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V.18 On rewards given by the sovereign

- The Spirit of Law - Book V. That the laws made by the legislator must be relative to the principle of the government -

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V.18 On rewards given by the sovereign

In despotic governments, where, as we have said, a person is motivated to act only by the expectation of the amenities of life, the prince who rewards has nothing but money to give. In a monarchy, where honor alone reigns, the prince would reward only by distinctions, if the distinctions which honor institutes were not accompanied by a luxury that necessarily provokes needs : the prince therefore rewards with honors that lead to fortune. But in a republic, where virtue reigns, a motive which suffices unto itself and excludes all others, the state rewards only by bearing witness to that virtue.

It is a general rule that great rewards in a monarchy and in a republic are a sign of their decadence, because they prove that their principles are corrupted : that, first, the idea of honor has lost much of its force, and secondly, that the quality of citizen has deteriorated.

The worst Roman emperors were those who gave the most, for instance Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Otho, Vitellius, Commodus, Elagabalus, and Caracalla. The best, like Augustus, Vespasian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Pertinax, were frugal. Under the good emperors the state resumed its principles ; the treasury of honor supplemented the other treasuries.