

BOOK VIII

OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE THREE GOVERNMENTS

1.—*General Idea of this Book*

THE corruption of every government generally begins with that of its principles.

2.—*Of the Corruption of the Principles of Democracy.*

The principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is extinct, but likewise when they fall into a spirit of extreme equality, and when each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him. Then the people, incapable of bearing the very power they have delegated, want to manage everything themselves, to debate for the senate, to execute for the magistrate, and to decide for the judges.

When this is the case, virtue can no longer subsist in the republic. The people are desirous of exercising the functions of the magistrates, who cease to be revered. The deliberations of the senate are slighted; all respect is then laid aside for the senators, and consequently for old age. If there is no more respect for old age, there will be none presently for parents; deference to husbands will be likewise thrown off, and submission to masters. This license will soon become general, and the trouble of command be as fatiguing as that of obedience. Wives, children, slaves will shake off all subjection. No longer will there be any such thing as manners, order, or virtue.

We find in Xenophon's Banquet a very lively description of a republic in which the people abused their equality. Each guest gives in his turn the reason why he is satisfied. "Content I am," says Chamides, "because of my poverty. When I

was rich, I was obliged to pay my court to informers, knowing I was more liable to be hurt by them than capable of doing them harm. The republic constantly demanded some new tax of me; and I could not decline paying. Since I have grown poor, I have acquired authority; nobody threatens me; I rather threaten others. I can go or stay where I please. The rich already rise from their seats and give me the way. I am a king, I was before a slave: I paid taxes to the republic, now it maintains me: I am no longer afraid of losing: but I hope to acquire."

The people fall into this misfortune, when those in whom they confide, desirous of concealing their own corruption, endeavor to corrupt them. To disguise their own ambition, they speak to them only of the grandeur of the state; to conceal their own avarice, they incessantly flatter theirs.

The corruption will increase among the corruptors, and likewise among those who are already corrupted. The people will divide the public money among themselves, and, having added the administration of affairs to their indolence, will be for blending their poverty with the amusements of luxury. But with their indolence and luxury, nothing but the public treasure will be able to satisfy their demands.

We must not be surprised to see their suffrages given for money. It is impossible to make great largesses to the people without great extortion: and to compass this, the state must be subverted. The greater the advantages they seem to derive from their liberty, the nearer they approach towards the critical moment of losing it. Petty tyrants arise who have all the vices of a single tyrant. The small remains of liberty soon become insupportable; a single tyrant starts up, and the people are stripped of every thing, even of the profits of their corruption.

Democracy has, therefore, two excesses to avoid—the spirit of inequality, which leads to aristocracy or monarchy, and the spirit of extreme equality, which leads to despotic power, as the latter is completed by conquest.

True it is, that those who corrupted the Greek republics did not always become tyrants. This was because they had a greater passion for eloquence than for the military art. Be-

sides there reigned an implacable hatred in the breasts of the Greeks against those who subverted a republican government; and for this reason anarchy degenerated into annihilation, instead of being changed into tyranny.

But Syracuse being situated in the midst of a great number of petty states, whose government had been changed from oligarchy to tyranny,^a and being governed by a senate^b scarcely ever mentioned in history, underwent such miseries as are the consequence of a more than ordinary corruption. This city, ever a prey to licentiousness,^c or oppression, equally laboring under the sudden and alternate succession of liberty and servitude, and notwithstanding her external strength, constantly determined to a revolution by the least foreign power—this city, I say, had in her bosom an immense multitude of people, whose fate it was to have always this cruel alternative, either of choosing a tyrant to govern them, or of acting the tyrant themselves.

3.—Of the Spirit of extreme Equality

As distant as heaven is from earth, so is the true spirit of equality from that of extreme equality. The former does not imply that everybody should command, or that no one should be commanded, but that we obey or command our equals. It endeavors not to shake off the authority of a master, but that its masters should be none but its equals.

In the state of nature, indeed, all men are born equal, but they cannot continue in this equality. Society makes them lose it, and they recover it only by the protection of the laws.

Such is the difference between a well-regulated democracy and one that is not so, that in the former men are equal only as citizens, but in the latter they are equal also as magistrates, as senators, as judges, as fathers, as husbands, or as masters.

The natural place of virtue is near to liberty; but it is not nearer to excessive liberty than to servitude.

^a See Plutarch in the lives of Timoleon and Dio.

^b It was that of the Six Hundred, of whom mention is made by Diodorus.

^c Upon the expulsion of the tyrants, they made citizens of strangers and mercenary troops, which gave rise to civil wars.—Aristot. "Polit." lib. V. cap. iiii.

The people having been the cause of the victory over the Athenians, the republic was changed.—Ibid. cap. iv. The passion of two young magistrates, one of whom carried off the other's boy, and in revenge the other debauched his wife, was attended with a change in the form of this republic.—Ibid. lib. VII. cap. iv.

4.—*Particular Cause of the Corruption of the People*

Great success, especially when chiefly owing to the people, intoxicates them to such a degree that it is impossible to contain them within bounds. Jealous of their magistrates, they soon become jealous likewise of the magistracy; enemies to those who govern, they soon prove enemies also to the constitution. Thus it was that the victory over the Persians in the straits of Salamis corrupted the republic of Athens;^d and thus the defeat of the Athenians ruined the republic of Syracuse.^e

Marseilles never experienced those great transitions from lowness to grandeur; this was owing to the prudent conduct of that republic, which always preserved her principles.

5.—*Of the Corruption of the Principle of Aristocracy*

Aristocracy is corrupted if the power of the nobles becomes arbitrary: when this is the case, there can no longer be any virtue either in the governors or the governed.

If the reigning families observe the laws, it is a monarchy with several monarchs, and in its own nature one of the most excellent; for almost all these monarchs are tied down by the laws. But when they do not observe them, it is a despotic state swayed by a great many despotic princes.

In the latter case, the republic consists only in the nobles. The body governing is the republic; and the body governed is the despotic state; which forms two of the most heterogeneous bodies in the world.

The extremity of corruption is when the power of the nobles becomes hereditary;^f for then they can hardly have any moderation. If they are only a few, their power is greater, but their security less: if they are a larger number, their power is less, and their security greater, insomuch that power goes on increasing, and security diminishing, up to the very despotic prince who is encircled with excess of power and danger.

The great number, therefore, of nobles in an hereditary aristocracy renders the government less violent: but as there is less virtue, they fall into a spirit of supineness and negligence, by which the state loses all its strength and activity.^g

^d Aristot. "Polit." lib. V. cap. iv.

^e Ibid.

^f The aristocracy is changed into an oligarchy.

^g Venice is one of those republics that has enacted the best laws for correcting the inconveniences of an hereditary aristocracy.

An aristocracy may maintain the full vigor of its constitution if the laws be such as are apt to render the nobles more sensible of the perils and fatigues than of the pleasure of command: and if the government be in such a situation as to have something to dread, while security shelters under its protection, and uncertainty threatens from abroad.

As a certain kind of confidence forms the glory and stability of monarchies, republics, on the contrary, must have something to apprehend.^h A fear of the Persians supported the laws of Greece. Carthage and Rome were alarmed, and strengthened by each other. Strange, that the greater security those states enjoyed, the more, like stagnated waters, they were subject to corruption!

6.—*Of the Corruption of the Principle of Monarchy*

As democracies are subverted when the people despoil the senate, the magistrates, the judges of their functions, so monarchies are corrupted when the prince insensibly deprives societies or cities of their privileges. In the former case the multitude usurp the power, in the latter it is usurped by a single person.

"The destruction of the dynasties of Tsin and Soui," says a Chinese author, "was owing to this: the princes, instead of confining themselves, like their ancestors, to a general inspection, the only one worthy of a sovereign, wanted to govern every thing immediately by themselves."ⁱ

The Chinese author gives us in this instance the cause of the corruption of almost all monarchies.

Monarchy is destroyed when a prince thinks he shows a greater exertion of power in changing than in conforming to the order of things; when he deprives some of his subjects of their hereditary employments to bestow them arbitrarily upon others; and when he is fonder of being guided by fancy than judgment.

Again, it is destroyed when the prince, directing everything entirely to himself, calls to the state his capital, the capital to his court, and the court to his own person.

^h Justin attributes the extinction of Athenian virtue to the death of Epaminondas. Having no further emulation, they spent their revenues in feasts, frequentius cœnam, quam castra visen-

tes. Then it was that the Macedonians emerged from obscurity, l. 6.

ⁱ Compilation of works made under the Mings, related by Father Du Halde.

It is destroyed, in fine, when the prince mistakes his authority, his situation and the love of his people, and when he is not fully persuaded that a monarch ought to think himself secure, as a despotic prince ought to think himself in danger.

7.—*The same Subject continued*

The principle of monarchy is corrupted when the first dignities are marks of the first servitude, when the great men are deprived of public respect, and rendered the low tools of arbitrary power.

It is still more corrupted when honor is set up in contradiction to honors, and when men are capable of being loaded at the very same time with infamy *j* and with dignities.

It is corrupted when the prince changes his justice into severity; when he puts, like the Roman emperors, a Medusa's head on his breast; *k* and when he assumes that menacing and terrible air which Commodus ordered to be given to his statues. *l*

Again, it is corrupted when mean and abject souls grow vain of the pomp attending their servitude, and imagine that the motive which induces them to be entirely devoted to their prince exempts them from all duty to their country.

But if it be true (and, indeed, the experience of all ages has shown it) that in proportion as the power of the monarch becomes boundless and immense, his security diminishes, is the corrupting of this power, and the altering of its very nature, a less crime than that of high treason against the prince?

8.—*Danger of the Corruption of the Principle of monarchical Government*

The danger is not when the state passes from one moderate to another moderate government, as from a republic to a mon-

j During the reign of Tiberius statues were erected to, and triumphal ornaments conferred on, informers; which debased these honors to such a degree, that those who had really merited them disdained to accept them. Frag. of Dio, book LVIII., taken from the "Extract of Virtues and Vices," by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. See in Tacitus in what manner Nero, on the discovery and punishment of a pretended conspiracy, bestowed triumphal ornaments

on Petronius Turpilianus, Nerva, and Tigellinus.—"Annal." book XIV. See likewise how the generals refused to serve, because they condemned the military honors: *pervulgatis triumphis insignibus.*—Tacit. "Annal." book XIII.

k In this state the prince knew extremely well the principle of his government.

l Herodian.

archy, or from a monarchy to a republic; but when it is precipitated from a moderate to a despotic government.

Most of the European nations are still governed by the principles of morality. But if from a long abuse of power or the fury of conquest, despotic sway should prevail to a certain degree, neither morals nor climate would be able to withstand its baleful influence: and then human nature would be exposed, for some time at least, even in this beautiful part of the world, to the insults with which she has been abused in the other three.

9.—*How ready the Nobility are to defend the Throne*

The English nobility buried themselves with Charles the First under the ruins of the throne; and before that time, when Philip II endeavored to tempt the French with the allurements of liberty, the crown was constantly supported by a nobility who think it an honor to obey a king, but consider it as the lowest disgrace to share the power with the people.

The house of Austria has ever used her endeavors to oppress the Hungarian nobility; little thinking how serviceable that very nobility would be one day to her. She would fain have drained their country of money, of which they had no plenty; but took no notice of the men, with whom it abounded. When princes combined to dismember her dominions, the several parts of that monarchy fell motionless, as it were one upon another. No life was then to be seen but in those very nobles, who, resenting the affronts offered to the sovereign, and forgetting the injuries done to themselves, took up arms to avenge her cause, and considered it the highest glory bravely to die and to forgive.

10.—*Of the Corruption of the Principle of despotic Government*

The principle of despotic government is subject to a continual corruption, because it is even in its nature corrupt. Other governments are destroyed by particular accidents, which do violence to the principles of each constitution; this is ruined by its own intrinsic imperfections, when some accidental causes do not prevent the corrupting of its principles. It maintains itself, therefore, only when circumstances, drawn

from the climate, religion, situation, or genius of the people, oblige it to conform to order, and to admit of some rule. By these things its nature is forced without being changed; its ferocity remains; and it is made tame and tractable only for a time.

II.—*Natural Effects of the Goodness and Corruption of the Principles of Government*

When once the principles of government are corrupted, the very best laws become bad, and turn against the state: but when the principles are sound, even bad laws have the same effect as good; the force of the principle draws everything to it.

The inhabitants of Crete used a very singular method to keep the principal magistrates dependent on the laws, which was that of "Insurrection." Part of the citizens rose up in arms,^m put the magistrates to flight, and obliged them to return to a private life. This was supposed to be done in consequence of the law. One would have imagined that an institution of this nature, which established sedition to hinder the abuse of power, would have subverted any republic whatsoever; and yet it did not subvert that of Crete. The reason is this.ⁿ

When the ancients would cite a people that had the strongest affection for their country, they were sure to mention the inhabitants of Crete: "Our Country," said Plato,^o "a name so dear to the Cretans." They called it by a name which signifies the love of a mother for her children.^a Now the love of our country sets everything right.

The laws of Poland have likewise their Insurrection: but the inconveniences thence arising plainly show that the people of Crete alone were capable of using such a remedy with success.

The gymnastic exercises established among the Greeks had the same dependence on the goodness of the principle of government. "It was the Lacedæmonians and Cretans," said Plato,^b "that opened those celebrated academies which gave them so eminent a rank in the world. Modesty at first was alarmed;

^m Aristot. "Polit." book II. chap. 10.
ⁿ They always united immediately against foreign enemies, which was called "Syncretism."—Plut. "Mor." p. 88.

^o "Repub." lib. IX.
^a Plutarch's "Morals," treatise "whether a man advanced in years ought to meddle with public affairs."
^b "Repub." lib. V.

but it yielded to the public utility." In Plato's time these institutions were admirable: as they bore a relation to a very important object, which was the military art. But when virtue fled from Greece, the military art was destroyed by these institutions; people appeared then on the arena, not for improvement, but for debauch.^d

Plutarch informs us^e that the Romans in his time were of opinion that those games had been the principal cause of the slavery into which the Greeks had fallen. On the contrary, it was the slavery of the Greeks that corrupted those exercises. In Plutarch's time,^f their fighting naked in the parks, and their wrestling, infected the young people with a spirit of cowardice, inclined them to infamous passions, and made them mere dancers. But under Epaminondas the exercise of wrestling made the Thebans win the famous battle of Leuctra.^g

There are very few laws which are not good, while the state retains its principles: here I may apply what Epicurus said of riches: "It is not the liquor, but the vessel that is corrupted."

12.—*The same Subject continued*

In Rome the judges were chosen at first from the order of senators. This privilege the Gracchi transferred to the knights; Drusus gave it to the senators and knights; Sylla to the senators only: Cotta to the senators, knights, and public treasurers; Cæsar excluded the latter; Antony made decuries of senators, knights, and centurions.

When once a republic is corrupted, there is no possibility of remedying any of the growing evils, but by removing the corruption and restoring its lost principles; every other correction is either useless or a new evil. While Rome preserved her principles entire, the judicial power might without any abuse be lodged in the hands of senators; but as soon as this city became corrupt, to whatsoever body that power was transferred,

^c The Gymnic art was divided into two parts, dancing and wrestling. In Crete they had the armed dances of the Curetes; at Sparta they had those of Castor and Pollux; at Athens the armed dances of Pallas, which were extremely proper for those that were not yet of age for military service. "Wrestling is the image of war," said Plato ("Laws," book VII.). He commends antiquity for having established only two dances,

the pacific and the Pyrrhic. See how the latter dance was applied to the military art, Plato, *ibid.*

^d "Aut libidinosæ."
Ladæas Lacedæmonis palæstras."
—Mart. lib. IV. ep. 55.

^e Plutarch's "Morals," in the treatise entitled "Questions concerning the affairs of the Romans."

^f *Ibid.*

^g *Ibid.*, Table propositions, book II.

whether to the senate, to the knights, to the treasurers, to two of those bodies, to all three together, or to any other, matters still went wrong. The knights had no more virtue than the senate, the treasurers no more than the knights, and these as little as the centurions.

After the people of Rome had obtained the privilege of sharing the magistracy with the patricians, it was natural to think that their flatterers would immediately become arbiters of the government. But no such thing ever happened.—It was observable that the very people who had rendered the plebeians capable of public offices ever fixed their choice upon the patricians. Because they were virtuous, they were magnanimous; and because they were free, they had a contempt of power. But when their morals were corrupted, the more power they were possessed of, the less prudent was their conduct, till at length, upon becoming their own tyrants and slaves, they lost the strength of liberty to fall into the weakness and impotency of licentiousness.

13.—*The effect of an Oath among virtuous People*

There is no nation, says Livy,^h that has been longer uncorrupted than the Romans; no nation where moderation and poverty have been longer respected.

Such was the influence of an oath among those people, that nothing bound them more strongly to the laws. They often did more for the observance of an oath than they would ever have performed for the thirst of glory or for the love of their country.

When Quintus Cincinnatus the consul wanted to raise an army in the city against the Æqui and the Volsci, the tribunes opposed him. "Well," said he, "let all those who have taken an oath to the consul of the preceding year march under my banner."ⁱ In vain did the tribunes cry out that this oath was no longer binding, and that when they took it Quintus was but a private person: the people were more religious than those who pretended to direct them; they would not listen to the distinctions or equivocations of the tribunes.

When the same people thought of retiring to the Sacred Mount, they felt some remorse from the oath they had taken

^h Book I.

ⁱ "Livy," book III. 20.

to the consuls, that they would follow them into the field.^j They entered then into a design of killing the consuls; but dropped it when they were given to understand that their oath would still be binding. Now it is easy to judge of the notion they entertained of the violation of an oath from the crime they intended to commit.

After the battle of Cannæ, the people were seized with such a panic that they would fain have retired to Sicily.^k But Scipio having prevailed upon them to swear they would not stir from Rome, the fear of violating this oath surpassed all other apprehensions. Rome was a ship held by two anchors, religion and morality, in the midst of a furious tempest.

14.—*How the smallest Change of the Constitution is attended with the Ruin of its Principles*

Aristotle mentions the city of Carthage as a well-regulated republic. Polybius tells us^l that there was this inconvenience at Carthage in the second Punic war, that the senate had lost almost all its authority. We are informed by Livy that when Hannibal returned to Carthage he found that the magistrates and the principal citizens had abused their power, and converted the public revenues to their private emolument. The virtue, therefore, of the magistrates, and the authority of the senate, both fell at the same time; and all was owing to the same cause.

Every one knows the wonderful effects of the censorship among the Romans. There was a time when it grew burdensome; but still it was supported because there was more luxury than corruption. Claudius^m weakened its authority, by which means the corruption became greater than the luxury, and the censorship dwindled away of itself.ⁿ After various interruptions and resumptions, it was entirely laid aside, till it became altogether useless—that is, till the reigns of Augustus and Claudius.

^j "Livy," book III.
^k "The people here referred to were several young officers, who, in despair, proposed to retire, but were restrained by Scipio."—Crévier.

^l See Book XI, chap. xii.
^m See "Dio," book XXXVII.
Cicero's life in Plutarch, Cicero to Atticus, book IV, letters 10 and 15.
Asconius on Cicero, de divinatione.

ⁿ About a hundred years after.

15.—*Sure Methods of preserving the three Principles*

I shall not be able to make myself rightly understood till the reader has perused the four following chapters.

16.—*Distinctive Properties of a Republic*

It is natural for a republic to have only a small territory; otherwise it cannot long subsist. In an extensive republic there are men of large fortunes, and consequently of less moderation; there are trusts too considerable to be placed in any single subject; he has interests of his own; he soon begins to think that he may be happy and glorious, by oppressing his fellow-citizens; and that he may raise himself to grandeur on the ruins of his country.

In an extensive republic the public good is sacrificed to a thousand private views; it is subordinate to exceptions, and depends on accidents. In a small one, the interest of the public is more obvious, better understood, and more within the reach of every citizen; abuses have less extent, and, of course, are less protected.

The long duration of the republic of Sparta was owing to her having continued in the same extent of territory after all her wars. The sole aim of Sparta was liberty; and the sole advantage of her liberty, glory.

It was the spirit of the Greek republics to be as contented with their territories as with their laws. Athens was first fired with ambition and gave it to Lacedæmon; but it was an ambition rather of commanding a free people than of governing slaves; rather of directing than of breaking the union. All was lost upon the starting up of monarchy—a government whose spirit is more turned to increase of dominion.

Excepting particular circumstances,^o it is difficult for any other than a republican government to subsist longer in a single town. A prince of so petty a state would naturally endeavor to oppress his subjects, because his power would be great, while the means of enjoying it or of causing it to be respected would be inconsiderable. The consequence is, he would trample upon his people. On the other hand, such a prince might

^o As when a petty sovereign supports himself between two great powers by means of their mutual jealousy; but then he has only a precarious existence.

be easily crushed by a foreign or even a domestic force; the people might any instant unite and rise up against him. Now as soon as the sovereign of a single town is expelled, the quarrel is over; but if he has many towns, it only begins.

17.—*Distinctive Properties of a Monarchy*

A monarchical state ought to be of moderate extent. Were it small, it would form itself into a republic; were it very large, the nobility, possessed of great estates, far from the eye of the prince, with a private court of their own, and secure, moreover, from sudden executions by the laws and manners of the country—such a nobility, I say, might throw off their allegiance, having nothing to fear from too slow and too distant a punishment.

Thus Charlemagne had scarcely founded his empire when he was obliged to divide it; whether the governors of the provinces refused to obey; or whether, in order to keep them more under subjection, there was a necessity of parcelling the empire into several kingdoms.

After the decease of Alexander his empire was divided. How was it possible for those Greek and Macedonian chiefs, who were each of them free and independent, or commanders at least of the victorious bands dispersed throughout that vast extent of conquered land—how was it possible, I say, for them to obey?

Attila's empire was dissolved soon after his death; such a number of kings, who were no longer under restraint, could not resume their fetters.

The sudden establishment of unlimited power is a remedy which in those cases may prevent a dissolution: but how dreadful the remedy, which after the enlargement of dominion opens a new scene of misery!

The rivers hasten to mingle their waters with the sea; and monarchies lose themselves in despotic power.

18.—*Particular Case of the Spanish Monarchy*

Let not the example of Spain be produced against me; it rather proves what I affirm. To preserve America she did what even despotic power itself does not attempt: she de-

stroyed the inhabitants. To preserve her colony, she was obliged to keep it dependent even for its subsistence.

In the Netherlands, she essayed to render herself arbitrary; and as soon as she abandoned the attempt, her perplexity increased. On the one hand the Walloons would not be governed by Spaniards; and on the other, the Spanish soldiers refused to submit to Walloon officers.^p

In Italy she maintained her ground, merely by exhausting herself and by enriching that country. For those who would have been pleased to have got rid of the King of Spain were not in a humor to refuse his gold.

19.—*Distinctive Properties of a despotic Government*

A large empire supposes a despotic authority in the person who governs. It is necessary that the quickness of the prince's resolutions should supply the distance of the places they are sent to; that fear should prevent the remissness of the distant governor or magistrate; that the law should be derived from a single person, and should shift continually, according to the accidents which incessantly multiply in a state in proportion to its extent.

20.—*Consequence of the preceding Chapters*

If it be, therefore, the natural property of small states to be governed as a republic, of middling ones to be subject to a monarch, and of large empires to be swayed by a despotic prince; the consequence is, that in order to preserve the principles of the established government, the state must be supported in the extent it has acquired, and that the spirit of this state will alter in proportion as it contracts or extends its limits.

21.—*Of the Empire of China*

Before I conclude this book, I shall answer an objection that may be made to the foregoing doctrine.

Our missionaries inform us that the government of the vast Empire of China is admirable, and that it has a proper mixture of fear, honor, and virtue. Consequently I must have given an idle distinction in establishing the principles of the three governments.

^p See the "History of the United Provinces," by M. Le Clerc.

But I cannot conceive what this honor can be among a people who act only through fear of being bastinadoed.^q

Again, our merchants are far from giving us any such accounts of the virtue so much talked of by the missionaries; we need only consult them in relation to the robberies and extortions of the mandarins.^r I likewise appeal to another unexceptionable witness, the great Lord Anson.

Besides, Father Perennin's letters concerning the emperor's proceedings against some of the princes of the blood^s who had incurred his displeasure by their conversion, plainly show us a settled plan of tyranny, and barbarities committed by rule, that is, in cold blood.

We have likewise Monsieur de Mairan's, and the same Father Perennin's, letters on the government of China. I find, therefore, that after a few proper questions and answers the whole mystery is unfolded.

Might not our missionaries have been deceived by an appearance of order? Might not they have been struck with that constant exercise of a single person's will—an exercise by which they themselves are governed, and which they are so pleased to find in the courts of the Indian princes; because as they go thither only in order to introduce great changes, it is much easier to persuade those princes that there are no bounds to their power, than to convince the people that there are none to their submission.^t

In fine, there is frequently some kind of truth even in errors themselves. It may be owing to particular and, perhaps, very extraordinary circumstances that the Chinese government is not so corrupt as one might naturally expect. The climate and some other physical causes may, in that country, have had so strong an influence on their morals as in some measure to produce wonders.

The climate of China is surprisingly favorable to the propagation of the human species.^u The women are the most prolific in the whole world. The most barbarous tyranny can put no stop to the progress of propagation. The prince cannot say

^q "It is the cudgel that governs China," says Father Du Halde.

^r Among others, De Lange's relation.

^s Of the family of Sourmama, "Edifying Letters," 18th collection.

^t See in Father Du Halde how the

missionaries availed themselves of the authority of Canhi to silence the mandarins, who constantly declared that by the laws of the country no foreign worship could be established in the empire.

^u See "Lettres Persanes," cxx.

there like Pharaoh, "Let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply." He would be rather reduced to Nero's wish, that mankind had all but one head. In spite of tyranny, China by the force of its climate will be ever populous, and triumph over the tyrannical oppressor.

China, like all other countries that live chiefly upon rice, is subject to frequent famines. When the people are ready to starve, they disperse in order to seek for nourishment; in consequence of which, gangs of robbers are formed on every side. Most of them are extirpated in their very infancy; others swell, and are likewise suppressed. And yet in so great a number of such distant provinces, some band or other may happen to meet with success. In that case they maintain their ground, strengthen their party, form themselves into a military body, march up to the capital, and place their leader on the throne.

From the very nature of things, a bad administration is here immediately punished. The want of subsistence in so populous a country produces sudden disorders. The reason why the redress of abuses in other countries is attended with such difficulty is, because their efforts are not immediately felt; the prince is not informed in so sudden and sensible a manner as in China.

The Emperor of China is not taught like our princes, that if he governs ill he will be less happy in the other life, less powerful and less opulent in this. He knows that if his government be not just he will be stripped both of empire and life.

As China grows every day more populous, notwithstanding the exposing of children,^v the inhabitants are incessantly employed in tilling the lands for their subsistence. This requires a very extraordinary attention in the government. It is their perpetual concern that every man should have it in his power to work, without the apprehension of being deprived of the fruits of his labor. Consequently this is not so much a civil as a domestic government.

Such has been the origin of those regulations which have been so greatly extolled. They wanted to make the laws reign in conjunction with despotic power; but whatever is joined to the latter loses all its force. In vain did this arbitrary sway,

^v See the order of Tsongtou for tilling the land, in the "Edifying Letters," 21st collection.

laboring under its own inconveniences, desire to be fettered; it armed itself with its chains, and has become still more terrible.

China is, therefore, a despotic state, whose principle is fear. Perhaps in the earliest dynasties, when the empire had not so large an extent, the government might have deviated a little from this spirit; but the case is otherwise at present.