

## PREFACE

If amidst the infinite number of subjects contained in this book there is anything which, contrary to my expectation, may possibly offend, I can at least assure the public that it was not inserted with an ill intention: for I am not naturally of a captious temper. Plato thanked the gods that he was born in the same age with Socrates: and for my part I give thanks to the Supreme that I was born a subject of that government under which I live; and that it is His pleasure I should obey those whom He has made me love.

I beg one favour of my readers, which I fear will not be granted me; this is, that they will not judge by a few hours' reading of the labour of twenty years; that they will approve or condemn the book entire, and not a few particular phrases. If they would search into the design of the author, they can do it in no other way so completely as by searching into the design of the work.

I have first of all considered mankind; and the result of my thoughts has been, that amidst such an infinite diversity of laws and manners, they were not solely conducted by the caprice of fancy.

I have laid down the first principles, and have found that the particular cases follow naturally from them; that the histories of all nations are only consequences of them; and that every particular law is connected with another law, or depends on some other of a more general extent.

When I have been obliged to look back into antiquity, I have endeavoured to assume the spirit of the ancients, lest I should consider those things as alike which are really different; and lest I should miss the difference of those which appear to be alike.

I have not drawn my principles from my prejudices, but from the nature

of things.

Here a great many truths will not appear till we have seen the chain which connects them with others. The more we enter into particulars, the more we shall perceive the certainty of the principles on which they are founded. I have not even given all these particulars, for who could mention them all without a most insupportable fatigue?

The reader will not here meet with any of those bold flights which seem to characterise the works of the present age. When things are examined with never so small a degree of extent, the sallies of imagination must vanish; these generally arise from the mind's collecting all its powers to view only one side of the subject, while it leaves the other unobserved.

I write not to censure anything established in any country whatsoever. Every nation will here find the reasons on which its maxims are founded; and this will be the natural inference, that to propose alterations belongs only to those who are so happy as to be born with a genius capable of penetrating the entire constitution of a state.

It is not a matter of indifference that the minds of the people be enlightened. The prejudices of magistrates have arisen from national prejudice. In a time of ignorance they have committed even the greatest evils without the least scruple; but in an enlightened age they even tremble while conferring the greatest blessings. They perceive the ancient abuses; they see how they must be reformed; but they are sensible also of the abuses of a reformation. They let the evil continue, if they fear a worse; they are content with a lesser good, if they doubt a greater. They examine into the parts, to judge of them in connection; and they examine all the causes, to discover their different effects.

Could I but succeed so as to afford new reasons to every man to love his prince, his country, his laws; new reasons to render him more sensible in every nation and government of the blessings he enjoys, I should think myself the most happy of mortals.

Could I but succeed so as to persuade those who command, to increase their knowledge in what they ought to prescribe; and those who obey, to find a new pleasure resulting from obedience -- I should think myself the most happy of mortals.

The most happy of mortals should I think myself could I contribute to make mankind recover from their prejudices. By prejudices I here mean, not that which renders men ignorant of some particular things, but whatever renders them ignorant of themselves.

It is in endeavouring to instruct mankind that we are best able to practise that general virtue which comprehends the love of all. Man, that flexible being, conforming in society to the thoughts and impressions of others, is equally capable of knowing his own nature, whenever it is laid open to his view; and of losing the very sense of it, when this idea is banished from his mind.

Often have I begun, and as often have I laid aside, this undertaking. I have a thousand times given the leaves I had written to the winds: I, every day, felt my paternal hands fall. I have followed my object without any fixed plan: I have known neither rules nor exceptions; I have found the truth, only to lose it again. But when I once discovered my first principles, everything I sought for appeared; and in the course of twenty years, I have seen my work begun, growing up, advancing to maturity, and finished.

If this work meets with success, I shall owe it chiefly to the grandeur and majesty of the subject. However, I do not think that I have been totally deficient in point of genius. When I have seen what so many

great men both in France, England, and Germany have said before me, I have been lost in admiration; but I have not lost my courage: I have said with Correggio, "And I also am a painter."

#### ADVERTISEMENT

1. For the better understanding of the first four books of this work, it is to be observed that what I distinguish by the name of virtue, in a republic, is the love of one's country, that is, the love of equality. It is not a moral, nor a Christian, but a political virtue; and it is the spring which sets the republican government in motion, as honour is the spring which gives motion to monarchy. Hence it is that I have distinguished the love of one's country, and of equality, by the appellation of political virtue. My ideas are new, and therefore I have been obliged to find new words, or to give new acceptations to old terms, in order to convey my meaning. They, who are unacquainted with this particular, have made me say most strange absurdities, such as would be shocking in any part of the world, because in all countries and governments morality is requisite.

2. The reader is also to notice that there is a vast difference between saying that a certain quality, modification of the mind, or virtue, is not the spring by which government is actuated, and affirming that it is not to be found in that government. Were I to say such a wheel or such a pinion is not the spring which sets the watch going, can you infer thence that they are not to be found in the watch? So far is it from being true that the moral and Christian virtues are excluded from monarchy, that even political virtue is not excluded. In a word, honour is found in a republic, though its spring be political virtue; and political virtue is found in a monarchical government, though it be actuated by honour.

To conclude, the honest man of whom we treat in the third book, chapter

5, is not the Christian, but the political honest man, who is possessed of the political virtue there mentioned. He is the man who loves the laws of his country, and who is actuated by the love of those laws. I have set these matters in a clearer light in the present edition, by giving a more precise meaning to my expression: and in most places where I have made use of the word virtue I have taken care to add the term political.