CHAPTER 10

Of the Taste for
Material Well-Being in America

a. 1. The taste for material well-being is universal in America. Why?
   1. In aristocracies, the upper classes, since they have never acquired well-being or feared losing it, readily apply their passions elsewhere and on a more lofty level. Since the lower classes do not have the idea of bettering their lot and are not close enough to well-being to desire it, their imagination is thrown toward the other world.
   2. In democratic centuries, on the contrary, each person tries hard to attain well-being or fears losing it. That constantly keeps the soul in suspense on this point (YTC, CVI, p. 29).

First organization of this part of the book in the Rubish:

OF THE TASTE FOR MATERIAL ENJOYMENTS IN DEMOCRACIES.

1. Of the taste for material enjoyments in America.
2. Of the different effects that the taste for material enjoyments produces in an aristocracy and in a democracy.
3. Of some bizarre sects that are arising in America.
4. Of restlessness of the heart in America.
5. How the taste for material enjoyments is combined among the Americans with love of liberty and concerns for public affairs.
6. How equality of conditions (or democracy) leads Americans toward industrial professions.
7. How the religious beliefs of the Americans hold within certain limits the excessive taste for material well-being (Rubish of chapter 15 of this part, Rubish, 1).

b. In the Rubish there is a voluminous sheaf bearing the title RUBISH AND IDEAS RELATING TO THE CHAPTERS ON MATERIAL ENJOYMENTS. It contains notes and pages of rubish for this chapter and for those that follow, up to and including chapter 18. The rubish for this chapter retains another sheaf with this note on the cover:

WHAT MAKES THE LOVE OF RICHES PREDOMINATE OVER ALL OTHER PASSIONS IN DEMOCRATIC CENTURIES.

Chapter to insert in the course of the book, probably before industrial careers.

In America, the passion for material well-being is not always exclusive, but it is general; if everyone does not experience it in the same way, everyone feels it. The concern to satisfy the slightest needs of the body and to provide for the smallest conveniences of life preoccupies minds universally.

Something similar is seen more and more in Europe.

Among the causes that produce these similar effects in two worlds, several are close to my subject, and I must point them out.

When wealth is fixed in the same families by inheritance, you see a great number of men who enjoy material well-being, without feeling the exclusive taste for well-being.

What most strongly holds the human heart is not the peaceful possession of a precious object but the imperfectly satisfied desire to possess it and the constant fear of losing it.

In aristocratic societies the rich, never knowing a state different from their own, do not fear its changing; they scarcely imagine another one. So for them material well-being is not the goal of life; it is a way of living. They consider it, in a way, like existence, and enjoy it without thinking about it.

Since the natural and instinctive taste that all men feel for well-being is thus satisfied without difficulty and without fear, their soul proceeds else-

At ambition, what diverts from great ambition, it is the petty ambition for money.

You devote yourself to the petty ambition for money as preliminary to the other and, when you have devoted yourself to it for a long time, you are incapable of moving away from it.

To put I think before material enjoyments. The desire for wealth is close to the desire for material enjoyments, but is distinct.

The only page of the sheaf bears particularly the following notes:

"Regularity. Monotony of life."

"That is not democratic but commercial, or at least it is democratic only in so far as democracy pushes toward commerce and industry.

"There are also religious habits in the middle of that."

In another place: "In aristocracies, even the life of artisans is varied; they have games, ceremonies, a form of worship that serves as a diversion from the monotony of their works. Their body is attached to their profession, not their soul.

"It is not the same thing with democratic peoples" (Rubish, 1).
where and attaches itself to some more difficult and greater enterprise that animates it and carries it away.

In this way, in the very midst of material enjoyments, the members of an aristocracy often demonstrate a proud scorn for these very enjoyments and find singular strength when they must finally do without them. All the revolutions that have disturbed or destroyed aristocracies have shown with what ease men accustomed to superfluity were able to do without necessities, while men who have laboriously attained comfort are hardly ever able to live after losing it.5

If, from the upper ranks, I pass to the lower classes, I will see analogous effects produced by different causes.

Among nations where aristocracy dominates society and keeps it immobile, the people end by becoming accustomed to poverty as the rich are to their opulence. The latter are not preoccupied by material well-being, because they possess it without difficulty; the former do not think about material well-being, because they despair of gaining it and do not know it well enough to desire it.6

c. *Byron remarks somewhere that in his voyages, he easily bore and suffered almost without complaint the privations that made his valet despair. The same remark could have been made by a thousand others* [Rabish, 1]. Letter of Byron to his mother, Athens, 17 January 1831; reproduced in Correspondence of Lord Byron with a Friend . . . (Paris: A. and W. Calignani, 1825), I, pp. 21–22; the same publishing house published a French version of this text.

d. How the different forms of government can more or less favor the taste for money among men.7

Among nations that have an aristocracy you seek money because it leads to power. Among nations that have a nobility you seek it to console yourself for being excluded from power. It seems that it is among democratic peoples that you have to seek it the least. There as elsewhere, ordinary souls undoubtedly continue to be attached to it; but ambitious spirits take it neither as principal goal and as a makeshift equivalent [? (ed.)].

You object to me in vain that in the United States, which forms a democracy, the love of money is excessive and that in France, where we turn daily toward democracy, love of money is becoming more and more the dominant passion. I will reply that political institutions definitively exercise only a limited influence over the inclinations of the human heart. If love of money is great in France and in the United States, that comes from the fact that in France mores, beliefs and characters are becoming depraved, and that in the United States the material condition of the country presents continual opportunities to the passion to grow rich. In the two countries you love

money not because there are democratic institutions, but even though there are democratic institutions [YTC, CVa, pp. 53–54].

On 28 May 1831, Tocqueville writes from New York to his brother, Édouard:

We are very truly here in another world; political passions here are only on the surface. The profound passion, the only one that profoundly moves the human heart, the passion of every day, is the acquisition of wealth, and there are a thousand means to acquire it without disturbing the State. You have to be very blind in my opinion to want to compare this country to Europe and to adapt to one what suits the other; I believed it before leaving France; I believe it more and more while examining the society in the midst of which I now live; it is a people of merchants who are busy with public affairs when its [sic] work leaves it the leisure (YTC, Blaz).

e. "What makes democratic nations egotistic is not even so much the great number of independent citizens that they contain as the great number of citizens who are constantly reaching independence" (YTC, CVa, pp. 7–8).

f. To the side: "<This sentence is good, but interrupts the flow of the idea.>"
this class; it becomes preponderant with it. From there it gains the upper ranks of society and descends to the people.

I did not meet, in America, a citizen so poor who did not cast a look of hope and envy on the enjoyments of the rich, and whose imagination did not grasp in advance the good things that fate stubbornly refused him.

On the other hand, I never saw among the rich of the United States this superb disdain for material well-being that is sometimes shown even within the heart of the most opulent and most dissolve aristocracies.

Most of these rich have been poor; they have felt the sting of need; they have long fought against a hostile fortune, and now that victory is won, the passions that accompanied the struggle survive it; they remain as if intoxicated amid these small enjoyments that they have pursued for forty years.

It is not that in the United States, as elsewhere, you do not find a fairly large number of rich men who, holding their property by inheritance, possess without effort an opulence that they have not gained. But even these do not appear less attached to the enjoyments of material life. The love of well-being has become the national and dominant taste. The great current of human passions leads in this direction, it sweeps everything along in its wake.8

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8. "Other reason. In a democratic society the only visible advantage that you can enjoy over your fellows is wealth. This explains the desire for riches, but not that for material enjoyments. These two things are close, but are nonetheless distinct. While it comes to the aid of sensuality here, pride in aristocracies often runs counter to it; you want to distinguish yourself from those who do not have money" (Rubish, 1).
You could believe, from what precedes, that the love of material enjoyments must constantly lead the Americans toward disorder in morals, disturb families and in the end compromise the fate of society itself.

But this is not so; the passion for material enjoyments produces within democracies other effects than among aristocratic peoples.

It sometimes happens that weariness with public affairs, the excess of wealth, the ruin of beliefs, the decadence of the State, little by little turn the heart of an aristocracy toward material enjoyments alone. At other times, the power [v. tyranny] of the prince or the weakness of the people, without robbing the nobles of their fortune, forces them to withdraw from power, and by closing the path to great undertakings to them, abandons them to the restlessness of their desires; they then fall heavily back onto themselves, and they seek in the enjoyments of the body to forget their past grandeur.

When the members of an aristocratic body turn exclusively in this way toward material enjoyments, they usually gather at this point alone all the energy that the long habit of power gave them.

To such men the pursuit of well-being is not enough; they require a sumptuous depravity and a dazzling corruption. They worship the material magnificently and seem to vie with one another in their desire to excel in the art of making themselves into brutes.

The more an aristocracy has been strong, glorious and free, the more it will appear depraved, and whatever the splendor of its virtues had been, I dare to predict it will always be surpassed by the brilliance of its vices.

The taste for material enjoyments does not lead democratic peoples to existence less; and you arrive at the great abyss without having had the time to notice the road that you followed.

These men call themselves virtuous; I deny it. They are steady, that is all that I am able to say in their favor. They steal from the neighbor and respect his wife, which I can only explain to myself because they love money and do not have the time to make love (Letter of 8 November 1831, YTC, Bla2).

c. "#1 know nothing more deplorable than the spectacle presented by an aristocracy that, losing its power, has remained master of its wealth.°" (Rubish, 1).

d. "In aristocracies the taste for material well-being breaks the bonds of society, in democracies it tightens them" (Rubish, 1).

e. In the rubish, the sentence says: "cannot be applied except to the poor of democracies." On this subject, you read as well the following note: "The remark of Édouard on this point is this:

"I am speaking here," he says, "only about the poor or at most about people who are well-off, but there are rich people in democracies and it must be explained why these rich men are also forced to pursue material enjoyments in small ways and share on this point the instincts of the poor.

"True remark" (Rubish, 1)."
material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to satisfy itself. Nor is it the enemy of regularity of morals; for good morals are useful to public tranquillity and favor industry. Often it even comes to be combined with a sort of religious morality; you want to be as well-off as possible in this world, without renouncing your chances in the other.

Among material goods, there are some whose possession is criminal; you take care to do without them. There are others whose use is allowed by religion and morality; to the latter you give unreservedly your heart, your imagination, your life, and by trying hard to grasp them, you lose sight of these more precious goods that make the glory and the grandeur of the human species.

What I reproach equality for is not carrying men toward the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments; it is for absorbing them entirely in the pursuit of permitted enjoyments.

In this way there could well be established in the world a kind of honest materialism that would not corrupt souls, but would soften them and end by silently relaxing all their springs of action.

CHAPTER 12

Why Certain Americans Exhibit So Excited a Spiritualism

Although the desire to acquire the goods of this world is the dominant passion of the Americans, there are moments of respite when their soul seems suddenly to break the material bonds that hold it and to escape impetuously toward heaven.

In all of the states of the Union, but principally in the half-populated regions of the West, you sometimes meet itinerant preachers who peddle the divine word from place to place.

Entire families, old people, women and children cross difficult places and go through uninhabited woods in order to come from far away to hear them; and when these people have found the preachers, for several days and

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a. Although the Americans have as a dominant passion the acquisition of the goods of this world, spiritualism shows itself from time to time among all, and exclusively among some, with singular forms and a fervor that often goes nearly to extravagance. Camp meetings. Bizarre sects. These different effects come from the same cause. The soul has natural needs that must be satisfied. If you want to imprison it in contemplation of the needs of the body, it ends by escaping and in its momentum it does not stop even at the limits of common sense (YTC, CV, pp. 30–31).

b. Original title in the rubish: OF SOME BIZARRE SECTS THAT ARISE IN AMERICA. See the appendix SECTS IN AMERICA.

c. On the jacket of the manuscript: "Small chapter that must be retained only if someone formally advises me to do so. "The core of the idea is questionable. Everything considered there were more mystical extravagances in the Middle Ages (centuries of aristocracy) than in America today. "Moreover, several of these ideas reappear or have already appeared (I believe) in the book!"

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