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XIX.2 How necessary it is, for the best laws, that minds be prepared

- The Spirit of Law - Book XIX. On the laws in the relation they have to the principles that constitute the general spirit, the ethos, and the manners of a nation -

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Nothing seemed more unbearable to the Germans than the tribunal of Varus. [1] The one which Justinian set up [2] among the Lazi to try their king's murderer seemed to them something horrible and barbaric. Mithridates, orating against the Romans, [3] reproaches them above all for the formalities of their justice. [4] The Parthians could not bear this king, who, having been raised in Rome, became affable and accessible to everyone. [5] Liberty itself seemed unbearable to peoples who were unaccustomed to enjoying it. So it is that pure air is sometimes harmful to those who have lived in marshy lands.

A Venetian named Balbi, being in Pegu, [6] was introduced into the king's presence. When the king learned that there was no king in Venice, he burst out laughing so hard that he was taken with a cough, and had great difficulty speaking with his courtiers. Who is the legislator who could propose popular government to peoples of the sort ?

[1] "They cut out the lawyers' tongues, and said : *Viper, cease thy hissing*" (Tacitus).

[2] Agathias, book IV.

[3] Justinus, book XXXVIII.

[4] *Calumnias litium* (*ibid.*).

[5] *Prompti aditus, nova comitas, ignotoe Parthis virtutes, nova vitia* (Tacitus [*Annals*, book II, ch. ii]).

[6] He described it in 1596 (*Recueil des voyages qui ont servi à l'établissement de la Compagnie des Indes*, vol. III, part 1, p. 33).