This is not so for the American Union; the federal government, like most ordinary governments, can do everything that it has the right to do.

The human mind invents things more easily than words; this is what causes the use of so many incorrect terms and incomplete expressions.

Several nations form a permanent league and establish a supreme authority that, without acting on ordinary citizens as a national government could, nonetheless acts on each of the confederated peoples, taken as a group.

This government, so different from all the others, is given the name federal.

Next, a form of society is found in which several peoples truly blend together as one for certain common interests, and remain separate and only confederated for all the others.

Here the central power acts without intermediary on the governed, administering and judging them as national governments do, but it acts this way only within a limited circle. Clearly that is no longer a federal government; it is an incomplete national government. So a form of government, neither precisely national nor federal, is found. But here things have stopped, and the new word needed to express the new thing does not yet exist.

Because this new type of confederation was unknown, all unions have arrived at civil war, or slavery, or inertia. The peoples who composed them have all lacked either the enlightenment to see the remedy to their ills, or the courage to apply them.

The first American Union had also lapsed into the same faults.

But in America, the confederated states, before achieving independence, had been part of the same empire for a long time; so they had not yet contracted the habit of complete self-government, and national prejudices had not been able to become deeply rooted. Better informed than the rest of the world, they were equal to each other in enlightenment; they only weakly felt the passions that ordinarily, among peoples, resist the extension of federal power; and these passions were fought against by the greatest citizens. The Americans, at the same time that they felt the evil, resolutely envisaged the remedy. They corrected their laws and saved the country.

Of the Advantages of the Federal System in General, and of Its Special Utility for America

Happiness and liberty that small nations enjoy.—Power of large nations.—Large empires favor the developments of civilization.—That strength is often the first element of prosperity for nations.—The purpose of federal systems is to combine the advantages that peoples gain from the largeness and the smallness of their territory.—Advantages that the United States derives from this system.—The law yields to the needs of the populations; the populations do not yield to the necessities of the law.—Activity, progress, taste for and practice of liberty among the American peoples.—The public spirit of the Union is only the sum of provincial patriotism.—Things and ideas circulate freely within the territory of the United States.—

The Union is free and happy, like a small nation; respected, like a large one.

Among small nations, society keeps its eye on everything; the spirit of improvement gets down to the smallest details. Since the weakness of the people profoundly tempers their ambition, their efforts and resources are

m. In the margin: "Perhaps this chapter should be shifted to the place where I will talk about the future of the Union."
almost entirely focused on their internal well-being and are not likely to be wasted on the empty illusion of glory. Since the capacities of each one are generally limited, desires are limited as well. The mediocrity of wealth makes conditions nearly equal; and mores have a simple and peaceful air. Thus, considering everything and taking into account various degrees of morality and enlightenment, more comfort, population and tranquillity are usually found in small nations than in large ones.

When tyranny establishes itself within a small nation, it is more troublesome than anywhere else; acting inside a smaller circle, it extends to everything within this circle. Unable to undertake some great objective, it is busy with a multitude of small ones; it appears both violent and meddlesome. From the political world, which is strictly speaking its domain, it penetrates into private life. After dictating actions, it aspires to dictate tastes; after governing the State, it wishes to govern families. But that rarely happens; as a matter of fact, liberty forms the natural condition of small societies. There, government offers too little attraction to ambition, and the resources of individuals are too limited, for sovereign power to be easily concentrated in the hands of one man. Should it happen, it is not difficult for the governed to unite together and, by a common effort, to overthrow the tyrant and the tyranny at the same time. [*Liberty is, moreover, something so natural and so easy within a small nation that abuse can hardly be brought about.*]

So small nations have at all times been the cradle of political liberty. It has happened that most of them have lost this liberty by growing larger, which clearly reveals that liberty is due to the small size of a people and not to the people themselves.

The history of the world provides no example of a large nation that remained a republic for long; this has led men to say that the thing was impractical. As for me, I think that it is very imprudent for man to want to limit the possible and to judge the future; the real and the present elude him every day, and he finds himself constantly surprised by the unexpected in the things he knows best. What can be said with certainty is that the existence of a large republic will always be infinitely more at risk than that of a small one.⁰

All the passions fatal to republics grow with the extent of the territory, while the virtues that serve to support them do not increase in the same measure.⁹

The ambition of individuals increases with the power of the State; the strength of parties, with the importance of the end that they have in mind; but love of country, which must combat these destructive passions, is not stronger in a vast republic than in a small one. It would even be easy to prove that love of country there is less developed and less powerful. Great riches and profound poverty, large cities, depravity of mores, individual egoism, complexity of interests are so many perils that almost always result from the large size of the State. Several of these things do not harm the existence of a monarchy; some can even work toward its duration. In monarchies, moreover, government has a strength of its own; it makes use of the people and does not depend on them; the more numerous the people, the stronger the prince. But to these dangers, republican government can oppose only the support of the majority. Now, this element of strength is not proportionately more powerful in a vast republic than in a small one. Thus, while the means of attack constantly increase in number and power, the strength of resistance remains the same. It can even be said that it decreases, for the more numerous the people and the more varied the nature

⁰ "I suspect that this doctrine that presents small States to us as the only ones that are suitable for republican forms will be refuted by experience. Perhaps it will be recognized that in order to establish a republic in which justice reigns, the republic must be large enough so that local egoism is never able to harm the whole, nor corrupt the major part of those who lead it; so that on every question you will always be sure to find in the councils a majority free of particular interests and capable of making solely the principles of justice prevail."


⁹ The wording of this sentence comes from Beaumont (YTC, CIIIb, 3, p. 34).
of minds and interests, the more difficult it is, as a result, to form a compact majority.

Republican government is fragile by nature. It lasts much more because of the weakness of the attacks directed against it than because of a strength of its own [v: its own power]. It relies only on a certain sentiment of order, virtue and moderation on the part of the governed. The immoderate desires of parties, great riches and great poverty, vast cities, and the profound corruption of mores that they engender, constantly threaten the existence of republics. Now, all of these things are found only among large nations alone. A government that has the source of its power outside of the people can continue to exist for a long time, whatever the opinions of the people; but a republican government has strength only in the support of the majority; the more numerous the people, the harder to form a majority. Here my reasoning is based only upon a numerical calculation. #

We have been able to note, moreover, that human passions acquired intensity, not only from the greatness of the end that they wanted to attain, but also from the multitude of individuals who felt them at the same time. There is no one who does not find himself more moved in the middle of an agitated crowd that shares his emotion than if he were to feel it alone. In a large republic, political passions become irresistible, not only because the objective that they pursue is immense, but also because millions of men experience those political passions in the same way and at the same moment.

So it is permissible to say that, in general, nothing is so contrary to the well-being and to the liberty of men as large empires.

Large States have particular advantages, however, that must be recognized.

In them, the desire for power is more passionate among common men than elsewhere. So too the love of glory there is more developed among certain souls who find in the applause of a great people an objective that is worthy of their efforts and appropriate for raising them, in a way, above themselves. There, thought in all fields is given a more rapid and powerful impetus; ideas circulate more freely; large cities are like vast intellectual centers where all the lights of the human mind come to shine and combine.

This fact explains for us why large nations bring more rapid progress to enlightenment and to the general cause of civilization than small ones. It must be added that important discoveries often require a development of national strength of which the government of a small people is incapable; among large nations, the government has a greater number of general ideas; it is more completely free from the routine of antecedents and from local egotism. There is more genius in its conceptions, more boldness in its ways of doing things.

Internal well-being is more complete and more widespread among small nations as long as they remain at peace; but a state of war is more harmful to them than it is to large nations. In the latter, great distance from the borders sometimes allows most people to remain far from danger for centuries. For them, war is more a cause of discomfort than of ruin. #Large nations are at war more than small ones, but all things considered, among the large ones, there are more men at peace.

Moreover, in this matter as in many others, there is a consideration that predominates over all the rest: that of necessity.

If there were only small nations and not any large ones, humanity would certainly be freer and happier; but the existence of large nations cannot be avoided.

This introduces into the world a new element of national prosperity, which is strength. What good is it for a people to present a picture of comfort and liberty, if they are exposed each day to devastation or conquest? What good is it that they have manufacturing and commerce, if another people commands the seas and establishes the law for all markets? Small nations are often miserable, not because they are small, but because they are weak; large nations prosper, not because they are large, but because they are strong. So for nations, strength is often one of the first conditions of happiness and even of existence. Because of that, barring particular circumstances, small peoples always end up being violently united with large ones or uniting with them on their own. I know of no condition more deplorable than that of a people able neither to defend itself nor to be self-sufficient.

q. This sentence and the preceding one have been corrected by Beaumont (YTC, CIIIb, 3, pp. 34–35).
The federal system has been created to unite the various advantages that result from the large and the small sizes of nations. It is enough to look at the United States of America to see all the good that comes to those who adopt this system.

Among large centralized nations, the legislator is forced to give laws a uniform character that does not allow for the diversity of places and mores; never learning about individual cases, he can only proceed by general rules. Men are then obliged to bend to the necessity of legislation, for legislation cannot adapt to the needs and mores of men; this is a great cause of trouble and misery.

This disadvantage does not exist in confederations. The congress regulates the principal actions of social existence; all the detail is left to the provincial legislatures.

You cannot imagine to what degree this division of sovereignty serves the well-being of each of the states that compose the Union. In these small societies, not occupied by the need to defend themselves or to expand, all public power and all individual energy are turned toward internal improvements. The central government of each state, situated close to the governed, is alerted daily to needs that make themselves felt. Consequently, each year new plans are presented; these plans, discussed in town assemblies or the state legislature and then reproduced in the press, excite universal interest and the zeal of the citizens. This need to improve agitates the American republic constantly and does not trouble them; there, ambition for power is replaced by the love of well-being, a more vulgar, but less dangerous passion. It is an opinion generally shared in America that the existence and duration of republican forms in the New World depend on the existence and the duration of the federal system. A great part of the miseries engulfing the new States of South America is attributed to the desire to establish large republics there, instead of dividing sovereignty.

As a matter of fact, it is incontestable that in the United States the taste and the practice of republican government were born in the towns and within the provincial assemblies. In a small nation such as Connecticut, for example, where the important political matter is opening a canal or laying out a roadway, where the state has no army to pay nor war to sustain, and where the state can give to those who lead it neither wealth nor much glory, you can imagine nothing more natural and more appropriate to the nature of things than a republic. Now, this same republican spirit, these mores and these habits of a free people, after being born and developing in the various states, are then applied easily to the whole country. In a way, the public spirit of the Union is itself only a summary of provincial patriotism. Each citizen of the United States transfers, so to speak, the interest inspired in him by his small republic to the love of the common native land. By defending the Union, he defends the growing prosperity of his district, the right to direct its affairs, and the hope of winning acceptance there for the plans for improvement that are to enrich him himself: all things that ordinarily touch men more than the general interests of the country and the glory of the nation.

r. Rousseau made the following recommendation to the Poles: "Apply yourselves to expanding and perfecting the system of federative governments, the only one that unites the advantages of large and small States" (Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, chapter V, in Œuvres complètes, III, Paris: Pléiade, 1964, p. 971). The same idea is set forth at the beginning of Jugement sur le projet de paix perpétuelle, and it appears in a note at the end of chapter XV of book III of the Contrat social (ibid., p. 431). The advantages of the federal form had been equally praised by Montesquieu in the first chapter of book IX of Esprit des lois (in Œuvres complètes, Paris: Pléiade, 1951, II, p. 369).

s. Cf. conversation with Mr. Bowring (Voyage en Angleterre, OC, V, 2, p. 35).

t. "#Nevertheless, the greatest difficulty is not to find some peoples who know how to manage their own affairs, but to find some with this habit who can understand federal sovereignty and submit to it#" (YTC, CVh, 4, p. 4).

u. Hervé de Tocqueville: "All that precedes is very good. A thought however: Isn't the well-being that, for the states of the Union, results from the division of sovereignty disturbed by the vices of their democratic organization that Alexis had pointed out?"

Édouard de Tocqueville: "It seems to me that this can only be related to the whole. It is certain that the United States, as they are constituted, enjoy an enormous prosperity, and that the nations of the South are in anarchy" (YTC, CIIIb, 3, p. 24).

v. In the first version, the state cited was Massachusetts.
On the other hand, if the spirit and the mores of the inhabitants make them more suitable than others to cause a large republic to prosper, the federal system has made the task much less difficult. The confederation of all the American states does not show the usual disadvantages of numerous human agglomerations. The Union is a large republic in terms of expanse; but in a way, it can be likened to a small republic, because of the small number of matters that concern its government. Its acts are important, but rare. Since the sovereignty of the Union is hindered and incomplete, the use of this sovereignty is not dangerous to liberty. Nor does it excite those immoderate desires for power and reputation that are so deadly to great republics. Since everything there does not necessarily end up at a common center, you see neither vast cities, nor enormous wealth, nor great poverty, nor sudden revolutions. Political passions, instead of spreading instantaneously like a firestorm over the whole surface of the country, are going to break against the individual passions and interests of each state.

Within the Union, however, ideas and things circulate freely, as among one and the same people. Nothing stops the rise of the spirit of enterprise. Its government draws upon talents and enlightenment. Within the boundaries of the Union, as within the interior of a country under the same empire, a profound peace reigns. Outside, the Union ranks among the most powerful nations of the world; it offers to foreign trade more than eight hundred leagues of coastline. Holding in its hands the keys to a whole world, it enforces respect for its flag in the far reaches of the seas.

w. Hervé de Tocqueville: "And New York which is so large? Édouard de Tocqueville: "New York, it seems to me, is only a large city and not a metropolis, in the true meaning of this word" (YTC, CIIIb, 3, p. 24).

x. Hervé de Tocqueville: "This peroration is beautiful, but isn't Alexis making America into too much of an El Dorado? It must not be forgotten that he thinks himself obliged to disenchant us in the following chapters. Two sentences here appear too strong to me: that of the profound peace that reigns within the interior—two recent examples have shown that this peace is easily troubled—and that of respect for the flag, which exists only because the European nations wish it or do not agree to humiliate it. Not with its small fleet would America force the maritime powers to respect its flag."

Édouard de Tocqueville: "Alexis shows in several places what the future dangers of the American government are, and what its weak side is at the present time. But, if one judges it now as a whole, one can say, as in the last sentence, 'The Union is free and happy, etc.'" (YTC, CIIIb, 3, pp. 24-25).

The Union is free and happy like a small nation, glorious and strong like a large one.

What Keeps the Federal System from Being within the Reach of All Peoples; And What Has Allowed the Anglo-Americans to Adopt It

There are, in all federal systems, inherent vices that the law-maker cannot fight.—Complication of all federal systems.—It requires from the governed the daily use of their intelligence.—Practical knowledge of the Americans in the matter of government.—Relative weakness of the government of the Union, another vice inherent in the federal system.—The Americans have made it less serious, but have not been able to destroy it.—The sovereignty of the individual states weaker in appearance, stronger in reality than that of the Union.—Why.—So among confederated peoples, there must be natural causes of union, apart from the laws.—What these causes are among the Anglo-Americans.—Maine and Georgia, 400 leagues apart, more naturally united than Normandy and Brittany.—That war is the principal danger to confederations.—This proved by the very example of the United States.—The Union has no great wars to fear.—Why.—Dangers that the peoples of Europe would run by adopting the federal system of the Americans.

[Of all beings, man is assuredly the one best known; and yet his prosperity or misery are the product of unknown laws of which only a few isolated and incomplete fragments come into our view. Absolute truth is hidden and perhaps will always remain hidden.] The law-maker sometimes succeeds, after a thousand efforts, in exercising an indirect influence on the destiny of nations, and then his genius is celebrated. While often, the geo-

y. See the conversation with Mr. MacLean (non-alphabetic notebooks 2 and 3, YTC BIIa, and Voyage, OC, V, 1, p. 127).