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XVIII.1 How the nature of the terrain influences the laws

- The Spirit of Law - Book XVIII. On laws in their relationship to the nature of the terrain -

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XVIII.1 How the nature of the terrain influences the laws

The quality of a country's lands naturally establishes dependency. Rural people, who make up most of the population, are not so jealous of their freedom ; they are too busy with, and too preoccupied by, their private concerns. A countryside abounding in wealth fears pillage, and fears an army. "Who makes up the good party ?" said Cicero to Atticus. "Will it be merchants and country folk ? Not unless we imagine they are opposed to the monarchy, those to whom all governments are equal, as long as they are tranquil." [1]

Thus, government by one man alone is more often found in fertile countries, and government by several in countries which are not fertile, which is sometimes a compensation.

The aridity of the Attic terrain established popular government there, and fertility of Lacedæmon's terrain, aristocratic government. For in those times Greece wanted nothing to do with government of one man alone, and aristocratic government is most like that of one man alone.

Plutarch says that after the Cylonian sedition was put down in Athens the city reverted to its former dissensions, and divided itself into as many parties as there were kinds of territories in Attica. The mountain people insisted on a popular government ; the people of the plain wanted a government by the principals ; those near the sea favored a mixture of the two. [2]

[1] Book VII.

[2] *Life of Solon*.