realize that the so-called Constitution provides only an unstable balance: on August 10, the deal is torn up. However, the prejudice could not be immediately overcome: the Convention, instead of abandoning the constitutional chimera, accuses the monarch of the errors of the contract, and sends him to the scaffold. Then it gives birth to the first attempt at direct government, the Constitution of 93. But direct government, in the vulgar sense of the word, is impracticable: we have advanced too much or too little; and as we have not discovered a way out, we throw ourselves back into the middle terms. The directory lasts five years, after which it dissolves into the consulate.

Bonaparte, then, perfectly edified on the value of representative government, after having avenged the injuries of the Revolution and re-established order, brings us back to despotism, the extreme abolished in 89. National feeling rises; he was forced to abdicate under enemy fire: the Imperial Power, which had become refractory to the revolution, suspected by the middle classes, was treated in 1814 as the feudal power had been 21 years earlier.

A charter is thus negotiated between Louis XVIII and the Nation, on the bases of the treaty of 91. Soon, in spite of the hard lesson of 1815, the restored royalty shows itself more intolerant, illiberal than ever; the reaction is increasing, but the revolution precedes it. To the challenge of the prince, the People respond with the victory of July. A plebeian posits this adage, which must henceforth prevent any ambiguity: *The King reigns and does not govern*. Louis-Philippe accepts the condition; soon he tries to elude it. In turn, he succumbs: his flight is for the People a formal notice to govern themselves directly, since they do not want a king to govern them. In response to this summons, we made the Constitution of 1848, and appointed Louis Bonaparte as President: this is what is called a moderate and constitutional republic, yet another compromise, a happy medium, a middle term.

Now where are we? What is the state of affairs after four years? Did universal suffrage express national consent as hoped? Is power easy for citizens? Has the middle class obtained its guarantees and its balance?

Universal and direct suffrage, consulted on three consecutive occasions, gave the most counter-revolutionaries, the most anti-republicans. The democracy has been able to convince itself, through the saddest of experiences, that the further down the social strata one descends, the more retrograde ideas one finds, and that, as the France of the nineteenth century is incontestably more advanced than that of Charlemagne, in the same way it was easy to foresee that the proletarians of 1848 would not be worth, very nearly, as voters, the censitaires of Louis-Philippe. Now the Republic, handed over by the incompetence of the masses to the royalists and the Jesuits, makes war on its allies, unites with the despots; the Government resulting from a democratic Constitution disarms the citizens, decimates the electors, destroys the municipalities, puts the sovereign in a state of siege, and works to raise, on the ruins of universal suffrage, an irresponsible and hereditary power. The irruption of the masses, suddenly summoned, has made society an incomprehensible monster, a thing without a name. The Church, still modest before February, the Church that exists only through the tolerance of the State, regained its preponderance over the temporal, and immediately showed itself to be anti-liberal and persecutory. The State, abhorring its principle and its mandate, seems to have sworn the extermination of the democracy, and arbitrarily surpasses all that we have seen. Property depreciated, crushed under mortgages, industry ruined by capital and unemployment, labor squeezed by taxes and without a future, all prices debased: the condition of the People is further than ever from the golden mean and from security.

So what are we to do? What are we to resolve, and above all what are we to hope for? Such a state of affairs, emerging from socialist terror and the conflict of factions, is not

tenable; it weighs on the very people who have assumed responsibility for it, and one of the most curious arguments of the royalist party against the republican regime is the need to get out of this revolutionary situation as soon as possible, and to reenter the peaceful current of the traditional monarchy. Will we return to the monarchy?

I want to take no account of the inextricable embarrassments that can result from the multiplicity of candidacies and the competition of dynasties. I dismiss this question, which is entirely one of personalities. In my eyes the once real opposition between empire and legitimacy, between legitimate royalty and citizen royalty, has disappeared under revolutionary pressure, and no longer constitutes a difference of system. It is obvious that the legitimate king would be very happy and at ease to return to the throne, on the condition of recognizing the principles of 89 and taking an oath to a Constitution, as Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Louis-Philippe did; that thus the elder branch would not be distinguished in absolutely anything, as for the conditions of its re-establishment, from the younger branch; and as for the emperor, it does not seem less clear to me that he cannot grant or accept, as one wishes, less than the *Additional Act*, that is to say, yet another Constitution. Basically, these three hypotheses, which until February we may have believed to be disparate, are completely identical; and if it were as easy to reconcile people as systems, the merger would soon be complete. That is not the difficulty for me.

I ask what good is a monarchy, an inevitable expression of not only the political, but the social middle ground, if it does not bring with it the means and the guarantee of this happy medium? For it is not a question today of beginning any one of the three fallen dynasties again, going back either to the year 1830, or to 1814, or to 1804; it is a question, for the restored royalty, whatever it is, on the day of its accession, first, of giving satisfaction for all the grievances of the Country against the Orleans, against the Bourbons, against the Emperor; second, of arresting the development of mercantile feudalism and of the proletariat, through the balancing of the economic forces and the definitive constitution of the middle class.

It is a question, short, of the monarchy, if it is returned to us in 1852, taking the lead of the Revolution, instead of fighting it, as it does, to excess; and of executing on the country and on itself what its partisans protest against with all their force, the transmutation of the political and governmental regime into an economic and contractual regime.

Is such a conversion possible? I cannot believe it; and if I am not mistaken, the royalists, to whatever dynasty they refer, are all of my opinion. Monarchical power, they say, can only be re-established on the condition of becoming counter-revolutionary, that is, of throwing itself again into an extreme four times condemned: that is enough to arouse against it the invincible antipathy of the middle classes.

We are therefore compelled to stick to the Republic. But which Republic? Will it only be an *honest, moderate, philanthropic, representative, constitutional Republic*?

I do not deny that such is at this moment the desire and the will of the greatest number; I readily admit that this shade, the least dark, of democracy, has a serious chance of reappearing, all the more so since, in despair of their own cause, the monarchical factions cannot fail to support it. But I would add that one would have to be devoid of the most common foresight not to be convinced that this other form of happy medium could not be of long duration.

What is the purpose of the Republic?

It is, article 13 of the Constitution answers for me, to establish Liberty and Progress, on an average, almost constant, and made general, of labor and fortune.

What is the instrument, the mainspring of the Republic, to achieve this end?

Universal and direct suffrage.

Hitherto universal and direct suffrage has given, to represent it, a majority composed of Orleanists, Legitimists, Bonapartists, priests, high bourgeois, and for President, a prince, Louis Bonaparte.

It may well produce, in 1852, a no less considerable majority of honest bankers, talkative lawyers, liberal proprietors, progressive manufacturers, enlightened workers, irreproachable bosses, and for President of the Republic, General Cavaignac, or M. Carnot.

But, by the natural course of things and the reversals of opinion, it is inevitable that in a third, fourth, or fifth batch, universal and direct suffrage gives an equally deep and compact majority, composed of socialists, communists, anarchists, atheists, starving people, and for president, Blanqui, Greppo, Adam *le cambreur*, or any other.

For universal and direct suffrage not to come to this, it would be necessary for its first elect to take on the task of satisfying all the aspirations and needs of the People, which is against the hypothesis.

Thus, universal suffrage, in the present state of minds, and with the reigning political prejudice, must engender in turn, the government of those who do not possess by those who possess, and of those who possess by those who do not own; from the great number by the small, and from the small by the great; needs by institutions, and institutions by needs: in two words, sometimes tyranny, sometimes anarchy. Is this a society? Is this order and progress? Is it not obvious that soon the country, tired of all these movements from bottom to top and from top to bottom, will be disgusted with all kinds of government, and that excessive centralization will sooner or later be succeeded by complete dissolution?...

## V.

### *Jacobin tradition.*

I know very well that, the doctrinaires of the Republic overthrown, their rivals and immediate successors, in the order of the parties, the Jacobins, are doing their best to restore stability in the power and in public opinion; to oppose an insurmountable barrier to anarchy, atheism, the division of property, etc., etc. Jacobinism is well looked upon by the people; and what is more governmental, more devout, more opposed to agrarianism, to the democratization of capital, than Jacobinism? On all these points, it has proven itself.

Jacobinism, then, is the last hope of authority. Robespierre's tail, here is the mooring rope that must retain the ship of civilization in the port of Religion, Government and Property!...

Let us therefore see what further vitality the Jacobin tradition can communicate to the political regime; let us see if this party, which succeeded, in 93 and 94, while dying with difficulty, in hindering the revolution and in reviving the constitutional system, is in a position to deceive the masses a second time, and to make them accept, under revolutionary harangues, a policy of resistance.

I have defined Jacobinism, a variety of doctrinairism. It is the doctrine, transferred from the Bourgeoisie to the People; the happy medium for the use of the lower classes; a kind of honest and moderate sans-culottism, substituted for bourgeois honesty and moderation. For the rest, the same governmental spirit, but more marked; the same preponderance of the State, but more energetic; the same respect for representative fictions, but elevated to fetishism. The Jacobin rejects dictatorship less than the Girondin: in this way he is closer to royalty.

The triumph of Jacobinism was conceived in 93. At this time, the principle of authority had not been questioned; only the monarchical expression had caused itself to be proscribed. As for the power itself, those who were called *anarchists* and *enragés* were as faithful to it as the others: they were more violent, that is all. Jacobinism, carried into the government by a succession of irresistible crises, was therefore in agreement, on the political question, with universal consent, but as it represented the class immediately below the middle, it seemed the *ne plus ultra* of the revolutionary movement, the most complete expression of the democracy. That was its strength. To remain below Jacobin

society was, for two years, to put oneself below the revolutionary level; to go further was to exaggerate and render oneself suspect.

Jacobinism, thus constituted and served by events, was therefore bound to come to power. But once there, it was to succumb in its turn, either through the exaggeration of its policy and the incapacity of its leaders, or through the effect of time, which wears down all the masks and lays bare the vice of all systems.

Exaggeration and incapacity alone caused the Jacobins to fall in Thermidor. As they were not worn out and refuted by experience, one could believe that the party still had a future; that it would later have, along with the constitutional monarchy, its restoration and reign. This is what motivated the reappearance of Jacobinism after 1830, and what constitutes its full value today.

But this same Jacobinism, which in 1830 might have seemed logical and consequently still had chances, has since completely lost them: socialist propaganda, the progress of public reason, during the last 20 years, have taken away from it, as from the monarchical parties, any reason for existence. Today, in fact, the question is no longer political, but social; and it is so true that the movement accomplished in this direction was made against Jacobinism as much as against absolutism and the doctrine, that already in 1848, the eve of the February Revolution, the *Démocratie Pacifique* and the *Populaire*, the only socialist newspapers that existed then, won by far by the number and quality of their readers over the *Reforme*.

Since then, the Jacobin party or *Mountain* has continued to lose credit and consideration in the eyes of the people. Not an idea of the future has arisen from this exhausted milieu. Does the Provisional Government attempt, under the name of *Circulars*, addresses to the French people? They are hissed. Does it want to send commissioners? They are expelled. The clubs themselves, organized on the model of the old society, only produce noise and parodies. In April, in May, in June, and until October, Jacobinism shows itself to be reactionary; it is only when forced and constrained that it passes to socialism. From that moment it abdicates, and each of its acts is a new protest against its old faith.

To the theory of non-government, developed in the *Voix du Peuple*; of absolute liberty in the *Presse*; of decentralization, in the legitimist journals, was joined by the theory of direct government, in the *Voix du Proscrit*. This progress was forced. When the party of divine right, in agreement with socialism, repudiates a thing as essential to authority as centralization, could the Jacobin party show itself less liberal?

It was in vain that Louis Blanc, in a first brochure, *Plus de Girondins!* then in a second, *La République une et indivisible*, recalls the democracy to the tradition of 93, to

the faith of Robespierre. His dissertations have no effect; they are not even read. The accusation of federalism is now outdated and scares no one.

It is in vain that the *Mountain*, as foreign to the movement as the majority, abstains and hides: the new spirit springs up and envelops it on all sides. At the podium, a powerful orator, Michel (de Bourges), raises both the social question and the principle of *arbitration*, the idea of CONTRACT, intended to replace the idea of Authority. In his revolutionary stories, the great historian Michelet completes the unveiling of the doctrinaro-Jacobin mystery, and prophesies the advent of the people.

This is why Ledru-Rollin, who, after having disavowed socialism, ended up rallying to it publicly; who, after having repudiated anarchical theories, declared himself for direct government; that is why, I say, Ledru-Rollin, the tribune who always advances, remains, in spite of his own party, like the living image of progress, and sees his popularity grow every day. The People do not always follow the scout who outruns them; they never abandon the leader who opens the way for them.

Finally, it is to the deep feeling, widespread among the masses, of the economic and social character of the Revolution, that we must attribute this disdain for things governmental, this political indifferentism, so well expressed by the calm of the People, in the presence of the more irritating provocations. The Revolution advances, they think. Why risk a battle? The enemy, surrounded by the invisible battalions of ideas, will sooner or later be forced to lay down their arms. We will win without firing a shot.

Thus, the political middle ground, in its most passionate and popular form, Jacobinism, is powerless to achieve the economic middle ground; it proclaims its incompetence, through the mouths of its most illustrious representatives, itself.

Thus, universal suffrage, in its broadest expression, exercised without fraud, directly, with an imperative mandate, both on officials and on representatives, would be equally incapable of providing a stable regime and establishing the balance of society. For universal suffrage to become a truly organic power, it is necessary that instead of applying itself to *the election of the legislator and the magistrate*, instead of being complicit and supportive of a governmental order that has become impossible, it simply serves as the expression common to the *industrial transactions and guarantees*, which need neither prince nor legislator for their execution.

Thus, and to conclude, this question of average fortunes, — which in the present state of civilization must be considered as the problem of the century, and which contains the future, not only of France, but of humanity, — this question is insoluble by any kind of constitution of authority. To solve it, it is necessary to leave the sphere of ancient ideas, to rise, with the help of a new science, above religious dogmas, constitutional artifices, the

usurious practices of capital, the random routines of exchange. We must create the social economy from scratch, deny both civil and ecclesiastical authority, and proprietary prelibation.

Undoubtedly the sacrifice must seem hard to intelligences seized unexpectedly, deceived, for 50 years, by the logomachies of moralists and statesmen. The public conscience murmurs, when for the first time it intends to attack, in the name of Progress, Liberty, Reason and Social Right, the divine Being. Property rumbles at the denial of the police. The democracy offends itself when a disrespectful voice dares to indict its authors and violate the Pantheon of its saints.

Patience! This feeling of painful surprise will be short-lived. Imaginations will calm down quickly, as soon as they have understood that this universal negation is the last term of the previous positions; as soon as they are convinced that there is no security for the people nor well-being in the old milieu, and that it is absolutely necessary either to abandon tradition or to renounce equilibrium.

Moreover, the conversion takes place by itself. The proletariat, gradually de-jacobinized, demands its share, not only of direct suffrage in the affairs of society, but of direct action. Now, what are the means of satisfying this desire, with the old hypotheses of Government and political Constitution? The bourgeoisie, put on notice by the logic of reaction to choose between the Revolution and absolutism, turns away with horror from the Jesuits, and declares itself, without hesitation, liberal and revolutionary. A little later, it will affirm with us the religion of Hegel, of Lessing, of Anacharsis Cloutz, of Diderot, of Molière, of Spinoza, the religion that recognizes neither pontiff, nor emperor, nor producer, the religion of 'humanity.

Richelieu was dead. The dying feudalism believed that it was going to live again: it had only the Mazarin in front of it. What a moment for the old principle, if it retained its virtue! They talk to each other, they agitate, they unite against the child-monarchy: the parliament is carried away, the bourgeoisie seduced, the people fanaticized. We run to the barricades; there is fighting in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and at Charenton. The court is forced to flee; the master reaction imposes its conditions on royalty.

It is then that jealousies and divisions break out. The agitators no longer know what they want. Their aimless force becomes impotence. The Fronde, since it is victorious, seems ridiculous. The shrewdest hasten to compromise with the court; the phantom vanishes in defection; Louis XIV grows up, Mazarin dies in peace, and the absolute monarchy is founded.

We are in a similar situation.



As Richelieu struck feudalism, so the Revolution in 1848 struck authority.

Authority is the Church, the State, Capital.

Unfortunately, the Revolution, too young to act, gave itself as tutors a council of Mazarins. Immediately authority, already lying on its deathbed, raised its head! It still speaks, it reigns, and for four years now we have fallen back into full Fronde. What an opportunity for the decrepit idea to restore itself, if it still had the slightest living force! But the old parties cannot get along; the solution escapes them, they are powerless. Tomorrow you will see them offering their services. Jacobinism is converted; Caesarism gives way; pretenders to royalty try to make themselves popular; the Church, like an old sinner between life and death, asks for reconciliation. THE GREAT PAN IS DEAD! The gods are gone; the kings depart; privilege is erased; everyone ranks among the workers. While the taste for well-being and elegance tears the multitude away from sans-culottism, the aristocracy, frightened by its small number, seeks its salvation in the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie. France, showing more and more of its true character, sets the world in motion, and the Revolution appears triumphant, embodied in the middle class.

P.-J. PROUDHON.

Ste-Pélagie, October 1851.