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XXIII.11 On the harshness of the government

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXIII. On laws in their relation to the number of inhabitants -

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XXIII.11 On the harshness of the government

People who have absolutely nothing, like beggars, have many children. For they are in the situation of rising peoples : it is easy enough for the father to pass his art on to his children, who from the time they are born are instruments of that art. In a rich or superstitious country these people multiply, because they do not have the burdens of society but are themselves the burdens of society. But people who are poor only because they live under a harsh government, who see their field less as the basis of their subsistence than as a pretext for harassment, those men, I say, beget few children : they have not even enough food for themselves ; how could they possibly imagine sharing it ? They cannot provide care for themselves in sickness ; how could they raise creatures who are in a continual sickness, which is childhood ?

It is the ease of talking and the inability to examine that have caused some to say that the poorer the subjects were, the more numerous were the families ; that the more burdened they were by taxes, the more they put themselves in a position to pay them : two sophisms which have always doomed monarchies, and forever will.

The harshness of the government can go so far as to destroy natural sentiments by the natural sentiments themselves. Did not the women of America [\[1\]](#) make themselves abort so their children would not have such cruel masters ?

[\[1\]](#) Relation of Thomas Gage, p. 58.