

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA. c7

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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EDITED, WITH NOTES,

THE TRANSLATION REVISED AND IN GREAT PART REWRITTEN, AND THE ADDITIONS  
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# ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND PART.

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**T**HE Americans have a democratic state of society, which has naturally suggested to them certain laws and certain political manners. It has also created in their minds many feelings and opinions which were unknown in the old aristocratic societies of Europe. It has destroyed or modified the old relations of men to each other, and has established new ones. The aspect of civil society has been as much altered as the face of the political world.

I have treated of the former subject in the work which I published, five years ago, upon American Democracy; the latter is the object of the present book. These two Parts complete each other, and form but a single work.

But I must warn the reader immediately against an error which would be very prejudicial to me. Because I attribute so many different effects to the principle of equality, it might be inferred that I consider this principle as the only cause of everything that takes place in our day. This

would be attributing to me a very narrow view of things.

A multitude of the opinions, sentiments, and instincts which belong to our times owe their origin to circumstances which have nothing to do with the principle of equality, or are even hostile to it. Thus, taking the United States for example, I could easily prove that the nature of the country, the origin of its inhabitants, the religion of the early settlers, their acquired knowledge, their previous habits, have exercised, and still do exercise, independently of democracy, an immense influence upon their modes of thought and feeling. Other causes, equally independent of the principle of equality, would be found in Europe, and would explain much of what is passing there.

I recognize the existence and the efficiency of all these various causes; but my subject does not lead me to speak of them. I have not undertaken to point out the origin and nature of all our inclinations and all our ideas; I have only endeavored to show how far both of them are affected by the equality of men's conditions.

As I am firmly convinced that the democratic revolution which we are now beholding is an irresistible fact, against which it would be neither desirable nor prudent to contend, some persons perhaps may be surprised that, in the course of this book, I have often applied language of strong censure to the democratic communities which this

revolution has created. The simple reason is, that precisely because I was not an opponent of democracy, I wished to speak of it with all sincerity. Men will not receive the truth from their enemies, and it is very seldom offered to them by their friends; on this very account, I have frankly uttered it. I believed that many persons would take it upon themselves to inform men of the benefits which they might hope to receive from the establishment of equality, whilst very few would venture to point out from afar the dangers with which it would be attended. It is principally towards these dangers, therefore, that I directed my gaze; and, believing that I had clearly discerned what they are, it would have been cowardice to say nothing about them.

I hope the same impartiality will be found in this second work which people seemed to observe in its predecessor. Placed between the conflicting opinions which divide my countrymen, I have endeavored for the time to stifle in my own bosom the sympathy or the aversion that I felt for either. If the readers of my book find in it a single phrase intended to flatter either of the great parties which have agitated our country, or any one of the petty factions which in our day harass and weaken it, let them raise their voices and accuse me.

The subject which I wished to cover by my investigations is immense; for it includes most of the feelings and opinions produced by the new

condition of the world's affairs. Such a subject certainly exceeds my strength, and in the treatment of it I have not been able to satisfy myself. But though I could not reach the object at which I aimed, my readers will at least do me the justice to believe, that I conceived and followed out the undertaking in a spirit which rendered me worthy of success.

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## CHAPTER IX.

THAT THE AMERICANS APPLY THE PRINCIPLE OF INTEREST  
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IF the principle of interest rightly understood had nothing but the present world in view, it would be very insufficient, for there are many sacrifices which can only find their recompense in another; and whatever ingenuity may be put forth to demonstrate the utility of virtue, it will never be an easy task to make that man live aright who has no thought of dying.

It is therefore necessary to ascertain whether the principle of interest rightly understood can be easily reconciled with religious belief. The philosophers who inculcate this system of morals tell men that, to be happy in this life, they must watch their own passions, and steadily control their excess; that lasting happiness can be secured only by renouncing a thousand transient gratifications; and that a man must perpetually triumph over himself in order to secure his own advantage. The founders of almost all religions have held the same language. The track they point out to man is the same, only the goal is more remote; instead of placing in this world the reward of the sacrifices they impose, they transport it to another.

Nevertheless, I cannot believe that all those who practise virtue from religious motives are actuated only by the hope of a recompense. I have known zealous Christians who constantly forgot themselves, to work with greater ardor for the happiness of their fellow-men; and I have heard them declare that all they did was only to earn the bless-

ings of a future state. I cannot but think that they deceive themselves : I respect them too much to believe them.

Christianity, indeed, teaches that a man must prefer his neighbor to himself, in order to gain eternal life ; but Christianity also teaches that men ought to benefit their fellow-creatures for the love of God. A sublime expression ! Man searches by his intellect into the Divine conception, and sees that order is the purpose of God ; he freely gives his own efforts to aid in prosecuting this great design, and, whilst he sacrifices his personal interests to this consummate order of all created things, expects no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating it.

I do not believe that interest is the sole motive of religious men : but I believe that interest is the principal means which religions themselves employ to govern men, and I do not question that in this way they strike the multitude and become popular. I do not see clearly why the principle of interest rightly understood should undermine the religious opinions of men ; it seems to me more easy to show why it should strengthen them. Let it be supposed that, in order to attain happiness in this world, a man combats his instincts on all occasions, and deliberately calculates every action of his life ; that, instead of yielding blindly to the impetuosity of first desires, he has learned the art of resisting them, and that he has accustomed himself to sacrifice without an effort the pleasure of a moment to the lasting interest of his whole life. If such a man believes in the religion which he professes, it will cost him but little to submit to the restrictions it may impose. Reason herself counsels him to obey, and habit has prepared him to endure these limitations. If he should have conceived any doubts as to the object of his hopes, still he will not easily allow himself to be stopped by them ; and he will decide that it is wise to risk some of the advantages

of this world, in order to preserve his rights to the great inheritance promised him in another. "To be mistaken in believing that the Christian religion is true," says Pascal, "is no great loss to any one; but how dreadful to be mistaken in believing it to be false!"

The Americans do not affect a brutal indifference to a future state; they affect no puerile pride in despising perils which they hope to escape from. They therefore profess their religion without shame and without weakness; but there generally is, even in their zeal, something so indescribably tranquil, methodical, and deliberate, that it would seem as if the head, far more than the heart, brought them to the foot of the altar.

The Americans not only follow their religion from interest, but they often place in this world the interest which makes them follow it. In the Middle Ages, the clergy spoke of nothing but a future state; they hardly cared to prove that a sincere Christian may be a happy man here below. But the American preachers are constantly referring to the earth; and it is only with great difficulty that they can divert their attention from it. To touch their congregations, they always show them how favorable religious opinions are to freedom and public tranquillity; and it is often difficult to ascertain from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world, or prosperity in this.