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XVIII.18 The force of superstition

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

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If what the relations tell us is true, the constitution of a people in Louisiana called the Natchez is an exception to this. Their chief disposes of the property of all his subjects, and makes them work at his whim ; they cannot refuse him their heads [1] : he is like the Turkish sultan. When the presumptive heir is born, all nursing infants are given to him to serve him throughout his lifetime. You would take him for the great Sesostris. This chief is treated in his cabin with ceremonies befitting an emperor of Japan or China.

The prejudices of superstition take precedence over all other prejudices, and its reasons over all other reasons. Thus, although savage peoples do not naturally know despotism, this people does. They worship the sun ; and if their chief had not imagined that he was the brother of the sun, they would have seen nothing more in him than a poor devil like themselves.

[1] *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 20th volume.