

PART III

ABOLISHING CLASS BOUNDARIES AND
EQUALIZING [ALL] PEOPLE

OF the sufferings of mankind due to inequality, none compare to [those which stem from] a baseless [distinction by] classes. There are three important kinds [of inferior classes]: the first is inferior races; the second is slaves; the third is women.

Now, the practice of inequality is not only contrary to the universal principles of nature (*t'ien*) but is actually detrimental to the progress of man. By looking at India we can learn this.

(There follows here a description of the caste system of India and its stultifying effects upon the individual. Caste and slavery have existed in Egypt, Babylon, Greece, the Far East, and Europe in the Middle Ages. In Europe these class divisions were responsible for the thousand-year period of darkness and cultural stagnation. The great revolution of modern times is the abolition of this system, as the principle of equality is recognized more clearly day by day.)

Japan was formerly feudalistic, having its Imperial House, its nobility, its feudatory lords, its knights, and its commoners. It rather resembled the [Chinese society of] the Ch'un Ch'iu period (722-481 B.C.). Since the Restoration (1868) there has been a clean sweep, and therefore Japan has been able rapidly to become strong. At present, Egypt, Turkey, Persia, and Russia have their royalty, their great priests, their hereditary nobility, their commoners, and their slaves, [comprising their] five classes. Hence, the Turks are weak; and Russia, even though outwardly strong, is internally inert.

The people of America have attained equality. There is no monarch, but a president. Since Washington established the Constitution, hereditary nobility has been regarded as seditious [*sic*]. Although there are great priests, they cannot hold office or interfere in public affairs. [When] Lincoln freed the negro slaves, a war was fought over it, strongly contested and with much bloodshed. As a result [of this war whereby the slaves were freed], all of America's people are ordinary citizens, and have attained equality. Even

though negroes are [still] not treated equally. [America] is still the harbinger of the Era of Increasing Peace-and-Equality. Therefore [America] is most tranquil, strong, prosperous, and happy.

China, during the Ch'un Ch'iu period and before, had a feudal, hereditary nobility. The lords inherited their states, and the lesser nobles also inherited their fiefs.¹ . . . At that time, even though it was not as bad as India, it was quite like medieval Europe and pre-Restoration Japan. Confucius originated the idea of equality. [He] made clear the unity [of the Empire] so as to do away with feudalism, and derided the [institution of] hereditary nobility so as to do away with heredity of office. [He transmitted the ancient] assigned-field system² [so as] to do away with slavery, and wrote (作)³ the constitution of the Ch'un Ch'iu so as to put a limit to the monarch's powers. [He] did not exalt himself [to] his followers, and [he] rejected [the authority] of great priests. Hereby caste was completely swept out from Chinese institutions. Everyone became a commoner; anyone could [rise] from common status to be ennobled, to be a minister of state, to be a teacher or scholar; anyone could aspire to official advancement, could 'show his stuff'.⁴ The evils of caste did not exist. Verily this was the remarkable accomplishment of Confucius, and he did it two thousand years before [it was done] in Europe. [That] China has been stronger and more flourishing than India is entirely due to this.

However, even though the prince's authority be exercised with principle, yet we have not done away with autocratic rule; even though Kuang Wu⁵ had employed the ideas of the Confucian teachings and manumitted the slaves,⁶ yet an endless [number] have been given over [to be slaves in] the households of the wealthy since Ming [times]. And [persons bearing] the name of prostitute, beggar, or boat-dweller,⁷ are still not able to be fully equal citizens; while the restrictions on women have not been relaxed. [These] three [types of inequality] not having been amended, the ideal of equality has not yet been fully realized, and ignorance and weakness follow thereupon. However, the freedom of males has been attained. But a single step remains to be taken.⁸ It actually will be possible to reach the Way with one [more] reform.

The coming to birth of all men proceeds from Heaven. All are

[according] to standing in society, and be weighed [in the balance] and be cast out? Moreover, speaking of it according to the general trend of affairs, wherever there is much class gradation and men are not equal, the people will inevitably be ignorant and miserable, the state will inevitably be weak and disorderly,⁹ [as] India is. Wherever class gradations have been completely swept away and men are equal, the people will inevitably be intelligent and happy, the state will inevitably be prosperous and orderly, as America is. The [relative amount] of ignorance and intelligence, misery and happiness, strength and weakness, prosperity and decline of other peoples and states can all be seen to be caused by the percentage of equality and inequality [existing among] those peoples. How great is the significance of equality! Hence it is that Confucius, in regard to the world (*t'ien-hsia*) did not speak of governing, but spoke of equality; and in the *Ch'un Ch'iu*, [in discussing] the progress of the Three Eras, [he] particularly spoke of it in terms of 'increasing equality' and 'complete equality'.

Nowadays slavery is almost entirely discarded. To China belongs the credit for having first abolished it, under Emperor Kuang Wu; while Confucius was the first to propound the idea of having no slaves. After Lincoln freed the negroes in America, the emancipation of slaves throughout the world soon followed. The slavery that still remains in China is all the more shameful, because, while in America at least the slaves were of a different race than their masters, in China both are of the same descent. Therefore, speaking of it in the light of the universal principles of nature, men all have the right to self-determination and independence; they should be equal, and should not have slaves. Speaking of it in the light of human affairs, [since, if] they are equal, then [people] are intelligent and happy, prosperous and strong; [but if] they are not equal, then [people] are ignorant and miserable, decadent and weak; [therefore] it is impossible to have slavery [and yet promote the welfare of a nation]. Speaking of it in the light of the genealogy of the Chinese people, then [since] we are all sprung from the same forebear, we are all kinsmen and brothers, and cannot bear to have slaves [from among our own people]. Above, it is to break the holy laws of Confucius; below, it is to shame the loving hearts of Kuang Wu and Lincoln. Hence, since China carried out the emancipation

of slaves before other nations had done so, that China now has not done it is most shameful.

(Examining into the history of slavery in China, we find that there never was much of it. Although there was some use of captives of war as slaves, and some buying and selling of persons, yet, since every man had his land under the well-field system, slavery did not fit into the economy. Confucius did not countenance slaves as a class in society, and thus we find no mention of slavery in the Six Classics. Liu Hsin [a minister of the usurper Wang Mang—A.D. 9-23] revised the penal code to include various types of slaves, falsely attributing this law to Chou Kung [the universally revered younger brother of the founder of the Chou dynasty]. But Emperor Kuang Wu, [returning the Han dynasty to the throne], emancipated the slaves with several edicts, returning them to the status of commoners. In truth, China was the first to abolish slavery, under Confucianism.

(Slavery became common under the Mongols, but this was not due to its being a Chinese institution. Under the Ming, many people were forced into slavery for economic reasons. The true teachings of Confucius had been forgotten, and Liu Hsin's foisting of the slave laws on to Chou Kung was accepted. Still, of the eighteen provinces, in only two—Kwangtung and Chekiang—was slavery much practised. The Ch'ing have some slave laws; these are counter both to universal principles and to the holy laws of Confucius . . .)

Now man is [a being] to which Heaven has given birth; people are what a state possesses. No single family or person is private. Laws freeing the slaves would certainly be proper. (Still, hasty action would arouse the resentment of slave-owners, so emancipation should be carried out with due consideration for all concerned. Besides the manumission of the slaves, the outcasts—boat-dwellers, singing girls, beggars, *yamen* lictors and actors—should be given status in society. As for the first group, there is no essential difference between their occupation and farming; as for the second, their occupation is music, a refined one; as for the third, they should be gathered into institutions, and trained to do useful work; as for the fourth, their bad actions are due to the fact that they have no chance to earn advancement honestly; as for the fifth, their occupation is actually a very beneficial one, giving both pleasure and instruction, so they should certainly not be outcast.)

India's race and caste laws are the worst. Therefore, its many . . . races and castes should be scoured out and expunged, and all be made equal. [They should] first encourage the opening of occupations [to all]; and then universal intermarriage should be fostered. [This] transforming [process] having gone on for a long time, equality will become customary, and after that we may hope for complete unity. Egypt, Turkey, and Persia still have their castes. These should all uniformly be eradicated so as to bring about the transformation to complete equality.

The nations having swept away slavery and perfectly equalized their peoples, yet hereditary nobility will not have been abolished, the great priests will still be revered, and imperial families will still exist. [However], after several hundred years, people's rights will have been thriving every day, and every day more countries will have been becoming democracies. [They] will inevitably follow the example of America: hereditary nobility will be abolished and prohibited, and regarded as seditious. Natural philosophy daily becomes better understood, the [traditional] religions daily become fewer and weaker, [while] the New Religion¹⁰ is daily advancing. The great priests [of the traditional religions] will become fewer day by day, and [their authority] will daily wane. It is certain that eventually there will come about the transformation to complete equality. The countries [of the world] having entirely altered into democratic presidencies, [they] will then have neither emperors nor monarchs. When there are no imperial families, equality will no longer be awaited, it will then have been attained. The rights and personal independence of [all] men and women will be attained by this time. Mankind throughout the world will be perfectly equal. Then the efficacy of Complete Equality will gradually be manifested!

REFERENCES

¹ Literally, 'their families'.

² 授田制 Under the first three dynasties land-ownership was a 'public' rather than a private matter. That is, fields were assigned by the state (i.e. the suzerain) to a man upon his coming of age; and they reverted to the state upon his decease. It was only with the first Ch'in

emperor (216 B.C.) that private ownership of land became permissible. (For a good, detailed account of the 'well-field system', of which this assigned-field arrangement was a part, see Chen Huan-chang, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School*, vol. II, Chapter XXVI, pp. 497-533.)

³ For another possible interpretation of 作 (but definitely not one K'ang Yu-wei had in mind), see Fung-Bodde, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 62, n. I.

⁴ 登揚蹈 (correcting 踏) 厲. A phrase from the *Li Chi*, impossible to translate, but well expressed in our colloquialism.

⁵ First Emperor of the Latter or Eastern Han dynasty (reigned A.D. 25-58).

⁶ 頻免為良人.

⁷ There is a large boat-population in Canton and other south-coast cities.

⁸ 但一間未達耳.

⁹ Reading 妄 for 忘.

¹⁰ See above, Part II; Chart, item 14F, column 2.

