Machiavelli

*The Discourses*

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## Chapter XVI

## A PEOPLE THAT HAS BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO LIVE UNDER A PRINCE PRESERVES ITS LIBERTIES WITH DIFFICULTY, IF BY ACCIDENT IT HAS BECOME FREE

Many examples in ancient history prove how difficult it is for a people that has been accustomed to live under the government of a prince to preserve its liberty, if by some accident it has recovered it, as was the case with Rome after the expulsion of the Tarquins. And this difficulty is a reasonable one; for such a people may well be compared to some wild animal, which (although by nature ferocious and savage) has been as it were subdued by having been always kept imprisoned and in servitude, and being let out into the open fields, not knowing how to provide food and shelter for itself, becomes an easy prey to the first one who attempts to chain it up again. The same thing happens to a people that has not been accustomed to self-government; for, ignorant of all public affairs, of all means of defence or offence, neither knowing the princes nor being known by them, it soon relapses under a yoke, oftentimes much heavier than the one which it had but just shaken off. This difficulty occurs even when the body of the people is not wholly corrupt; but when corruption has taken possession of the whole people, then it cannot preserve its free condition even for the shortest possible time, as we shall see further on; and therefore our argument has reference to a people where corruption has not yet become general, and where the good still prevails over the bad. To the above comes another difficulty, which is, that the state that becomes free makes enemies for itself, and not friends. All those become its enemies who were benefited by the tyrannical abuses and fattened upon the treasures of the prince, and who, being now deprived of these advantages, cannot remain content, and are therefore driven to attempt to re-establish the tyranny, so as to recover their former authority and advantages. A state then, as I have said, that becomes free, makes no friends; for free governments bestow honors and rewards only according to certain honest and fixed rules, outside of which there are neither the one nor the other. And such as obtain these honors and rewards do not consider themselves under obligations to any one, because they believe that they were entitled to them by their merits. Besides the advantages that result to the mass of the people from a free government, such as to be able freely to enjoy one's own without apprehension, to have nothing to fear for the honor of his wife and daughters, or for himself, — all these, I say, are not appreciated by any one

whilst he is in the enjoyment of them; for no one will confess himself under obligation to any one merely because he has not been injured by him.

Thus it is that a state that has freshly achieved liberty makes enemies, and no friends. And to prevent this inconvenience, and the disorders which are apt to come with it, there is no remedy more powerful, valid, healthful, and necessary than the killing of the sons of Brutus, who, as history shows, had conspired with other Roman youths for no other reason than because under the Consuls they could not have the same extraordinary advantages they had enjoyed under the kings; so that the liberty of the people seemed to have become their bondage. Whoever undertakes to govern a people under the form of either republic or monarchy, without making sure of those who are opposed to this new order of things, establishes a government of very brief duration. It is true that I regard as unfortunate those princes who, to assure their government to which the mass of the people is hostile, are obliged to resort to extraordinary measures; for he who has but a few enemies can easily make sure of them without great scandal, but he who has the masses hostile to him can never make sure of them, and the more cruelty he employs the feebler will his authority become; so that his best remedy is to try and secure the good will of the people. Although I have departed in this discourse from my subject, in speaking sometimes of a republic and sometimes of a prince, yet I will say a few words more, so as not to be obliged to come back to this matter.

A prince, then, who wishes the good will of a people that is hostile to him, (I speak of such princes as have been tyrants in their country,) should first of all ascertain what the people really desire, and he will always find that they want two things r one, to revenge themselves on those who have been the cause of their enslavement, and the other, to recover their liberty. The first of these desires the prince may satisfy entirely, and the second in part. As to the first, the following is an example in point. When Clearchus, tyrant of Heraclea, had been banished, a dissension arose between the people and the nobles of Heraclea. The latter, finding themselves the feebler of the two, resolved to recall Clearchus; and having conspired together, they placed him in opposition to the popular faction of the people of Heraclea, and thus deprived the people of their liberty. Clearchus, finding himself placed between the insolence of the nobles on the one hand, whom he could in no way content or control, and the rage of the popular faction on the other hand, who could not support the loss of their liberty, resolved suddenly to rid himself of the importunities of the nobles, and to secure to himself the good will and support of the people. Availing of a favorable opportunity, he had all the nobles massacred, to the extreme satisfaction of the people; and in this way he satisfied one of the wishes of the people, namely, the desire of revenge. But as to the other popular desire, that of recovering their liberty, the prince, not being able to satisfy that, should examine the causes that make them desire to be free; and he will find that a small part of them wish to be free for the purpose of commanding, whilst all the others,

who constitute an immense majority, desire liberty so as to be able to live in greater security. For in all republics, however organized, there are never more than forty or fifty citizens who attain a position that entitles them to command. As this is a small number, it is easy to make sure of them, either by having them put out of the way, or by giving them such a share of the public honors and offices as, according to their condition, will in great measure content them. The others, who only care to live in security, are easily satisfied by institutions and laws that confirm at the same time the general security of the people and the power of the prince. When a prince does this, and the people see that by no chance he infringes the laws, they will in a very little while be content, and live in tranquillity. An example of this is the kingdom of France, where there would be no security but for the fact that the king there has bound himself by a number of laws that provide for the security of all his people. Those who organized that state wanted that the kings should dispose of the army and treasury at their own will, but that in all other matters they should conform to the laws. That sovereign, therefore, or that republic, which fails from the start to secure its authority, should do so on the first occasion, as the Romans did; and he who allows the opportunity to pass will repent too late not having done what he should have done in the beginning. The Romans, being not yet corrupted when they recovered their liberty, were able to maintain it after the death of the sons of Brutus and the expulsion of the Tarquins, by means of such laws and institutions as we have treated of above. But if the people had been corrupt, then there would have been no sufficient remedies found in Rome or elsewhere to maintain their liberty, as we shall show in the next chapter.