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**A View Of Society In Europe, In Its Progress From
Rudeness To Refinement: Or, Inquiries Concerning The
History Of Law, Government, And Manners**

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Edinburgh, 1778

Section I. Of Mercenaries. The Evils which result from them. The Rise of
Taxations.

urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-1563

C H A P T E R V.

The Military Arrangements which prevailed in the Declension of Fiefs and Chivalry. The Introduction of standing Armies.

S E C T I O N I.

Of Mercenaries. The Evils which result from them. The Rise of Taxations.

THE mercenaries, which were made necessary by the disorders of fiefs and chivalry, were to lead to misfortune and misery. They were scarcely known, when the princes of Europe invented the art of extorting the wealth of their subjects, and of employing it to oppress them. While the lands dealt out by the crown created an effectual army, soldiers gave their service for their possessions. But, when the inconveniences and the defects of this system had produced mercenaries,

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the prince had no possessions to bestow. His domains had gone away from him in prodigalities and donations. It was yet incumbent on him to maintain his troops. Money was absolutely indispensable to him, and he was to find out measures to procure it. These measures are interesting in themselves, and still more so in their consequences. They gave rise to taxations in Europe.

The vassals of the crown by knight-service were obliged to personal attendance in wars; but, considering it as a burden, were disposed to compound for it. This was also the case with the inferior tenants. They were no less inclined to contribute their proportions to their lords, than these were to satisfy their prince. To the prince, the money of his vassals was of more advantage than their service; but agreements with each were fatiguing and endless; and his mercenaries were clamorous and impatient.

An expedient presented itself, which, to all parties, gave the promise of ease and satisfaction. The prince, instead of the service that was due, and, instead of contracting with every tenant who held from him, assessed a moderate sum on every knight's fee throughout the kingdom (1). It was just that his tenants should give a fine for their attendance; and what they furnished was to go to his mercenaries.

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The prerogative thus begun, was pregnant with misfortunes to subjects, and with advantages to princes, which were foreseen neither by the former, nor the latter. What, at first, was a matter of expediency, and an expression of the confidence of the people, and of the discretion of the sovereign, grew into a most formidable taxation (2). It was to be exerted with no moderation or decency. In the delirium of their greatness, the princes of Europe were to fancy, that, in extracting money from their subjects, they ought to know no rule but their ambition, their wants, and their caprice.

In a conformity with the assessment on the estates subject to knight-service, a tax was to be demanded from the possessors of land holden in frankalmoigne and in soccage (3). And I have already observed, that the tenants by *escuage* paid a stipulated fine for their fees. All the territory of a kingdom was thus to contribute to the necessities of princes, and the greatest proportion of it was to be actually exposed to their ravages.

Their rapacity was not yet to be satisfied. The cravings of ambition, and the prodigalities of mercenaries, demanded something more. During the fortunate times of the feudal association, it had been common for the inhabitants of the cities and towns within the demesnes of the sovereign, and within those of the nobility, to express, respectively, by presents, their submission, satisfaction, and gratitude. In more unhappy times, these
gifts,



gifts, these fruits of generosity, were demanded as a right. These presents, the expressions of happiness, grew into tallages and exactions, and were to denote misery and wretchedness. The prince, with an unblushing audacity, levied grants at his will from his cities and towns; and his example was followed by the nobles within the cities and towns within their territories. Hence the most destructive and the most calamitous of all the oppressions of the middle times (4).

Measures, so hostile to the free spirit of the Gothic governments, infringements of property so audacious, were every where to excite and to inflame the passions of the people. The princes of Europe were to contend for power, and their subjects for liberty. Struggles, the most critical and the most serious, were sustained; and the progress of these, and the respective success of the parties in the different kingdoms of Europe, were to alter its governments to the forms they maintain at this hour.

In France, and in other countries, the command of the mercenaries, and the power of taxation, were finally to prevail. In England, the frantic weaknesses of King John, and the union of the nobles and the people, were to renovate the Gothic liberty, and to set limits to princes. While, in states less fortunate, the kingly authority was to grow into despotism, and to debase the genius of men, while taxes, and tallages, and exactions, were to be demanded in wantonness and caprice, and a cruel tyranny

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to diffuse oppression and grievance, the *magna charta* was to command, that no prince of England should presume to levy any tax, tallage, or exaction, without the consent of the parliament (5); and that, while the land of the kingdom was to be free from his rapaciousness, he should not dare to harass its cities or towns, but that they should return to the possession and enjoyment of their *antient* liberties (6).

The disorders of the feudal militia produced mercenaries, and the use of mercenaries gave birth to taxations. Taxations were begun to be levied, in all the states of Europe, at the will of the prince. This occasioned contentions between sovereigns and their subjects. The victory of the kingly authority over the liberty of the people, continued in many princes the power of taxation; and this power, and the command of mercenaries, are the completion of despotism. In England, the prerogative of taxation which the prince had assumed, was wrested from him by the great charter of liberties. He was to command his mercenaries; but he was to depend for their support and their pay on the generosity of his people.

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