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# XII.28 On the consideration which monarchs owe to their subjects

- The Spirit of Law - Book XII. On laws that constitute political liberty in its relation to the citizen -

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They must be extremely cautious with respect to mockery. It flatters when it is moderate, because it offers a means of developing familiarity ; but cutting mockery is much less allowable to monarchs than to the least of their subjects, because they are the only ones who always wound mortally.

Even less must they pointedly insult one of their subjects : they exist to pardon and to punish, never to insult.

When they insult their subjects, they treat them much more cruelly than the Turk or the Muscovite treats his. When these insult, they humiliate without dishonoring ; but monarchs both humiliate and dishonor.

Such is the bias of Asiatics that they take an affront from the prince as an effect of paternal kindness ; and such is our manner of thinking that we add to the cruel feeling of the affront the despair of never being able to purge it.

They must be charmed to have subjects for whom honor is dearer than life, and not less a reason for loyalty than for courage.

We can recall misfortunes that have befallen princes for insulting their subjects : the reprisals of Chærea, [1] of the eunuch Narses, [2] and of Count Julian [3] ; also of the Duchess of Montpensier, who, furious at Henry III for having revealed one of her secret flaws, tormented him for the rest of his life. [4]

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[1] [Cassius Chaerea assassinated Caligula for mocking him, in the year 41.]

[2] [Narses, a Byzantine general (mid-6th century) was reputed to have taken vengeance on the empress Sophie by inviting the Lombards to invade Italy.]

[3] [Count Julien was said to have avenged an insult to his daughter Florinda by calling the Moors into Spain.]

[4] [Catherine de Lorraine, duchess of Montpensier, was a declared enemy of Henry III and, after two of her brothers were assassinated at Blois, claimed to be behind the king's own assassination in 1589.]