

CHAPTER IX

Of the multiplication of Individuals, or of Population.

LOVE is a passion which so violently affects our heads, that it is not astonishing we should often be mistaken on all its effects. I acknowledge I no more partake of the zeal of the moralists, to diminish and constrain our pleasures, than of that of the politicians, to increase our fecundity and accelerate our multiplication. Each appears to me equally contrary to reason. At a proper time I may develope my opinions on the first point, at present the second is under consideration. Let us begin by establishing facts, by taking a view of all which surrounds us.

Under this relation, as under every other, we see nature occupied solely with the species, and not at all with the individual. Its fecundity is such in every kind, that if almost the totality of germs which it produces were not abortive, and if much the greater part of the beings brought forth did not perish almost immediately for want of aliment, in a very short time a single species of plants would suffice to cover the whole earth, and one single species of animals to people it entirely. The human species is subjected to the common law, though perhaps in a smaller degree than many others. Man is led to reproduction, by the most violent and imperious of his inclinations. A man and a woman, having attained ripe age, well constituted, and surrounded with the means of providing abundantly for all their wants, are able to raise many more children than are necessary to replace themselves on the scene of the world; and, if their career is not shortened by some unforeseen accident, they die surrounded with a numerous family, which continues always increasing. Accordingly the human race, when circumstances are favourable, multiplies very rapidly. The United States of North America furnish a proof of this, their whole population doubling in twenty years, and in some places in fifteen, and even in twelve years; and, that too where the emigration is almost nothing, and without the fecundity of women being greater there than elsewhere. And it is also

to be remarked, on the contrary that, whatever be the cause, cases of longevity are rare in that country, so that the mean duration of life would be shorter there than in the greater part of Europe, without the great number of infants who perish from want in this same Europe. Here is an incontestable datum, on which we can rest.

If this be so, why then is population stationary, and sometimes retrograde, in so many places, even very healthy ones? Here we must recollect the distinction we have already established, in the 4th Chapter, between our means of existence and our means of subsistence. The latter are the alimentary matters with which we are nourished; they are the most necessary part of our means of existence, but they are only a part. By these last we are to understand, all which contributes to defend us against all the dangers and all the sufferings of every kind; thus they consist in all the resources, whatever, with which we are furnished by the arts and sciences, that is to say by the entire mass of our knowledge. This distinction, well understood, we may establish as a general thesis, that population is always proportioned to the means of existence; and this single principle will give us an explanation of all the facts, and all their circumstances.

Amongst savages population is not only stationary, but little numerous, because their means of existence are very slender. Independently of their frequent want of subsistence, they have neither the conveniences sufficient, nor the attentions necessary for raising their children; accordingly the greater part perish. They neither know how to defend themselves against the severity of the seasons, nor the insalubrity of the climate; nor against the epidemics which frequently carry off three-fourths of a population. Having no sound ideas of the social state, wars are continual and destructive, vengeance atrocious; their women and old men are often abandoned. Thus it is misfortune and suffering, amongst them, which render the fecundity of the human species useless, and perhaps diminishes it.

Civilized people have all the resources which are wanting to the others; accordingly their population becomes numerous sooner or later; but we see it stops every where, when it has attained to that point, that many men can no longer procure by their labour sufficient wages to raise their children, and conveniently take care of themselves. If in general it is yet a little progressive, although very slowly in the actual state of our old societies, it is because the arts and sciences, and particularly the social science, being constantly cultivated there more or

less perfectly, their progress is always adding from time to time some little facilities to the means of living, and open some new vents to commerce and industry. It is true that things proceed thus, that when from some causes, natural or political, great sources of profit are diminished in a country, population immediately becomes retrograde; and, on the contrary, when it has been suddenly diminished by great epidemics, or cruel wars, without knowledge having suffered, it quickly regains its level; because labour being more in demand, and better paid, the poor have more means of preserving their children and themselves.

If from these general observations we pass to particular facts, we shall find the reason for them with the same ease. Let us take Russia for the first example. I do not pretend to make either eulogy or satire on this nation, which I know not: But we may safely affirm that it is not more skillful than other European nations, yet it is proved that its population increases more rapidly than that of other states of Europe. It is because it has a great extent of land; which as yet, having no masters, offers large means of existence to those who go or are carried thither: and if this immense advantage does not there produce a multiplication of men as rapid as in the United States, it is because its social organization and its industry are far from being as perfect. Fertile countries, all things otherwise equal, are more peopled than the others, and easily repair their disasters, because their land furnishes great means, that is to say the labour applied to the land is there fruitful. Accordingly, Lombardy and Belgium, so often ravaged, are always flourishing. Poland however, which is very fertile, has a small population, and that stationary; because its inhabitants being serfs, and wretched, have in the midst of abundance very slender means of existence. But suppose for a moment the small number of men, to whom these serfs belong, and who devour their substance, driven from the country, and the land become the property of those who cultivate it, you would see them quickly become industrious, and multiply rapidly. Two other countries, in general tolerably good, Westphalia and even Switzerland, notwithstanding the latter has wiser laws, have small population through want of industry; while Geneva, Hamburgh, and all Holland have it in excess. On the contrary, Spain, which is a delicious country, has few inhabitants relatively to its extent. However it has been proved, that for the forty or fifty years, which preceded the present unhappy war, its population sensibly increased; because they had been able to free it's industry from some of its fetters, and in some

degree to increase their information. It is then well proved, that *population* is always proportioned to the means of existence.

This truth has been already avowed by many political writers; but we see in their works, that they have not perceived all its extent. M. Say, whom I have already cited, and whom I may frequently cite, is I think the first who has clearly said, in his first book, chap. 46, "That nothing can increase population but what favours production; and that nothing can diminish it, at least permanently, but what attacks the sources of production." And observe that by production M. Say understands production of utility. It is even after him that I have given this idea of it. Now to *produce* in this sense, is clearly to add to our means of existence, for whatever is useful to us is a mean of providing for our wants; and indeed nothing merits the name of *useful*, but for this reason. Thus the principle of M. Say is exactly the same with that which I have established. Accordingly he draws from it this very just conclusion, that it is absurd to attempt to influence population by direct encouragements, by laws concerning marriages, by premiums granted to numerous families, &c. &c. He justly laughs on this subject at the famous ordinances of Augustus, of Louis XIV. and of so many other legislators, so much boasted of. These are in effect very false measures, which could in no way augment population; and he added, very justly, in my opinion, that the smallest regulation hurtful to industry, made by these princes could and must have diminished the number of men. I think absolutely the same.

M. Malthus goes much further still. He is, at least as far as I am acquainted, of all the authors who have written on population, the one who has treated the subject the most profoundly, and has developed all its consequences. His work, singularly remarkable, should be regarded as the last state of science on this important object, and he leaves almost nothing to be desired. M. Malthus does not limit himself to prove, that though population is arrested at different degrees in different countries, and according to different circumstances, it is always and every where as great as it can be, having regard to the means of existence—He shows that always in civilised nations it is too great for the happiness of man; because that men, and above all the poor, who every where constitute the great number, urged by the stimulus so imperious to reproduction, always multiply imprudently and without foresight; and plunge themselves into inevitable misery by a multiplication of the men, who demand occupation, and to whom none can

be given. All he advances is founded not only on convincing reasoning, but on tables of deaths, births, marriages, of the mean duration of life, and of the total population collected in different countries and discussed with care.

I add this latter point as very necessary: for it is to be observed first that all these data not only are often inexact, but that even when exact, they require to be examined attentively, and compared the one with the other, with much sagacity, before consequences are drawn from them; without which they would lead to serious errors. Secondly, that however imperfect these documents may be, they exist but in few countries, and within a short time only; so that in political economy, as in astronomy, we should calculate very little on ancient and distant observations. Even in France the simple registers of mortality deserve scarcely any confidence before the year 1700; and none of the other circumstances have been collected. Also, in the examples of population which I have above cited, I have made no mention of what is told respecting certain eastern countries, and of some nations ancient or of the middle age. If China, if Spain, in the time of the Romans, are or were as populous as we are told, there must certainly have been local reasons for the fact. But we have no means of knowing it sufficiently to see the causes clearly, and to venture to draw consequences. It is the same case with all the parts of the political and domestic economy of the ancients, founded almost solely on the practice of slavery, and the profits or losses of war, and very little on the free and peaceful development of industry. It is an order of things entirely different from our modern societies. As to the prodigious number of men which some authors pretend to have existed in France—for example under Charles V. or under Charles the IX. in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, that is to say at times in which industry was as unskilful and the social order as bad as we have seen it in Poland the eighteenth century—I believe the only answer to be made to these assertions is that which I have opposed to the marvellous union, which is said to have reigned at Sparta.—That is, that it is not true because it is not possible.

However it may be, all those who have reflected on these matters agree, that population is always proportioned to the means of existence. M. Say concludes therefrom, with reason, that it is absurd to think it possible to augment population otherwise than by an augmentation of these means; and Mr. Malthus proves further, that it is barbarous to endeavour to augment this *population always too great*, and the excess of

which is the source of all miseries; and that, even in relation to power, the chiefs of nations lose by it: for since they cannot continue in life a greater number of men than they can at the same time subsist, by multiplying births they only multiply premature deaths, and augment the number of children in proportion to that of adults; which produces a weaker population, numbers being equal. *The interest of men, under every consideration*, then is to diminish the effects of their fecundity.

I will say no more on the subject, which is but too clear of itself; and which nevertheless has given occasion to such false opinions, before it was thoroughly explained. We leave them for time to destroy.