

CONCLUSION
OR
GENERAL LAW OF THE PAST.

CHAPTER I.

The three possible kinds of inequality, or Castes.

For a long time I considered history with torment, with anxiety, seeking a general law of the past, so that order would appear to me and appear to others in the apparent disorder of past centuries, and so that there would be no would have given rise to this trouble of the soul of which Herder speaks thus: "How many I have known who, on the immense ocean of human history, sought in vain this God who, in the immutable sphere of the physical world, they saw with the eyes of their soul and recognized with an ever new emotion in each blade of grass, in each grain of sand! In the temple of earthly creation, from all sides arose a hymn to the glory of power and eternal wisdom. On the contrary, in the theater of human actions, it was only a permanent conflict of blind passions, of unregulated forces, of destructive arts, of vanished good designs. The story resembles this loose web hanging in the corner of a palace, and inextricable threads still preserve the traces of a recent carnage after the insect which had woven it has hidden itself from view. However, if there is a God in nature, this God is also in history. For man is also a part of creation; and, even in the midst of his passions, and even in his last wanderings, he does not fail to follow laws as beautiful, as immutable, as those that govern the revolutions of the celestial bodies."⁶

Here is the law of the past, as metaphysics and history have made it known to me:

THE HUMAN RACE, following Lessing's idea, PASSES THROUGH ALL THE PHASES OF A SUCCESSIVE EDUCATION. IT THEREFORE ONLY ARRIVED AT THE PHASE OF EQUALITY AFTER HAVING PASSED THROUGH THE THREE POSSIBLE SORTS OF INEQUALITY:

1. THE REGIME OF THE CASTES OF FAMILY,
2. THE REGIME OF THE CASTES OF HOMELAND,
3. THE REGIME OF THE CASTES OF PROPERTY.

The human spirit aspires to escape from this triple regime of castes, which is slavery, to enter into liberty. This is what characterizes the point of time in which we live.

TODAY WE ARE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, BETWEEN A WORLD OF INEQUALITY AND SLAVERY THAT IS ENDING AND A WORLD OF EQUALITY THAT IS BEGINNING.

⁶ *Idées sur la philosophie de l'histoire de l'Humanité*, book XV, preamble.

CHAPTER II.

Explanation of the word Caste.

I must explain this word *Caste*, and justify the use I make of it.

“We call *Castes*,” says the Dictionary of the Academy, “the tribes between which the Indians are *divided*.”

The characteristic of castes in the East is, in fact, *division*. This word expresses the separation, the division of a people into several peoples, or, in general, the separation of the human species into several parts, into several species.⁷

Political writers, through lack of reflection, have not seen until now that the oriental castes are only one of the three forms of the idea of caste. And hence the emptiness of all political science.

The right of man and his interest being free communion with the whole human race, and, through the human race, with the whole universe, everything that destroys this right, everything that divides the human race, everything that pens up men in herds hostile or indifferent to each other deserve to be severely condemned, whether the means of this division, of this separation, of this *confinement*, is called the family, or political law, or civil law; and the name *caste*, consecrated for one of these kinds of imprisonment and separation, can very legitimately be applied to the others. This being the case, why, if divisions constituting parts in Humanity, species within the species, are based on property, would I not see there property castes? Why should the divisions of peoples, which have led to so many wars and shed so much blood, not also be philosophically designated under the term caste? In a word, why should divisions originating from only one of the modes of human manifestation, the family, be considered castes? Politicians, you have tarnished the oriental castes, which for centuries have fallen into decadence; but your eyes do not see other castes just as real and just as harmful to Humanity, and your ignorance protects them!

I therefore understand by *castes of family*, or *family caste*, the limitation of the natural liberty of man by the false extension given to the *family*.

By *castes of homeland*, or *homeland caste*, I mean the limitation of the natural liberty of man by the false extension given to the city or *homeland*.

By *castes of property*, or *property caste*, I mean the limitation of the natural liberty of man by the false extension given to *property*.

Human nature produces three things: family, country, property.

These three things, inherent in human nature, are good in themselves, but have become evil and produced evil.

⁷ The Hindus themselves relate their word caste to this idea of *separation*: “This name,” says a traveler, “takes, in usage, a great expression; it designates not only the four castes, but the profession, the pay of a person, etc. They say: *Tanti ka zat*, the profession of the weavers; *Kon zat toumara*, what is your nation? (*Des castes de l’Inde*, by Morenas.)

This resulted in three modes of slavery for man.

All human society until now has been affected, simultaneously, although to varying degrees, by these three modes of slavery.

In the course of the ages and the development of Humanity, these three modes of slavery have predominated in turn in human societies, starting with the slavery that results from the family, continuing with the slavery that results from the city, and ending with the slavery that results from property.

All the ancient empires, India, China, Persia, Chaldea, Egypt, the entire Orient, were the seat of the regime of family castes.

Greece, the Roman Empire, the entire south-western part of Europe, until the time of the Barbarian invasion, were the seat of the caste regime of the homeland.

The regime of property castes began with the invasion of the Barbarians, and has continued down to us. It dominates today in Europe and America.

Thus high antiquity, middle antiquity, and modernity are three very distinct ages, three ages that follow one another like three possible phases of inequality or slavery.

And, in space, three different seats of civilization correspond to these three ages of history. If Benares, Babylon or Memphis were the seat of the ancient caste regime, that is to say of the vice of the family castes, if Sparta and Rome were the seat of the middle caste regime, that is to say of the vice of city castes, it can be said that England and the United States of America are today the most apparent seat of the vice of individual property, or of the modern caste regime .

Civilization marched from East to West, and from the equator to the pole, changing principles and vices. The empires where the vice of family slavery reigned were the first to be founded in the East, and the first to collapse. The empires where the vice of social slavery reigned were then founded on the borders of Asia and Europe, and collapsed like the preceding ones. Finally came, in the north, empires that were based on the vice of proprietary slavery: these flourish today; but every great soul has despised this false splendor of a civilization where man becomes a thing, and values himself by the gold he possesses or is possessed by.

CHAPTER III.

The man of the Castes.

Rousseau attributes the origin of society to the establishment of property, which he does not know how to explain: "The first," he says, "who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared by someone who, tearing up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his fellow men: Be careful not to listen to this imposter; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all, and that the earth belongs to no one."⁸

Rousseau transported back to primitive times an idea inspired by his time, a vice of the society of his time. It is quite certain that modern society is mainly based on property, and that the main cause of current inequality is the false property that reigns today. But it is false that society began there, that the first empires suffered to the same degree from this vice, and that inequality had no other sources. The slavery that results for the man from the family and the city is no less than that which results from property, and preceded this by many centuries.

Ask ancient man what he is and what his rights are: he quickly goes back to his race, he tells you the name of his tribe and his most distant ancestor; he comes from Melchizedek or Abraham; he came out of the head, or the hand, or the foot of Brahma. Pariah, he is not even surprised that there are Pariahs and Brahmins; he only recognizes his rights as those that he has inherited; he only knows himself, so to speak, and is conscious of himself, because he knows those who engendered him and who passed before him on earth through the same furrow of birth as he did. This man therefore only really exists through his ancestors: if he has no ancestors to name, he does not know what he is, he enters into nothingness, he ceases to be.

Address the same question to the man of middle antiquity, to the Greek, to the Roman. He will answer you by showing you the city around him. *Sum civis Romanus*, this is the brilliant title that the Roman orator gives to his clients, as a safeguard against torture. And did we not see St. Paul himself, the great destroyer of the castes of nations, obliged to resort to this title of Roman citizen for protection! In middle antiquity, man is no longer confined to castes of birth, but to castes of homeland; he is born before every subject of his country, and his right comes from this quality. He is entitled because he currently has a certain society with those around him. He and his fellow citizens form an alliance, a city, from which results for everyone the right, and all the right. But this city is separated from the rest of the human race, as was the birth caste. The duality of Brahmins and Pariahs was followed by the duality of Greeks and Barbarians. Man is therefore still only associated with an infinitely restricted portion of Humanity. He is the associate of anyone who is part of the same city as him; but he is hostile to all other men, and reciprocally all other men are hostile to him. All other men are foreigners to him, *βάρβαροι*. There he is who makes war

⁸ *On Inequality of Conditions*, second part.

on them, who reduces them to slavery, or who is reduced to slavery by them. His city therefore, which constitutes his power, at the same time limits his power: by the very fact that he has enemies, he is weak; and by the very fact that he has slaves, he is a slave.

Finally, ask the same question to the feudal man, to the man of the Middle Ages, or to the bourgeois of today, who succeeded the man of the Middle Ages and who lives, without knowing it, under the same regime.⁹ The man from the Middle Ages will show you his fortress, and lead you to the limits of his land. This land belongs to him, but he belongs to this land; it is the land that limits him and constitutes him. Let the king destroy his manor, and all his rights will be destroyed. Likewise the bourgeois today shows you the capital he has at his disposal; it is his feudal castle. His power is in his gold, but conversely his life is chained and limited by his gold. Let his capital be destroyed, the wretch is lost! He becomes a serf of industry, from the tyrant that he was. And even as a tyrant, he is only a tyrant up to the limit of his capital.

This, I repeat, is the distinctive and predominant character of each of the three great phases through which Humanity has passed until our times.

What we call Civilization, without us having clearly formulated until now what this civilization consists of, has moved, as I said, from the equator to the pole. At the equator, man was characterized and limited by his birth title; later, on the shores of the Mediterranean, he was characterized and limited by his title of citizen; still later, in modern Europe, he was characterized and limited by his title of proprietor.

Certainly, I do not intend to say that birth castes were radically abolished when what I call *middle antiquity* came. Nor do I intend to say that the political castes that succeeded them were radically destroyed when the regime of property castes began to take on the main influence in the Middle Ages. I only mean that, for those who understand history, three great eras, characterized by three different predominances, share the life of the human race down to us: 1. the *era of birth castes*, or the oriental era, India, Persia, Babylonia, Egypt; 2. the *era of the homeland castes*, or the Mediterranean era, the Greeks, the Romans; 3. the *era of property castes*, or the feudal era, which still continues today.

The caste regime of birth, the caste regime of homeland, the caste regime of property, are in ruins around us. At least, the ideal of the human spirit has surpassed all that.

⁹ the present form of property, born within feudal property, is of the same nature. The rent and the *droit du seigneur* are identical things.

CHAPTER IV.

The new man.

From the midst of all these ruins comes a NEW MAN; he is the man of modern times: he is the man who has received in his heart the teachings of Christianity and Philosophy.

Modern man has ancestors other than those of the flesh; so he does not argue about his ancestors: he is a man, and this title is enough for him.

Modern man does not feel dependent, in his essence, on the place where he was born, nor even on the nation that gave birth to him. He feels not only a *citizen* in this nation from which he came, but a *member of the sovereign*. He even feels like something more; because, as if he feared alienating his liberty, he put at the head of his Constitutions a distinction between the *rights of man* and those of the citizen.

The proof that the castes of countries have lost all their influence in his eyes is that he rejects the slavery of any race of men as odious, and that he regards war as a scourge, and in many cases as a crime.

Modern man declaims on the stage:

The first to be king was a fortunate soldier;

or:

Our priests are not what a vain people think,
Our credulity makes all their knowledge;

or even :

The great are only great because we are on our knees: let us get up.

Ancient man did not conceive of society without masters and slaves, without priests, without nobles and without kings. Modern man no longer conceives of masters, slaves, priests, nobles or kings. He calls himself his own priest, he calls himself his master, he feels noble, he feels himself a king, simply because he is a man. Luther taught him to do without the nobility of the Church, Descartes to judge everything by himself, Rousseau to regard himself as a member of the only legitimate sovereign. He is therefore neither king nor subject, he is man; he is neither layman nor priest, he is man. Man, in his eyes this quality says it all; nothing bounds or limits it; it embraces all times and all places, all generations and all peoples.

Thus, while in the past man was always hidden under qualities, today the quality of man is first.

By dint of overturning all the barriers of space and time, the human mind has arrived at an immense generalization. One God for all men, the earth for the home and inheritance of all, and all past generations, to whatever races they may have belonged, as ancestors of each of us.

What new consciousness must have emerged for man from such a thought! Humanity, once divided into a multitude of streams, appears to us today as a single whole. Ancient man, with his

particular gods. and his race isolated from others, felt like a wave in the current of a river: modern man, with his united God and his united human race, feels part of an ocean.

It is this new sentiment that man has today regarding himself that basically constitutes what we call EQUALITY.

Feeling himself to be part of a great whole, man puts himself in contact with everything, sees himself as linked to everything, and finally comes to understand that he has the right to everything.

This new sentiment, this new consciousness that man has today of himself is basically nothing more than the transformation and development of the sentiment and consciousness that constituted ancient man. The difference, as I indicated earlier, is only that of a river at the meeting of all rivers, at the ocean.

The castes have become the only caste, that is to say the human race. Man is therefore no longer the man of this or that caste, but the man of the only caste that exists, the man of the human race. When he was only the man of a particular caste, he only felt entitled to certain things: having become the man of the whole, he feels entitled to everything.

Now, as it is only in his capacity as a man that he feels this right to everything, he cannot help but recognize this right in others, who also have this quality of man. It is because he is a man that he has rights: therefore it is man who has rights, man in general; therefore all men have the right.

Hence a certain incontestable, primordial, absolute notion of the right of all to everything. Hence two faces in Equality, two faces that respond to each other and one of which cannot exist without the other. Equality happens to be the personal, individual, selfish sentiment that each man has regarding himself; but at the same time it cannot be that without being the most positive and certain recognition of the rights of others.

EQUALITY, this word sums up all the previous progress accomplished so far by Humanity; it sums up, so to speak, the entire past life of Humanity, in the sense that it represents the result, the goal, and the final cause of the entire career already covered. It is so that Equality could appear that all the initiators and all the revealers have succeeded one another, that all the discoveries have been made, that so many wars have taken place, that so much blood has flowed on the earth, that so much sweat has been shed for so many centuries by the entire mass of humankind. The individual sufferings of men, like the collective sufferings endured by them, had the providential goal of Equality, the sentiment of Equality, the notion of Equality. It is so that the human mind arrives at this notion that Socrates and Jesus are divinely dead; but it is also for this purpose that the compass was discovered, America discovered, the printing press discovered, all the great inventions discovered. It is also for this purpose that the Alexanders, the Caesars, and the Napoleons passed on earth; but it is also for this same final cause that the slaves laboriously leveled the roads that served the armies of the conquerors.

END.