

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

The Discourses

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Book One

[THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROME'S CONSTITUTION]

[*The Preface*]

ALTHOUGH owing to the envy inherent in man's nature it has always been no less dangerous to discover new ways and methods than to set off in search of new seas and unknown lands because most men are much more ready to belittle than to praise another's actions, none the less, impelled by the natural desire I have always had to labour, regardless of anything, on that which I believe to be for the common benefit of all, I have decided to enter upon a new way; as yet untrod- den by anyone else. And, even if it entails a tiresome and difficult task, it may yet reward me in that there are those who will look kindly on the purpose of these my labours. And if my poor ability, my limited experience of current affairs, my feeble knowledge of antiquity, should render my efforts im- perfect and of little worth, they may none the less point the way for another of greater ability, capacity for analysis, and judgement, who will achieve my ambition; which, if it does not earn me praise, should not earn me reproaches.

When, therefore, I consider in what honour antiquity is held, and how – to cite but one instance – a bit of an old statue has fetched a high price that someone may have it by him to give honour to his house and that it may be possible for it to be copied by those who are keen on this art; and how the

latter then with great industry take pains to reproduce it in all their works; and when, on the other hand, I notice that what history has to say about the highly virtuous actions performed by ancient kingdoms and republics, by their kings, their generals, their citizens, their legislators, and by others who have gone to the trouble of serving their country, is rather admired than imitated; nay, is so shunned by everybody in each little thing they do, that of the virtue of bygone days there remains no trace, it cannot but fill me at once with astonishment and grief. The more so when I see that in the civic disputes which arise between citizens and in the diseases men get, they always have recourse to decisions laid down by the ancients and to the prescriptions they drew up. For the civil law is nothing but a collection of decisions, made by jurists of old, which the jurists of today have tabulated in orderly fashion for our instruction. Nor, again, is medicine anything but a record of experiments, performed by doctors of old, upon which the doctors of our day base their prescriptions. In spite of which in constituting republics, in maintaining states, in governing kingdoms, in forming an army or conducting a war, in dealing with subjects, in extending the empire, one finds neither prince nor republic who repairs to antiquity for examples.

This is due in my opinion not so much to the weak state to which the religion of today has brought the world, or to the evil wrought in many provinces and cities of Christendom by ambition conjoined with idleness, as to the lack of a proper appreciation of history, owing to people failing to realize the significance of what they read, and to their having no taste for the delicacies it comprises. Hence it comes about that the great bulk of those who read it take pleasure in hearing of the various incidents which are contained in it, but never think of imitating them, since they hold them to be not merely difficult but impossible of imitation, as if the heaven, the sun, the

elements and man had in their motion, their order, and their potency, become different from what they used to be.

Since I want to get men out of this wrong way of thinking, I have thought fit to write a commentary on all those books of Titus Livy which have not by the malignity of time had their continuity broken.¹ It will comprise what I have arrived at by comparing ancient with modern events, and think necessary for the better understanding of them, so that those who read what I have to say may the more easily draw those practical lessons which one should seek to obtain from the study of history. Though the enterprise is difficult, yet, with the help of those who have encouraged me to undertake the task, I think I can carry it out in such a way that there shall remain to another but a short road to traverse in order to reach the place assigned.

Book One

[DISCOURSES I-10]

[THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT]

I. *Concerning the Origin of Cities in General and of Rome in Particular*

THOSE who read of the origin of the city of Rome, of its legislators and of its constitution, will not be surprised that in this city such great virtue was maintained for so many centuries, and that later on there came into being the empire into which that republic developed.

Since this first discourse will deal with its origin, I would point out that all cities are built either by natives of the place in which they are built, or by people from elsewhere. The first case comes about when inhabitants, dispersed in many small communities, find that they cannot enjoy security since no one community of itself, owing to its position and to the smallness of its numbers, is strong enough to resist the onslaught of an invader, and, when the enemy arrives, there is no time for them to unite for their defence; or, if there be time, they have to abandon many of their strongholds, and thus at once fall as prey to their enemies. Hence, to escape these dangers, either of their own accord or at the suggestion of someone of greater authority among them, such communities undertake to live together in some place they have

chosen in order to live more conveniently and the more easily to defend themselves.

This was the case with Athens and Venice, among many others. Athens was built under the authority of Theseus for reasons such as these by inhabitants who were dispersed; Venice by numerous peoples who had sought refuge in certain islets at the top of the Adriatic Sea that they might escape the wars which daily arose in Italy after the decline of the Roman empire owing to the arrival of a new lot of barbarians. There, without any particular person or prince to give them a constitution, they began to live as a community under laws which seemed to them appropriate for their maintenance. And this happened because of the long repose the situation afforded them in that the sea at their end had no exit and the peoples who were ravaging Italy had no ships in which to infest them. This being so, a beginning, however small, sufficed to bring them to their present greatness.

The second case occurs when a city is built by men of a foreign race. They may either be free men, or men dependent on others, as are the colonies sent out either by a republic or a prince to relieve their towns of some of the population or for the defence of newly acquired territory which they desire to hold securely and without expense. The Romans built a number of such cities, and this throughout the whole of their empire. Others have been built by a prince, not that he may dwell there, but to enhance his reputation, as the city of Alexandria was built by Alexander. And since such cities are not at the outset free, it very seldom happens that they make great progress or that of their own doing they come to be reckoned among the capitals of kingdoms.

It was thus that Florence came to be built; for – whether it was built by the soldiers of Sulla, or was built by chance by inhabitants from the hills of Fiesole who, relying on the long peace which the world enjoyed under Octavian, came to

dwell in the plains above the Arno – it was built under the Roman empire, and could at the outset make no addition to its territory save such as was allowed by the courtesy of the emperor.

Free cities are those which are built by peoples who, either under a prince or of their own accord, are driven by pestilence or famine or war to abandon the land of their birth and to look for new habitations. These may be either cities they find in countries they have occupied and in which they go to dwell, as Moses did; or new cities which they build, as Aeneas did. In this case the virtue of the builder is discernible in the fortune of what was built, for the city is more or less remarkable according as he is more or less virtuous who is responsible for the start. This virtue shows itself in two ways: first in the choice of a site, and secondly in the drawing up of laws.

Since men work either of necessity or by choice, and since there is found to be greater virtue where choice has less to say to it, the question arises whether it would not be better to choose a barren place in which to build cities so that men would have to be industrious and less given to idleness, and so would be more united because, owing to the poor situation, there would be less occasion for discord; as happened in Ragusa and in many other cities built in such-like places.

Such a choice would undoubtedly be wiser and more advantageous were men content to earn their own living and not anxious to lord it over others. Since, however, security for man is impossible unless it be conjoined with power, it is necessary to avoid sterile places and for cities to be put in very fertile places where, when expansion has taken place owing to the fruitfulness of the land, it may be possible for them both to defend themselves against attack and to overcome any who stand in the way of the city's greatness. As to the idleness which such a situation may encourage, it must be provided for by laws imposing that need to work which the situation

does not impose. It is advisable here to follow the example of those wise folk who have dwelt in most beautiful and fertile lands, i.e. in such lands as tend to produce idleness and ineptitude for training in virtue of any kind, and who, in order to obviate the disasters which the idleness induced by the amenities of the land might cause, have imposed the need for training on those who were to become soldiers, and have made this training such that men there have become better soldiers than those in countries which were rough and sterile by nature.

A case in point is the kingdom of the Egyptians which, notwithstanding the amenities of the land, imposed the need to work so successfully by means of laws that it produced most excellent men, whose names, if they had not been lost in antiquity, would be even more celebrated than that of Alexander the Great, and than those of many others whose memory is still fresh. So, too, anyone who has reflected on the kingdom of the Sultan, on the discipline of the Mamelukes, and on that of their troops, before they were wiped out by Selim, the Great Turk, might have noted there the many exercises the troops underwent, and might have inferred from this how greatly they feared the idleness to which the beneficence of the country might have led if they had not obviated it by very strict laws.

I maintain, then, that it is more prudent to place a city in a fertile situation, provided its fertility is kept in due bounds by laws. When Alexander the Great was proposing to build a city that should redound to his credit, Deinocrates, the architect, came to him and suggested that he should build it on Mount Athos, for, besides being a strong place, it could be so fashioned as to give the city a human form, which would be a remarkable thing, a rare thing, and worthy of his greatness. And on what, Alexander asked, would the inhabitants live? Deinocrates replied that he had not thought of this. Whereupon

Alexander laughed, and, leaving the mountain alone, built Alexandria where inhabitants would be glad to live owing to the richness of the land and to the conveniences afforded by the sea and by the Nile.

For those, then, who, having examined the question how Rome came to be built, hold that Aeneas was its first founder, it will be a city built by foreigners, but for those who prefer Romulus, it will be a city built by natives of the place. But, whichever be the case, both will recognize that it began as a free city, dependent upon no one. They will also recognize, as we shall presently point out, under what strict discipline it was placed by the laws made by Romulus, Numa, and others, and that, in consequence, neither its fertile situation, the convenience afforded by the sea, its frequent victories, nor the greatness of its empire, were for many centuries able to corrupt it, but that these laws kept it so rich in virtue that there has never been any other city or any other republic so well adorned.

Wherefore since what was done by this city, as Titus Livy records it, was done sometimes in accordance with public enactments, sometimes on the initiative of private individuals, and sometimes within the city, sometimes abroad, I shall begin by discussing such of the events due to public decrees as I shall judge to be more worthy of comment, and with the events shall conjoin their consequences to which the discourses of this first book or first part will be restricted.

2. *How many Kinds of State^a there are and of what Kind was that of Rome*

I PROPOSE to dispense with a discussion of cities which from the outset have been subject to another power, and shall speak only of those which have from the outset been far removed from any kind of external servitude, but, instead,

have from the start been governed in accordance with their wishes, whether as republics or principalities. As such cities have had diverse origins, so too they have had diverse laws and institutions. For either at the outset, or before very long, to some of them laws have been given by some one person at some one time, as laws were given to the Spartans by Lycurgus; whereas others have acquired them by chance and at different times as occasion arose. This was the case in Rome.

Happy indeed should we call that state^a which produces a man so prudent that men can live securely under the laws which he prescribes without having to emend them. Sparta, for instance, observed its laws for more than eight hundred years without corrupting them and without any dangerous disturbance. Unhappy, on the other hand, in some degree is that city to be deemed which, not having chanced to meet with a prudent organizer, has to reorganize itself. And, of such, that is the more unhappy which is the more remote from order; and that is the more remote from order whose institutions have missed altogether the straight road which leads it to its perfect and true destiny. For it is almost impossible that states of this type should by any eventuality be set on the right road again; whereas those which, if their order is not perfect, have made a good beginning and are capable of improvement, may become perfect should something happen which provides the opportunity. It should, however, be noted that they will never introduce order without incurring danger, because few men ever welcome new laws setting up a new order in the state unless necessity makes it clear to them that there is need for such laws; and since such a necessity cannot arise

^a *quella republica*. [Walker renders this 'Commonwealth'. Plainly in the context *republica* means any kind of state with some civic spirit or sense of *res publica* (see above, p. 24), not specifically a republican one. But 'Commonwealth' (shades of Cromwell!) sounds even more republican than 'republic'. B.R.C.]

without danger, the state may easily be ruined before the new order has been brought to completion. The republic of Florence bears this out, for owing to what happened at Arezzo in '02 it was reconstituted, and owing to what happened at Prato in '12 its constitution was destroyed.

It being now my intention to discuss what were the institutions of the city of Rome and what events conduced to its perfection, I would remark that those who have written about states^a say that there are to be found in them one of three forms of government, called by them *Principality*, *Aristocracy* and *Democracy*,^b and that those who set up a government in any particular state^c must adopt one of them, as best suits their purpose.²

Others – and with better judgement many think – say that there are six types of government,^d of which three are very bad, and three are good in themselves but easily become corrupt, so that they too must be classed as pernicious. Those that are good are the three above mentioned. Those that are bad are the other three, which depend on them, and each of them is so like the one associated with it that it easily passes from one form to the other. For *Principality* easily becomes *Tyranny*. From *Aristocracy* the transition to *Oligarchy*^e is an easy one. *Democracy*^f is without difficulty converted into *Anarchy*.^g So that if anyone who is organizing a commonwealth sets up one of the three first forms of government, he sets up what will last but for a while, since there are no means whereby to prevent it passing into its contrary, on account of the likeness which in such a case virtue has to vice.

These variations of government among men are due to chance. For in the beginning of the world, when its inhabitants were few, they lived for a time scattered like the beasts. Then,

^arepubliche. ^buno de' tre stati, chiamati da loro Principato, Ottimati, e Popolare. ^ccittà. ^dsei ragioni governii. ^estato di pochi. ^fpopolare. ^glicenzioso.

with the multiplication of their offspring, they drew together and, in order the better to be able to defend themselves, began to look about for a man stronger and more courageous than the rest, made him their head, and obeyed him.

It was thus that men learned how to distinguish what is honest and good from what is pernicious and wicked, for the sight of someone injuring his benefactor evoked in them hatred and sympathy and they blamed the ungrateful and respected those who showed gratitude, well aware that the same injuries might have been done to themselves. Hence to prevent evil of this kind they took to making laws and to assigning punishments to those who contravened them. The notion of justice thus came into being.

In this way it came about that, when later on they had to choose a prince, they did not have recourse to the boldest as formerly, but to one who excelled in prudence and justice.

But when at a yet later stage they began to make the prince hereditary instead of electing him, his heirs soon began to degenerate as compared with their ancestors, and, forsaking virtuous deeds, considered that princes have nought else to do but to surpass other men in extravagance, lasciviousness, and every other form of licentiousness. With the result that the prince came to be hated, and, since he was hated, came to be afraid, and from fear soon passed to offensive action, which quickly brought about a tyranny.

From which, before long, was begotten the source of their downfall; for tyranny gave rise to conspiracies and plots against princes, organized not by timid and weak men, but by men conspicuous for their liberality, magnanimity, wealth and ability, for such men could not stand the dishonourable life the prince was leading. The masses,^a therefore, at the instigation of these powerful leaders,^b took up arms against the prince, and, when he had been liquidated, submitted to the

^ala moltitudine. ^bpotenti.

authority of those whom they looked upon as their liberators. Hence the latter, to whom the very term 'sole head' had become odious, formed themselves into a government. Moreover, in the beginning, mindful of what they had suffered under a tyranny, they ruled in accordance with the laws which they had made, subordinated their own convenience to the common advantage, and, both in private matters and public affairs, governed and preserved order with the utmost diligence.

But when the administration passed to their descendants who had no experience of the changeability of fortune, had not been through bad times, and instead of remaining content with the civic equality then prevailing, reverted to avarice, ambition and to seizing other men's womenfolk, they caused government by an aristocracy to become government by an oligarchy in which civic rights were entirely disregarded; so that in a short time there came to pass in their case the same thing as happened to the tyrant, for the masses, sick of their government, were ready to help anyone who had any sort of plan for attacking their rulers; and so there soon arose someone who with the aid of the masses liquidated them.

Then, since the memory of the prince and of the injuries inflicted by him was still fresh, and since, having got rid of government by the few, they had no desire to return to that of a prince, they turned to a democratic form of government, which they organized in such a way that no sort of authority was vested either in a few powerful men or in a prince.

And, since all forms of government are to some extent respected at the outset, this democratic form of government maintained itself for a while but not for long, especially when the generation that had organized it had passed away. For anarchy quickly supervened, in which no respect was shown either for the individual or for the official, and which was such that, as everyone did what he liked, all sorts of outrages were

constantly committed. The outcome was inevitable. Either at the suggestion of some good man or because this anarchy had to be got rid of somehow, principality was once again restored. And from this there was, stage by stage, a return to anarchy, by way of the transitions and for the reasons assigned.

This, then, is the cycle through which all commonwealths pass, whether they govern themselves or are governed. But rarely do they return to the same form of government, for there can scarce be a state of such vitality that it can undergo often such changes and yet remain in being. What usually happens is that, while in a state of commotion in which it lacks both counsel and strength, a state becomes subject to a neighbouring and better organized state. Were it not so, a commonwealth might go on for ever passing through these governmental transitions.

I maintain then, that all the forms of government mentioned above are far from satisfactory, the three good ones because their life is so short, the three bad ones because of their inherent malignity. Hence prudent legislators, aware of their defects, refrained from adopting as such any one of these forms, and chose instead one that shared in them all, since they thought such a government would be stronger and more stable, for if in one and the same state^a there was principality, aristocracy and democracy each would keep watch over the other.

Lycurgus is one of those who have earned no small measure of praise for constitutions of this kind. For in the laws which he gave to Sparta, he assigned to the kings, to the aristocracy, and to the populace each its own function, and thus introduced a form of government which lasted for more than eight hundred years to his very great credit and to the tranquillity of that city.

^a città.

It was not so in the case of Solon, who drew up laws for Athens, for he set up merely a democratic form of government, which was so short-lived that he saw before his death the birth of a tyranny under Pisistratus; and though, forty years later, Pisistratus' heirs were expelled, and Athens returned to liberty because it again adopted a democratic form of government in accordance with Solon's laws, it did not retain its liberty for more than a hundred years. For, in spite of the fact that many constitutions were made whereby to restrain the arrogance of the upper class^a and the licentiousness of the general public,^b for which Solon had made no provision, none the less Athens had a very short life as compared with that of Sparta because with democracy Solon had not blended either princely power or that of the aristocracy.

But let us come to Rome. In spite of the fact that Rome had no Lycurgus to give it at the outset such a constitution as would ensure to it a long life of freedom, yet, owing to friction between the plebs and the senate, so many things happened that chance effected what had not been provided by a law-giver. So that, if Rome did not get fortune's first gift, it got its second. For her early institutions, though defective, were not on wrong lines and so might pave the way to perfection. For Romulus and the rest of the kings made many good laws quite compatible with freedom; but, because their aim was to found a kingdom, not a republic, when the city became free, it lacked many institutions essential to the preservation of liberty, which had to be provided, since they had not been provided by the kings. So, when it came to pass that its kings lost their sovereignty, for reasons and in the manner described earlier in this discourse, those who had expelled them at once appointed two consuls to take the place of the king, so that what they expelled was the title of king, not the royal power. In the republic, then, at this stage there were the consuls and

^a *grandi*. ^b *universale*.

the senate, so that as yet it comprised but two of the aforesaid estates,^a namely, Principality and Aristocracy. It remained to find a place for Democracy. This came about when the Roman nobility became so overbearing for reasons which will be given later – that the populace rose against them, and they were constrained by the fear that they might lose all, to grant the populace a share in the government; the senate and the consuls retaining, however, sufficient authority for them to be able to maintain their position in the republic.

It was in this way that tribunes of the plebs came to be appointed, and their appointment did much to stabilize the form of government in this republic, for in its government all three estates now had a share. And so favoured was it by fortune that, though the transition from Monarchy to Aristocracy and thence to Democracy, took place by the very stages and for the very reasons laid down earlier in this discourse, none the less the granting of authority to the aristocracy did not abolish altogether the royal estate, nor was the authority of the aristocracy wholly removed when the populace was granted a share in it. On the contrary, the blending of these estates made a perfect commonwealth; and since it was friction between the plebs and the senate that brought this perfection about, in the next two chapters we shall show more fully how this came to be.

3. *What Kind of Events gave rise in Rome to the Creation of Tribunes of the Plebs, whereby that Republic was made more Perfect*

ALL writers on politics have pointed out, and throughout history there are plenty of examples which indicate, that in constituting and legislating for a commonwealth it must

^a *qualità* – here used in the sense of what is earlier called *potenza*, just as we say either 'three powers' or 'three estates'.

needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers.³ That evil dispositions often do not show themselves for a time is due to a hidden cause which those fail to perceive who have had no experience of the opposite; but in time – which is said to be the father of all truth – it reveals itself.

After the expulsion of the Tarquins there appeared to be in Rome the utmost harmony between the plebs and the senate. The nobles seemed to have set aside their pride, to have become imbued with the same spirit as the populace, and to be bearable by all, even by the meanest. In this neither their deception nor the cause of it was apparent so long as the Tarquins lived; for the nobility were afraid of them and feared that, if they treated the plebs badly, it would not be friendly towards them, but would make common cause with the Tarquins, so they treated the plebs with consideration. But, no sooner were the Tarquins dead and the fears of the nobility removed, than they began to vomit forth against the plebs the poison hid in their hearts and to oppress them in every way they could.

This bears out what has been said above, namely, that men never do good unless necessity drives them to it; but when they are too free to choose and can do just as they please, confusion and disorder become everywhere rampant. Hence it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and that laws make them good. There is no need of legislation so long as things work well without it, but, when such good customs break down, legislation forthwith becomes necessary. Hence when the regime of the Tarquins collapsed and the nobility were no longer kept in check by the fear of them, it became necessary to devise some new institution which should produce the same effect as the Tarquins had done in their time. Wherefore, after many disturbances, rumours, and

dangers of scandal had been occasioned by the squabbles between the plebs and the nobility, for the security of the former tribunes came to be appointed, and were invested with such prerogatives and standing that henceforth they could always mediate between the plebs and the senate and curb the arrogance of the nobility.

4. *That Discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both Free and Powerful*

I MUST not fail to discuss the tumults that broke out in Rome between the death of the Tarquins and the creation of the tribunes, nor yet to mention certain facts which militate against the view of those who allege that the republic of Rome was so tumultuous and so full of confusion that, had not good fortune and military virtue counterbalanced these defects, its condition would have been worse than that of any other republic. I by no means deny that fortune and military organization had a good deal to do with Rome's empire, but it seems to me that this view fails to take account of the fact that where military organization is good there must needs be good order, and that rarely does it happen that good fortune does not also accompany it.

There are also other points to be observed in connection with this city. To me those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and the plebs, seem to be cavilling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome's retaining her freedom, and that they pay more attention to the noise and clamour resulting from such commotions than to what resulted from them, i.e. to the good effects which they produced. Nor do they realize that in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them.

It is easy to see that this was the consequence in Rome; for from the days of the Tarquins to those of the Gracchi, which was more than three hundred years, tumults in Rome seldom led to banishment, and very seldom to executions. One cannot, therefore, regard such tumults as harmful, nor such a republic as divided, seeing that during so long a period it did not on account of its discords send into exile more than eight or ten citizens, put very few to death, and did not on many impose fines. Nor can a republic reasonably be stigmatized in any way as disordered in which there occur such striking examples of virtue, since good examples proceed from good education, good education from good laws, and good laws in this case from those very tumults which many so inconsiderately condemn; for anyone who studies carefully their result, will not find that they occasioned any banishment or act of violence inimical to the common good, but that they led to laws and institutions whereby the liberties of the public benefited.

But, someone may object, the means used were extraordinary and almost barbaric. Look how people used to assemble and clamour against the senate, and how the senate decried the people, how men ran helter-skelter about the streets, how the shops were closed and how the plebs *en masse* would troop out of Rome – events which terrify, to say the least, anyone who read about them. To which I answer that every city should provide ways and means whereby the ambitions of the populace may find an outlet, especially a city which proposes to avail itself of the populace in important undertakings. The city of Rome was one of those which did provide such ways and means in that, when the populace wanted a law passed, it either behaved in some such way as we have described or it refused to enlist for the wars, so that, to placate it, it had to some extent to be satisfied.

The demands of a free populace, too, are very seldom

harmful to liberty, for they are due either to the populace being oppressed or to the suspicion that it is going to be oppressed, and, should these impressions be false, a remedy is provided in the public platform on which some man of standing can get up, appeal to the crowd, and show that it is mistaken. And though, as Tully remarks, the populace may be ignorant, it is capable of grasping the truth and readily yields when a man, worthy of confidence, lays the truth before it.

Critics, therefore, should be more sparing in finding fault with the government of Rome, and should reflect that the excellent results which this republic obtained could have been brought about only by excellent causes. Hence if tumults led to the creation of the tribunes, tumults deserve the highest praise, since, besides giving the populace a share in the administration, they served as the guardian of Roman liberties, as we shall show in the next chapter.

5. Whether the Safeguarding of Liberty can be more safely entrusted to the Populace or to the Upper Class; and which has the Stronger Reason for creating Disturbances, the 'Have-nots' or the 'Haves'^a

THOSE who have displayed prudence in constituting a republic have looked upon the safeguarding of liberty as one of the most essential things for which they had to provide, and according to the efficiency with which this has been done liberty has been enjoyed for a longer or a shorter time. And, since in every republic there is an upper and a lower class,^b it may be asked into whose hands it is best to place the guardianship of liberty. By the Lacedaemonians, and in our day by

^a *chi vuole acquistare o chi vuole mantenere* – those who want to acquire or those who want to keep, i.e. what we commonly call the have-nots and the haves. ^b *uomini grandi e popolari*.

Venice, it was entrusted to the nobles, but by the Romans it was entrusted to the plebs.

It is necessary, therefore, to inquire which of these republics made the better choice. If we appeal to reason arguments may be adduced in support of either thesis; but, if we ask what the result was, the answer will favour the nobility, for the freedom of Sparta and of Venice lasted longer than did that of Rome.

Let us deal first with the appeal to reason. It may be urged in support of the Roman view that the guardianship of anything should be placed in the hands of those who are less desirous of appropriating it to their own use. And unquestionably if we ask what it is the nobility are after and what it is the common people are after, it will be seen that in the former there is a great desire to dominate and in the latter merely the desire not to be dominated. Consequently the latter will be more keen on liberty since their hope of usurping dominion over others will be less than in the case of the upper class. So that if the populace be made the guardians of liberty, it is reasonable to suppose that they will take more care of it, and that, since it is impossible for them to usurp power, they will not permit others to do so.

On the other hand, the defenders of the Spartan and Venetian systems say that to place the guardianship in the hands of the powerful has two good results. First, it satisfies their ambition more, since with this stick in their hands, they play a more important part in the republic, and so should be more contented. Secondly, it prevents the restless minds of the plebs from acquiring a sense of power, which is the cause of endless squabbles and trouble in a republic, and is enough to drive the nobility to desperate measures which in course of time have disastrous results. They cite as an instance Rome itself, where, when the plebs through their tribunes got this power into their hands, they were not content with one plebeian consul, but wanted to have both. After which they demanded the

ensorship, the praetorship, and all the other great offices in the city. Nor did this satisfy them, but, impelled by the same mad desire, they began later on to worship any men they saw were strong enough to get the better of the nobility. Whence arose the power of Marius and Rome's undoing. It must be confessed, then, if due weight be given to both sides, that it still remains doubtful which to select as the guardians of liberty, for it is impossible to tell which of the two dispositions we find in men is more harmful in a republic, that which seeks to maintain an established position or that which has none but seeks to acquire it.

All things considered, however, and due distinctions being made, we shall arrive in the end at this conclusion. Either you have in mind a republic that looks to founding an empire, as Rome did; or one that is content to maintain the *status quo*. In the first case it is necessary to do in all things as Rome did. In the second case it is possible to imitate Venice and Sparta, as will be explained in the next chapter.

Turning now to the question as to which are more harmful in a republic, the 'have-nots' who wish to have or the 'haves' who are afraid of losing what they have, I would point out that when Marcus Menenius was appointed dictator and Marcus Fulvius master of horse, both of them plebeians, in order to investigate certain conspiracies formed in Capua against Rome, the people empowered them to inquire also about those in Rome who, moved by ambition, had sought to obtain the consulship and other posts in the city by other than the accepted methods. To the nobility it looked as if the authority thus vested in the dictator was a hit at them, so they spread it about in Rome that it was not the nobles who had ambitioned these positions and used out-of-the-way means to get them, but commoners who, having neither blood nor virtue on which to rely, sought to obtain these posts by round-about methods, and in particular they accused the dictator of

this. So much weight was attached to this accusation that Menenius, having made a speech in which he complained about the calumnies spread by the nobles, resigned the dictatorship, and submitted his actions to the judgement of the people. He defended his own case and was acquitted.

At the trial there arose considerable discussion as to whether the 'haves' or the 'have-nots' were the more ambitious, for the appetites of both might easily become the cause of no small disturbance. Actually, however, such disturbances are more often caused by the 'haves', since the fear of losing what they have arouses in them the same inclination we find in those who want to get more, for men are inclined to think that they cannot hold securely what they possess unless they get more at others' expense. Furthermore, those who have great possessions can bring about changes with greater effect and greater speed. And yet again their corrupt and grasping deportment arouses in the minds of the 'have-nots' the desire to have, either to revenge themselves by despoiling them, or that they may again share in those riches and honours in regard to which they deem themselves to have been badly used by the other party.

6. *Whether in Rome such a Form of Government could have been set up as would have removed the Hostility between the Populace and the Senate*

WE have just been discussing the effects produced by the controversies between the populace and the senate. Now, since these controversies went on until the time of the Gracchi⁴ when they became the causes which led to the destruction of liberty, it may occur to some to ask whether Rome could have done the great things she did without the existence of such animosities. Hence it seems to me worth while to inquire whether it would have been possible to set

up in Rome a form of government which would have prevented these controversies. In order to discuss this question it is necessary to consider those republics which have been free from such animosities and tumults and yet have enjoyed a long spell of liberty, to look at their governments, and to ask whether they could have been introduced into Rome.

Among ancient states Sparta is a case in point, and among modern states Venice, as I have already pointed out. Sparta set up a king and a small senate to govern it. Venice did not distinguish by different names those who took part in its government, but all who were eligible for administrative posts were classed under one head and called gentry.^a This was due to chance rather than to the prudence of its legislators; for many people having retired to those sandbanks on which the city now stands and taken up their abode there for the reasons already assigned, when their numbers grew to such an extent that it became necessary for them to make laws if they were to live together, they devised a form of government. They had frequently met together to discuss the city's affairs, so, when it seemed to them that the population was sufficient to form a body politic,^b they decided that all newcomers who meant to reside there, should not take part in the government. Then, when in course of time they found that there were quite a number of inhabitants in the place who were disbarred from government, with an eye to the reputation of those who governed they called them gentlesfolk and the rest commoners.

Such a form of government could arise and be maintained without tumult because, when it came into being, whoever then dwelt in Venice was admitted to the government, so that no one could complain. Nor had those who came to dwell there later on and found the form of government firmly established, either cause or opportunity to make a commotion.

^a *Gentiluomini.* ^b *vivere politico.*

They had no cause because they had been deprived of nothing. They had no opportunity because the government had the whip-hand and did not employ them in matters which would enable them to acquire authority. Besides, there were not many who came later to dwell in Venice, nor were they so numerous as to upset the balance between rulers and ruled; for the number of gentlefolk^s was either equal to, or greater than, that of the newcomers. These, then, were the causes which enabled Venice to set up this form of government and to maintain it without disruption.

Sparta, as I have said, was governed by a king and by a small senate. It was able to maintain itself in this way for a long time, because in Sparta there were few inhabitants and access to outsiders desirous of coming to dwell there was forbidden. Moreover, it had adopted the laws of Lycurgus and shared in his repute, and, as these laws were observed, they removed all occasion for tumult, so that the Spartans were able to live united for a long time. The reason was that the laws of Lycurgus prescribed equality of property and insisted less on equality of rank. Poverty was shared by all alike, and the plebeians had less ambition, since offices in the city were open but to few citizens and from them the plebs were kept out; nor did it desire to have them since the nobles never ill-treated the plebs. This was due to the position assigned to the Spartan kings, for, since in this principality they were surrounded by nobles, the best way of maintaining their position was to protect the plebs from injustice. It thus came about that the plebs neither feared authority nor desired to have it, and, since they neither feared it nor desired it, there was no chance of rivalry between them and the nobility, nor any ground for disturbances, and they could live united for a long time. It was, however, mainly two things which brought this union about: (i) the smallness of Sparta's population, which made it possible for a few to rule, and (ii) the exclusion of

foreigners from the state, which gave it no chance either to become corrupt or to become so unwieldy that it could no longer be managed by the few who governed it.

All things considered, therefore, it is clear that it was necessary for Rome's legislators to do one of two things if Rome was to remain tranquil like the aforesaid states: either to emulate the Venetians and not employ its plebs in wars, or, like the Spartans, not to admit foreigners. Rome did both these things, and, by doing so, gave to its plebs alike strength, increase and endless opportunities for commotion. On the other hand, had the government of Rome been such as to bring greater tranquillity, there would have ensued this inconvenience, that it would have been weaker, owing to its having cut off the source of supply which enabled it to acquire the greatness at which it arrived, so that, in seeking to remove the causes of tumults, Rome would have removed also the causes of expansion.

So in all human affairs one notices, if one examines them closely, that it is impossible to remove one inconvenience without another emerging. If, then, you want to have a large population and to provide it with arms so as to establish a great empire, you will have made your population such that you cannot now handle it as you please. While, if you keep it either small or unarmed so as to be able to manage it, and then acquire dominions, either you will lose your hold on it or it will become so debased that you will be at the mercy of anyone who attacks you. Hence in all discussions one should consider which alternative involves fewer inconveniences and should adopt this as the better course; for one never finds any issue that is clear cut and not open to question. Rome might indeed have emulated Sparta, have appointed a prince for life, and have made its senate small; but it would not in that case have been able to avoid increasing its population with a view to establishing a great empire; nor would the appointment of

a king for life and of a small number of senators have been of much help in the matter of unity.

Should, then, anyone be about to set up a republic, he should first inquire whether it is to expand, as Rome did, both in dominion and in power, or is to be confined to narrow limits. In the first case it is essential to constitute it as Rome was constituted and to expect commotions and disputes of all kinds which must be dealt with as best they can, because without a large population, and this well armed, such a republic will never be able to grow, or to hold its own should it grow. In the second case it might be constituted as Sparta and Venice were, but, since expansion is poison to republics of this type, it should use every endeavour to prevent it from expanding, for expansion, when based on a weak republic, simply means ruin. This happened both in Sparta's case and in that of Venice. For of these republics the first, after having subjugated almost the whole of Greece, revealed, on an occasion of slight importance in itself, how weak its foundation was, since, when Thebes revolted at the instigation of Pelopidas and other cities followed suit, this republic entirely collapsed. In like manner Venice, having occupied a large part of Italy, most of it not by dint of arms, but of money and astute diplomacy, when its strength was put to the test, lost everything in a single battle.

I am firmly convinced, therefore, that to set up a republic which is to last a long time, the way to set about it is to constitute it as Sparta and Venice were constituted; to place it in a strong position, and so to fortify it that no one will dream of taking it by a sudden assault; and, on the other hand, not to make it so large as to appear formidable to its neighbours. It should in this way be able to enjoy its form of government for a long time. For war is made on a commonwealth for two reasons: (i) to subjugate it, and (ii) for fear of being subjugated by it. Both these reasons are almost entirely re-

moved by the aforesaid precautions; for, if it be difficult to take by assault owing to its being well organized for defence, as I am presupposing, rarely or never will it occur to anyone to seize it. And, if it be content with its own territory, and it becomes clear by experience that it has no ambitions, it will never occur that someone may make war through fear for himself, especially if by its constitution or by its laws expansion is prohibited. Nor have I the least doubt that, if this balance could be maintained, there would be genuine political life and real tranquillity in such a city.

Since, however, all human affairs are ever in a state of flux and cannot stand still, either there will be improvement or decline, and necessity will lead you to do many things which reason does not recommend. Hence if a commonwealth be constituted with a view to its maintaining the *status quo*, but not with a view to expansion; and by necessity it be led to expand, its basic principles will be subverted and it will soon be faced with ruin. So, too, should heaven, on the other hand, be so kind to it that it has no need to go to war, it will then come about that idleness will either render it effeminate or give rise to factions; and these two things, either in conjunction or separately, will bring about its downfall.

Wherefore, since it is impossible, so I hold, to adjust the balance so nicely as to keep things exactly to this middle course, one ought, in constituting a republic, to consider the possibility of its playing a more honourable role, and so to constitute it that, should necessity actually force it to expand, it may be able to retain possession of what it has acquired. Coming back, then, to the first point we raised, I am convinced that the Roman type of constitution should be adopted, not that of any other republic, for to find a middle way between the two extremes I do not think possible. Squabbles between the populace and the senate should, therefore, be looked upon as an inconvenience which it is necessary to put

up with in order to arrive at the greatness of Rome. For, besides the reasons already adduced to show that the authority of the tribunes was essential to the preservation of liberty, it is easy to see what benefit a republic derives when there is an authority that can bring charges in court, which was among the powers vested in the tribunes, as will be shown in the following chapter.

7. *How necessary Public Indictments are for the Maintenance of Liberty in a Republic*

No authority more useful and necessary can be granted to those appointed to look after the liberties of a state^a than that of being able to indict before the people or some magistrate or court such citizens as have committed any offence prejudicial to the freedom of the state.^b Such an institution has two consequences most useful in a republic. First, for fear of being prosecuted, its citizens attempt nothing prejudicial to the state, and, if they do attempt anything, are suppressed forthwith without respect to persons. Secondly, an outlet is provided for that all feeling which is apt to grow up in cities against some particular citizen, however it comes about; and, when for such ill feeling there is no normal outlet, recourse is had to abnormal methods likely to bring disaster on the republic as a whole. Hence nothing does so much to stabilize and strengthen a republic as some institution whereby the changeful humours which agitate it are afforded a proper outlet by way of the laws.

This can be shown by numerous examples, and especially by one that Titus Livy adduces, namely, that of Coriolanus. Livy tells us that, when the nobility were annoyed with the plebs because it seemed to them that the plebs had too much authority owing to the appointment of tribunes to protect

^a città. ^b *allo stato libero.*

them, and when, besides this, there was a great scarcity of provisions in Rome and the senate had to send to Sicily for corn, Coriolanus, who was hostile to the popular faction, suggested that the time had come to punish the plebs and to deprive them of the authority they had assumed to the prejudice of the nobility. Hence he advised that they should be kept hungry and that the corn should not be distributed among them. When this came to the ears of the populace, indignation against Coriolanus grew so intense that, as he was leaving the senate, he would have been killed in the tumult if the tribunes had not cited him to appear in his own defence. One notes in this incident what has been said above, namely, how useful and necessary it is for republics to provide a legal outlet for the anger which the general public has conceived against a particular citizen, because when no such normal means are available, recourse is had to abnormal means, which unquestionably have a worse effect than does the normal method.

The reason is that, though wrong may be done when a citizen is punished in the normal way, scarce any disorder, or none at all, is brought about in the republic; for in carrying out the sentence no appeal is made either to private or to foreign forces, and it is these that entail the downfall of civic liberties. On the contrary, such force as is employed, is employed by public authority which functions within specified limits, and does not, overstepping them, go on to do things which ruin the republic.

There is no need to corroborate this view by citing further examples from olden times in addition to that of Coriolanus. In his regard, however, all should reflect on the evils that might have ensued in the Roman republic had he been tumultuously put to death, for this would have given rise to private feuding, which would have aroused fear; and fear would have led to defensive action; this to the procuring of partisans; partisans would have meant the formation of

Florence. And, as in Rome such provision did much good, the lack of it in Florence did much harm. Anyone who reads the history of that city will notice how at all times calumnies have been spread against such of its citizens as were employed in important public affairs. Of one they said that he had embezzled the public funds; of another that he had failed in some undertaking because he had been bribed; of yet another that through ambition he had caused such and such an inconvenience. It thus came about that hatred arose on all sides; whence came divisions; from divisions factions, and from factions ruin. Whereas, if in Florence provision had been made for the accusing of citizens and for the punishment of calumniators, there would not have ensued the innumerable scandals that did ensue. For citizens, whether condemned or acquitted, would not have been able to harm the city, and there would have been fewer people indicted than there were calumniated, since, as I have said, it is not possible to bring an indictment against anyone as it is to calumniate anyone.

Calumnies, too, are among the various things of which citizens have availed themselves in order to acquire greatness, and are very effective when employed against powerful citizens who stand in the way of one's plans, because by playing up to the populace and confirming the poor view it takes of such men, one can make it one's friend. Of this it would be possible to adduce numerous examples, but I propose to confine myself to just one. The Florentine army was encamped about Lucca, under the command of Messer Giovanni Guicciardini, its commissary. Owing either to mismanagement or to misfortune, the taking of that city did not come about. Anyhow, whichever was the case, Messer Giovanni took the blame for it, since it was said that he had been suborned by the Lucchese. This calumny, fostered by his enemies, almost drove Messer Giovanni to utter despair. For, although, to justify himself, he offered to place himself in the

hands of the 'Captain',⁷ he none the less was unable ever to justify himself, since in that republic there were no means of doing so. This gave rise to considerable indignation alike among Messer Giovanni's friends, who comprised most people of standing, and among those who desired to introduce innovations in Florence. The affair, for this reason and others like it, grew to such dimensions that it led to the downfall of that republic.

Manlius Capitolinus, then, was a calumniator, not an accuser; and the Romans have shown us in his case precisely how calumniators should be punished. They should be made to bring a formal charge, and, when the charge is borne out by the facts, should be rewarded or at any rate not punished; but, when it is not borne out by the facts, they should be punished, as Manlius was.

9. That it is necessary to be the Sole Authority if one would constitute a Republic afresh or would reform it thoroughly regardless of its Ancient Institutions

To some it will appear strange that I have got so far in my discussion of Roman history without having made any mention of the founders of that republic or of either its religious or its military institutions. Hence, that I may not keep the minds of those who are anxious to hear about such things any longer in suspense, let me say that many perchance will think it a bad precedent that the founder of a civic state, such as Romulus, should first have killed his brother, and then have acquiesced in the death of Titus Tatius, the Sabine, whom he had chosen as his colleague in the kingdom. They will urge that, if such actions be justifiable, ambitious citizens who are eager to govern, will follow the example of their prince and use violence against those who are opposed to *their* authority. A view that will hold good provided we leave out

of consideration the end which Romulus had in committing these murders.

One should take it as a general rule that rarely, if ever, does it happen that a state, whether it be a republic or a kingdom, is either well-ordered at the outset or radically transformed *vis-à-vis* its old institutions unless this be done by one person. It is likewise essential that there should be but one person upon whose mind and method depends any similar process of organization. Wherefore the prudent organizer of a state whose intention it is to govern not in his own interests but for the common good, and not in the interest of his successors but for the sake of that fatherland which is common to all, should contrive to be alone in his authority. Nor will any reasonable man blame him for taking any action, however extraordinary, which may be of service in the organizing of a kingdom or the constituting of a republic. It is a sound maxim that reprehensible actions may be justified by their effects, and that when the effect is good, as it was in the case of Romulus, it always justifies the action. For it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy.

The organizer of a state ought further to have sufficient prudence and virtue not to bequeath the authority he has assumed to any other person, for, seeing that men are more prone to evil than to good, his successor might well make ambitious use of that which he had used virtuously. Furthermore, though but one person suffices for the purpose of organization, what he has organized will not last long if it continues to rest on the shoulders of one man, but may well last if many remain in charge and many look to its maintenance. Because, though the many are incompetent to draw up a constitution since diversity of opinion will prevent them from discovering how best to do it, yet when they realize it has been done, they will not agree to abandon it.

That Romulus was a man of this character, that for the death of his brother and of his colleague he deserves to be excused, and that what he did was done for the common good and not to satisfy his personal ambition, is shown by his having at once instituted a senate with which he consulted and with whose views his decisions were in accord. Also, a careful consideration of the authority which Romulus reserved to himself will show that all he reserved to himself was the command of the army in time of war and the convoking of the senate. It is clear, too, that when the Tarquins were expelled and Rome became free, none of its ancient institutions were changed, save that in lieu of a permanent king there were appointed each year two consuls. This shows that the original institutions of this city as a whole were more in conformity with a political and self-governing state than with absolutism or tyranny.

I might adduce in support of what I have just said numberless examples, for example Moses, Lycurgus, Solon and other founders of kingdoms and republics who assumed authority that they might formulate laws to the common good; but this I propose to omit since it is well known. I shall adduce but one further example, not so celebrated but worth considering by those who are contemplating the drawing up of good laws. It is this. Agis, King of Sparta, was considering how to confine the activities of the Spartans to the limits originally set for them by the laws of Lycurgus, because it seemed to him that it was owing to their having deviated from them in part that this city had lost a good deal of its ancient virtue, and, in consequence, a good deal of its power and of its empire. He was, however, while his project was still in the initial stage, killed by the Spartan ephors, who took him to be a man who was out to set up a tyranny. But Cleomenes, his successor in that kingdom, having learned from some records and writings of Agis which he had discovered, what was the latter's true mind

and intention, determined to pursue the same plan. He realized, however, that he could not do this for the good of his country unless he became the sole authority there, and, since it seemed to him impossible owing to man's ambition to help the many against the will of the few, he took a suitable opportunity and had all the ephors killed and anybody else who might obstruct him. He then renewed in their entirety the laws of Lycurgus. By so doing he gave fresh life to Sparta, and his reputation might thereby have become as great as that of Lycurgus if it had not been for the power of the Macedonians and the weakness of other Greek republics. For, after Sparta had thus been reorganized, it was attacked by the Macedonians, and, since its forces proved to be inferior and it could get no outside help, it was defeated, with the result that Cleomenes' plans, however just and praiseworthy, were never brought to completion.

All things considered, therefore, I conclude that it is necessary to be the sole authority if one is to organize a state, and that Romulus' action in regard to the death of Remus and Titus Tatius is excusable, not blameworthy.

10. *Those who set up a Tyranny are no less Blameworthy than are the Founders of a Republic or a Kingdom Praiseworthy*⁸

OF all men that are praised, those are praised most who have played the chief part in founding a religion. Next come those who have founded either republics or kingdoms. After them in the order of celebratees are ranked army commanders who have added to the extent of their own dominions or to that of their country's. With whom may be conjoined men of letters of many different kinds who are each celebrated according to their status. Some modicum of praise is also ascribed to any man who excels in some art and in the

practice of it, and of these the number is legion. On the other hand, those are held to be infamous and detestable who extirpate religion, subvert kingdoms and republics, make war on virtue, on letters, and on any art that brings advantage and honour to the human race, i.e. the profane, the violent, the ignorant, the worthless, the idle, the coward. Nor will there ever be anyone, be he foolish or wise, wicked or good, who, if called upon to choose between these two classes of men, will not praise the one that calls for praise and blame the one that calls for blame.

And yet, notwithstanding this, almost all men, deceived by the false semblance of good and the false semblance of renown, allow themselves either wilfully or ignorantly to slip into the ranks of those who deserve blame rather than praise; and, when they might have founded a republic or a kingdom to their immortal honour, turn their thoughts to tyranny, and fail to see what fame, what glory, security, tranquillity, conjoined with peace of mind, they are missing by adopting this course, and what infamy, scorn, abhorrence, danger and disquiet they are incurring.

Nor is it possible for anybody, whether he be but a private citizen living in some republic, or has been fortunate enough or virtuous enough to have become a prince, to read history and to make use of the records of ancient deeds, without preferring, if he be a private citizen, to conduct himself in his fatherland rather as Scipio did than as Caesar did, or, if he be a prince, as did Agesilaus, Timoleon and Dion, rather than as did Nabis, Phalaris and Dionysius, for he could not but see how strongly the latter are dismissed with scorn, and how highly the former are praised. He would also notice that Timoleon and the like had no less authority in their respective countries than had Dionysius or Phalaris in theirs, and would observe that they enjoyed far greater security.

Nor should anyone be deceived by Caesar's renown when

throughout the city. He will find the sea covered with exiles and the rocks stained with blood. In Rome he will see countless atrocities perpetrated; rank, riches, the honours men have won, and, above all, virtue, looked upon as a capital crime. He will find calumniators rewarded, servants suborned to turn against their masters, freed men to turn against their patrons, and those who lack enemies attacked by their friends. He will thus happily learn how much Rome, Italy, and the world owed to Caesar.

There can be no question but that every human being will be afraid to imitate the bad times, and will be imbued with an ardent desire to emulate the good. And, should a good prince seek worldly renown, he should most certainly covet possession of a city that has become corrupt, not, with Caesar, to complete its spoliation, but, with Romulus, to reform it. Nor in very truth can the heavens afford men a better opportunity of acquiring renown; nor can men desire anything better than this. And if in order to reform a city one were obliged to give up the principate, someone who did not reform it in order not to fall from that rank would have some excuse. There is, however, no excuse if one can both keep the principate and reform the city.

In conclusion, then, let those to whom the heavens grant such opportunities reflect that two courses are open to them: either so to behave that in life they rest secure and in death become renowned, or so to behave that in life they are in continual straits, and in death leave behind an imperishable record of their infamy.

Book One

[DISCOURSES II-15]

[RELIGION]

II. *Concerning the Religion of the Romans*

THOUGH the first person to give Rome a constitution was Romulus, to whom, as a daughter, it owed its birth and its education, yet, since heaven did not deem the institutions of Romulus adequate for so great an empire, it inspired the Roman senate to choose Numa Pompilius as Romulus's successor, so that the things which he had left undone, might be instituted by Numa. Numa, finding the people ferocious and desiring to reduce them to civic obedience by means of the arts of peace, turned to religion as the instrument necessary above all others for the maintenance of a civilized state, and so constituted it that there was never for so many centuries so great a fear of God as there was in this republic.

It was religion that facilitated whatever enterprise the senate and the great men of Rome designed to undertake. Whoever runs through the vast number of exploits performed by the people of Rome as a whole, or by many of the Romans individually, will see that its citizens were more afraid of breaking an oath than of breaking the law, since they held in higher esteem the power of God than the power of man. This is clearly seen in the case of Scipio and of Manlius Torquatus. For, after the defeat which Hannibal had inflicted on the

Romans at Cannae, many of the citizens got together and, despairing of their fatherland, decided to abandon Italy and to transfer themselves to Sicily. When Scipio heard of this, he sought them out, and, sword in hand, forced them to swear that they would not abandon their country. Again, Lucius Manlius, the father of Titus Manlius, afterwards called Torquatus, had been indicted by Marcus Pomponius, the plebeian tribune. Before the case came up for trial, Titus went to Marcus, threatened to kill him if he did not swear to withdraw the charge against his father, and forced him to take an oath to this effect. Having taken the oath out of fear, Marcus withdrew the charge. Thus were those citizens whom neither love for their country nor the laws of their country sufficed to keep in Italy, kept there by an oath which they had been forced to take; and thus did a tribune set aside the hatred which he had for the father, and the injustice which the son had done him, together with his honour, for the sake of the oath he had taken. All of which was due to nothing else but the religion which Numa had introduced into that city.

It will also be seen by those who pay attention to Roman history, how much religion helped in the control of armies, in encouraging the plebs, in producing good men, and in shaming the bad. So that if it were a question of the ruler to whom Rome was more indebted, Romulus or Numa, Numa, I think, should easily obtain the first place. For, where there is religion, it is easy to teach men to use arms, but where there are arms, but no religion, it is with difficulty that it can be introduced. Thus, one sees that in establishing the senate and introducing other civic and military institutions, Romulus did not find it necessary to appeal to divine authority; but to Numa it was so necessary that he pretended to have private conferences with a nymph who advised him about the advice he should give to the people. This was because he wanted to introduce new institutions to which the city was unaccustomed, and doubted whether his own authority would suffice.

Nor in fact was there ever a legislator who, in introducing extraordinary laws to a people, did not have recourse to God, for otherwise they would not have been accepted, since many benefits of which a prudent man is aware, are not so evident to reason that he can convince others of them. Hence wise men, in order to escape this difficulty, have recourse to God. So Lycurgus did; so did Solon, and so have many others done who have had the same end in view. Marvelling, therefore, at Numa's goodness and prudence, the Roman people accepted all his decisions. True, the times were so impregnated with a religious spirit and the men with whom he had to deal so stupid that they contributed very much to facilitate his designs and made it easy for him to impress on them any new form. Doubtless, too, anyone seeking to establish a republic at the present time would find it easier to do so among uncultured men of the mountains than among dwellers in cities where civilization is corrupt; just as a sculptor will more easily carve a beautiful statue from rough marble than from marble already spoiled by a bungling workman.

All things considered, therefore, I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa was among the primary causes of Rome's success, for this entailed good institutions; good institutions led to good fortune; and from good fortune arose the happy results of undertakings. And, as the observance of divine worship is the cause of greatness in republics, so the neglect of it is the cause of their ruin. Because, where the fear of God is wanting, it comes about either that a kingdom is ruined, or that it is kept going by the fear of a prince, which makes up for the lack of religion. And because princes are short-lived, it may well happen that when a kingdom loses its prince, it loses also the virtue of its prince. Hence kingdoms which depend on the virtue of one man do not last long, because they lose their virtue when his life is spent, and it seldom happens that it is revived by his successor; for, as Dante has wisely remarked:

Rarely to the branches
Does human worth ascend; for 'tis the will
Of its donor that men may recognize it as his gift.¹⁰

The security of a republic or of a kingdom, therefore, does not depend upon its ruler governing it prudently during his lifetime, but upon his so ordering it that, after his death, it may maintain itself in being. And, though it is easier to persuade rude men^a to adopt a new institution or a new standpoint, it does not follow that it is impossible to persuade civilized men to do so, i.e. those who do not look on themselves as rude men. It did not seem to the people of Florence that they were either ignorant or rude, yet they were persuaded by Friar Girolamo Savonarola that he had converse with God. I do not propose to decide whether it was so or not, because of so great a man one ought to speak with reverence; but I do say that vast numbers believed it was so, without having seen him do anything out of the common whereby to make them believe; for his life, his teaching and the topic on which he preached, were sufficient to make them trust him. Let no one despair, then, of being able to effect that which has been effected by others; for, as we have said in our preface, men are born and live and die in an order which remains ever the same.

12. *How Important it is to take Account of Religion,
and how Italy has been ruined for lack of it,
thanks to the Roman Church*

THOSE princes and those republics which desire to remain free from corruption, should above all else maintain incorrupt the ceremonies of their religion and should hold them always in veneration; for there can be no surer indication of the decline of a country than to see divine worship neglected.

^auomini rozzi.

This is easy to understand provided one knows on what basis the religion of a man's homeland is founded, for every religion has the basis of its life rooted in some one of its main institutions. Thus religious life among the gentiles was based on the responses given by oracles and upon a body of soothsayers and diviners. All the rest of its ceremonies, sacrifices and rites depended on these, for it was easy to believe that the god who can predict your future, be it good or evil, could also bring it about. Hence there came to be temples in which the gods were venerated by sacrifices, supplications and ceremonies of all kinds; and also the oracle of Delos, the temple of Jupiter Ammon, and other well-known oracles, which filled the world with wonder and devotion. But when the oracles began to say what was pleasing to the powerful, and this deception was discovered by the people, they became incredulous and inclined to subvert any good institution.

The rulers of a republic or of a kingdom, therefore, should uphold the basic principles of the religion which they practise in, and, if this be done, it will be easy for them to keep their commonwealth religious, and, in consequence, good and united. They should also foster and encourage everything likely to be of help to this end, even though they be convinced that it is quite fallacious. And the more should they do this the greater their prudence and the more they know of natural laws. It was owing to wise men having taken due note of this that belief in miracles arose and that miracles are held in high esteem even by religions that are false; for to whatever they owed their origin, sensible men made much of them, and their authority caused everybody to believe in them.

There were plenty of such miracles in Rome, among them one that happened when Roman soldiers were sacking the city of Veii. Some of them went into the temple of Juno and, addressing her image, said: '*Do you want to come to Rome?*' To some it seemed that she nodded. To others that she

answered, Yes. The reason was that the men were so deeply imbued with religion; for, as Livy points out, on entering the temple, they did not create a disturbance but behaved devoutly and displayed the greatest reverence. Hence it seemed to them that they heard the answer they wanted the goddess to give and had taken for granted when they approached her. Such beliefs and such credulity was studiously fostered and encouraged by Camillus and by the rest of the city's rulers.

If such a religious spirit had been kept up by the rulers of the Christian commonwealth as was ordained for us by its founder, Christian states and republics would have been much more united and much more happy than they are. Nor if one would form a conjecture as to the causes of its decline can one do better than look at those peoples who live in the immediate neighbourhood of the Church of Rome, which is the head of our religion, and see how there is less religion among them than elsewhere. Indeed, should anyone reflect on our religion as it was when founded, and then see how different the present usage is, he would undoubtedly come to the conclusion that it is approaching either ruin or a scourge.

Many are of opinion that the prosperity of Italian cities is due to the Church of Rome. I disagree, and against this view shall adduce such reasons as are necessary, two of them so potent that, in my opinion, it is impossible to gainsay them. The first is that owing to the bad example set by the Court of Rome, Italy has lost all devotion and all religion. Attendant upon this are innumerable inconveniences and innumerable disorders; for as, where there is religion, it may be taken for granted that all is going well, so, where religion is wanting, one may take for granted the opposite. The first debt which we, Italians, owe to the Church and to priests, therefore, is that we have become irreligious and perverse.

But we owe them a yet greater debt, which is the second

cause of our ruin. It is the Church that has kept, and keeps, Italy divided. Now of a truth no country has ever been united and happy unless the whole of it has been under the jurisdiction of one republic or one prince, as has happened to France and Spain. And the reason why Italy is not in the same position, i.e. why there is not one republic or one prince ruling there, is due entirely to the Church. For, though the Church has its headquarters in Italy and has temporal power, neither its power nor its virtue has been sufficiently great for it to be able to usurp power in Italy and become its leader; nor yet, on the other hand, has it been so weak that it could not, when afraid of losing its dominion over things temporal, call upon one of the powers to defend it against an Italian state that had become too powerful. There is abundant evidence of this in times gone by. For instance, with the help of Charles the Great, it drove out the Lombards who had established a sort of kingship over the whole of Italy. So, too, in our own day, it stripped Venice of its power with the help of France, and, later on, drove out the French with the help of the Swiss.¹¹

The Church, then, has neither been able to occupy the whole of Italy, nor has it allowed anyone else to occupy it. Consequently, it has been the cause why Italy has never come under one head, but has been under many princes and *signori*, by whom such disunion and such weakness has been brought about, that it has now become the prey, not only of barbarian potentates, but of anyone who attacks it. For which our Italians have to thank the Church, and nobody else. Should anyone want to prove the truth of this by actual experience, he would need to have such power that he could send the Roman Court, together with the authority it has in Italy, to dwell in the territories of the Swiss, who are the only people who today, with respect both to religion and to military institutions, live as the ancients did. He would then find that

the evil ways of this court would cause before long more disorders in that country than any that any other event at any time whatsoever has been able to bring about.

13. *What Use the Romans made of Religion in reorganizing the City, in prosecuting their Enterprises, and in composing Tumults*

It does not seem to me foreign to my purpose to adduce some examples of how the Romans used religion in reforming their city, and in prosecuting their wars. In Titus Livy there are many examples of this, but I shall be content with the following. The Roman people, having created tribunes with consular power, all of whom, save one, were plebeians, there occurred in that year pestilences and famine, and certain prodigies took place. Availing themselves of this opportunity in the next appointment of tribunes, the nobles said that the gods were angry with Rome for having abused the majesty of her authority, and that the only way to placate them was to restore the election of tribunes to its proper position. The result was that the plebs, terrified by this appeal to religion, appointed only nobles as tribunes.

One notes also in the siege of the city of Veii how the army leaders used religion in order to keep the troops keyed up for attack. During the year, the Alban lake had risen in an extraordinary way, and the Roman soldiers, tired of the long siege, were desirous of returning to Rome when it was discovered that Apollo and certain other oracles had said that the city of Veii would be taken in the year in which Lake Alba overflowed. This report made the soldiers endure the fatigues of the siege, since they now felt sure that they would capture the town. Contentedly, therefore, they went on with the attack until Camillus was made dictator and took the city after it had been besieged for ten years. Thus religion, when properly

used, helped both towards the taking of a city and towards the restoring of the tribunate to the nobility; which it would in both cases have been difficult to carry out save by these means.

I must not omit to add yet another relevant example. There had arisen in Rome a number of tumults occasioned by Terentillus, a tribune, who wanted to propose a certain law, for reasons which will be given later in their proper place. One of the first remedies the nobility used was religion, of which they availed themselves in two ways. First they got someone to look up the Sibylline books, which told them, so they said, that, owing to sedition, the city would be in danger of losing its liberties that very year. Though the tribunes exposed the fraud, it none the less put such fear into the breasts of the plebs that they refrained from following their lead.

Another way in which they used religion was when one Appius Herdonius, with a crowd of exiles and slaves, numbering four thousand men, seized the Capitol by night; which made people afraid lest the Aequi and the Volsci, Rome's perpetual enemies, should come and capture Rome. In spite of this, the tribunes obstinately persisted in pushing forward the Terentillian law, alleging that the aforesaid attack was a fabrication, and that it was not true. Then from the senate came one Publius Ruberius, a grave man and a citizen of considerable authority, who, in a speech that was half friendly, half threatening, pointed out the dangers to the city and the inopportuneness of their demand to such effect that he got the plebs to swear to abide by the decision of the consul; with the result that the now obedient plebs recovered the Capitol by force. However, in the course of the attack, Publius Valerius, the consul, was killed, and forthwith Titus Quintius was re-appointed in his stead, so the latter, giving the plebs no time for rest or to think of the Terentillian law, bade them go forth against the Volsci, alleging that by the oath they had made

not to abandon the consul, they were obliged to follow him. The tribunes objected to this on the ground that the oath had been given to the dead consul and not to him. None the less, Titus Livy shows how the plebs, out of reverence for religion, preferred rather to obey the consul than to believe the tribunes; and on behalf of the ancient religion uses these words: 'Not as yet was there that negligence of the gods which now prevails in the world, nor did the individual put upon oaths and laws his own interpretation.' This made the tribunes afraid lest they should now lose the whole of their standing, so they agreed to remain obedient to the consul, and not to raise the question of the Terentillian law for a year, and the consuls agreed not to take the plebs off to the war for a year. Religion thus enabled the senate to overcome these difficulties, which, otherwise, they would never have succeeded in doing.

14. *The Romans interpreted their Auspices in accordance with their Needs, were wise enough ostensibly to observe Religion when forced to ignore it, and punished those who were so rash as to disparage it*

AUGURIES were not only in large part the basis of the ancient religion of the gentiles, as we have remarked in a previous discourse, but they also contributed to the well-being of the Roman republic. Hence the Romans took more care in regard to them than in regard to any other institution in that republic. They made use of them in the election of consuls, in entering upon military enterprises, in leading forth their armies, on engaging in battles, and in all their important enterprises, whether civic or military. Never would they set forth on an expedition until they had convinced the troops that the gods had promised them victory.

Among other exponents of augury they had in their armies certain officials concerned with the taking of auspices,

who were called poultrymen; and whenever they had to fix the day for an engagement with the enemy, they requested the poultrymen to take the auspices. If the poultry pecked, the augury was good and they fought; if they didn't peck, they abstained from battle. Nevertheless, when reason told them that a thing had to be done, they did it anyhow, even should the auspices be adverse. But, so adroit were they in words and actions at giving things a twist that they did not appear to have done anything disparaging to religion.

Adroitness of this kind was used by Papirius, the consul, in an important battle which he fought with the Samnites, after which the latter were left extremely weak and dispirited. For, when Papirius was encamped opposite to the Samnites, and it seemed to him that in battle he would certainly win, in order that he might choose the day for this he told the poultrymen to take the auspices. But the poultry did not peck. Observing, however, the army's great eagerness to fight and that alike the commander and all the troops thought they would win, the head-poultryman in order not to deprive the army of so good an opportunity for the work in hand, sent word to the consul that the result of the auspices had been favourable. So Papirius ordered the troops to fall in. But meanwhile some of the poultrymen let it out to some soldiers that the poultry had not pecked; and they told Spurius Papirius, the consul's nephew, who passed it on to the consul. Whereupon the consul told him to mind his own business and to mind it well, and that, as for himself and the army, the auspices had been good, and that, if the poultryman had told a lie, that was his look-out. That the result should agree with the prognostication, he then told the legates to put the poultrymen in the forefront of the battle. Whence it came about that, when they attacked the enemy, the head-poultryman was accidentally killed by a javelin thrown by a Roman soldier. When the consul heard of this, he said that all was going well, thanks be

to the gods; for by the death of this liar the army had been purged of any blame and any wrath which it had incurred in the sight of the gods. Thus, through knowing how to accommodate nicely his plans to the auspices, he engaged the enemy and beat them without the army's suspecting that he had in any way neglected what was prescribed by their religion.

In Sicily during the first Punic war Appius Pulcher acted very differently. When about to engage with the Carthaginian army, he had the auspices taken by the poultrymen, and, when they reported that the poultry would not peck, he exclaimed 'Let's see if they won't drink!', and had them thrown into the sea. He then made the attack and lost the day. For which he was condemned at Rome and Papirius honoured; not so much because the one had been victorious and the other had lost, as because the one, in contravening the auspices, had been prudent and the other rash. Nor did this custom of consulting the auspices tend to produce any result save to cause troops to go confidently into battle, the which confidence almost always leads to victory. Nor yet was it only the Romans who used it, but also foreigners, of which I think I will give an example in the following chapter.

15. *The Samnites had recourse to Religion as a last Resort when their Affairs were going badly*

AFTER the Samnites had been defeated several times by the Romans and had been finally destroyed in Tuscany, their army and its officers killed, their allies such as the Tuscans, Gauls and Umbrians conquered, 'they could rely now neither on their strength nor on that of others, yet they did not withdraw from the war, so far were they from becoming weary of defending liberty even without success, and so much did they prefer to be beaten rather than not try to win'. They determined, therefore, to make a final effort; and, since they

knew it was necessary to instil into the minds of the soldiers an obstinate will to conquer, and that, to instil it, there were no better means than religion, they decided on the advice of Ovius Paccius, their priest, to revive one of their ancient sacrifices. The ritual they observed was as follows. Having offered a solemn sacrifice, and made all the officers of the army stand between the dead victims and the flame-lit altars and swear that they would never abandon the fight, they called up the soldiers one by one, made them stand between the altars in the midst of a number of centurions with drawn swords in their hands, and first of all swear that they would not reveal anything which they saw or observed. They then made them promise the gods with curses and the most terrible incantations that they would be ready to go wherever the generals ordered, that they would never flee from the battle, and that they would kill anyone whom they saw running away, and, if they did not do this, they prayed that the curse might fall on the heads of their family and on their children. Some of them, terrified, were reluctant to take the oath, and were at once killed by the centurions. All those who came after them, frightened by the ferocity of the spectacle, then took the oath. To make this, their assemblage of forty thousand men, yet more magnificent, they clad half of them in white, with crests and plumes on their helmets; and, thus arrayed, the army took up its position near Aquilonia.

Papirius went to meet them, and, to encourage his troops, told them that 'crests do not cause wounds, and the Roman javelin goes through painted and gilded shields'. Then, in order to dispel any false impression his own troops might have formed of the enemy owing to the oath they had taken, he said that its effect would be to make them afraid, not to strengthen them, since at one and the same time they were afraid of their fellow citizens, of the gods, and of the enemy.

When the engagement took place, the Samnites were over-