

Book XVII. How the Laws of Political Servitude Bear a Relation to the Nature of the Climate

1. Of political Servitude. Political servitude does not less depend on the nature of the climate than that which is civil and domestic; and this we shall now demonstrate.

2. The Difference between Nations in point of Courage. We have already observed that great heat enervates the strength and courage of men, and that in cold climates they have a certain vigour of body and mind, which renders them patient and intrepid, and qualifies them for arduous enterprises. This remark holds good, not only between different nations, but even in the different parts of the same country. In the north of China[1] people are more courageous than those in the south; and those in the south of Korea[2] have less bravery than those in the north.

We ought not, then, to be astonished that the effeminacy of the people in hot climates has almost always rendered them slaves; and that the bravery of those in cold climates has enabled them to maintain their liberties. This is an effect which springs from a natural cause.

This has also been found true in America; the despotic empires of Mexico and Peru were near the Line, and almost all the little free nations were, and are still, near the Poles.

3. Of the Climate of Asia. The relations of travellers[3] inform us "that the vast continent of the north of Asia, which extends from forty degrees or thereabouts to the Pole, and from the frontiers of Muscovy even to the eastern ocean, is in an extremely cold climate; that this immense tract of land is divided by a chain of mountains which run from west to east, leaving Siberia on the north, and Great Tartary on the south; that the climate of Siberia is so cold that, excepting a few places, it is unsusceptible of cultivation; and that, though the Russians have settlements all along the Irtis, they cultivate nothing;

that this country produces only some little firs and shrubs; that the natives of the country are divided into wretched hordes or tribes, like those of Canada; that the reason of this cold proceeds, on the one hand, from the height of the land, and on the other from the mountains, which, in proportion as they run from south to north, are levelled in such a manner that the north wind everywhere blows without opposition; that this wind, which renders Nova Zembla uninhabitable, blowing in Siberia makes it a barren waste; that in Europe, on the contrary, the mountains of Norway and Lapland are admirable bulwarks, which cover the northern countries from the wind; so that at Stockholm, which is about fifty-nine degrees latitude, the earth produces plants, fruits, and corn; and that about Abo, which is sixty-one degrees, and even to sixty-three and sixty-four, there are mines of silver, and the land is fruitful enough."

We see also in these relations "that Great Tartary, situated to the south of Siberia, is also exceedingly cold; that the country will not admit of cultivation; that nothing can be found but pasturage for flocks and herds; that trees will not grow there, but only brambles, as in Iceland; that there are, near China and India, some countries where there grows a kind of millet, but that neither corn nor rice will ripen; that there is scarcely a place in Chinese Tartary at forty-three, forty-four, and forty-five degrees where it does not freeze seven or eight months in the year, so that it is as cold as Iceland, though it might be imagined, from its situation, to be as hot as the south of France; that there are no cities, except four or five towards the eastern ocean, and some which the Chinese, for political reasons, have built near China; that in the rest of Great Tartary there are only a few situated in Buchar, Turkestan, and Cathay; that the reason of this extreme cold proceeds from the nature of the nitrous earth, full of saltpetre and sand, and more particularly from the height of the land. Father Verbiest found that a certain place, eighty leagues north of the great wall, towards the source of Kavamhuran, exceeded the height of the sea near Pekin three thousand geometrical paces; that this height<sup>[4]</sup> is the cause that though almost all the great rivers of Asia have their

source in this country, there is, however, so great a want of water that it can be inhabited only near the rivers and lakes."

These facts being laid down, I reason thus: Asia has properly no temperate zone, as the places situated in a very cold climate immediately touch upon those which are exceedingly hot, that is, Turkey, Persia, India, China, Korea, and Japan.

In Europe, on the contrary, the temperate zone is very extensive, though situated in climates widely different from each other; there being no affinity between the climates of Spain and Italy and those of Norway and Sweden. But as the climate grows insensibly cold upon our advancing from south to north, nearly in proportion to the latitude of each country, it thence follows that each resembles the country joining it; that there is no very extraordinary difference between them, and that, as I have just said, the temperate zone is very extensive.

Hence it comes that in Asia, the strong nations are opposed to the weak; the warlike, brave, and active people touch immediately upon those who are indolent, effeminate, and timorous; the one must, therefore, conquer, and the other be conquered. In Europe, on the contrary, strong nations are opposed to the strong; and those who join each other have nearly the same courage. This is the grand reason of the weakness of Asia, and of the strength of Europe; of the liberty of Europe, and of the slavery of Asia: a cause that I do not recollect ever to have seen remarked. Hence it proceeds that liberty in Asia never increases; whilst in Europe it is enlarged or diminished, according to particular circumstances.

The Russian nobility have indeed been reduced to slavery by the ambition of one of their princes; but they have always discovered those marks of impatience and discontent which are never to be seen in the southern climates. Have they not been able for a short time to establish an aristocratic government? Another of the northern kingdoms has lost its

laws; but we may trust to the climate that they are not lost in such a manner as never to be recovered.

4. The Consequences resulting from this. What we have now said is perfectly conformable to history. Asia has been subdued thirteen times; eleven by the northern nations, and twice by those of the south. In the early ages it was conquered three times by the Scythians; afterwards it was subdued once by the Medes, and once by the Persians; again by the Greeks, the Arabs, the Moguls, the Turks, the Tartars, the Persians, and the Afghans. I mention only the Upper Asia, and say nothing of the invasions made in the rest of the south of that part of the world which has most frequently suffered prodigious revolutions.

In Europe, on the contrary, since the establishment of the Greek and Phoenician colonies, we know but of four great changes; the first caused by the conquest of the Romans; the second by the inundation of barbarians, who destroyed those very Romans; the third by the victories of Charlemagne; and the last by the invasions of the Normans. And if this be rightly examined, we shall find, even in these changes, a general strength diffused through all the parts of Europe. We know the difficulty which the Romans met with in conquering Europe, and the ease and facility with which they invaded Asia. We are sensible of the difficulties the northern nations had to encounter in overturning the Roman empire; of the wars and labours of Charlemagne; and of the several enterprises of the Normans. The destroyers were incessantly destroyed.

5. That when the People in the North of Asia and those of the North of Europe made Conquests, the Effects of the Conquest were not the same. The nations in the north of Europe conquered as freemen; the people in the north of Asia conquered as slaves, and subdued as others only to gratify the ambition of a master.

The reason is that the people of Tartary, the natural conquerors of Asia, are themselves enslaved. They are incessantly making conquests in

the south of Asia, where they form empires: but that part of the nation which continues in the country finds that it is subject to a great master, who, being despotic in the south, will likewise be so in the north, and exercising an arbitrary power over the vanquished subjects, pretends to the same over the conquerors. This is at present most conspicuous in that vast country called Chinese Tartary, which is governed by the emperor, with a power almost as despotic as that of China itself, and which he every day extends by his conquests.

We may likewise see in the history of China that the emperors[5] sent Chinese colonies into Tartary. These Chinese have become Tartars, and the mortal enemies of China; but this does not prevent their carrying into Tartary the spirit of the Chinese government.

A part of the Tartars who were conquerors have very often been themselves expelled; when they have carried into their deserts that servile spirit which they had acquired in the climate of slavery. The history of China furnishes us with strong proofs of this assertion, as does also our ancient history.[6]

Hence it follows that the genius of the Getic or Tartarian nation has always resembled that of the empires of Asia. The people in these are governed by the cudgel; the inhabitants of Tartary by whips. The spirit of Europe has ever been contrary to these manners; and in all ages, what the people of Asia have called punishment those of Europe have deemed the most outrageous abuse.[7]

The Tartars who destroyed the Grecian empire established in the conquered countries slavery and despotic power: the Goths, after subduing the Roman empire, founded monarchy and liberty.

I do not know whether the famous Rudbeck, who in his *Atlantica* has bestowed such praises on Scandinavia, has made mention of that great prerogative which ought to set this people above all the nations upon

earth; namely, this country's having been the source of the liberties of Europe -- that is, of almost all the freedom which at present subsists amongst mankind.

Jornandes the Goth called the north of Europe the forge of the human race. I should rather call it the forge where those weapons were framed which broke the chains of southern nations. In the north were formed those valiant people who sallied forth and deserted their countries to destroy tyrants and slaves, and to teach men that, nature having made them equal, reason could not render them dependent, except where it was necessary to their happiness.

6. A new physical Cause of the Slavery of Asia, and of the Liberty of Europe. In Asia they have always had great empires; in Europe these could never subsist. Asia has larger plains; it is cut out into much more extensive divisions by mountains and seas; and as it lies more to the south, its springs are more easily dried up; the mountains are less covered with snow; and the rivers, being not so large, form more contracted barriers.[8]

Power in Asia ought, then, to be always despotic; for if their slavery was not severe they would soon make a division inconsistent with the nature of the country.

In Europe the natural division forms many nations of a moderate extent, in which the ruling by laws is not incompatible with the maintenance of the state: on the contrary, it is so favourable to it, that without this the state would fall into decay, and become a prey to its neighbours.

It is this which has formed a genius for liberty that renders every part extremely difficult to be subdued and subjected to a foreign power, otherwise than by the laws and the advantage of commerce.

On the contrary, there reigns in Asia a servile spirit, which they have

never been able to shake off, and it is impossible to find in all the histories of that country a single passage which discovers a freedom of spirit; we shall never see anything there but the excess of slavery.

7. Of Africa and America. This is what I had to say of Asia and Europe. Africa is in a climate like that of the south of Asia, and is in the same servitude. America, [9] being lately destroyed and re peopled by the nations of Europe and Africa, can now scarcely display its genuine spirit; but what we know of its ancient history is very conformable to our principles.

8. Of the Capital of the Empire. One of the consequences of what we have been mentioning is, that it is of the utmost importance to a great prince to make a proper choice of the seat of his empire. He who places it to the southward will be in danger of losing the north; but he who fixes it on the north may easily preserve the south. I do not speak of particular cases. In mechanics there are frictions by which the effects of the theory are frequently changed or retarded; and policy has also its frictions.

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1. Father Du Halde, i, p. 112.

2. The Chinese books make mention of this. Ibid., iv, p. 448.

3. See Travels to the North, viii; the History of the Tartars; and Father Du Halde, iv.

4. Tartary is, then, a kind of flat mountain.

5. As Vouty V, emperor of the fifth dynasty.

6. The Scythians thrice conquered Asia, and thrice were driven thence.

Justin, ii. 3.

7. This is in no way contrary to what I shall say in book xxviii. 20 concerning the manner of thinking among the German nations in respect to the cudgel; let the instrument be what it will, the power or action of beating was always considered by them as an affront.

8. The waters lose themselves or evaporate before or after their streams are united.

9. The petty barbarous nations of America are called by the Spaniards Indios Bravos and are much more difficult to subdue than the great empires of Mexico and Peru.