THE PRINCE
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Second Edition

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago and London
order? If we wanted to retreat from here, how would we have to do it? If they retreated, how would we have to follow them?” And he put before them, as he went along, all the chances that can occur to an army; he listened to their opinions, gave his own, supported it with reasons, so that because of these continued cogitations there could never arise, while he led the army, any accident for which he did not have the remedy.

But, as to the exercise of the mind, a prince should read histories and consider in them the actions of excellent men, should see how they conducted themselves in wars, should examine the causes of their victories and losses, so as to be able to avoid the latter and imitate the former. Above all he should do as some excellent man has done in the past who found someone to imitate who had been praised and glorified before him, whose exploits and actions he always kept beside himself, as they say Alexander the Great imitated Achilles; Caesar, Alexander; Scipio, Cyrus. And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, how much in chastity, affability, humanity, and liberality Scipio conformed to what had been written of Cyrus by Xenophon.

A wise prince should observe such modes, and never remain idle in peaceful times, but with his industry make capital of them in order to be able to profit from them in adversities, so that when fortune changes, it will find him ready to resist them.

5. The title of Xenophon’s book is actually Cyropaideia, “The Education of Cyrus.”
one merciful;¹ the one a breaker of faith, the other faithful; the one effeminate and pusillanimous, the other fierce and spirited; the one humane, the other proud; the one lascivious, the other chaste; the one honest, the other astute; the one hard, the other agreeable;² the one grave, the other light; the one religious, the other unbelieving, and the like. And I know that everyone will confess that it would be a very praiseworthy thing to find in a prince all of the above-mentioned qualities that are held good. But because he cannot have them, nor wholly³ observe them, since human conditions do not permit it, it is necessary for him to be so prudent as to know how to avoid the infamy of those vices that would take his state from him and to be on guard against those that do not, if that is possible; but if one cannot, one can let them go on with less hesitation. And furthermore one should not care about incurring the fame⁴ of those vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state; for if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be virtue, which if pursued would be one’s ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one’s security and well-being.

1. pietos has a connotation of “pious.”
2. lit.: easy.
3. Or honestly.
4. Some manuscripts have infamia, “infamy.”

**§XVI**

Of Liberality and Parsimony

Beginning, then, with the first of the above-mentioned qualities, I say that it would be good to be held liberal; nonetheless, liberality, when used so that you may be held liberal, hurts¹ you. For if it is used virtuously and as it should be used, it may not be recognized, and you will not escape the infamy of its contrary. And so, if one wants to maintain a name for liberality among men, it is necessary not to leave out any kind of lavish display, so that a prince who has done this will always consume all his resources in such deeds. In the end it will be necessary, if he wants to maintain a name for liberality, to burden the people extraordinarily, to be rigorous with taxes, and to do all those things that can be done to get money. This will begin to make him hated by his subjects, and little esteemed by anyone as he becomes poor; so having offended the many and rewarded the few with this liberality of his, he feels every least hardship and runs into risk at every slight danger. When he recognizes this, and wants to draw back from it, he immediately incurs the infamy of meanness.

Thus, since a prince cannot, without damage to himself, use the virtue of liberality so that it is recognized, he should not, if he is prudent, care about a name for meanness. For with time he will always be held more and more liberal when it is seen that with his parsimony his income is enough for him, that he can defend himself from whoever makes war on him, and that he can undertake campaigns without burdening the people. So he comes to use liberality with all those from whom he does not take, who are infinite, and meanness with all those to whom he does not give, who are few. In our times we have not seen great things done except by those who have been considered mean; the others have been eliminated. Pope Julius II, while he made use of a name for liberality to attain the papacy, did not think of maintaining it later, so as to be able to make war. The present king of France² has carried on many wars without imposing an extraordinary tax on his subjects, only because

1. lit.: offends.
2. Louis XII.
How Much Fortune Can Do in Human Affairs, and in What Mode It May Be Opposed

It is not unknown to me that many have held and hold the opinion that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God, that men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all; and on account of this they might judge that one need not sweat much over things but let oneself be governed by chance. This opinion has been believed more in our times because of the great variability of things which have been seen and are seen every day, beyond every human conjecture. When I have thought about this sometimes, I have been in some part inclined to their opinion. Nonetheless, so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern. And I liken her to one of these violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It happens similarly with fortune, which demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order\(^1\) to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her. And if you consider Italy, which is the seat of these variations and that which has given them motion, you will see\(^2\) a country without dams and without any dike. If it had been diked by suitable virtue, like Germany, Spain, and France, either this flood would not have brought the great variations that it has, or it would not have come here.

And I wish that this may be enough to have said about opposing fortune in general.\(^3\) But restricting myself more to particulars, I say that one sees a given prince be happy today and come to ruin tomorrow without having seen him change his nature or any quality. This I believe arises, first, from the causes that have been discussed at length in the preceding, that is, that the prince who leans entirely on his fortune comes to ruin as it varies. I believe, further, that he is happy who adapts his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unhappy whose procedure is in disaccord with the times. For one sees that in the things that lead men to the end that each has before him, that is, glories and riches, they proceed variously: one with caution,\(^4\) the other with impetuosity; one by violence, the other with art; one with patience, the other with its contrary—and with these different modes each can attain it. One also sees two cautious persons, one attaining his plan, the other not; and similarly two persons are equally happy with two different methods, one being cautious, the other impetuous. This arises from nothing other than from the quality of the times that they conform to or not in their procedure. From this follows what I said, that two persons working differently come out with the same effect; and of two persons working identically, one is led to his end, the

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1. lit.: ordered.
2. Both you’s in this sentence are the formal or plural you.
3. lit.: universal.
4. lit.: respect; respetto is translated usually as “caution” and “hesitation,” occasionally as “regard.”
other not. On this also depends the variability of the good: for if one governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his government is good, he comes out happy; but if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding. Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it. And so the cautious man, when it is time to come to impetuosity, does not know how to do it, hence comes to ruin: for if he would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change.

Pope Julius II proceeded impetuously in all his affairs, and he found the times and affairs so much in conformity with his mode of proceeding that he always achieved a happy end. Consider the first enterprise that he undertook in Bologna, while Messer Giovanni Bentivoglio was still living. The Venetians were not content with it; nor was the king of Spain; with France he was holding discussions on that enterprise; and nonetheless, with his ferocity and impetuosity, he personally put that expedition into motion. This move made Spain and the Venetians stand still in suspense, the latter out of fear and the other because of the desire he had to recover the whole kingdom of Naples. From the other side he pulled the king of France after him; because when that king saw him move, and since he desired to make Julius his friend in order to bring down the Venetians, he judged he could not deny him his troops without injuring him openly. Julius thus accomplished with his impetuous move what no other pontiff, with all human prudence, would ever have accomplished, because if he had waited to depart from Rome with firm conclusions and everything in order, as any other pontiff would have done, he would never have succeeded. For the king of France would have had a thousand excuses and the others would have raised in him a thousand fears. I wish to omit all his other actions, since all have been alike and all succeeded well. And the brevity of his life did not allow him to feel the contrary, because if times had come when he had needed to proceed with caution, his ruin would have followed: he would never have deviated from those modes to which nature inclined him.⁷

I conclude, thus, that when fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their modes, men are happy while they are in accord, and as they come into discord, unhappy. I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity.

⁷. See Discourses on Livy III 9.

§§ XXVI

Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians

Thus, having considered everything discussed above, and thinking to myself whether in Italy at present the times have been tending to the honor of a new prince, and whether