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VIII.17 Distinctive properties of monarchy

- The Spirit of Law - Book VIII. On the corruption of the principles of the three governments -

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A monarchical state should be of medium size. If it were small, it would form as a republic ; if it were very extensive, the principal members of the state, great in themselves, not being under the prince's eye, having their court outside his court, assured moreover against swift executions by the laws and standards, could cease to obey ; they would not fear a punishment that is too slow and too distant.

Thus Charlemagne, when he had barely founded his empire, had to divide it up : either because the governors of the provinces would not obey, or to make them obey better it was necessary to divide the empire into several kingdoms.

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided. How could those grandees of Greece and Macedonia, free, or at least chiefs of the conquerors distributed throughout that vast conquest, have obeyed ?

After the death of Attila, his empire was dissolved : so many kings who were no longer contained could not take up chains again.

The prompt establishment of unlimited power is the remedy which in these cases can prevent dissolution, a new misfortune after that of expansion !

Rivers flow to blend into the sea ; monarchies go and lose themselves in despotism.