

THE OLL READER: AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST OF THE OLL

No. 74: John Millar, "Circumstances which tend to increase the power of the
Sovereign" (1771)
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"The tendency of a standing mercenary army to increase the power and prerogative of the crown ... is sufficiently obvious. As the army is immediately under the conduct of the monarch; as the individuals of which it is composed depend entirely upon him for preferment; as, by forming a separate order of men, they are apt to become indifferent about the rights of their fellow-citizens; ... in most cases, they will be disposed to pay an implicit obedience to his commands, and that the same force which is maintained to suppress insurrections, and to repel invasions, may often be employed to subvert and destroy the liberties of the people."



John Millar (1735 -1801)

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Editor's Introduction

John Millar (1735 -1801) attended the University of Glasgow where he heard Adam Smith lecture. He became an advocate in 1760, and in 1761 he accepted the Regius Chair of civil law at Glasgow. During his career Millar enjoyed the patronage and friendship of Smith, Lord Kames, and David Hume and influenced James Mill and his son J.S. Mill.

The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (1771) is one of the major products of the Scottish Enlightenment and a masterpiece of jurisprudence and social theory. Millar developed a progressive account of the nature of authority in society by analyzing changes in subsistence, agriculture, arts, and manufacture. The book is perhaps the most precise and compact development of the abiding themes of the liberal wing of the Scottish Enlightenment. Drawing on Smith's four-stages theory of history, Millar provides a rich historical analysis of the ways in which progressive economic change transforms the nature of authority. In particular, he argues that, with the progress of arts and manufacture, authority tends to become less violent and concentrated, and ranks tend to diversify. Millar's analysis of this historical progress is nuanced and sophisticated; for example, his discussion of servants is perhaps the best developed of the "economic" arguments against slavery.

In chapter V Millar argues that the transition from a "rude age" to a modern, centralized monarchy occurs with the formation of a standing army under

the control of the monarch (what Millar called "the great engine of tyranny and oppression"), the professionalization of judges in an organised legal system, and the creation of a tax system in order to fund the standing army. However, as "persons of inferior rank" become better educated and prosperous they begin to challenge the privileges of the monarch and nobles and even begin to seek a "democratical government" to replace it. The expansion of commerce and broader property ownership, or what he called "fluctuations of property", create a new class or "party" of people who are independent of traditional authority figures and money becomes more important than political status. This begins a long "conflict ... between these two opposite parties." Millar optimistically concludes that:

"Wherever men of inferior condition are enabled to live in affluence by their own industry, and, in procuring their livelihood, have little occasion to court the favour of their superiors, there we may expect that ideas of liberty will be universally diffused. This happy arrangement of things is naturally produced by commerce and manufactures; but it would be as vain to look for it in the uncultivated parts of the world, as to look for the independent spirit of an English waggoner among persons of low rank in the highlands of Scotland."

John Millar, "The Changes Produced in the Government of a People, by Their Progress in Arts, and in Polished Manners" (1771)

SECTION I: Circumstances, in a polished nation, which tend to increase the power of the Sovereign.

The advancement of a people in the arts of life, is attended with various alterations in the state of individuals, and in the whole constitution of their government.

Mankind, in a rude age, are commonly in readiness to go out to war, as often as their circumstances require it. From their extreme idleness, a military expedition is seldom inconvenient for them; while the prospect of enriching themselves with plunder, and of procuring distinction by their valour, renders it always agreeable. The members of every clan are no less eager to follow their chief, and to revenge his quarrel, than he is desirous of their assistance. They look upon it as a privilege, rather than a burden, to attend upon him, and to share in the danger, as well as in the glory and profit of all his undertakings. By the numberless acts of hostility in which they are engaged, they are trained to the use of arms, and acquire experience in the military art, so far as it is then understood. Thus, without any trouble or expence, a powerful militia is constantly maintained, which, upon the slightest notice, can always be brought into the field, and employed in the defence of the country.

When Caesar made war upon the Helvetii they were able to muster against him no less than ninety-two thousand fighting men, amounting to a fourth part of all the inhabitants.*

Hence those prodigious swarms which issued, at different times, from the ill cultivated regions of the north, and over-ran the several provinces of the Roman empire. Hence too, the poor, but superstitious princes of Europe, were enabled to muster such numerous forces under the banner of the cross, in order to attack the opulent nations of the east, and to deliver the holy sepulchre from the hands of the infidels.

The same observation will, in some measure, account for those immense armies which we read of in the early periods of history; or at least may incline us to consider the exaggerated relations of ancient authors, upon that subject, as not entirely destitute of real foundation.

These dispositions, arising from the frequent

disorders incident to a rude society, are of course laid aside when good order and tranquillity begin to be established. When the government acquires so much authority as to protect individuals from oppression, and to put an end to the private wars which subsisted between different families, the people, who have no other military enterprises but those which are carried on in the public cause of the nation, become gradually less accustomed to fighting, and their martial ardour is proportionably abated.

The improvement of arts and manufactures, by introducing luxury, contributes yet more to enervate the minds of men, who, according as they enjoy more ease and pleasure at home, feel greater aversion to the hardships and dangers of a military life, and put a lower value upon that sort of reputation which it affords. The increase of industry, at the same time, creates a number of lucrative employments which require a constant attention, and gives rise to a variety of tradesmen and artificers, who cannot afford to leave their business for the transient and uncertain advantages to be derived from the pillage of their enemies.

In these circumstances, the bulk of a people become at length unable or unwilling to serve in war, and when summoned to appear in the field, according to the ancient usage, are induced to offer a sum of money instead of their personal attendance. A composition of this kind is readily accepted by the sovereign or chief magistrate, as it enables him to hire soldiers among those who have no better employment, or who have contracted a liking to that particular occupation. The forces which he has raised in this manner, receiving constant pay, and having no other means of procuring a livelihood, are entirely under the direction of their leader, and are willing to remain in his service as long as he chooses to retain them. From this alteration of circumstances, he has an opportunity of establishing a proper subordination in the army, and according as it becomes fitter for action, and, in all its motions capable of being guided and regulated with greater facility, he is encouraged to enter upon more difficult enterprises, as well as to meditate more distant schemes of ambition. His wars, which were formerly concluded in a few weeks, are now gradually protracted to a greater length of time, and occasioning a greater variety of operations, are productive of suitable improvements in the military art.

After a numerous body of troops have been levied

at considerable expence, and have been prepared for war by a long course of discipline and experience, it appears highly expedient to the sovereign that, even in time of peace, some part of them, at least, should be kept in pay, to be in readiness whenever their service is required. Thus, the introduction of mercenary forces is soon followed by that of a regular standing army. The business of a soldier becomes a distinct profession, which is appropriated to a separate order of men; while the rest of the inhabitants, being devoted to their several employments, become wholly unaccustomed to arms; and the preservation of their lives and fortunes is totally devolved upon those whom they are at the charge of maintaining for that purpose.

This important revolution, with respect to the means of national defence, appears to have taken place in all the civilized and opulent nations of antiquity. In all the Greek states, even in that of Sparta, we find that the military service of the free citizens came, from a change of manners, to be regarded as burdensome, and the practice of employing mercenary troops was introduced. The Romans too, before the end of the republic, had found it necessary to maintain a regular standing army in each of their distant provinces.

In the modern nations of Europe, the disuse of the feudal militia was an immediate consequence of the progress of the people in arts and manufactures; after which the different sovereigns were forced to hire soldiers upon particular occasions, and at last to maintain a regular body of troops for the defence of their dominions. In France, during the reign of Lewis XIII. and in Germany, about the same period, the military system began to be established upon that footing, which it has since acquired in all the countries of Europe.

"The tendency of a standing mercenary army to increase the power and prerogative of the crown ... is sufficiently obvious. As the army is immediately under the conduct of the monarch; as the individuals of which it is composed depend entirely upon him for preferment; as, by forming a separate order of men, they are apt to become indifferent about the rights of their fellow-citizens; ... in most cases, they will be disposed to pay an implicit obedience to his commands, and that the same force which is maintained to suppress insurrections, and to repel invasions, may often be employed to subvert and destroy the liberties of the people."

The tendency of a standing mercenary army to increase the power and prerogative of the crown, which has been the subject of much declamation, is sufficiently obvious. As the army is immediately under the conduct of the monarch; as the individuals of which it is composed depend entirely upon him for preferment; as, by forming a separate order of men, they are apt to become indifferent about the rights of their fellow-citizens; it may be expected that, in most cases, they will be disposed to pay an implicit obedience to his commands, and that the same force which is maintained to suppress insurrections, and to repel invasions, may often be employed to subvert and destroy the liberties of the people.

The same improvements in society, which give rise to the maintenance of standing forces, are usually attended with similar changes in the manner of distributing justice. It has been already observed that, in a large community, which has made but little progress in the arts, every chief or baron is the judge over his own tribe, and the king, with the assistance of his great council, exercises a jurisdiction over the members of different tribes or baronies. From the small number of law-suits which occur in the ages of poverty and rudeness, and from the rapidity, with which they are usually determined among a warlike and ignorant people, the office of a judge demands little attention, and occasions no great interruption to those pursuits in which a man of rank and distinction is commonly engaged. The sovereign and the nobility, therefore, in such a situation, may continue to hold this office, though, in their several courts, they should appoint a deputy-judge to assist them in discharging the duties of it. But when the increase of opulence has given encouragement to a variety of tedious litigation, they become unwilling to bestow the necessary time in hearing causes, and are therefore induced to devolve the whole business upon inferior judges, who acquire by degrees the several branches of the judicial power, and are obliged to hold regular courts for the benefit of the inhabitants. Thus the exercise of jurisdiction becomes a separate employment, and is committed to an order of men, who require a particular education to qualify them for the duties of their office, and who, in return for their service, must therefore be enabled to earn a livelihood by their profession.

A provision for the maintenance of judges is apt, from the natural course of things, to grow out of their employment; as, in order to procure an indemnification for their attendance, they have an opportunity of exacting fees from the parties who come before them. This is analogous to what happens with respect to every sort of manufacture, in which an artificer is commonly paid by those who employ him. We find, accordingly, that this was the early practice in

all the feudal courts of Europe, and that perquisites drawn by the judges, in different tribunals, yielded a considerable revenue both to the king and the nobles. It is likely that similar customs, in this respect, have been adopted in most parts of the world, by nations in the same period of their advancement. The impropriety, however, of giving a permission to these exactions, which tend to influence the decisions of a judge, to render him active in stirring up law-suits, and in multiplying the forms of his procedure, in order to increase his perquisites; these pernicious consequences with which it is inseparably connected, could not fail to attract the notice of a polished people, and at length produced the more perfect plan of providing for the maintenance of judges by the appointment of a fixed salary in place of their former precarious emoluments.

It cannot be doubted that these establishments, of such mighty importance, and of so extensive a nature, must be the source of great expence to the public. In those early periods, when the inhabitants of a country are in a condition to defend themselves, and when their internal disputes are decided by judges who claim no reward for their interpositions, or at least no reward from government, few regulations are necessary with respect to the public revenue. The king is enabled to maintain his family, and to support his dignity, by the rents of his own estate; and, in ordinary cases, he has no farther demand. But when the disuse of the ancient militia has been succeeded by the practice of hiring troops, these original funds are no longer sufficient; and other resources must be provided in order to supply the deficiency. By the happy disposition of human events, the very circumstance that occasions this difficulty appears also to suggest the means of removing it. When the bulk of a people become unwilling to serve in war, they are naturally disposed to offer a composition in order to be excused from that ancient personal service which, from long custom, it is thought they are bound to perform. Compositions of this nature are levied at first, in consequence of an agreement with each individual: to avoid the trouble arising from a multiplicity of separate transactions, they are afterwards paid in common by the inhabitants of particular districts, and at length give rise to a general assessment, the first considerable taxation that is commonly introduced into a country.

If this tax could always be laid upon the people in proportion to their circumstances, it might easily be augmented in such a manner as to defray all the expences of government. But the difficulty of ascertaining the wealth of individuals makes it impossible to push the assessment to a great height, without being guilty of oppression, and renders it proper that other methods of raising money should be

employed to answer the increasing demands of the society. In return for the protection which is given to merchants in carrying their goods from one country to another, it is apprehended that some recompence is due to the government, and that certain duties may be levied upon the exportation and importation of commodities. The security enjoyed by tradesmen and manufacturers, from the care and vigilance of the magistrate, is held also to lay a foundation for similar exactions upon the retail of goods, and upon the inland trade of a nation. Thus the payment of customs, and of what, in a large sense, may be called excise, is introduced and gradually extended.

"(A)s the sovereign claims a principal share at least, in the nomination of public officers, as he commonly obtains the chief direction in collecting and disposing of the revenue which is raised upon their account, he is enabled thereby to give subsistence to a great number of persons, who, in times of faction and disorder, will naturally adhere to his party, and whose interest, in ordinary cases, will be employed to support and to extend his authority. These circumstances contribute to strengthen the hands of the monarch, to undermine and destroy every opposite power, and to increase the general bias towards the absolute dominion of a single person."

It is not proposed to enter into a comparison of these different taxes, or to consider the several advantages and disadvantages of each. Their general effects in altering the political constitution of a state are more immediately the object of the present enquiry. With respect to this point, it merits attention that, as the sovereign claims a principal share at least, in the nomination of public officers, as he commonly obtains the chief direction in collecting and disposing of the revenue which is raised upon their account, he is enabled thereby to give subsistence to a great number of persons, who, in times of faction and disorder, will naturally adhere to his party, and whose interest, in ordinary cases, will be employed to support and to extend his authority. These circumstances contribute to strengthen the hands of the monarch, to undermine and destroy every opposite power, and to increase the general bias towards the absolute dominion of a single person.

SECTION II: Other circumstances, which contribute to advance the privileges of the people.

After viewing those effects of opulence and the progress of arts which favour the interest of the crown, let us turn our attention to other circumstances, proceeding from the same source, that have an opposite tendency, and are manifestly conducive to a popular form of government.

In that early period of agriculture when manufactures are unknown, persons who have no landed estate are usually incapable of procuring subsistence otherwise than by serving some opulent neighbour, by whom they are employed, according to their qualifications, either in military service, or in the several branches of husbandry. Men of great fortune find that the entertaining a multitude of servants, for either of these purposes, is highly conducive both to their dignity and their personal security; and in a rude age, when people are strangers to luxury, and are maintained from the simple productions of the earth, the number of retainers who may be supported upon any particular estate is proportionably great.

In this situation, persons of low rank, have no opportunity of acquiring an affluent fortune, or of raising themselves to superior stations; and remaining for ages in a state of dependence, they naturally contract such dispositions and habits as are suited to their circumstances. They acquire a sacred veneration for the person of their master, and are taught to pay an unbounded submission to his authority. They are proud of that servile obedience by which they seem to exalt his dignity, and consider it as their duty to sacrifice their lives and their possessions in order to promote his interest, or even to gratify his capricious humour.

But when the arts begin to be cultivated in a country, the labouring part of the inhabitants are enabled to procure subsistence in a different manner. They are led to make proficiency in particular trades and professions; and, instead of becoming servants to any body, they often find it more profitable to work at their own charges, and to vend the product of their labour. As in this situation their gain depends upon a variety of customers, they have little to fear from the displeasure of any single person; and, according to the good quality and cheapness of the commodity which they have to dispose of, they may commonly be assured of success in their business.

"(A)s the lower people, in general, become thereby more independent in their circumstances, they begin to exert those sentiments of liberty which are natural to the mind of man"

The farther a nation advances in opulence and refinement, it has occasion to employ a greater number of merchants, of tradesmen and artificers; and as the lower people, in general, become thereby more independent in their circumstances, they begin to exert those sentiments of liberty which are natural to the mind of man, and which necessity alone is able to subdue. In proportion as they have less need of the favour and patronage of the great, they are at less pains to procure it; and their application is more uniformly directed to acquire those talents which are useful in the exercise of their employments. The impressions which they received in their former state of servitude are therefore gradually obliterated, and give place to habits of a different nature. The long attention and perseverance, by which they become expert and skilful in their business, render them ignorant of those decorums and of that politeness which arises from the intercourse of society; and that vanity which was formerly discovered in magnifying the power of a chief, is now equally displayed in sullen indifference, or in contemptuous and insolent behaviour to persons of superior rank and station.

While, from these causes, people of low rank are gradually advancing towards a state of independence, the influence derived from wealth is diminished in the same proportion. From the improvement of arts and manufactures, the ancient simplicity of manners is in a great measure destroyed; and the proprietor of a landed estate, instead of consuming its produce in hiring retainers, is obliged to employ a great part of it in purchasing those comforts and conveniencies which have become objects of attention, and which are thought suitable to his condition. Thus while fewer persons are under the necessity of depending upon him, he is daily rendered less capable of maintaining dependents; till at last his domestics and servants are reduced to such as are merely subservient to luxury and pageantry, but are of no use in supporting his authority.

From the usual effects of luxury and refinement, it may at the same time be expected that old families will often be reduced to poverty and beggary. In a refined and luxurious nation those who are born to great affluence, and who have been bred to no business, are excited, with mutual emulation, to surpass one another in the elegance and refinement of their living. According as they have the means of indulging themselves in pleasure, they become more addicted to the pursuit of it, and are sunk in a degree of indolence and dissipation which renders them incapable of any active employment. Thus the expence of the landed gentleman is apt to be continually increasing, without any proportional addition to his income. His estate, therefore, being more and more incumbered with debts, is at length

alienated, and brought into the possession of the frugal and industrious merchant, who, by success in trade, has been enabled to buy it, and who is desirous of obtaining that rank and consequence which landed property is capable of bestowing. The posterity, however, of this new proprietor, having adopted the manners of the landed gentry, are again led, in a few generations, to squander their estate, with a heedless extravagance equal to the parsimony and activity by which it was acquired.

This fluctuation of property, so observable in all commercial countries, and which no prohibitions are capable of preventing, must necessarily weaken the authority of those who are placed in the higher ranks of life. Persons who have lately attained to riches, have no opportunity of establishing that train of dependence which is maintained by those who have remained for ages at the head of a great estate. The hereditary influence of family is thus, in a great measure, destroyed; and the consideration derived from wealth is often limited to what the possessor can acquire during his own life. Even this too, for the reasons formerly mentioned, is greatly diminished. A man of great fortune having dismissed his retainers, and spending a great part of his income in the purchase of commodities produced by tradesmen and manufacturers, has no ground to expect that many persons will be willing either to fight for him, or to run any great hazard for promoting his interest. Whatever profit he means to obtain from the labour and assistance of others, he must give a full equivalent for it. He must buy those personal services which are no longer to be performed either from attachment or from peculiar connexions. Money, therefore, becomes more and more the only means of procuring honours and dignities; and the sordid pursuits of avarice are made subservient to the nobler purposes of ambition.

"(T)hese circumstances have a tendency to introduce a democratical government. As persons of inferior rank are placed in a situation which, in point of subsistence, renders them little dependent upon their superiors; as no one order of men continues in the exclusive possession of opulence; and as every man who is industrious may entertain the hope of gaining a fortune; it is to be expected that the prerogatives of the monarch and of the ancient nobility will be gradually undermined, that the privileges of the people will be extended in the same proportion"

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SECTION III: Result of the opposition between these different principles.

" a standing army, the great engine of tyranny and oppression ... "

So widely different are the effects of opulence and refinement, which, at the same time that they furnish the king with a standing army, the great engine of tyranny and oppression, have also a tendency to inspire the people with notions of liberty and independence. It may thence be expected that a conflict will arise between these two opposite parties, in which a variety of accidents may contribute to cast the balance upon either side.

With respect to the issue of such a contest, it may be remarked that, in a small state, the people have been commonly successful in their efforts to establish a free constitution. When a state consists only of a small territory, and the bulk of the inhabitants live in one city, they have frequently occasion to converse together, and to communicate their sentiments upon every subject of importance. Their attention therefore is roused by every instance of oppression in the government; and as they easily take the alarm, so they are capable of quickly uniting their forces in order to demand redress of their grievances. By repeated experiments they become sensible of their strength, and are enabled by degrees to enlarge their privileges, and to assume a greater share of the public administration.

In large and extensive nations, the struggles between the sovereign and his people are, on the contrary, more likely to terminate in favour of despotism. In a wide country, the encroachments of the government are frequently overlooked; and, even when the indignation of the people has been roused by flagrant injustice, they find it difficult to combine in uniform and vigorous measures for the defence of their rights. It is also difficult, in a great nation, to bring out the militia with that quickness which is requisite in case of a sudden invasion; and it becomes

necessary, even before the country has been much civilized, to maintain such a body of mercenaries as is capable of supporting the regal authority.

It is farther to be considered that the revenue of the monarch is commonly a more powerful engine of authority in a great nation than in a small one. The influence of a sovereign seems to depend, not so much upon his absolute wealth, as upon the proportion which it bears to that of the other members of the community. So far as the estate of the king does not exceed that of the richest of his subjects, it is no more than sufficient to supply the ordinary expence of living, in a manner suitable to the splendour and dignity of the crown; and it is only the surplus of that estate which can be directly applied to the purposes of creating dependence. In this view the public revenue of the king will be productive of greater influence according to the extent and populousness of the country in which it is raised. Suppose in a country, like that of ancient Attica, containing about twenty thousand inhabitants, the people were, by assessment or otherwise, to pay at the rate of twenty shillings each person, this would produce only twenty thousand pounds; a revenue that would probably not exalt the chief magistrate above many private citizens. But in a kingdom, containing ten millions of people, the taxes, being paid in the same proportion, would in all probability render the estate of the monarch superior to the united wealth of many hundreds of the most opulent individuals. In these two cases, therefore, the disproportion of the armies maintained in each kingdom should be greater than that of their respective revenues; and if in the one, the king was enabled to maintain two hundred and fifty thousand men, he would, in the other, be incapable of supporting the expence of five hundred. It is obvious, however, that even five hundred regular and well disciplined troops will not strike the same terror into twenty thousand people, that will be created, by an army of two hundred and fifty thousand, over a nation composed of ten millions.

Most of the ancient republics, with which we are acquainted, appeared to have owed their liberty to the narrowness of their territories. From the small number of people, and from the close intercourse among all the individuals in the same community, they imbibed a spirit of freedom even before they had made considerable progress in arts; and they found means to repress or abolish the power of their petty princes, before their effeminacy or industry had introduced the practice of maintaining mercenary troops.

The same observation is applicable to the modern states of Italy, who, after the decay of the western empire, began to flourish in trade, and among whom a republican form of government was early established.

In France, on the other hand, the introduction of a great mercenary army, during the administration of Cardinal Richelieu, which was necessary for the defence of the country, enabled the monarch to establish a despotical power. In the beginning of the reign of Lewis XIII. was called the last convention of the states general which has ever been held in that country: and the monarch has, from that period, been accustomed to exercise almost all the different powers of government. Similar effects have arisen from the establishment of standing forces in most of the great kingdoms of Europe.

The fortunate situation of Great Britain, after the accession of James I. gave her little to fear from any foreign invasion, and superseded the necessity of maintaining a standing army, when the service of the feudal militia had gone into disuse. The weakness and bigotry of her monarchs, at that period, prevented them from employing the only expedient capable of securing an absolute authority. Charles I. saw the power exercised, about this time, by the other princes of Europe; but he did not discover the means by which it was obtained. He seems to have been so much convinced of his divine indefeasible right as, at first, to think that no force was necessary, and afterwards, that every sort of duplicity was excuseable, in support of it. When at the point of a rupture with his parliament, he had no military force upon which he could depend; and he was therefore obliged to yield to the growing power of the commons.

The boldness and dexterity, joined to the want of public spirit, and the perfidy of Oliver Cromwell, rendered abortive the measures of that party, of which he obtained the direction; but the blood that had been shed, and the repeated efforts that were made by the people in defence of their privileges, cherished and spread the love of liberty, and at last produced a popular government, after the best model, perhaps, which is practicable in an extensive country.

"Wherever men of inferior condition are enabled to live in affluence by their own industry, and, in procuring their livelihood, have little occasion to court the favour of their superiors, there we may expect that ideas of liberty will be universally diffused. This happy arrangement of things is naturally produced by commerce and manufactures."

Many writers appear to take pleasure in remarking that, as the love of liberty is natural to man, it is to be found in the greatest perfection among barbarians, and is apt to be impaired according as people make progress in civilization and in the arts of life. That

mankind, in the state of mere savages, are in great measure unacquainted with government, and unaccustomed to any sort of constraint, is sufficiently evident. But their independence, in that case, is owing to the wretchedness of their circumstances, which afford nothing that can tempt any one man to become subject to another. The moment they have quitted the primitive situation, and, by endeavouring to supply their natural wants, have been led to accumulate property, they are presented with very different motives of action, and acquire a new set of habits and principles. In those rude ages when the inhabitants of the earth are divided into tribes of shepherds, or of husbandmen, the usual distribution of property renders the bulk of the people dependent upon a few chiefs, to whom fidelity and submission becomes the principal point of honour, and makes a distinguishing part of the national character. The ancient Germans, whose high notions of freedom have been the subject of many a well-turned period, were accustomed, as we learn from Tacitus, to stake their persons upon the issue of a game of hazard, and after an unlucky turn of fortune, to yield themselves up to a voluntary servitude. Wherever men of inferior condition are enabled to live in affluence by their own industry, and, in procuring their livelihood, have little occasion to court

the favour of their superiors, there we may expect that ideas of liberty will be universally diffused. This happy arrangement of things is naturally produced by commerce and manufactures; but it would be as vain to look for it in the uncultivated parts of the world, as to look for the independent spirit of an English waggoner among persons of low rank in the highlands of Scotland.

Endnotes

*

De bell. Gall. lib. 1. [[29.]]

1.

This paragraph and the one preceding it are perhaps the most succinct description to be found in eighteenth-century political theory of the growth of commerce and opulence, and of the subsequent democratization and breakdown of static hierarchies of ranks. But as is apparent from the next section, Millar thought that opulence in large nations tended to give more power to the sovereign than to the people.

Further Information



Source

John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks; or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which give rise to Influence and Authority in the Different Members of Society*, edited and with an Introduction by Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006). <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/287>>

- CHAPTER V: The Changes Produced in the Government of a People, by Their Progress in Arts, and in Polished Manners <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/287#lfMillar_label_311>

Further Reading on John Millar (1735 -1801)

Other works by John Millar:

- <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/people/john-millar>>

School of Thought: The Scottish Enlightenment

- <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/groups/19>>.

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The OLL website has a large collection of books and study guides about individual liberty, limited constitutional government, the free market, and peace. It makes these resources available at no charge to the public for educational purposes. The OLL has won a number of international awards and recognition from such bodies as the Library of Congress (we were selected for the Minerva Archiving Project), the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the British Arts & Humanities Research Council.

- Liberty Fund: <www.libertyfund.org>
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