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VII.8 On public continence

- The Spirit of Law - Book VII. Consequences of the different principles of the three governments with respect to sumptuary laws, to luxury, and to the condition of women -

Publication date: vendredi 24 août 2018

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VII.8 On public continence

There are so many imperfections attached to the loss of virtue in women, their entire soul is so degraded by it, and this principal point lost makes so many others fall, that in a popular state we can regard public dissoluteness as the worst of misfortunes and the certainty of a change in the constitution.

Good legislators have in consequence required of women a certain moral gravity. From their republics they have banned not only vice but the very appearance of vice. They have forbidden even the gallant exchange that produces idleness, leads women to corrupt even before they are corrupted, places a value on all those nothings and devalues what is important, and makes a person cease to conduct him- or herself by any but the maxims of the ridiculous which women are so adept at instigating.