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MACHIAVELLI

The Prince

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 CAMBRIDGE
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written by Xenophon,^a will realise, when he considers Scipio's life and career, how greatly Scipio's imitation of Cyrus helped him to attain glory, and how much Scipio's sexual restraint,^b affability, humanity and generosity derived from his imitating the qualities of Cyrus, as recorded in this work by Xenophon. A wise ruler should act in such ways, and never remain idle in quiet times, but assiduously strengthen his position through such activities^c in order that in adversity he will benefit from them. Thus, when his situation worsens, he will be well equipped to overcome dangers and to flourish.

CHAPTER XV

The things for which men,
and especially rulers,
are praised or blamed

It remains now to consider in what ways a ruler should act with regard to his subjects and allies.^d And since I am well aware that many people have written about this subject I fear that I may be thought presumptuous, for what I have to say differs from the precepts offered by others, especially on this matter. But because I want to write what will be useful to anyone who understands, it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist.^e However, how men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persists in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honourably is surrounded by many unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable.

[^a *Cyropaedia*.] [^b An instance of Scipio's sexual restraint is given in *Disc.* III, 20.]

[^c I.e., keeping the army well trained and prepared for war, hunting and observing the terrain, and profiting from reading about war in historical books.]

[^d A ruler's conduct towards subjects is treated in Chs. XV–XVII, towards allies (*amico*) in Ch. XVIII.]

[^e M. apparently refers both to some ancient writers (e.g., Plato, in his *Republic*) and to more recent ones who emphasised ideals and the duties of rulers.]

Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared^a to act immorally when this becomes necessary.

I shall set aside fantasies about rulers, then, and consider what happens in fact. I say that whenever men are discussed, and especially rulers (because they occupy more exalted positions), they are praised or blamed for possessing some of the following qualities. Thus, one man is considered generous, another miserly (I use this Tuscan term^b because *avaro* in our tongue also signifies someone who is rapacious, whereas we call *misero* someone who is very reluctant to use his own possessions); one is considered a free giver, another rapacious; one cruel, another merciful; one treacherous, another loyal; one effeminate and weak, another indomitable and spirited; one affable, another haughty; one lascivious, another moderate; one upright, another cunning; one inflexible, another easy-going; one serious, another frivolous; one devout, another unbelieving, and so on.

I know that everyone will acknowledge that it would be most praiseworthy for a ruler to have all the above-mentioned qualities that are held to be good. But because it is not possible to have all of them, and because circumstances do not permit living a completely virtuous life, one must be sufficiently prudent to know how to avoid becoming notorious for those vices that would destroy one's power and seek to avoid those vices that are not politically dangerous; but if one cannot bring oneself to do this, they can be indulged in with fewer misgivings. Yet one should not be troubled about becoming notorious for those vices without which it is difficult to preserve one's power, because if one considers everything carefully, doing some things that seem virtuous may result in one's ruin, whereas doing other things that seem vicious may strengthen one's position and cause one to flourish.

CHAPTER XVI

Generosity and meanness

To begin, then, with the first of the above-mentioned qualities, I

[^a *imparare*, which some commentators think here means 'to learn'.]

[^b *misero*, which has only one sense when contrasted with *liberale* ('generous'); M. avoids using *avaro* because it is ambiguous.]

maintain that it would be desirable to be considered generous; nevertheless, if generosity^a is practised in such a way that you will be considered generous, it will harm you. If it is practised virtuously, and as it should be, it will not be known about, and you will not avoid acquiring a bad reputation for the opposite vice.^b Therefore, if one wants to keep up a reputation for being generous, one must spend lavishly and ostentatiously. The inevitable outcome of acting in such ways is that the ruler will consume all his resources in sumptuous display; and if he wants to continue to be thought generous, he will eventually be compelled to become rapacious, to tax the people very heavily, and raise money by all possible means.^c Thus, he will begin to be hated by his subjects and, because he is impoverished, he will be held in little regard. Since this generosity of his has harmed many people and benefited few, he will feel the effects of any discontent, and the first real threat to his power will involve him in grave difficulties. When he realises this, and changes his ways, he will very soon acquire a bad reputation for being miserly.

Therefore, since a ruler cannot both practise this virtue of generosity and be known to do so without harming himself, he would do well not to worry about being called miserly. For eventually he will come to be considered more generous,^d when it is realised that, because of his parsimony, his revenues are sufficient to defend himself against any enemies that attack him, and to undertake campaigns without imposing special taxes on the people. Thus he will be acting generously towards the vast majority, whose property he does not touch, and will be acting fairly towards the few to whom he gives nothing.^e

Those rulers who have achieved great things in our own times have all been considered mean; all the others have failed. Although Pope Julius II cultivated a reputation for generosity in order to become popular, he did not seek to maintain it afterwards, because he wanted to be able to wage war. The present King of France^f has fought many wars without imposing any special taxes on his subjects, because his parsimonious habits have always enabled him to meet the extra expenses. If the present King of Spain^g had a reputation for generosity, he would not have successfully undertaken so many campaigns.

Therefore, a ruler should worry little about being thought miserly: he will not have to rob his subjects; he will be able to defend himself; he will avoid being poor and despised and will not be forced to become rapacious. For meanness is one of those vices that enable him to rule. It may be objected that Caesar obtained power through his open-handedness, and that many others have risen to very high office because they were open-handed and were considered to be so. I would reply that either you are already an established ruler or you are trying to become a ruler. In the first case, open-handedness is harmful; in the second, it is certainly necessary to be thought open-handed. Caesar was one of those who sought power in Rome; but if after gaining power he had survived,^h and had not moderated his expenditure, he would have undermined his power. And if it should be objected that many rulers who have been considered very generous have had remarkable military successes, I would reply: a ruler spends either what belongs to him or his subjects,ⁱ or what belongs to others. In the former case, he should be parsimonious; in the latter, he should be as open-handed as possible. A ruler who accompanies his army, supporting it by looting, sacking and extortions, disposes of what belongs to others; he must be open-handed, for if he is not, his soldiers will desert. You can be much more generous with what does not belong to you or to your subjects, as Cyrus, Caesar and Alexander were. This is because giving away what belongs to others in no way damages your reputation; rather, it enhances it.^j It is only giving away what belongs to yourself that harms you.

There is nothing that is so self-consuming as generosity: the more you practise it, the less you will be able to continue to practise it.^k You will either become poor and despised or your efforts to avoid poverty will make you rapacious and hated. A ruler must above all guard against being despised and hated; and being generous will lead to both. Therefore, it is shrewder to cultivate a reputation for meanness, which

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liberalità; in M.'s works, *generosità* always denotes nobility of spirit or magnanimity, and it acquired the sense of 'generosity' only later in the sixteenth century.]

[i.e., *parsimonia*, 'meanness' or 'miserliness'.]

Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, II, 15.]

Clearly, in a different sense of the word; a 'genuine' generosity.]

[i.e., courtiers and others who would have expected to benefit from a 'generous' ruler.]

[i.e., by bribes.] [† Louis XII.]

[* Ferdinand the Catholic.] [† i.e., if he had not been assassinated.]

[‡ Here M. blurs the distinction between the ruler's property and his subjects' property.]

[§ M. obviously meant: in the eyes of his subjects or soldiers.]

[¶ Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, II, 15, 52.]

ill lead to notoriety but not to hatred. This is better than being forced, rough wanting to be considered generous, to incur a reputation for pacificity, which will lead to notoriety and to hatred as well.

CHAPTER XVII

Cruelty and mercifulness; and whether it is better to be loved or feared

Turning to the other previously mentioned qualities,^a I maintain that every ruler should want to be thought merciful, not cruel; nevertheless, he should take care not to be merciful in an inappropriate way. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel, yet his harsh measures restored order to the Romagna, unifying it and rendering it peaceful and loyal.^b If his conduct is properly considered, he will be judged to have been much more merciful than the Florentine people, who let Pistoia be torn apart, in order to avoid acquiring a reputation for cruelty. Therefore, if a ruler can keep his subjects united and loyal, he should not worry about acquiring a reputation for cruelty; for by punishing a very few he will actually be more merciful than those who over-indulgently permit disorders to develop, with resultant killings and plunderings. For the latter usually harm a whole community, whereas the executions ordered by a ruler harm only specific individuals. And a new ruler, in particular, cannot avoid being considered harsh, since new states are full of dangers. Virgil makes Dido say:

Res dura, et regni novitas me talia cogunt
moliri, et late fines custode tueri.^d

Nevertheless, he should be slow to believe accusations and to act against individuals, and should not be afraid of his own shadow. He

See p. 55.] [^a See pp. 25-6.]

M. refers to events in late 1501, when the Panciatichi and Cancellieri factions were fighting each other. See *Disc.* III, 27.]

Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 563-4: 'Harsh necessity and the newness of my kingdom force me to do such things, and to guard all the frontiers.')

should act with due prudence and humanity so that being over-confident will not make him incautious, and being too suspicious will not render him insupportable.

A controversy has arisen about this: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or vice versa.^a My view is that it is desirable to be both loved and feared; but it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved.

For this may be said of men generally: they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners and dissemblers, avoiders of danger, eager for gain. While you benefit them they are all devoted to you: they would shed their blood for you; they offer their possessions, their lives, and their sons, as I said before,^b when the need to do so is far off. But when you are hard pressed, they turn away. A ruler who has relied completely on their promises, and has neglected to prepare other defences, will be ruined, because friendships that are acquired with money, and not through greatness and nobility of character, are paid for but not secured, and prove unreliable just when they are needed.

Men are less hesitant about offending or harming a ruler who makes himself loved than one who inspires fear. For love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective. Nevertheless, a ruler must make himself feared in such a way that, even if he does not become loved, he does not become hated. For it is perfectly possible to be feared without incurring hatred. And this can always be achieved if he refrains from laying hands on the property of his citizens and subjects, and on their womenfolk.^c If it is necessary to execute anyone, this should be done only if there is a proper justification and obvious reason. But, above all, he must not touch the property of others, because men forget sooner the killing of a father than the loss of their patrimony.^d Moreover, there will always be pretexts for seizing property; and someone who begins to live rapaciously will always find

[^a See A. Gilbert, *Machiavelli's 'Prince' and its Forerunners*, pp. 103-15.]

[^b See p. 37.]

[^c *tristi*; its usual meaning is 'bad', but in some contexts it has a different sense.]

[^d These are persistent themes in M.'s works: e.g., pp. 63-4; *Disc.* III, 6 (beg.), III, 26.]

[^e *morte*: lit., 'death'.]
[^f In an almost contemporaneous piece, M. says that everyone knows that a change of regime will not bring relatives back to life, but it could well result in one's property being restored.]

pretexts for taking the property of others. On the other hand, reasons or pretexts for taking life are rarer and more fleeting.

However, when a ruler is with his army, and commands a large force, he must not worry about being considered harsh, because armies are never kept united and prepared for military action unless their leader is thought to be harsh. Among the remarkable things recounted about Hannibal is that, although he had a very large army, composed of men from many countries,[†] and fighting in foreign lands,[‡] there never arose any dissension, either among themselves or against their leader, whether things were going well or badly. This could be accounted for only by his inhuman cruelty which, together with his many good qualities, made him always respected and greatly feared by his troops. And if he had not been so cruel, his other qualities would not have been sufficient to achieve that effect. Thoughtless writers admire this achievement of his, yet condemn the main reason for it.

That his other qualities would not have sufficed is proved by what happened to Scipio, considered a most remarkable man not only in his own times but in all others, whose armies rebelled against him in Spain.[†] The only reason for this was that he was over-indulgent, and permitted his soldiers more freedom than was consistent with maintaining proper military discipline. Fabius Maximus rebuked him for this in the senate, and called him a corrupter of the Roman army. And when Locri[‡] was ravaged by one of Scipio's legates, the inhabitants were not avenged by him, and the legate was not punished for his arrogance, all because Scipio was too easy-going. Indeed, a speaker in the senate who wished to excuse him said that there were many men who were better at not committing misdeeds themselves than punishing the misdeeds of others. This character of his would eventually have tarnished his fame and glory, if he had continued his military command unchecked; but since he was controlled by the senate, this harmful quality was not only concealed but contributed to his glory.

Returning to the matter of being feared and loved, then, I conclude that whether men bear affection depends on themselves, but whether

[[†] I.e., mercenaries.]

[[‡] Far from home, and therefore subjected to particular stresses.]

[[†] In 206 B.C. See Livy, XXVIII, 24-5. There is a fuller comparison of Hannibal and Scipio in *Disc.* III, 21.]

[[‡] Locri Epizephyrri was a Greek city in Calabria. For these events, see Livy, XXIX, 8-9, 16-22.]

they are afraid will depend on what the ruler does. A wise ruler should rely on what is under his own control, not on what is under the control of others; he should contrive only to avoid incurring hatred, as I have said.

CHAPTER XVIII

How rulers should keep their promises

Everyone knows how praiseworthy it is for a ruler to keep his promises, and live uprightly and not by trickery. Nevertheless, experience shows that in our times the rulers who have done great things are those who have set little store by keeping their word, being skilful rather in cunningly deceiving men; they have got the better of those who have relied on being trustworthy.

You should know, then, that there are two ways of contending: one by using laws, the other, force. The first is appropriate for men, the second for animals; but because the former is often ineffective, one must have recourse to the latter.[‡] Therefore, a ruler must know well how to imitate beasts as well as employing properly human means. This policy was taught to rulers allegorically by ancient writers: they tell how Achilles and many other ancient rulers[†] were entrusted to Chiron the centaur, to be raised carefully by him. Having a mentor who was half-beast and half-man signifies that a ruler needs to use both natures, and that one without the other is not effective.

Since a ruler, then, must know how to act like a beast, he should imitate both the fox and the lion, for the lion is liable to be trapped, whereas the fox cannot ward off wolves. One needs, then, to be a fox to recognise traps, and a lion to frighten away wolves. Those who rely merely upon a lion's strength do not understand matters.[‡]

Therefore, a prudent ruler cannot keep his word, nor should he, when such fidelity would damage him, and when the reasons that made

[[†] See pp. xix-xx.] [[‡] Hercules, Theseus, Aesculapius and Jason.]

[[‡] It is implied that relying only on cunning is not a common error. See also *Disc.* II, 13.]

him promise are no longer relevant. This advice would not be sound if all men were upright; but because they are treacherous and would not keep their promises to you, you should not consider yourself bound to keep your promises to them.

Moreover, plausible reasons can always be found for such failure to keep promises. One could give countless modern examples of this, and show how many peace treaties and promises have been rendered null and void by the faithlessness of rulers; and those best able to imitate the fox have succeeded best. But foxiness should be well concealed: one must be a great feigner and dissembler. And men are so naive, and so much dominated by immediate needs, that a skilful deceiver always finds plenty of people who will let themselves be deceived.

I mention one recent case: Alexander VI was concerned only with deceiving men, and he always found them gullible. No man ever affirmed anything more forcefully or with stronger oaths but kept his word less. Nevertheless, his deceptions were always effective, because he well understood the naivety of men.

A ruler, then, need not actually possess all the above-mentioned qualities,^a but he must certainly seem to. Indeed, I shall be so bold as to say that having and always cultivating them is harmful, whereas seeming to have them is useful; for instance, to seem merciful, trustworthy, humane, upright and devout, and also to be so. But if it becomes necessary to refrain, you must be prepared to act in the opposite way, and be capable of doing it. And it must be understood that a ruler, and especially a new ruler, cannot always act in ways that are considered good because, in order to maintain his power,^b he is often forced to act treacherously, ruthlessly or inhumanely, and disregard the precepts of religion. Hence, he must be prepared to vary his conduct as the winds of fortune and changing circumstances constrain him and, as I said before,^c not deviate from right conduct if possible, but be capable of entering upon the path of wrongdoing when this becomes necessary.

A ruler, then, should be very careful that everything he says is replete with the five above-named qualities: to those who see and hear him, he should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout. And it is most necessary of all to seem devout. In

[^a Those classified as good on p. 55.]

[^b *per mantenere lo stato*: *stato* certainly signifies 'power' or 'government', though M. may be referring also to the political community. Cf. p. 63 n. b.]

[^c Earlier in this paragraph, and on p. 55.]

these matters, most men judge more by their eyes than by their hands. For everyone is capable of seeing you, but few can touch you. Everyone can see what you appear to be, whereas few have direct experience of what you really are;^a and those few will not dare to challenge the popular view, sustained as it is by the majesty of the ruler's position. With regard to all human actions, and especially those of rulers, who cannot be called to account, men pay attention to the outcome. If a ruler, then, contrives to conquer, and to preserve the state,^b the means will always be judged to be honourable and be praised by everyone. For the common people are impressed by appearances and results.^c Everywhere the common people are the vast majority, and the few^d are isolated when the majority and the government are at one. One present-day ruler, whom it is well to leave unnamed,^e is always preaching peace and trust, although he is really very hostile to both; and if he had practised them he would have lost either reputation or power several times over.

CHAPTER XIX

How contempt and hatred should be avoided

Since I have already discussed the most important of the qualities previously mentioned,^f I want to discuss the others briefly under this general heading: that a ruler, as has already been partly explained,^g should avoid anything that will make him either hated or despised. If he does avoid this he will have done what he should, and none of his other censurable faults will involve him in any danger.

What will make him hated, above all else, as I said,^h is being

[^a Lit., 'few touch that which you are'.]

[^b *mantenere lo stato*: the context seems to imply that *stato* signifies 'political community', not just the 'government'.]

[^c Strictly speaking, it would be the *apparent* outcomes. On the theme of appearance and reality, see *Disc.* I, 25, I, 47, I, 53; on judging by the outcome, see *Disc.* III, 35.]

[^d I.e., the discerning few, those who experience the realities of power, who do not only 'see', who are not taken in by appearances.]

[^e Ferdinand the Catholic (d. 1516); for his methods, see pp. 76-7.]

[^f See p. 55.] [^g In Chs. XVI and XVII.] [^h See p. 59.]