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**An Essay On The History Of Civil Society**

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Sect. V. Of National Defence and Conquest.

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## S E C T. V.

*Of National Defence and Conquest.*

**I**T is impossible to ascertain how much of the policy of any state has a reference to war, or to national safety. "Our legislator," says the Cretan in Plato, "thought that nations were by nature in a state of hostility: he took his measures accordingly; and observing that all the possessions of the vanquished pertain to the victor, he held it ridiculous to propose any benefit to his country, before he had provided that it should not be conquered."

CRETE, which is supposed to have been a model of military policy, is commonly considered as the original from which the celebrated laws of Lycurgus were copied. Mankind, it seems, in every instance, must have some palpable object to direct their proceedings, and must have a view to some point of external utility, even in the choice of their virtues. The discipline of Sparta was military; and a sense of its use in the field, more than the force of unwritten and traditionary laws, or the supposed engagement of the public faith obtained by the lawgiver, may have induced this people to persevere in the observance of many rules, which to other nations

tions do not appear necessary, except in the presence of an enemy.

EVERY institution of this singular people gave a lesson of obedience, of fortitude, and of zeal for the public: but it is remarkable that they chose to obtain, by their virtues alone, what other nations are fain to buy with their treasure; and it is well known, that, in the course of their history, they came to regard their discipline merely on account of its moral effects. They had experienced the happiness of a mind courageous, disinterested, and devoted to its best affections; and they studied to preserve this character in themselves, by resigning the interests of ambition, and the hopes of military glory, even by sacrificing the numbers of their people.

IT was the fate of Spartans who escaped from the field, not of those who perished with Cleombrotus at Leuctra, that filled the cottages of Lacedemon with mourning and serious reflection\*: it was the fear of having their citizens corrupted abroad, by intercourse with fervile and mercenary men, that made them quit the station of leaders in the Persian war, and leave Athens, during fifty years, to pursue, unrivalled, that career of ambition and profit, by which she made such acquisitions of power and of wealth †.

\* Xenophon.

† Thucydides, book 1.



WE have had occasion to observe, that in every rude state, the great business is war; and that in barbarous times, mankind, being generally divided into small parties, are engaged in almost perpetual hostilities. This circumstance gives the military leader a continued ascendant in his country, and inclines every people, during warlike ages, to monarchical government.

THE conduct of an army can least of all subjects be divided: and we may be justly surpris'd to find, that the Romans, after many ages of military experience, and after having recently felt the arms of Hannibal, in many encounters, associated two leaders at the head of the same army, and left them to adjust their pretensions, by taking the command, each a day in his turn. The same people, however, on other occasions, thought it expedient to suspend the exercise of every subordinate magistracy, and in the time of great alarms, to intrust all the authority of the state in the hands of one person.

REPUBLICS have generally found it necessary, in the conduct of war, to place great confidence in the executive branch of their government. When a consul at Rome had proclaimed his levies, and administered the military oath, he became from that moment master of the public treasury, and of the lives of those who were under his command\*. The axe and the rods were no longer a mere badge of magistracy, or an empty pageant, in the

\* Polybius.

hands



hands of the licitor: they were, at the command of the father, stained with the blood of his own children; and fell, without appeal, on the mutinous and the disobedient of every condition.

IN every free state, there is a perpetual necessity to distinguish the maxims of martial law from those of the civil; and he who has not learned to give an implicit obedience, where the state has given him a military leader, and to resign his personal freedom in the field, from the same magnanimity with which he maintains it in the political deliberations of his country, has yet to learn the most important lesson of civil society, and is only fit to occupy a place in a rude, or in a corrupted state, where the principles of mutiny and of servility being joined, the one or the other is frequently adopted in the wrong place.

FROM a regard to what is necessary in war, nations inclined to popular or aristocratical government, have had recourse to establishments that bordered on monarchy. Even where the highest office of the state was in common times administered by a plurality of persons, the whole power and authority belonging to it was, on particular occasions, committed to one; and upon great alarms, when the political fabric was shaken or endangered, a monarchical power has been applied, like a prop, to secure the state against the rage of the tempest. Thus were the dictators occasionally named at Rome, and the stadtholders in the United Provinces; and thus, in mix-



ed governments, the royal prerogative is occasionally enlarged, by the temporary suspension of laws \*, and the barriers of liberty appear to be removed, in order to vest a dictatorial power in the hands of the king.

HAD mankind, therefore, no view but to warfare, it is probable that they would continue to prefer monarchical government to any other; or at least that every nation, in order to procure secret and united councils, would intrust the executive power with unlimited authority. But, happily for civil society, men have objects of a different sort: and experience has taught, that although the conduct of armies requires an absolute and undivided command; yet a national force is best formed, where numbers of men are inured to equality; and where the meanest citizen may consider himself, upon occasion, as destined to command as well as to obey. It is here that the dictator finds a spirit and a force prepared to second his councils; it is here too that the dictator himself is formed, and that numbers of leaders are presented to the public choice; it is here that the prosperity of a state is independent of single men, and that a wisdom which never dies, with a system of military arrangements permanent and regular, can, even under the greatest misfortunes, prolong the national struggle. With this advantage, the Romans, finding a number of distinguished leaders arise in succession, were at all times almost equally prepared to contend with their enemies of Asia

\* In Britain, by the suspension of the *Habeas corpus*.



or Africa; while the fortune of those enemies, on the contrary, depended on the casual appearance of singular men, of a Mithridates, or of a Hannibal.

THE soldier, we are told, has his point of honour, and a fashion of thinking, which he wears with his sword. This point of honour, in free and uncorrupted states, is a zeal for the public; and war to them, is an operation of passions, not the mere pursuit of a calling. Its good and its ill effects are felt in extremes: the friend is made to experience the warmest proofs of attachment, the enemy the severest effects of animosity. On this system the celebrated nations of antiquity made war under their highest attainments of civility, and under their greatest degrees of refinement.

IN small and rude societies, the individual finds himself attacked in every national war; and none can propose to devolve his defence on another. "The King of Spain is a great prince," said an American chief to the governor of Jamaica, who was preparing a body of troops to join in an enterprise against the Spaniards: "do you propose to make war upon so great a king with so small a force?" Being told that the forces he saw were to be joined by troops from Europe, and that the governor could then command no more: "Who are these then," said the American, "who form this croud of spectators? are they not your people? and why do you not all go forth to so great a war?" He was answered, That the spectators were merchants, and  
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other inhabitants, who took no part in the service: "Would they be merchants still," continued this statesman, "if the King of Spain was to attack you here?" "For my part, I do not think that merchants should be permitted to live in any country: when I go to war, I leave no body at home but the women." It should seem that this simple warrior considered merchants as a kind of neutral persons, who took no part in the quarrels of their country; and that he did not know how much war itself may be made a subject of traffic; what mighty armies may be put in motion from behind the counter; how often human blood is, without any national animosity, bought and sold for bills of exchange; and how often the prince, the nobles, and the statesmen, in many a polished nation, might, in his account, be considered as merchants.

IN the progress of arts and of policy, the members of every state are divided into classes; and in the commencement of this distribution, there is no distinction more serious than that of the warrior and the pacific inhabitant; no more is required to place men in the relation of master and slave. Even when the rigours of an established slavery abate, as they have done in modern Europe, in consequence of a protection, and a property, allowed to the mechanic and labourer, this distinction serves still to separate the noble from the base, and to point out that class of men who are destined to reign and to domineer in their country.

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IT was certainly never foreseen by mankind, that in the pursuit of refinement, they were to reverse this order; or even that they were to place the government, and the military force of nations, in different hands. But is it equally unforeseen, that the former order may again take place? and that the pacific citizen, however distinguished by privilege and rank, must one day bow to the person with whom he has intrusted his sword. If such revolutions should actually follow, will this new master revive in his own order the spirit of the noble and the free? Will he renew the characters of the warrior and the statesman? Will he restore to his country the civil and military virtues? I am afraid to reply. Montesquieu observes, that the government of Rome, even under the emperors, became, in the hands of the troops, elective and republican: but the Fabii or the Bruti were heard of no more, after the prætorian bands became the republic.

WE have enumerated some of the heads under which a people, as they emerge from barbarity, may come to be classed. Such are, the nobility, the people, the adherents of the prince; and even the priesthood have not been forgotten: when we arrive at times of refinement, the army must be joined to the list. The departments of civil government and of war being severed, and the pre-eminence being given to the statesman, the ambitious will naturally devolve the military service on those who are contented with a subordinate station. They who have the greatest share in the division of fortune, and the greatest interest in defending their country, having re-  
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signed the sword, must pay for what they have ceased to perform; and armies, not only at a distance from home, but in the very bosom of their country, are subsisted by pay. A discipline is invented to inure the soldier to perform, from habit, and from the fear of punishment, those hazardous duties, which the love of the public, or a national spirit, no longer inspire.

WHEN we consider the breach that such an establishment makes in the system of national virtues, it is unpleasant to observe, that most nations who have run the career of civil arts, have, in some degree, adopted this measure. Not only states, which either have wars to maintain, or precarious possessions to defend at a distance; not only a prince jealous of his authority, or in haste to gain the advantage of discipline, are disposed to employ foreign troops, or to keep standing armies; but even republics, with little of the former occasion, and none of the motives which prevail in monarchy, have been found to tread in the same path.

IF military arrangements occupy so considerable a place in the domestic policy of nations, the actual consequences of war are equally important in the history of mankind. Glory and spoil were the earliest subject of quarrels; a concession of superiority, or a ransom, were the prices of peace. The love of safety, and the desire of dominion, equally lead mankind to wish for accessions of strength. Whether as victors or as vanquished, they tend to a coalition; and powerful nations considering a province,



vince, or a fortrefs acquired on their frontier, as fo much gained, are perpetually intent on extending their limits.

THE maxims of conquest are not always to be distinguished from those of self-defence. If a neighbouring state be dangerous, if it be frequently troublesome, it is a maxim founded in the consideration of safety, as well as of conquest, That it ought to be weakened or disarmed: If, being once reduced, it be disposed to renew the contest, it must from thenceforward be governed in form. Rome never avowed any other maxims of conquest; and she every where sent her insolent armies, under the specious pretence of procuring to herself and her allies a lasting peace, which she alone would reserve the power to disturb.

THE equality of those alliances which the Grecian states formed against each other, maintained, for a time, their independence and separation; and that time was the shining and the happy period of their story. It was prolonged more by the vigilance and conduct which they severally applied, than by the moderation of their councils, or by any peculiarities of domestic policy which arrested their progress. The victors were sometimes contented, with merely changing to a resemblance of their own forms the government of the states they subdued. What the next step might have been in the progress of impositions, is hard to determine. But when we consider, that one party fought for the imposition of tributes, another for the ascendant in war, it cannot be doubted,

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that the Athenians, from a national ambition, and from the desire of wealth, and the Spartans, though they originally only meant to defend themselves, and their allies, were both, at last, equally willing to become the masters of Greece; and were preparing for each other at home, that yoke, which both, together with their confederates, were obliged to receive from abroad.

IN the conquests of Philip, the desire of self-preservation and security seemed to be blended with the ambition natural to princes. He turned his arms successively to the quarters on which he found himself hurt, from which he had been alarmed or provoked: and when he had subdued the Greeks, he proposed to lead them against their ancient enemy of Persia. In this he laid the plan which was carried into execution by his son.

THE Romans, become the masters of Italy, and the conquerors of Carthage, had been alarmed on the side of Macedon, and were led to cross a new sea in search of a new field, on which to exercise their military force. In prosecution of their wars, from the earliest to the latest date of their history, without intending the very conquests they made, perhaps without foreseeing what advantage they were to reap from the subjection of distant provinces, or in what manner they were to govern their new acquisitions, they still proceeded to seize what came successively within their reach; and, stimulated by a policy which engaged them in perpetual wars, which led to perpetual victory and accessions of territory, they extended

tended the frontier of a state, which, but a few centuries before, had been confined within the skirts of a village, to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Weser, the Forth, and the Ocean.

IT is vain to affirm, that the genius of any nation is adverse to conquest. Its real interests indeed most commonly are so; but every state which is prepared to defend itself, and to obtain victories, is likewise in hazard of being tempted to conquer.

IN Europe, where mercenary and disciplined armies are every where formed, and ready to traverse the earth, where, like a flood pent up by slender banks, they are only restrained by political forms, or a temporary balance of power; if the sluices should break, what inundations may we not expect to behold? Effeminate kingdoms and empires are spread from the sea of Corea to the Atlantic ocean. Every state, by the defeat of its troops, may be turned into a province; every army opposed in the field to-day may be hired to-morrow; and every victory gained, may give the accession of a new military force to the victor.

THE Romans, with inferior arts of communication both by sea and land, maintained their dominion in a considerable part of Europe, Asia, and Africa, over fierce and intractable nations: What may not the fleets and armies of Europe, with the access they have by commerce to every part of the world, and the facility of

