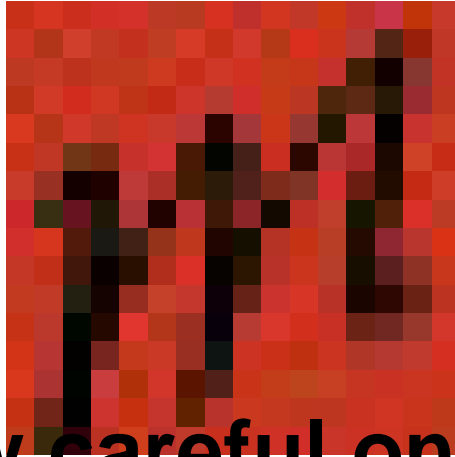


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XIX.5 How careful one must be not to change the general spirit of a nation

- The Spirit of Law - Book XIX. On the laws in the relation they have to the principles that constitute the general spirit, the morals, and the manners of a nation -

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XIX.5 How careful one must be not to change the general spirit of a nation

If there were a nation on earth that had a sociable humor, openness of heart, a joy in life, a taste, an ease in communicating its thoughts ; a lively nation, amiable, playful, sometimes imprudent, often indiscreet, and which besides had courage, generosity, candor, a certain point of honor : it would be a mistake to constrain its manners with laws, lest one also constrain its virtues. If in general the character is good, what does it matter if there are a few flaws ?

One could contain its women, enact laws to correct their morals and limit their luxury : but who knows whether a certain taste would not be lost that might be the source of the nation's wealth, and a refinement that attracts foreigners there ?

It is the legislator's job to follow the spirit of the nation as long as it is not contrary to the principles of the government ; for we do nothing better than what we do freely and by following our natural genius.

Give a spirit of pedantry to a naturally merry nation : the state will gain nothing, either at home or abroad. Let it do frivolous things seriously, and serious things cheerfully.