CHAP. XVI.: Distinctive Properties of a Republic.

IT is natural for a republic to have only a small territory; otherwise it cannot long subsist. In an extensive republic there are men of large fortunes, and consequently of less moderation: there are trusts too considerable to be placed in any single subject; he has interests of his own; he soon begins to think that he may be happy and glorious by oppressing his fellow-citizens; and that he may raise himself to grandeur on the ruins of his country.

In an extensive republic, the public good is sacrificed to a thousand private views; it is subordinate to exceptions, and depends on accidents. In a small one, the interest of the public is more obvious, better understood, and more within the reach of every citizen; abuses have less extent, and of course are less protected.

The long duration of the republic of Sparta was owing to her having continued in the same extent of territory after all her wars. The sole aim of Sparta was liberty; and the sole advantage of her liberty glory.

It was the spirit of the Greek republics to be as contented with their territories as with their laws. Athens was first fired with ambition, and gave it to Lacedæmon; but it was an ambition rather of commanding a free people than of governing slaves; rather of directing than of breaking the union. All was lost upon the starting up of monarchy, a government whose spirit is more turned to increase of dominion.

Excepting particular circumstances, it is difficult for any other than a republican government to subsist longer in a single town. A prince of so petty a state would naturally endeavour to oppress his subjects, because his power would be great, while the means of enjoying it, or of causing it to be respected, would be inconsiderable. The consequence is, he would trample upon his people. On the other hand, such a prince might be easily crushed by a foreign, or even a domestic, force; the people might every instant unite and rise up against him. Now, as soon as the sovereign of a single town is expelled, the quarrel is over; but, if he has many towns, it only begins.