



ETHER LIBRARY

0012

The Prince

Il Principe

Niccolò Machiavelli

1532

Philosophy · Religion

The Prince

Il Principe

Niccolò Machiavelli

Translated from the Italian by Ether Library

ETHER LIBRARY

Il Principe

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)

Translated from the Italian by Ether Library

Written in 1513 and first printed in 1532, after the author's death, by Antonio
Blado in Rome and by the heirs of Filippo Giunta in Florence.

A Note on the Translation

This is a complete translation of Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, made directly from the Italian. No earlier English version was used as its basis. The source is a public-domain digital edition of the text established by Luigi Firpo (Turin, 1972). One paragraph missing from that digital text, the second of chapter XV, has been translated from the Italian edition of 1814.

The book consists of a dedication and twenty-six chapters. Machiavelli wrote his chapter headings in Latin; they are translated here, with Roman numerals. Each of Machiavelli's 129 paragraphs appears as one paragraph, neither split nor merged. His paragraphs are long and his sentences often longer; we have kept their drive, the "I say," the "therefore," the hard either/or, rather than cutting them into tidy pieces.

Two words carry the argument of the book. *Fortuna* is "fortune" throughout: chance, circumstance, the force that gives and takes away. Its partner *virtù* is not Christian virtue but the capacity to act: skill, energy, foresight, nerve. We have rendered it "ability," so that the book's recurring alternative reads "by fortune or by ability," and so that Agathocles, a man of great *virtù* and no goodness, does not seem to be praised for being good. Where Machiavelli sets *virtù* against vice as a moral quality (chapters XV–XIX), it is "virtue." *Stato* is usually "state," but "power" or "position" where it means a ruler's hold on power. The famous *verità effettuale* of chapter XV is "the effectual truth," the truth of things as they actually work out.

Names of Italians are given in Italian; popes, kings, and ancients in their usual English forms. Spelling and punctuation are American. Latin quotations are translated in the text, with the Latin in a note. The notes are short and factual: they identify the people and events Machiavelli names without explanation, give the sources of quotations, and point out the few places where his memory slipped. They offer no interpretation.

Contents

Niccolò Machiavelli to the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici	7
I. How Many Kinds of Principalities There Are, and How They Are Acquired	9
II. Hereditary Principalities	10
III. Mixed Principalities	12
IV. Why the Kingdom of Darius, Conquered by Alexander, Did Not Rebel Against His Successors After His Death	22
V. How Cities or Principalities That Lived Under Their Own Laws Before They Were Conquered Should Be Governed	25
VI. New Principalities Acquired by One's Own Arms and Ability	27
VII. New Principalities Acquired by Others' Arms and by Fortune	31
VIII. Those Who Have Come to a Principality Through Crimes	39
IX. The Civil Principality	44
X. How the Strength of All Principalities Should Be Measured	48
XI. Ecclesiastical Principalities	51
XII. How Many Kinds of Armies There Are, and Mercenary Soldiers	54

XXIII. Auxiliary, Mixed, and One's Own Soldiers	60
XXIV. What a Prince Should Do About the Military	65
XXV. The Things for Which Men, and Especially Princes, Are Praised or Blamed	68
XXVI. Generosity and Parsimony	70
XXVII. Cruelty and Mercy, and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved Than Feared, or the Reverse	73
XXVIII. How Princes Should Keep Faith	77
XXIX. Avoiding Contempt and Hatred	80
XX. Whether Fortresses and Many Other Things Princes Commonly Do Are Useful or Harmful	91
XXI. What a Prince Should Do to Be Held in Esteem	96
XXII. The Ministers Princes Keep Beside Them	101
XXIII. How Flatterers Are to Be Avoided	103
XXIV. Why the Princes of Italy Have Lost Their States	106
XXV. How Much Fortune Can Do in Human Affairs, and How It Can Be Resisted	108
XXVI. An Exhortation to Seize Italy and Free Her from the Barbarians	112

Niccolò Machiavelli to the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici

Those who want to win the favor of a prince usually come before him with the things they hold dearest among their possessions, or with the things they see delight him most. So we often see princes presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones, and similar ornaments worthy of their greatness. Wishing, then, to offer myself to Your Magnificence¹ with some token of my devotion to you, I have found nothing among my belongings that I hold dearer or value so highly as my knowledge of the actions of great men, learned through long experience of modern affairs and continual reading of ancient ones. I have pondered and examined these things with great care for a long time, and now, having reduced them to a small volume, I send it to Your Magnificence. And although I judge this work unworthy to come into your presence, I am nonetheless confident that in your kindness you will accept it, considering that I could give you no greater gift than the means of understanding, in a very short time, everything that I have come to know over so many years and through so many hardships and dangers. I have not adorned this work or stuffed it with sweeping sentences, with pompous and magnificent words, or with any other allurements or outward ornaments of the kind many writers use to describe and decorate their subjects; for I wanted either that nothing should honor it, or that only the variety of its matter and the gravity of its subject should make it welcome. Nor do I want it to be thought presumptuous that a man of

low and humble station dares to discuss the government of princes and lay down rules for it. For just as those who draw maps of the land put themselves down in the plain to study the nature of mountains and high places, and climb up the mountains to study the low ground, so, to know the nature of peoples well, one must be a prince, and to know the nature of princes well, one must be one of the people.

Take, then, Your Magnificence, this small gift in the spirit in which I send it. If you read it and consider it carefully, you will find in it my deepest wish: that you may reach the greatness that fortune and your other qualities promise you. And if Your Magnificence, from the summit of your height, should sometimes turn your eyes toward these low places, you will see how undeservedly I bear a great and unremitting malice of fortune.²

[1.](#) Lorenzo de' Medici (1492–1519), grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent. He governed Florence for the Medici from 1513 and became Duke of Urbino in 1516. Machiavelli first meant to dedicate the book to Lorenzo's uncle Giuliano, who died in 1516.

[2.](#) When the Medici returned to Florence in 1512, Machiavelli lost his post as secretary of the republic; early in 1513 he was imprisoned and tortured on suspicion of conspiracy, then released. He wrote this book on his small farm outside the city.

I. How Many Kinds of Principalities There Are, and How They Are Acquired

All states, all dominions that have had and now have power over men, have been and are either republics or principalities. Principalities are either hereditary, in which the family of their lord has long been princes, or they are new. The new ones are either entirely new, as Milan was to Francesco Sforza,¹ or they are like limbs joined to the hereditary state of the prince who acquires them, as the Kingdom of Naples is to the king of Spain.² Dominions acquired in this way are either used to living under a prince or used to being free; and they are acquired either with the arms of others or with one's own, either by fortune or by ability (*virtù*).

[1.](#) Francesco Sforza (1401–1466), a mercenary captain who made himself Duke of Milan in 1450.

[2.](#) Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516), “the Catholic,” king of Aragon and, through his wife Isabella, ruler of Castile. He drove the French out of the Kingdom of Naples and held it from 1504.

II. Hereditary Principalities

I will leave aside any discussion of republics, because I have discussed them at length elsewhere.¹ I will turn only to the principality, and weave together the threads I have just laid out, and discuss how these principalities can be governed and kept.

I say, then, that in hereditary states, accustomed to the family of their prince, the difficulties of keeping them are far smaller than in new ones. It is enough not to depart from the order established by one's forebears, and then to take events as they come; so that if such a prince is of ordinary diligence, he will always keep his state, unless some extraordinary and overwhelming force deprives him of it; and even if he is deprived of it, he will win it back at the usurper's first stumble.

We have in Italy, for example, the Duke of Ferrara, who withstood the attacks of the Venetians in 1484 and those of Pope Julius in 1510 for no other reason than that his family was long established in that dominion.² For the natural prince has fewer reasons and less need to give offense, and so it follows that he will be better loved; and unless extraordinary vices make him hated, it is reasonable that his own people should naturally wish him well. And in the long continuance of a dominion the memories and the causes of innovation die away; for every change leaves behind the jutting stones on which the next can be built.

1. Probably a reference to his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, on which he was working in the same years.

2. Machiavelli runs two dukes together: Ercole I d'Este (ruled 1471–1505), who fought Venice in 1482–84, and his son Alfonso I (ruled 1505–34), attacked by Pope Julius II in 1510. Both kept their state.

III. Mixed Principalities

But it is in the new principality that the difficulties lie. First, if it is not entirely new but a limb added to an older state (so that the whole together may be called mixed), its upheavals arise in the first place from a natural difficulty found in all new principalities: men are glad to change their lord in the belief that they will better themselves, and this belief makes them take up arms against him. In this they deceive themselves, because they later see by experience that they have made things worse. This follows from another natural and ordinary necessity, which means that a new prince must always offend those over whom he becomes prince, both with his soldiers and with the countless other injuries that a new conquest brings in its train. So you have as enemies all those you have offended in seizing the principality, and you cannot keep as friends those who put you there, because you cannot satisfy them as they had expected, and you cannot use strong medicine against them, since you are in their debt. For however strong a man may be in his armies, he always needs the goodwill of the inhabitants to enter a province. For these reasons Louis XII, king of France, quickly occupied Milan and quickly lost it;¹ and the first time, Ludovico's own forces were enough to take it from him,² because the people who had opened the gates to him, finding themselves deceived in their expectations and in the future good they had counted on, could not bear the annoyances of the new prince.

It is quite true that when rebellious lands are acquired a second time, they are lost with more difficulty. The lord, taking the rebel-

lion as his opportunity, has fewer scruples about securing himself by punishing the offenders, exposing the suspects, and shoring up the weakest places. So if a Duke Ludovico making a commotion on the borders was enough to make France lose Milan the first time, to make it lose Milan the second time the whole world had to be against it, and its armies had to be destroyed or driven out of Italy;³ and this came about for the reasons given above. Nevertheless, Milan was taken from France both the first and the second time. The general causes of the first loss have been discussed; it remains now to speak of the causes of the second, and to see what remedies the king had, and what remedies someone in his position could have, to hold on to his conquest better than France did. I say, therefore, that the states which, when acquired, are added to the old state of the one who acquires them are either of the same province and the same language, or they are not. When they are, it is very easy to hold them, especially if they are not used to living in freedom; and to possess them securely it is enough to have wiped out the line of the prince who ruled them, because in other things, as long as their old conditions are kept and there is no difference in customs, men live quietly. We have seen this in Burgundy, Brittany, Gascony, and Normandy, which have been with France for so long; and although there is some difference of language, the customs are similar, and they can easily get along with one another. Whoever acquires such lands and wants to keep them must have two things in view: first, that the family of their old prince be extinguished; second, that neither their laws nor their taxes be altered. In this way they become one body with his old principality in a very short time.

But when states are acquired in a province that differs in language, customs, and institutions, here the difficulties lie; and here one needs great fortune and great diligence to hold them. One of the greatest and most effective remedies would be for the person

who acquires them to go and live there. This would make the possession safer and more lasting, as the Turk has done with Greece: with all the other institutions he has observed to hold that state, he could not have held it had he not gone to live there.⁴ For when you are there, you see disorders as they arise and can quickly remedy them; when you are not, you hear of them only when they have grown great and there is no longer any remedy. Besides this, the province is not plundered by your officials; the subjects are satisfied by having recourse to a prince close at hand, so that they have more reason to love him if they mean to be good, and more reason to fear him if they mean to be otherwise. Any outsider who might want to attack that state will be more wary of it; so that, while the prince lives there, he can lose it only with the greatest difficulty.

The other and better remedy is to send colonies to one or two places that serve as shackles on that state; for it is necessary either to do this or to keep a large force of men-at-arms and infantry there. Colonies cost little; the prince can send and keep them at little or no expense of his own, and he offends only those whose fields and houses he takes to give to the new inhabitants, who are a tiny part of that state. And those he offends, left scattered and poor, can never harm him, while all the others are left unharmed, which should keep them quiet, and also afraid of putting a foot wrong, for fear that what happened to those who were despoiled may happen to them. I conclude that these colonies cost nothing, are more faithful, and give less offense; and the offended cannot do harm, being poor and scattered, as I have said. For it must be noted that men must either be caressed or crushed; because they avenge themselves for slight injuries but cannot for grave ones. So the injury you do to a man should be such that you need not fear his revenge. But if he keeps soldiers there instead of colonies, he spends much more, since he must

consume all the revenues of that state in guarding it, so that the acquisition turns into a loss for him. And he gives much more offense, because he harms the whole state by moving his army about from one billet to another. Everyone feels this hardship, and everyone becomes his enemy; and they are enemies who can do him harm, since, though beaten, they remain in their own homes. From every point of view, then, this kind of garrison is as useless as colonies are useful.

Whoever is in a province that differs from his own, as I have said, must also make himself the leader and defender of the less powerful neighbors, and contrive to weaken the powerful ones there, and take care that no foreigner as powerful as himself gets in by some accident. And it will always happen that such a foreigner is brought in by those in the province who are discontented, either from too much ambition or from fear: as we once saw the Aetolians bring the Romans into Greece; and in every other province the Romans entered, they were brought in by the inhabitants. And the order of things is that as soon as a powerful foreigner enters a province, all the less powerful there join him, moved by the envy they bear toward whoever has held power over them. So with respect to these lesser powers, he has no trouble at all in winning them over, because they all quickly join in a single bloc with the state he has acquired there. He has only to see that they do not gain too much strength and too much authority; and with his own forces and their goodwill he can easily bring down those who are powerful, so as to remain the sole arbiter of that province. Whoever does not govern this part well will quickly lose what he has acquired, and while he holds it he will have endless difficulties and troubles within it.

The Romans observed these rules well in the provinces they took. They sent colonies, kept the less powerful friendly without increasing their power, brought down the powerful, and did not let

powerful foreigners gain a reputation there. I will let the province of Greece alone serve as an example. The Achaeans and the Aetolians were kept friendly; the kingdom of the Macedonians was brought down; Antiochus was driven out.⁵ Nor did the merits of the Achaeans or the Aetolians ever make the Romans allow them to enlarge any state of theirs; nor did the persuasions of Philip ever induce them to be his friends without bringing him down; nor could the power of Antiochus make them consent to his holding any state in that province. For in these cases the Romans did what all wise princes must do: they must have regard not only to present troubles but to future ones, and guard against them with every effort. Foreseen from afar, they are easy to remedy; but if you wait until they are upon you, the medicine is too late, because the disease has become incurable. It is with this as the physicians say of consumption: at the beginning of the illness it is easy to cure and hard to recognize, but as time goes on, if it has not been recognized and treated at the start, it becomes easy to recognize and hard to cure. So it is in affairs of state. If the evils that arise in a state are recognized from afar (which is given only to a prudent man), they are quickly healed; but when, for lack of being recognized, they are allowed to grow until everyone can see them, there is no longer any remedy.

So the Romans, seeing troubles from afar, always remedied them, and never let them run their course in order to avoid a war, because they knew that war is not avoided but only put off to the advantage of others. So they chose to make war on Philip and Antiochus in Greece so as not to have to fight them in Italy; and they could have avoided both for the time being, which they did not want. Nor did they ever like what is constantly on the lips of the wise men of our day, to enjoy the benefit of time; they preferred the benefit of their own ability and prudence. For time

drives everything before it, and can bring with it good as well as evil, and evil as well as good.

But let us return to France and examine whether it has done any of the things I have spoken of. I will speak of Louis and not of Charles,⁶ since Louis held possessions in Italy longer and his course can be seen more clearly; and you will see that he did the opposite of what must be done to hold a state in a province unlike one's own.

King Louis was brought into Italy by the ambition of the Venetians, who wanted to win half the state of Lombardy for themselves through his coming.⁷ I do not mean to blame the king for the course he took; for since he wanted to begin to get a foothold in Italy, and had no friends in this province (on the contrary, every door was shut against him because of the conduct of King Charles), he was forced to take what friendships he could. And this well-chosen course would have succeeded if he had made no mistakes in his other dealings. Having acquired Lombardy, then, the king at once regained the reputation Charles had lost him. Genoa yielded; the Florentines became his friends; the Marquis of Mantua, the Duke of Ferrara, the Bentivoglio, the Lady of Forlì, the lords of Faenza, Pesaro, Rimini, Camerino, and Piombino, the people of Lucca, Pisa, and Siena, every one of them came to meet him to be his friend. And then the Venetians could see the rashness of the course they had taken: to acquire two towns in Lombardy, they had made the king lord of two-thirds of Italy.

Consider now how little difficulty the king would have had in keeping his reputation in Italy if he had observed the rules set out above and kept all those friends of his secure and defended. They were many, and weak, and afraid, some of the Church, some of the Venetians, and so they were always obliged to stay with him; and through them he could easily have secured himself against whoever remained great there. But no sooner was he in Milan than he

did the opposite, giving help to Pope Alexander so that he could occupy the Romagna.⁸ Nor did he realize that with this decision he was making himself weak, depriving himself of his friends and of those who had thrown themselves into his lap, and making the Church great by adding so much temporal power to the spiritual power that gives it so much authority. And having made one first mistake, he was obliged to go on with it, until, to put an end to Alexander's ambition and keep him from becoming lord of Tuscany, he was forced to come into Italy himself. It was not enough for him to have made the Church great and to have lost his friends; because he wanted the Kingdom of Naples, he divided it with the king of Spain.⁹ Where he had been the arbiter of Italy, he brought in a partner, so that the ambitious men of that province, and those who were discontented with him, would have somewhere to turn; and where he could have left in that kingdom a king who was his pensioner, he took him out, in order to put in one who could drive Louis himself out.

It is truly a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire; and when men who can do so do it, they will always be praised, or at least not blamed. But when they cannot, and want to do it anyway, here is the error and the blame. If France, then, could have attacked Naples with its own forces, it should have done so; if it could not, it should not have divided it. And if the division of Lombardy with the Venetians deserved excuse, since by it the king got a foothold in Italy, this one deserves blame, because it was not excused by that necessity.

Louis, then, had made these five errors: he had destroyed the lesser powers; he had increased the power of one who was already powerful in Italy; he had brought into it a very powerful foreigner; he had not come to live there; he had not sent colonies. And even these errors, while he lived, might not have hurt him, had he not made the sixth, of taking away the Venetians' state.¹⁰ For if he had

not made the Church great or brought Spain into Italy, it would have been quite reasonable and necessary to bring them down; but having taken those first steps, he should never have consented to their ruin. Being powerful, they would always have kept the others away from any attempt on Lombardy, partly because the Venetians would not have consented to it unless they became its lords themselves, and partly because the others would not have wanted to take it from France in order to give it to them, and would not have had the courage to go and attack both. And if someone should say that King Louis gave up the Romagna to Alexander and the Kingdom to Spain in order to avoid a war, I answer, for the reasons given above, that one must never let a disorder run its course in order to avoid a war, because the war is not avoided but only put off to your disadvantage. And if others should cite the promise the king had given the pope to undertake that enterprise for him in return for the annulment of his marriage and the cardinal's hat for Rouen,¹¹ I answer with what I will say later about the faith of princes and how it should be kept. King Louis, then, lost Lombardy because he did not observe any of the conditions observed by others who have taken provinces and wanted to keep them. Nor is there any miracle in this; it is very ordinary and reasonable. I spoke of this matter at Nantes with Rouen, when Valentino (as Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander, was commonly called) was occupying the Romagna. When the cardinal of Rouen told me that the Italians did not understand war, I answered him that the French did not understand statecraft, because if they did, they would not let the Church grow so great. And experience has shown that the greatness of the Church and of Spain in Italy was caused by France, and France's ruin was caused by them. From this we can draw a general rule that never or rarely fails: whoever is the cause of another becoming powerful ruins himself; because that power is brought about by him either through skill or through

force, and both of these are suspect to the one who has become powerful.

[1.](#) Louis XII (1462–1515), king of France from 1498. He took Milan in 1499, lost it to Ludovico Sforza in February 1500, and recovered it in April.

[2.](#) Ludovico Sforza (1452–1508), called “il Moro,” Duke of Milan from 1494. Captured at Novara in April 1500, he died a prisoner in France.

[3.](#) The Holy League formed in 1511 by Pope Julius II with Venice and Spain, later joined by England and the Swiss. Though the French won at Ravenna in 1512, they were driven out of Italy the same year.

[4.](#) The Ottoman sultan Mehmed II took Constantinople in 1453 and made it his capital.

[5.](#) In 211 BC the Aetolian League allied with Rome against Philip V of Macedon. Rome defeated Philip at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC, and the Seleucid king Antiochus III at Thermopylae in 191 BC.

[6.](#) Charles VIII (1470–1498), king of France from 1483. He invaded Italy in 1494 to claim the Kingdom of Naples, took the city in 1495, and withdrew within months.

[7.](#) By the Treaty of Blois (1499) Venice joined Louis XII against the Duchy of Milan in return for Cremona and the Ghiara d’Adda.

[8.](#) Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, 1431–1503), pope from 1492. From 1499 Louis lent troops to the pope’s son Cesare Borgia (1475–1507) for the conquest of the Romagna; in 1502, when Cesare threatened Tuscany, Louis came to Italy in person.

[9.](#) By the Treaty of Granada (1500) Louis and Ferdinand of Spain agreed to depose King Federico of Naples and divide his kingdom. They soon fell out, and by 1504 all of it was Spain’s.

[10.](#) In the League of Cambrai (1508) Louis joined Julius II, the emperor Maximilian, and Spain against Venice, and crushed the Venetian army at Vailà (Agnadello) in 1509.

[11.](#) Georges d’Amboise (1460–1510), archbishop of Rouen and Louis’s chief minister. In 1498 Alexander VI annulled the king’s first marriage and made d’Amboise

a cardinal. Machiavelli met him on a Florentine mission to the French court in 1500.

IV. Why the Kingdom of Darius, Conquered by Alexander, Did Not Rebel Against His Successors After His Death

Considering the difficulties of holding a newly acquired state, someone might wonder how it happened that Alexander the Great became lord of Asia in a few years and died when he had barely occupied it. It would seem reasonable that the whole state should have rebelled; nevertheless Alexander's successors kept it, and had no difficulty in holding it except what arose among themselves from their own ambition. I answer that the principalities of which we have any record are found to be governed in two different ways: either by a prince with everyone else as his servants, who help him govern the kingdom as ministers by his grace and permission; or by a prince and barons, who hold their rank not by the grace of their lord but by the antiquity of their blood. Barons of this kind have states and subjects of their own, who recognize them as their lords and feel a natural affection for them. In states governed by a prince and servants, the prince has more authority, because in all his province there is no one who recognizes anyone as superior except him; and if they obey anyone else, they do it as to a minister and official, and bear him no particular love.

The examples of these two kinds of government in our own times are the Turk and the king of France. The whole monarchy of the Turk is governed by one lord, and the others are his servants; he divides his kingdom into sanjaks, sends various administrators to them, and moves and changes them as he pleases. But the king

of France stands in the midst of an ancient multitude of lords, recognized in that state by their subjects and loved by them. They have their privileges, and the king cannot take them away without danger to himself. Whoever considers these two states, then, will find that the Turk's state is difficult to acquire, but once conquered, very easy to hold. The reasons why the kingdom of the Turk is difficult to seize are that the invader cannot be called in by the princes of that kingdom, nor hope to make his enterprise easier through the rebellion of those around the sultan. This follows from the reasons given above: since they are all slaves and bound to him, they are harder to corrupt; and even if they were corrupted, little use could be expected from it, since they cannot carry the people with them, for the reasons I have given. So whoever attacks the Turk must expect to find him united, and must rely more on his own forces than on the disorders of others. But once the Turk has been beaten and routed in the field so that he cannot raise new armies, there is nothing to fear except the family of the prince; and when that is wiped out, no one remains to be feared, since the others have no standing with the people. And just as the victor could not count on them before the victory, so he need not fear them after it.

The opposite happens in kingdoms governed like that of France, because you can enter them easily by winning over some baron of the kingdom, since there are always malcontents and men who want change. These, for the reasons given, can open the way into that state for you and make your victory easy. But afterward, if you want to hold on, that victory brings endless difficulties in its train, both with those who helped you and with those you have crushed. Nor is it enough for you to wipe out the family of the prince, because the lords remain who make themselves leaders of new uprisings; and since you can neither satisfy them nor wipe them out, you lose that state whenever the occasion comes.

Now if you consider what kind of government Darius had, you will find it like the kingdom of the Turk. So Alexander first had to strike it with his whole force and drive Darius from the field; after that victory, Darius being dead, the state remained secure for Alexander, for the reasons discussed above. And if his successors had been united, they could have enjoyed it at their ease; no disturbances arose in that kingdom except those they stirred up themselves. But it is impossible to possess states organized like that of France with so much quiet. This is the source of the frequent rebellions against the Romans in Spain, France, and Greece, because of the many principalities in those lands.¹ As long as their memory lasted, the Romans were always uncertain of their possession; but once that memory was extinguished, by the power and long duration of their empire they became secure possessors. And later, when the Romans fought among themselves, each of them was able to draw a part of those provinces after him, according to the authority he had gained there; and the provinces, since the family of their old lords had been extinguished, recognized no one but the Romans. Considering all these things, then, no one will be surprised at the ease with which Alexander held the state of Asia, or at the difficulties others have had in preserving what they acquired, like Pyrrhus and many more.² This came not from the great or small ability of the victor, but from the difference in what he conquered.

[1.](#) By “France” Machiavelli means Roman Gaul.

[2.](#) Pyrrhus, king of Epirus (319–272 BC), won battles in southern Italy and Sicily but could not hold what he took.

V. How Cities or Principalities That Lived Under Their Own Laws Before They Were Conquered Should Be Governed

When the states acquired, as I have said, are accustomed to living under their own laws and in freedom, there are three ways to hold them: the first, to ruin them; the second, to go and live there in person; the third, to let them live under their own laws, taking a tribute from them and setting up a government of a few within them who will keep them friendly to you. For that government, having been created by the prince, knows that it cannot survive without his friendship and power, and must do everything to keep him there. And a city used to living in freedom is held more easily through its own citizens than in any other way, if you mean to preserve it.

The Spartans and the Romans are examples. The Spartans held Athens and Thebes by setting up a government of a few; yet they lost them again.¹ The Romans, to hold Capua, Carthage, and Numantia, destroyed them, and did not lose them. They tried to hold Greece almost as the Spartans had, making it free and leaving it its own laws, and they did not succeed; so they were forced to destroy many cities of that province in order to hold it. For in truth there is no sure way to possess such cities except to ruin them. And whoever becomes master of a city used to living in freedom and does not destroy it should expect to be destroyed by it; because in rebellion it always has as its refuge the name of liberty and its own ancient institutions, which are never forgotten,

either through the passage of time or through benefits received. And whatever is done or provided, unless the inhabitants are divided or scattered, they do not forget that name or those institutions, and at every turn they run back to them, as Pisa did after a hundred years of servitude to the Florentines.² But when cities or provinces are used to living under a prince and his family has been extinguished, then, being on the one hand used to obeying and on the other lacking their old prince, they cannot agree on making one from among themselves, and they do not know how to live in freedom. So they are slower to take up arms, and a prince can win them over and secure himself against them more easily. But in republics there is more life, more hatred, more desire for revenge; the memory of their ancient liberty does not and cannot let them rest. So the surest way is to wipe them out or to live there.

[1.](#) Sparta imposed the rule of the Thirty on Athens in 404 BC and a garrison and oligarchy on Thebes in 382 BC; both were overthrown within a few years.

[2.](#) Florence bought Pisa in 1405 and took it in 1406; Pisa rebelled in 1494, when Charles VIII entered Italy, and was not retaken until 1509. The servitude had lasted not a hundred years but less than ninety.

VI. New Principalities Acquired by One's Own Arms and Ability

Let no one be surprised if, in speaking of principalities that are entirely new, both in their prince and in their state, I bring forward the very greatest examples. For men almost always walk on paths beaten by others and proceed in their actions by imitation; and since one cannot keep entirely to the paths of others, nor attain the ability of those one imitates, a prudent man should always enter on the paths beaten by great men and imitate those who have been most excellent, so that if his own ability does not reach theirs, it will at least give off some scent of it. He should do as prudent archers do: when the place they mean to hit seems too far away, and they know how far the strength of their bow will carry, they aim a good deal higher than the target, not to reach such a height with their arrow, but to be able, with the help of so high an aim, to hit the mark they intend. I say, then, that in entirely new principalities, where there is a new prince, there is more or less difficulty in keeping them according to whether the one who acquires them is more or less able. And because this event, rising from private station to prince, presupposes either ability or fortune, it seems that one or the other of these two things lessens many of the difficulties to some extent. Nevertheless, the one who has relied less on fortune has held on longer. It also makes things easier when the prince, having no other states, is obliged to come and live there in person. But to come to those who have become princes by their own ability and not by fortune, I say that the most

excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and the like. And although Moses should not be discussed, since he was a mere executor of the things God commanded him, still he must be admired, if only for the grace that made him worthy to speak with God. But let us consider Cyrus and the others who have acquired or founded kingdoms: you will find them all admirable; and if their particular actions and institutions are considered, they will not seem different from those of Moses, who had so great a teacher. And examining their actions and lives, one does not see that they had anything from fortune but the opportunity, which gave them the matter into which they could introduce whatever form they pleased. Without that opportunity the ability of their spirit would have been wasted, and without that ability the opportunity would have come in vain. It was necessary, then, for Moses to find the people of Israel in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by the Egyptians, so that they would be willing to follow him to get out of servitude. It was fitting that Romulus should find no room in Alba and should have been exposed at birth, if he was to become king of Rome and founder of that nation. Cyrus had to find the Persians discontented with the rule of the Medes, and the Medes soft and effeminate after a long peace. Theseus could not have shown his ability if he had not found the Athenians scattered. These opportunities, therefore, made these men prosper, and their excellent ability made the opportunity known; so their country was ennobled by it and flourished.

Those who, like these men, become princes by the paths of ability acquire their principality with difficulty but hold it with ease. The difficulties they have in acquiring it arise partly from the new institutions and methods they are forced to introduce to found their state and their security. And it should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, or more dangerous to manage than to take the lead in

introducing new institutions. For the innovator has as enemies all those who do well under the old institutions, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would do well under the new. This lukewarmness comes partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not truly believe in new things until they have seen them confirmed by experience. Hence, whenever those who are enemies have the opportunity to attack, they do it with partisan zeal, while the others defend lukewarmly, so that the innovator is in danger along with them. It is necessary, therefore, if we want to discuss this part well, to examine whether these innovators stand on their own or depend on others: that is, whether to carry out their work they must beg, or can use force. In the first case they always come to grief and accomplish nothing; but when they depend on their own resources and can use force, they are seldom in danger. That is why all armed prophets have conquered and the unarmed have come to ruin. For besides what has been said, the nature of peoples is changeable: it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion. So things must be arranged in such a way that when they no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force. Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus could not have had their constitutions observed for long if they had been unarmed, as happened in our own times to Fra Girolamo Savonarola,¹ who was ruined with his new institutions as soon as the multitude began not to believe him, and he had no means of holding firm those who had believed or of making the unbelievers believe. Such men, therefore, have great difficulty in making their way; all their dangers lie along the road, and they must overcome them with their ability. But once they have overcome them and begin to be held in veneration, having destroyed those who envied them their qualities, they remain powerful, secure, honored, and happy.

To such lofty examples I want to add a lesser one, but one that will bear some proportion to them, and I will let it stand for all others of its kind: Hiero of Syracuse.² From private citizen he became prince of Syracuse; and he too had nothing from fortune but the opportunity. For when the Syracusans were oppressed, they chose him as their captain, and from there he earned the right to be made their prince. And he was of such ability, even in private life, that the writer who tells of him says “he lacked nothing to be a king except a kingdom.”³ He did away with the old militia and set up a new one; he gave up his old friendships and made new ones; and as soon as he had friendships and soldiers that were his own, he could build any building on such a foundation. So he took great pains to acquire, and little to keep.

[1.](#) Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), Dominican friar and preacher who dominated Florence after the expulsion of the Medici in 1494. He lost his following, was excommunicated, and was hanged and burned in the main square of Florence in 1498.

[2.](#) Hiero II, tyrant and then king of Syracuse (c. 270–215 BC).

[3.](#) Justin, *Epitome* 23.4: *quod nihil illi deesset ad regnandum praeter regnum*.

VII. New Principalities Acquired by Others' Arms and by Fortune

Those who rise from private citizens to princes by fortune alone rise with little effort but keep their position with a great deal. They meet no difficulty along the way, because they fly there; all their difficulties arise once they have landed. Such are those to whom a state is granted, either for money or by the favor of the one who grants it, as happened to many in Greece, in the cities of Ionia and the Hellespont, where Darius made men princes so that they would hold those cities for his security and glory; and such, too, were those emperors who rose from private life to the empire by corrupting the soldiers. These men rest simply on the will and the fortune of whoever granted them their state, which are two very fickle and unstable things; and they neither know how to hold that rank nor can they. They do not know how, because unless a man has great intelligence and ability, it is not reasonable to expect that, having always lived in private station, he should know how to command. They cannot, because they have no forces that can be friendly and faithful to them. Then, too, states that come quickly, like all other things in nature that are born and grow fast, cannot have their roots and branches in such a way that the first bad weather does not kill them; unless, as I have said, those who have so suddenly become princes are of such ability that they know how to prepare at once to keep what fortune has thrown into their laps, and to lay afterward the foundations that others laid before they became princes.

For these two ways of becoming a prince, by ability or by fortune, I want to bring forward two examples from the days within our memory, one for each: Francesco Sforza and Cesare Borgia. Francesco, by the proper means and with great ability, rose from private citizen to Duke of Milan, and what he had acquired with a thousand troubles he kept with little effort. On the other side, Cesare Borgia, whom the people called Duke Valentino, acquired his state through his father's fortune and lost it through the same, even though he made every effort and did all the things a prudent and able man should do to put down his roots in the states that the arms and fortune of others had granted him. For, as was said above, whoever does not lay his foundations first may, with great ability, lay them afterward, though they are laid with trouble for the architect and danger to the building. If, then, we consider all the Duke's progress, we will see that he had laid great foundations for his future power, and I do not judge it superfluous to discuss them, because I would not know what better precepts to give a new prince than the example of his actions. And if his measures did not profit him, it was not his fault, for it came from an extraordinary and extreme malice of fortune.

Alexander VI, in wanting to make his son the Duke great, had many difficulties, present and future. First, he saw no way of making him lord of any state that was not a state of the Church; and if he turned to taking a state of the Church, he knew that the Duke of Milan and the Venetians would not allow it, because Faenza and Rimini were already under Venetian protection. Besides this, he saw that the arms of Italy, and especially those he might have used, were in the hands of men who had reason to fear the pope's greatness; so he could not trust them, since they were all in the hands of the Orsini and the Colonna and their associates.¹ It was necessary, then, to upset the existing order and throw the states of these men into disorder, so as to be able to make himself securely

master of part of them. This was easy for him, because he found that the Venetians, moved by other reasons, had set about bringing the French back into Italy; and he not only did not oppose this, but made it easier by annulling King Louis's first marriage. So the king came into Italy with the help of the Venetians and the consent of Alexander; and no sooner was he in Milan than the pope had troops from him for the enterprise of the Romagna, which was allowed to go forward because of the king's reputation. Having acquired the Romagna, then, and beaten down the Colonna, the Duke wanted to keep it and go further, but two things stood in his way: one, his own forces, which did not seem faithful to him; the other, the will of France. That is, he feared that the Orsini troops, which he had been using, would fail him, and not only keep him from acquiring more but take away what he had acquired, and that the king might do the same. Of the Orsini he had a sign when, after taking Faenza, he attacked Bologna and saw them go coldly into that assault; and as for the king, he learned his mind when, after taking the duchy of Urbino, he attacked Tuscany, and the king made him give up that enterprise. So the Duke decided to depend no longer on the arms and fortune of others. First, he weakened the Orsini and Colonna factions in Rome, by winning over all their adherents who were gentlemen, making them his own gentlemen and giving them large salaries; and he honored them, according to their quality, with commands and governorships. So in a few months the attachment to the factions died out in their hearts, and all of it turned toward the Duke. After this, having scattered the members of the house of Colonna, he waited for an opportunity to wipe out the Orsini. It came to him well, and he used it better. For the Orsini, having realized too late that the greatness of the Duke and of the Church meant their ruin, held a meeting at Magione, near Perugia.² From that came the rebellion of Urbino, the uprisings in the Romagna, and countless dangers for

the Duke, all of which he overcame with the help of the French. And when his reputation had returned, trusting neither France nor any other outside force, so as not to have to put them to the test, he turned to deceit. He knew so well how to hide his intentions that the Orsini, through Signor Paolo,³ made peace with him; and the Duke spared no courtesy to reassure Paolo, giving him money, clothes, and horses, until their simplicity brought them into his hands at Senigallia.⁴ Having wiped out these leaders, then, and turned their partisans into his own friends, the Duke had laid very good foundations for his power, holding all the Romagna together with the duchy of Urbino; and above all he believed he had made the Romagna his friend and won over all its people, since they had begun to taste well-being.

And because this part deserves notice and imitation by others, I do not want to leave it out. When the Duke had taken the Romagna, he found that it had been ruled by impotent lords who had despoiled their subjects rather than governed them, and had given them reason for disunion rather than union, so that the province was full of robberies, feuds, and every other kind of lawlessness. He judged that to make it peaceful and obedient to the sovereign arm, it was necessary to give it good government. So he put in charge there Remirro de Orco, a cruel and efficient man, to whom he gave the fullest power. In a short time this man made it peaceful and united, with very great reputation. Then the Duke judged that such excessive authority was no longer necessary, because he feared it might become hateful; and he set up a civil court in the middle of the province, with a most excellent president, where every city had its own advocate. And because he knew that the past severities had generated some hatred against him, to purge the minds of those people and win them over completely, he wanted to show that if any cruelty had been committed, it had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And tak-

ing his opportunity from this, one morning at Cesena he had Remirro laid out in the piazza in two pieces, with a block of wood and a bloody knife beside him.⁵ The ferocity of this spectacle left those people at once satisfied and stunned.

But let us return to where we started. I say that the Duke, finding himself quite powerful and partly secured against present dangers, since he had armed himself in his own way and had largely destroyed the forces near enough to harm him, still had to reckon with the king of France if he wanted to go on acquiring; because he knew that the king, who had realized his mistake too late, would not put up with it. So he began to seek new friendships and to blow hot and cold with France, at the time the French were marching toward the Kingdom of Naples against the Spaniards who were besieging Gaeta.⁶ And his intention was to secure himself against the French, which he would quickly have achieved if Alexander had lived.

Such were his measures as to present things. But as to the future, he had to fear first of all that a new successor in the Church might not be his friend and might try to take away what Alexander had given him. He planned to guard against this in four ways: first, by wiping out the families of all the lords he had despoiled, so as to take that opportunity away from the pope; second, by winning over all the gentlemen of Rome, as was said, so as to hold the pope in check with them; third, by making the College of Cardinals as much his own as he could; fourth, by acquiring so much power before the pope died that he could resist a first assault on his own. Of these four things, at the death of Alexander he had accomplished three, and the fourth was almost done. Of the despoiled lords he killed as many as he could lay hands on, and very few escaped; he had won over the Roman gentlemen; and in the College he had a very large party. As for new acquisitions, he had planned to become lord of Tuscany; he already held Perugia

and Piombino, and had taken Pisa under his protection. And as soon as he no longer had to reckon with France (and he no longer had to, since the French had already been stripped of the Kingdom by the Spaniards, so that each of them was obliged to buy his friendship), he would have leapt into Pisa. After that, Lucca and Siena would have yielded at once, partly out of envy of the Florentines, partly out of fear; and the Florentines would have had no remedy. Had this succeeded for him (and it was succeeding in the very year Alexander died), he would have acquired so much strength and so much reputation that he would have stood on his own, and would no longer have depended on the fortune and forces of others, but on his own power and ability. But Alexander died five years after the Duke had first drawn his sword. He left the Duke with only the state of the Romagna consolidated, with all the others up in the air, between two very powerful hostile armies, and mortally ill.⁷ And there was in the Duke such ferocity and such ability, he knew so well how men are to be won or lost, and the foundations he had laid in so short a time were so sound, that if he had not had those armies on his back, or if he had been healthy, he would have held out against every difficulty. And that his foundations were good could be seen: the Romagna waited for him for more than a month; in Rome, though only half alive, he remained safe; and although the Baglioni, the Vitelli, and the Orsini came to Rome, they found no following against him. If he could not make the man he wanted pope, he could at least keep out the man he did not want. Had he been healthy when Alexander died, everything would have been easy for him. And he told me himself, in the days when Julius II was elected, that he had thought of everything that might happen when his father died, and had found a remedy for all of it, except that he never thought that at his father's death he himself would also be close to dying.

So, gathering up all the actions of the Duke, I would not know how to reproach him; on the contrary, it seems to me that I should hold him up, as I have done, for imitation by all those who have risen to power through fortune and the arms of others. For with his great spirit and his high aims, he could not have conducted himself otherwise, and the only things that stood against his designs were the shortness of Alexander's life and his own illness. Whoever, then, judges it necessary in his new principality to secure himself against his enemies, to win friends, to conquer by force or by fraud, to make himself loved and feared by the people, followed and respected by the soldiers, to wipe out those who can or must harm you, to renew old institutions with new methods, to be severe and gracious, magnanimous and generous, to destroy a disloyal militia and create a new one, to keep the friendship of kings and princes in such a way that they must either help you graciously or think twice before harming you, cannot find fresher examples than this man's actions. He can be faulted only in the election of Julius as pontiff, in which he made a bad choice.⁸ For, as was said, though he could not make a pope of his own liking, he could keep anyone from being pope; and he should never have agreed to the papacy of any of the cardinals he had injured, or of any who, once pope, would have reason to fear him. For men do injury either out of fear or out of hatred. Those he had injured were, among others, San Piero ad Vincula, Colonna, San Giorgio, and Ascanio; all the others, once pope, would have had reason to fear him, except Rouen and the Spaniards: the Spaniards because of kinship and obligation, Rouen because of his power, having the kingdom of France behind him. Therefore the Duke should above all have made a Spaniard pope, and failing that, should have agreed to Rouen and not to San Piero ad Vincula. And whoever believes that among great men new benefits make old injuries forgotten

deceives himself. The Duke, then, erred in this election, and it was the cause of his final ruin.

[1.](#) The Orsini and the Colonna, rival Roman baronial families who commanded much of the mercenary soldiery of central Italy.

[2.](#) In October 1502 Cesare's own captains (the Orsini, Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, and others) met at Magione and conspired against him.

[3.](#) Paolo Orsini, one of the conspirators.

[4.](#) On December 31, 1502, at Senigallia, Cesare seized the reconciled conspirators; Vitellozzo and Oliverotto were strangled that night, Paolo Orsini and the Duke of Gravina a few weeks later. Machiavelli was with Cesare as Florentine envoy.

[5.](#) December 26, 1502.

[6.](#) In 1503, during the war between France and Spain for the Kingdom of Naples.

[7.](#) Alexander VI died on August 18, 1503, of a fever that also struck Cesare. The French and Spanish armies were then both near Rome.

[8.](#) Giuliano della Rovere, cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli, was elected Pope Julius II (1503–13) in November 1503 with Cesare's support, after the brief reign of Pius III. Julius soon stripped Cesare of his states; Cesare died in Navarre in 1507. The other cardinals named are Giovanni Colonna, Raffaele Riario (San Giorgio), and Ascanio Sforza.

VIII. Those Who Have Come to a Principality Through Crimes

But because there are two further ways of rising from private citizen to prince, which cannot be attributed entirely either to fortune or to ability, I do not think they should be left aside, although one of them could be discussed more fully in a treatment of republics. These are when one rises to a principality by some wicked and criminal path, or when a private citizen becomes prince of his own country by the favor of his fellow citizens. In speaking of the first way, I will show it with two examples, one ancient and one modern, without going any further into the merits of this subject, because I judge that these are enough for anyone who might be obliged to imitate them.

Agathocles the Sicilian,¹ born not only to private station but to the lowest and most abject, became king of Syracuse. The son of a potter, he led a wicked life at every stage of his career; nevertheless he accompanied his crimes with such ability of mind and body that, having turned to soldiering, he rose through its ranks to become praetor of Syracuse. Once established in that rank, he decided to become prince and to hold by violence, and without obligation to anyone, what had been granted him by consent. He came to an understanding about this plan with Hamilcar the Carthaginian, who was campaigning with his armies in Sicily, and one morning he assembled the people and the senate of Syracuse as if he had matters of the republic to put before them. At a prearranged signal he had his soldiers kill all the senators and the rich-

est of the people. With these men dead, he seized and held the principality of that city without any civil strife. And although he was twice defeated by the Carthaginians and finally besieged, he was not only able to defend his city, but, leaving part of his men to defend it against the siege, he attacked Africa with the rest, and in a short time freed Syracuse from the siege and brought Carthage to the direst straits. The Carthaginians were forced to come to terms with him, to content themselves with the possession of Africa, and to leave Sicily to Agathocles. Whoever considers the actions and ability of this man, then, will see nothing, or very little, that he can attribute to fortune; since, as was said above, it was not through anyone's favor but by rising through the ranks of the army, which he had won with a thousand hardships and dangers, that he came to the principality, and he afterward kept it by so many bold and dangerous measures. Yet one cannot call it ability (*virtù*) to kill one's fellow citizens, to betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion. By these methods one can acquire power, but not glory. For if one considers the ability of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversity, one cannot see why he should be judged inferior to any of the most excellent captains. Nevertheless, his savage cruelty and inhumanity, along with his countless crimes, do not allow him to be celebrated among the most excellent men. One cannot, therefore, attribute to fortune or to ability what he achieved without either.

In our own times, during the reign of Alexander VI, Oliverotto of Fermo, who had been left fatherless as a small child some years before, was brought up by his maternal uncle, Giovanni Fogliani, and in the first years of his youth was sent to soldier under Paolo Vitelli, so that, steeped in that discipline, he might reach some excellent rank in the army. When Paolo died, he soldiered under his brother Vitellozzo,² and in a very short time, being clever and

vigorous in body and spirit, he became the first man of his company. But since it seemed servile to him to be under others, he planned to seize Fermo with the help of some citizens of Fermo who valued servitude more than the liberty of their country, and with the support of the Vitelli. He wrote to Giovanni Fogliani that, having been away from home for many years, he wanted to come and see him and his city, and to see something of his inheritance; and because he had labored for nothing but honor, he wanted to come in honorable style, accompanied by a hundred horsemen from among his friends and servants, so that his fellow citizens would see that he had not spent his time in vain. He begged his uncle to arrange for the people of Fermo to receive him honorably, which would do honor not only to Oliverotto but to Giovanni himself, since Oliverotto was his ward. Giovanni, therefore, did not fail in any duty toward his nephew. He had him received honorably by the people of Fermo, and Oliverotto lodged in his uncle's house. There, after a few days spent arranging what was needed for his coming crime, he gave a very formal banquet, to which he invited Giovanni Fogliani and all the leading men of Fermo. When the food and all the other entertainments usual at such banquets were finished, Oliverotto artfully began certain grave discussions, speaking of the greatness of Pope Alexander and of Cesare his son, and of their enterprises. Giovanni and the others answered him, and then he suddenly rose, saying that these were things to be spoken of in a more private place; and he withdrew into a room, where Giovanni and all the other citizens followed him. No sooner were they seated than soldiers came out of hiding places in the room and killed Giovanni and all the others. After this murder Oliverotto mounted his horse, rode through the town, and besieged the chief magistrates in the palace, so that out of fear they were forced to obey him and set up a government of which he made himself prince. And having killed all those who, being discontented, could

harm him, he strengthened himself with new civil and military institutions, so that in the space of the one year he held the principality, he was not only secure in the city of Fermo but had become fearsome to all his neighbors. And it would have been as hard to dislodge him as Agathocles, had he not let himself be deceived by Cesare Borgia when, as was said above, Cesare took the Orsini and the Vitelli at Senigallia. There Oliverotto too was taken, one year after the parricide he had committed, and he was strangled together with Vitellozzo, who had been his teacher in ability and in crime.

Someone might wonder how it came about that Agathocles, and others like him, after endless betrayals and cruelties, could live long and securely in his own country and defend himself against outside enemies, and that his citizens never conspired against him; whereas many others, by means of cruelty, have been unable to keep their states even in peaceful times, not to mention the uncertain times of war. I believe that this comes from cruelties being badly used or well used. Well used are those (if one may speak well of evil) that are done all at once, out of the necessity of securing oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much benefit for the subjects as possible. Badly used are those which, though few at the beginning, grow with time rather than die out. Those who follow the first way can, with God and with men, find some remedy for their state, as Agathocles did; the others cannot possibly survive. Hence it should be noted that in seizing a state, the one who takes it must reckon up all the injuries he needs to do, and do them all at once, so as not to have to repeat them every day, and so as to be able, by not renewing them, to reassure men and win them over with benefits. Whoever does otherwise, out of timidity or bad advice, is always obliged to keep the knife in his hand; nor can he ever rely on his subjects, since they, because of fresh and continual injuries, can never feel secure

with him. For injuries must be done all together, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; and benefits must be given little by little, so that they may be tasted better. And above all a prince must live with his subjects in such a way that no accident, good or bad, makes him change course; because when necessities come in adverse times, you are too late for harsh measures, and the good you do does not help you, because it is judged to be forced, and you get no thanks for it.

[1.](#) Agathocles (361–289 BC), tyrant and later king of Syracuse. Machiavelli follows the account in Justin's *Epitome*.

[2.](#) Paolo Vitelli, a Florentine condottiere, was executed by the Florentines in 1499 for alleged treachery in the war against Pisa. His brother Vitellozzo was one of Cesare Borgia's captains.

IX. The Civil Principality

But coming to the other case, when a private citizen becomes prince of his own country not through crime or other intolerable violence but by the favor of his fellow citizens (what may be called a civil principality, and to attain it requires neither pure ability nor pure fortune, but rather a fortunate cunning), I say that one rises to this principality either by the favor of the people or by the favor of the great. For in every city these two different humors are found, and they arise from this: the people do not want to be commanded or oppressed by the great, and the great want to command and oppress the people. From these two different appetites one of three effects arises in cities: principality, liberty, or license.

A principality is brought about either by the people or by the great, according to which of these parties has the opportunity. For when the great see that they cannot resist the people, they begin to build up the reputation of one of their own and make him prince, so that under his shadow they can satisfy their appetite. The people, too, when they see that they cannot resist the great, build up the reputation of one man and make him prince, so as to be defended by his authority. The one who comes to the principality with the help of the great holds on with more difficulty than the one who becomes prince with the help of the people, because he finds himself a prince surrounded by many who seem to be his equals, and for this reason he can neither command them nor manage them as he likes. But the one who arrives at the principality by popular favor finds himself alone there, and has around him either no one or very few who are not ready to obey. Besides this,

one cannot honestly satisfy the great without injury to others, but one can satisfy the people; for the people's aim is more honest than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed. Besides, a prince can never secure himself against a hostile people, because there are too many of them; he can secure himself against the great, because they are few. The worst a prince can expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by them; but from hostile great men he must fear not only being abandoned but also their coming against him, because, having more foresight and more cunning, they always get out in time to save themselves, and seek favor with whoever they expect will win. The prince is also obliged always to live with the same people, but he can do very well without the same great men, since he can make and unmake them every day, and give and take away their reputation as he pleases.

To make this part clearer, I say that the great are to be considered chiefly in two ways. Either they conduct themselves in such a way that they bind themselves entirely to your fortune, or they do not. Those who bind themselves and are not rapacious should be honored and loved. Those who do not bind themselves are to be examined in two ways. Either they do this out of faintheartedness and a natural lack of spirit, and then you should make use of them, especially those who give good counsel, because in prosperity they bring you honor and in adversity you have nothing to fear from them. But when they do not bind themselves by design and for ambitious reasons, it is a sign that they are thinking more of themselves than of you; and the prince must guard against such men and fear them as if they were open enemies, because in adversity they will always help to ruin him.

One who becomes prince through the favor of the people, therefore, must keep them friendly to him, which will be easy, since they ask only not to be oppressed. But one who becomes

prince against the people with the favor of the great must before everything else try to win the people over, which will be easy if he takes them under his protection. And because men who receive good from someone from whom they expected harm are more bound to their benefactor, the people quickly become better disposed toward him than if he had been brought to the principality by their favor. The prince can win them over in many ways, but because these vary with circumstances, no fixed rule can be given, and so they will be left aside. I will conclude only that a prince must have the people friendly; otherwise he has no remedy in adversity.

Nabis, prince of the Spartans,¹ withstood a siege by all of Greece and by a very victorious Roman army, and defended his country and his state against them; and when the danger came, it was enough for him to secure himself against a few. If he had had the people hostile, this would not have been enough. And let no one contest this opinion of mine with that trite proverb, that whoever builds on the people builds on mud. That is true when a private citizen lays his foundation on them and persuades himself that the people will free him if he is oppressed by his enemies or by the magistrates. In that case he could often find himself deceived, like the Gracchi in Rome and Giorgio Scali in Florence.² But if it is a prince who builds on them, who can command and is a man of heart, who does not lose his nerve in adversity, who does not neglect other preparations, and who keeps the whole people in good spirit with his courage and his institutions, he will never find himself deceived by them, and he will see that he has laid his foundations well.

These principalities are usually in danger when they are about to pass from a civil to an absolute order. For these princes command either by themselves or through magistrates. In the latter case their position is weaker and more dangerous, because they

depend entirely on the will of the citizens who have been placed in the magistracies, and these men, especially in adverse times, can take the state from them with great ease, either by acting against them or by not obeying them. And in times of danger the prince is too late to seize absolute authority, because the citizens and subjects, who are used to receiving their orders from the magistrates, are not ready in those emergencies to obey his; and in uncertain times he will always be short of men he can trust. For such a prince cannot rely on what he sees in quiet times, when the citizens need the state; because then everyone comes running, everyone makes promises, and each one is willing to die for him, when death is far away. But in adverse times, when the state needs its citizens, then few are found. And this test is all the more dangerous in that it can be made only once. So a wise prince must think of a way by which his citizens, always and in every kind of time, will need the state and him; and then they will always be faithful to him.

[1.](#) Nabis, tyrant of Sparta (207–192 BC), held out against the Romans and the Achaean League in 195 BC.

[2.](#) The brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Roman tribunes of the people, were killed in 133 and 121 BC. Giorgio Scali, a leader of the popular party in Florence after the Ciompi revolt, was beheaded in 1382 when the people failed to rise for him.

X. How the Strength of All Principalities Should Be Measured

In examining the qualities of these principalities, there is another consideration to keep in mind: whether a prince has so much power that he can, if need be, stand on his own, or whether he always needs the protection of others. To make this part clearer, I say that I judge those able to stand on their own who, through an abundance of men or of money, can put together an adequate army and fight a pitched battle against anyone who comes to attack them; and I judge those always in need of others who cannot take the field against the enemy but are forced to take refuge behind their walls and guard them. The first case has been discussed, and we will say more about it as the occasion arises. In the second case nothing more can be said except to urge such princes to fortify and provision their own town and to take no account of the surrounding country. Whoever has fortified his town well, and has managed his other dealings with his subjects as was said above and will be said below, will always be attacked with great caution; for men are always enemies of enterprises in which they see difficulty, and no one can see it as easy to attack a man who has a strong town and is not hated by the people.

The cities of Germany are entirely free; they have little surrounding territory, they obey the emperor when they choose, and they fear neither him nor any other power around them. For they are so well fortified that everyone thinks taking them would be a slow and difficult business. They all have suitable moats and walls;

they have enough artillery; they always keep in their public store-houses enough to drink, to eat, and to burn for a year. Besides this, so as to keep the common people fed without loss to the public purse, they always keep on hand enough to give them a year's work in the trades that are the sinews and life of the city and by whose industry the common people live. They also hold military exercises in high esteem, and have many ordinances to maintain them.

A prince, then, who has a strong city and does not make himself hated cannot be attacked; and even if someone did attack him, the attacker would leave in disgrace. For the affairs of the world are so changeable that it is almost impossible for anyone to sit idle with his armies for a year besieging him. And if someone should reply that if the people have their property outside the walls and see it burning, they will lose patience, and the long siege and their own self-interest will make them forget their prince, I answer that a powerful and spirited prince will always overcome all these difficulties, now giving his subjects hope that the evil will not last long, now making them fear the cruelty of the enemy, now deftly securing himself against those who seem too bold. Besides this, the enemy will naturally burn and ruin the country on his arrival, at the very time when men's spirits are still hot and eager for defense; and so the prince has all the less to fear, because after some days, when spirits have cooled, the damage has already been done, the harm has been suffered, and there is no longer any remedy. And then they come to unite with their prince all the more, since it seems that he is under an obligation to them, their houses having been burned and their property ruined in his defense. For it is the nature of men to be bound as much by the benefits they give as by those they receive. So, if all this is considered well, it will not be difficult for a prudent prince to keep the spirits of his citizens

firm, both at the beginning and later on in a siege, as long as he does not lack food or the means of defense.

XI. Ecclesiastical Principalities

It now remains for us to discuss only ecclesiastical principalities, in which all the difficulties come before they are possessed. For they are acquired either by ability or by fortune, and kept without either, because they are sustained by institutions grown old in religion, which have been so powerful and of such a kind that they keep their princes in power however they behave and live. These princes alone have states and do not defend them, and subjects and do not govern them; and their states, though undefended, are not taken from them, and their subjects, though ungoverned, do not care, and neither think of breaking away from them nor can. These principalities alone, then, are secure and happy. But since they are ruled by higher causes, which the human mind cannot reach, I will not speak of them; for since they are exalted and maintained by God, it would be the act of a presumptuous and rash man to discuss them. Nevertheless, someone might ask me how it has come about that the Church has risen to such greatness in temporal power, when before Alexander the Italian powers (and not only those called the powers, but every baron and lord, however small) held it in little esteem as a temporal force, while now a king of France trembles before it, and it has been able to drive him out of Italy and ruin the Venetians. Although this is well known, it does not seem superfluous to me to recall a good part of it to memory.

Before Charles, king of France, came into Italy, this province was under the rule of the pope, the Venetians, the king of Naples, the Duke of Milan, and the Florentines. These powers had to have

two chief concerns: one, that no foreigner should enter Italy in arms; the other, that none of them should seize more territory. Those they were most concerned about were the pope and the Venetians. To hold back the Venetians required the union of all the others, as in the defense of Ferrara; and to keep the pope down they made use of the barons of Rome. These were divided into two factions, the Orsini and the Colonna, and there was always cause for trouble between them; and standing with arms in hand under the pontiff's very eyes, they kept the papacy weak and infirm. And although a spirited pope sometimes arose, like Sixtus,¹ neither fortune nor wisdom could ever free him from these troubles. The shortness of the popes' lives was the cause of it; for in the ten years that a pope lived, on average, he could barely put down one of the factions; and if, for instance, one pope had almost wiped out the Colonna, another arose who was hostile to the Orsini, which made the Colonna rise again, and he did not have time to wipe out the Orsini. This made the temporal forces of the pope little esteemed in Italy. Then Alexander VI arose, who, of all the pontiffs there have ever been, showed how far a pope could prevail with money and with force; and with Duke Valentino as his instrument, and the coming of the French as his opportunity, he did all the things I discussed above in speaking of the Duke's actions. And although his intention was to make not the Church great but the Duke, nevertheless what he did turned to the greatness of the Church, which, after his death and the Duke's fall, became the heir of his labors. Then came Pope Julius, and he found the Church great, holding all the Romagna, with the barons of Rome wiped out and those factions crushed by Alexander's blows; and he also found the way open to a method of accumulating money never used before Alexander's time.

Julius not only followed these things but increased them. He planned to win Bologna, to destroy the Venetians, and to drive the

French out of Italy; and all these enterprises succeeded for him, and with all the more praise to him because he did everything to increase the Church and not any private person. He also kept the Orsini and Colonna factions in the condition in which he found them; and although there were some leaders among them ready to make trouble, two things have kept them quiet: one, the greatness of the Church, which daunts them; the other, their having no cardinals of their own, who are the source of the tumults among them. These factions will never be quiet whenever they have cardinals, because the cardinals nourish the factions in Rome and outside, and the barons are forced to defend them; and so from the ambition of prelates arise the discords and tumults among the barons. His Holiness Pope Leo,² then, has found this papacy very powerful; and it is hoped that if those popes made it great with arms, he, with his goodness and his countless other virtues, will make it very great and venerable.

[1.](#) Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere), pope 1471–84.

[2.](#) Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici, 1475–1521), son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and uncle of the Lorenzo to whom the book is dedicated; elected pope in March 1513.

XII. How Many Kinds of Armies There Are, and Mercenary Soldiers

Having discussed in detail all the qualities of the principalities I proposed to discuss at the beginning, and having considered to some extent the causes of their well-being and their ills, and shown the methods by which many have sought to acquire and hold them, it remains for me now to discuss in general terms the offense and defense that can occur in each of them. We said above that a prince must have good foundations; otherwise he is bound to fall. The chief foundations of all states, new as well as old or mixed, are good laws and good arms. And because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws, I will leave aside the discussion of laws and speak of arms.

I say, then, that the arms with which a prince defends his state are either his own, or mercenary, or auxiliary, or mixed. Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous; and if a man keeps his state founded on mercenary arms, he will never be steady or secure, because they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, and unfaithful; bold among friends, cowardly among enemies; they have no fear of God and keep no faith with men; and your ruin is put off only as long as the attack is put off. In peace you are despoiled by them, in war by the enemy. The reason for this is that they have no love or any other cause to keep them in the field except a little pay, which is not enough to make them want to die for you. They are glad to be your soldiers as long as

you are not making war; but when war comes, they either run away or leave. I should need little effort to persuade anyone of this, because the present ruin of Italy has been caused by nothing other than its having rested for many years on mercenary arms. These did once bring some success to some, and they seemed brave among themselves; but when the foreigner came, they showed what they were. So Charles, king of France, was able to take Italy with chalk.¹ And whoever said that our sins were the cause of it spoke the truth;² but they were not the sins he believed, but these I have described; and because they were the sins of princes, the princes too have paid the penalty for them.

I want to demonstrate more fully the unhappy nature of these arms. Mercenary captains are either excellent men or not. If they are, you cannot trust them, because they will always aspire to their own greatness, either by oppressing you, who are their master, or by oppressing others against your intentions; but if the captain is not able, he ruins you in the ordinary way. And if someone answers that anyone who has arms in hand will do this, mercenary or not, I would reply that arms have to be employed either by a prince or by a republic. The prince must go in person and perform the office of captain himself; the republic has to send its citizens, and when it sends one who does not turn out to be a capable man, it must replace him, and when he is capable, restrain him by law so that he does not overstep the mark. And experience shows that princes on their own and armed republics make very great progress, while mercenary arms never do anything but harm. And a republic armed with its own arms falls under the sway of one of its citizens with more difficulty than one armed with foreign arms.

Rome and Sparta stood armed and free for many centuries. The Swiss are the most armed and the most free. Among ancient examples of mercenary arms there are the Carthaginians, who were almost overthrown by their mercenary soldiers after the end

of the first war with the Romans, even though the Carthaginians had their own citizens as commanders. Philip of Macedon was made captain of the Thebans' forces after the death of Epaminondas, and after the victory he took away their liberty.³ The Milanese, after the death of Duke Filippo, hired Francesco Sforza against the Venetians; and once he had defeated the enemy at Caravaggio, he joined with them to oppress the Milanese, his masters.⁴ His father Sforza, in the pay of Queen Giovanna of Naples, suddenly left her disarmed, so that to avoid losing her kingdom she was forced to throw herself into the arms of the king of Aragon.⁵ And if the Venetians and the Florentines have in the past increased their dominion with such arms, and their captains have not made themselves princes but have defended them, I answer that the Florentines in this case have been favored by luck; because of the able captains they had reason to fear, some did not win, some met opposition, and others turned their ambition elsewhere. The one who did not win was John Hawkwood,⁶ whose loyalty could not be known, since he did not win; but everyone will admit that if he had won, the Florentines would have been at his mercy. Sforza always had the followers of Braccio against him, so that each kept watch on the other. Francesco turned his ambition to Lombardy; Braccio turned his against the Church and the Kingdom of Naples. But let us come to what happened only a short time ago. The Florentines made Paolo Vitelli their captain, a very prudent man who had risen from private station to very great reputation. Had he taken Pisa, no one would deny that the Florentines would have had to stay with him; for if he had become the soldier of their enemies, they would have had no remedy, and if they kept him, they would have had to obey him. As for the Venetians, if we consider their progress, we will see that they acted securely and gloriously as long as they made war with their own men, which

was before they turned their enterprises to the mainland. At sea, with their gentlemen and their armed common people, they fought with the greatest ability; but when they began to fight on land, they left this ability behind and followed the customs of the wars of Italy. At the beginning of their expansion on land, because they did not have much territory there and had a great reputation, they did not have much to fear from their captains; but as they expanded, which was under Carmagnola, they had a taste of this mistake.⁷ For they saw that he was very able, since they had beaten the Duke of Milan under his command; and they knew, on the other hand, that he had cooled toward the war. They judged that they could no longer win with him, because he did not want to win, and that they could not dismiss him, for fear of losing again what they had acquired; so to secure themselves against him they were forced to kill him. Since then they have had as their captains Bartolomeo da Bergamo, Roberto da San Severino, the count of Pitigliano, and the like, with whom what they had to fear was losing, not winning, as happened later at Vailà, where in a single day they lost what they had acquired with so much labor in eight hundred years.⁸ For from these arms come only slow, late, and feeble gains, and sudden and astonishing losses. And because these examples have brought me to Italy, which has been governed for many years by mercenary arms, I want to discuss them from further back, so that once their origin and progress have been seen, they can be better corrected.

You must understand, then, that as soon as the empire began to be driven out of Italy in recent times, and the pope gained more reputation there in temporal matters, Italy was divided into many states. For many of the large cities took up arms against their nobles, who, favored at first by the emperor, had held them in oppression, and the Church favored the cities so as to gain reputation in temporal affairs; in many other cities, their own citizens

became princes. So Italy came almost entirely into the hands of the Church and of a few republics, and since those priests and those other citizens were not used to arms, they began to hire foreigners. The first to give this soldiery its reputation was Alberigo da Conio, from the Romagna.⁹ From his school came, among others, Braccio and Sforza, who in their time were the arbiters of Italy. After them came all the others who have commanded these arms down to our own times. And the result of their ability has been that Italy has been overrun by Charles, plundered by Louis, violated by Ferdinand, and insulted by the Swiss. The method they have followed has been, first, to take reputation away from the infantry in order to give it to themselves. They did this because, having no state and living by their profession, a few foot soldiers would not give them reputation, and they could not feed many; so they turned to cavalry, where with a manageable number they were fed and honored. And things were reduced to such a state that in an army of twenty thousand soldiers there were not two thousand infantry. Besides this, they had used every means to spare themselves and their soldiers fatigue and fear, not killing one another in their skirmishes but taking prisoners, and releasing them without ransom. They did not attack towns at night; those in the towns did not attack their tents; they made no stockade or ditch around their camp; they did not campaign in winter. And all these things were permitted by their military rules, devised by them, as I have said, to escape both fatigue and danger; so that they have brought Italy to slavery and disgrace.

[1](#). That is, without a fight: the quartermasters of Charles VIII simply chalked the doors of the houses where his troops were to be billeted (1494). The phrase is attributed to Pope Alexander VI.

- [2.](#) Savonarola, who preached that the French invasion was God's punishment for the sins of Italy.
- [3.](#) Machiavelli's memory fails him here: Philip II of Macedon had lived in Thebes as a hostage in his youth, but he was never the Thebans' hired captain. He defeated Thebes and Athens at Chaeronea in 338 BC.
- [4.](#) After the death of Filippo Maria Visconti, the last Visconti duke (1447), Milan became a republic and hired Sforza; he beat the Venetians at Caravaggio in 1448, then changed sides and made himself duke in 1450.
- [5.](#) Muzio Attendolo Sforza (1369–1424) abandoned Queen Giovanna II of Naples in 1420, and she adopted Alfonso V of Aragon as her heir.
- [6.](#) Sir John Hawkwood (c. 1320–1394), an English mercenary captain who served Florence for many years. The Italian text has "Giovanni Aucut."
- [7.](#) Francesco Bussone, count of Carmagnola (c. 1385–1432), commanded the Venetian army against Milan; suspected of double dealing, he was tried and beheaded in Venice in 1432.
- [8.](#) The battle of Vailà (Agnadello), May 14, 1509, in which the army of the League of Cambrai routed the Venetians.
- [9.](#) Alberico da Barbiano, count of Cunio (c. 1348–1409), founder of the first great all-Italian mercenary company.

XIII. Auxiliary, Mixed, and One's Own Soldiers

Auxiliary arms, the other kind of useless arms, are what you have when you call in a powerful ruler to come with his forces to help and defend you, as Pope Julius did in recent times. Having seen in the enterprise of Ferrara the sorry showing of his mercenary arms, he turned to auxiliaries, and agreed with Ferdinand, king of Spain, that Ferdinand should help him with his men and armies. These arms can be useful and good in themselves, but for the one who calls them in they are almost always harmful; for if they lose, you are undone, and if they win, you are their prisoner. And although ancient histories are full of such examples, I do not want to leave this fresh example of Pope Julius II. Nothing could have been less well considered than his decision to put himself entirely in the hands of a foreigner because he wanted Ferrara. But his good fortune brought about a third thing, so that he did not reap the fruit of his bad choice: when his auxiliaries were routed at Ravenna,¹ the Swiss rose up and drove out the victors, against all expectation, his own and everyone else's; and so he did not end up the prisoner either of his enemies, who had fled, or of his auxiliaries, since he had won with arms other than theirs. The Florentines, being entirely unarmed, brought ten thousand Frenchmen to Pisa to take it, and by this decision they ran more danger than at any other time in their troubles.² The emperor of Constantinople, to oppose his neighbors, put ten thousand Turks into Greece, who

would not leave when the war was over; and this was the beginning of Greece's servitude to the infidels.³

Whoever, then, wants to be unable to win should make use of these arms, because they are much more dangerous than mercenaries. With auxiliaries your ruin is ready-made: they are all united, all trained to obey someone else. With mercenaries, once they have won, they need more time and a better opportunity to harm you, since they are not one body and were found and paid by you; and a third party whom you make their head cannot at once gain enough authority to harm you. In short, with mercenaries the greater danger is their cowardice; with auxiliaries, their ability.

A wise prince, therefore, has always avoided these arms and turned to his own, and has preferred to lose with his own men than to win with others, judging that no true victory is won with foreign arms. I will never hesitate to cite Cesare Borgia and his actions. This duke entered the Romagna with auxiliary arms, bringing nothing but French troops, and with them he took Imola and Forlì. But since such arms did not seem safe to him afterward, he turned to mercenaries, judging that there was less danger in them, and hired the Orsini and the Vitelli. Then, finding in his dealings with them that they were doubtful, unfaithful, and dangerous, he destroyed them and turned to his own men. And one can easily see the difference between these kinds of arms by considering the difference in the Duke's reputation when he had the French alone, when he had the Orsini and the Vitelli, and when he was left with his own soldiers and relied on himself. It will be found to have grown at every step; and he was never esteemed so highly as when everyone saw that he was the complete master of his own arms.

I did not want to leave Italian and recent examples; still, I do not want to leave out Hiero of Syracuse, since he is one of those I named above. As I said, when the Syracusans made him head of

their armies, he quickly realized that their mercenary soldiery was useless, since its captains were made like our Italian ones; and since he thought he could neither keep them nor let them go, he had them all cut to pieces, and afterward made war with his own arms and not with foreign ones. I also want to recall a figure from the Old Testament that bears on this point. When David offered himself to Saul to go and fight Goliath, the Philistine challenger, Saul, to give him courage, armed him with his own armor; and once David had it on, he refused it, saying that in it he could not make good use of himself, and so he wanted to meet the enemy with his own sling and his own knife.⁴

In the end, the arms of others either slip off your back, or weigh you down, or bind you. Charles VII, father of King Louis XI, having freed France from the English with his fortune and his ability, recognized this necessity of being armed with one's own arms, and established in his kingdom a standing organization of men-at-arms and infantry.⁵ Afterward his son King Louis abolished the infantry and began to hire Swiss. This error, followed by his successors, is, as can now be seen in fact, the cause of that kingdom's dangers. For having given reputation to the Swiss, he has debased all his own arms; he has abolished his infantry and made his men-at-arms dependent on the arms of others, since, being accustomed to fighting alongside the Swiss, they do not think they can win without them. So it is that the French are no match for the Swiss, and without the Swiss they do not try themselves against others. The armies of France, then, have been mixed, partly mercenary and partly their own; and such arms taken together are much better than pure auxiliaries or pure mercenaries, and much inferior to one's own. And let this example suffice; for the kingdom of France would be invincible if the organization of Charles had been developed or preserved. But the poor prudence of men begins something which, because it tastes good at the time, does

not notice the poison underneath, as I said above of consumptive fevers.

Therefore whoever does not recognize the evils in a principality as they arise is not truly wise, and this is given to few. And if one considers the first cause of the ruin of the Roman Empire, it will be found to have been simply that it began to hire the Goths; for from that beginning the forces of the Roman Empire began to weaken, and all the ability that was taken from it was given to them. I conclude, then, that without arms of its own no principality is secure; on the contrary, it is entirely dependent on fortune, having no ability to defend it in adversity. And it has always been the opinion and judgment of wise men “that nothing is so weak or unstable as a reputation for power not founded on one’s own strength.”⁶ One’s own arms are those composed of subjects, or citizens, or men of your own making; all others are either mercenary or auxiliary. And the way to organize one’s own arms will be easy to find if one examines the institutions of the four I have named above, and sees how Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, and how many republics and princes have armed and organized themselves. To their institutions I refer entirely.

[1.](#) At Ravenna, on April 11, 1512, the French defeated the Spanish and papal army of the Holy League; in the following months the Swiss drove the French out of Lombardy.

[2.](#) In 1500 Florence hired French and Swiss troops from Louis XII for the siege of Pisa; they mutinied and the siege failed.

[3.](#) John VI Cantacuzenus, in his civil war of 1341–47, brought Ottoman troops into Thrace; in 1354 the Turks took Gallipoli, their first foothold in Europe.

[4.](#) 1 Samuel 17:38–51. In the Bible David has only his sling and stones; he cuts off Goliath’s head with the giant’s own sword.

[5.](#) Charles VII (1403–1461) ended the Hundred Years' War and created the first French standing army, the companies of ordinance (1445) and the free archers (1448). Louis XI reigned 1461–83.

[6.](#) Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19: *nihil rerum mortalium tam instabile ac fluxum est quam fama potentiae non sua vi nixae*. Machiavelli quotes from memory.

XIV. What a Prince Should Do About the Military

A prince, then, should have no other object and no other thought, and should take up nothing as his profession, except war and its institutions and discipline; for this is the only art that belongs to one who commands. And it is of such power that it not only keeps those who were born princes in their place, but often enables men of private station to rise to that rank. Conversely, one sees that when princes have thought more about luxuries than about arms, they have lost their states. The first cause that makes you lose your state is neglect of this art, and the cause that enables you to acquire one is to be a master of this art.

Francesco Sforza, because he was armed, rose from private citizen to Duke of Milan; and his sons, because they shunned the hardships of arms, fell from dukes to private citizens.¹ For among the other evils that being unarmed brings you, it makes you contemptible, which is one of those disgraces a prince must guard against, as will be said below. For there is no proportion at all between an armed man and an unarmed one; and it is not reasonable that an armed man should willingly obey an unarmed one, or that an unarmed man should be safe among armed servants. For with scorn in the one and suspicion in the other, it is impossible for them to work well together. And so a prince who does not understand military matters, besides the other misfortunes already mentioned, cannot be esteemed by his soldiers or trust them.

He must, therefore, never lift his thoughts from this exercise of war, and in peace he must exercise himself in it even more than in war. This he can do in two ways: one with deeds, the other with the mind. As to deeds, besides keeping his men well organized and trained, he must always be out hunting, and by this means accustom his body to hardship; and at the same time he must learn the nature of the terrain, and get to know how the mountains rise, how the valleys open, how the plains lie, and understand the nature of rivers and marshes, and give the greatest care to this. This knowledge is useful in two ways. First, he learns to know his own country and can better understand how to defend it; second, through his knowledge of and experience with that terrain, he can easily grasp any other terrain he may need to study for the first time. For the hills, the valleys, the plains, the rivers, and the marshes that are, for instance, in Tuscany have a certain likeness to those of other provinces, so that from knowing the terrain of one province one can easily come to know that of others. And the prince who lacks this expertise lacks the first thing a captain must have; for it teaches you to find the enemy, to choose your quarters, to lead armies, to plan battles, and to besiege towns to your advantage.

Among the praises the writers give to Philopoemen, prince of the Achaeans,² is that in times of peace he never thought of anything but the methods of war. When he was out in the country with his friends, he would often stop and reason with them: "If the enemy were on that hill, and we found ourselves here with our army, which of us would have the advantage? How could we go to meet them while keeping our ranks? If we wanted to retreat, how should we do it? If they retreated, how should we pursue them?" And as they went along he would put before them all the situations that can arise in an army. He listened to their opinion and gave his own, supporting it with reasons; so that, because of these contin-

ual reflections, no accident could ever arise while he was leading his armies for which he did not have the remedy.

As for the exercise of the mind, the prince should read histories, and in them consider the actions of excellent men, see how they conducted themselves in war, and examine the causes of their victories and defeats, so as to be able to avoid the latter and imitate the former. Above all he should do as some excellent men have done in the past: they took as a model someone before them who had been praised and glorified, and always kept his deeds and actions before them, as it is said that Alexander the Great imitated Achilles, Caesar imitated Alexander, and Scipio imitated Cyrus. And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, and how closely Scipio conformed in chastity, affability, humanity, and generosity to what Xenophon wrote of Cyrus. A wise prince must observe such methods as these, and never remain idle in peaceful times, but industriously make capital of them so as to be able to draw on it in adversity; so that when fortune changes, it will find him ready to resist her.

[1.](#) Machiavelli probably has in mind Francesco's son Ludovico, who lost the duchy in 1500 and died a prisoner in France.

[2.](#) Philopoemen (c. 253–183 BC), general of the Achaean League. The scene comes from Livy (35.28) and Plutarch's *Life of Philopoemen*.

XV. The Things for Which Men, and Especially Princes, Are Praised or Blamed

It remains now to see what the methods and conduct of a prince should be toward his subjects and his friends. And because I know that many have written about this, I fear that I may be thought presumptuous in writing about it too, especially since in discussing this matter I depart from the rules others have laid down. But since my intention is to write something useful for whoever understands it, it has seemed to me more fitting to go after the effectual truth (*verità effettuale*) of the thing than after what people imagine about it. Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality. For there is such a distance between how one lives and how one ought to live that whoever abandons what is done for what ought to be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation; because a man who wants to make a profession of goodness in everything is bound to come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence a prince who wants to keep his position must learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.

Leaving aside, then, the things imagined about a prince, and discussing those that are true, I say that all men, when they are spoken of, and princes above all, since they are placed higher, are noted for some of these qualities that bring them either blame or praise. That is, one is held generous, another a miser (to use a Tuscan word, because in our language an *avaro* is also someone who wants to have things by robbery, while we call *misero* one

who refrains too much from using what is his own); one is held a giver, another rapacious; one cruel, another merciful; one faithless, another faithful; one effeminate and cowardly, another fierce and spirited; one humane, another proud; one lascivious, another chaste; one sincere, another cunning; one hard, another easygoing; one serious, another frivolous; one religious, another unbelieving; and so on. I know that everyone will admit that it would be a most praiseworthy thing for a prince to be found with all of the qualities listed above that are held to be good. But because he cannot have them all, or observe them fully, since the conditions of human life do not allow it, he must be prudent enough to know how to avoid the infamy of those vices that would take his state from him, and to guard against those that would not, if he can; but if he cannot, he may let them go with less hesitation. And again, he should not mind incurring the infamy of those vices without which it would be difficult for him to save his state; because, if everything is considered well, something will be found that looks like virtue, and following it would be his ruin, and something else that looks like vice, and following it brings about his security and well-being.¹

¹ This paragraph is missing from the e-text on which this translation is based; it is translated from the Italian edition of 1814.

XVI. Generosity and Parsimony

Beginning, then, with the first of the qualities listed above, I say that it would be good to be held generous. Nevertheless, generosity used in such a way that you are held generous will harm you; for if it is used virtuously and as it should be used, it will not be recognized, and you will not escape the infamy of its opposite. And so, if you want to keep a name for generosity among men, you cannot leave out any kind of lavishness; so that a prince of this kind will always use up all his resources in such displays, and in the end, if he wants to keep his name for generosity, he will be forced to burden the people extraordinarily, to be grasping in taxation, and to do all the things one can do to get money. This will begin to make him hateful to his subjects, and, once he becomes poor, little esteemed by anyone; so that, having offended the many and rewarded the few with this generosity of his, he feels every first hardship and is endangered by every first danger. And when he realizes this and wants to draw back, he at once incurs the infamy of a miser.

A prince, then, since he cannot use this virtue of generosity in such a way that it is recognized without harm to himself, should not, if he is prudent, mind being called a miser. For with time he will come to be held more and more generous, when people see that because of his parsimony his revenues are enough for him, that he can defend himself against whoever makes war on him, and that he can undertake enterprises without burdening the people. So he comes to be generous toward all those from whom he does not take, who are countless, and miserly toward all those to

whom he does not give, who are few. In our own times we have seen great things done only by those who were held to be misers; the others have been wiped out. Pope Julius II, after he had made use of a name for generosity to attain the papacy, did not think of keeping it afterward, so that he could make war. The present king of France has waged so many wars without imposing an extraordinary tax on his people, solely because his long parsimony has provided for the extra expenses.¹ The present king of Spain, if he were held generous, would not have undertaken or won so many enterprises.

Therefore a prince should think little of being called a miser, so as not to have to rob his subjects, so as to be able to defend himself, so as not to become poor and contemptible, and so as not to be forced to become rapacious; for this is one of those vices that enable him to rule. And if someone should say that Caesar came to power through generosity, and that many others have risen to the highest ranks because they were and were held to be generous, I answer: either you are already a prince, or you are on the way to becoming one. In the first case this generosity is harmful; in the second it is indeed necessary to be held generous. And Caesar was one of those who wanted to attain the principate of Rome; but if he had survived after attaining it and had not moderated those expenses, he would have destroyed that empire. And if someone should reply that there have been many princes, held to be extremely generous, who have done great things with their armies, I answer: either the prince spends what is his own and his subjects', or what belongs to others. In the first case he should be sparing; in the second he should not leave out any part of generosity. And the prince who goes out with his armies, who lives on plunder, sacking, and ransoms, and handles what belongs to others, needs this generosity; otherwise his soldiers would not follow him. And of what is not yours or your subjects' you can be a more

lavish giver, as Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander were; because spending what belongs to others does not take reputation away from you but adds to it. Only spending your own is what harms you. And there is nothing that uses itself up as generosity does: while you practice it, you lose the means of practicing it, and you become either poor and contemptible or, to escape poverty, rapacious and hated. And among all the things a prince must guard against is being contemptible and hated, and generosity leads you to both. So it is wiser to keep the name of miser, which breeds infamy without hatred, than to be forced, because you want a name for generosity, to incur the name of rapacious, which breeds infamy with hatred.

[1.](#) Louis XII, king of France until January 1515.

XVII. Cruelty and Mercy, and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved Than Feared, or the Reverse

Coming now to the other qualities mentioned above, I say that every prince should want to be held merciful and not cruel; nevertheless he must take care not to misuse this mercy. Cesare Borgia was held to be cruel; nevertheless that cruelty of his had restored order in the Romagna, united it, and brought it to peace and loyalty. If this is considered well, it will be seen that he was much more merciful than the Florentine people, who, to avoid a name for cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed.¹ A prince, therefore, should not mind the infamy of cruelty in order to keep his subjects united and loyal; because with a very few examples he will be more merciful than those who, out of too much mercy, allow disorders to continue, from which come killings and robberies. For these usually harm a whole community, while the executions that come from the prince harm one individual. And of all princes, it is impossible for a new prince to escape a name for cruelty, because new states are full of dangers. And Virgil, through the mouth of Dido, says:

Harsh necessity and the newness of my kingdom force me
to do such things, and to guard my borders far and wide.²

Nevertheless he should be slow to believe and to act, and should not make himself afraid of shadows, and should proceed in

a temperate way, with prudence and humanity, so that too much confidence does not make him careless and too much distrust does not make him intolerable.

From this a dispute arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the reverse. The answer is that one would like to be both; but because it is difficult to combine them, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if you have to do without one of the two. For this can be said of men in general: that they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain. As long as you do them good, they are all yours; they offer you their blood, their property, their lives, and their children, as I said above, when the need is far off; but when it comes near you, they turn away. And the prince who has relied entirely on their words, finding himself stripped of other preparations, is ruined. For friendships acquired with a price, and not with greatness and nobility of spirit, are paid for but not possessed, and when the time comes they cannot be spent. And men have less hesitation in offending one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a bond of obligation which, because men are wretched creatures, is broken at every opportunity for their own advantage, but fear is held by a dread of punishment that never leaves you. Nevertheless the prince should make himself feared in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because being feared and not hated can very well go together. He will always manage this if he keeps his hands off the property of his citizens and his subjects, and off their women. And when he does need to proceed against someone's life, he should do it when there is proper justification and a manifest cause. But above all he should keep his hands off the property of others, because men forget the death of their father more quickly than the loss of their patrimony. Besides, reasons for taking property are never lacking, and whoever begins to live by plunder always finds

reasons for seizing what belongs to others; while reasons for taking life, on the contrary, are rarer and run out sooner.

But when the prince is with his armies and has a multitude of soldiers under his command, then it is absolutely necessary not to mind a name for cruelty, because without it no army was ever kept united or fit for any action. Among the admirable actions of Hannibal is counted this one: that having a very large army, made up of countless kinds of men, which he had led to fight in foreign lands, no dissension ever arose in it, either among themselves or against their prince, in bad fortune as well as in good. This could not have come from anything but his inhuman cruelty, which, together with his countless abilities, always made him venerated and terrible in the sight of his soldiers; and without it his other abilities would not have been enough to produce that effect. And the writers, with little consideration, on the one hand admire this achievement of his and on the other condemn its principal cause. And that it is true that his other abilities would not have been enough can be seen in Scipio, a most extraordinary man not only in his own times but in all the memory of things we know, whose armies rebelled against him in Spain. This came from nothing but his excessive mercy, which had given his soldiers more license than befits military discipline. For this he was reproached in the Senate by Fabius Maximus, and called by him the corrupter of the Roman soldiery. The Locrians, having been destroyed by one of Scipio's legates, were not avenged by him, nor was that legate's insolence corrected, all of which came from his easygoing nature; so that someone in the Senate, wanting to excuse him, said that there were many men who knew better how not to err than how to correct errors.³ This nature would in time have spoiled the fame and glory of Scipio had he persisted in it while in command; but since he lived under the government of the Senate, this harmful quality of his was not only hidden but brought him glory.

I conclude, then, returning to being feared and loved, that since men love at their own pleasure and fear at the pleasure of the prince, a wise prince should build on what is his own, not on what is another's. He must only contrive to avoid hatred, as has been said.

[1.](#) In 1501–2 Florence, which ruled Pistoia, failed to put down the feud between the Panciatichi and Cancellieri factions there, and the city was devastated.

[2.](#) Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.563–64: *Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt / moliri, et late fines custode tueri.*

[3.](#) Scipio's troops mutinied at Sucro in Spain in 206 BC. In 205 BC his legate Pleminius plundered Locri in southern Italy. Livy reports both episodes and the debate in the Senate (28.24–29; 29.8–22).

XVIII. How Princes Should Keep Faith

How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep faith and to live with integrity and not with cunning, everyone understands. Nevertheless one sees by experience in our times that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men's minds with cunning; and in the end they have overcome those who built on loyalty.

You must know, then, that there are two ways of fighting: one with laws, the other with force. The first is proper to man, the second to beasts; but because the first is often not enough, one must resort to the second. Therefore a prince needs to know how to make good use of the beast and of the man. This lesson was taught to princes covertly by the ancient writers, who wrote that Achilles and many other princes of antiquity were given to Chiron the centaur to be brought up, so that he would keep them under his discipline. To have as one's teacher a creature half beast and half man means nothing else but that a prince must know how to use both natures, and that the one without the other does not last.

Since a prince, then, must know how to make good use of the beast, he should choose from among the beasts the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend itself from snares, and the fox cannot defend itself from wolves. So you need to be a fox to recognize the snares and a lion to frighten off the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand this. A prudent lord, therefore, cannot and should not keep faith when keeping it would work against him and when the reasons that made him promise

have disappeared. If men were all good, this precept would not be good; but because they are wicked and would not keep faith with you, you too need not keep it with them. Nor has a prince ever lacked legitimate reasons to color his failure to keep it. Of this one could give countless modern examples and show how many peace treaties, how many promises have been made null and void by the faithlessness of princes; and the one who has known best how to use the fox has come out best. But one must know how to color this nature well, and be a great feigner and dissembler; and men are so simple, and so ready to obey present necessities, that whoever deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived.

Of recent examples there is one I do not want to pass over in silence. Alexander VI never did anything, and never thought of anything, but deceiving men, and he always found material to work on. There was never a man more effective in making assurances, or who affirmed a thing with greater oaths and kept it less; nevertheless his deceptions always succeeded as he wished, because he knew this side of the world well.

It is not necessary, then, for a prince to have all the qualities listed above, but it is very necessary to seem to have them. I will even dare to say this: that having them and always observing them is harmful, and seeming to have them is useful; as it is useful to seem merciful, faithful, humane, upright, and religious, and to be so; but with your mind so disposed that, when you need not to be, you are able and know how to change to the contrary. And this must be understood: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all the things for which men are held good, since in order to keep his state he is often obliged to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion. And so he must have a mind ready to turn as the winds and the variations of for-

tune command him, and, as I said above, not depart from good when he can, but know how to enter into evil when he must.

A prince, then, must take great care that nothing ever comes out of his mouth that is not full of the five qualities listed above, and that to see and hear him he should seem all mercy, all faith, all integrity, all religion. And there is nothing more necessary to seem to have than this last quality. Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because it belongs to everyone to see, to few to touch. Everyone sees what you seem to be; few touch what you are; and those few do not dare to oppose the opinion of the many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them. And in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the result. Let a prince, then, win and keep his state: the means will always be judged honorable and will be praised by everyone. For the common people are always taken in by appearances and by the outcome of a thing, and in the world there is nothing but the common people; and the few have no room when the many have something to lean on. A certain prince of the present day, whom it is better not to name,¹ never preaches anything but peace and faith, and is the greatest enemy of both; and either one, had he observed it, would have taken from him many times over either his reputation or his state.

[1.](#) Ferdinand of Aragon.

XIX. Avoiding Contempt and Hatred

But since I have spoken of the most important of the qualities mentioned above, I want to discuss the others briefly under this general heading: that the prince should think, as has been partly said above, of avoiding the things that make him hated and contemptible. Whenever he avoids this, he will have done his part, and will find no danger in other infamies. What makes him hated above all, as I said, is being rapacious and seizing the property and the women of his subjects, from which he must abstain. Whenever the generality of men are deprived of neither property nor honor, they live content, and he has only to contend with the ambition of a few, which can be curbed in many ways and with ease. What makes him contemptible is being held changeable, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, and irresolute. A prince must guard against this as against a reef, and contrive that greatness, spirit, gravity, and strength be recognized in his actions; and in the private dealings of his subjects he should insist that his judgment be irrevocable, and maintain such an opinion of himself that no one thinks of deceiving him or getting around him.

The prince who gives this opinion of himself is highly esteemed; and it is difficult to conspire against one who is esteemed, and difficult to attack him, provided he is understood to be excellent and revered by his own people. For a prince must have two fears: one within, on account of his subjects; the other without, on account of foreign powers. From the latter he defends himself with good arms and good friends; and if he has good arms, he will always have good friends. And things inside will always be

steady when things outside are steady, unless they have already been disturbed by a conspiracy; and even if things outside should be stirred up, if he has organized himself and lived as I have said, and does not give up, he will always withstand every assault, as I said that Nabis the Spartan did. But as for his subjects, when things outside are not stirring, he has to fear that they may conspire in secret. Against this the prince secures himself well by avoiding being hated or despised and keeping the people satisfied with him, which it is necessary to achieve, as was said at length above. And one of the most powerful remedies a prince has against conspiracies is not to be hated by the people at large. For whoever conspires always believes that he will satisfy the people by killing the prince; but when he believes he will offend them, he does not take heart to adopt such a course, because the difficulties on the side of conspirators are countless. Experience shows that there have been many conspiracies and few have ended well. For whoever conspires cannot be alone, nor can he take as companions anyone but those he believes to be discontented; and as soon as you have revealed your mind to a malcontent, you give him the means to content himself, because he can obviously hope for every advantage from it. So that, seeing a sure gain on one side, and on the other a doubtful one full of danger, he must indeed be a rare friend, or else a thoroughly obstinate enemy of the prince, to keep faith with you. And to reduce the matter to brief terms, I say that on the side of the conspirator there is nothing but fear, jealousy, and the dread of punishment that terrifies him; but on the side of the prince there is the majesty of the principality, the laws, and the protection of his friends and of the state to defend him. So that, when the goodwill of the people is added to all these things, it is impossible that anyone should be so rash as to conspire. For ordinarily, where a conspirator has to fear before carrying out his crime, in this case he must also fear afterward, having the people

as his enemy once the deed is done, and being unable for this reason to hope for any refuge.

Of this matter one could give countless examples, but I want to be content with only one, which happened within the memory of our fathers. Annibale Bentivoglio, prince in Bologna and grandfather of the present Annibale, was killed by the Canneschi, who had conspired against him, and no one of his family was left but Giovanni, who was in swaddling clothes. Immediately after the murder the people rose up and killed all the Canneschi. This came from the popular goodwill that the house of Bentivoglio enjoyed in those times, which was so great that, since no one of that house remained in Bologna who could govern the state after Annibale's death, and since there was word that in Florence there was one born of the Bentivoglio who until then had been thought the son of a blacksmith, the Bolognese came to Florence for him and gave him the government of their city. And it was governed by him until Giovanni came of an age fit to govern.¹

I conclude, therefore, that a prince should take little account of conspiracies when the people are well disposed toward him; but when they are hostile and hate him, he must fear everything and everyone. And well-ordered states and wise princes have taken every care not to drive the great to desperation and to satisfy the people and keep them content; for this is one of the most important matters a prince has to deal with.

Among the well-ordered and well-governed kingdoms of our times is that of France, and in it are found countless good institutions on which the liberty and security of the king depend. The first of these is the parlement and its authority.² For the one who organized that kingdom knew the ambition of the powerful and their insolence, and judged that they needed a bit in their mouths to correct them; on the other hand, he knew the hatred of the people at large for the great, founded on fear, and wanted to

secure them. He did not want this to be the particular charge of the king, so as to spare him the resentment he might incur with the great by favoring the people, and with the people by favoring the great. So he set up a third judge, to beat down the great and favor the lesser without any burden to the king. No institution could be better or more prudent than this, or a greater cause of the security of the king and the kingdom. From this another notable thing can be drawn: that princes should have others administer the things that bring blame, and keep for themselves the things that bring favor. Again I conclude that a prince should esteem the great but not make himself hated by the people.

It may perhaps seem to many, considering the life and death of some Roman emperors, that they are examples contrary to this opinion of mine, since some who always lived nobly and showed great strength of spirit nevertheless lost the empire, or were killed by their own men, who conspired against them. Wanting to answer these objections, then, I will discuss the qualities of some emperors, showing that the causes of their ruin are not different from those I have put forward; and in part I will bring forward the things worth noting for anyone who reads of the actions of those times. And I want it to be enough to take all the emperors who succeeded to the empire from Marcus the philosopher to Maximinus: they were Marcus, his son Commodus, Pertinax, Julian, Severus, his son Antoninus Caracalla, Macrinus, Heliogabalus, Alexander, and Maximinus.³ And it should first be noted that where in other principalities one has only to contend with the ambition of the great and the insolence of the people, the Roman emperors had a third difficulty: they had to put up with the cruelty and greed of the soldiers. This was so difficult that it was the cause of the ruin of many, since it was difficult to satisfy both the soldiers and the people. For the people loved quiet, and for this reason loved modest princes, while the soldiers loved a prince

of military spirit who was insolent, cruel, and rapacious; and they wanted him to practice these things on the people, so that they could have double pay and give vent to their greed and cruelty. As a result, those emperors who by nature or by art did not have a great enough reputation to hold both in check always came to ruin. And most of them, especially those who came to the principality as new men, recognizing the difficulty of these two different humors, turned to satisfying the soldiers, caring little about injuring the people. This course was necessary; for since princes cannot avoid being hated by someone, they must first try not to be hated by the whole community; and when they cannot achieve this, they must contrive with every effort to avoid the hatred of the most powerful group. And so those emperors who, being new, needed extraordinary support, attached themselves to the soldiers rather than to the people; and this nevertheless turned out to be useful to them or not, according to whether the prince knew how to keep his reputation with them. From the causes mentioned above it came about that Marcus, Pertinax, and Alexander, all of modest life, lovers of justice, enemies of cruelty, humane and kindly, all came to a bad end except Marcus. Marcus alone lived and died in the greatest honor, because he succeeded to the empire by hereditary right and did not owe it to either the soldiers or the people; and then, since he was endowed with many virtues that made him venerated, he always kept both orders within their bounds while he lived, and was never hated or despised. But Pertinax was made emperor against the will of the soldiers, who, being used to living licentiously under Commodus, could not bear the honest life to which Pertinax wanted to bring them back. So, having made himself hated, and with contempt added to this hatred because he was old, he was ruined at the very beginning of his reign.

And here it should be noted that hatred is acquired through good works as well as through wicked ones; and so, as I said above, a prince who wants to keep his state is often forced not to be good. For when that body, whether the people or the soldiers or the great, whose support you judge you need to keep your position, is corrupt, you must follow its humor to satisfy it, and then good works are your enemies. But let us come to Alexander, who was so good that among the other praises given him is this: that in the fourteen years he held the empire, no one was ever put to death by him without trial. Nevertheless, since he was held effeminate, and a man who let himself be governed by his mother, and had come into contempt for this, the army conspired against him and killed him.

Now, discussing by contrast the qualities of Commodus, Severus, Antoninus Caracalla, and Maximinus, you will find them extremely cruel and rapacious. To satisfy the soldiers they did not spare any kind of injury that could be inflicted on the people; and all of them except Severus came to a bad end. For in Severus there was so much ability that, keeping the soldiers friendly, though the people were oppressed by him, he was always able to reign successfully; because his abilities made him so admirable in the sight of the soldiers and the people that the people remained in a way astonished and stupefied, and the soldiers reverent and satisfied. And because this man's actions were great for a new prince, I want to show briefly how well he knew how to use the persons of the fox and the lion, the natures I say above a prince must imitate. Knowing the sloth of the emperor Julian, Severus persuaded the army he commanded in Slavonia that it would be good to go to Rome to avenge the death of Pertinax, who had been killed by the Praetorian soldiers. Under this pretext, without showing that he aspired to the empire, he moved his army against Rome, and was in Italy before his departure was known. When he arrived in Rome,

the Senate, out of fear, elected him emperor, and Julian was killed. After this beginning, two difficulties remained for Severus if he wanted to make himself master of the whole state: one in Asia, where Niger, head of the Asian armies, had had himself proclaimed emperor; and the other in the west, where Albinus also aspired to the empire. And because he judged it dangerous to reveal himself as the enemy of both, he decided to attack Niger and deceive Albinus. He wrote to Albinus that, having been elected emperor by the Senate, he wanted to share that dignity with him; he sent him the title of Caesar and, by decree of the Senate, made him his colleague; and Albinus accepted these things as genuine. But after Severus had defeated and killed Niger and pacified the East, he returned to Rome and complained in the Senate that Albinus, ungrateful for the benefits he had received from him, had treacherously sought to kill him, and that for this reason he was obliged to go and punish his ingratitude. Then he went to find him in France and took from him his state and his life.

Whoever examines this man's actions closely, then, will find him a very fierce lion and a very cunning fox, and will see that he was feared and revered by everyone and not hated by the armies; and he will not be surprised that he, a new man, could hold so great an empire, because his very great reputation always protected him from the hatred the people might have conceived for his plundering. But Antoninus his son was also a man with most excellent qualities, which made him admirable in the sight of the people and welcome to the soldiers; for he was a military man, able to endure every hardship, contemptuous of all delicate food and every other softness, which made all the armies love him. Nevertheless his ferocity and cruelty were so great and so unheard of (after countless individual killings he put to death a large part of the people of Rome and all the people of Alexandria) that he became extremely hateful to the whole world, and began to be feared even by those

around him; so that he was killed by a centurion in the midst of his army. Here it should be noted that deaths like this, which follow from the deliberate resolve of an obstinate mind, cannot be avoided by princes, because anyone who does not care about dying can harm a prince; but the prince should fear them less, because they are very rare. He must only take care not to do grave injury to any of those he employs and has around him in the service of his principality, as Antoninus had done. He had shamefully put to death a brother of that centurion and threatened the centurion himself every day, yet kept him in his bodyguard; this was a rash course and one bound to ruin him, as it did.

But let us come to Commodus, for whom it was very easy to hold the empire, since he had it by hereditary right, being the son of Marcus. It would have been enough for him to follow in his father's footsteps, and he would have satisfied both the soldiers and the people. But being of a cruel and bestial spirit, he set about indulging the armies and making them licentious, so as to be able to practice his rapacity on the people. On the other hand, not keeping up his dignity, often going down into the arenas to fight with gladiators, and doing other very base things little worthy of the imperial majesty, he became contemptible in the sight of the soldiers. And being hated on one side and despised on the other, he was conspired against and killed.

It remains for us to describe the qualities of Maximinus. He was a very warlike man; and since the armies were annoyed by the softness of Alexander, of whom I spoke above, when Alexander was dead they elected Maximinus to the empire. He did not hold it for long, because two things made him hated and contemptible. One was his very base origin, since he had once herded sheep in Thrace, which was known everywhere and brought him great disdain in everyone's eyes. The other was that at the beginning of his reign he had put off going to Rome to take possession of the impe-

rial seat, and had given the opinion of himself that he was very cruel, having had his prefects commit many cruelties in Rome and everywhere in the empire. So the whole world was stirred, with indignation at the baseness of his blood and with hatred out of fear of his ferocity; first Africa rebelled, then the Senate with all the people of Rome, and all Italy conspired against him. To this was added his own army, which, besieging Aquileia and finding it difficult to take, and annoyed by his cruelty, and fearing him less when it saw how many enemies he had, killed him.

I do not want to discuss Heliogabalus, Macrinus, or Julian, who, being thoroughly contemptible, were quickly wiped out; but I will come to the conclusion of this discussion. I say that the princes of our times have less of this difficulty of satisfying their soldiers by extraordinary means in their governments. For although one must give them some consideration, the matter is quickly resolved, since none of these princes has armies that have grown old together with the government and administration of provinces, as the armies of the Roman Empire had. So if at that time it was necessary to satisfy the soldiers more than the people, it was because the soldiers could do more than the people; now it is more necessary for all princes, except the Turk and the Sultan, to satisfy the people than the soldiers, because the people can do more than the soldiers. I except the Turk because he always keeps around him twelve thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalry, on whom the security and strength of his kingdom depend; and that lord must keep them friendly, putting every other consideration aside. Similarly, since the kingdom of the Sultan is entirely in the hands of the soldiers, he too must keep them friendly without regard for the people.⁴ And you must note that this state of the Sultan is unlike all other principalities, because it is similar to the Christian pontificate, which can be called neither a hereditary principality nor a new principality. For it is not the sons of the old prince who

are the heirs and remain lords, but the one who is elected to that rank by those who have the authority. And since this order is ancient, it cannot be called a new principality, because none of the difficulties of new principalities are found in it; for although the prince is new, the institutions of that state are old and organized to receive him as if he were their hereditary lord.

But let us return to our subject. I say that whoever considers the discussion above will see that either hatred or contempt was the cause of the ruin of the emperors named, and will also see how it came about that, though some of them proceeded in one way and some in the opposite, in either group one had a happy end and the others an unhappy one. For to Pertinax and Alexander, being new princes, it was useless and harmful to want to imitate Marcus, who held the principality by hereditary right; and similarly to Caracalla, Commodus, and Maximinus it was ruinous to imitate Severus, since they did not have enough ability to follow in his footsteps. Therefore a new prince in a new principality cannot imitate the actions of Marcus, nor again is it necessary to follow those of Severus; but he should take from Severus those parts that are necessary to found his state, and from Marcus those that are fitting and glorious for preserving a state that is already established and firm.

[1.](#) Annibale Bentivoglio was murdered in 1445. The young man brought from Florence was Santi Bentivoglio, who governed Bologna from 1446 until his death in 1463; Giovanni II Bentivoglio then ruled until Julius II drove him out in 1506.

[2.](#) The *parlement* of Paris, the supreme court of the kingdom, not a representative assembly.

[3.](#) The emperors from Marcus Aurelius to Maximinus Thrax, AD 161–238. Machiavelli follows the Greek historian Herodian. Julian is Didius Julianus (193); Alexander is Severus Alexander (222–35).

[4.](#) The Mamluk sultan of Egypt, chosen from and by the slave-soldier caste. The Mamluk state fell to the Ottomans in 1517.

XX. Whether Fortresses and Many Other Things Princes Commonly Do Are Useful or Harmful

Some princes, to hold their states securely, have disarmed their subjects; some others have kept their subject towns divided; some have fostered enmities against themselves; some others have turned to winning over those they suspected at the beginning of their rule; some have built fortresses; some have pulled them down and destroyed them. And although one cannot give a definite judgment on all these things without coming to the particulars of the states in which such a decision had to be made, I will nevertheless speak in the broad way that the subject itself allows.

There has never been a new prince, then, who disarmed his subjects; on the contrary, when he has found them disarmed, he has always armed them. For when they are armed, those arms become yours; those who were suspect to you become faithful, those who were faithful remain so, and from subjects they become your partisans. And since all your subjects cannot be armed, when you benefit those you arm, you can deal more safely with the others. The difference in treatment they see in themselves makes the armed ones obliged to you; the others excuse you, judging it necessary that those who have more danger and more duty should have more reward. But when you disarm them, you begin to offend them; you show that you distrust them, judging them either cowardly or disloyal, and either of these opinions breeds hatred against you. And because you cannot remain unarmed, you must

turn to mercenary soldiery, which is of the quality described above; and even if it were good, it could not be strong enough to defend you against powerful enemies and suspect subjects. So, as I have said, a new prince in a new principality has always set up arms there; the histories are full of such examples. But when a prince acquires a new state that is added like a limb to his old one, then it is necessary to disarm that state, except for those who were your partisans in acquiring it; and even they, with time and opportunity, must be made soft and effeminate, and things must be arranged so that all the arms of your state are in the hands of your own soldiers, who live near you in your old state.

Our ancestors, and those who were held wise, used to say that Pistoia had to be held by factions and Pisa by fortresses; and for this reason they fostered quarrels in some of their subject towns so as to possess them more easily. In those times, when Italy was in a certain way balanced, this may well have been the right thing to do; but I do not believe it can be given as a precept today. For I do not believe that divisions ever did any good; on the contrary, when the enemy approaches, divided cities are necessarily lost at once, because the weaker party will always join the outside forces and the other will not be able to hold out.

The Venetians, moved, I believe, by the reasons given above, fostered the Guelf and Ghibelline sects in their subject cities;¹ and although they never let them come to bloodshed, they still fostered these disagreements among them, so that the citizens, busy with their own quarrels, would not unite against them. As was seen, this did not afterward serve their purpose; for when they were routed at Vailà, one party in those cities at once took courage and took the whole state from them. Such methods, therefore, argue weakness in the prince; because in a strong principality such divisions will never be permitted. They are profitable only in time of peace, when subjects can be managed more easily

by means of them; but when war comes, such a policy shows its fallacy.

Without doubt princes become great when they overcome the difficulties and the opposition they meet. And so fortune, especially when she wants to make a new prince great (since he has a greater need to acquire reputation than a hereditary one), raises up enemies for him and has them undertake enterprises against him, so that he will have reason to overcome them and climb higher on the ladder his enemies have brought him. So many judge that a wise prince, when he has the opportunity, should cunningly foster some enmity, so that by crushing it his greatness will grow.

Princes, and especially new ones, have found more faith and more usefulness in men who were held suspect at the beginning of their rule than in those who were trusted at the beginning. Pandolfo Petrucci, prince of Siena,² governed his state more with those who had been suspect to him than with the others. But one cannot speak of this broadly, because it varies with circumstances. I will say only this: that the men who were enemies at the beginning of a principality, if they are of a kind that needs support to maintain themselves, can always be won over by the prince with the greatest ease; and they are all the more obliged to serve him faithfully because they know how necessary it is for them to cancel by their deeds the bad opinion held of them. And so the prince always gets more use out of them than out of those who, serving him with too much security, neglect his affairs.

And since the subject calls for it, I do not want to fail to remind princes who have taken a new state with the help of people inside it to consider well what moved those who helped them to do so. If it is not natural affection for the prince, but only that they were not content with their former state, he will be able to keep them friendly only with toil and great difficulty, because it will be impossible for him to content them. And if he examines the reason

for this carefully, with the examples drawn from ancient and modern affairs, he will see that it is much easier for him to win as friends the men who were content with the former state, and were therefore his enemies, than those who, because they were not content with it, became his friends and helped him seize it.

It has been the custom of princes, in order to hold their states more securely, to build fortresses that serve as a bridle and bit for those who might plan to act against them, and as a safe refuge against a sudden attack. I praise this method, because it has been used since ancient times. Nevertheless, in our own times Niccolò Vitelli has been seen to pull down two fortresses in Città di Castello in order to hold that state. Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, on returning to his dominion, from which Cesare Borgia had driven him, razed all the fortresses of that province to the ground, and judged that without them he would be less likely to lose that state again. The Bentivoglio, on returning to Bologna, took similar measures.³ Fortresses, then, are useful or not according to the times; and if they do you good in one way, they harm you in another. One can put the matter this way: the prince who is more afraid of his people than of foreigners should build fortresses, but the one who is more afraid of foreigners than of his people should do without them. The castle of Milan, which Francesco Sforza built there, has made and will make more war on the house of Sforza than any other disorder in that state. So the best fortress there is is not to be hated by the people; because even if you have fortresses and the people hate you, the fortresses will not save you, since once the people have taken up arms, foreigners will never be lacking to come to their aid. In our own times one does not see that fortresses have profited any prince, except the countess of Forlì when her husband Count Girolamo was killed;⁴ for by means of her fortress she was able to escape the fury of the people, wait for help from Milan, and recover her state. And the times

were then such that no foreigner could come to the aid of the people. But afterward her fortresses were of little use to her when Cesare Borgia attacked her and her hostile people joined with the foreigners. So, then and before, it would have been safer for her not to be hated by the people than to have fortresses. Considering all these things, then, I will praise whoever builds fortresses and whoever does not, and I will blame anyone who, trusting in fortresses, thinks little of being hated by the people.

[1.](#) The Guelfs and Ghibellines, the old factions of medieval Italy, originally supporters of the pope and of the emperor respectively.

[2.](#) Pandolfo Petrucci (1452–1512), lord of Siena from about 1500.

[3.](#) Niccolò Vitelli, father of Paolo and Vitellozzo, recovered Città di Castello in 1482. Guidobaldo da Montefeltro returned to Urbino in 1503 after Alexander VI's death. The Bentivoglio returned briefly to Bologna in 1511.

[4.](#) Caterina Sforza (1463–1509). When her husband Girolamo Riario, lord of Forlì and Imola, was murdered in 1488, she held out in the fortress of Ravaldino until help came from her uncle Ludovico of Milan. Cesare Borgia took Forlì and captured her in 1500.

XXI. What a Prince Should Do to Be Held in Esteem

Nothing makes a prince so esteemed as great enterprises and giving rare examples of himself. In our own times we have Ferdinand of Aragon, the present king of Spain. He can be called almost a new prince, because from a weak king he has become, in fame and glory, the first king of Christendom; and if you consider his actions, you will find them all very great and some of them extraordinary. At the beginning of his reign he attacked Granada, and that enterprise was the foundation of his state.¹ First, he undertook it when he had nothing else to do and without fear of being hindered. He kept the minds of the barons of Castile occupied with it, so that, thinking about that war, they did not think about making trouble; and meanwhile he was acquiring reputation and power over them without their noticing. With the money of the Church and of the people he was able to maintain armies, and by that long war to lay a foundation for his own military, which has since brought him honor. Besides this, so as to be able to undertake greater enterprises, always making use of religion, he turned to a pious cruelty, driving the Marranos out of his kingdom and despoiling them;² nor could there be a more pitiful or a rarer example than this. Under this same cloak he attacked Africa; he undertook the enterprise of Italy; he has lately attacked France.³ And so he has always done and planned great things, which have always kept the minds of his subjects in suspense and wonder and

occupied with their outcome. And these actions of his have arisen one out of another in such a way that between one and the next he has never given men room to work quietly against him.

It also helps a prince greatly to give rare examples of himself in internal government, like those told of Bernabò of Milan,⁴ when the occasion arises of someone doing something extraordinary in civil life, for good or for ill, and to find a way of rewarding or punishing him that will be much talked about. And above all a prince must contrive in every action to give himself the fame of a great and excellent man.

A prince is also esteemed when he is a true friend and a true enemy, that is, when he declares himself without any reservation in favor of one party against another. This course will always be more useful than remaining neutral. For if two powerful neighbors of yours come to blows, either they are such that, if one of them wins, you have to fear the victor, or they are not. In either of these two cases it will always be more useful to you to declare yourself and wage war in earnest. For in the first case, if you do not declare yourself, you will always be the prey of the winner, to the pleasure and satisfaction of the one who has been beaten, and you will have no reason and nothing to defend you or to give you shelter. For whoever wins does not want suspect friends who do not help him in adversity; and whoever loses does not shelter you, since you were unwilling to share his fortune with arms in hand.

Antiochus had come into Greece, brought there by the Aetolians to drive out the Romans. He sent ambassadors to the Achaeans, who were friends of the Romans, to urge them to stay neutral, while on the other side the Romans were urging them to take up arms on their behalf. The matter came up for deliberation in the council of the Achaeans, where the envoy of Antiochus urged them to stay neutral; to which the Roman envoy replied: "As for what they tell you, that you should not take part in the war,

nothing could be more contrary to your interests: without thanks, without dignity, you will be the prize of the victor.”⁵

And it will always happen that the one who is not your friend will ask you to be neutral, and the one who is your friend will ask you to declare yourself with arms. And irresolute princes, to escape present dangers, most often follow the neutral path, and most often they are ruined. But when the prince declares himself boldly in favor of one side, if the one you join wins, even though he is powerful and you remain at his discretion, he is obliged to you and a bond of affection has been formed; and men are never so dishonest as to crush you with such an example of ingratitude. Besides, victories are never so clean that the victor does not have to show some respect, especially for justice. But if the one you join loses, you are sheltered by him; he helps you while he can, and you become the companion of a fortune that may rise again. In the second case, when those who are fighting are such that you have nothing to fear, it is all the more prudent to join one of them; for you bring about the ruin of one with the help of the other, who would save him if he were wise; and if he wins, he remains at your discretion; and with your help it is impossible that he should not win.

And here it should be noted that a prince must take care never to make common cause with someone more powerful than himself in order to attack others, unless necessity compels him, as was said above; because if you win, you remain his prisoner, and princes must avoid, as far as they can, being at the discretion of others. The Venetians allied themselves with France against the Duke of Milan, and could have avoided making that alliance; and their ruin resulted from it. But when it cannot be avoided, as happened to the Florentines when the pope and Spain went with their armies to attack Lombardy,⁶ then the prince must join in, for the reasons given above. Nor should any state ever believe that it can

always choose safe courses; on the contrary, it should expect to have to take only doubtful ones. For it is found in the order of things that one never tries to escape one disadvantage without running into another; but prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of the disadvantages, and in taking the least bad as good.

A prince must also show himself a lover of ability, and honor those who excel in an art. Next, he must encourage his citizens to be able to pursue their occupations in peace, in trade, in agriculture, and in every other human occupation, so that one man is not afraid to improve his possessions for fear they will be taken from him, and another is not afraid to open a business for fear of taxes. He should instead offer rewards to whoever wants to do these things, and to whoever thinks of enlarging his city or his state in any way. Besides this, at suitable times of the year he should keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles. And because every city is divided into guilds or wards, he should take account of these bodies, meet with them sometimes, and give an example of humanity and munificence, while always keeping firm the majesty of his dignity, because this must never be lacking in anything.

[1.](#) Ferdinand and Isabella waged war on the Moorish kingdom of Granada from 1482 until its fall in 1492.

[2.](#) *Marranos*: converted Jews and Moors, many suspected of practicing their old faith in secret. The Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, and the Moors of Castile were forced to convert or leave in 1502.

[3.](#) Spanish expeditions took ports in North Africa from 1505 to 1511; Ferdinand fought for Naples from 1501 and joined the Holy League against France in 1511–12.

[4.](#) Bernabò Visconti (1323–1385), lord of Milan, famous for his extravagant rewards and punishments.

[5.](#) Livy 35.49: *Quod autem isti dicunt non interponendi vos bello, nihil magis alienum rebus vestris est; sine gratia, sine dignitate, praemium victoris eritis.*
The words were spoken by Titus Quinctius Flamininus in 192 BC.

[6.](#) In 1512, when the Holy League attacked the French in Lombardy, Florence stayed neutral; the Spanish army then sacked Prato and restored the Medici in Florence.

XXII. The Ministers Princes Keep Beside Them

The choice of ministers is of no small importance to a prince, and they are good or not according to the prince's prudence. The first guess one makes about the intelligence of a lord is from seeing the men he has around him. When they are capable and faithful, one can always consider him wise, because he has known how to recognize their capability and keep them faithful. But when they are otherwise, one can always form an unfavorable judgment of him, because the first mistake he makes, he makes in this choice.

There was no one who knew Antonio da Venafrò as the minister of Pandolfo Petrucci, prince of Siena, who did not judge Pandolfo to be a very able man for having him as his minister. For there are three kinds of brains: one understands things by itself; the second discerns what others understand; the third understands neither by itself nor through others. The first is most excellent, the second excellent, the third useless. It followed of necessity, therefore, that if Pandolfo was not of the first rank, he was of the second. For whenever someone has the judgment to recognize the good or the bad that another does and says, even if he has no invention of his own, he recognizes the bad and the good works of his minister, praises the good and corrects the bad; and the minister cannot hope to deceive him, and so keeps himself good.

But as for how a prince can know his minister, there is this method, which never fails. When you see the minister thinking more of himself than of you, and seeking his own advantage in all

his actions, such a man will never be a good minister, and you will never be able to trust him. For the one who has another's state in his hands must never think of himself but always of the prince, and must never bring to his attention anything that does not concern the prince. On the other side, the prince, to keep him good, must think of the minister, honoring him, making him rich, putting him under obligation, sharing honors and responsibilities with him, so that he sees that he cannot stand without the prince, and so that his many honors do not make him want more honors, his great riches do not make him want more riches, and his many responsibilities make him fear changes. When ministers, then, and princes in their dealings with ministers, are of this kind, they can trust each other; when they are otherwise, the end will always be harmful for one or the other.

XXIII. How Flatterers Are to Be Avoided

I do not want to leave out an important point, an error from which princes defend themselves with difficulty unless they are very prudent or make good choices. This is flatterers, of whom courts are full. For men take such pleasure in their own affairs, and deceive themselves about them so much, that they defend themselves with difficulty against this plague; and in trying to defend themselves against it they run the risk of becoming contemptible. For there is no other way to guard yourself against flattery than to let men understand that they will not offend you by telling you the truth; but when everyone can tell you the truth, you lose their respect. Therefore a prudent prince must take a third way, choosing wise men in his state, and to them alone he must give freedom to speak the truth to him, and only of the things he asks about, and nothing else. But he must ask them about everything, and listen to their opinions, and then decide by himself, in his own way. With these councils, and with each member of them, he must conduct himself so that each one knows that the more freely he speaks, the better he will be received. Apart from these, he must not want to listen to anyone; he must go straight on with what has been decided, and be firm in his decisions. Whoever does otherwise either is ruined by flatterers or changes often because of the variety of opinions, and from this comes his low reputation.

I want to bring forward a modern example on this subject. Father Luca, a man of Maximilian, the present emperor, said of His Majesty that he took counsel with no one and never did anything

in his own way.¹ This came from his following the opposite course to the one described above. For the emperor is a secretive man; he does not share his plans with anyone or take their advice. But as his plans begin to be known and revealed when he puts them into effect, they begin to be contradicted by those around him, and he, being easily swayed, is talked out of them. Hence the things he does one day he undoes the next; no one ever understands what he wants or plans to do; and no one can rely on his decisions.

A prince, therefore, should always take counsel, but when he wants to, and not when others want him to; on the contrary, he should discourage everyone from advising him about anything unless he asks. But he should be a great asker, and then, about the things he has asked, a patient listener to the truth; indeed, if he learns that someone, out of some scruple, is not telling him the truth, he should be angry. And since many think that a prince who gives the impression of being prudent is held so not because of his own nature but because of the good advisers he has around him, they are undoubtedly deceived. For this is a general rule that never fails: a prince who is not wise himself cannot be well advised, unless by chance he should put himself entirely in the hands of a single man who governs him in everything and happens to be very prudent. In that case he may well be well advised, but it would not last long, because that governor would soon take his state from him. But if he takes counsel with more than one, a prince who is not wise will never have unified counsel and will not know how to unify it himself. Each of the counselors will think of his own interests, and he will not know how to correct them or see through them. And they cannot be found to be otherwise, because men will always turn out bad for you unless they are made good by some necessity. So the conclusion is that good counsel, from whomever it comes, must arise from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from good counsel.

[1.](#) Luca Rinaldi, a priest and envoy of the emperor Maximilian I (reigned 1493–1519). Machiavelli knew the emperor's court from his mission to Germany in 1507–8.

XXIV. Why the Princes of Italy Have Lost Their States

The things set out above, if prudently observed, make a new prince seem old, and quickly make him more secure and more firmly established in his state than if he had grown old in it. For a new prince is watched much more closely in his actions than a hereditary one; and when his actions are recognized as able, they win men over and bind them to him much more than ancient blood does. For men are much more taken by present things than by past ones, and when they find good in the present, they enjoy it and do not look further; indeed, they will take up every defense of the prince, as long as he does not fail himself in other things. And so he will have a double glory: that of having founded a new principality and adorned and strengthened it with good laws, good arms, good friends, and good examples; just as the one who was born a prince and has lost his principality through his lack of prudence has a double shame.

And if one considers those lords in Italy who have lost their states in our times, like the king of Naples, the Duke of Milan, and others,¹ one will find in them, first, a common defect in arms, for the reasons discussed at length above; and then one will see that some of them either had the people as enemies, or, if they had the people friendly, did not know how to secure themselves against the great. For without these defects, states that have enough sinew to keep an army in the field are not lost. Philip of Macedon (not the father of Alexander, but the one who was defeated by

Titus Quinctius)² did not have much of a state compared with the greatness of the Romans and of Greece, who attacked him. Nevertheless, because he was a military man who knew how to keep the people friendly and secure himself against the great, he sustained the war against them for many years; and if in the end he lost his dominion over a few cities, he still kept his kingdom.

Therefore these princes of ours, who had been in their principalities for many years, should not blame fortune for having lost them afterward, but their own sloth. For never having thought in quiet times that things could change (which is a common defect of men, not to reckon with the storm in fair weather), when adverse times came they thought of running away and not of defending themselves, and hoped that the people, annoyed by the insolence of the victors, would call them back. This course is good when others are lacking; but it is very bad to have left aside the other remedies for this one. For one should never fall in the belief that someone will be found to pick you up. Either this does not happen, or if it does, it is not to your security, because that kind of defense is cowardly and does not depend on you. And the only defenses that are good, that are certain, that are lasting, are those that depend on you yourself and on your own ability.

[1.](#) Federico of Naples, deposed in 1501, and Ludovico Sforza of Milan, deposed in 1500.

[2.](#) Philip V of Macedon (reigned 221–179 BC), defeated by Titus Quinctius Flaminius at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC.

XXV. How Much Fortune Can Do in Human Affairs, and How It Can Be Resisted

I am not unaware that many have held and still hold the opinion that the things of the world are so governed by fortune and by God that men with their prudence cannot correct them, and indeed have no remedy for them at all; and for this reason they might judge that one should not sweat much over things, but let oneself be governed by chance. This opinion has been more widely believed in our times because of the great changes in things that have been seen and are seen every day, beyond all human conjecture. Thinking about this myself sometimes, I have in some measure inclined to their opinion. Nevertheless, so that our free will may not be extinguished, I judge that it may be true that fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but that she still leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern. And I compare her to one of those ruinous rivers that, when they rage, flood the plains, tear down trees and buildings, take soil from one place and put it down in another. Everyone flees before them, everyone yields to their violence without being able to resist them in any way. And although they are like this, it does not follow that men, when the weather is quiet, cannot make provision against them with dikes and embankments, so that when they rise again, either they will go off through a channel or their violence will not be so unchecked or so harmful. It is the same with fortune, which shows her power where no ability has been organized to resist her, and turns her violence where she knows that no dikes or embankments have

been made to hold her. And if you consider Italy, which is the seat of these changes and the one that has set them in motion, you will see that she is a countryside without dikes and without any embankment; for if she had been protected by proper ability, like Germany, Spain, and France, either this flood would not have caused the great changes it has, or it would not have come at all. And I want this to be enough to have said about opposing fortune in general.

But confining myself more to particulars, I say that one sees a prince flourishing today and ruined tomorrow without having seen him change his nature or any of his qualities. This, I believe, arises first from the causes discussed at length earlier: that the prince who leans entirely on fortune is ruined as she changes. I also believe that the one who adapts his way of proceeding to the quality of the times will be fortunate, and similarly that the one whose way of proceeding is out of tune with the times will be unfortunate. For one sees that men, in the things that lead them to the end each one has before him, that is, glory and riches, proceed in various ways: one with caution, another with impetuosity; one by violence, another by art; one with patience, another with its opposite; and each of them can reach it by these different methods. One also sees two cautious men, one of whom attains his goal and the other not; and similarly two who succeed equally well with two different methods, one being cautious and the other impetuous. This comes from nothing but the quality of the times, which either suit their way of proceeding or do not. From this follows what I have said, that two men working differently arrive at the same result, and of two working in the same way, one reaches his goal and the other does not. On this, too, depends the change in their fortunes; for if a man governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his conduct is good, he goes on prospering; but if the times and affairs change,

he is ruined, because he does not change his way of proceeding. Nor is there any man so prudent that he knows how to adapt himself to this, both because he cannot deviate from what his nature inclines him to, and also because, having always prospered by walking along one path, he cannot be persuaded to leave it. And so the cautious man, when it is time to act impetuously, does not know how, and so he is ruined; for if he changed his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change.

Pope Julius II proceeded impetuously in all his affairs, and he found the times and affairs so suited to his way of proceeding that he always achieved a happy result. Consider the first enterprise he undertook against Bologna, while Giovanni Bentivoglio was still alive.¹ The Venetians were not happy with it, nor was the king of Spain; Julius was still in talks with France about it; and nevertheless, with his ferocity and impetuosity, he set out on that expedition in person. This move left Spain and the Venetians hesitant and motionless, the latter out of fear and the former because of his desire to recover the whole Kingdom of Naples; and on the other side Julius drew the king of France after him, because the king, seeing him on the move and wanting to make him his friend in order to bring down the Venetians, judged that he could not refuse him troops without openly injuring him. So Julius achieved with his impetuous move what no other pontiff, with all human prudence, would ever have achieved. For if he had waited to leave Rome until everything was agreed and all things in order, as any other pontiff would have done, he would never have succeeded; because the king of France would have had a thousand excuses, and the others would have raised a thousand fears. I want to leave aside his other actions, which were all similar and all turned out well for him; and the shortness of his life did not let him experience the opposite. For if times had come in which he had to pro-

ceed with caution, his ruin would have followed; nor would he ever have deviated from the ways to which his nature inclined him.

I conclude, then, that since fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their ways, men are fortunate as long as fortune and their ways agree, and unfortunate when they disagree. I do think this: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you want to keep her down, you have to beat her and knock her about. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by such men than by those who proceed coldly. And so, like a woman, she is always the friend of young men, because they are less cautious, fiercer, and command her with more audacity.

[1.](#) In 1506 Julius II marched in person against Perugia and Bologna and drove out Giovanni Bentivoglio.

XXVI. An Exhortation to Seize Italy and Free Her from the Barbarians

Having considered, then, all the things discussed above, and thinking to myself whether the present times in Italy are right for honoring a new prince, and whether there is matter here that would give a prudent and able man the opportunity to introduce a form that would bring honor to him and good to the whole body of her people, it seems to me that so many things are coming together for the benefit of a new prince that I do not know of any time that was ever more fit for it. And if, as I said, it was necessary for the people of Israel to be enslaved in Egypt in order to see the ability of Moses, and for the Persians to be oppressed by the Medes in order to know the greatness of spirit of Cyrus, and for the Athenians to be scattered to know the excellence of Theseus, so at present, in order to know the ability of an Italian spirit, it was necessary for Italy to be reduced to the condition she is in now: more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more scattered than the Athenians, without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, overrun, having endured every kind of ruin. And although up to now some glimmer has shown itself in someone, which might make one judge that he had been ordained by God for her redemption, still it has been seen afterward how, at the highest point of his career, he was rejected by fortune.¹ So that Italy, left as if lifeless, waits for the one who may heal her wounds and put an end to the sacking of Lombardy, to the extortions in the Kingdom and in Tuscany, and cure her of those sores of hers

that have long since festered. One sees how she prays God to send someone to redeem her from these barbarous cruelties and insults. One sees, too, that she is ready and willing to follow a banner, if only there is someone to raise it. Nor can one see at present anyone in whom she can place more hope than in your illustrious house, which, with its fortune and ability, favored by God and by the Church, of which it is now the head,² can make itself the leader of this redemption. This will not be very difficult if you keep before you the actions and lives of the men I have named. And although those men were rare and marvelous, they were nevertheless men, and each of them had less opportunity than the present one; for their enterprise was not more just than this one, nor easier, nor was God more their friend than yours. Here there is great justice: “for a war is just to those for whom it is necessary, and arms are holy when there is no hope but in arms.”³ Here there is the greatest readiness; and where there is great readiness there cannot be great difficulty, provided your house adopts the methods of those I have put forward as models. Besides this, here we see extraordinary things without precedent, brought about by God: the sea has opened; a cloud has shown you the way; the rock has poured out water; here manna has rained down; everything has come together for your greatness. The rest you must do yourself. God does not want to do everything, so as not to take away our free will and the part of the glory that belongs to us.

And it is no wonder that none of the Italians I have named has been able to do what one may hope your illustrious house will do, or that in so many revolutions in Italy and so many campaigns of war it always seems that military ability in her is extinct. This comes from the fact that her old institutions were not good, and there has been no one who knew how to find new ones; and nothing brings so much honor to a man newly risen as the new laws and the new institutions he has devised. These things, when they

are well founded and have greatness in them, make him revered and admired; and in Italy there is no lack of matter on which to impress any form. Here there is great ability in the limbs, if only it were not lacking in the heads. Look at the duels and the combats of a few, how superior the Italians are in strength, in dexterity, in ingenuity. But when it comes to armies, they do not measure up. And all of this comes from the weakness of the leaders; because those who know are not obeyed, and everyone thinks he knows, since up to now there has been no one who has known how to rise so far above the rest, by ability and by fortune, that the others yield to him. Hence, in so much time, in so many wars fought in the past twenty years, whenever there has been an army entirely Italian, it has always performed badly. Witness first the Taro, then Alessandria, Capua, Genoa, Vailà, Bologna, Mestre.⁴

If your illustrious house, then, wants to follow those excellent men who redeemed their countries, it is necessary before all else, as the true foundation of every enterprise, to provide yourself with your own arms; because you cannot have more faithful, truer, or better soldiers. And although each of them is good, all together they will become better when they see themselves commanded by their own prince, and honored and maintained by him. It is necessary, therefore, to prepare these arms, so as to be able to defend yourself against foreigners with Italian ability. And although the Swiss and Spanish infantry are thought to be terrifying, nevertheless there is a defect in both, by which a third kind of formation could not only oppose them but be confident of overcoming them. For the Spaniards cannot stand up to cavalry, and the Swiss have to be afraid of infantry when they meet it in combat as stubborn as themselves. Hence it has been seen and will be seen by experience that the Spaniards cannot withstand French cavalry, and the Swiss are ruined by Spanish infantry. And although this last has not been fully proved by experience, still a sample of it was seen at the bat-

tle of Ravenna, when the Spanish infantry met the German battalions, which follow the same order as the Swiss. There the Spaniards, with the agility of their bodies and the help of their bucklers, had got in under the Germans' pikes and could strike at them in safety without the Germans having any remedy; and if the cavalry had not charged the Spaniards, they would have destroyed the Germans to a man. One can, therefore, knowing the defect of both these infantries, organize a new one that can resist cavalry and not be afraid of infantry. This will be done by the kind of arms and a change in the formation. And these are among the things which, newly organized, give reputation and greatness to a new prince.

This opportunity, then, must not be allowed to pass, so that Italy, after so long a time, may see her redeemer. Nor can I express with what love he would be received in all those provinces that have suffered from these foreign floods, with what thirst for revenge, with what obstinate faith, with what devotion, with what tears. What doors would be closed to him? What peoples would deny him obedience? What envy would oppose him? What Italian would deny him homage? This barbarian dominion stinks in everyone's nostrils. Let your illustrious house, then, take up this charge with the spirit and the hope with which just enterprises are taken up, so that under its banner this country may be ennobled, and under its auspices those words of Petrarch may come true:

Virtue against fury
will take up arms, and the fight will be short;
for the ancient valor
in Italian hearts is not yet dead.⁵

[1.](#) Usually taken to mean Cesare Borgia.

[2.](#) The Medici pope Leo X.

[3.](#) Livy 9.1, words of the Samnite leader Gaius Pontius: *iustum enim est bellum quibus necessarium, et pia arma quibus nulla nisi in armis relinquitur spes.*

[4.](#) Italian defeats from 1495 to 1513: the Taro (Fornovo, 1495), Alessandria (1499), Capua (1501), Genoa (1507), Vailà (1509), Bologna (1511), Mestre (1513).

[5.](#) Petrarch, *Italia mia*, *Canzoniere* 128, lines 93–96: *Vertù contra furore / prenderà l'arme, et fia 'l combatter corto: / ché l'antiquo valore / ne gli italici cor' non è anchor morto.*

Colophon

The Prince

Original title · *Il Principe* (Latin working title *De principatibus*)

Author · Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)

Translator · Ether Library

Written and first published · Written in 1513; first printed in 1532, five years after the author's death, in Rome (Antonio Blado) and in Florence (heirs of Filippo Giunta).

Source text · A public-domain digital edition of the Italian text established by Luigi Firpo (Turin: Einaudi, 1972); the second paragraph of chapter XV, missing there, from the Italian edition of 1814. Translated directly from the Italian.

Extent · Complete and unabridged · dedication and twenty-six chapters · 129 paragraphs, as in the original · short translator's notes on persons, events, and quotations

Copyright · The author died in 1527; the original work is in the public domain.

This translation · Translated from the Italian by Ether Library. The English text is © Ether Library and is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0): you may copy and share it for noncommercial purposes, with attribution.

Edition · English edition 1.0 · October 2026

Typography · Set in Lora (SIL Open Font License 1.1). Cover painting and design by Ether Library.



Original in the public domain · English translation **CC BY-NC 4.0**

Ether Library · No. 0012