

The Catholic Series

No. XXII.

SPIHERE AND DUT
GOVERNMENT.

Translated from the German of
BARON WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT,

BY
JOSEPH COULTIARD, JUN.

“ Le difficile est de ne promulguer que des lois nécessaires, de rester à jamais fidèle à ce principe vraiment constitutionnel de la société, de se mettre en garde contre la fureur de gouverner, la plus funeste maladie des gouvernemens modernes.”—MIRABEAU *l'Ami*, sur l'Éducation Publique, p. 69.

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PREFACE.

THE book of which a translation is here offered to the English reader was published posthumously at Berlin, in the year 1852, by the Author's younger brother, Alexander von Humboldt, the eminent Naturalist. It appeared under the title of 'Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen;' forming part of the seventh and concluding volume of the 'Gesammelte Werke' of its distinguished author. Written in 1791, in his early manhood, and at a time when the ideas which it unfolds were in striking contrast to the events and opinions of the day, the book was long obnoxious to the scruples of the German Censorship; and his friend Schiller, who took much interest in its publication, had some difficulty in finding a publisher willing to incur the necessary responsibility. The Author therefore retained the manuscript in his possession, revising it from time to time, and re-writing considerable portions, which appeared in Schiller's 'Thalia' and the 'Berlin Monthly Review;' but, although the obstacles which at first opposed the issue of the book were subsequently removed, it was never given to the

PREFACE.

world

It is in a complete form during his life. It is probably that his important official engagements,* and those profound studies in critical philology, of which we have such noble and enduring monuments in the literature of Germany, left him no leisure to revert to this the chosen subject of his earlier labours. But we cannot but feel grateful to his distinguished brother, for giving publicity to a treatise which has such strong claims to attention, whether we regard the eminence of its Author as a philosopher and a statesman, the intrinsic value of its contents, or their peculiar interest at a time when the Sphere of Government seems more than ever to require careful definition. To English-

* In 1790 Humboldt was appointed a Councillor of Legation, and attached to the High Court of Berlin. In 1791 he resigned these offices, and the next ten years of his life (during which the present work was written) were spent in travel, literary activity, and constant intercourse with Goethe, Schiller, Wolf, etc. In 1802 he was made Privy Councillor of Legation and Ambassador at the Papal Court, in which capacity he resided six years at Rome. On giving up his diplomatic engagements, he was appointed in 1808 Privy Councillor of State; and as Minister of Worship and Public Instruction, was one of the most active members of the Prussian Reform Ministry, until, through the influence of Napoleon, it was dismissed in 1810. Among many other important improvements and reforms, he founded the University of Berlin. Soon after, he was appointed Ambassador and Plenipotentiary at the Austrian Court, with the additional title of Privy Minister of State. In 1813 he was Plenipotentiary at the Peace Congress of Prague, at Chatillon, and subsequently at the Congress of Vienna. He afterwards visited Paris in a diplomatic capacity; and it was here that Madame de Staël was so much impressed with his genius and culture, that she called him "la plus grande capacité de l'Europe." In 1818 he was appointed to the Ministry of the Interior; but his strenuous advocacy of constitutional liberty (in opposition to the Carlsbad decrees) was an insuperable obstacle to the schemes of the Cabinets of Vienna and Petersburg, and of some of his colleagues in the Ministry of Prussia. He was offered the ministerial pension of 6000 dollars, but, refusing it, retired to prosecute his more congenial literary labours.

PREFACE.

Yen, least of all, is it likely to prove unattractive or uninteresting, since it endeavours to show the theoretical ideal of a policy to which their institutions have made a gradual and instinctive approximation; and contributes important ideas towards the solution of questions which now lie so near to the heart and conscience of the English public.

With respect to the translation, I have aimed at scrupulous fidelity; believing that, even where there may be some obscurity (as in one or two of the earlier chapters), the intelligent reader would prefer the *ipsissima verba* of so great a man, to any arbitrary construction put upon them by his translator. Still, I have spared no pains to discover the author's sense in all cases, and to give it in simple and unmistakable words; and I would here mention, with grateful acknowledgment, the valuable assistance I have received in this endeavour from my accomplished German friend, Mr. Eugen Oswald: those who are best acquainted with the peculiarities of thought and style which characterize the writer, will be best able to appreciate the importance of such assistance.

In conclusion, I cannot but feel that there may be many to whom this book contains little to recommend itself;—little of showy paradox or high-sounding declamation, little of piquant attack or unhesitating dogmatism, little immediate reference to sects, or parties, or political schools; but I would also venture to anticipate that there are others, to whom the subject is no less congenial, who would willingly listen to a calm investigation of the most important ~~questions that~~

PREFACE.

can occupy the attention of the statesman and the moralist to earnest ideas clothed in simple and well-measured words; and that these will receive with welcome any worthy contribution to the expanding opinions of our day and nation, and look in these "Ideas," perhaps not unsuccessfully, for some true and abiding materials towards the structure of some fairer polity of the future.

BRAMPTON,
August 4th, 1854.

* * * In the MS. of the Third Chapter, on "Positive Welfare," there occurs an hiatus of a few pages. This has not been supplied in the German edition, published by the Author's brother; but the thread of the argument is sufficiently clear, from the Author's summary, to occasion little difficulty to the reader in continuing it in his own mind.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

INTRODUCTION

Object of the Inquiry defined.—An Inquiry seldom prosecuted, though of the highest importance.—Historical View of the limits which States have practically assigned to their sphere of action.—Difference between Ancient and Modern States.—On the Aim of the State Organization in general.—Should the Solitude of the State be confined to the preservation of SECURITY, or should it attempt to provide for the POSITIVE WELFARE of the Nation?—Legislators and Authors in favour of the latter opinion.—Notwithstanding their conclusions, this question seems to require a profounder Investigation.—This Investigation can proceed only from a consideration of Human Nature and its highest aims.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE INDIVIDUAL MAN, AND THE HIGHEST ENDS OF HIS EXISTENCE 11

Man's highest end is the highest and most harmonious Development of his Powers in their perfect Individuality.—Conditions necessary for the attainment of this end: Freedom of Action and a Variety of Situations.—Closer application of these positions to the inner life of man.—Historical confirmation.—Highest Principle of the whole Inquiry derived from these considerations.

CHAPTER III.

	PAGE
ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR THE POSITIVE WELFARE OF THE CITIZEN	19

- Scope of this Chapter.—A Solicitude of the State for the Positive Welfare of the Citizen is hurtful.—For it creates uniformity; weakens the power and resources of the nation; confuses and impedes the reaction even of mere corporeal pursuits, and of external relations in general, on the human mind and character; must operate upon a promiscuous mass of individuals, and therefore does harm to these by measures which cannot meet individual cases; it hinders the development of individuality in human nature; it increases the difficulty of administration, multiplies the means necessary for it, and so becomes a source of manifold evils; lastly, it tends to confound the just and natural points of view from which men are accustomed to regard the most important objects.—Vindication from the Charge of having overdrawn these evils.—Advantages of an opposite System.—General Principle.—Means of a State Solicitude directed to the Positive Welfare of the Citizen.—Their pernicious character.—Difference between the accomplishment of any object by the State in its capacity of State, and the same effected by the efforts of the Citizens.—Examination of the objection, that a Solicitude of the State for the Positive Welfare of the Citizen is necessary, because it might not be possible without it to obtain the same external ends, and realize the same essential results.—This shown to be possible, especially in the common Associations of the Citizens under their voluntary management.—This voluntary management superior to State arrangements.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR THE NEGATIVE WELFARE OF THE CITIZEN—FOR HIS SECURITY	51
---	----

This Solicitude is necessary; it constitutes the real end of the State.
—General Principle: confirmed by History.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER V.

	PAGE
ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR SECURITY AGAINST FOREIGN ENEMIES	55

Point of View selected for this consideration.—Influence of War in general on National Spirit and Character.—Comparison instituted between this and its condition with us, and the Institutions connected with it.—Manifold evils flowing from this condition as regards Man's internal Development.—General Principle.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR THE MUTUAL SECURITY OF THE CITIZENS.—MEANS FOR ATTAINING THIS END.—INSTITUTIONS FOR REFORMING THE MIND AND CHARACTER OF THE CITIZEN.—NATIONAL EDU- CATION	62
--	----

Possible extent of the Means for promoting Mutual Security.—Moral means.—National education.—Is hurtful, especially in that it hinders variety of development; useless, since there will be no lack of good private education in a Nation which enjoys due freedom; effects too much, seeing that the Solicitude for Security does not necessitate an entire Reformation of Morals; it therefore lies beyond the sphere of Political Agency.

CHAPTER VII.

RELIGION	72
--------------------	----

Historical view of the Methods in which States have employed the agency of Religion.—All State interference in Religious affairs produces the encouragement of certain opinions to the exclusion of others, and gives a certain direction to the Citizen.—General considerations on the Influence of Religion upon the human Mind and Character.—Religion and Morality are not inseparably connected.—For the origin of all Religions is entirely subjective; Religiousness, and the utter absence of it, may give rise to equally beneficial results for Morality; the princi-

ples of Morality are wholly independent of Religion, and the efficiency of all Religion rests entirely on the peculiar disposition of the individual; so that what operates on Morality is not the sum of the dogmas of Religious systems, but the form of their internal acceptation.—Application of these considerations to the present Inquiry, and examination of the question, whether the State should make use of Religion as instrumental to its ends. All furtherance of Religion by the State produces, in the best of cases, legal actions only.—But this result is not enough, seeing that the State must bring the Citizens to acquiesce in the requirements of the Law, and not only conform their actions to these.—Moreover, this result is uncertain, or even improbable, and, at least, is better attainable by other methods.—Further, this method is attended with such preponderating disadvantages, that these alone absolutely forbid the State to make use of it.—Refutation of an objection likely to be advanced here, founded on the want of culture in several classes of the people. Lastly, the following consideration decides the question on the highest and most general grounds, that the State has no access to the real channels of influence on Morality, viz. the form of the internal acceptation of Religious conceptions.—Hence, everything pertaining to Religion is wholly beyond the sphere of the State's activity.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMELIORATION OF MORALS 97

Means possible for this end.—Principally reducible to the restraining of Sensualism.—General considerations on the influence of the Sensuous in Man.—Influence of Sensuous impressions considered in the Abstract.—Difference of this influence according to their own different nature: chiefly the difference between the influence of the energizing and other sensuous impressions.—Union of the Sensuous and the Spiritual in the sense of the Beautiful and the Sublime.—Influence of the Sensuous element in Human Nature on the inquiring and intellectual,—on the creative, moral powers of man.—Evils and Dangers of Sensualism.—Application of these Considerations to the present Inquiry, and examination of the question, whether the State should attempt to act positively on Morals.—Every such at-

tempt is confined in its influence to external actions, and produces numerous and serious evils.—Even the very immorality which it is designed to prevent is not wholly devoid of beneficial results,—and, at least, does not necessitate a means for the Reformation of Morals in general.—Hence such a means lies beyond the sphere of the State's activity.—General Principle derived from this and the two preceding chapters.

PAGE

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR SECURITY MORE ACCURATELY AND POSITIVELY DEFINED.—FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF SECURITY	114
--	-----

The course of the whole Inquiry reviewed.—Enumeration of what still remains to be examined.—Determination of the idea of Security.—Definition.—Rights for the security of which provision must be made.—Rights of the single Citizens.—Rights of the State.—Actions which disturb Security.—Distribution of the remaining parts of the Inquiry.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR SECURITY WITH RESPECT TO ACTIONS WHICH DIRECTLY RELATE TO THE AGENT ONLY. (POLICE LAWS.)	120
---	-----

On the expression, Police Laws.—The only ground on which restrictions in this respect can be justified is the Infringement of others' rights, proceeding from the consequences of certain actions.—Nature of the consequences which imply such infringement.—Illustration in the example of actions creating Offence.—Precautionary measures to be adopted by the State in the case of actions which (inasmuch as a rare degree of knowledge is required to avoid the danger) endanger the rights of others in their consequences.—What degree of consequence between those results and the actions is necessary to justify limitation.—General Principle.—Exceptions.—Advantages resulting from the performance of anything by the Citizens

through means of contracts, which otherwise the State must enforce by law.—Examination of the question whether the State may enforce positive actions.—This position disproved, seeing that such coercion is hurtful, while it is unnecessary for the maintenance of Security.—Exception in the case of necessary self-protection.—Actions affecting common property.

PAGE

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR SECURITY WITH RESPECT TO SUCH OF THE CITIZENS' ACTIONS AS RELATE DIRECTLY TO OTHERS. (CIVIL LAWS.)	131
---	-----

actions infringing on the rights of others.—Duty of the State to obtain redress for him who is wronged, and to protect him who has done the wrong from the revenge of him who has sustained it.—Actions performed by mutual consent.—Promises and Engagements.—Twofold duty of the State with regard to these: first, to enforce them when valid; second, to refuse the support of the law to those which are contrary to right, and, even in the case of legal engagements, to prevent men binding themselves by too oppressive restrictions.—Validity of Engagements.—Extension of facilities for dissolving legal contracts, as a consequence of the second duty of the State above-mentioned; only allowable in the case of such contracts as concern the Person; and with various modifications according to the particular nature of the contracts.—Testamentary Dispositions.—Are they valid according to the general principles of right?—Their injurious consequences.—Dangers of a merely hereditary succession *ab intestato*, and the advantages of private disposition of property.—Middle course, by which the latter advantages may be secured, while the former disadvantages may be avoided.—Succession *ab intestato*.—Determination of the portions due to the testator's family.—How far contracts entered into by the living must be binding on their heirs;—only in so far as the means bequeathed have assumed another form.—Precautionary measures to be adopted by the State in order to prevent, in this case, relations which are restrictive of freedom.—Corporations.—Their disadvantages.—The cause of these.—They are obviated when every aggregate Corporation is regarded only as a union of the actual members.—General Principle.

CHAPTER XII.

	PAGE
ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR SECURITY AS MANIFESTED IN THE JURIDICAL DECISION OF DISPUTES AMONG THE CITIZENS	147

The State, here, simply takes the place of the parties.—First principle of every Judicial proceeding hence arising.—The State must protect the Right on both sides.—Hence flows the second principle of every Judicial proceeding.—Evils arising from the neglect of these principles.—Necessity for another class of laws to render Juridical decisions possible.—The degree in which this necessity exists is a standard by which we may determine the excellence of the Juridical Constitution.—Advantages and Disadvantages of such laws.—Rules of Legislation suggested by these general principles.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE SOLICITUDE FOR SECURITY AS MANIFESTED IN THE PUNISHMENT OF TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE STATE'S LAWS. (CRIMINAL LAWS.)	153
--	-----

Actions which the State must punish.—Punishments.—Their Measure, absolutely: the greatest moderation compatible with due efficiency.—Hurtfulness of punishing by degradation and disgrace.—Injustice of Punishments which extend beyond the Criminal to others.—The Measure of Punishment, relatively: degree of disregard for others' Rights.—Refutation of the principle which apportions this scale according to the frequency of the crime, and the number of incentives to its commission.—Its injustice.—Its hurtfulness.—General gradation of Crimes with regard to the severity of their Punishment.—Application of the Criminal Laws to actual crimes.—Manner of proceeding adopted towards the Criminal during the course of the inquiry.—Examination of the question as to how far the State is to prevent crimes.—Difference between the answer to this question and the limitations derived in a former chapter, in the case of actions which refer only to the agent.—Review of the different possible plans for preventing Crime according to its general causes.—The first of these, or that which attempts to remedy the indigence which commonly leads to crime, is hurtful and

useless.—Still more hurtful, and hence unadvisable, is the second method, or that which aims at removing the causes of crime in the character.—Application of this method to actual criminals.—Their moral improvement.—How to proceed with those who are absolved *ab instantid.*—Last method of preventing crimes; the removal of opportunities for committing them.—Limitation of this method to the preventing crimes from being actually committed, which are already resolved on. What means are we to supply for those disapproved of as preventive of crime?—The closest vigilance with regard to crimes committed, and the consequent rareness of impunity.—Hurtfulness of the right of granting reprieve and mitigation.—Arrangements for detecting crime.—Necessity for the perfect publicity of all criminal laws.—General Principles.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SOLICITUDE OF THE STATE FOR THE WELFARE
OF MINORS, LUNATICS, AND IDIOTS 176

Difference between the Persons here referred to and the other Citizens.—Necessity of a Solitude for their Positive Welfare.—Minors.—Mutual duties of Parent and Child.—Duty of the State.—To determine the period of Minority.—To see to the fulfilment of those Duties.—Guardianship, after the death of the parents.—Duty of the State with respect to Guardians.—The advantage of transferring the special exercise of this duty, when possible, to the Municipality.—Arrangements for protecting Minors against attacks upon their Rights.—Persons deprived of Reason.—Difference between these and Minors.—General Principle.—Plan of this and the four preceding chapters.—General relation of the present work to the Theory of Legislation.—Highest points of view of all Legislation.—Preliminary essentials for every Legislative System hence derived.

CHAPTER XV.

MEANS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE STATE ORGANISM.—COMPLETION OF THE THEORY 185

Financial arrangements.—Internal Political Union.—The proposed Theory considered in its relation to Right.—Highest point of

CONTENTS.

XV

view of the whole Theory.—How far History and Statistics may support and confirm it.—Distinction drawn between the relation of the Citizens to the State, and their mutual relation towards each other.—Necessity for this distinction. PAGE

CHAPTER XVI.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE THEORY PROPOSED . 191

General relation of Theoretical Truths to their application in Practice.—The necessity for Prudence.—In every Reform the new condition of things must be interwoven with that which precedes it.—This is most successfully effected when the Reform proceeds from men's minds and thoughts.—General Principles of all Reform flowing from these positions.—Application of these Principles to the present Inquiry.—Principal peculiarity of the System laid down.—Dangers to be apprehended in its application.—Necessity for gradual steps in the attempt to realize it.—General Principle.—Connection of this Principle with the Fundamental Principles of the proposed Theory.—Principle of Necessity suggested by this connection.—It is superior to that of Utility.—Conclusion.