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IV.5 On education under republican government

- The Spirit of Law - Book IV. That laws of education must relate to the principles of the government -

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IV.5 On education under republican government

It is under republican government that all the authority of education is needed. The fear of despotic governments arises spontaneously in the midst of threats and punishments ; the honor of monarchies is favored by the passions, and favors them in turn ; but virtue is self-renunciation, which is always a very hard thing.

This virtue may be defined as love of the laws and of the homeland. As this love requires a continual preference for the public interest over one's own, it confers all the separate virtues : they are nothing more than this preference.

This love is singularly attached to democracies. Only there is the government entrusted to each citizen. Now the government is like everything else in the world : to preserve it, you must love it.

You have never heard it said that kings did not love monarchy, and that despots hated despotism.

Everything therefore depends on establishing this love in the republic, and it is to inspire it that education must be attuned ; but for children to have it, there is one sure means, which is for the fathers themselves to have it.

We are ordinarily at liberty to pass our knowledge on to our children, and even more at liberty to share our passions with them.

If that does not occur, it is because what has been done in the father's house is undermined by outside impressions.

It is not the rising people that degenerates ; it only declines when the fully-formed men are already corrupted.