

**DISCOURSE**  
on  
**INDUCTION**  
to the  
**FRENCH ACADEMY**

by  
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GENTLEMEN,

I have to thank the Academy for two things: first, for having called me to its heart; second, for having named me as successor to Mr. de Tocqueville.

Mr. de Tocqueville died young. He did not have time as an accomplice to his glory. Whether we see in him the writer, the orator, or the statesman, he appears — considering only his age and his activity — as an unfinished work. And yet, if we strain to hear the echoes of his memory, there arises from him to the soul a voice which lacks nothing of brilliance, of fullness, of depth, a voice which already has the air of posterity, and which makes of Mr. de Tocqueville one of those majestic names whose eminence must not perish. A man unique among all those whom we have seen, he did not owe his renown to any party; he had served none. He shared in none of the errors of his century. Several times,

everything around him tumbled down without his being involved in the falls or being honored for the victories. He was, however, an active worker, a soldier filled with courage, an ardent citizen up to his last day, but one who in the struggle had taken a place from which he witnessed more events, and where passion for the good and for justice clothed him with an invulnerable shield.

If I look at my contemporaries, I would say about this one that he was a loyal and generous friend of the monarchy, an old-fashioned soul for his fidelity, content against the billows of misfortune and opinion. I would say of this other one that he loved the right of nations to govern themselves, and that he was taken for a Gracchus transforming the universe into a second Rome, calling the whole human race to the rights of a citizen. I would say about the latter that, devoted especially to freedom of thought, speech, and conscience, he had seen in the rostrum of a parliament the crowning point of human grandeur and the happiness of nations. In summary, I would say about all of them that they served either a victorious cause or a lost one, helped by general sympathies or victims of popular dislikes, some superior to their faction and, yet, men of their party. Even while admiring their genius, their sincerity, their faith, their role in defeat or in success, I am reluctant to believe that their vision was too limited to the horizon of their times, whose entire mystery they had not grasped, or whose peril they had not anticipated.

Alone, perhaps, among all men, Mr. de Tocqueville escaped from those boundaries where his contemporaries stop. It is to no purpose that some would endeavor to create a parallel between their position and his.

Would I say that he was a servant of the old monarchies of Europe and that the inalienable heritage of power was for him a matter of the heart at the same time as a dogma of reason? I could not do it. Antiquity, no doubt, tradition, the ancestors, the majesty of centuries, all of that was for him grand and venerable; he never demeaned the fallen

thrones, as deserved as their fall seemed to him. Rather, he was saddened by the situation, as by a shipwreck in which something holy was disappearing, or as by a ruin in which he read regretfully the deterioration of man and of his works. His was a soul on whom obliteration weighed heavy. He never saw anything perish of what had been centuries-old and glorious without honoring it within himself with an eloquent sigh. With these words, I have paid my debt to his generous nature. He viewed the law and the future with an unflinching eye; he sought in what had been living the successor to what was dead. The illusion of a chivalrous immutability could not hide from him the need to sow in the furrow that remained open. He had loved the oaths which are never forgotten; but he preferred the action which always hopes, even if it saved only once.

Would I say that he belonged totally to that liberal opinion born of the eighteenth century, fostered in the early exhilaration of our national assemblies, extinguished or rather lulled by the oppressive atmosphere of our immortal victories, and which, suddenly awakened at the voice of a king, who had returned from exile, engaged France in a struggle wherein all self-sacrifices had their existence, all talents their freedom, all parties their days of greatness, and all of them also their days of atonement? No more would I be able to do so, because there were in this opinion — as popular as it was — some areas of weakness too noticeable to the penetrating eye of Mr. de Tocqueville, and even some areas of injustice which wounded his honesty while misleading his insight. Because of its origin in the very heart of a skeptical age, liberal opinion had maintained a youthful propensity contrary to ideas and matters religious. Yet nothing was less sympathetic to Mr. de Tocqueville than the little appreciation shown whenever something approached God. When Montesquieu, having become an adult, sought, for the instruction of his century, to deal with civil and political laws, by the sole result of his application of spirit to the foundations and needs of human society, he had suddenly broken the links which fastened him to his times. With the same pen which he had used in the past for his *Lettres persanes* [Persian Letters], he wrote his twenty-fourth book *Esprit des lois* [Spirit of Laws] — the most

striking apologia for Christianity in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, and the highest tribute to what truth can effect in a great soul which has sincerely placed its thought at the service of men. More fortunate than Montesquieu, Mr. de Tocqueville had no cause to regret his *Lettres persanes*; his manly spirit had not known the failures of scepticism. If ever he had in his faith some dry days, never did he have impiety in his heart, nor blasphemy on his lips. Loving God seemed native to him, even if he did not love him in a Christian way; he loved Him as a man of genius who feels himself borne toward the father of spirits as if to his source. And, when more mature and stronger, he was obliged to judge his era, he experienced pangs in finding the liberal cause so distant from God who had made man free. He did not understand how freedom of conscience could become a weapon used against Christianity, and that the Gospel could be persecuted or shackled by the emotion which let loose Mohammed. Nor could he even understand how anything could be firm or solid without a religious foundation. Moreover, in seeing freedom separating its name from a name more exalted than its own, he feared that one day it would be harshly warned for having relied too much on itself and too little on the help of eternity.

On another point, liberal opinion continued to offend Mr. de Tocqueville. It seemed to him that it appealed too much to a single class of men, to that class rich in spirit, in industry, and in fortune, which had prevailed over power, by wresting it from the nobility and the clergy, from the throne itself. Sole heir of so much pomp, this liberal opinion was perhaps too unmindful that there remained beneath it a huge population, freed from much pain, it is true, but nonetheless still suffering from the needs of its soul and those of its body. Was there nothing to be done for these people? Was it sufficient for them no longer to be slaves or serfs, though governed, I admit, by laws applicable to all, but for all that, deprived of political rights — servants rather than fellow citizens, unchained rather than freed? Is it reasonable to believe that there was between the people and the ruling class a genuine sympathy? As for the deep division which in former times placed a chasm between the nobility by birth and all the rest of the country, did division not exist, in another guise,

between the new people and their new masters? Was the moral solidarity of France truly established? Mr. de Tocqueville was unable to banish from his mind these weighty preoccupations. He did not discern in the striking triumph of the French bourgeoisie the final word about the future, or at least, he looked beyond it with uneasiness; in the massed ranks of the crowd, he anxiously questioned his conscience and that of everyone.

What then? Will we say that he surrendered his soul to the mounting swells of democracy, and that it was there, in the heart of the popular disturbances, where he — son of a noble house, with a mind more developed than that of his fellow noblemen — descended all the steps of the world, seeking as close to the earth as possible, the sacred cradle of future destinies? Is that where Mr. de Tocqueville lived, there where his hopes and his heart lay? Was the populace for him the natural sovereign of humanity, the perfect legislator, the best magistrate, the honest man par excellence, the master and the most human of fathers, captain in battle, counselor on good days and bad, in summary, the head of this sizable body which has circled around God for so many centuries while searching for and creating its lot as best it could? Would I believe this, and would I repeat it? To be sure, Mr. de Tocqueville, just as any true Christian, loved the people; he respected in them the presence of humanity, and in humanity the presence of God. No one was more appreciated by those who surrounded him: servants, colonists, laborers, peasants, or unfortunates of all types. To see him on his lands, at his leaving the toilsome study where he earned the daily bread of his glory, one would have taken him for a patriarch of biblical times — when the idea of the first and unique family was still extant and that the distinctions of society were none other than those of nature, all of them reduced to the beauty of the age and of paternity. In his domains, Mr. de Tocqueville practiced to the letter the words of the Gospel: “Let him among you who wishes to be the first be the servant of all.” By the courteous and generous disclosure of himself to all that was subordinate to him, by the simplicity of his morals which did not offend the mediocrity of anyone, by the genuine charm of a character which did not lack pride but which knew how to lighten itself

unselfconsciously, he was of assistance to everyone — so natural was it for him to be a man among men. “People love Mr. de Tocqueville,” said a man of the people to a stranger, “but it must be acknowledged that he shows much gratitude for it.”

This admiration, so remarkably expressed, was finally realized. When 1848 inaugurated universal and direct suffrage, Mr. de Tocqueville obtained, in his canton, the unanimous vote of the electors. Without stain, he entered the Constituent Assembly by the door, based on a most evident and most legitimate popularity. He owed this popularity neither to the excess of beliefs or efforts of a strong party, nor to the growth of a sizable fortune; he owed it to his virtues. Fortunate is the citizen who is elected in this way amid civil discords! More fortunate the people who recognize and elect such citizens without a dissenting vote! But how could I forget one significant trait of this election! On the very day, Mr. de Tocqueville had gone on foot to the country seat of his canton with the pastor, the mayor, and all the electors of his commune, weighed down by fatigue, he leaned against one of the pillars of the entrance hall to the open polling station. A peasant whom he did not know approached him and told him: “I am very much surprised, Mr. de Tocqueville, at your being tired: because all of us have been carrying you in our pocket.”

Indeed, Mr. de Tocqueville loved the people and he was beloved by them. But some kings had the same experience and yet, we can reach no conclusions about the beliefs of their publicist. What were they?

Still quite young — between twenty-five and thirty years old — when the 1830 revolution had already shaken in France the foundations of the monarchical and parliamentary government, Mr. de Tocqueville had obtained the mission of going to the United States of America to study the penitentiary systems which had been instituted there. But this mission, useful and limited as it was, masked a snare from Providence. It was impossible for Mr. de Tocqueville to land on American soil without being struck by this

new world, so different from the one in which he was born. Everywhere else in the old world, when he had visited England, Russia, China, or Japan, he found something he already knew: people being governed. For the first time, a nation displayed itself to him: flourishing, peaceful, industrious, powerful, respected outside its borders, spreading each day in vast territories the peaceful flow of its population, and yet having no other master than itself, recognizing no distinction of birth. It elected its own magistrates to all levels of the civil and political hierarchies, free as the Aboriginal, civilized as the European man, religious without according to any religion either exclusion or preponderance, and, in summary, presenting to the astonished world the living drama of a most absolute liberty within a most complete equality. Mr. de Tocqueville had well heard in his homeland these two words: liberty, equality! He had even seen revolutions carried out to establish their supremacy. But that sincere reign, that indifferent reign, that reign which lives by itself without anyone's help, because it concerns everyone, he had not yet found anywhere, not even among those peoples of antiquity who had a *forum* and laws that had been publicly deliberated, but whose advantages belonged only to rare citizens within the narrow walls of a city. A society without precedent, founded by outcasts and emancipated by colonists, the United States accomplished over an immense territory that which neither Athens nor Rome was able to do, and that which Europe seemed to look for in vain in onerous and bloody revolutions. What had been the cause? What were the results? Was it an ephemeral accident or an intimation of centuries to come?

Mr. de Tocqueville studied these questions while yet a young sage, but one enlightened by the independence of a spirit which sought only the good and the true. He did not admire America without restriction; he did not believe that all its laws were applicable to all peoples; he knew how to distinguish the variable forms of government from that sacred font which belongs to the human race. He raised himself above even his own admiration to inform America of the perils which threaten it, to decry slavery — that inhuman and godless scourge in favor of which fifteen states were prepared to sacrifice the

glory and the very existence of their homeland. In a word, from this impartial and profound viewpoint, in which he avoided at once adulation, paradox, and utopia, he cast onto Europe a more mature but stimulating view which filled him, according to his own expression, *with a kind of religious fear*. He believed that he saw Europe, and France in particular, advancing in giant strides toward absolute equality of standing, and that America was the prophet and the vanguard of the future status of Christian nations. I say 'of Christian nations' because he linked to the Gospel this progressive movement of the human race toward equality. He thought that equality before God, proclaimed by the Gospel, was the principle whence equality before the law descended, and that both divine equality and civil equality had opened before souls the unlimited horizon where all arbitrary distinctions disappear, leaving in the midst of men only the hard-won glory of personal merit. And yet, despite this sacred origin which he attributed to equality, despite the astonishing spectacle which it allowed him to enjoy in America, despite his conviction that this constituted a universal and irresistible fact, willed by God, he faced with only a holy fear that future which was preparing for the world such a far-reaching change in social relations. He had noticed among Americans that equality was acting naturally as an hereditary virtue: in Europe, he had come upon it all too frequently under the guise of a passion, an envious passion, an enemy of the superiority in others, but a superiority it coveted for itself — a mixture of pride and hypocrisy, capable of lending itself at any cost to the spectacle of universal abasement, and out of the very humiliation, to make for itself a capitol and a pantheon. In America, Mr. de Tocqueville had witnessed order being born from an equality recognized by all, assimilated into behavior just as in the laws: true, sincere, cordial, bringing closer together all the citizens in the same duties and the same rights. In Europe, he found equality restive, threatening, godless, attacking God Himself. Its victory, inevitable for all that, brought about the dizziness of fear along with the peace of certitude.

I notice another opinion which weighed him down more than the others and which, until his last day, was the target of his astute reflections.

In the United States equality did not stand alone; it constantly allied itself with the most comprehensive civil, political, and religious liberty. These two sentiments are inseparable in the heart of the American, who cannot conceive of equality without liberty, nor of liberty without equality. But in considering events in history and those close to us, it is clear that democracy, when it is only kept in check by itself, easily falls into an excess which is its undoing and which calls, for its rescue, the counterweight of a despotism which is allowed everything, because it does everything in the name of the people — an idol in which the multitude still seeks to find itself, believing that it will again obtain there what it has lost. Indeed, Mr. de Tocqueville saw in France and in Europe a democracy, still quite young, already leaning towards its downfall and taking on this unbridled character which leaves it no other remedy than suffering under an almighty master. He had a premonition that demagoguery would deliver to this nascent liberty a mortal blow, and that among Christian nations, even more than in antiquity, license would equip authority in the name of collective security — to the detriment of the liberty of all.

At a time when no one else was experiencing this premonition, Mr. de Tocqueville had it and did experience it, admittedly so. From 1835, at the first appearance of his book: *Democracy in America*, he announced that liberty in France and in Europe was in imminent danger. He declared that, among us, the spirit of equality prevailed over the spirit of liberty, and that this disposition, along with other causes, threatened us with failures and catastrophes which would astound the present century. This century did not believe him. He marched self-confidently, convinced of his triumph, scorning advice as much as prophecies, convinced, like Pompey, the day before the eve of the Pharsalia [*epic poem, AKA The Civil War - Trans.*], that he had only to stamp his foot in order to provide Rome, the republic, with invincible legions. But Mr. de Tocqueville was not to die without having seen his predictions vindicated, nor without having prepared for his times some lessons relevant to their misfortunes.

To instruct democracy, he wrote, to revive its beliefs, if possible; to purify its behavior; to adjust its movements; to substitute little by little the science of business for its experience; the knowledge of its actual interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to times and places; to alter the government according to circumstances and men: — such is, in these days, the primary duty imposed on those who rule society. An altogether new world requires a totally new political science.

That new science, Mr. de Tocqueville believed he had discovered in the institutions, history, and the mores of the first people who had lived under a perfect democracy. Unable to remain a simple spectator before such a vast phenomenon, he had wanted to delve into its causes, learn its laws. Moreover, sure of teaching his motherland, perhaps even Europe, he had written about America with the wisdom of a philosopher and the soul of a citizen. His book gained renown in an instant, like a flash of lightning. Given its translation in all the cultured languages, one would think that the human race had been awaiting its appearance. And yet, from that side of the Atlantic, he answered to no passion, party, school, or nation. He came alone, with the endowment of the writer, the purity of his heart, and the will of God. He brought to all intelligent minds — embroiled in the turmoil of beliefs and events — a light that could not be ignored, but which differed from any other, an approaching light which did not weigh down the present. Nothing of the kind had been seen since the day when Montesquieu published his *Esprit des lois* [The Spirit of Laws], also a work without precedent, more exalted than his century by religion and significance. And yet, despite his profoundly serious temperament, Montesquieu possessed the art of charm and still remains popular even though he is so little read.

Your voices, Gentlemen, join the votes of the two hemispheres. You did not wait until the age had ripened the glory of the young reporter, but you had him sit next to you, on this seat where a death as premature as had been his renown took him away. But I reproach myself for having moved too quickly and for having opened a grave when I am still at the threshold of an immortality.

In the work of Mr. de Tocqueville, there was more than one type of attraction. America was poorly known; no superior mind had yet studied it. Some saw from afar only a coarse and troublesome demagogy; others applauded in anticipation the success of their personal utopias. Mr. de Tocqueville substituted truth for fable; his exacting pen placed on a fresh new board the boundless charm of sincere brightness. Manners, history, legislation, character of men and of the country, causes and consequences — everything took on, under his pen, the power of the investigator who discovers and the writer who traces for the absentees his own vision. But what is especially striking and enticing is the very freshness of the book, an infectious enthusiasm which animates the writer and offers a glimpse in him of the man preoccupied with the fate of his fellow-men in the moment and in the future. He arouses because he is aroused, and his very rigor adds to the emotion by the eloquence of the contrast. While Montesquieu places some art in his spirit, all the while believing in a cause and wishing to serve it, Mr. de Tocqueville gives himself up to the irresistible unfolding of his calamitous forebodings. He looks at the truth and he fears it; he fears it, and admits the fear, supported by the thought that there is a remedy and that he knows what it is, and that perhaps his contemporaries as well as posterity would be open to receive it from him. Sometimes hope forges ahead of anxiety, sometimes anxiety darkens hope. Out of this conflict which unceasingly crosses between the author of the book to the book of the reader there springs up an interest which binds, uplifts, and arouses emotions.

But then, just what was this medicine with which Mr. de Tocqueville soothed his thoughts, and from which he awaited the rescue of generations? It was not, as you rightly

surmise, in a childish imitation of the American institutions that he found it, but in the spirit which arouses that nation and which has formulated its laws. Truly, it is the spirit which creates the life of institutions, just as the soul gives life to the body. Yet, the American spirit — such as it appeared to Mr. de Tocqueville — is summed up in the qualities or rather in the virtues which I will list:

The American spirit is religious;  
It has innate respect for the law;  
It values freedom as dearly as equality;  
It places within civil liberty the prime foundation  
for political liberty.

It is exactly the opposite of the spirit which carries along a sizable portion of European democracy, instead of guiding it. While the American believes in his soul, in God who made him, in Jesus Christ who redeemed him, in the Gospel which is the communal book of the soul and of God, the European democrat, except for some notable exceptions, believes only in humanity, in a fictitious humanity, at that, which he created in a dream. This dream is at the same time his soul, his God, his Christ, his Gospel; he does not think of any other religion, however ancient and revered it be, except to persecute or annihilate it, if he can. The American has had forebears who upheld faith to the point of intolerance; he has forgotten their intolerance and kept only their faith. The European has had some forebears who practiced no faith but who preached tolerance; he has forgotten their tolerance and has remembered only their incredulity. The American does not understand a man who has no personal religion. The European democrat does not understand a man who prays in his heart, and even less a citizen who prays facing the people.

A similar difference can be found in what concerns the law. The American who respects God's law also respects the law of man; and if he believes the law to be unjust, he

maintains the goal to obtain one day its repeal, not through violence, but by crafting a weapon peaceful and cogent from all the means of persuasion which man carries with him in his intellect, and other even more powerful means which he can exercise from a loyalty seasoned in the cause of justice. For the European democrat — and I always say this with the necessary exceptions — the law is only a temporary cessation imposed by force, which another force has the right to overthrow. Even if an entire nation had given its assent and approbation to the law, the latter maintains that a minority, or even a single person, has the right to oppose it with a bloody sword thus tearing a document which holds no other meaning than the impotence in which we find ourselves in trying to replace it with another. He boldly proclaims the *sovereignty of the goal*, namely, the absolute and superior legitimacy over everything, even over the people, of that principle which each one values within himself as being the common cause of the people.

The American, having come from a land where the aristocracy of birth always played a considerable role in public matters, rejected hereditary nobility from its institutions, and reserved the honor of governing to individual merit. Nonetheless, while being passionate for the equality of opportunity, whether he considers it from God's point of view, or from man's, he does not consider liberty to be worth any less; and should the opportunity present itself to choose between either, he would do as did the mother in Solomon's verdict, he would tell God and the world: Do not separate them because their life is as one in my soul, and I will die on the day when one of them dies. The European democrat does not see it that way. In his eyes, equality is the foremost and supreme law, the one which prevails over all the others and for which everything must be sacrificed. Equality in servitude seems to him to be preferable to a liberty upheld by the hierarchies of the social classes. He prefers Tiberius issuing commands to a multitude which no longer has rights or a name, rather than the Roman nation governed by a secular patrician from whom it receives the impulse which renders it free along with the curbs which make it strong.

The American leaves nothing of himself at the mercy of an arbitrary power. He understands that, starting with his soul, everything that surrounds him should be free: family, commune, province, association for liberal arts or history, the worship of his God, the well-being of his body. The European democrat, idolater of what they call the State, captures man as early as the cradle to offer him as a holocaust to the almighty public power. He maintains that the child, before being a member of the family, belongs to the commune, and that the commune — that is, the people represented by those who govern it — has the right to shape his intellect according to a uniform and legal model. He (the European democrat) maintains that the commune, the province, and all the associations, even the most disinterested, depend on the State, and cannot act, speak, sell, buy, or, in a word, exist without the intervention of the State, and to the degree that it determines, thereby making of the most absolute civil servitude the entrance-hall to and the foundation of political liberty. The American provides the unity of the homeland with only what is needed to constitute a body; the European democrat oppresses the whole man to create for him, in the name of the motherland, a cramped prison.

In the end, Gentlemen, if we compare the results, American democracy has founded an outstanding population, religious, powerful, respected, in a word, free, although not without trials and dangers. European democracy has broken the bonds tying the present to the past, concealed some abuses in the ruins, established here and there a precarious liberty, shook the world by some events much more than reforming it by some institutions; moreover, as the indisputable mistress of the future, it prepares for us — if it is not eventually instructed and regulated — the frightening alternative of a baseless demagogy or an unbridled despotism.

It is the certainty of this alternative which troubled endlessly the patriotic soul of Mr. de Tocqueville, which directed all his works and won for him the spotless glory in which he took comfort, and in which he died. No other man of our times has been

simultaneously more sincere, more logical, more generous, more firm, and more alarmed. In the main, what he loved above all — his true and only idol, alas! — dare I say it? was not America; it was France and its liberty. He loved liberty by studying it in himself, in the depths of his conscience, as the first principle of the moral being and the fountain whence, with the support of opposition, there rushes all power and all virtues. He loved liberty in history, presiding over the destinies of the greatest nations, and which fashioned all the men who left of themselves in the memory of the world, into a record which enlightens and sustains him. He loved liberty in Christianity, caught in the omnipotent clutches of a degenerate empire, prompting the souls of martyrs, and, by them, no longer preserving simply the truths of wise men but divine truth itself; no longer the dignity of mankind, but the dignity of the Christ, the Son of God. Mr. de Tocqueville loved liberty in the remembrances of the nation, in those extended generations during which liberty had been honored, when liberty was seen as the first benefit of life, and when life was forfeited to preserve honor, to prove love, to defend the faith, to die, at the last, worthy of one's self and worthy of God. He loved liberty in his own blood, from which he had drawn, along with the traditions of his ancestors, the pride of an obedience which had never been base, and the glory of a name which had always been unsullied. Finally, he loved liberty through another viewpoint: in seeing nations in decline, in perverted morals, in rewarded vileness, in degrading talents, in hearts without courage. In pointing out that all those disgraces which overflow in history corresponded to the eras and to the lessons of servitude, he embraced for himself the liberty of a second love, stronger than the first, that love wherein indignation flares up and pledges everlasting hatreds and combats.

This oath lived in the soul of Mr. de Tocqueville. It motivated all his thoughts, it commanded all his actions.

Here, Gentlemen, I need tell you about the twelve years of his legislative career. On this still smoldering lava, I would no longer come upon ideas and virtues only, but also on

men and events. May I bring them up? From the height of this bench where he had been summoned as early as 1839, and whence he descended in the last days of 1851, he witnessed the parliamentary monarchy collapse, the republic emerge, and an empire founded — downfalls and events which he had foreseen and which led to his retirement, but not his silence or his discouragement. He loved the parliamentary monarchy and would have liked to save it. Born in 1814 out of long meditations in exile, the monarchy had to reconcile all of the French to a throne which had the prestige of antiquity, and which, in the misfortune, had retrieved that youthfulness that only the throne can grant to kings. But the spirit of France, even after twenty-five years of revolutions, was not ready to assume the secrets and virtues of liberty. King and people, clergy and nobility, Christians and unbelievers, all had need for a genius which time had not yet given them. The first throne fell. The second sought to forge again, in a more popular royal bloodline, the broken chain of our institutions. To this work, Mr. de Tocqueville devoted a courage and a competency that deserved to succeed. But this weakened monarchy found itself facing again the same difficulties which had beset its predecessor. The second throne fell. Mr. de Tocqueville had no influence either on its adversaries or on its defenders. Along with the victorious opposition, he demanded a more independent elected chamber and a more incorruptible electoral body. But never did he appear in the public square, only at the rostrum where with his voice he called for reforms and rejected any support for the revolution which was being prepared.

Nonetheless, the republic admitted him in its counsels, at first as a Deputy, then as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Into this new phase of his political existence, he brought a spirit free from illusions. Indeed, he did not believe that France, which had misjudged the conditions of liberty under two monarchies, could have been able to serve it, or even to save it, under a republic. The name was new, the situation was the same. No progress was realized in the general sphere of minds, save for a small number of eminent men to whom the extent of the danger had revealed the breadth of the faults and who joined together to

provide the country with the first civil liberty which it had enjoyed up to that point: the liberty of teaching. This was a mighty bolt of lightning in a stormy night.

There was another.

The restorer of liberty in Italy, the prince, at his accession to the throne, had on his own promised his people generous institutions. For this, he deserved from all of Europe cheers which would echo up to the last survivor. Pope Pius IX had been driven out of the capital of Christianity, after having witnessed there the slaughter of his minister on the steps of the first legislative assembly which Rome had held since the ancient Roman Senate. A sacrilegious ingratitude had rewarded the gifts of the communal father of souls. Betrayed, a fugitive, he had turned towards God those glances of misfortune and of justice which do not always move people — but which leave them insensitive for only a very short time — to that God who, in creating the world, had promised man an initial justice in time, and a second justice in eternity. Again, just as so often before, the justice of time was returned to the sword of France. Our battalions were seen bringing back to Rome, under the flag of the Republic, the priest formerly crowned by Charlemagne and consecrated on his throne by the respect of generations for over ten centuries. To be sure, he was a priest, a feeble and unarmed old man; but under his whitened hair, under his toga — unknown to the consuls whose place he was occupying — he no longer shouldered the pride of the Roman people as masters of the world, but the sovereignty of the cross, and with this, the peace and the liberty of the universe. Against his crown, arguments and armies could be drawn up. France opposed the arguments with the unerring instinct of its political and Christian genius; and against the armies of a deceitful democracy, it opposed the gift of victory accorded to it by God on the very day when Clovis, its first king, bowed his head in the face of truth.

The freedom to teach, the restoration of the Supreme Pontiff on his earthly throne, in these lay the heroic works of the Second French Republic. In reading these two decrees,

one could believe that the republic had really been established. As a Minister, Mr. de Tocqueville took part in this double act of wisdom and of strength. Doubtless today, as he lies in his grave, nothing gives his conscience a more consoling reward concerning the doings and the sufferings of this world.

Soon afterwards, on 2 December 1851, Mr. de Tocqueville returned to his home, to his village, at the end of a political career which had lasted for twelve years. He brought back there a character without blemish, a reputation whose glory none of his contemporaries could surpass, but at the same time, a body enfeebled by the labors of activity and those of thought. There, in his home, he found again those youthful memories so dear to a man in decline, those shade-trees he had planted, those waters which he had channeled, the respect and the love of everything that had aged during his absence. Moreover, closer to his heart, he remembered another life given over to his own, one which would have been sufficient without the glory he received as a reward for all the good he had done, and for all the truths he had expressed in his writings. On this point also, it can be said that he was superior to his century. Quite young and hardly rich, he had never sought in his companions the brilliance of name or of fortune; but entrusting his lot to some more perfect benefits, he had been misled only in the measure of his happiness, which was greater than he had expected and greater than he had been promised.

Nonetheless, this fine retreat, to which friendship came from afar seeking his presence, did not erase at all in the reporter the memory of the cause he had served. Even though he had predicted them, the injuries inflicted on liberty had pierced him like a sword; this he carried within himself, as a bleeding wound, a deep mourning for everything he had seen accomplished. He wanted to provide some comfort for himself, to seek some hope, and so he imagined this book, the last one he was to write, in which, comparing together the “Revolution and the Old Regime,” he intended to demonstrate to his contemporaries

that, without knowing it, they were still living under the same regime which they believed they had destroyed, and that it was there that lay the principal source of their everlasting illusions. Indeed, a rostrum had been left standing, a press had been freed. Yet, what lay behind this striking theater of national life, if not the absolute autocracy of public administration, if not the passive obedience of an entire nation, the silence of dead machinery, irresistibly moved by an impulse alien to the family, to the commune, to the province, to the life of everyone even in its most minute details, handed over to the domination of a few men of state, under the indolent and disinterested pen of one hundred thousand scribes? Yet, said the author, do you really know who invented this mechanism, who created this servitude? It was not the Revolution, it was the Old Regime; it was not 1789, it was Louis XIV, and Louis XV; it is not the present, it was the past. You have only disguised civil servitude, which is the worst of all, with the misleading veil of political liberty, thereby providing to a golden head feet of clay. Thus did you make French society another statue of Nabuchadnezzar that a rock thrown by an unknown hand was enough to destroy and reduce to powder. And this thesis, so new and yet so obvious, Mr. de Tocqueville developed with the calm of erudition after having for a long time rummaged through the administrative archives of the last two centuries — archives all the more eloquent in the belief that they were keeping their secrets for the State and not for the world.

This, then, was the testament of Mr. de Tocqueville, the crowning expression of his thoughts. After that, he did nothing more than decline. Too serious a worker for not having been worn out in that light of which he had been the voice, he moved forward little by little, yet unaware, toward a death which was to be the third reward of his life. Glory had been the first; he found the second in a domestic bliss of twenty-five years; his premature demise was to have brought him the last one, and affix the seal of divine justice upon him. He had always been as sincere with God as with men. A just discernment, a judgment ripened by

integrity even before reflection and experience, had revealed to him — without any effort on his part — the active, living, personal God who governed all things. From this elevation, so unaffected, although very sublime, Mr. de Tocqueville again had prostrated himself easily to the God who draws breath in the Gospel and by whom love became the redeemer of the world. But his faith stemmed perhaps more from reason rather than from the heart. He saw the truth of Christianity, he served it without shame, he linked its effectiveness even to the temporal rescue of man. Nonetheless, he had not reached that realm wherein religion leaves us nothing which does not take its shape and ardor. It was to be death that gave him the gift of love. He received like a friend of long-standing the God who used to visit him. Touched by his presence, to the point of shedding tears, now released from the world, Mr. de Tocqueville forgot who he had been, his name, his services, his regrets, and his desires. Moreover, even before he had bid us his goodbyes, there was nothing remaining in the soul but the virtues it had acquired during its passage on earth.

These virtues, Gentlemen, belong to you also. Sublime embellishments that they are of the highest and genuine literary talent, you rejoiced at their alliance in the person of Mr. de Tocqueville. He himself considered it a significant honor to be counted among the members of your illustrious company, because you were, in his eyes, the personification of French literature. He saw in literature more than the ingenious expansion of the faculties of the mind: he saw in it the powerful auxiliary of the cause to which he had devoted his life, the torch of truth, the sword of justice, the bountiful shield wherein are engraved thoughts that do not die because they serve all times and all nations. His youth was shaped by these exceptional lessons. Leaning toward antiquity as a son toward his mother, he had heard Demosthenes defend the liberty of Greece and Cicero plead against the patricidal designs of Cataline, both of these men victims of their eloquence and of their patriotism; the first took his life by poison, to escape the vengeance of a lieutenant of Alexander, the second, presented his head to Anthony's assassins — that head which the Roman population would see nailed to the rostrum, there to be an everlasting image of the fear

evoked in tyrants by the word of a man on the lips of the orator. He had heard Plato dictate in his *Republic* the ideal laws of society; declare that justice is its first foundation; that power is therein established for the welfare of all and not in the interest of those who govern; that power belongs by the nature of things to the most enlightened and the most virtuous, and that everyone who exercises it is accountable; that citizens are brothers; that they must be reared by the most wise of the republic in the respect of laws, the love of virtue, and the fear of the gods; that peace between nations is the duty of all of them as well as the honor of those who draw the sword only reluctantly, for the defense of right. He had admired in Zeno, the father of that heroic posterity which survived all the grandeur of Rome, and who consoled, by the spectacle of an invincible energy of soul, all those who still believed in themselves at a time when no one believed anything. Even though Horace and Virgil had presented to him in the form of admirable verses the distasteful image of courtesan poets, he, no less than Caesar, had found again in Lucan [*Annaeus Marcus Lucanus*] the mark of courage as well as the gods, the gods sacrificed by him to the vanquished of the Pharsalia [*epic poem AKA The Civil War - Trans.*]. In summary, towards the end of ancient literature, and as if on the threshold of its tomb, Tacitus had spoken to him that avenging language which had made of crime itself a monument to virtue, and made of the most profound servitude a road to liberty.

Others were opening that road when Tacitus dug within it with his unrelenting pen a sarcastic and everlasting furrow. Indeed, like those regular gusts of wind which leave the waves of one sea only to raise up those of another, liberty changes location, people, and souls, but it never dies. When it is believed to be put out, it has only risen or descended a few degrees from the equator. It has abandoned an aged population to prepare the destinies of a nascent people, and suddenly it reappears at the summit of human matters when it was thought to have been forgotten forever. There were, in fact, in the time of Tacitus, new men who labored as he did — but in a language unknown to him — at the renovation of human dignity, and who, for the liberty of conscience, foundation for all the others, did more than

had ever been done by orators, philosophers, poets, and historians of the previous age. They were no longer called Demosthenes or Cicero, Plato, or Zeno, and they no longer spoke to a single people from the height of an illustrious but isolated rostrum. They were called Justin the Martyr, Tertullian the African, Athanasius the Bishop, and either by their word, or by their writings, they addressed to all the parts of the known world a universal literature which presided at the foundation of a society more widespread than the Roman Empire; a literature that still lives on after nineteen centuries, and of which at the present time you are, Gentlemen, an offshoot which I praise — a glory which I did not deserve to see from so close.

For three centuries, French literature has had an everlasting share in the destinies of the world. Under Louis XIV, those Christian destinies, with the same eloquence but with a more refined savor than in the Fathers of the Church, have matched Pascal with Tertullian, Bossuet with Saint Augustine, Massillon and Bourdaloue with Saint John Chrysostom, Fénelon with Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, while at the same time they opposed Corneille to Euripides and to Sophocles, Racine to Virgil, La Bruyère to Theophrastus, Molière to Plautus and Terence. It was a rare century which made of Louis XIV the immediate successor of Augustus and of Theodosius, and of our language, the heiress of Greece and dominant over minds.

The following century fell away from Christianity but not from genius. Sire of two men totally fresh in the history of letters, the century had in them its first stars, one who took after Lucian through irony, the other who took after no one. Both had the power to destroy and to charm, as they attacked a corrupt society with contaminated weapons and prepared for us these formidable ruins in which, for sixty years, we have been trying to replace the shaken axis of beliefs and of civic values. Yet, in the eighteenth century, these two men were not the only representatives of literary glory and effectiveness. Buffon wrote about nature with majesty; Montesquieu, uplifted by thirty years of meditation from the

youthful errors of his *Esprit des lois* [Spirit of Laws], took his place beside Aristotle and Plato, his only predecessors in the science of political law. He had the honor of dislodging from commonplace irreligion the principles of a healthy liberty. He cannot be read without encountering on each page some features which attack despotism, but without leaning to disorder and without any alliance with destruction. It is accurate to say that, if Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Contrat social* [Social Contract] was the father of modern fanaticism, Montesquieu, in his *Esprit des Lois* [Spirit of Laws] was the father of conservative liberalism wherein one day we hope to seat the honor and the tranquility of the world.

I am anxious, Gentlemen, to reach that century which is yours, wherein I will again meet Mr. de Tocqueville next to you. As Christian in its notable representatives as the century of Louis XIV, but more generous; friendlier towards public liberties, but less dazzled by the power and the brilliance of any one of them; our century was opened by a writer who, it seems, Providence wanted to create as the Jean-Jacques Rousseau of Christianity. Melancholy poet in a prose whose secret he was the first to learn, Mr. de Chateaubriand touched the hearts of his generation, like a pilgrim returning from the era of Homer and from the unexplored forests of the new world. But at the same time as he was establishing this unprecedented style, in which no one since has equaled him, he also gave us an example of political virility of character. The walls of this building will never forget that he entered here unable to deliver his discourse called for by your votes and required by his gratitude to you. Others, like him, credited their religious faith or their personal independence for this debt of courage before the Almighty. Mr. de Bonald deserved to have his *Législation primitive* [Primitive Legislation] ground under the pestle of censure. The aged Ducis, insensitive to victory, preserved intact under its rays the crown of his white hair. Madame de Staël atoned by ten years of exile a silence which nothing had called for. While standing, Delille sang the realms of nature; he had been allowed to say in a movement of legitimate pride:

“Not a word of my candor could be plucked,  
A lie from my pen, fear from my heart.”

I stop with the dead, Gentlemen, because the tomb puts up with praise, and, on lifting its shroud, there is no fear of wounding the modesty of immortality. But this sacrifice comes at a price in the presence of an assembly wherein I see seated the direct heirs of the first literary glories of our age: orators who for thirty years have moved the rostrum or the bar; poets who have discovered in the harmony of words and of thoughts new vibrations; historians who have dug up our national antiquities or who have related to the present generation the courage of its forebears in civil life and in the life of the military camps; publicists who have written in favor of the right against the regrets of despotism and the dreams of utopia; men of State who have governed by means of the word some stormy assemblies and have gained from power only the perception of having been worthy of it; philosophers who have revived among us the school of Plato and of Saint Augustine, of Descartes and of Bossuet, and, following them, inscribed their names in the abundant army of eloquent wisdom; writers who held in idolatry the perfection of style, and whose privileged old age did not make them unlearn the art; — all of them associated honorably with the struggles of their times, covered with their scars, and, although unable to save honor, were convinced that one day they would be numbered among those who had neither flattered nor betrayed it.

And you also, de Tocqueville, you were among them; this place from which I am speaking was yours. Freer with you than with the living, I was able to praise you. By delineating your thoughts, by retracing your actions and your character, I was able to praise along with you all those, who like you, sought to enlighten their century without belittling it and to direct our uncertain generations onto that road where God, the soul, the Gospel, order and action, work together to form the citizen and to support society in its never ceasing oscillation between two dangers: that of giving itself a master, and that of

governing itself without being able to. No one better than you has known our weaknesses and disclosed our errors, nor better indicated the remedies. Mr. de Chateaubriand said at one memorable occasion: “No, I will never at all believe that I write on the ruins of the monarchy.” You yourself could have said: “No, I will never at all believe that I write on the ruins of liberty.”

It is also your belief, Gentlemen, it is the belief of French literature, and, on the whole, this will be its task. In observing the outcomes of our three literary centuries and this continuous succession of eminent men in all orders of the spirit, one would not fail to see that a predestination of Providence watches over our literature in view of a mission that it is to fulfill. That this mission will be beneficial, that it is part of the plans for an ordered and peaceful future wherein, under new conditions, the genuine needs of perfected humanity will be satisfied — I have no reason to doubt. To convince oneself of it, it is enough to observe that, save for rare exceptions, the genius of France leads to truth and serves it. Everything which emerges from the regions of intelligence, everything which remains visible to admiration, from Pascal to the Count de Maistre, from Montesquieu to Mr. de Tocqueville, takes up to the highest degree the character of the rank, that serious and holy element which gives light without fading, which changes without destroying, and which is simultaneously the sign and the very strength of the good. Unable to be concealed from ourselves, these are the broad lines of French literature and those impressive summits where posterity, in spite of itself, comes to seek the benefits of light in the splendor of a flawless taste. You, Gentlemen, carry on this two-fold tradition of the beautiful and the real, of independence and of restraint, which are the secular mark of French genius. Also — how could I not admit it to you — when your votes summoned me unexpectedly to your midst, I did not believe that I heard the plain voice of a literary body, but the very voice of my country summoning me to take a place among those who are like the senate of its thoughts and the prophetic representatives of its future. I saw the prejudices which would have separated me from you twenty years ago; those prejudices overcome by your choice made

me realize the achievements from sixty years of an experiment fraught with dangers, or reversals of fortune, of wisdom deceived, of impotent but glorious daring. Mr. de Tocqueville was for you the symbol of liberty, magnificently understood by an outstanding intellect.

**I will be — I dare say — the symbol of liberty recognized and strengthened by religion. I could not receive on earth a higher reward than that of succeeding such a man to advance so noble a cause.**



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*- The Brothers CHRISTIAN*

