

CHAPTER VII

Reflections on what precedes.

MANY readers will perhaps imagine that, so far, I have followed rather a whimsical course; that I have often ascended very high to establish truths very common; that I have disposed my chapters in an order which does not appear methodical; and, above all, that I have abandoned the subjects which I have treated without giving them all the developements of which they are susceptible. But I pray them to remark, that this is not a mere treatise on political economy. It is the second section of a treatise on our intellectual faculties. It is a treatise on the will, forming a sequel to a treatise on the understanding. My intention is much less to exhaust all the details of the moral sciences, than to see how they are derived from our nature, and from the conditions of our existence, in order to detect with certainty the errors which may have slidden into them by not ascending to this source of all we are and all we know. Now to execute such a design it is not the abundance of ideas we are to seek, but their severe enchainment, and a course uninterrupted and without chasms. Still however I am persuaded that, without perceiving it, we are already much further advanced than we are aware.

In fact, we have seen that the property of being endowed with will, by giving us a distinct knowledge of our individuality, gives us thereby and necessarily the idea of property; and that thus property, with all its consequences, is an inevitable result of our nature. Here then is already a great source of rambling disquisition and of declamation totally drained.

We have afterwards seen that this same will, which constitutes all our wants, is the cause of all our means of providing for them; that the employment of our force, which it directs, is the only primitive riches and the sole principle of the value of whatever has one for us.

Before drawing any consequences from this second observation, we

have likewise seen that the state of society is not only very advantageous to us, but is also so natural to us that we could not otherwise exist. Here then is another subject of common place notions, very false, exhausted.

Uniting these two points, the examination of the effect of the employment of our force, and of that of the increase of efficacy given to it by a state of society, has enabled us to discover what it is to *produce* for beings like ourselves, and what we ought to understand by this word. This, also, annihilates a great subject of ambiguity.

Strengthened by these premises, after some elucidations of the measure of utility of things, it was easy for us to conclude that all our industry reduces itself to a change of form and of place, and consequently that culture is a fabrication like every other; which dissipates many clouds obscuring this subject; and has enabled us to see very clearly the progress of every kind of industry, its interests, and the obstacles opposed to them. This likewise leads us to appreciate both men and things very differently from what is commonly done.

Finally, amongst all the things which have a value, we have remarked those which possess the qualities proper for becoming *money*; and we have easily recognised the advantages and the utility of this good and real money, and the danger of debasing it and of replacing it by another entirely fictitious and false in continuation; we have even cast a rapid glance on the small operations, commonly regarded as very great, to which the exchange of these monies and their economical transportation, under the name of banking, give place.

From whence it follows, if I am not mistaken, that we have acquired clear and certain ideas on all the important circumstances in the formation of our riches. Nothing then remains but to see in what manner their *distribution* amongst individuals is effected, and in what manner their consumption is effected, that is to say the use we make of them. We shall then have an abridged but complete treatise on all the results of the employment of our means of existence.

This second part, the distribution of riches in society, is perhaps that one of the three which gives place to the most delicate considerations, and in which we meet with phenomena the most complicated. However, if we have well elucidated the first, we shall see the obscurity of this fly before us, and all dissipate with facility. Let us endeavour to follow constantly the clue that guides us.