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X.9 Of a monarchy that conquers its neighbors

- The Spirit of Law - Book X. On the laws in their relation to offensive strength -

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X.9 Of a monarchy that conquers its neighbors

If a monarchy can act long before aggrandizement has weakened it, it will become fearsome, and its strength will last as long as it is pressed by neighboring monarchies.

It must therefore conquer only while it remains within the limits natural to its government. Prudence would have it halt as soon as it exceeds those limits.

In this sort of conquest things must be left as they were found : the same courts, the same laws, the same customs, the same privileges ; nothing must be changed except the army and the name of the sovereign.

When the monarchy has extended its boundaries by the conquest of some neighboring provinces, it must treat them with great leniency.

In a monarchy which has long striven to conquer, the provinces of its former domain will ordinarily be very downtrodden. They must have to suffer both the new and former abuses, and depopulation by a vast capital that sucks up everything. Now if, after conquering in the vicinity of this domain, the conquered peoples were treated the same as its former subjects, the state would be undone ; the tributes which the conquered provinces would send to the capital would no longer return to them ; the borderlands would be ruined, and consequently weaker ; the peoples would be hostile ; the subsistence of the armies that must remain there and act would be more precarious.

Such is the necessary state of a conquering monarchy : horrendous luxury in the capital, poverty in the more distant provinces, and abundance in the outlying parts. It is like our planet : there is fire in the center, greenery on the surface, and an arid, cold and sterile land in between.