

Book IX. Of Laws in the Relation They Bear to a Defensive Force

1. In what Manner Republics provide for their Safety. If a republic be small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it be large, it is ruined by an internal imperfection.

To this twofold inconvenience democracies and aristocracies are equally liable, whether they be good or bad. The evil is in the very thing itself, and no form can redress it.

It is, therefore, very probable that mankind would have been, at length, obliged to live constantly under the government of a single person, had they not contrived a kind of constitution that has all the internal advantages of a republican, together with the external force of a monarchical, government. I mean a confederate republic.

This form of government is a convention by which several petty states agree to become members of a larger one, which they intend to establish. It is a kind of assemblage of societies, that constitute a new one, capable of increasing by means of further associations, till they arrive at such a degree of power as to be able to provide for the security of the whole body.

It was these associations that so long contributed to the prosperity of Greece. By these the Romans attacked the whole globe, and by these alone the whole globe withstood them; for when Rome had arrived at her highest pitch of grandeur, it was the associations beyond the Danube and the Rhine -- associations formed by the terror of her arms -- that enabled the barbarians to resist her.

Hence it proceeds that Holland, [1] Germany, and the Swiss cantons are considered in Europe as perpetual republics.

The associations of cities were formerly more necessary than in our

times. A weak, defenceless town was exposed to greater danger. By conquest it was deprived not only of the executive and legislative power, as at present, but moreover of all human property.[2]

A republic of this kind, able to withstand an external force, may support itself without any internal corruption; the form of this society prevents all manner of inconveniences.

If a single member should attempt to usurp the supreme power, he could not be supposed to have an equal authority and credit in all the confederate states. Were he to have too great an influence over one, this would alarm the rest; were he to subdue a part, that which would still remain free might oppose him with forces independent of those which he had usurped, and overpower him before he could be settled in his usurpation.

Should a popular insurrection happen in one of the confederate states, the others are able to quell it. Should abuses creep into one part, they are reformed by those that remain sound. The state may be destroyed on one side, and not on the other; the confederacy may be dissolved, and the confederates preserve their sovereignty.

As this government is composed of petty republics, it enjoys the internal happiness of each; and with regard to its external situation, by means of the association, it possesses all the advantages of large monarchies.

2. That a confederate Government ought to be composed of States of the same Nature, especially of the republican Kind. The Canaanites were destroyed by reason that they were petty monarchies, that had no union or confederacy for their common defence; and, indeed, a confederacy is not agreeable to the nature of petty monarchies.

As the confederate republic of Germany consists of free cities, and of

petty states subject to different princes, experience shows us that it is much more imperfect than that of Holland and Switzerland.

The spirit of monarchy is war and enlargement of dominion: peace and moderation are the spirit of a republic. These two kinds of government cannot naturally subsist in a confederate republic.

Thus we observe, in the Roman history, that when the Veientes had chosen a king, they were immediately abandoned by all the other petty republics of Tuscany. Greece was undone as soon as the kings of Macedon obtained a seat among the Amphyktyons.

The confederate republic of Germany, composed of princes and free towns, subsists by means of a chief, who is, in some respects, the magistrate of the union, in others, the monarch.

3. Other Requisites in a confederate Republic. In the republic of Holland one province cannot conclude an alliance without the consent of the others. This law, which is an excellent one, and even necessary in a confederate republic, is wanting in the Germanic constitution, where it would prevent the misfortunes that may happen to the whole confederacy, through the imprudence, ambition, or avarice of a single member. A republic united by a political confederacy has given itself entirely up, and has nothing more to resign.

It is difficult for the united states to be all of equal power and extent. The Lycian^[3] republic was an association of twenty-three towns; the large ones had three votes in the common council, the middling ones two, and the small towns one. The Dutch republic consists of seven provinces of different extent of territory, which have each one voice.

The cities of Lycia^[4] contributed to the expenses of the state, according to the proportion of suffrages. The provinces of the United Netherlands cannot follow this proportion; they must be directed by that

of their power.

In Lycia[5] the judges and town magistrates were elected by the common council, and according to the proportion already mentioned. In the republic of Holland they are not chosen by the common council, but each town names its magistrates. Were I to give a model of an excellent confederate republic, I should pitch upon that of Lycia.

4. In what Manner despotic Governments provide for their Security. As republics provide for their security by uniting, despotic governments do it by separating, and by keeping themselves, as it were, single. They sacrifice a part of the country; and by ravaging and desolating the frontiers they render the heart of the empire inaccessible.

It is a received axiom in geometry that the greater the extent of bodies, the more their circumference is relatively small. This practice, therefore, of laying the frontiers waste is more tolerable in large than in middling states.

A despotic government does all the mischief to itself that could be committed by a cruel enemy, whose arms it were unable to resist.

It preserves itself likewise by another kind of separation, which is by putting the most distant provinces into the hands of a great vassal. The Mogul, the king of Persia, and the emperors of China have their feudatories; and the Turks have found their account in putting the Tartars, the Moldavians, the Wallachians, and formerly the Transylvanians, between themselves and their enemies.

5. In what Manner a Monarchical Government provides for its Security. A monarchy never destroys itself like a despotic government. But a kingdom of a moderate extent is liable to sudden invasions: it must therefore have fortresses to defend its frontiers; and troops to garrison those fortresses. The least spot of ground is disputed with military skill and

resolution. Despotic states make incursions against one another; it is monarchies only that wage war.

Fortresses are proper for monarchies; despotic governments are afraid of them. They dare not entrust their officers with such a command, as none of them have any affection for the prince or his government.

6. Of the defensive Force of States in general. To preserve a state in its due force, it must have such an extent as to admit of a proportion between the celerity with which it may be invaded, and that with which it may defeat the invasion. As an invader may appear on every side, it is requisite that the state should be able to make on every side its defence; consequently it should be of a moderate extent, proportioned to the degree of velocity that nature has given to man, to enable him to move from one place to another.

France and Spain are exactly of a proper extent. They have so easy a communication for their forces as to be able to convey them immediately to what part they have a mind; the armies unite and pass with rapidity from one frontier to another, without any apprehension of such difficulties as require time to remove.

It is extremely happy for France that the capital stands near to the different frontiers in proportion to their weakness; and the prince has a better view of each part of his country according as it is more exposed.

But when a vast empire, like Persia, is attacked, it is several months before the troops are assembled in a body; and then they are not able to make such forced marches, for that space of time, as they could for fifteen days. Should the army on the frontiers be defeated, it is soon dispersed, because there is no neighbouring place of retreat. The victor, meeting with no resistance, advances with all expedition, sits down before the capital, and lays siege to it, when there is scarcely

time sufficient to summon the governors of the provinces to its relief. Those who foresee an approaching revolution hasten it by their disobedience. For men whose fidelity is entirely owing to the danger of punishment are easily corrupted as soon as it becomes distant; their aim is their own private interest. The empire is subverted, the capital taken, and the conqueror disputes the several provinces with the governors.

The real power of a prince does not consist so much in the facility he meets with in making conquests as in the difficulty an enemy finds in attacking him, and, if I may so speak, in the immutability of his condition. But the increase of territory obliges a government to lay itself more open to an enemy.

As monarchs therefore ought to be endued with wisdom in order to increase their power, they ought likewise to have an equal share of prudence to confine it within bounds. Upon removing the inconveniences of too small a territory, they should have their eye constantly on the inconveniences which attend its extent.

7. A Reflection. The enemies of a great prince, whose reign was protracted to an unusual length, have very often accused him, rather, I believe, from their own fears than upon any solid foundation, of having formed and carried on a project of universal monarchy. Had he attained his aim, nothing would have been more fatal to his subjects, to himself, to his family, and to all Europe. Heaven, that knows our true interests, favoured him more by preventing the success of his arms than it could have done by crowning him with victories. Instead of raising him to be the only sovereign in Europe, it made him happier by rendering him the most powerful.

The subjects of this prince, who in travelling abroad are never affected but with what they have left at home; who on quitting their own habitations look upon glory as their chief object, and in distant

countries as an obstacle to their return; who disgust you even by their good qualities, because they are tainted with so much vanity; who are capable of supporting wounds, perils, and fatigues, but not of foregoing their pleasures; who are supremely fond of gaiety, and comfort themselves for the loss of a battle by a song upon the general: those subjects, I say, would never have the solidity requisite for an enterprise of this kind, which if defeated in one country would be unsuccessful everywhere else; and if once unsuccessful, would be so for ever.

8. A particular Case in which the defensive Force of a State is inferior to the offensive. It was a saying of the Lord of Coucy to King Charles V that the English are never weaker, nor more easily overcome, than in their own country. The same was observed of the Romans; the same of the Carthaginians; and the same will happen to every power that sends armies to distant countries, in order to reunite by discipline and military force those who are divided among themselves by political or civil interests. The state finds itself weakened by the disorder that still continues, and more so by the remedy.

The Lord of Coucy's maxim is an exception to the general rule, which disapproves of wars against distant countries. And this exception confirms likewise the rule because it takes place only with regard to those by whom such wars are undertaken.

9. Of the relative Force of States. All grandeur, force, and power are relative. Care therefore must be taken that in endeavouring to increase the real grandeur, the relative be not diminished.

During the reign of Louis XIV France was at its highest pitch of relative grandeur. Germany had not yet produced such powerful princes as have since appeared in that country. Italy was in the same case. England and Scotland were not yet formed into one united kingdom. Aragon was not joined to Castile: the distant branches of the Spanish monarchy were

weakened by it, and weakened it in their turn; and Muscovy was as little known in Europe as Crim Tartary.

10. Of the Weakness of neighbouring States. Whensoever a state lies contiguous to another that happens to be in its decline, the former ought to take particular care not to precipitate the ruin of the latter, because this is the happiest situation imaginable; nothing being so convenient as for one prince to be near another, who receives for him all the rebuffs and insults of fortune. And it seldom happens that by subduing such a state the real power of the conqueror is as much increased as the relative is diminished.

1. It is composed of about fifty different republics, all different from one another. -- M. Janisson, State of the United Provinces.

2. Civil liberty, goods, wives, children, temples, and even burying-places.

3. Strabo, xiv.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.