CHAPTER VIII

Of the distribution of our Riches amongst individuals.

HITHERTO we have considered man collectively; it remains to examine him distributively. Under this second point of view he presents an aspect very different from the first. The human species, taken in mass, is rich and powerful, and sees a daily increase of its resources and its means of existence; but it is not so with individuals. All in their quality of animated beings are condemned to suffer and to die: All, after a short period of increase, should they even live through it, and after some momentary successes, should they obtain them, relapse and decline; and the most fortunate amongst them can do little more than diminish their sufferings and retard their term. Beyond this their industry cannot go. It is not useless to have this gloomy but true picture of our condition present to our minds. It will teach us not to desire impossibilities, and not to consider as a consequence of our faults what is a necessary result of our nature. It brings us back from romance to history.

There is more. These resources, these riches, so insufficient for happiness, are also very unequally divided amongst us; and this is inevitable. We have seen that *property* exists in nature: for it is impossible that every one should not be the proprietor of his individuality and of his faculties. The inequality in these is not less: for it is impossible that all individuals should be alike, and have the same degree of force, intelligence and happiness. This natural inequality is extended and manifested in proportion as our means are developed and diversified. While they are very limited it is less striking, but it exists. It is an error not to have recognised this among savage nations. With them particularly it is very grievous: for it is that of force without restraint.

If, to banish from society this natural inequality, we undertake to disregard natural property, and oppose ourselves to its necessary consequences, it would be in vain: for nothing which has its existence in

nature can be destroyed by art. Such conventions, if they were practicable, would be a slavery too much against nature, and consequently too insupportable to be durable; and they would not accomplish their purposes. During their continuance, we should see as many quarrels for a greater share of the common goods, or a smaller part of the common trouble, as can exist among us for the defence of the property of individuals; and the only effect of such an order of things would he to establish an equality of misery and deprivation, by extinguishing the activity of personal industry. I know all they tell us of the community of property with the Spartans; but I reply boldly it is not true because it is impossible. I know well that at Sparta the rights of individuals were very little respected by the laws, and totally violated in respect to slaves. But a proof that nevertheless they still had property, is that there were thefts. Oh! tutors, what contradictory things you have said, without being aware of it!

The frequent opposition of interest among us, and the inequality of means, are then conditions of our nature, as are sufferings and death. I do not conceive that there can be men sufficiently barbarous to say that it is a good; nor can I any more conceive, that there should be any sufficiently blind, to believe that it is an evitable evil. I think this evil a necessary one, and that we must submit to it. The conclusion which I should draw from it (but it is as yet premature) is, that the laws should always endeavour to protect weakness; while too frequently they incline to favour power. The reason is easily perceived.

After these data, society should have for its basis, the free disposition of the faculties of the individual, and the guarantee of whatever he may acquire by their means; then every one exerts himself. One possesses himself of a field by cultivating it, another builds a house, a third invents some useful process, another manufactures, another transports; all make exchanges; the most skilful gain, the most economical amass. One of the consequences of individual property is, if not that the possessor may dispose of it according to his will after death, that is to say at a time when he shall no longer have any will, yet at least that the law determines in a general manner to whom it shall pass after him; and it is natural that it should be to his nearest kindred. Then inheritance becomes a new mean of acquiring; and what is more, or rather what is worse, of acquiring without labour. However, so long as society has not occupied all the space of which it may dispose, all still prosper with care; for those who have nothing but their hands, and who do not find

a sufficiently advantageous employment for their labour, can go and possess themselves of some of those lands which have no owners, and derive from them a profit so much the more considerable, as they are not obliged to lease or buy them. Accordingly care is general in new and industrious nations. But when once all the country is filled, when there no longer remains a field, which belongs to nobody, it is then that pression begins. Then those who have nothing in advance, or who have too little, can do no otherwise than put themselves in the pay of those who have a sufficiency.* They offer their labour every where, it falls in price. This does not yet prevent them from begetting children and multiplying imprudently; they quickly become too numerous. Then it is only the most skilful and the most fortunate among them who can succeed. All those whose services are in the least demand, can no longer procure for themselves but a subsistence the most strict, always uncertain, and often insufficient. They become almost as unhappy as if they were still savages.

It is this class, destitute of the favours of fortune that many writers on economy call *non-proprietors*; this expression is vicious in several respects. First, there are no non-proprietors, if by that we understand men entirely without the right of property. Those of whom we speak are more or less poor; but they all possess something, and have a need of preserving it. Were they but proprietors of their individuality, of their labour, and of the wages of this labour, they would have a great interest that this property should be respected. It is but too often violated, in many of the regulations made by men who speak of nothing but property and justice. When a thing exists in nature, no one is without interest in it. This is so true of the right of property, that the felon, even, who is about to be punished for having violated it, if he is not entirely cut off from society, has an interest that this right should be respected: For the day after he had undergone his punishment, he could not be sure of any thing that remained to him, if property were not protected.

Secondly, the same writers, in opposition to the pretended non-proprietors, call by the name of proprietors those only who possess estates in land. This division is entirely false, and presents no meaning;

*Once more I repeat, that hired labourers are not solely in the pay of the proprietors of land, but in that of all those who have capitals with which to pay their wages.

for we have seen that a landed estate is but a capital like another, like the sum of money which it has cost, like every other effect of the same value. One may be very poor, possessing a small field, and very rich without possessing an inch of land. It is therefore ridiculous to call the possessor of a poor inclosure a proprietor, and to refuse this title to a millionary. It would be more reasonable to divide society into poor and rich, if we knew where to place the line of demarcation. But if this division were less arbitrary, it would not be less illusory in relation to property. For, once again I repeat, the poor man has as much interest in the preservation of what he has, as the most opulent.

A distinction more real in respect to the difference of interests, would be between the hirelings on the one part, and those who employ them on the other, whether consumers or undertakers. The latter, under this point of view, may be regarded as the consumers of labour. This classification would, without doubt, have the inconvenience of uniting together things very different; as, for example, of classing among the hired, a minister of state, with a day-labourer, and of placing amongst consumers the smallest master workman with the richest idler. But in fine, it is true that all the hirelings have an interest in being paid high, and that all those who employ them have an interest in paying them low. It is true, however, that the undertaker who has an interest in paying little to the hired, has the moment after an interest in being paid high by the definitive consumer; and, above all, it is true, that we are all more or less consumers: for the poorest day labourer consumes articles produced by other hired persons; on which I make two reflections.

First, the interest of the hired being that of a very great number, and the interest of the consumers being that of all, it is singular enough that modern governments should be always ready to sacrifice first the hired to the undertakers, in shackling those by apprenticeships, corporation privileges, and other regulations; and afterwards to sacrifice the consumers to these same undertakers, by granting to these privileges, and sometimes even monopolies.

Secondly, I remark, that although each of us has particular interests, we change so frequently our parts in society, that often we have under one aspect an interest contrary to that which we have under another, so that we find ourselves connected with those to whom we were opposed the moment before; which fortunately prevents us from forming groupes constantly enemies. But, above all, I observe that in

the midst of all these momentary conflicts, we are all and always united by the common and immutable interests of proprietors and consumers, that is to say, that we have all and always an interest, first, that property be respected; secondly, that industry should be perfected; or, in other words, that fabrication and transportation should be in the best state possible. These truths are useful, to comprehend perfectly the workings of society, and to be sensible of all its advantages. It was a desire of rendering them evident which induced me to enter into these details. Let us return to the subject of the distribution of riches, from which they have drawn us, although they are not foreign to it.

I have a little hastened above the moment in which distress begins to make itself felt in the bosom of new societies, by fixing it at the instant in which all land has a master, and at which it can no longer be procured, without being bought or rented. Certainly at this epoch a great mean of care is exhausted, labour loses an opportunity of employing itself in a manner extremely advantageous, and the mass of subsistence ceases to increase as rapidly; because there can no longer be a question of establishing new cultures, but only of perfecting the old, a thing always more difficult and less productive than is generally believed. However immense resources still remain. All the arts offer them in competition, especially if the race of men who form the new society have sprung from an industrious and enlightened nation, and if it has relations with other civilized countries: for then there is no question about inventing and discovering, which is always very slow; but of profiting and practising what is known, which is always very easy.

In fact, so long as agriculture offered such great advantages, all men unemployed, or not profitably enough employed to their liking, have turned themselves to that. They have only thought of extracting productions from the earth, and exporting them. Observe that without a facility of exportation, the progress of agriculture would have been much less rapid, but with this circumstance, it has employed all hands. Wages excessively high have scarcely been able to determine a sufficient number of individuals to remain attached to the profession of the other arts the most necessary. But for all those things, the manufacture of which has not been indispensable within the country itself in which they are consumed, it has been more economical to draw them even from a great distance, and they have not failed to do it! Accordingly the commerce of these infant nations consists at first solely in exporting raw products, and importing manufactured articles.

Now what happens at the epoch of which we are speaking, when all the territory is occupied? Agriculture no longer offering the means of rapid fortune, the men who have been devoted to it spread into the other professions; they offer their labour—they obstruct one another—wages lower in truth: But long before they have become as low as in the countries anciently civilized from whence manufactured articles are drawn, there begins to be a profit in manufacturing within the country itself the greater part of these articles: for it is a great advantage for the manufacturer to be within reach of the consumer, and not to fear for his merchandise either the expenses or dangers of a long voyage, nor the inconveniences which result either from the slowness or difficulty of the communications; and this advantage is more than sufficient to counterbalance a certain degree of dearness in the manufactory. Manufactories then of every kind are established. Several of them, with the aid of some favourable circumstances, open to themselves foreign markets after having supplied the internal consumption, and give birth to new branches of commerce. All this occupies a numerous population, who live on the produce of the soil, which then is no longer exported in as great quantities, because it has not augmented in the same proportion. This new industry is for a long time increasing, as was agricultural industry, which was the first developed, and so long as it increases, it affords, if not riches, at least ease to the lower classes of people.* It is not until it becomes stationary or retrograde that misery begins, because all lucrative employments being filled, without a possibility of creating new ones, there is every where more labour offered than demanded. Then it is inevitable that the least skilful and least fortunate among the labourers should find no employment, or receive but insufficient wages for what they do. Many of them necessarily languish, and even perish, and a great number of wretched must constantly exist. Such is the sad state of old nations. We shrill soon see from what causes they arrive at it sooner than they

*How very desirable it would be in such a case, that the superior class of society should be sufficiently enlightened to give to the inferior ideas completely sound of the social order, during this happy and necessarily transient period, in which it is the most susceptible of instruction. If the United States of America do not profit of it, their tranquility and even safety will be much exposed, when interior and exterior obstacles, and inconveniences, shall have multiplied. This will be called their decline and corruption. It will be the slow but necessary effect of their anterior improvidence and carelessness.

ought, and by what means it might to a certain point be remedied. But previously some explanations are still necessary.

In fact, I am so bold as to believe that the picture which I have just traced, of the progress of societies from their birth, presents striking truths. There is in it neither a system made at pleasure, nor a theory established beforehand. It is a simple exposition of facts. Every one may look and see, if it is not thus they present themselves to the unprejudiced eye. It may even be observed that I have represented a nation, happily situated, enjoying all kinds of advantages, and making good use of them, and yet we come to this painful conclusion, that its state of full prosperity is necessarily transient. To account for a phenomenon so afflicting, it is not possible to stop at these vague words, of degeneration, of corruption, of the old age of nations, (as if an abstract being could be really old or young like a living individual,) all metaphorical expressions, which have been strangely abused, with which we have often been satisfied for want of better, but which in truth explain nothing, and which if they had a prevalence, would express effects rather than causes. We must then penetrate further. Every inevitable event has its cause in nature. The cause of this is the fecundity of the human species. Thus it is necessary to consider population; and afterwards we will resume the examination of the distribution of our riches.