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XII.25 On the manner of governing in a monarchy

- The Spirit of Law - Book XII. On laws that constitute political liberty in its relation to the citizen -

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XII.25 On the manner of governing in a monarchy

Royal authority is a great resource that should move smoothly and quietly. The Chinese vaunt one of their emperors who governed, they say, like heaven, in other words by his example.

There are cases where authority must act to its full extent ; there are some where it must act by its limits. The sublime in administration is to know what aspect of power, great or small, should be brought to bear in various circumstances.

In our monarchies all felicity consists in the opinion people have of the government's benevolence. An inept minister always wants to remind you that you are slaves. But if that were the case, he ought to try to keep you from knowing it. He knows how to say or write to you only that the prince is annoyed, that he is surprised, that he will put things aright. There is a certain facility in commanding ; it should be the prince who encourages, and the laws that threaten.

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[1] Nerva, says Tacitus, increased the facility of empire.