

EXTRACT

From DUGLASS STEWART'S Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind. [CONCLUDED.]

The economical system which, about thirty years ago, employed the speculations of some ingenious men in France, seemed to me to have been the first and only system to attain this ideal perfection of the social order; and the light which, since that period has been thrown on the subject, in different parts of Europe, is far from having induced human mind is able to accomplish its faculties, when it has once received a proper direction. To all the various tenets of these writers, I would, by no means be understood to subscribe; nor do I consider their system to perfect in every different part, as some of its more sanguine admirers have represented it to be. A few of the most important principles of political economy, they have undoubtedly established with demonstrative evidence; but what the world is chiefly indebted to them for, is the commencement which they have given to a new branch of every man's philosophical investigation which they have exhibited to their successors. A short account of what I conceive to be the scope of their speculations, will justify the remarks, and will comprehend every thing which I have to offer at present, in answer to the question by which they were suggested. Such an account I attempt with the greatest satisfaction, that the leading views of the economical system have, in my opinion, been no more misrepresented by its opponents, than misapprehended by those who have alleged its consequences.

In the first place, then, I think it important to remark, that the object of the economical system ought, by no means to be confounded (as is likewise the case in this country) with that of the Utopian plans of government, which have, at different times been offered to the world; and which have also, of late years, attracted the notice of some bold and reasonable inquirers. Of these plans, by far the greater number proceed on the supposition, that the social order is entirely the effect of human art; and that whatever this order is imperfect, it will may be traced to some want of foresight on the part of the legislator, or to some intimation of the magistrate to the unenfranchised franchise, which the legislator, which regulates the movements. The projects of reform, therefore, which such plans involve, are, in general, well entitled to all the ridicule and contempt they have met with; inasmuch as they employ an arrogant and presumptuous belief in their authors, of the superiority of their own political sagacity, to the accumulated wisdom of former ages. The only way by which we derive the economical system; which the leading views (so far as I am able to judge) proceed on the two following suppositions: First, that the social order is, in the most essential respects, the result of the influence of nature, and not of human contrivance; and, therefore, that the proper business of the politician, is not to divide his attention among all the different parts of the system, which is by far too complicated for his comprehension; but, by protecting the rights of individuals; and by allowing to each as complete a liberty as is compatible with the perfect security of the rights of his fellow-citizens; to remove every obstacle which the prejudices and views of men have opposed to the establishment of that order which society has a tendency to assume. Secondly, that in proportion to the progress of the diffusion of knowledge, those prejudices, an artificial management of which all the old systems of policy proceeded, must gradually disappear; and, consequently, that whatever may be the pretensions to political sagacity, the inevitable course of events, imposes on the politician the necessity of forming his measures on more solid and permanent principles, than those of the old world has hitherto been governed. Both of these suppositions are of modern origin. The former, so far as I know, was first stated and illustrated by the French economists. The latter has been more generally admitted by that rapid improvement which has actually taken place in every country of Europe, where the press has enjoyed a moderate degree of liberty.

It may be further observed, with respect to the greater part of the plans proposed by Utopian projectors, that they proceed on the supposition of a miraculous reformation in the moral character of the human race to be effected by some new system of education. All such plans (as Mr. Hume has justly observed) may be safely abandoned as impracticable and visionary. But this objection does not apply to the economical system; the chief object of which, for promoting moral improvement, is not that

education which depends on the attention and care of our instructors; but an education which necessarily results from the political order of society. How inefficient would the Roman laws and the Jewish law, if they were not supported by good morals! How inefficient (if the economists) are all our efforts to preserve the morals of a people, if the laws which regulate the political order, doom one half of mankind to indigence, to fraud, to servility, to ignorance, to superstition; and the other half to the lives of all the vices and vices which result from a total want of morality, and the influence of opulence? Suppose, for a moment, that the inordinate accumulation of wealth in the hands of individuals, which we every where meet with in modern Europe, were gradually diminished by abolishing the law of entails, and by establishing a perfect freedom of commerce and of industry; it is almost evident, that this simple alteration in the order of society; an alteration which has been often demonstrated to be the most effectual and the most infallible measure for the promotion of the prosperity of a country; would contribute, more than all the labours of moralists, to secure the virtue and the happiness of all the classes of mankind. It is worthy of no remark, that such a plan, if it were actually adopted, requires, for its accomplishment, many new and complicated institutions; and therefore does not proceed upon any exaggerated conception of the efficacy of human policy. On the contrary, it requires only (like most of the other expedients proposed by this system) the gradual abolition of the arbitrary and unjust arrangements, by which the order of nature is disturbed.

Another mistaken idea concerning the economical system is, that it is founded entirely upon theory, and unsupported by facts; that any new political speculations which have been offered to the world; for they are founded, not on a few examples collected from the small number of governments of which we possess an adequate knowledge, but on the laws of human nature, and their various modifications, which are daily verified in the intercourse of private life.

Of those who have speculated on the subject of legislation, far the greater part seem to have considered it as a science *generis*; the first principles of which can be obtained in no other way than by examining the various degrees of mankind in their political capacities. The economists, on the contrary, have searched for causes of national prosperity, and rational improvement, in those arrangements, which have already offered to the world, for the property and to the improvement of individuals. The former resemble those philosophers of antiquity, who, affirming that the phenomena of the heavens are regulated by laws, which are already discovered, discouraged every attempt to investigate their physical causes, which was founded upon facts collected from common experience. The latter resemble those who, contemplating a reformation in politics, similar to what Kepler and Newton accomplished in astronomy; and, by fabricating to that common sense, which guides mankind in their private concerns, those questions, of which some were supplied to be competent judges, but men in the mysteries of government, have given a beginning to a series of inquiries, which, if pursued, would widely our prospects; and which, in its progress, may probably afford an illustration, not less striking than that which physical astronomy exhibits, of the simplicity of the laws by which the universe is governed.

When a political writer, in order to expose the folly of those commercial regulations which aim at the encouragement of domestic industry, by reducing its importation, appeals to the maxims upon which men act in private life; when he remarks, that the trader does not attempt to make his own shoes, but buys them of the shoemaker; that the farmer does not attempt to make his own clothes, but employs a tailor; and when he concludes, that what is prudence in the conduct of every private family, is scarcely he folly in that of a great nation; he may not, doubtfully be said, in one sense, to indulge in theory; as he calls in question the utility of institutions which appear, from the facts, to be not only useful, but of a high degree of political propriety. But, in another sense, and in a much more philosophical one, he may be said to oppose to the false theories of statemen, the common sense of mankind; and to exhibit the expediency, of which every man may verify the truth by his own daily observation.

There is yet another mistake (of full greater consequence, perhaps, than that of those I have mentioned) which has misled most of the opponents, and even friends, of the economical system; and which I think it was meant to exhibit a political order, which is really attainable in the present state of Europe. So different would it be from the system of the enlightened advocates, that they have uniformly retired their only hopes of its gradual establishment in the world, on that influence in the conduct of human affairs, which is to be expected from the progress to acquire, in consequence of the progress of reason and civilization. To suppose that a period is ever to arrive, when all shall be regulated in its full extent, would be the height of enthusiasm and absurdity; but it is surely neither enthusiasm nor absurdity to affirm, that governments are more or less perfect, in proportion to the greater or smaller number of individuals to whom they afford the means of cultivating their intellectual and moral powers, and whom they admit to live together on a more equal footing.

To delineate that state of political society, which is to be expected from the progress nearer and nearer, as the triumph of philosophy extend, was, I apprehend, the leading object of the civil and moral philosophers of the economical system. It is a false of society, which they by no means intended to recommend to their contemporaries, as the most eligible mode of things to which they have a tendency of themselves to approach, and to which it ought to be the aim of the legislator to facilitate their progress. In the language of a philosopher, who has been applied to the progressive improvement of the political order; and, in the mean time, it exhibits a standard of comparison, by which the excellence of particular institutions may be estimated.

According to the view which has now been given of the economical system, its principles appear highly favorable to the tranquility of society, and to the happiness of its members, by inspiring us with a confidence in the triumph which truth and liberty must finally gain in the end over error and injustice; as a tendency to discourage every plan of innovation, which is not supported by violence and bloodshed. And accordingly, fact has always been the language of those who were well acquainted with the views of the economical system, and who were therefore we have taught the oppressed, "(say one of the ablest of its present supporters), "we shall risk the loss of liberty, and risk that to support the progress of reason. History affords proofs of this truth. He often, in spite of the efforts of the friends of freedom, has the event of a single battle, reduced nations to the slavery of ages." As the liberty enjoyed by those nations, which have recovered it by force of arms, and not by the influence of philosophy? Have not most of them founded the forms of republicanism in the enjoyment of it, and the disposal of numbers with liberty? How many laws, conformable to the rights of nature, have dishonoured the code of every people which has recovered its freedom, by restoring those ages in which reason was still in its infancy."

"Why not profit by this fatal experience, and widely wait the progress of knowledge, in order to secure freedom more effectually, more substantial, and more permanent? Why pursue it by blood and inevitable confusion, and trust that to chance, which time mult certainly, and without bloodshed, will remove, and which, by its progress, may deal, will relieve us from many grievances under which we labour at present, but which will secure the perfection, and the permanence of freedom, we must patiently wait the period, when men emancipated from their prejudices, and guided by philosophy, shall be rendered worthy of liberty, by comprehending its claims."—Condorcet

Nor is it the employment of violent and oppressive means, in order to establish political innovations, that this enlightened and humane philosophy has a tendency to discourage. By extending our views to the plan of the economical system, and showing us the mutual relations and dependencies of its most distant parts, I cannot fail to check that indiscriminate zeal against established institutions, which arises from the want of a certain degree of well as to produce a certain degree of scepticism with respect to every change, the success of which is not infrequently by the prevailing ideas and manners of the age. Some of the most judicious projectors of reform are frequently the offspring of clear and argumentative and systematical understandings; but rarely of comprehensive minds. For electing them, indeed, nothing is so difficult, as a general survey of the complicated structure of society. Even although the perfection of the political system, provided it be conducted on an extensive scale, is more useful, at least for this purpose, than the most minute and successful inquiries, which are circumscribed within a narrow circle. If it should be necessary, it will at least satisfy us of the extreme difficulty of predicting, with confidence, the remote effects of new arrangements; and that the perfection of the political system, not in incurring the machine of government with new contrivances to obviate every partial inconvenience, but in removing gradually and imperceptibly, the obstacles which disturb the order of nature, and (as Mr. Addison more expressly it) "in grafting upon her institutions."

When the economical system, indeed, is first proposed to the mind, and when we compare the perfection which it exhibits, with the actual state of human affairs, it is by no means unnatural, that it should fugit plans of reform, which are too sudden to be practicable. A more complete acquaintance, however, with the subject, will effectually cure these first impressions, and will induce us to consider chiefly to be apprehended from an injudicious combination of theoretical perfection with our established laws, prejudices and manners. "As the various unatural modes and habits of society, which the bodily constitution is gradually reconciled by a course of luxurious indulgences, have such a tendency to correct these early efforts, as to remove us from a more simple regimen, a dangerous, and, sometimes, a fatal experiment; so it is possible, that many of our imperfect political institutions, which are so much to be regretted, may be such that a partial and judicious reformation, simple and equitable plan of reformation, might tend, in the first instance, to frustrate some important purposes which we are anxious to promote. It is not necessary, for example, that the influence which is founded on a respect for hereditary rank, may have its use in counteracting that aristocracy, which arises from inequality of wealth; and which, in proportion to the extent of property to support? That the former species of influence is rapidly declining of itself, in consequence of the progress which commerce and agriculture have already made, is sufficiently obvious, and, I think, may reasonably be doubted, whether a well-wisher to mankind would be disposed to accelerate its destruction, till the principles of political economy are completely understood and acknowledged by the world."

VARDEN & CARPENTER, TAYLORS. Gratefully acknowledge the favors of the public, whilst carrying on business opposite Mr. JACK'S Tavern, and inform, that they have removed to the new building of Mr. TUNNICLIFFE's Hotel, where gentlemen and ladies who wish to be in a file of blood and elegance will find them at the disposal of their business to execute, and they presume, that the most populous cities in the United Kingdom and Legation and Legation made in the month of March. No. 11, 1801. wif

One Dollar Reward. RAN away from the subscriber, a Negro Boy named JACK, about fifteen years of age. had on a blue coat, and a blue waistcoat, and a blue cap. Whoever apprehends him and brings him to the subscriber, shall receive the above reward. GEORGE ANDREWS, July 22, 1801. 31

Nail Manufactory. ALL kinds of cast Nails for Sale by Wholesale and Retail, at the Factory on Fleet Street, and at the Hardware Store of the Subscriber, where persons who wish to purchase, may purchase may be supplied with any quantity at the most reasonable rate. JOHN JACK, Washington Post, A. 1801.

Conrad & Munn HAVE opened houses of entertainment in the range of buildings formerly occupied by the late Mr. Munn, at the corner of the Capitol, in New Jersey avenue, leading from thence to the Eastern Branch. They are spacious and airy, and well furnished, and are adapted for stage passengers and travellers, the other for the accommodation of boarders. There is Bathing and Dressing Rooms, and a good Kitchen, and every other public convenience. City of Washington, Nov. 24, 1800. FOR SALE, A YOUNG NEGRO GIRL, About 15 years old—Apply at this office, April 25, 1801.