

The Prince



“We are much beholden to Machiavelli and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do.”

Francis Bacon

“In his 1513 work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli created a monster that has haunted politics ever since... *The Prince* is not a practical-advice manual aimed at any specific individual – rather it creates a fantastic creature, a kind of armoured colossus bestriding (and in Machiavelli’s precocious dream, uniting) Italy.”

The Guardian

“Machiavelli is a pivotal figure in the history of political thought. His views of human nature, society and government mark a break with medieval philosophy and sixteenth-century political thought based on assumptions about God’s purposes for man.”

New Statesman

“Machiavelli was a pioneer of political science. He was a republican and a patriot. His prose style was as clear as Julius Caesar’s. He was a literary genius.”

The Times

ALMA CLASSICS

The Prince

Niccolò Machiavelli

Translated by J.G. Nichols



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*Niccolò Machiavelli's dedication to
Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent**

USUALLY THOSE who wish to gain the favour of a prince approach him with those things which they themselves hold most dear or which they have seen delight him most; and so we frequently find princes presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar ornaments worthy of their dignity. I therefore, now that I wish to present Your Excellency with some token of my service to you, have found nothing among my possessions which is more dear to me and which I value more than an understanding of the actions of great men, acquired by me from a long experience of current affairs and an assiduous study of the ancients; and it is this, deeply considered and examined over a long period, and now condensed into one small volume, which I send to Your Excellency.

And although I judge this work unworthy to come into the presence of Your Excellency, I do trust that your benignity may make it acceptable, bearing in mind that I could not have given you a greater gift than the means of appreciating in a short space of time everything that I, during so many years and through so many hardships and dangers, have experienced and come to understand. This is a work which I have not embellished or crammed with rhetorical flourishes, or with splendid and high-sounding words, or with any of those extrinsic ornaments or decorations with which so many others are accustomed to garnish their writings; my wish has been that either my work should not be admired at all, or else that the variety of the material in it and the importance of its subject matter alone would make it acceptable. Moreover I should not like it to be thought presumptuous of a man of low and humble condition to dare to discuss and direct the actions of princes: no, just as those who wish to draw landscapes place themselves low down on a plain in order to examine the nature of hills and high places, and to examine the low lands place themselves high up in the hills, so likewise in order to understand properly the nature of the populace one must be a

prince, and to understand properly the nature of a prince one must be a commoner.

Be pleased to accept then, Your Excellency, this tiny gift in the spirit in which I send it: if you read it and examine it diligently, you will perceive that it reveals my greatest desire, which is that you will rise to that greatness which your status and your other qualities promise. And should Your Excellency from the height of your eminence happen to turn your eyes at times to these low places, you will realize how much I suffer, continually and undeservedly, from the malignity of Fortune.

1

*What kinds of principality there are
and how they are acquired.*

ALL STATES, ALL GOVERNMENTS, past and present, are or have been either republics or principalities. Principalities are either hereditary, where the family of their ruler goes back a long way, or they are recently established. The ones established recently are either completely new, like Milan under Francesco Sforza,* or they are additions to the hereditary state of the prince who acquires them, as the King of Spain acquired the Kingdom of Naples.* The states acquired in this way are either accustomed to living under a prince or used to being free; and they are acquired by another's arms or by one's own, or by chance, or by intelligence.

2

Hereditary principalities.

I SHALL LEAVE any discussion of republics to one side, since I have discussed them at length elsewhere,* turning instead to principalities, filling in the outline given above, and discussing how principalities may be governed and preserved.

It is my opinion that it is less difficult to preserve a state which is hereditary and accustomed to the family of their prince than one which is recently established: it is enough not to neglect the constitutional arrangements made by one's predecessors, and then adapt one's conduct to circumstances as they arise; in this way, if a prince is reasonably capable, he will always preserve his state, unless some extraordinary and excessive force deprives him of it; and if he should be deprived of it, he will regain it whenever the usurper meets with any unfavourable circumstances.

We have in Italy the example of the Duke of Ferrara, who was able to resist the attacks of the Venetians in 1484 and those of Pope Julius in 1510 simply because his family had been established in that state for generations.* The hereditary prince has fewer reasons and less necessity to give offence to his subjects: he is therefore more loved; if he has no egregious vices to make him hated, it naturally follows that his subjects wish him well. Since change always leads to more change, the reasons for any innovations which have been made, and even the memory of them, have been lost in the course of time and with the continuation of the same power.

3

Mixed principalities

IT IS IN NEWLY ESTABLISHED PRINCIPALITIES that difficulties arise. To begin with, if the principality is not completely new, but an addition to an already existing one (so that the two parts together may be called mixed) its instability arises from a problem which is inherent in all new principalities: that is, men are happy to change their ruler if they believe this will advantage them, and so they take up arms against him; and in this they deceive themselves, because they soon realize their condition has become worse. That follows from another natural and commonplace necessity: the new ruler is always bound to offend his new subjects by the outrages his troops commit and by all the other ill-treatment which occurs in any newly acquired territory; in this way you make enemies of all those you attacked in occupying that principality, and you cannot keep the friendship of those who sided with you, since you cannot reward them according to their expectations, and neither can you give them strong medicine now that you are under an obligation to them; because, whatever military force anyone possesses, he must have the backing of the inhabitants if he is to capture a province. It is for these reasons that King Louis XII of France, who occupied Milan quickly, quickly lost it; and the first time, Ludovico's own forces sufficed to take it back from him: those citizens who had opened the gates to Louis, finding they had deceived themselves and were thwarted of the benefits they

had hoped for, could not endure the overbearing actions of their new prince.*

It is certainly true that when rebellious territories have been reconquered they are less likely to be lost: their ruler, seizing the opportunity which the rebellion affords, is less cautious in punishing the wrongdoers, seeking out those who are suspect, and strengthening himself where he is most vulnerable. In this way, all that was needed for the King of France to lose Milan the first time was for Duke Ludovico to be a threatening presence on the frontier, while the second time it required him to have the whole world against him, with all his own forces either destroyed or driven out of Italy.* And this all happened for the reasons mentioned above. Nevertheless, both the first and second time he did lose it.

The reasons for his first loss have been discussed. It now remains to give the reasons for his second loss, and to see what countermeasures were open to him or are open to anyone in his position who wishes to keep possession of his conquest better than the King of France did. I must explain therefore that those states which are conquered and added to the hereditary state of their conqueror are either part of the same country and have the same language, or they are not. When they are part of the same country it is very easy to keep them, especially if their people are not accustomed to living in liberty; and to secure them it is only necessary to eliminate the family line of their former lord, because so far as everything else is concerned, if their old way of life is preserved and there are no cultural differences, people live peacefully enough. We have seen this happen with Burgundy, Brittany, Gascony and Normandy, which have for so long been part of France;* although there are some linguistic variations, their customs are similar, and they find it easy to get along with each other. Whoever conquers them and wishes to keep them must bear in mind two things: one, their prince's descendants must be eliminated; and two, neither their laws nor their taxes must be altered; in this way they will in a short time become one body with the old principality.

However, when states are acquired in a country with a different language, different customs and different institutions, then there are problems; great good fortune and great abilities are required in order to keep such states. One of the best and most efficacious solutions would be for those who acquire them to go and live there. This would

make their possession more secure and lasting; and this is what the Turks have done with Greece: even if they had used every other method of keeping hold of that state, they could not have held onto it without going to live there. The reason is that, when one is there, one sees troubles as they arise, and can deal with them immediately; when one is not there, one hears about them when they are full-grown and there is no longer any remedy. In addition, the province is not looted by one's officials; and one's subjects are happy to have immediate recourse to their prince; consequently, those who wish their prince well have more reason to love him, and those who do not wish him well, more reason to fear him. Any potential external aggressor will think twice, for he who lives there can only be dislodged with extreme difficulty.

Another and better precaution is to establish colonies in one or two places which will act as fetters on that state: it is essential either to do this or to keep a large force of cavalry and infantry there. Colonies do not cost much; they can be sent there and maintained without any expense, or with only a little; they offend no one but those whose fields and houses are taken to be given to the new inhabitants, who are only a tiny minority in that state; and those whom the prince does offend cannot possibly harm him, since they are scattered and poor, while all the others on the one hand are unharmed, and for this reason should keep the peace, and on the other hand are fearful of putting a foot wrong, for fear of suffering the same fate as those who have been despoiled. I conclude that these colonies are not expensive, they are more loyal, and they do less harm; and those to whom harm is done cannot cause any trouble, since they are poor and scattered, as I have said. For this reason it should be noted that men must be either pampered or eliminated, because they avenge slight offences, while they cannot avenge serious ones: consequently, if anyone is harmed it must be in such a way that there is no fear of vengeance. But, by maintaining instead of colonies a troop of armed men, the expense is much greater, enough to use up all the revenue of that state for its security, so that the gain turns into a loss; and many more people are offended, because it harms the whole state as the army chops and changes its quarters; everyone feels the hardship, and everyone becomes an enemy; and these enemies can cause harm because, although overpowered, they remain in their own home. In

every respect, then, such protection is useless, just as that given by the colonies is useful.

Again, anyone who is in a province with an alien culture ought to make himself head and defender of lesser rulers who are round about, and take pains to weaken those who are more powerful, and take care that no unforeseen event may lead to the appearance of a foreigner as powerful as he is. And one such always will be introduced by those who are discontented, either through ambition or fear: this was seen when the Aetolians sent the Romans into Greece; and in every other province they entered they were introduced by the inhabitants. And the way of things is such that, as soon as a foreign potentate enters a province, all those there who are less powerful come under his influence, moved by the envy which they bear to whoever has been in power over them; and the result is that he needs to make no effort to win over these less powerful people, since they are straight away happy to become one with the state he has conquered. He need only take care that they do not acquire too much power or authority; and he can easily, with his own forces and their support, crush those who are powerful and remain the absolute master of that province. And anyone who does not follow this procedure will soon lose what he has acquired; and even while he still holds it, he will hold it with infinite difficulties and troubles.

The Romans, in the provinces which they conquered, were careful to fulfil these requirements: they sent out colonies, they treated the weaker favourably without letting their power increase, they weakened the powerful, and they did not allow powerful aliens to gain any standing there. I shall take the province of Greece as one example: the Achaeans and the Aetolians were treated favourably by the Romans; the kingdom of Macedonia was weakened; Antiochus was expelled; nor did the merits of the Achaeans and the Aetolians ever result in permission to raise their status; nor did the blandishments of Philip of Macedon ever induce them to be his friends without overwhelming him first; nor did the power of Antiochus ever bring them to consent to his having any authority in that province.* The Romans, in fact, did what all wise rulers ought to do: they must consider not only the dissension which is already present, but that which lies in the future, and do their utmost to avert it; if they foresee it when it is still far off, it can easily be remedied; but if they wait for it to arrive, the medicine

comes too late, because the illness is by now incurable. This is similar to what the doctors say about consumption: in its early stages it is hard to diagnose yet easy to cure, but as time goes on, when it has not been diagnosed or treated at the beginning, it is easy to diagnose and hard to cure. The same thing happens in affairs of state: if the arising evils are discerned from far off (something which only the prudent are able to do), they are soon dealt with; but if they have not been discerned, but allowed to grow until everyone sees them, there is no longer any remedy.

The Romans, however, discerning trouble from afar, always coped with it; and they never, in order to avoid a war, allowed any trouble to continue, because they knew that war would not be avoided, but merely postponed to the advantage of the enemy; they were therefore willing to wage war on Philip and Antiochus in Greece, so that they would not have to fight them in Italy; for the time being they could have avoided fighting in either place, but they did not wish to. They were never influenced by the advice we hear from the mouths of our present-day wiseacres, to enjoy the benefits time brings, but influenced rather by their own power and prudence; because time brings everything in its course, and can bring good as well as ill, and ill as well as good.

But let us revert to France, and see if she did any of the things which have been mentioned; I shall speak not of Charles,* but of Louis, as of someone whose progress can be better seen, because he held his possessions in Italy longer: and you will see that he did the opposite of what he should have done in order to keep hold of territories in a foreign land.

King Louis was brought into Italy by the ambition of the Venetians, who hoped to gain half of Lombardy by his coming.* I do not criticize this decision of the King's: he wished to gain a foothold in Italy, and since he had no friends in that country – indeed all doors had been shut in his face by Charles's conduct – he was obliged to make what friends he could; and his decision would have turned out to be a good one if he had not made mistakes in his other actions. Once this King had taken Lombardy, then, he regained the reputation which Charles had lost for him: Genoa yielded; the Florentines became his allies; the Marquis of Mantua, the Duke of Ferrara, the Bentivoglio family, the Countess of Forli, the Lords of Faenza, Pesaro, Rimini, Camerino

and Piombino, and the inhabitants of Lucca, Pisa and Siena were all anxious to be his friends. And then the Venetians could see how rash their own policy had been: in order to acquire a couple of towns in Lombardy, they had made the King lord of a third of Italy.

Consider now how easily the King might have maintained his prestige in Italy if he had observed the above rules, and how he might have secured and protected all those friends of his who, since there were many of them, and they were weak and fearful either of the Church or of the Venetians, were always obliged to be his allies; and how by means of them he could have kept himself safe against the great powers that remained. But he was no sooner in Milan than he did precisely the opposite, by assisting Pope Alexander to occupy Romagna. And he did not realize that, with this decision, he weakened himself, by alienating his friends and those who had fallen into his lap, and strengthened the Church by adding to its spiritual authority, which was already great, so much temporal power. And once he had made that first mistake he had to go on and make others; so that, to put an end to Alexander's ambitions and prevent his becoming the lord of Tuscany, he himself was obliged to come into Italy.* It was not enough for him to have strengthened the Church and lost his own friends, but in his desire for the Kingdom of Naples he divided it with the King of Spain;* and where he had once been the arbiter of Italy, he provided himself with an associate and consequently someone to whom the ambitious and the malcontents in that country could have recourse; and although he could have left a tributary king there,* he substituted one who could expel him.

The desire for acquisitions is a very natural and commonplace thing; and always, when men achieve what they can, they are praised and not criticized; but when they cannot, and yet try to do it by any means available, then that is a blameworthy mistake. So if France could have attacked Naples with her own forces, she should have done so; if she could not, she should not have shared the territory. Sharing Lombardy with the Venetians may be excused, since that gained the French a foothold in Italy; but sharing Naples was blameworthy, since it could not be excused by such a necessity.

Louis had, then, made five mistakes: he had eliminated the lesser powers; he had given more power in Italy to one who was already powerful; he had introduced into that country a very powerful

foreigner; he had not made his home there; he had not introduced any colonies into that country. Nevertheless, those five mistakes, if he had lived, might not have harmed him if he had not made a sixth by reducing the power of the Venetians:* if he had not strengthened the Church and brought the Spaniards into Italy, it would have been sensible and necessary to limit their power; but once he had taken his first decisions, he should not have agreed to their ruin: while they remained powerful they would always have discouraged others from making incursions into Lombardy, both because the Venetians would never have agreed to this unless they themselves became lords of Lombardy, and because no others would have wished to take it from France to give it to the Venetians; and no one would have had the audacity to attack both of them. And if anyone were to say that Louis ceded Romagna to Alexander and the Kingdom of Naples to Spain in order to avoid a war, I would respond with the arguments given above: that is, one should never allow problems to develop in order to avoid a war, because one does not really avoid it, but merely postpones it to one's own disadvantage. And if anyone were to mention the promise which the King had made to the Pope, to undertake that enterprise in return for the annulment of his marriage and a cardinal's hat for the Archbishop of Rouen, I should respond by referring to what I shall say below concerning the promises made by princes and how they should be kept. King Louis, therefore, lost Lombardy because he did not follow any of those procedures followed by others who seized territories and wanted to hold onto them. And this is no miracle, but something commonplace, normal. I discussed this in Nantes with the Cardinal of Rouen* when Valentino (as Cesare Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander, was commonly known) occupied Romagna; for when the Cardinal of Rouen told me that the Italians had no understanding of war, I replied that the French had no understanding of political matters; if they had, they would not permit the Church to become so powerful. Experience has shown us that the power of the Church and of Spain in Italy has been brought about by France, and that they have brought about her ruin. From this we can deduce a general rule, which is seldom or never found faulty: that anyone who is the cause of another becoming powerful will himself be ruined; because that power is the result of either skill or force, and both these are regarded with suspicion by the one who has become powerful.