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IV.6 On some institutions of the Greeks

- The Spirit of Law - Book IV. That laws of education must relate to the principles of the government -

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The ancient Greeks, convinced of the necessity of inculcating virtue in peoples living under a popular government, created singular institutions for inspiring it. When you see in the life of Lycurgus the laws he gave to the Lacedæmonians, you think you are reading the histoire of the Severambians. The laws of Crete were the originals of Lacedæmon's, and Plato's were their corrective.

Do pay some heed to the breadth of genius it took for those legislators to see that by going against all the accepted customs, by conflating all the virtues, they would display their wisdom to the world. Lycurgus, mixing theft with the spirit of justice, the harshest slavery with extreme freedom, the most atrocious sentiments with the greatest moderation, gave stability to his city. He seemed to be taking away all the resources : the arts, trade, money, its walls : there they are ambitious without expectation of a better life ; they have natural sentiments without being either child, or husband, or father ; chastity even is deprived of modesty. It is by these paths that Sparta is led to greatness and glory ; but with such infallibility in its institutions that nothing could be gained against her by winning battles if the enemy did not manage to take away her political order. [1]

Crete and Laconia were governed by these laws. Lacedæmon was the last to yield to the Macedonians, and Crete [2] was the last prey of the Romans. The Samnites had these same institutions, and they were for those Romans the subject of twenty-four victories. [3]

We have seen this extraordinary aspect of Greek institutions in the dregs and corruption of our modern times. [4] An upstanding legislator has founded a people for whom probity appears as natural as bravery did to the Spartans. Mr. Penn is a veritable Lycurgus ; and while Penn's objective was peace while the latter's was war, they are alike in the singular path on which they put their people, in the influence they held over free men, in the prejudices they overcame, in the passions they subdued.

Paraguay can furnish us another example. It has been imputed as a crime to the Society, [5] which regards the pleasure of commanding as the only good in life ; but it will always be admirable to govern men by making them better off. [6]

It is glorious for the Society to have been the first to show in those regions the idea of religion combined with that of humanity. By repairing the devastations of the Spanish, it began to heal one of the greatest wounds that humankind has yet suffered.

An exquisite sense which that Society has for everything it calls honor, and its zeal for a religion that is much more humbling to those who hear it than to those who preach it, have led it to undertake great things, and it has succeeded. It has brought scattered peoples out of the woods, given them an assured subsistence, and clothed them ; and had it in this way done no more than increase industry among men, it would have accomplished a great deal.

Those who wish to create similar institutions will establish the communal property of Plato's *Republic*, the respect he prescribed for the gods, separation from foreigners for the preservation of their ethos, and the city engaging in trade and not the citizens : they will produce our arts without our luxury, and our needs without our desires.

They will ban money, which has the effect of bloating men's fortune beyond the bounds that nature had placed on it, and teaching men to preserve needlessly what had been amassed in this way, multiplying desires without end, and improving on nature, which had given us very limited means of exciting our passions and corrupting each other.

"The Epidamnians, sensing that their ways were being corrupted by their communication with the barbarians, elected

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a magistrate to effect all of their trading in the name of the city and for the city." [7] That done, commerce does not corrupt the constitution, and the constitution does not deprive society of the advantages of commerce.

[1] Philopoemen forced the Lacedæmonians to abandon their way of nourishing their children, knowing full well that without it they would still possess great souls and lofty hearts : Plutarch, *Life of Philopoemen* ; see Livy, book XXXVIII.

[2] She defended her laws and freedom for three years. See books XCVIII, XCIX, etc. of Livy, in the synopsis of Florus ; she put up more resistance than the greatest of kings.

[3] Florus, book I.

[4] *In fæce Romuli* ['in the dregs of Romulus'] (Cicero).

[5] [I.e., the Society of Jesus (commonly known as the Jesuits), then known in particular for its far-flung missionary (but also commercial) activities.]

[6] The Indians of Paraguay are not dependents of a particular lord, pay only a fifth of the tributes, and have firearms for their defense.

[7] Plutarch, *Greek Questions*.