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XV.6 The true origin of the right of slavery

- The Spirit of Law - Book XV. How the laws of civil slavery relate to the nature of the climate -

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XV.6 The true origin of the right of slavery

It is time to seek the true origin of the right of slavery. It must be based on the nature of things : let us see whether there are cases where it derives from that.

In every despotic government it is very easy to sell oneself ; there political slavery obliterates, as it were, civil liberty.

Mr. Perry [1] says that Muscovites sell themselves quite readily. I am sure of the reason, which is that their freedom is worth nothing.

In Achim [2] everyone tries to sell himself. Some of the principal lords [3] have no fewer than a thousand slaves, who are among the principal merchants, who also have many slaves under them, and these many more ; they are inherited and traded. In these states free men, too weak against the government, try to become the slaves of those who tyrannize the government.

And that is the origin, just and consistent with reason, of that very mild right of slavery one finds in some countries, and it must be mild because it is based on the free election which a man, for his own purposes, makes of a master, which creates a reciprocal convention between the two parties.

[1] *The State of Russia*, by Jean Perry, Paris, 1717, in-12°.

[2] [Aceh, a province in Sumatra.]

[3] *Nouveau Voyage autour du monde*, by William Dampierre [Dampier], vol. III, Amsterdam, 1711.