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XVI.12 On natural modesty

- The Spirit of Law - Book XVI. How the laws of domestic slavery relate to the nature of the climate -

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All nations have equally agreed on stigmatizing the incontinence of women : that is because nature has spoken to all nations. She instituted defense, she instituted attack ; and having put desires on both sides, she placed boldness on one side, and shame on the other ; she has given to individuals long stretches of time for their own preservation, and only moments for their perpetuation.

It is therefore untrue that incontinence follows the laws of nature ; on the contrary, it violates them. It is modesty and reserve that follow those laws.

It is moreover in the nature of intelligent beings to be aware of their imperfections ; nature has therefore put shyness in us, in other words shame for our imperfections.

Thus, when the physical power of certain climates violates the natural law of the two sexes and of intelligent beings, it is up to the legislator to make civil laws that force the nature of the climate and re-establish the original laws.