

be said to be as yet subdued. This versatile republic had always flattered the predominant power, and thence had preserved a bastard species of liberty much akin to servitude. The Romans assisted the Athenians in a war against the Acarnanians, but Athens unwisely deprived herself of this alliance by concluding a treaty with an enemy of the Romans, Mithridates, king of Pontus. Aristion was the adviser of this imprudent measure, and Mithridates rewarded his services by raising him to the tyranny of Athens; an elevation which was dearly purchased, for Sylla besieged and took the city of Athens, delivered it for a day to the fury and plunder of his troops, and put Aristion to death. From that period, the Athenians quietly submitted to the dominion of Rome. They were allowed to retain their form of a democracy, which was now more quietly administered than their liberty was extinct, and there was no object to rouse the passions or inflame the turbulent spirit of the populace.

The Romans treated Greece with more peculiar favor and distinction than any other of the conquered provinces of the empire. The ancient habit of associating with that people the idea of all that in past ages was respectable in virtue or in valor, and more recently the idea of a singular eminence in philosophy, and the culture of the fine arts, had assuredly great weight in maintaining this favorable opinion of a degenerate and fallen people. Low as they had sunk in the scale of true greatness, the Greeks were yet in some respects superior to their conquerors. Rome was arrived at that period when the severer virtues which distinguished the first ages of the commonwealth had yielded to that refinement which arises from, and in its turn cherishes, the cultivation of letters and the taste for the fine arts. In these respects, Greece was to Rome an instructor and a model.

*Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes  
Intulit agresti Latio.—Hor. Ep. ad Aug.*

Hence she was still regarded in an honorable point of view by her conquerors,—a consideration which leads us, at this period of the termination of the history of Greece, to take a short view of the national character and attainments in those departments of art and science in which the Greeks still continued to make a distinguished figure among the contemporary nations. Previously, however, to these considerations, the preceding sketch of the history of Greece furnishes naturally some political reflections which shall be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI.

Political reflections arising from the history of Greece—Retrospective view—Constitutional defects in the leading republics—A pure democracy is a chimaera—All government essentially of the nature of a monarchy—Error of Montesquieu's theory—Ferguson's idea of a perfect republic—Democracy unfavorable to patriotism—Danger of generalizing in politics—A rude state of society favorable to patriotism—Greece a strong instance of this—Character of Greece after the Roman conquest.

WE have now traced Greece from her origin; from the rude and barbarous periods when she owed even the most necessary arts of life to foreign instructors, through every stage of her progress to the highest rank among the civilized nations of the earth. We have seen the foundation and rise of her independent states; the vigorous perseverance by which they succeeded in shaking off the yoke of intolerable tyranny, and establishing a popular system of government; the alternate differences of these states from petty quarrels, the fruit of ambition and the love of power; while, at the same time they cordially united their strength and resources to oppose foreign hostilities, when such were formidable enough to threaten their liberties as a nation. We have remarked the domestic disorders which sprang from the abuse of that freedom which these republics enjoyed; and, finally, that general corruption of manners which, tainting all the springs of public virtue, and annihilating patriotism, at length brought this illustrious nation entirely under subjection to a foreign yoke. The revolutions which in this progress the states of Greece underwent, and the situations into which they were thrown by their alternate connection and differences, as well as by their wars with foreign powers, were so various, that their history is a school of instruction in politics, as there is scarce a doctrine in that important science which may not find an example or an illustration from their history.

The science of politics, like every other subject of philosophical speculation, admits of a variety of opposite and contradictory opinions—a truth the more to be lamented that of all sciences it is that, where for the interest of mankind it were most to be wished that our reasonings should rest upon solid and fixed principles. If, however, there is in reality any criterion of the solidity of abstract principles in political reasoning, it must be when we ascertain their coincidence or disagreement with actual experience in the history of nations. I shall adopt this criterion in laying before my readers a few reflections which naturally arise from the foregoing short delineation of the Grecian history.



The miserable oppression which, according to all accounts of the ancient historians, the states of Greece sustained under their first governors, a set of tyrants, who owed their elevation to violence, and whose rule was subject to no control from existing laws or constitutional restraints, was assuredly a most justifiable motive on the part of the people for emancipating themselves from that state of servitude, and for abolishing entirely that worst of governments—a pure despotism. It is therefore with pleasure we remark, in the early history of this nation, the noble exertion by which those states shook off the yoke of their tyrants, and established for themselves a new system of government on the just and rational basis of an equality of rights and privileges in all the members of the commonwealth. We admit, without scruple, the belief that those new republics were framed by their virtuous legislators in the true spirit of patriotism. But the intentions of the legislator are no test of the actual merits of the institutions themselves: and it is certain that those boasted republics were very far from exhibiting in practice that perfect system of political freedom which was expected from them in theory. We seek in vain either in the history of Athens or of Lacedæmon, for the beautiful idea on which speculative writers have exercised their fancy of a well-ordered commonwealth.

In treating formerly of the peculiar constitution of those two great and leading states, we endeavored to point out such circumstances as appeared to be defects in the constitution of those political fabrics. In the republic of Sparta, Lycurgus, by exterminating luxury, by the equal partition of the lands, and by banishing every motive to the ambition of individuals, certainly laid the foundation of that equality among the citizens of his commonwealth which is essential to the constitution of a perfect republic. Yet, under the Spartan government, there were some circumstances which seem totally adverse to this spirit of equality. It was adverse to equality that there should be any citizen invested with the honors and appendages of royalty. The idea of a king possessing rank without power is an absurdity; and if the law denies it him, it will be his constant endeavor to wrest and arrogate it. The high authority of the Ephori was likewise adverse to the spirit of equality. There was a perpetual contention for superiority of power between those magistrates and the kings; and the people, dividing themselves into parties, bribed to support those opposite and contending interests, furnished a continual source of faction and disorder.

In the Athenian republic the great defect of the constitution seemed to be in this, that it was doubtful where the supreme power was definitively lodged. The senate was, in theory, a wise institution, for it possessed the sole power of convoking the assemblies of the people, and of preparing all business that was to be the subject of discussion in those assemblies. But, on the other hand,

this senate being annually elected, its members were ever under the necessity of courting that people for their votes, and of flattering their prejudices and passions, by adopting and proposing measures which had no other end than to render themselves popular. These delegates were therefore the mean dependants on the mob who elected them. The guardians nominally of the people's rights, they were themselves the abject slaves of a corrupted populace. The wise purpose of the institution was thus utterly defeated by the single circumstance of the senators being annually elected. There were other radical defects in the constitution of Athens. All the offices of the state were by Solon destined to be filled from the three first classes of the richer citizens. The fourth or inferior class, (*Θητες*), had, however, an equal right of suffrage in the public assembly, and being superior in number to all the other three, had it in their power to carry every question against the higher classes. Thus there was a perpetual source of discord inherent in this constitution; the power and pre-eminence of office exclusively vested in one division of the people, which they would jealously maintain by every possible means; while, at the same time, the other was furnished with arms sufficient to defeat that power altogether, or, at least, to maintain at all times a violent struggle for superiority.

The best apology that can be made for Solon is, that his intentions were good. He knew that a constitution purely democratic is an absolute chimera in politics. He knew that the people are themselves incapable of exercising rule, and that, under one name or another, they must be led and controlled. He wished, therefore, to give them this control by the natural means which the rich possess over the poor; in other words, to moderate the discordant counsels of a populace, in whom lay the rights of deciding, by the influence of an aristocracy who might lead or dictate those decisions; but he knew not how to accomplish this by a clear and explicit definition of the powers of the one body over the other; whence it happened, that neither part of the public having its rights and privileges well defined, they were perpetually quarrelling about the limits of authority, and instead of a salutary and cordial coöperation for the general good of the state, it was an eternal contest for supremacy, and a mutual desire of each other's abasement.

These, which may be esteemed radical defects in the constitution of the two principal republics of Greece, were heightened by several very impolitic laws and customs peculiar to each, which, as I formerly touched on them, I shall not recapitulate. It is sufficient to say, that the detail of the systems of Solon and Lycurgus, such as they are described to us by ancient writers, and the history of those rival republics, both in their quarrels with each other, in their foreign wars, and above all in their intestine factions and disorders, afford full conviction that the form of government which they enjoyed was in itself extremely faulty. The revolu-



tions to which those states, and particularly the former, was subject, plainly prove that their constitutions were not framed for stability, or for any long measure of duration; and the condition of the people (the true criterion of the merit of any political fabric) was, in reality, such as to partake more of actual servitude and oppression than the condition of the subjects of the most despotic monarchies. It is a known fact, that the slaves formed by far the greater part of the inhabitants, both of the Athenian and Lacedæmonian states; and to these, more especially at Lacedæmon, the free citizens behaved with the most inhuman rigor. Neither were the free citizens more inclined to a humane and liberal conduct to those of their own condition; a debtor became *ipso facto* the slave and bondman of his creditor, who might compel him to labor in bondage and fetters at his pleasure. Thus, a great part, even of the free citizens, was actually enslaved to the other; a circumstance which we shall see, under the Roman commonwealth, was the source of the most violent civil commotions. We may judge then with what propriety these can be termed free governments, where abject slavery was the condition of the majority of the people. Nor were the superior classes in the actual enjoyment of a rational liberty and independence. They were perpetually divided into factions, which servilely ranked themselves under the banners of the contending demagogues; and these maintained their influence over their partisans by the most shameful corruption and bribery, of which the means were supplied alone by the plunder of the public money. The whole, therefore, was a regular system of servitude, which left nothing free or ingenuous in the condition of individuals, nor any thing that can justly furnish encomium to an unprejudiced advocate for the dignity of human nature.

If such was the condition of the chief republics of antiquity, whose liberty we so frequently hear extolled with boundless encomium, and whose constitution we are taught from our childhood to admire, (and, in fact, this may fairly be ranked among the prejudices with which ingenuous youth can scarcely fail to be tinctured from a classical education,) it is not, perhaps, unreasonable to conclude, that a pure and perfect democracy is a thing not attainable by man, constituted as he is of contending elements of vice and virtue, and ever mainly influenced by the predominant principle of self-interest. It may, indeed, be confidently asserted, that there never was that government called a republic, which was not ultimately ruled by a single will, and, therefore, (however bold may seem the paradox,) virtually and substantially a monarchy. The only difference between governments, with respect to the political freedom of the subject, consists in the greater or the smaller number of restraints by which the regulating will is controlled. This subject is sufficiently important to merit a short illustration.

In every regular state there must be a governing power, whose will regulates the community. In the most despotic governments, that power is lodged in a single person, whose will is subject to no other control than that which arises from the fear of his own deposition. Of this we have an example in the Ottoman government, which approaches the nearest of any monarchy we know to a pure despotism. But in most monarchies, the will of the person called the sovereign is limited by certain constitutional restraints which he cannot transgress with safety. In the British government the will of the prince is controlled by a parliament; in other limited monarchies, by a council of state, whose powers are acknowledged and defined. But this parliament, or council, which thus limits the will of the prince, is in those matters where it exercises its right of limitation, superior to the will of the prince, and, therefore, in fact, the sovereign power of the state. Now this controlling power, consisting apparently of a number of wills, is, in reality, always led by a single will; by some individual of great and commanding talents, to whose acknowledged superiority his equals in rank or office either all pay a willing obedience, or whose partisans are generally sufficient to outnumber his opponents. Thus we have a single will in the council opposed to, or controlling the will of the prince. But where there are two contending wills, one must of necessity yield to the other. The king must either rule the leader of the council, or the latter must rule the former; and in this case, though not nominally, it cannot be denied that the latter is, in reality, in any such exercise of his will, the supreme power of the state.

Thus it is in limited monarchies. Now how does the matter stand with respect to a republic or democracy? Precisely the same. The people flatter themselves that they have the sovereign power. These are, in fact, words without meaning. It is true they elect their governors; but how are these elections brought about? In every instance of election by the mass of a people—through the influence of those governors themselves, and by means the most opposite to a free and disinterested choice, by the basest corruption and bribery. But these governors once elected, where is the boasted freedom of the people? They must submit to their rule and control, with the same abandonment of their natural liberty, the freedom of their will, and the command of their actions, as if they were under the rule of a monarch. But these governors, it is said, are, in a republic, chosen from the people itself, and therefore will respect its interests; they are not one but many, and the will of each will have a control from that of his fellows. That they are chosen from the people affords no pledge that they will either be wiser men, or less influenced by selfish ambition, or the passion of tyrannizing; all experience goes to prove the contrary: and that the will of the many is in truth a mere chimera, and ultimately resolves into the will of one, we