

to two parts, throwing the trouble upon others and keeping the satisfaction for themselves. Let us examine a current manifestation of this sad tendency.

The Intermediary

The oppressor no longer uses his own force directly upon his victim. No, our conscience has become too sensitive for that. There is still the tyrant and his victim, but between them is an intermediary which is The State — the Law itself. What could be better designed to silence our scruples and — more important — to overcome all resistance? Thus do all of us, by various claims and under one pretext or another, appeal to The State:

"I am dissatisfied with the ratio between my labor and my pleasures. In order to establish the desired balance, I should like to take part of the possessions of others. But that is a dangerous thing. Couldn't you facilitate it for me? Couldn't you give me a good post? Or restrain my competitors' business? Or perhaps lend me some interest-free capital, which you will have taken from its rightful owners? Or bring up my children at the taxpayers' expense? Or grant me a subsidy? Or assure me a pension when I reach my fiftieth year? By this means I shall achieve my goal with an easy con-

science, for the law will have acted for me. Thus I shall have all the advantages of plunder, without the risk or the disgrace!"

All of us are petitioning The State in this manner, yet it has been proven that The State has no means of granting privileges to some without adding to the labor of others.

The State is the great fiction through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody.

Today, as in the past, nearly everyone would like to profit by the labor of others. No one dares admit such a feeling; he even hides it from himself. So what does he do? He imagines an intermediary; he appeals to The State, and every class in its turn comes and says to it: "You, who can do so justifiably and honestly, take from the public; and we will partake of the proceeds."

Alas! The State is only too much disposed to follow this diabolical advice; for it is composed of ministers and officials — of men, in short — who, like all other men, desire in their hearts and eagerly seize every opportunity to increase their wealth and influence. The State quickly perceives the advantages it can derive from the role entrusted to it by the public. It will be the judge, the master of the destinies of all. It will take a

lot: then much will remain for itself. It will multiply the number of its agents, and increase its functions, until it finally acquires crushing proportions.

The Great Illusion

But the most remarkable thing is the astonishing blindness of the public while all this takes place. In the past, when victorious soldiers reduced the vanquished to slavery they were barbarous, but they were not foolish. Their object, like ours, was to live at the expense of others; but they succeeded, where we fail. What are we to think of a people who never seem to realize that *reciprocal plunder* is no less plunder because it is reciprocal; that it is no less criminal, because it is carried out legally and peacefully; that it adds nothing to the public good, but rather diminishes it by the amount of the cost of that expensive intermediary we call The State?

And this great illusion we have placed, for the edification of the people, as a frontispiece to the Constitution. Here are the first words of the preamble:

"France has constituted itself a Republic to . . . raise all the citizens to an ever-increasing degree of morality, enlightenment, and well-being."

Thus it is France — an *abstrac-*

tion — which is to raise the French — or *realities* — to morality, well-being, and so on. Isn't it our blind attachment to this strange delusion that leads us to expect everything from a power not our own? Isn't it suggesting that there is, apart from the French people, a virtuous, enlightened, rich being who can and should bestow its favors upon them?

The American Ideal

The Americans develop a different idea of the relationship of the citizens with The State, when they placed these simple words at the beginning of their Constitution:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain. . . ."

Here is no shadowy creation, no *abstraction*, from which the citizens may demand everything. They expect nothing except from themselves and their own energy.

I contend that the *personification* of The State has been in the past and will be in the future, a fertile source of calamities and revolutions. There is the public on one side, The State on the other,