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Rhedi to Rica in Paris

One of the things that has most exercised my curiosity on arrival to Europe is the history and origin of republics. You know that most Asians have not even a notion of this sort of government, and that imagination has not served them to the point of letting them understand that there can be any other kind of government on earth than despotic.

The first governments of the world were monarchical ; it was only by chance, and by the succession of centuries, that republics were formed.

Greece having been wrecked by a flood, other inhabitants came to people it ; it attracted almost all its colonies from Egypt and the nearest regions of Asia ; and as these countries were governed by kings, the peoples who came from them were governed likewise. But as the tyranny of these princes became too heavy, they shook off the yoke, and from the debris of so many kingdoms rose up those republics that brought such flowering to Greece, alone civilized among barbarians.

The love of freedom and the hatred of kings long preserved Greek independence, and extended republican government afar. The Greek cities found allies in Asia Minor ; they sent there colonies as free as they were, which served them as ramparts against the enterprises of the kings of Persia. That is not all : Greece peopled Italy ; Italy, Spain, and perhaps the Gauls. We know that that great Hesperia so famous among the ancients was at the beginning Greece, which its neighbors regarded as an abode of bliss ; the Greeks who did not find that happy country at home went to seek it in Italy ; those of Italy, in Spain ; those of Spain, in Baetica [1] or Portugal, and so it was that all these regions bore that name among the ancients. These Greek colonies brought with them a spirit of freedom which they had taken from that fair land. Thus in those distant times we see hardly any monarchies in Italy, Spain, or the Gauls. We shall soon see that the peoples of the North and Germany were not less free, and that if we find vestiges of some royalty among them, it is because we have mistaken for kings the chiefs of armies or republics.

All this was taking place in Europe ; for where Asia and Africa are concerned, they have always been weighted down by despotism, if you except some cities of Asia Minor of which we have spoken, and the republic of Carthage in Africa.

The world was divided between two powerful republics : that of Rome and that of Carthage. Nothing is so well known as the beginnings of the Roman republic, and nothing so little known as the origin of that of Carthage. We know absolutely nothing about the succession of African princes since Dido, [2] and how they lost their power. The prodigious growth of the Roman republic would have been a very good thing for the world if there had not been that unjust difference between Roman citizens and the conquered peoples ; if the governors of the provinces had been given less broad authority ; if those laws so sacred for preventing their tyranny had been observed ; and if they had not, in order to silence them, made use of the same treasures that their injustice had amassed.

It seems that liberty is made for the genius of the peoples of Europe, and servitude for the genius of the peoples of Asia. The Romans offered that precious treasure to the Cappadocians, to no avail : that cowardly nation refused it, and rushed as eagerly into servitude as other peoples rushed to freedom.

Caesar oppressed the Roman republic and subjected it to arbitrary power.

Europe long suffered under a violent military government, and Roman leniency was changed into cruel oppression.

Meanwhile countless unknown nations came out of the North, spread like torrents into the Roman provinces ; and finding it as easy to make conquests as to practice their piracies, they dismembered them and turned them into kingdoms. These peoples were free, and so strictly limited the authority of their kings that they were properly only chiefs or generals. Thus these kingdoms, although founded by force, did not feel at all the victor's yoke. When the peoples of Asia, like the Turks and Tartars, made conquests, obedient to the will of a single man, they thought only of giving him new subjects and establishing his violent authority by force of arms ; but the peoples of the North, free in their country, taking over the Roman provinces, did not give their chiefs great authority. Some of these peoples, like the Vandals in Africa and the Goths in Spain, even deposed their kings as soon as they were dissatisfied with them ; and among the others the prince's authority was limited in a thousand different ways : a great number of lords shared it with him ; wars were undertaken only with their consent ; the spoils were divided between the chief and his soldiers ; no tax for the benefit of the prince ; the laws were made in the assemblies of the nation. That is the fundamental principle of all these states that were created from the debris of the Roman empire.

Venice this 20th day of the moon of Regeb 1719

[1] Andalusia.

[2] An allusion to the mythical origins of Carthage (Virgile, *Aeneid*, I).