

ern with more prudence than they themselves could ever have imagined; for great exertions of authority were, in the event, found to be impolitic; and from experience it is manifest that nothing but the goodness and lenity of a government can make it flourish.

We begin to be cured of Machiavelism, and recover from it every day. More moderation has become necessary in the councils of princes. What would formerly have been called a master-stroke in politics would be now, independent of the horror it might occasion, the greatest imprudence.

Happy is it for men that they are in a situation in which, though their passions prompt them to be wicked, it is, nevertheless, to their interest to be humane and virtuous.

21.—*The Discovery of two new Worlds, and in what Manner Europe is affected by it*

The compass opened, if I may so express myself, the universe. Asia and Africa were found, of which only some borders were known; and America, of which we knew nothing.

The Portuguese, sailing on the Atlantic Ocean, discovered the most southern point of Africa; they saw a vast sea, which carried them to the East Indies. Their danger upon this sea, the discovery of Mozambique, Melinda, and Calicut, have been sung by Camoens, whose poems make us feel something of the charms of the "Odyssey" and the magnificence of the "Æneid."

The Venetians had hitherto carried on the trade of the Indies through the Turkish dominions, and pursued it in the midst of oppressions and discouragements. By the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, and those which were made some time after, Italy was no longer the centre of the trading world; it was, if I may be permitted the expression, only a corner of the universe, and is so still. The commerce even of the Levant depending now on that of the great trading nations to both the Indies, Italy even in that branch can no longer be considered as a principal.

The Portuguese traded to the Indies in right of conquest. The constraining laws which the Dutch at present impose on

the commerce of the little Indian princes had been established before by the Portuguese.<sup>q</sup>

The fortune of the house of Austria was prodigious. Charles V succeeded to the possession of Burgundy, Castile, and Aragon; he arrived afterwards at the imperial dignity; and to procure him a new kind of grandeur, the globe extended itself, and there was seen a new world paying him obeisance.

Christopher Columbus discovered America; and though Spain sent thither only a force so small that the least prince in Europe could have sent the same, yet it subdued two vast empires, and other great states.

While the Spaniards discovered and conquered the west, the Portuguese pushed their conquests and discoveries in the east. These two nations met each other; they had recourse to Pope Alexander VI, who made the celebrated line of partition, and determined the great suit.

But the other nations of Europe would not suffer them quietly to enjoy their shares. The Dutch chased the Portuguese from almost all their settlements in the East Indies; and several other nations planted colonies in America.

The Spaniards considered these new-discovered countries as the subject of conquest; while others, more refined in their views, found them to be the proper subjects of commerce, and upon this principle directed their proceedings. Hence several nations have conducted themselves with so much wisdom that they have given a kind of sovereignty to companies of merchants, who, governing these far distant countries only with a view to trade, have made a great accessory power without embarrassing the principal state.

The colonies they have formed are under a kind of dependence, of which there are but very few instances in all the colonies of the ancients; whether we consider them as holding of the state itself, or of some trading company established in the state.

The design of these colonies is, to trade on more advantageous conditions than could otherwise be done with the neighboring people, with whom all advantages are reciprocal. It has been established that the metropolis,<sup>r</sup> or mother country, alone shall trade in the colonies, and that from very good rea-

<sup>q</sup> See the "Relation of Fr. Pirard," part II. chap. xv.

<sup>r</sup> This, in the language of the ancients, is the state which founded the colony.

son; because the design of the settlement was the extension of commerce, not the foundation of a city or of a new empire.

Thus it is still a fundamental law of Europe that all commerce with a foreign colony shall be regarded as a mere monopoly, punishable by the laws of the country; and in this case we are not to be directed by the laws and precedents of the ancients, which are not at all applicable.<sup>s</sup>

It is likewise acknowledged that a commerce established between the mother countries does not include a permission to trade in the colonies; for these always continue in a state of prohibition.

The disadvantage of a colony that loses the liberty of commerce is visibly compensated by the protection of the mother country, who defends it by her arms, or supports it by her laws.

Hence follows a third law of Europe, that when a foreign commerce with a colony is prohibited, it is not lawful to trade in those seas, except in such cases as are excepted by treaty.

Nations who are, with respect to the whole globe, what individuals are in a state, are governed like the latter by the laws of nature, and by particular laws of their own making. One nation may resign to another the sea, as well as the land. The Carthaginians forbade the Romans to sail beyond certain limits,<sup>t</sup> as the Greeks had obliged the King of Persia to keep as far distant from the sea-coast as a horse could gallop.<sup>u</sup>

The great distance of our colonies is not an inconvenience that affects their safety; for if the mother country, on whom they depend for their defence, is remote, no less remote are those nations who rival the mother country, and by whom they may be afraid of being conquered.

Besides, this distance is the cause that those who are established there cannot conform to the manner of living in a climate so different from their own; they are obliged, therefore, to draw from the mother country all the conveniences of life. The Carthaginians,<sup>v</sup> to render the Sardinians and Corsicans more dependent, forbade their planting, sowing, or doing anything of the kind, under pain of death; so that they supplied them with necessaries from Africa.

<sup>s</sup> Except the Carthaginians, as we see by the treaty which put an end to the first Punic war.

<sup>t</sup> Polyb. lib. III.

<sup>u</sup> The King of Persia obliged himself

by treaty not to sail with any vessel of war beyond the Cyanean rocks and the Chelidonean isles.—Plutarch, in the "Life of Cimon."  
<sup>v</sup> Aristotle on "Wonderful Things"; Livy, lib. VII. dec. 2.

The Europeans have compassed the same thing, without having recourse to such severe laws. Our colonies in the Caribbean Islands are under an admirable regulation in this respect; the subject of their commerce is what we neither have nor can produce; and they want what is the subject of ours.

A consequence of the discovery of America was the connecting Asia and Africa with Europe; it furnished materials for a trade with that vast part of Asia known by the name of the East Indies. Silver, that metal so useful as the medium of commerce, became now as merchandise the basis of the greatest commerce in the world. In fine, the navigation to Africa became necessary, in order to furnish us with men to labor in the mines, and to cultivate the lands of America.

Europe has arrived at so high a degree of power that nothing in history can be compared with it, whether we consider the immensity of its expenses, the grandeur of its engagements, the number of its troops, and the regular payment even of those that are least serviceable, and which are kept only for ostentation.

Father Du Halde says *w* that the interior trade of China is much greater than that of all Europe. That might be, if our foreign trade did not augment our inland commerce. Europe carries on the trade and navigation of the other three parts of the world; as France, England, and Holland do nearly that of Europe.

#### 22.—Of the Riches which Spain drew from America

If Europe has derived so many advantages from the American trade, it seems natural to imagine that Spain must have derived much greater.<sup>x</sup> She drew from the newly discovered world so prodigious a quantity of gold and silver, that all we had before could not be compared with it.

But (what one could never have expected) this great kingdom was everywhere baffled by its misfortunes. Philip II, who succeeded Charles V, was obliged to make the celebrated bankruptcy known to all the world. There never was a prince who suffered more from the murmurs, the insolence, and the revolt of troops constantly ill paid.

<sup>w</sup> Tom. ii. p. 170.

<sup>x</sup> This has been already shown in a small treatise written by the author

about twenty years ago; which has been almost entirely incorporated in the present work.

From that time the monarchy of Spain has been incessantly declining. This has been owing to an interior and physical defect in the nature of those riches, which renders them vain—a defect which increases every day.

Gold and silver are either a fictitious or a representative wealth. The representative signs of wealth are extremely durable, and, in their own nature, but little subject to decay. But the more they are multiplied, the more they lose their value, because the fewer are the things which they represent.

The Spaniards, after the conquest of Mexico and Peru, abandoned their natural riches, in pursuit of a representative wealth which daily degraded itself. Gold and silver were extremely scarce in Europe, and Spain becoming all of a sudden mistress of a prodigious quantity of these metals, conceived hopes to which she had never before aspired. The wealth she found in the conquered countries, great as it was, did not, however, equal that of her mines. The Indians concealed part of them; and besides, these people, who made no other use of gold and silver than to give magnificence to the temples of their gods and to the palaces of their kings, sought not for it with an avarice like ours. In short, they had not the secret of drawing these metals from every mine; but only from those in which the separation might be made with fire: they were strangers to the manner of making use of mercury, and perhaps to mercury itself.

However, it was not long before the specie of Europe was doubled; this appeared from the price of commodities, which everywhere was doubled.

The Spaniards raked into the mines, scooped out mountains, invented machines to draw out water, to break the ore, and separate it; and as they sported with the lives of the Indians, they forced them to labor without mercy. The specie of Europe soon doubled, and the profit of Spain diminished in the same proportion; they had every year the same quantity of metal, which had become by one-half less precious.

In double the time the specie still doubled, and the profit still diminished another half.

It diminished even more than half: let us see in what manner.

To extract the gold from the mines, to give it the requisite

preparations, and to import it into Europe, must be attended with some certain expense. I will suppose this to be as 1 to 64. When the specie was once doubled, and consequently became by one-half less precious, the expense was as 2 to 64. Thus the galloons which brought to Spain the same quantity of gold, brought a thing which really was of less value by one-half, though the expenses attending it had been twice as high.

If we proceed doubling and doubling, we shall find in this progression the cause of the impotency of the wealth of Spain.

It is about two hundred years since they have worked their Indian mines. I suppose the quantity of specie at present in the trading world is to that before the discovery of the Indies as 32 is to 1; that is, it has been doubled five times: in two hundred years more the same quantity will be to that before the discovery as 64 is to 1; that is, it will be doubled once more. Now, at present, fifty quintals of ore yield four, five, and six ounces of gold; <sup>y</sup> and when it yields only two, the miner receives no more from it than his expenses. In two hundred years, when the miner will extract only four, this too will only defray his charges. There will then be but little profit to be drawn from the gold mines. The same reasoning will hold good of silver, except that the working of the silver mines is a little more advantageous than those of gold.

But, if mines should be discovered so fruitful as to give a much greater profit, the more fruitful they may be, the sooner the profit will cease.

The Portuguese in Brazil have found mines of gold so rich,<sup>z</sup> that they must necessarily very soon make a considerable diminution in the profits of those of Spain, as well as in their own.

I have frequently heard people deplore the blindness of the Court of France, who repulsed Christopher Columbus, when he made the proposal of discovering the Indies.<sup>a</sup> Indeed they did, though perhaps without design, an act of the greatest wisdom. Spain has behaved like the foolish king who desired that

<sup>y</sup> See Frezier's "Voyages."

<sup>z</sup> According to Lord Anson, Europe receives every year from Brazil two millions sterling in gold, which is found in sand at the foot of the mountains, or in the beds of rivers. When I wrote the little treatise mentioned in the first note of this chapter the returns from Brazil

were far from being so considerable an item as they are at present.

<sup>a</sup> Voltaire deplores the insufficiency of Montesquieu's knowledge upon finance and commerce, saying that these principles were not then discovered, or, at least, had not been developed in his time.—Ed.

everything he touched might be converted into gold, and who was obliged to beg of the gods to put an end to his misery.

The companies and banks established in many nations have put a finishing stroke to the lowering of gold and silver as a sign of representation of riches; for by new fictions they have multiplied in such a manner the signs of wealth, that gold and silver having this office only in part have become less precious.

Thus public credit serves instead of mines, and diminishes the profit which the Spaniards drew from theirs.

True it is that the Dutch trade to the East Indies has increased, in some measure, the value of the Spanish merchandise: *b* for as they carry bullion, and give it in exchange for the merchandise of the East, they ease the Spaniards of part of a commodity which in Europe abounds too much.

And this trade, in which Spain seems to be only indirectly concerned, is as advantageous to that nation as to those who are directly employed in carrying it on.

From what has been said we may form a judgment of the last order of the Council of Spain, which prohibits the making use of gold and silver in gildings, and other superfluities; a decree as ridiculous as it would be for the states of Holland to prohibit the consumption of spices.

My reasoning does not hold good against all mines; those of Germany and Hungary, which produce little more than the expense of working them, are extremely useful. They are found in the principal state; they employ many thousand men, who there consume their superfluous commodities, and they are properly a manufacture of the country.

The mines of Germany and Hungary promote the culture of land; the working of those of Mexico and Peru destroys it.

The Indies and Spain are two powers under the same master; but the Indies are the principal, while Spain is only an accessory. It is in vain for politics to attempt to bring back the principal to the accessory; the Indies will always draw Spain to themselves.

Of the merchandise, to the value of about fifty millions of livres, annually sent to the Indies, Spain furnishes only two millions and a half: the Indies trade for fifty millions, the Spaniards for two and a half.

<sup>b</sup> Voltaire holds that the Spaniards had no manufactures of their own, and that they were obliged to draw such supplies from abroad.—Ed.

That must be a bad kind of riches which depends on accident, and not on the industry of a nation, on the number of its inhabitants, and on the cultivation of its lands. The King of Spain, who receives great sums from his custom-house at Cadiz, is in this respect only a rich individual in a state extremely poor. Everything passes between strangers and himself, while his subjects have scarcely any share in it; this commerce is independent both of the good and bad fortune of his kingdom.

Were some provinces of Castile able to give him a sum equal to that of the custom-house of Cadiz, his power would be much greater; his riches would be the effect of the wealth of the country; these provinces would animate all the others, and they would be altogether more capable of supporting their respective charges; instead of a great treasury he would have a great people.

### 23.—A Problem

It is not for me to decide the question whether if Spain be not herself able to carry on the trade of the Indies, it would not be better to leave it open to strangers. I will only say that it is for their advantage to load this commerce with as few obstacles as politics will permit. When the merchandise which several nations send to the Indies is very dear, the inhabitants of that country give a great deal of their commodities, which are gold and silver, for very little of those of foreigners; the contrary to this happens when they are at a low price. It would perhaps be of use that these nations should undersell each other, to the end that the merchandise carried to the Indies might be always cheap. These are principles which deserve to be examined, without separating them, however, from other considerations: the safety of the Indies, the advantages of only one custom-house, the danger of making great alterations, and the foreseen inconveniences, which are often less dangerous than those which cannot be foreseen.