

## **Herman Bernstein (1935) argues that the *Protocols of Zion* is a forgery**

Peter Myers, September 20, 2002; update February 25, 2018. My comments are shown {thus}

This is Bernstein's Exhibit A, Maurice Joly's book *Dialogues in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquie*

address: <http://mailstar.net/joly.doc>

Bernstein's other material is at <http://mailstar.net/bernstein.doc>.

For arguments that the Bernstein / Cohn "forgery" hypothesis is flawed, see *The Protocols of Zion Toolkit* at <http://mailstar.net/toolkit.html>

{p. 75} EXHIBIT A

DIALOGUES IN HELL\*

BETWEEN

MACHIAVELLI AND MONTESQUIEU

Or the Policies of Machiavelli in the Nineteenth Century

BY A CONTEMPORARY  
(MAURICE JOLY)

"Soon will be seen a frightful calm, during which all will reunite against the infringing power of the laws:  
"When Sylla desired to restore liberty to Rome, she was no longer able to harbor it."  
(Montesquieu, *Esprit des Loix*.)

BRUSSELS

PRESS OF A. MERTENS AND SON  
22, RUE DE L'ESCALIER

1864

\*See Exhibit I for facsimile of original title page.

{p. 77} PREFACE

THIS book has characteristics that can be applied to all governments, but its goal is more exact; it personifies one particular political system which has not varied once in its methods since the fatal and alas! already too distant date of its enthronement.

There is no question here of a defamatory lampoon, nor of a pamphlet: opinion in modern nations is too regimented to accept violent truths about contemporary affairs. The supernatural duration of certain successes is, moreover, making for the corruption of honesty itself; but the public conscience is still alive and providence will one fine day interfere in the game being played against it.

One judges better certain facts and certain principles when one sees them outside of the framework in which they usually exist in our sight; the change in point of view sometimes terrifies the eyes!

**Here, all is presented in the form of fiction:** it would be superfluous **to give away the key** in anticipation. **If this book has a message, if it bears a lesson, the reader must discover it for himself** and not be informed. This reading, moreover, will lack certain lively distractions; nevertheless, one must proceed slowly, as is necessary with **writings that are not frivolous**.

No one will ask **whose hand has written these words:** a work such as this is **in a way impersonal**. It responds to the call of the conscience; the whole world conceived it, it is done. **The author** stands back, for he **is only the editor of a thought** which is in the general mind, he is but the **more or less obscure tool of the coalition for good**.

Geneva, October 15, 1864.

{p. 79} FIRST DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. On **the bank of this deserted coast**, they told me, I would encounter **the shade** of the great Montesquieu. Is it he who stands before me?

MONTESQUIEU. The name "great" belongs to no one **here**, O Machiavelli. But I am the one you seek.

MACHIAVELLI. Of all the illustrious **personages whose shades people the resting place of darkness**, there is none I would rather meet than Montesquieu. Carried into this unknown territory by **the migration of souls**, I give thanks to the chance that at last places me in the presence of **the author of the Esprit des Loix**.

MONTESQUIEU. **The former secretary of State of the Florentine Republic** has not yet forgotten his courtly language. But what can those who have traversed these dark shores exchange, save anguish and regrets?

MACHIAVELLI. Is it the philosopher, or is it the statesman who speaks thus? What does death matter to those who have lived by thought, since thought never dies? For myself, I know of no condition more tolerable than that **in which we shall remain until the day of last judgment**. To be free of the cares and worries of material life, **to live in the domain of pure reason**, to be able to converse with the great men who have filled the universe with the sound of their names; **to follow from afar the revolutions among the states, the fall and the transformation of empires**, to meditate on their new constitutions, on the changes applied to the customs and ideas of the peoples of Europe, on the progress of their civilization, in politics, in art, in industry, as well as in the sphere of philosophical ideas, what a theatre for the mind! What subjects for astonishment! How many new points

{p. 80} of view! How many unexpected revelations! How many marvels, **if we are to believe the shades that come among us**. Death for us is like **a profound retreat** in which we manage to gather the lessons of history and the rights of humanity! Oblivion itself could not break all the bonds which attach us to the earth, for posterity still speaks of those who, like you, have imprinted the great movements upon the human soul. **Your political principles reign at the present time over almost half Europe**; and if someone could be freed of fear in **effecting the dark passage which leads from hell to heaven**, who better than he who bears with him such pure titles to **glory before the eternal justice**?

MONTESQUIEU. You do not speak for yourself, Machiavelli: you show too much **modesty for one who leaves behind him the tremendous renown of the author of *The Prince***.

MACHIAVELLI. I believe I understand **the irony which is hidden beneath your words**. The great French publicist would judge then like the mob who only knows my name and a blind prejudice? That book gave me a fatal renown, I know: it **made me responsible for all tyrannies**; it drew down upon me the maledictions of those peoples who personified in me their hatred for despotism; it poisoned my last days, and the reprobation of posterity seems to have followed me here. But what have I done? For fifteen years I served my fatherland, a republic; I conspired for her independence and I defended her unceasingly against Louis XII, against the Spaniards, against Julius II, against Borgia himself, who, but for me, would have strangled her. I protected her against the bloody intrigues which were woven in all directions around her, combating by diplomacy as another would have combated by the sword; treating, negotiating, weaving or snapping threads according to the interests of the republic, which was then crushed between the great powers and tossed by war like a small boat. And it was not an oppressive or autocratic government which we upheld in Florence; they were popular institutions. Was I one of those whom you see changing with a change in fortune? The executioners of the Medicis knew where

{p. 81} to find me after the fall of Soderini. Fostered by liberty, I succumbed with her; **I lived as one proscribed**, without the regard of a single prince deigning to be turned on me. I died poor and forgotten. That was my life, and those were the crimes which have cost me the ingratitude of my fatherland, the hate of posterity. Providence will perhaps be more just to me.

MONTESQUIEU. I knew all that, Machiavelli, and it is for that reason that I have never been able to understand how the Florentine patriot, how the servant of a republic, had made himself **the founder of this sombre school** that has **made all the crowned heads your disciples**, but which is qualified to **justify the most heinous crimes of tyrants**.

MACHIAVELLI. And what if I told you that this book was but the fantasy of a diplomat; that it was **not written to be printed**; that it received a fame that its author did not wish for it; that it was conceived under the influence of **ideas which were at that time common to all the Italian principalities** avid for territory at the expense of others, and directed by cunning policies in which the most perfidious were reputed to be the most able. ...

MONTESQUIEU. Is that really your thought? Since you speak to me with this frankness, I can admit to you that it was mine also, and that I shared in that respect the opinion of many others who knew your life and had carefully read your books. Yes, yes, Machiavelli, and this avowal honors you, you did not then say what you thought or you only said it under the influence of personal sentiments which muddled for a moment your powers for clear reasoning.

MACHIAVELLI. That is what deceives you, Montesquieu, as well as those who thought as you do. **My single crime was to say the truth to the people as to the kings**; not the moral truth, but the political truth; not truth such as it should have been, but such as it is, such as it will always be. It is not I who am the founder of the doctrine the paternity of which is attributed to me; it is the human heart. Machiavellism preceded Machiavelli.

Moses, Sesostris, Solomon, Lysander, Philip and Alexander of

{p. 82} Macedon, Agathocles, Romulus, Tarquin, Julius Caesar, Augustus and even Nero, Charlemagne, Theodoric, Clovis, Hugh Capet, Louis XI, Gonzalo of Cordova, Caesar Borgia, those were the ancestors of my doctrines. I speak without mentioning, of course, those who came after me, and better ones, the list of whom would be long, and to whom *The Prince* taught nothing but what they already knew, by the practice of power. Who in your time rendered me more brilliant homage than Frederic II? He refuted me, his pen in his hand, in the interest of his popularity, and in politics he rigorously applied my doctrines.

By what inexplicable whim of the human soul was what I wrote in that work made sinful? As much reproach the savant for seeking the physical causes which bring about the fall of bodies that wound us in descending, the doctor for describing maladies, the chemist for making a history of poisons, the moralist for painting the vices, the historian for describing history.

MONTESQUIEU. Oh! Machiavelli, **that Socrates were here to contest the sophistries that are hidden in your words!** No matter how awkward in argument nature has made me, it is scarcely difficult for me to answer you: **you compare to poison and sickness the evils engendered by the spirit of domination**, of cunning and of violence; and these are the maladies that your writings teach the means to communicate to the states, **these are the poisons that you instruct how to distil**. When the savant, the doctor, the moralist, seek evil, it is not to teach how to propagate it; it is **to heal it. Now, that is what your book does not do**; but it matters little, and I am not less disarmed because of it. From the moment you do not erect despotism in principle, from the moment you yourself consider it an evil, it seems to me that by that you condemn it, and on this point at least we can be in accord.

MACHIAVELLI. That we are not, Montesquieu, for you have not understood my whole thought; I threw you off by a comparison which was too easy to refute. The irony of Socrates himself would disturb me, for only a sophist would use more ably than others, **that false instrument, logomachy**. That is not your school

{p. 83} and it is not mine: let us leave alone words and comparisons and hold ourselves to ideas. **Here is how I formulate my system**, and I doubt whether you will shake it, for it is only composed of **deductions from** the moral and political facts of **an eternal truth**: The evil instinct in man is more powerful than the good. **Man leans more toward the evil** than the good; fear and power have more control over him than reason. I do not stop to demonstrate such truths; there was among you **only the hare-brained coterie of Baron d'Holbach, of which J. J. Rousseau was the grand priest** and Diderot the apostle, **who could have contradicted them. All men seek power, and there is none who would not be an oppressor if he could; all, or nearly all, are ready to sacrifice the rights of others to their own interests.**

What restrains **these ravenous animals that we call men? In the beginnings of society, it is brute force, without control; later, it is law, that is, force again, ruled by certain forms**. You have consulted all the sources of history; everywhere force appears before justice.

**Political liberty is only a relative idea**; the necessity to live is what dominates States as well as individuals.

In certain latitudes of Europe, there are people incapable of moderation in the exercise of liberty. **If liberty prolongs itself, it is transformed to license; civil or social war arrives, and the State is lost**, either by division or dismemberment because of its own convulsions, or by its divisions rendering it the prey of other lands. In such conditions, **the people prefer despotism to anarchy**; are they wrong?

States, once constituted, have **two kinds of enemies; the enemies within and the enemies without**. What arms shall they employ in war against the foreigners? Will the two enemy generals communicate to one another their campaign plans in order that each shall be able to defend himself? Will they forbid themselves night attacks, snares, ambushes, battles in which the number of troops are unequal? Without doubt, they will not. And such fighters would make one laugh. And these snares, these

{p. 84} artifices, all this strategy indispensable to warfare, you don't want them to be employed against **the enemies within, against the disturbers of peace?** No doubt, they will be used with less rigor; but, fundamentally, the rules will be the same. **Is it possible to conduct by pure reason violent masses which are moved only by sentiment, passion and prejudice?**

No matter whether the direction of affairs is placed **in the hands of an autocrat, of an oligarchy or of the people itself**, no war, no negotiation, no internal reform, could succeed without the help of **these combinations which you seem to reprove**, but which you would have been obliged to employ yourself if the king of France had given you charge of the smallest affair of state.

What a puerile reproach is that which attacked The Prince! Has politics anything to do with morals? **Have you ever seen a single state conduct its affairs according to the principles that govern private morals?** Then every war would be a sin, even when it would have just cause; every conquest having no other motive than glory, would be a heinous crime; every treaty in which one power would tip the balance to its side, would be an unworthy deception; every usurpation of sovereign power would be an act meriting death. **Nothing would be legitimate but what is based on justice!** but I told you just now, and I maintain even in the face of modern history: all sovereign powers have had force for an origin, or, what is the same thing, the negation of justice. **Does that mean that I should outlaw it?** No; but I regard it as an extremely limited application, as much in the relations of nations among themselves as in the relations of the governors with the governed.

**This word "justice"** itself, by the way, do you not see that it is **infinitely vague?** Where does it begin, where does it end? When will justice exist, when will it not exist? I take examples. Here is a State: bad organization of public powers, turbulence of democracy, impotence of laws to control discontented, **disorder which reigns everywhere**, will all precipitate it into ruin. **A strong man**

{p. 85} **thrusts himself from the ranks of the aristocracy or from the heart of the people**; he breaks through all constituted power; he puts his hand on the laws, **he alters all the institutions, and he gives twenty years of peace** to his country. Did he have the right to do what he has done?

Pisistratus captures the citadel by a sudden attack and lays the ground for the age of Pericles. **Brutus violates the monarchical constitution of Rome**, expels the Tarquins, and **with a stab founds a republic whose grandeur is the most imposing spectacle** that has ever been presented to the universe. But the struggle between the patricians and the plebes, which, as long as it was carried on, made for the vitality of the republic, brought dissolution with it, and **everything was about to perish. Caesar and Augustus appear; they too are violators; but the Roman empire which succeeded the republic**, thanks to them, **lasts as long as did the republic**, and failed only after covering the whole world with its debris. Well, **was justice with these audacious men?** No, according to you. And yet posterity has covered them with glory; **in reality, they served and saved their country**; they prolonged its existence through the centuries. You can easily see that among States the principle of justice is dominated by the principle of interest, and the thing that is made clear from these considerations is that **good can come from evil, that one arrives at good through evil**, as one heals through poison, as one saves life by cutting it with iron. **I am less preoccupied by what is good and moral than by what is useful and necessary**; I have taken societies as they are, and I have laid down rules in consequence.

Speaking abstractly, **are violence and cunning an evil? Yes; but it is necessary to use them in governing men, so long as men are not angels.**

Everything is **good or evil, according to the use** one makes of it and the fruit one harvests from it; the end justifies the means: and now, if you ask me **why I, a republican, give preference everywhere to absolutist government**, I will tell you that, as a witness in my homeland of the **fickleness and the cowardice of the**

{p. 86} **populace, of its innate taste for slavery**, of its incapacity to conceive and to respect the conditions of free life; it is to my eyes **a blind force which dissolves itself** sooner or later, if it is not in the hands of **a single man**; I answer that **the people, left to itself, would only be able to destroy itself**; that it would never be able to administer, nor to judge, nor to make war. I will tell you that **Greece never shone except in the eclipses of liberty**; that without the despotism of the Roman aristocracy, and that, later, without the despotism of the emperors, the brilliant civilization of Europe would never have developed.

Shall I seek examples among modern States? They are so striking and so numerous that I take the nearest ones.

Under what institutions and under what men did the Italian republics shine? With what sovereigns did Spain, France and Germany constitute their power? Under Leo X, Julius II, Philip II, Barbarossa, Louis XIV, Napoleon, all men with heavy hands, placed more often on their swords than on the charters of their countries.

But I am surprised that I must talk so long to convince the illustrious writer who listens to me. Are not a part of these ideas, if I am not mistaken, in the *Esprit des Lois*? Has this discourse wounded the grave and calm man who meditated without passion on political problems? The encyclopedists were not Catos; the author of the *Persian Letters* was not a saint, nor even a fervent believer. **Our school, which men call immoral, was perhaps more closely attached to the real God than the philosophers of the eighteenth century.**

MONTESQUIEU. Your last words find me without anger, Machiavelli, and I have listened to you attentively. Will you listen to me, and will you let me speak to you with the same liberty?

MACHIAVELLI. I will be silent, and listen respectfully to **the man who is called the legislator of nations.**

{p. 87} SECOND DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. Your doctrines are not new to me, Machiavelli; and if I find some **difficulty in refuting them**, it is, whether wrong or right, rather because **they have no philosophical basis** than because they disturb my thoughts. I readily understand that you are above all a man of politics, and that **facts impress you more than ideas**. But you will admit nevertheless that when it is a question of government, one must end up at certain principles. **You give no place in your political system to morals, to religion, or to justice**; you have in your mouth **but two words: force and cunning**. If your system reduces itself to the declaration that force plays a great role in human affairs, that cleverness is a necessary qualification for a statesman, you understand well that this is a truth that needs not be proved; but, **if you elevate violence to a principle, cunning to a maxim of government**, if you do not take into consideration in your calculations any of the laws of humanity, the code of tyranny is naught but **the code of the brute**, for animals, too, are adroit and strong, and, indeed, **there is no justice among them but that of brute force**. But I do not believe that even your fatalism will go so far, for **you admit the existence of good and evil.**

**Your principle is that good can come from evil**, and that **it is permissible to do evil when it will result in good.**

Thus, you do not say: It is good in itself to go back on one's word; it is good to use corruption, violence and murder. But you do say: One can deceive when it is useful to do so, kill when that is necessary, take the property of others when that is advantageous. I hasten to add that, in your system, these maxims are applied only to principles, and when it is a question of their interests or of those of the State. Consequently, **the prince has a right to violate his oaths**; he can shed streams of blood to usurp power and to maintain himself; **he can pillage those whom he proscribes, upset all the laws, make new ones, and violate these, too**; he can squander

{p. 88} his finances, corrupt, compromise, punish and strike unceasingly.

MACHIAVELLI. But was it not you who said that **in autocratic states** fear was necessary, virtue useless, honor dangerous; that blind obedience was necessary, and that **the prince would be lost if for one instant he failed to lift his arm?** (*Esprit des Lois*, pp. 24 and 25, Chap. IX, Book III.)

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, I said that; but when I discovered, as you did, the frightful conditions upon which tyrannical power maintains itself, it was **to disgrace it and not to build altars to it**; it was to inspire horror in my fatherland which never, luckily for her, bowed her head beneath such a yoke. How is it you do not see that force is only an accident in the progress of regular society, and that **the most arbitrary powers are obliged to seek their sanction in considerations foreign to the theories of force?** It is not only in the name of interest, **it is in the name of duty that all oppressors act. They violate it, but they invoke it**; the doctrine of interest is thus just as impotent by itself as are the means which it employs.

MACHIAVELLI. I interrupt you here; you take interest into account, that is enough to justify all the necessary policies which are not in accord with justice.

MONTESQUIEU. It is a reason of state that you invoke. Notice, then, that I cannot give as a basis of society just the thing that destroys it. In the name of selfishness, princes and peoples, like citizens, can only commit crimes. The selfishness of the State, you say! But how am I to know if it is really profitable to commit such-and-such an iniquity? Do we not know that the interests of the state are more often the interests of the prince in particular, or those of the corrupt favorites around him? I do not expose myself to such consequences when I give justice as a basis for the existence of society, because the idea of justice traces limits which state interests cannot exceed. And if you ask me **what is the foundation of justice, I will tell you that it is morality** whose precepts have in them nothing doubtful or obscure, because they are **written into all religions**, and

{p. 89} they are imprinted in luminous characters on **the conscience of man**. It is this pure source **from which should spring all laws**, civil, political, economic, **international.**

Ex eodem jure, siue ex eodem fronte, siue ex eodem principio.

But here is where your inconsistency is conspicuous; you are Catholic, you are Christian; **we worship the same God, you admit His commandments**, you admit the existence of morality, you admit justice in the relations among human beings, and you throw to the ground all these rules when the question of the State or the prince arises. In a word, politics, according to you, has nothing to do with morality. **You permit the monarch to do what you forbid the subject.** According to whether the same actions are done by the weak or by the strong, you glorify them or you blame them; they are either crimes or virtues, according to the rank of the man who accomplishes them. You praise the prince for having done them, and you send the subject to the galleys. You do not dream that with such maxims, no society can last; **you believe that the subject will keep his promises when he sees his sovereign break his**; that he will respect the law when he knows that the man who handed it down to him has violated it and continually violates it; you believe he will hesitate to follow the road to violence, corruption and fraud when he sees those who are supposed to lead him following it at all times? Learn the truth; know that **each usurpation of the prince in public affairs authorizes an equal infraction on the part of the subject**; that every political perfidy engenders a social perfidy; that every violence on high legitimizes a violence lower down. That much for what concerns the citizens among themselves.

As for what concerns their relations with the governing powers, I need not tell you that it means civil war introduced in a state of ferment into the breast of society. **The silence of the people is but the truce of the vanquished** for whom complaint is a crime. **Wait for him to awaken; you have invented the theory of force; rest assured that he has remembered it.** At the first opportunity,

{p. 90} he will break his chains; he will break them perhaps under the most futile pretext, and he will retake by force what force had taken from him.

The maxim of despotism is the perinde ac cadaver of the Jesuits; to kill or to be killed: that is its law: it is **brutality today, civil war tomorrow. It is thus, at least, that things come about in European climes; in the Orient, the peoples sleep in peace amid the degradation of servitude.**

**Princes cannot**, therefore, **permit themselves what private morality does not permit; that is my conclusion**; it is positive. You thought you could embarrass me by giving examples of many great men who, by bold acts accomplished in violation of the laws, had given peace and sometimes glory to their country; and from them you took your great argument: good comes from evil. I am little moved; **it has not been proven to me that these daring men have done more good than evil**; it is in no way established for me that their societies would not have been saved and upheld without them. The **methods of salvation** which they bring do not compensate for the **germs of dissolution** which they introduce into the States. Several years of anarchy are often less fatal for a kingdom than many years of quiet despotism.

**You admire the great men; I admire only the great institutions.** I believe that, to be happy, people have less need of men of genius than of men of integrity; but I grant you, if you wish, that several of the violent enterprises for which you are the apologist have been capable of being turned to the advantage of certain States. These acts could **justify themselves in the ancient nations where slavery and the dogma of fatality reigned.** One finds them again in the Middle Ages and even in modern times; but in proportion as the customs are modified, as light is propagated among the divers peoples of Europe, in proportion, especially, **as the principles of political science have become better known, justice has found itself substituted for force** in principle as well as in fact. No doubt, the tempests of liberty will always exist, and a good number of crimes will yet be committed in her name: but political fatalism

{p. 91} no longer exists. If you were able to say, in your times, that despotism was a necessary evil, you could not say it today, for, in the actual state of customs and political institutions **among the principal peoples of Europe, despotism has become impossible.**

MACHIAVELLI. Impossible ...? If you can manage to prove that to me, I agree to make a step in the direction of your ideas.

MONTESQUIEU. I will prove it to you very easily, if you still wish to listen.

MACHIAVELLI. Very willingly, but take care; I believe you are attempting a great deal.

### THIRD DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. A thick mass of shadows is coming toward this shore; the region we are in now will soon be invaded. Come to this side; otherwise we will soon be separated.

MACHIAVELLI. I did not find in your words just now the precision that characterized your language at the beginning of our conversation. I find that you have exaggerated the consequences of the principles which are comprised in the Esprit des Lois.

MONTESQUIEU. I expressly avoided, in that work, the making of long theories. If you knew it otherwise than by what has been reported to you, you would see that the particular developments that you give here spring without effort from the principles that I have laid down. Besides, I find no difficulty in admitting that the knowledge that I have acquired lately has modified or completed several of my ideas.

MACHIAVELLI. Do you really expect to maintain that despotism is incompatible with the political conditions of the peoples of Europe?

MONTESQUIEU. I have not said all the peoples; but I will cite, if you wish, those among whom the development of political science has brought great results.

MACHIAVELLI. What are those nations?

{p. 92} MONTESQUIEU. **England, France, Belgium, a part of Italy, Prussia, Switzerland, the German Confederation, Holland, even Austria;** that is, as you see, almost all that part of Europe **over which once spread the Roman world.**

MACHIAVELLI. I know a little about what has happened in Europe from 1527 to these times, and I assure you that I am very curious to hear you justify your position.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, listen to me, and I will succeed in convincing you, perhaps. It is not men but institutions that assure the reign of liberty and of good customs in the nations. On the perfection or the imperfection of the institutions depend all the benefits, as well necessarily as all the evils which could result for men in their union in a community; and, when I demand the best institutions, you understand that, according to the beautiful saying of Solon, I mean the most perfect institutions that the people can support. That is to say that I do not conceive of impossible conditions of existence for them, and that by that **I separate myself from those deplorable reformers who pretend to construct governments on pure, rational hypotheses** without taking into consideration climate, habits, customs and even prejudices.

At the beginning of a nation's history, institutions are what they can be. **Antiquity has shown us marvelous civilizations, states in which the conditions of the free government were admirably understood.** The peoples of the Christian era have had more difficulty in putting their constitutions in harmony with the movement of political life; but they have profited from the lessons of antiquity, and with civilizations infinitely more complicated, they have nevertheless arrived at more perfect results.

One of the primary causes of anarchy, as of despotism, has been the theoretical and practical ignorance in which the nations of Europe have been for so long of the principles which govern the organization of power. How, when the principle of sovereignty rested solely on the person of the prince, could the rights of the nation be affirmed? How, when **the one charged with executing the laws was at the same time the legislator,** could his power not

{p. 93} be tyrannical? How could the citizens be guaranteed against arbitrary rule when **the legislative and the executive power were already combined, and the judicial power also about to be united to it?** (Esprit des Lois, p. 129, Book XI, Chap. VI.)

I know well that certain liberties, that certain public rights which are introduced sooner or later into the least advanced political customs, do not but permit the bringing of **obstacles to the unlimited exercise of absolute royalty;** that, on the other side, the fear of angering the people, the spirit of moderation among certain kings, have **made them use with moderation the excessive powers** with which they are invested; but it is not less true that such precarious guarantees were at the mercy of the monarch who possessed in principle the goods, the rights and the person of his subjects. **The division of powers has realized in Europe the problem of free societies,** and if something can sweeten for me the anxiety of the hours which precede the last judgment, it is the thought that my passage on earth was not foreign to this great emancipation.

You were born, Machiavelli, on the borders of the Middle Ages, and you saw, with the renaissance of art, the first dawning of modern times; but the society in the center of which you lived was, permit me to declare it, **still imprinted with the manners of barbarity;** Europe was a tournament. The ideas of **war, domination and conquest filled the heads of the statesmen and the princes.** Force was everything then, justice very little, I admit; kingdoms were as prey for the conquerors; within the states, **the sovereigns fought with the great vassals;** the great vassals wiped out the cities. Amid the feudal anarchy which placed all Europe in arms, the people, crushed to the ground, were in the habit of considering the great men and **the princes as fatal divinities, to whom the human race had been delivered.** You came into those tumultuous times, times full of grandeur, too. You saw intrepid captains, men of iron, audacious geniuses; and this world, filled with sombre beauties in its disorder, appeared to you as it would appear to an artist whose imagination is more struck than his moral sense; it

{p. 94} is that which, to my eyes, explains The Prince, and you were not so far from the truth which you are willing to admit, when, a moment ago, by an Italian feint, it pleased you, in order to sound me, to attribute it to the caprice of a diplomat. But, since your time, the world has progressed; **the peoples look upon themselves today as the arbiters of their destinies;** they have, in fact as well as in law, **destroyed privilege, destroyed aristocracy;** they have established a principle which may be very new to you, a descendant of Marquis Hugo; **they have established the principle of equality; they see in those who govern them only mandatories;** they have realized the principle of equality by civil laws that nothing could take away from them. They hold to these laws as to their own blood, because they have in fact cost enough in the blood of their ancestors.

I spoke to you of **wars** just now: they rage always, I know; but, the first progress is that **today they no longer give the conquerors the property of the vanquished states.** A law that you hardly knew, **international law, today guides the relations between the nations,** just as civil law guides the relations of the subjects of every country.

After having assured their private rights by civil laws, their public rights by treaties, the peoples wanted to put themselves in order with their princes, and they **assured their political rights by constitutions.** Long in the hands of arbitrary rule by the confusion of powers, which permitted the princes to make tyrannical laws and to exercise them tyrannically, they **separated the three powers, legislative, executive and judicial,** by constitutional lines which **cannot be crossed** without an alarm being given to the political body.

By this single reform, which is an immense point, interior public justice was created, and the superior principles which constitute it are found to be redeemed. The person of the prince ceases to be confounded with that of the state; the sovereignty appears to have in part its source in the very heart of the nation, which makes for the **distribution of powers between the prince and the**

{p. 95} **political bodies, independent of one another.** I do not wish to theorize before the illustrious statesman who listens to me, upon the regime which is called **in England and France the constitutional regime;** it has today passed into the customs of the principal states of Europe, not only because it is the expression of the highest political science but mostly because it is **the only practical method of government** in the presence of the ideas of modern civilization.

In all times, under the rule of liberty as under that of tyranny, **one cannot but govern by laws**. It is, therefore, on the manner in which the laws are made that are founded all the guarantees of the citizens. **If it is the prince who is the sole legislator, he will only make tyrannical laws**, and it would be fortunate if he did not overthrow the state constitution in a few years; but, in any case, it is full absolutism; **if it is a senate, an oligarchy has been constituted**, a regime odious to the people, because it gives them as many tyrants as masters; **if it is the people, one runs to anarchy, which is another way to end up in despotism; if it is an assembly elected by the people, the first part of the problem is already resolved**; for therein is the very basis of **representative government**, today in power in the whole southern part of Europe.

But an assembly of representatives of the people which would possess in itself the whole legislative sovereignty would not lose time in **abusing its power** and in making the state run the greatest perils. The regime definitely established is **a happy compromise between aristocracy, democracy and the monarchical establishment**, having something of the nature of the three forms of government at once, by means of a balance of powers which seem to be the masterpiece of the human intellect. **The person of the sovereign remains sacred, inviolate**; but, while conserving a mass of capital privileges which, for the good of the state, must remain in his power, his essential role is not more than that of procurator of the execution of the laws. **No longer having in his hand the abundance of power**, his responsibility lessens and passes to **the ministers whom he associates with his government**. The law, which he has either the exclusive power to propose or, together

{p. 96} with another state body, is prepared by a council composed of men experienced in government affairs, **submitted to a high chamber, hereditary or elected for life**, which examines whether these dispositions are not contrary to the constitution, **voted by a legislative body emanating from national suffrage**, applied by an independent magistracy. If the law is defective, it is rejected or amended by the legislative body; the upper chamber opposes its adoption if it is contrary to the principles upon which the constitution reposes.

The triumph of this system so profoundly conceived, and the mechanism of which, you understand, can be put together in a thousand ways, according to the temperament of the people to whom it is applied, has been to **conciliate order with liberty**, stability with movement, to **make the entire citizenry participate in political life** and to **suppress the agitations in the public square**. It is **the country governing itself**, by the alternative displacement of majorities, which influences in the chambers the naming of the directing ministers.

The relations between the prince and the subjects rest, as you see, on a vast system of guarantees, the unshakable basis of which is civil order. No one can be reached, body or goods, by an act of the administrative authority; individual liberty is under the protection of the magistrates; **in criminal trials, the accused are judged by their peers**; above all the jurisdictions, there is a supreme jurisdiction charged with revoking the decrees which are handed down in violation of the laws. **The citizens themselves are armed**, for the defense of their rights, by the institution of bourgeois militia which cooperates with the police in the cities; the humblest individual can, by means of petition, bring his complaint to the feet of the assembled sovereigns which represent the nation. The townships are administered by public officials named at the election. Each year, **great provincial assemblies, also elected by suffrage**, unite to express the needs and the wishes of the populations which surround them.

Such is the faint image, O Machiavelli, of some of the insti-

{p. 97} tutions which flourish today in modern countries, and **especially in my beautiful fatherland**; but as **publicity is the essence of free nations**, all these institutions could not live long if they did not function in broad daylight. A power still unknown in your century, and which was but born in my times, has come to give them the last breath of life. It is **the press**, long forbidden, still discredited by ignorance, but **to which could be applied the beautiful words uttered by Adam Smith in speaking of credit**: It is **a public voice**. It is **by this voice**, in fact, that **is manifested the whole progress of ideas** among modern nations. The press exercises the functions of the police on the state; it **expresses needs, brings forth complaints, denounces abuses**, arbitrary acts; it **forces morality on all guardians of power**; to bring this about, it is but necessary to draw public attention to them.

In societies ruled thus, O Machiavelli, what argument could you make for the ambition of princes and the enterprises of tyranny? I do not forget by what sorrowful convulsions this progress triumphed. **In France, liberty, drowned in blood during the revolutionary period, only revived during the period of the restoration**. There, new disturbances prepared themselves again; but already all the principles, all the institutions of which I have spoken, had **passed into the tradition of France** and of the people who gravitate about the sphere of her civilization. I have finished, Machiavelli. States, like sovereigns, are governed today only by the rules of justice. The modern minister who is inspired by your teachings would not stay in power one year; the monarch who put into practice the maxims of The Prince would rouse against him the reprobation of his subjects; he would be exiled from Europe.

MACHIAVELLI. You think so?

MONTESQUIEU. Will you pardon my frankness?

MACHIAVELLI. Why not?

MONTESQUIEU. Am I to believe that your ideas have been modified a little?

MACHIAVELLI. I propose to demolish, bit by bit, all the beautiful

{p. 98} things you have just said, and to prove to you that **it is my doctrines alone that hold good even today**, in spite of the new ideas, **in spite of the new customs, in spite of your pretended principles of public rights**, in spite of all the institutions of which you have just spoken; but permit me, first, to ask you one question: How much do you know of contemporary history?

MONTESQUIEU. **The facts that I have learned** about the various states of Europe **go up to the last days of the year 1847**. The hazards of my **wandering travels through infinite space and the confused multitude of souls which fill it**, have not led me to encounter anyone who would have been able to inform me beyond the period I have just mentioned. Since I have descended into **the resting place of the shades**, I have passed about a half-century among the peoples of the ancient world, and it is only since the last quarter of a century that I have met the modern legions; besides, it must be said that most have arrived from the most distant corners of the universe. I do not even know exactly what year it is on earth.

MACHIAVELLI. Here, the last are the first, O Montesquieu! The statesman of the Middle Ages, the politician of barbarian times, finds that he knows more about the history of modern times than the philosopher of the eighteenth century. **Human beings are in the year of our lord 1864**.

MONTESQUIEU. Be kind enough, Machiavelli, to tell me now what has gone on in Europe since the year 1847.

MACHIAVELLI. Not, if you permit, before I have given myself the pleasure of throwing confusion into the heart of your theories.

MONTESQUIEU. As you please; but believe me, I do not feel any fear in that direction. Centuries are needed to change the principles and the form of governments under which people are in the habit of living. **No new political teaching could have resulted in the fifteen years which have just passed**; and, in any case, if that did happen, it would not be the doctrines of Machiavelli which could ever triumph.

MACHIAVELLI. You think not; then listen to me in my turn.

{p. 99} FOURTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. In listening to your theories on the division of powers and on the benefits that the peoples of Europe owe it, I could not help admiring, Montesquieu, to what extent **the illusion of the system can take hold of the greatest intellects**.

Seduced by the institutions of England, you thought to be able to make of the constitutional regime the universal panacea for all states; but you have counted without the irresistible movement which today tears the nations from their old traditions. Two centuries will not pass before this form of government, which you admire, will be no more in Europe than a historic memory, something superannuated and decayed like Aristotle's rule of three unities.

First permit me to examine in itself your political mechanism: you balance the three powers, and you confine each one to its department; **this one will make laws, this other will apply them, and this third will execute them**: the **prince will reign, the ministers will govern**. What a marvelous thing is this constitutional seesaw! You have foreseen all, regulated all, save progress: the triumph of such a system would not be action; it would be immobility if the mechanism functioned with precision; but, in reality, things do not happen in this way. On the first occasion, movement will be produced by **the rupture of one of the springs which you have so carefully forged**. Do you believe that the powers will remain for a long time within the constitutional limits that you have assigned them, and that they will **not attempt to go beyond them**? Where is the independent legislative assembly that does not aspire to sovereignty? Where is the magistracy that will not bow to the weight of opinion? Where is the prince, above all, sovereign of a kingdom or chief of a republic, who will accept without reserve **the passive role** to which you would have him condemned; who, in his secret thoughts, will not meditate on the overthrow of the rival powers which disturb his action? In reality,

{p. 100} **you would have begun a struggle between all the opposing forces**, roused all enterprises, **given arms to all parties**. You would have given strength to the assault of all ambitions, and made of **the state an arena in which all factions would be unchained**. In little time, **there would be disorder everywhere**; inexhaustible **rhetoricians** would transform the deliberating assemblies into **oratorical jousts; audacious journalists, unbridled pamphleteers**, would each day **attack** the person of **the sovereign**, would **discredit the government**, the ministers, the men of position. ...

MONTESQUIEU. I have for a long time known these reproaches against liberal governments. They have no value in my eyes; the abuses do not condemn the institutions. I know of many states that live in peace, and have done so for a long time, under such laws; I pity those that cannot live thus.

MACHIAVELLI. Wait: In your calculations, **you have not counted the social minorities**. There are tremendous populations **riveted to labor by poverty**, as they were in other times by slavery. What difference, I ask you, do your **parliamentary fictions** make to their happiness? Your great political movement has after all only ended in the **triumph of a minority privileged by chance as the ancient nobility was by birth**. What difference does it make to **the proletariat bent over its labor, weighted down by the heaviness of its destiny, that some orators have the right to speak, that some journalists have the right to write**? You have created **rights which will be purely academic for the mass of people**, since it cannot make use of them. These rights, of which the law permits him the ideal enjoyment and necessity refuses him the actual exercise, are for the people only a bitter irony of destiny. I answer for it that **one day they will capture them out of hatred, and that they will destroy them by their own hand to intrust themselves to despotism**.

MONTESQUIEU. But what dislike has Machiavelli for humanity, and what idea has he of the baseness of modern nations? All-powerful God, I shall not believe that Thou hast created them so base. Machiavelli, no matter what he says, does not recognize

{p. 101} the principles and the conditions of existence of modern civilization. **Work** is today the common law, as it is the divine law; and **far from being a sign of servitude among men, it is the bond of their society**, the instrument of their equality.

Political rights are in no way illusory to people in the lands where the law recognizes no privileges and where all careers are open to individual activity. No doubt, and in no society would it be otherwise, the inequality of intelligence and fortune brings about inevitable inequalities for individuals in the exercise of their rights; but does it not suffice that these rights exist so that the will of an enlightened

philosophy shall be fulfilled, so that **the emancipation of man** shall be assured in such measure as it can be? Even for those whom chance has caused to be born into the most humble conditions, is it nothing to live in the realization of their independence and in their dignity as citizens? But that is only one facet of the question; for if the moral greatness of the races is attached to liberty, they are not less attached by their material interests.

MACHIAVELLI. I was expecting you to come to that. The school to which you belong has **laid down principles** of which it does not seem to realize the final consequences: **you think that they lead to the reign of reason; I shall show you that they bring about the reign of force.** Your political system, taken in its original purity, consists in giving a practically equal part of the action to different groups of forces of which nations are composed, to permit the social activities a justly proportionate competition; you do not wish the aristocratic element to surpass the democratic element. However, the temper of **your institutions** is to **give more force to the aristocracy than to the people**, more force **to the prince than to the aristocracy**, thus adjusting the powers to the political capacity of those who must exercise them.

MONTESQUIEU. You are right.

MACHIAVELLI. You make the different classes of society participate in the public functions according to their degree of aptitude and their enlightenment; **you emancipate the bourgeoisie by the**

{p. 102} **vote**, you restrain the people by the amount of taxes conferring electoral rights; popular liberties create the power of opinion, aristocracy gives the prestige of grand manners, the throne throws over the nation the brilliance of the supreme rank; you keep all traditions, all the great memories, the culture of all great things. On the surface one sees a monarchical society, but all is fundamentally democratic; for, in reality, there is no barrier between the classes, and labor is the instrument of all fortunes. Is it not that, approximately?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, Machiavelli; and you can at least understand the opinions which you do not share.

MACHIAVELLI. Well, all these fine things have passed or will pass like a dream; for you have a new principle with which all institutions undergo a change with a startling rapidity.

MONTESQUIEU. What is that principle?

MACHIAVELLI. It is that of popular sovereignty. Rest assured that the method of squaring a circle will be found long before the conciliation of balance of power with the existence of such a principle among nations in which it is admitted. **The people**, by an absolutely inevitable consequence, **will** one day or another **take possession of all the powers which have been recognized as resting in it.** Will it be to keep them? No. After several days of madness, **it will throw them, out of weariness, to the first soldier of fortune** who finds himself in its road. In your country, you saw, in 1793, how the French headsmen treated representative monarchy; **the sovereign people asserted itself by the execution of its king, then made a litter of all its rights; it gave itself to Robespierre, Barras and Bonaparte.**

You are a great thinker, but you do not know the unfathomable cowardice of humanity; I do not speak of those of my time, but of those of yours; **servile in the face of force, pitiless in the face of weakness, implacable before blunders, indulgent before crimes, incapable of supporting the contrarities of a liberal regime, and patient to the point of martyrdom before all the violences of bold despotism**, upsetting thrones in its moments of anger, and **giving**

{p. 103} **itself rulers, whom it pardons for actions the least of which would have caused it to decapitate twenty constitutional kings.**

Look then for justice; look for law, stability, order, respect of the so-complicated forms of your parliamentary mechanism with the **violent, undisciplined, uncultivated masses to whom you have said: You are the law, you are the masters, you are the arbiters of the State!** Oh, I know very well that the prudent Montesquieu, the circumspect politician, who laid down principles and reserved the consequences, did not write the dogma of popular sovereignty in the *Esprit des Lois*; but, as you said a moment ago, the consequences flow of themselves from the principles you have laid down. **The affinity of your doctrines with those of the Contrat Social also makes itself felt.** Thus, from the day **the French revolutionaries** wrote, swearing in verba magistri: "A government can only be the free work of a convention of associates," monarchical and parliamentary government was condemned to death in your homeland. Vainly was it attempted to restore the old principles, vainly did your king, Louis XVIII, on returning to France, attempt to make the powers return to their source by promulgating the declarations of '89 as a precedent for the royal grant; that pious fiction of aristocratic monarchy was in too flagrant contradiction with the past: it had to vanish at the sound of **the revolution of 1830**, like the government of 1830 in its turn. ...

MONTESQUIEU. Finish.

MACHIAVELLI. Let us not anticipate. What you as well as I know of the past authorizes me until now to say that **the principle of popular sovereignty is destructive of all stability**, that it indefinitely **perpetuates the right to revolution.** It puts nations into open war against all human powers and even against God; it is the very incarnation of violence. **It makes of the people a ferocious brute which sleeps when it is satiated with blood**, and which is enchained; and this is the invariable progress which then follows the communities whose movement is ruled by this principle: popular sovereignty engenders demagoguery, demagoguery engenders

{p. 104} **anarchy, anarchy brings back despotism. Despotism, to you, is barbarity. Well, you see that the people returns to barbarity by way of civilization.**

But that is not all, I assert that from still other points of view despotism is the sole form of government that is really appropriate to the social state of modern peoples. You have told me that their material interests bound them to liberty; here, you play too fine a game. What are, in general, the states which are in need of liberty? They are those which live by great sentiments by great passions, by heroism, by

faith, even by honor, as you would say in your times in speaking of the French monarchy. **Stoicism can make a free people; Christianity, under certain conditions, could have the same privilege.** I understand the necessities of liberty **in Athens, in Rome, among the nations which breathed only by the glory of arms**, all of whose expansions were satisfied by war, who, moreover, had need of all the energies of patriotism, of all civic enthusiasms to triumph over their enemies.

Public liberties were the natural patrimony of the states in which **the servile and industrial functions were left to the slaves**, in which man was useless if he was not a citizen. I include also liberty at certain epochs of the Christian era, and especially in the little states united to one another by systems of confederation analogous to those of the Hellenic republics, as in Italy and Germany. I find there a part of the natural causes which made **liberty** necessary. **It would almost have been inoffensive in times when** the principle of authority was not placed in question, in which religion had absolute authority over the spirit, in which the people, placed under the tutelar regime of the corporations, **walked docilely under the hands of its pastors.** If its political emancipation had been undertaken then, it would have been without danger; for it would have been accomplished in conformity with the principles on which rests the existence of all societies. But, with your great states, which exist only by means of industry; **with your populations, Godless and faithless**, in times when people are no longer satisfied by war, and when their violent activity is, of

{p. 105} necessity, restricted to the homeland, liberty, with the principles which serve as its foundation, cannot but be a cause of dissolution and ruin. I add that it is no more necessary for the moral needs of the individual than it is for the states.

**From** the weariness of ideas and **the shock of revolutions have come cold and disillusioned societies**, which have achieved indifference in politics as in religion, which have **no other stimulant than material satisfactions**, which live only in their own interest, which have **no other cult than that of gold, whose mercantile customs compete with those of the Jews whom they have taken for models.** Do you believe that it is for love of liberty in itself that the inferior classes are trying to rise to the assault on power? It is by **hatred of those who possess**; in reality, it is to take away their riches, an instrument of enjoyment which they **envy.**

Those who possess invoke from all sides a strong arm, a forceful power; they demand only one thing, the **protection of the state against the agitations which its weak constitution cannot resist**, to give to themselves the necessary security so that they may enjoy and do business. What forms of government would you apply to societies in which **corruption has stolen everywhere**, in which **morality has no guarantee save in repressive laws**, in which the sentiment of **patriotism** itself is **extinguished by** I know not what **universal cosmopolitanism?**

I see no **salvation** in these societies, veritable giants with feet of clay, except **in** the institution of an **extreme centralization, which puts all public force at the disposition of those who govern; in a hierarchic administration resembling that of the Roman empire**, which rules mechanically all the movements of individuals; in a vast system of legislation which **takes up in detail all the liberties that have been imprudently bestowed; in a tremendous despotism**, in short, which could immediately and at all times strike at all who resist, all who complain. The Caesarism of the Lower-Empire seems to me to realize quite well what I desire for the well-being of modern society. **Thanks to these** vast aparati which, I have been told, already function in more than one country of

{p. 106} Europe, they can **live in peace, as in China, as in Japan, as in India. A common prejudice should not make us condemn these oriental civilizations**, whose institutions we learn to appreciate more each day. **The Chinese people, for example, is very commercial and very well administered.**

## FIFTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. I hesitate in answering you, Machiavelli, for there is in your words I know not what satanic mockery, which gives me the inward suspicion that your discourse is not in complete accord with your secret thoughts. Yes, you have the fatal eloquence that loses the trace of truth, and you are the same **sombre genius** whose name is still **the bogie of modern generations.** Nevertheless, I readily recognize the fact that with such a powerful intellect one would lose too much in remaining quiet; I wish to hear you to the end, and I even wish to answer you, although, even now, I have little hope to convince you. You have just drawn a really sinister picture of modern society; I cannot know whether it is faithful, but it is at least incomplete, for in all things, besides the evil, there is the good, and you have only shown me the evil; moreover, you have not given me the means to verify how far you are right, for I know neither of what peoples nor of what states you wished to speak when you painted this dark picture of contemporary custom.

MACHIAVELLI. Well, let us admit that I have taken as an example that one of all the nations in Europe which is the **most advanced in its civilization**, and to which, I hasten to say, the picture that I have drawn could be least applied.

MONTESQUIEU. It is then **of France** that you wish to speak?

MACHIAVELLI. Well, yes.

MONTESQUIEU. You are right, for **there the dark doctrines of materialism have penetrated least.** It is France who has remained the home of the great ideas and the great passions whose source

{p. 107} you believe exhausted, and **it is from there that have come those great principles of public right** to which you give no place in the government of nations.

MACHIAVELLI. You may add that it is the field of **experiment consecrated to political theories.**

MONTESQUIEU. I know of no experiment that has yet, by the establishment of despotism, proved of lasting benefit to contemporary nations and least of all to France, and it is this that in the very first place makes me find that your theories on the necessity of absolute power conform little to the reality of matters. I know at the present time of **but two states in Europe completely deprived of**

the **liberal institutions** that have modified in all parts the purely monarchical element: they are **Turkey and Russia**, and still if you regard closely **the interior movements** which are operating in the heart of this latter power, perhaps you will find there the symptoms of **an approaching transformation**. You tell me, it is true, that in the more or less near future, the peoples, menaced by an inevitable dissolution, will return to **despotism as to an ark of safety**; that they will constitute themselves under the form of **great absolute monarchies, similar to those of Asia**; that is only a prediction: in how much time will that be accomplished?

MACHIAVELLI. Within a century.

MONTESQUIEU. You are a soothsayer; one century is always just so much gained; but let me tell you now why your prediction will not be fulfilled. Modern societies today must no longer be considered with the eyes of the past. Their customs, their habits, their needs, all have changed. One must not, therefore, put confidence without reserve in the inferences of historical analogy, when it comes to judging their destinies. One must beware above all of taking for universal laws facts which are but accidents, and of transforming into general rules the necessities of such a situation or the necessities of such a time. As for despotism occurring many times in history as a consequence of social disturbances, does it follow that it must be taken as a rule of government? As for its having served as a transition in the past, shall I conclude that

{p. 108} it is calculated to settle the crises of modern times? Is it not more rational to say that other evils bring forth other remedies, other problems other solutions, other social customs other political customs? **An invariable law of society is that it always tends toward perfection, toward progress**; eternal wisdom has, if I may say so, condemned it; it has refused it movement in the opposite direction. It must achieve this progress.

MACHIAVELLI. Or it must die.

MONTESQUIEU. Let us not place ourselves at extremes; societies never die when they are about to give birth. When they are constituted in the manner which pleases them, their institutions can change, fall into decadence and perish; but they will have lasted for many centuries. It is thus that the different peoples of Europe have passed, by successive transformations, from the feudal system to the monarchical system, and from the monarchical system to the constitutional regime. This progressive development, the unity of which is so imposing, has nothing of fortuitousness about it; it has arrived as the **necessary consequence of the movement** which operated **in ideas** before being translated into fact.

Society cannot have forms of government other than those which are in agreement with its principles, and it is against this absolute law that you place yourself when you believe despotism compatible with modern civilization. **As long as the peoples regarded sovereignty as a pure emanation of the divine will, they submitted** without a murmur to absolute power; as long as their institutions were insufficient to assure their progress, they accepted arbitrariness. But, **from the day their rights are recognized** and solemnly declared, from the day more fertile institutions have been able to resolve through liberty all the functions of the social body, politics as an instrument of princes fell from its pedestal; power has become a dependency of the public domain; the art of government has changed into an affair of administration. Today things are ordained in such a way, in the various countries, that the directing power only appears as the motor of the organized forces.

{p. 109} Certainly, if you imagine these societies infected by all the corruptions, by all the vices of which you spoke to me only a moment ago, they will progress rapidly in the direction of decomposition: but how is it you do not see that the argument you draw from this is a veritable petition of principle? Since when does liberty abase the soul and degrade the character? Those are not the teachings of history; for it attests everywhere in characters of fire that **the greatest peoples have been the most free**. If customs were degraded, as you say, in some part of Europe that I do not know of, it is because despotism had passed through it; it is because liberty was extinguished there; it is, therefore, necessary to maintain it wherever it is, and to reestablish it where it no longer exists.

Do not forget that we are at this moment on the plane of principles; and if yours differ from mine, I expect them to be invariable; now, I no longer know where I am when **I hear you praise liberty in antiquity and prohibit it in modern times**, refusing or admitting it according to periods and places. These distinctions, supposing them justified, still do not leave the principle less intact, and it is to the principle alone that I hold.

MACHIAVELLI. I see that you avoid the reefs like an able pilot, keeping yourself to the high seas. Generalities are a great help in argument; but I confess that I am very impatient to know how the grave Montesquieu will extricate himself with **the principle of popular sovereignty**. I could not tell, until now, whether or not it was a part of your system. Do you or do you not admit it?

MONTESQUIEU. I cannot answer a question couched in those terms.

MACHIAVELLI. I knew that even your mind would be disturbed before this phantom.

MONTESQUIEU. You are wrong, Machiavelli; but, before answering you, I had to remind you what my writings were and what was the character of the mission which they were able to carry out. **You have made my name jointly and severally responsible for the iniquities of the French revolution**: it is a severe enough

{p. 110} judgment for the philosopher who walked with such a prudent step in search of truth. Born in a century of intellectual effervescence, on the eve of a revolution which was to carry off the ancient forms of monarchic government in my native land, I can say that none of the subsequent consequences of progress of ideas then going on escaped my eyes from that time on. I could not fail to realize that the system of the division of power would one day necessarily displace the seat of sovereignty.

This principle, little known, poorly defined, above all, badly applied, could engender terrible equivocations, and overthrow French society from top to bottom. The perception of these perils became the rule for my words. Thus, while **imprudent innovators**, immediately

attacking the source of power, **unwittingly prepared a great catastrophe**, I applied myself solely to the study of the forms of free government, to the extraction of clearly defined principles which preside over their establishment. Statesman rather than philosopher, lawyer rather than theologian, practical legislator, if the boldness of such a word is permitted me, I thought to do more for my country by **teaching it to govern itself** than by questioning the very principle of authority. God forbid, however, that I attempt to give myself purer merit at the expense of those who, like myself, sought truth in good faith! We have all made mistakes, but to each the responsibility for his deeds.

Yes, Machiavelli, and it is a concession that I do not hesitate to make to you, you were right just now when you said that it was necessary that the emancipation of the French people should be made in conformity with the superior principles which preside over the existence of human communities, and this reserve permits you to foresee the judgment that I will bring upon the principle of popular sovereignty.

First of all, **I do not admit a designation which seems to exclude from sovereignty the most enlightened classes of society**. This distinction is fundamental, because it makes of a state a pure democracy or a representative state. If sovereignty rests anywhere, it rests **upon the entire nation**; I will therefore in the first place

{p. 111} call it **national sovereignty**. But the idea of this sovereignty is **not an absolute truth, it is only relative**. The sovereignty of human power corresponds to an idea profoundly **subversive, the sovereignty of human rights**; it is **this materialist and atheistic doctrine that precipitated the French revolution into blood**, and inflicted on it **the disgrace of despotism** after the delirium of independence. It is not correct to say that the nations are the absolute masters of their destinies, for **their sovereign master is God Himself**, and they will never be beyond His power. If they possessed absolute sovereignty, they could do everything, even contrary to eternal justice, even contrary to God; who would dare to go that far? But **the principle of divine right**, with the significance that is generally attached to it, **is a no less fatal principle**, for it links the people to obscurantism, to despotism, to the void; it reconstitutes logically the regime of **castes**, it **makes of the people a herd of slaves, conducted, as in India, by the hand of the priests**, and trembling beneath the whip of the master. How could it be otherwise? If the sovereign is the messenger of God, if he is the very representative of the Divinity on earth, he has every power over the human creatures subject to his empire, and this power will have a brake only in the general rules of equity, which it will always be easy to transgress.

It is in the field that separates these two extreme opinions that have been waged the furious battles of party spirit; some shout: No divine authority!; others: No human authority! O supreme Providence, my mind refuses to accept one or the other of these alternatives; they **both appear to me equal blasphemies against Thy wisdom! Between divine right which excludes man and human right which excludes God, there lies the truth**, Machiavelli; nations, like individuals, are free in the hands of God. They have all rights, all powers, charged with using them according to the rules of eternal justice. Sovereignty is human in the sense that it is given by men, and it is men who exercise it; it is divine in the sense that it is instituted by God, and that it can only be exercised in accordance with the precepts that He has established.

{p. 112} SIXTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. I would like to come to definite conclusions. How far does the hand of God extend over humanity? **Who makes the sovereigns?**

MONTESQUIEU. **The people.**

MACHIAVELLI. It is written: **Per me reges regnant**. Which means literally: **God makes kings**. (Through me kings reign.)

MONTESQUIEU. That is a translation in the manner of The Prince, O Machiavelli, and it was given you in that century by one of your most illustrious partisans (Note: Machiavelli here evidently alludes to **Joseph de Maistre**, whose name, moreover, is again mentioned later on), but it is not from the Holy Scripture. God instituted sovereignty, he did not institute sovereigns. His all-powerful hand stopped there, because there begins the free human arbiter. **"Kings reign according to My commandments, they must reign according to My law"**: such is the meaning of the divine Book. If it were otherwise, it would have to be said that the good as well as the evil princes are established by Providence: one would have to bow down before Nero as before Titus, before Caligula as before Vespasian. No, God did not wish that the most sacrilegious dominations should invoke His protection, that the vilest tyrannies should claim His investiture. To peoples as to kings, He left the responsibility for their acts.

MACHIAVELLI. I doubt very much whether that is orthodox. Whatever it is, according to you, it is the people who dispose of sovereign authority?

MONTESQUIEU. Be careful, in contesting it, of setting yourself up against a truth of pure common sense. That is not a novelty in history. In ancient times, in the middle ages, everywhere that power was established without invasion or conquest, sovereign power was born through the free will of the people, in the original form of election. To cite but one example, it was thus that in France the head of the Carolingian race succeeded the de

{p. 113} scendants of Clovis, and the dynasty of Hugh Capet that of Charlemagne. (Esprit des Lois, p. 513, Book XXXI, ch. IV.) No doubt heredity became the substitute for election. The brilliance of services rendered, public gratitude, traditions, fixed the sovereignty on the principal families of Europe, and nothing was more legitimate. But the principle of entire national power is constantly rediscovered at the bottom of revolutions; it has always been invoked for the consecration of new powers. It is a prior and pre-existent principle, which has made itself only more strictly realized in the various constitutions of modern countries.

MACHIAVELLI. But **if it is the people who choose their masters, cannot they, therefore, also overthrow them?** If they have the right to establish the form of government which satisfies them, what will stop them from changing at the behest of their caprice? It will not be a regime of order and liberty that will come forth from your doctrines, it will be the indefinite era of revolutions.

MONTESQUIEU. You confound justice with the abuse that can result from its exercise, the principles with their application; those are fundamental distinctions, without which we cannot agree.

MACHIAVELLI. Do not hope to escape me, I demand of you logical deductions; refuse me them if you wish. I wish to know if, according to your principles, the people have the right to overthrow their sovereign?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, in extreme cases and for just causes.

MACHIAVELLI. **Who will be the judge of these extreme cases** and of the justice of these extremes?

MONTESQUIEU. And who would you wish it to be, if not the people themselves? Have things happened otherwise since the beginning of world? That is a formidable sanction, no doubt, but beneficial and inevitable. How is it you do not see that the contrary doctrine, which commands of man respect for the most odious governments, would make them fall once more under the yoke of monarchical fatalism?

MACHIAVELLI. Your system has but one inconvenience, that it **supposes the infallibility of reason among the people**; but have they

{p. 114} not, like individuals, their passions, their mistakes, their injustices?

MONTESQUIEU. When the people will make mistakes, they will be punished as are individuals who have sinned against the moral law.

MACHIAVELLI. In what way?

MONTESQUIEU. They will be punished by the scourges of dissension, anarchy, even despotism. There is no other justice on earth, when awaiting that of God.

MACHIAVELLI. You have just uttered the word despotism, you see that one returns to it.

MONTESQUIEU. That objection is not worthy of your great mind, Machiavelli; I imagined the most extreme consequences of the principles which you oppose; that was sufficient for the real idea to be perverted. God did not give the people either the power or the will to change thus the forms of government which are the essential means of their existence. Among political societies as among organized beings, the nature of things limits of itself the expansion of free forces. The import of your argument must restrict itself to what is acceptable to reason.

You believe that, under the influence of modern ideas, revolutions would be more frequent. They will not be more, it is possible they will be less. Nations, indeed, as you said a moment ago, exist at the present time through industry, and what seems to you a cause for servitude is at the same time a principle of order and liberty. Industrial civilizations have sores that I do not forget, but one must not deny their benefits, nor distort their tendencies. Societies which live **by labor, by exchange, by credit**, are societies essentially Christian, no matter what one may say, for all these forms of industry, so powerful and so varied, are fundamentally but the application of several great moral ideas borrowed from Christianity, source of all strength as of all truth.

Industry plays such a considerable role in the progress of modern society that one cannot, from the point of view which you assume, make an exact calculation without taking into consideration its influence; and this influence is not all that you thought to charge it with. The science that seeks the relationships

{p. 115} of industrial life and the maxims that are drawn therefrom are quite the most contrary to the principle of the concentration of powers. The tendency of political economy is to see in the political organism only a necessary but very costly mechanism, whose energy must be simplified, and it reduces the role of the government to functions so elementary that its greatest inconvenience is perhaps to destroy prestige. **Industry is the born enemy of revolutions, for without social order it perishes** and with it is arrested the vital progress of modern nations. It cannot do without liberty; and, note well, **liberties in the question of industry necessarily engender political liberty**, so much so that one could say that the people most advanced in industry are also the people most advanced in liberty. **Leave India and China which exist under the blind destiny of absolute monarchy; look at Europe**, and you will see.

You have just mentioned the word despotism again; well, Machiavelli, you whose sombre genius so profoundly assimilated all the subterranean passages, all the occult combinations, all the artifices of law and of government with the aid of which one can enchain the physical activity and the mental activity of the people; you who distrust man, **you who dream of the terrible dominations of the Orient** for them, you whose **political doctrines are borrowed from frightful theories of Indian mythology**, tell me, I beg of you, how you would go about organizing despotism amongst peoples whose public rights rest essentially on liberty, whose morals and religion develop all progress in the same direction, among Christian nations who live by commerce and industry, in states whose political bodies are in the presence of the publicity of **the press which throws floods of light** into the most obscure corners of power; call upon all the resources of your powerful imagination, seek, invent, and if you resolve the problem, I will say with you that the modern spirit is conquered.

MACHIAVELLI. Take care, you give me a fine chance, I may take you at your word.

MONTESQUIEU. Do so, I beseech you.

{p. 116} MACHIAVELLI. I do not expect to fail.

MONTESQUIEU. In a few hours we will perhaps be separated. These parts are not known to you, follow me in the twisting path that I shall take with you along this dark passage, we can yet escape for several hours the wave of shadows that you perceive over there.

## SEVENTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. We can stop here.

MONTESQUIEU. I am listening to you.

MACHIAVELLI. First I must tell you that you are wrong from beginning to end in the application of my principles. **Despotism always presents itself before your eyes in the decayed forms of oriental monarchy, but it is not thus that I think of it;** with new societies, new procedures must be employed. Today there is no question, in order to govern, of committing violent iniquities, decapitating one's enemies, stripping one's subjects of their possessions, spreading punishment; no, death, spoliation and physical torture cannot play a role secondary enough in the interior policies of modern states.

MONTESQUIEU. That is fortunate.

MACHIAVELLI. No doubt I have little admiration, I confess, for your civilizations of cylinders and shafts; but I advance with the centuries; the power of the doctrines to which my name is attached is that they accommodate themselves to all times and all situations. Machiavelli today has grandchildren who know the price of his lessons. I am believed very old, and every day I grow younger on earth.

MONTESQUIEU. You are jesting?

MACHIAVELLI. Listen to me and you shall judge. Today it is **less a question of doing men violence than of disarming them, less of suppressing their political passions than of wiping them out, less of combating their instincts than of deceiving them, less of prohibit**

{p. 117} **ing their ideas than of changing them by appropriating them** to oneself.

MONTESQUIEU. And how is that done? For I do not understand this language.

MACHIAVELLI. Permit me; that is the moral side of politics, we shall soon arrive at the applications. **The principal secret of government consists in enfeebling the public spirit to the point of disinteresting it** entirely in the ideas and the principles with which revolutions are made nowadays. In all times, **peoples, like individuals, have been paid in words. Appearances nearly always are sufficient** for them; they demand no more. **One can, then, establish artificial institutions which correspond to a language and to ideas equally artificial;** it is necessary to have the talent to **strip the parties of that liberal phraseology** with which they arm themselves against the government. It is necessary to **satiating the people with it until they are weary**, until they are disgusted. One speaks often today of **the power of public opinion**. I shall show you that **it is made to express whatever one wants** when one knows well the hidden resources of power. But **before thinking of directing it, one must benumb it, strike it with uncertainty by astounding contradictions**, work on it with incessant diversions, dazzle it with all sorts of different actions, mislead it imperceptibly in its pathways. One of the great secrets of the day is to know how to take possession of popular prejudices and passions, in such a way as to introduce a confusion of principles which makes impossible all understanding between those who speak the same language and have the same interests.

MONTESQUIEU. Where are you going with these words whose obscurity has in it something sinister?

MACHIAVELLI. If the wise Montesquieu means to put sentiment in the place of politics, I should perhaps stop here; I have not pretended to place myself on the terrain of morals. You have defied me to stop the progress in your societies **unendingly tormented by the spirit of anarchy and revolt**. Do you wish to let me say

{p. 118} how I would solve the problem? You can put aside your scruples in accepting this thesis as a question of pure curiosity.

MONTESQUIEU. So be it.

MACHIAVELLI. I understand moreover that you would demand more precise information of me; I will arrive at that. But permit me to tell you first under what essential conditions the Prince can hope today to consolidate his power. He will have to endeavor above all to destroy the parties, to dissolve the collective forces wherever they exist, to **paralyze in all its manifestations individual initiative**; then the level of character would descend to himself, and all knees will soon bend in servitude. Absolute power will no longer be an accident, it will become a need. These political precepts are not entirely new, but, as I said to you, it is the processes that must be new. A large number of these results can be obtained by simple regulations of the police and the administration. In your societies, so fine and so well organized, **in the place of absolute monarchies you have put a monster which is called the State**, a new Briareus whose arms extend everywhere, a colossal organism of tyranny in whose shadow despotism is always reborn. Well, under the invocation of the state, nothing will be easier than to consummate the occult work of which I spoke to you just now, and the most powerful methods of action will perhaps be precisely those that one will have the talent to borrow from this very industrial regime which calls forth your admiration.

With the aid of the sole regulating power, **I would institute**, for example, **huge financial monopolies, reservoirs of the public wealth, on which depends so closely the fate of all the private fortunes that they would be swallowed up with the credit of the state the day after any political catastrophe. You are an economist, Montesquieu, weigh the value of this combination.**

Head of the government, all my edicts, all my ordinances would constantly tend toward the same goal: to annihilate collective and individual forces; **to develop** excessively **the preponderance of the state**, to make of it the sovereign protector, promoter and remunerator.

{p. 119} Here is another scheme borrowed from the industrial order: In modern times, the aristocracy, as a political force, has disappeared; but **the landed bourgeoisie is still an element of dangerous resistance to governments, because it is independent** in itself; **it may be necessary to impoverish it or even to ruin it** completely. It is enough, for this, to increase the charges which weigh on landed property, to **maintain agriculture in a state of relative inferiority**, to favor commerce and industry excessively, but **speculation principally**; for **too great prosperity in industry** can itself become a danger, in **creating too large a number of independent fortunes**.

The great industrialists and manufacturers will be reacted against advantageously by **stimulation to a disproportionate luxury**, by the elevation of taxes on salaries, by **deep blows ably struck at the sources of production**. **I need not develop these ideas, you can readily understand** in what circumstances and **under what pretexts** all this can be done. The interests of the people, and even a sort of zeal for liberty, for the great economic principles, will easily **cover the true goal**, if it is desired. It is useless to add that the perpetual upkeep of **a large army continually exercised by foreign wars** must be the indispensable complement of this system; it is necessary to arrive at the existence in the state only of **proletarians, several millionaires, and soldiers**.

MONTESQUIEU. Continue.

MACHIAVELLI. So much for the interior policies of the state. **Outside, it is necessary to incite, from one end of Europe to the other, the revolutionary fermentation that is curbed at home**. Two considerable advantages would result from that; the liberal agitation outside makes passable the repression within. Moreover, in this way **one controls all the powers, among which one can create order or disorder at will**. The important point is to entangle by cabinet intrigues all the threads of European politics in such a way as to **play one against the other** the Powers with whom one treats. Do not think that this duplicity, if it is well carried on, could become detrimental to a sovereign. Alex-

{p. 120} under VI practised only deception in his diplomatic negotiations and yet he always succeeded, so well did he know the science of cunning. (The Prince, p. 114, ch. XVII.) But for what you call today the official language, a striking contrast is necessary, and there one cannot affect too much the spirit of loyalty and conciliation; **the people, who see only the outward appearance of things, will manufacture a reputation of wisdom** for the ruler who can conduct his affairs in this way.

**To all internal agitation, he must be able to respond with a foreign war; to any imminent revolution, with a general war**; but since in politics **words must never be in accord with deeds**, it is necessary that, in these various crises, the prince be able enough to **disguise his real designs** under contrary design; he must always give the **impression of acceding to public opinion while he does what his hands have secretly prepared**.

To sum up the whole system in a word, **revolution in the state is restrained** on the one hand **by the terror of anarchy**, on the other, **by bankruptcy**, and, all things considered, **by general war**.

You have already been able to see, by means of the rapid outline I have just given you, what an important role **the art of language** is called upon to play in modern politics. I am far from disdaining the press, as you see, and I would be able in time of need to use the rostrum; what is essential is **the use against one's enemies of all the arms they could employ against you**. Not content with relying on the violent force of democracy, I would borrow of the subtleties of justice their most learned resources. When one makes decisions that could seem unjust or rash, it is essential to know how to express them in fine terms, to give them the highest reasons of morality and justice.

**The power** of which I dream, far, as you see, from having barbarian customs, must draw to itself all the forces and all the talents of the civilization in the heart of which it lives. It **must surround itself with publicists, lawyers, jurisconsults, practical men and administrators**, men who know thoroughly all the secrets, all the strength of social life, who speak all languages,

{p. 121} who have studied man in all circles. They must be taken from anywhere and everywhere, for these men give surprising service through the ingenious procedures they apply to politics. With that, a whole world of economists is necessary, of bankers, of industrialists, of capitalists, of men of vision, of men with millions, for all fundamentally **resolves itself into a question of figures**.

As for the principal dignities, the principal dismemberment of power, one must so arrange as to give them to men whose antecedents and character place a gulf between them and other men, every one of whom has only to expect death or exile in case of a change in government and is in need of defending until his last breath all that exists.

Imagine for a moment that I have at my disposal the different moral and material resources which I have just sketched for you, and now **give me any nation**, do you hear! You regard it as a capital point, in the *Esprit des Lois*, not to change the character of a nation (*Esprit des Lois*, p. 252 et seq., book XIX, Chap. V) when one wishes it to conserve its original vigor. Well, **I do not ask you twenty years to transform in the most complete way the most untamable European character and to make it as docile under tyranny as the smallest nation in Asia**.

MONTESQUIEU. You have just added, in your jesting, another chapter to your treatise on *The Prince*. Whatever are your doctrines, I do not debate them; I make but one observation to you. It is evident that you have in no way held to the promise you had made; **the use of these methods presupposes** the existence of **absolute power**, and I have asked you precisely **how you could establish it in political societies which rest upon liberal institutions**.

MACHIAVELLI. Your observation is perfectly fair and I do not mean to escape it. This beginning was only a preface.

MONTESQUIEU. I put you in the presence of a state founded on representative institutions, monarchic or republic; I speak to you of a nation long familiar with liberty, and I ask you how, from there, you could return to absolute power.

{p. 122} EIGHTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. I take the hypothesis which is most contrary to me; I take a state constituted as a republic. With a monarchy, the role that I propose to play would be too easy. I take a republic, because with such a form of government, I will encounter resistance almost insurmountable in appearance, in ideas, in custom, in laws. This hypothesis is not acceptable to you? I accept from your hands a state of no matter what form, great or small; I imagine it endowed with all the institutions that guarantee liberty, and I ask you this single question: Do you believe power is protected from a blow or from what is today called a coup d'etat?

MONTESQUIEU. No, that is true; but you will at least admit that such an enterprise would be singularly difficult in the political society of our times, as it is organized.

MACHIAVELLI. And why? Are not these societies, as in all times, prey to factions? Are there not everywhere the elements of civil war, between parties, between pretenders?

MONTESQUIEU. That is possible; but I think I can make you understand in one word where your error lies. These usurpations, necessarily very rare because they are full of peril and they repudiate modern customs, supposing that they succeed, would in no way have the importance that you seem to attribute to them. A change of power would not bring about a change of institutions. A pretender will trouble the state; his party will triumph, I admit it; the power is in other hands, that is all; but the public rights and very foundation of the institutions remain upright. That is what concerns me.

MACHIAVELLI. Is it true that you have such an illusion?

MONTESQUIEU. Prove the contrary.

{p. 123} MACHIAVELLI. You grant me, for the moment, the success of an armed enterprise against the established power?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes.

MACHIAVELLI. Then note in what situation I find myself placed. I have for the moment suppressed all power other than my own. If the institutions still standing can erect some obstacle before me, it is pure form; in fact, the acts of my will can encounter no real resistance; at last I am in that extra-legal condition that the Romans called by a word so beautiful and so powerfully energetic: dictatorship. That is to say I can do all I wish at the present time; I am legislator, executive, judge, and, on horseback, chief of the army.

Remember this. Now **I have triumphed through the support of one faction**, that is, this occurrence could only be accomplished in an atmosphere of **deep internal dissension**. One can tell at random, without being wrong, what were the causes. It will be **an antagonism between the aristocracy and the people or between the people and the bourgeoisie**. At the basis of things, it could not be otherwise; on the surface, **there is a mixture of contrary ideas**, opinions, influences and currents, **as in all states where liberty has been unchained for a moment**. There will be political elements of all kinds, **fragments of parties once victorious**, today defeated, unbridled ambitions, wild cupidity, **implacable hatreds**, terror everywhere, men of all opinions and all doctrines, would-be **restorers of former regimes, demagogues, anarchists, utopians**, all at work, all laboring equally from their side **for the overthrow of the established order**. What may be concluded from such a situation? Two things: first, that **the country has great need of peace** and that it will refuse nothing to him who can give it her; second, that in the middle of this division of parties, there is no real force or rather, there is only one, the people.

I myself am a victorious pretender; I bear, let us suppose, a great name in history, qualified to work on the imagination of the masses. Like Pistratus, **like Caesar, like Nero even, I rely on the people**; that is the a b c of all usurpers. There lies **the**

{p. 124} **blind power** that gives the means to do everything with impunity, there lies authority, there the name that will cover all. The people indeed care much for your legal fictions and your constitutional guarantees!

I have brought quiet amid all the factions, and now you will see how I am going to proceed.

Perhaps you remember the rules I established in The Prince for the **conservation of conquered provinces**. The usurper in a state is in a situation similar to that of the conqueror. He is **condemned to the renovation of everything**, the dissolution of the state, the destruction of the city, the changing of the face of customs.

That is the goal, but in modern times one must aim at it only through roundabout ways, indirect means, cunning schemes and, as far as possible, without violence. Therefore, **I will not destroy institutions directly, but I will reach them one by one by an unseen blow which will throw the mechanism into confusion**. Thus I will reach, each in its turn, **the judicial organization, the electorate, the press, individual liberty, education**.

**Above the primitive laws I will have passed a whole new legislation which, without exactly abrogating the old, will mask it first, and soon make it disappear** completely. Such are my general conceptions, now you will see the details of execution.

MONTESQUIEU. Would that you were still in the gardens of Rucellai, O Machiavelli, to teach these fine lessons, and how sad it is that posterity could not hear you!

MACHIAVELLI. Rest assured; for those who can read, **all this is in The Prince**.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, you have arrived at the day after your coup d'etat; what are you going to do?

MACHIAVELLI. One great thing, then a very little one.

MONTESQUIEU. Let us see the great one first.

MACHIAVELLI. After the success of a coup against the established power, all is not finished, and the parties do not generally consider themselves beaten. It is not yet exactly known how much

{p. 125} the usurper's energy is worth, he will be tried, and they will rise against him with weapons in their hands. The moment has come to **impress terror which will strike the entire city** and will make the most intrepid souls shrink back.

MONTESQUIEU. What are you going to do? You told me that you repudiated bloodshed.

MACHIAVELLI. It is not a question of false humanity here. Society is menaced, it is in **a state of lawful defense**; the excess of strictness, even cruelty, will **prevent more flowing of blood in the future**. Do not ask me what will be done; **it is necessary that the people be terrified once and for all and that fear soften them**.

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, I remember; that is what you teach in The Prince in recounting the sinister execution of Borgia in Cesene (The Prince, p. 47, chap. VII). You are still the same.

MACHIAVELLI. No, no, you will see later; I only do this by necessity, and I suffer from it.

MONTESQUIEU. But who will start this blood flowing?

MACHIAVELLI. The army! that great judiciary of the state whose hand never dishonors its victims. Two results of the greatest importance will be obtained in the repression by the intervention of the army. From this time, on the one hand, **it will find itself forever hostile to the civil population** which it had punished without consideration, and on the other, it will attach itself in an indissoluble manner to the fate of its leader.

MONTESQUIEU. And you think that this blood will not fall back on you?

MACHIAVELLI. No, for **in the eyes of the people, the sovereign, definitely, is a stranger to the excesses of a soldiery** which is not always easy to hold back. Those who could be held **responsible are the generals, the ministers** who had executed my orders. These men, I assure you, will be devoted to me until their last breath, for they know very well what awaits them after me.

MONTESQUIEU. That is, therefore, your first act as sovereign? Now let us hear the second.

MACHIAVELLI. I do not know whether you have noticed what is,

{p. 126} in politics, the power of little things. After what I have just told you, **I will have all new coins struck with my effigy**, and I will issue a considerable quantity.

MONTESQUIEU. But amid the first cares of the state, that would be a puerile measure.

MACHIAVELLI. You think so? You have not been in power. **The human effigy on coins is the supreme sign of power**. At the beginning there will be proud spirits who will shake with anger, but they will become accustomed to it; even the enemies of my power will be obliged to have my portrait in their purses. It is quite certain that the people will accustom themselves to seeing with a softer regard the features that are printed everywhere on the material token of our possessions. From the day my effigy is on the coins, I am king.

MONTESQUIEU. I confess that this notion is new to me; but let us continue. You have not forgotten that new peoples have the weakness of giving themselves constitutions that are guaranties of their rights? With your power emanating from force, with the projects that you explain to me, you will perhaps find yourself embarrassed in the presence of **a fundamental charter** whose every principle, every regulation, every plan, is contrary to your maxims of government.

MACHIAVELLI. **I will make another constitution**, that is all.

MONTESQUIEU. And you think that that will not be difficult?

MACHIAVELLI. Wherein will lie the difficulty? For the moment, there is no other will, no other force than mine and I have the popular element as a basis of action.

MONTESQUIEU. That is true. Still, I have one doubt: according to what you have been telling me, I imagine that **your constitution will not be a monument of liberty**. Do you think that a single crisis of strength, a single lucky violence will be sufficient to ravish all the rights of a nation, all her conquests, all her institutions, all the principles with which she has been in the habit of living?

MACHIAVELLI. Permit me! I don't go as fast as that. I said to

{p. 127} you, a few moments ago, that **nations were like individuals**, that they **attached more to appearances** than to the reality of things; in politics that is a rule the details of which I will follow scrupulously; if you will call to mind the principles to which you hold the most, you will see that I am not as embarrassed by them as you seem to think.

MONTESQUIEU. What are you going to do, O Machiavelli?

MACHIAVELLI. Don't be afraid, name them to me.

MONTESQUIEU. I don't trust myself, I confess it.

MACHIAVELLI. Then I will remind you myself. You would not fail, no doubt, to speak to me of the principles of the separation of powers, of **liberty of speech and of the press, religious liberty**, individual liberty, the **right to congregate**, equality before the law, the **inviolability of property** and of the home, the right of petition, free consent to taxation, adequacy of punishment, the non-retroactivity of the laws; is that enough and do you wish more?

MONTESQUIEU. I think that is much more than is necessary, Machiavelli, to make your government uneasy.

MACHIAVELLI. There you are wrong, and this is so true that **I see no reason why I should not proclaim these principles; if you wish, I will even make them the preamble to my constitution.**

MONTESQUIEU. You have already proved to me that you are **a great magician.**

MACHIAVELLI. There is no magic here, only political savoir faire.

MONTESQUIEU. But how, having inscribed these principles at the head of your constitution, **are you going to go about without applying them?**

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! take care, I have told you that I would proclaim these principles, but I have not said I would inscribe them or even that I would expressly designate them.

MONTESQUIEU. What do you mean?

MACHIAVELLI. **I will in no way sum up;** I will take care to declare to the people that I recognize and confirm the great principles of modern justice.

MONTESQUIEU. The import of this reticence escapes me.

{p. 128} MACHIAVELLI. You will see how important it is. **If I expressly enumerated these rights, my freedom of action will be chained** to those I have mentioned; that is what I do not want. In **not naming them**, I seem to accord all and I **do not specially accord any**; this permits me to set aside later, by means of exception, those that I may judge dangerous.

MONTESQUIEU. I understand.

MACHIAVELLI. Of these principles, moreover, some belong to political and **constitutional law**, others to **civil law**. That is a distinction that must always serve as a rule in the exercise of absolute power. It is to the **civil rights** that people hold most; I will not touch them, if I can, and, in this way, one part of my program at least will be fulfilled.

MONTESQUIEU. And as for the political rights ...?

MACHIAVELLI. I have written in my treatise on The Prince the following maxim, which has never ceased to be true: "The governed will always be content with the prince, so long as he **touches neither their possessions nor their honor**, and from that time on he has only to combat the pretensions of **a small number of malcontents, whom he can finish off** easily." That is my answer to your question.

MONTESQUIEU. Strictly, one could find it insufficient; one could answer you that political rights are also possessions; that it also is of importance to the honor of the people to maintain it, and that in disturbing it you are in reality striking at their possessions as well as their honor. One could add still further that the maintenance of civil rights is linked with the maintenance of political rights by a close solidarity. Who is to guarantee to the citizens that if you strip them of political liberty today, you will not strip them of individual liberty tomorrow; that if you attack their liberty today, you will not attack their fortunes tomorrow?

MACHIAVELLI. It is certain that the argument has been presented with much vivacity, but I believe that you also perfectly understand the exaggeration. You seem always to believe that people

{p. 129} of today are starved for liberty. Have you foreseen the case when they wish no more of it, and can you demand of the princes more passion for it than the people? Now, in your **societies so deeply liberated, in which the individual only lives in the sphere of his egoism and his material interests**, question the greatest number, and you will see whether, from every side, you will not be answered: What has politics to do with me? What has liberty to do with me? Are not all governments the same? Must not a government protect itself?

Note this well, moreover, it is not even the people who will speak thus; it will be the bourgeois, the industrialists, the educated men, the rich, the literati, all those who are in a position to appreciate your fine doctrines of public rights. They will bless me, they will cry out that I have saved them, that they are in a minority position, that they cannot help themselves. Look, the nations have I know not what secret love for the vigorous genius of force. Of all violent actions marked by the talent of artifice, you will hear said with an admiration that overcomes all blame: **This is not good, so be it, but it is clever, it is well done**, it is strong!

MONTESQUIEU. You are, then, going to penetrate the professional party with your doctrines?

MACHIAVELLI. No, we have arrived at the execution. I would certainly have made several more steps if you had not obliged me to digress. Let us continue.

NINTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. You were at the day following **a constitution drawn up by yourself without the consent of the nation.**

MACHIAVELLI. Here I stop you; I have not intended to offend to this point the acknowledged ideas whose influence I am aware of.

MONTESQUIEU. Really!

{p. 130} MACHIAVELLI. I speak very seriously.

MONTESQUIEU. You expect, then, to associate the nation with the new fundamental work that you are preparing?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, no doubt. That surprises you? I will do much better; **I will first have ratified by a popular vote the coup that I have carried against the state;** I will say to the people, in suitable terms: All was going wrong; **I have smashed everything, I have saved you, do you want me?** You are free to condemn me or to absolve me by your vote.

MONTESQUIEU. Free, under the weight of terror and armed force.

MACHIAVELLI. I will be acclaimed.

MONTESQUIEU. I believe that.

MACHIAVELLI. And **the popular vote**, which I have as an instrument of my power, **will become the very base of my government.** I will establish a suffrage without distinction of class or tax, with which absolutism will be organized in a single blow.

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, for by one blow you crush at the same time the unity of the **family**, you lessen suffrage, you annul the preponderance of the enlightened, and you make numbers a blind power which operates at your will.

MACHIAVELLI. I bring about a progress ardently hoped for today by all peoples of Europe: **I organize universal suffrage as did Washington in the United States, and the first use I make of it is to submit to it my constitution.**

MONTESQUIEU. What! **you are going to have it discussed in primary or secondary assemblies?**

MACHIAVELLI. Oh! let us forget, I beg of you, your eighteenth century ideas; they are no longer of modern times.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, then in what manner will you have the acceptance of your constitution deliberated? How will the articles embodied in it be discussed?

MACHIAVELLI. But **I do not intend that they shall be discussed at all**, I thought I told you that.

MONTESQUIEU. I have only followed you on the terrain of the

{p. 131} principles it has pleased you to choose. You spoke to me of the United States; I do not know whether you are a new Washington, but what is certain is that the present constitution of the United States was discussed, deliberated and voted by representatives of the people.

MACHIAVELLI. I beg you, let us not confound the time, the place and the people; we are in Europe; **my constitution is presented en bloc, it is accepted en bloc.**

MONTESQUIEU. But in acting thus you are disguising nothing to anyone. How, in voting under these conditions, can the people know what they are doing and to what point it engages them?

MACHIAVELLI. And where have you ever seen that a constitution, really worthy of the name, really durable, has ever been the result of popular deliberation? **A constitution must come forth fully armed from the head of one man alone**, or it is nothing but a work condemned to oblivion. Without homogeneity, without linking of parties, without practical strength, it will necessarily bear the imprint of all the weakness of sight that have presided at its composition. A constitution, once more, cannot but be the work of a single man; never have things been done otherwise; I prove it by the history of all the founders of empires, the example of Sesostris, of Solon, Lycurgus, Charlemagne, Frederick II, Peter I.

MONTESQUIEU. That is a chapter of one of your disciples that you are developing there.

MACHIAVELLI. Of whose?

MONTESQUIEU. Of **Joseph de Maistre**. There are therein certain general reflections that are not without truth but that I find without application. One would say, to hear you, that you are going to draw a people out of chaos or out of the deep night of their first origins. You do not seem to remember that, in the hypothetical nation in which we place ourselves, the country has attained the summit of its civilization, that its public rights are soundly entrenched, and that it is in possession of regular institutions.

{p. 132} MACHIAVELLI. I do not say no; therefore you will see that I need not destroy your institutions from top to bottom to arrive at my goal. It will suffice me to modify the arrangements and to change the methods.

MONTESQUIEU. Explain yourself.

MACHIAVELLI. Just now you gave me a discourse on constitutional politics, I intend to profit from it. I do not, by the way, know as little as is generally believed in Europe about all these ideas of seesaw politics; you can see that by my discourses on Titus-Livy. But let us return to the present problem. You noticed rightly, a moment ago, that in the parliamentary states of Europe the public powers were distributed almost everywhere in the same manner between a certain number of political bodies whose regular working constituted the government.

Thus one finds everywhere, **under various names**, but with practically uniform attributes, **a ministerial organization, a senate, a legislative body, a council of state, a court of cassation**; I must not exact from you any useless development of the respective mechanism of these powers, whose secret you know better than I; it is evident that **each one of them corresponds to an essential function of the government**. You will note well that **it is the function that I call essential, not the institution**. Thus it is necessary that there be a directing power, a moderating power, a legislative power, a regulating power; there can be no doubt of that.

MONTESQUIEU. But, if I understand you well, the various powers are but one in your estimation and you are ready to give it all to a single man by suppressing the institutions.

MACHIAVELLI. Once more it is that which deceives you. One could not act thus without danger ... especially in France with the fanaticism which reigns there for what you call **the principles of '89**; but please listen to me carefully: **in statics the displacement of a point of support changes the direction of the force, in mechanics the displacement of a spring changes the movement**.

{p. 133} And yet in appearance it is the same apparatus, it is the same mechanism. It is equally true in physiology that the temperament depends on the state of the organs. If the organs are modified, the temperament changes. Well, the various institutions of which we have just spoken function, in governmental economics, like real organs of the human body. **If I touch the organs, they remain, but the political complexion of the State will be changed**. Do you understand that?

MONTESQUIEU. That is not difficult, and no periphrase was necessary for it. You keep names, you put aside things. **That is what Augustus did at Rome when he destroyed the Republic. There was always a consulate, a praetorship, a censorship, a tribunal; but there were no longer consuls, praetors, censors, nor tribunes**.

MACHIAVELLI. You must admit that one could choose worse models. Anything may be done in politics as long as one flatters public prejudices and **respects appearances**.

MONTESQUIEU. Don't go back into generalities; get to work, I am following you.

MACHIAVELLI. Don't forget from what personal convictions each one of my acts will spring. In my eyes your parliamentary governments are nothing but schools for dispute, nothing but centers of sterile agitations in the midst of which is exhausted the fertile activity of nations which the court and the press condemn to impotence. Consequently I have no remorse; I start from an elevated point of view and my aim justifies my acts.

**For abstract theories I substitute practical reason**, the experience of centuries, the example of men of genius who have done great things by the same means, I begin by returning to power its vital conditions.

My first reform at once dwells upon your claim of ministerial responsibility. In centralized countries, like yours, for instance, where opinion instinctively leaves everything to the head of the State, the good as well as the bad, to write at the top of a chart

{p. 134} that the sovereign is irresponsible is to lie to public sentiment, is to establish a fiction which will always vanish at the sound of revolutions. I begin, then, by **striking out of my constitution the principle of ministerial responsibility; the sovereign that I institute will alone be responsible** to the people.

MONTESQUIEU. Fortunately, there is no circumlocution there.

MACHIAVELLI. In your parliamentary system the representatives of the nation have, as you explained it to me, **the initiative** in projects of laws either alone or concurrently with executive power; well, that is the source of the most serious abuses, for in such an order of things each deputy could, at any time, substitute himself for the government in presenting **laws insufficiently studied, insufficiently examined from all angles**; why, with parliamentary initiative, the Chamber could, if it wished, overthrow the government. **I strike out parliamentary initiative. The sovereign alone may propose laws**.

MONTESQUIEU. I see that you are taking the best method of entering the course of absolute power; for in a State where the initiative of law belongs only to the sovereign, it is practically the sovereign who is the sole legislator; but before you go further, I should like to make an objection. You wish to establish yourself on a rock, and I find you seated on sand.

MACHIAVELLI. How?

MONTESQUIEU. **Did you not take popular suffrage as the basis of your power?**

MACHIAVELLI. Certainly.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, **you are nothing but a representative** to be recalled at the will of the people in whom alone resides the true sovereignty. You thought you could make use of this principle to support your authority; don't you see that you could easily be overthrown? On the other hand, you declared yourself solely responsible; do you, then, consider yourself an angel? But be so, if you wish; **you will still be blamed for any evil which may arise, and you will perish at the first crisis**.

{p. 135} MACHIAVELLI. You anticipate: the objection comes too soon, but I shall answer it at once since you force me to it. You are strangely mistaken if you believe that I have not foreseen your argument. **If my power were threatened, it could be only because of factions. I am guarded against** them by two basic rights which I have placed in my constitution.

MONTESQUIEU. And what are those rights?

MACHIAVELLI. **The appeal to the people**, the right to put the country in a state of siege. I am head of the army, **I have the entire public force in my hands; at the first insurrection against my power, the bayonets would be an answer** to resistance and I would again find in the ballot-box a new sanction of my authority.

MONTESQUIEU. You have unanswerable arguments; but let us get back to the legislative body which you have established. On this point I see complications; you have deprived this assembly of the parliamentary initiative, but it still has the right to vote the laws which you will present for its adoption. Undoubtedly you do not expect to permit it to exercise this right?

MACHIAVELLI. You are more suspicious than I, for I confess that I see nothing wrong with it. Since no one but myself may present the law, I have nothing to fear that anything may be done against my power. I have the key of the tabernacle. Besides, as I have already told you, it is a part of my plan to **allow the institutions to exist - in appearance**. Only I must state that **I do not mean to allow to the Chamber** what you call **the right of amendment**. It is evident that with the exercise of such a faculty, there is no law which could not be diverted from its original goal and the disposition of which is not capable of being changed. **The law is accepted or rejected - no other alternative**.

MONTESQUIEU. But no more is necessary to overthrow you: it would suffice merely that the legislative assembly **systematically reject all your proposed laws** or simply that it refuse to vote the taxes.

MACHIAVELLI. You know perfectly well that things cannot hap-

{p. 136} pen like that. Any chamber which would obstruct by such an act of temerity the movement of public affairs would commit suicide. Besides, I would have a thousand means of neutralising the power of such an assembly. **I would reduce by half the number of representatives** and I would, consequently, have half the amount of political passions to combat. **I would reserve for myself the nominations of the presidents and vice-presidents who direct the deliberations. In place of permanent sessions, I would reduce them to several months**. Above all I would do one thing which is of very great importance and the practice of which has already begun, I hear: I would abolish the free services of the legislative mandate; **the deputies would receive a fee so that their duties would, to some extent, be salaried**. I consider this innovation the most certain method of putting the representatives of the nation in power; I need not go into details about that for you; the efficacy of the method is self-evident. I may add that, as chief of the executive power, **I have the right to call together or to dissolve the legislative body**, and that in the event of dissolution, I would take advantage of the longest delay before calling together a new representation. I understand perfectly that the legislative assembly could not, without danger, remain independent of my power, but be reassured: we shall soon come across other practical means of linking it up. Do these constitutional details satisfy you? Or do you want more?

MONTESQUIEU. No, that is not at all necessary and you may go on now to the organisation of the Senate.

MACHIAVELLI. I see that you have very well understood that there lies the principal part of my work, the keystone of my constitution.

MONTESQUIEU. I really do not know what else you can do for, up to now, I consider you completely master of the Senate.

MACHIAVELLI. It pleases you to say that; but, in reality, sovereignty could not be established on such superficial bases. **At the side of the ruler there must be bodies which impress** by the brilliance of their titles and their dignities and by the personal ex-

{p. 137} ample of those who compose them. It is not wise that the sovereign be seen to have a hand in everything; he must be able, if necessary, to **cover his actions under the authority of the great judges who surround the throne**.

MONTESQUIEU. It is easy to see that it is for this role that you destine **the Senate and the Council of State**.

MACHIAVELLI. It is impossible to conceal anything from you.

MONTESQUIEU. You speak of the throne: **I see that you are king and we are just now in a republic**. The transition has not been effected.

MACHIAVELLI. The illustrious French publicist cannot require me to stop for such details of execution: **from the moment that I have full power, the hour when I shall have myself proclaimed king is no more than a question of opportunity**. I shall be king before or after having promulgated my constitution - that is of little consequence.

MONTESQUIEU. That is true. Let us get back to the organisation of the Senate.

## TENTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. In the profound studies which you must have made for the composition of your memorable work on The Causes of the Grandeur and of the Decadence of the Romans, you must certainly have noticed **the role played by the Senate in connection with the Emperors**, starting from the reign of Augustus.

MONTESQUIEU. That, if you will permit me to say so, is a point which historical researches seem to me not yet to have completely clarified. This much is certain, that **up until the last days of the Republic, the Roman Senate was an autonomous**

**institution**, vested with great privileges, having its own powers; that was the secret of its power, of the depth of its political traditions and of the grandeur which it impressed on the Republic. From the time of Augustus, the Senate is no more than **an instrument in the**

{p. 138} **hands of the Emperors**, but it is not clear by what succession of acts they succeeded in stripping it of its power.

MACHIAVELLI. It is not precisely to elucidate this point of history that I beg you to return to this period of the Empire. This question for the moment does not interest me; all that I wished to tell you is that the Senate which I picture must fill, at the side of the prince, a political role analogous to that of the Roman Senate in the times which followed the fall of the Republic.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, but at this period **the law was no longer voted in the popular comitia, but by senatorial decree**; is that what you were thinking of?

MACHIAVELLI. Not at all: that would not conform at all to modern principles of constitutional law.

MONTESQUIEU. What thanks are due you for such a scruple!

MACHIAVELLI. Oh, I have no need of that to decree what I think necessary. No legislative order, you know, could go forth except at my suggestion, and besides **I make decrees which have the force of laws**.

MONTESQUIEU. That is true, you have forgotten that point which is by no means trivial; but I do not quite see for what purposes you are keeping the Senate.

MACHIAVELLI. Placed in the highest constitutional spheres, its direct intervention need appear only under solemn circumstances; if it were necessary, for instance, to alter the fundamental pact or if the sovereignty were placed in danger.

MONTESQUIEU. This language is prophetic. You like to prepare your effects.

MACHIAVELLI. The fixed idea of your **modern constituents** has been, up to the present, to wish to foresee all, to **provide for all in the charters which they give to the people**. I would not fall into such an error; **I would not wish to enclose myself within an impassable circle**; I would settle only that which it is impossible to leave uncertain; **I would allow sufficient room for change** so that, in great crises, there would be other means of safety than the disastrous expedient of revolution.

{p. 138} MONTESQUIEU. You speak wisely.

MACHIAVELLI. As for that which concerns the Senate, I would write into my constitution: **"The Senate has the power to decide, by a senatus-consultum, everything which has not been foreseen by the constitution** and which is necessary to its progress; it has the power to define the meaning of the articles of the constitution which may give rise to different interpretations; it has the power to maintain or to annul all the acts which are reported to it as unconstitutional by the government or denounced by the petition of the citizens; it has the power to lay the foundations of projects of law of a great national interest; it has the power to propose amendments to the constitution which will be enacted by a senatus-consultum."

MONTESQUIEU. That is all very fine and it is truly a Roman Senate. But I should like to make several remarks about your constitution: it will, I gather, be drawn up in **very vague and ambiguous terms** since you judge in advance that the articles which it contains will be capable of various interpretations.

MACHIAVELLI. No, but one must foresee everything.

MONTESQUIEU. I thought, on the contrary, that your principle in such a matter was to avoid foreseeing and providing for everything.

MACHIAVELLI. The illustrious president has not haunted the palace of Themis without profit, nor has he worn in vain the cap of president of a court of justice. My words had no other meaning than this: **One must foresee what is essential**.

MONTESQUIEU. Be good enough to tell me this: Has your Senate, which is the interpreter and guardian of the fundamental pact, a power of its own?

MACHIAVELLI. Decidedly not.

MONTESQUIEU. Then all that the Senate does will really be done by you?

MACHIAVELLI. I do not contradict that.

MONTESQUIEU. And all that it will interpret will really be interpreted by you; all that it will modify will really be modified

{p. 140} by you; all that it will annul will really be annulled by you?

MACHIAVELLI. I admit it.

MONTESQUIEU. That is as much as to say that you reserve the right to destroy what you have done, to take away what you have given, to change your constitution, either for the worse or for the better, or even to make it disappear completely if you judge it necessary. I do not conjecture at your intentions or at the motives which might make you act in certain given circumstances; I only ask you where the citizens would find even the weakest guarantee in the midst of such despotism, and especially how they would ever agree to submit to it?

MACHIAVELLI. I see that your philosophic sensitiveness is returning. Rest assured, I would not bring any modification to the fundamental basis of my constitution without **submitting these modifications to the acceptance of the people by means of universal suffrage.**

MONTESQUIEU. But it would still be you who would be judge of the question as to whether the modification which you propose bears within it the fundamental character which would cause it to be submitted for the approval of the people. I still suppose that you would not pass by a decree or by a senatus-consultum what should be passed by a plebiscite. Would you surrender your constitutional amendments to general discussion? Would you allow them to be deliberated upon in the popular assembly?

MACHIAVELLI. By no means. If a debate over constitutional articles were ever engaged in before the popular assemblies, nothing could prevent the people from examining everything in virtue of its right of removal, and the next day there would be a revolution in the streets.

MONTESQUIEU. You are logical at least: then **the constitutional amendments are to be presented in bulk and accepted in bulk?**

MACHIAVELLI. Just so.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, then, I believe that we may pass on to the organization of the Council of State.

{p. 141} MACHIAVELLI. Really, you direct debates with the consummate precision of a President of a supreme court. I forgot to tell you that **I would appoint the Senate as I appointed the legislative body.**

MONTESQUIEU. That is understood.

MACHIAVELLI. And it is needless to add that **I should also reserve to myself the right to nominate the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents of this assembly.** Concerning the Council of State, I shall be more brief. Your modern institutions are instruments of centralisation so powerful that it is almost impossible to make use of them without exercising sovereign authority.

According to your own principles, what, in fact, is **the Council of State?** It is a sham political body destined to put a considerable power into the hands of the Prince, the customary power which is a sort of discretionary one which can serve at will to make real laws.

The Council of State is, I am told, invested in France with a special privilege perhaps even more excessive. In litigious matters, it may, I am assured, claim by right of evocation, and recover in its own authority, before the ordinary courts of justice, the knowledge of all litigations that seem to have an administrative character. Thus, to characterise briefly the exceptional in this latter privilege, the courts of justice must refuse to judge when it is a question of an act of the administrative authority, and the administrative authority may, in like case, take it out of the hands of the courts in order to leave the decision to the Council of State.

Now, once more, what is the Council of State? Has it any power of its own? Is it independent of the sovereign? Not at all. It is nothing but a Draughting Committee. **When the Council of State makes a law, it is really the sovereign who makes it;** when it renders a judgment, it is the sovereign who renders it, **or, as you say nowadays, it is the administration,** the administration which is judge and interested party in its own cause. Do

{p. 142} you know anything stronger than that and do you believe that it would take much to place absolute power in those States where such institutions are already organized?

MONTESQUIEU. Your criticism is very just, I admit; but, since the Council of State is, in itself, an excellent institution, nothing is easier than to give it the necessary independence by isolating it, to a certain extent, from power. That, undoubtedly, is not what you will do.

MACHIAVELLI. Indeed, I shall maintain the type of unity in the institution where I find it and I shall bring it where it does not exist, by tightening the bonds of a solidarity which I regard as indispensable. We have not wasted any time, you see, for here is my constitution finished.

MONTESQUIEU. Already?

MACHIAVELLI. A few contrivances wisely arranged are sufficient to change completely the progress of power. This part of my program is complete.

MONTESQUIEU. I thought you still had something to say about the highest court of appeal.

MACHIAVELLI. What I have to say to you can better be said at another time.

MONTESQUIEU. It is true that if we evaluate the sum of the powers which lie in your hands, you ought to begin to be satisfied.

To sum up:

You make laws:

1. In the form of propositions to the legislative body;
2. In the form of decrees;
3. In the form of senatorial decrees;
4. In the form of general regulations;
5. In the form of resolutions at the Council of State;
6. In the form of ministerial regulations;
7. And, finally, in the form of coups d'etat.

MACHIAVELLI. You seem to have the idea that what still re-

{p. 143} mains for me to do is not exactly the most difficult to accomplish.

MONTESQUIEU. That is, indeed, my idea.

MACHIAVELLI. Then you have not sufficiently noticed that my constitution was **silent about** a mass of acquired rights which would be incompatible with the new order of things that I have just established. There is, for instance, the **freedom of the press; the right of association; the independence of the magistracy; the right of suffrage**, of the election, by communes, of municipal officers; the institution of civic guards and many more things which will have to **disappear or else be greatly modified**.

MONTESQUIEU. But did you not recognize all these rights implicitly, since you solemnly recognized the principles of which they are but the application?

MACHIAVELLI. As I have told you, **I recognized no principle and no right in particular**; moreover, the measures which I shall take will only be the exceptions to the rule.

MONTESQUIEU. The exceptions which prove it - that is true.

MACHIAVELLI. But, to do that, I must be careful to choose the right moment, for an error there might ruin everything. I wrote in the treatise of The Prince a maxim which should serve as a rule of conduct in such cases: "The usurper of a state must commit, all at one time, the acts of severity which his safety necessitates, for later he will not be able to change either for the better or the worse; if it is for the worse that you have to act, you are too late once luck is against you; if it is for the better, your subjects will not be grateful for a change which they will consider forced on them."

The very next day after the promulgation of my constitution, **I shall issue a succession of decrees**, having the force of laws, **which will suppress at a single stroke all the liberties** and rights the exercise of which might be dangerous.

MONTESQUIEU. The moment would indeed be well chosen. The country would still be terror-stricken at your coup d'etat. As for your constitution, nothing would be refused you, since you would be in a position to take everything; and as for your decrees, there

{p. 144} would be nothing to grant you, since you ask for nothing and take all.

MACHIAVELLI. You have a quick tongue.

MONTESQUIEU. Not so quick as your action. In spite of your strength and penetration, I must admit that I have difficulty in believing that the country would not rise up in a second coup d'etat prepared behind your back.

MACHIAVELLI. **The country would voluntarily close its eyes; for**, according to my hypothesis, **it would be tired of strife**, it would yearn for rest like the sand in the desert after the shower which follows the storm.

MONTESQUIEU. You are merely making beautiful figures of speech; it is too much.

MACHIAVELLI. I hasten to add that **the liberties which I suppress I would promise solemnly to restore after the agitation dies down**.

MONTESQUIEU. I believe they would have to wait forever.

MACHIAVELLI. That is possible.

MONTESQUIEU. It is certain, for your maxims permit the prince not to keep his word if he finds it to his interest.

MACHIAVELLI. Don't be in a hurry to speak; you shall see the use I expect to make of this promise; I should soon take it upon myself to pass for the most liberal man in my kingdom.

MONTESQUIEU. That would be a startling thing for which I am not in the least prepared; in the meanwhile, you would directly suppress all the liberties.

MACHIAVELLI. Directly is no word for a statesman; **I would suppress nothing directly**; it is just at this point that **the fox's skin must be sewed on to the lion's skin**. Of what use is politics if one could not **reach by oblique means the goal which cannot be attained by a straight line**? The foundations of my establishments are laid, the forces are ready, all that is necessary is to get them going. I shall do that with all the discretion which the new constitutional customs permit. It is here that one naturally places the stratagems of government and of legislation which prudence recommends to the prince.

{p. 145} MONTESQUIEU. I see that we are entering a new phase: I am prepared to listen.

#### ELEVENTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. You wisely mention, in your Esprit des Lois that **the word liberty** is a word to which one attaches **greatly varied meanings**. I am told that the following proposition may be found in your book: "**Liberty is the right to do that which the laws permit.**" (Esprit des Lois, p. 123, book XI, chap. III.) I am well pleased with that definition which I consider a good one, and I assure you that my laws will permit only what is necessary. Where would you like me to begin?

MONTESQUIEU. I should not mind seeing first of all **how you will defend yourself against the press.**

MACHIAVELLI. You have put your finger on the most delicate part of my task. The system which I conceive is, in this respect, as vast in its applications as it is diversified. Here, fortunately, I have full scope; I may decide and command with absolute security and almost without raising any discussion.

MONTESQUIEU. How so, if I may ask?

MACHIAVELLI. Because, in the majority of the parliamentary nations, the press has the faculty of making itself hated, since it is at the service only of violent, selfish, and exclusive passions, since it disparages through prejudice, since it is mercenary, since it is unjust, since it is without generosity and without patriotism; and, last but not least, since you will never be able to make the masses of the people understand of what value it may be.

MONTESQUIEU. Oh, if you are looking for grievances against the press, it is easy enough to amass a great many. If you ask of what value it may be, that is another thing. Briefly, **it hinders the arbitrary use of power; it compels the government to act constitutionally**; it forces the guardians of public authority to be honest, to be moderate, and to respect themselves and others. Finally, in

{p. 146} a word, **it gives to the oppressed the means of complaining and of being heard.** One pardons much to an institution which, despite so many abuses, necessarily renders such services.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, I am familiar with these pleadings, but make them understood, if you can, by the greatest number; count those who will be interested in the fate of the press, and you will see.

MONTESQUIEU. That is why it should be just as well for you to go on at once to the practical methods of **muzzling the press**; I believe that is the word for it.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, it is just the word for it; besides, **it isn't only journalism that I intend to repress.**

MONTESQUIEU. **It is printing itself.**

MACHIAVELLI. You are beginning to use irony.

MONTESQUIEU. In just another moment you are going to take that away from me since you expect to shackle the press in all forms.

MACHIAVELLI. One is completely disarmed by such playfulness when it is so clever; but you will understand perfectly that **it would hardly be worth while escaping from the attacks of journalism if one had to remain exposed to those of books.**

MONTESQUIEU. Well, let us begin with journalism.

MACHIAVELLI. If I decided to suppress newspapers purely and simply, I would very imprudently shock public sensibility which it is always dangerous to oppose openly; I should proceed by a series of provisions which would seem to be simple measures of precaution and policy. I would decree that in the future **no newspaper could be founded except by authorization of the government**; right there you have the danger arrested in its development; for, as you can easily understand, the newspapers which would be authorized would be only those organs devoted to the government.

MONTESQUIEU. But, since you are going into all details, allow me this question: the spirit of a newspaper changes with the per-

{p. 147} sonnel of its editorial staff; **how would you get rid of a staff hostile to your power?**

MACHIAVELLI. The objection is very weak, for, in the last analysis, if I so wished, I would not authorize the publication of any new sheet; but I have other plans, as you will see. You ask how I should counteract a hostile editorial staff? In the simplest manner; I would add that **the authorization of the government is necessary for any changes made in the personnel of the chief or sub-editors** of a newspaper.

MONTESQUIEU. But the old papers, which have remained enemies of your government, and whose staff has not changed, will speak aloud.

MACHIAVELLI. Wait! I would reach all newspapers, present or future, by fiscal measures which would check when needed all publicity enterprises; **I would subject political journals to what you call nowadays the stamp and security.** The business of the press would soon become so unremunerative, thanks to the raising of these taxes, that no one would go into it unknowingly.

MONTESQUIEU. The remedy is insufficient, because political parties spare no expenses.

MACHIAVELLI. Calm yourself - I have something with which to close their mouths: **here come the repressive measures.** There are some states in Europe where the knowledge of the misdemeanors of the press has been given over to the jury to decide upon. I know of no measure more deplorable than that, since it only stirs up opinion in connection with the most insignificant nonsense of journalists. The misdemeanors of the press have such an elastic character, the writer may disguise his attacks under such varied and subtle forms that it is not even possible to convey to the courts the knowledge of these offenses. The courts will always remain armed, that goes without saying, but the usual restraining force must be in the hands of the administration.

MONTESQUIEU. Then there are offenses which will not come under the jurisdiction of the courts, or, rather, which you will

{p. 148} strike from both sides: from the courts of justice and from the administration?

MACHIAVELLI. Such a misfortune! What solicitude for a few wicked little journalists who insist on attacking and disparaging everything, who act with the government like the bandits that travelers meet on the road. They are always putting themselves beyond the law; what if one did outlaw them a little!

MONTESQUIEU. So it is upon them alone that your restrictions will fall?

MACHIAVELLI. I cannot undertake to do that, because these people are **like the heads of the hydra of Lerna; when you cut ten, fifty more grow**. I should put the blame principally on the newspapers as publicity undertakings. I would speak to them as follows: "I could have suppressed you all. I did not. I can still do it. **I am going to let you exist, but naturally there is one condition, and that is that you do not obstruct my progress or diminish my power**. I do not want to have to bring action against you every day, nor expound the law to restrain your infractions; **neither can I have an army of censors** whose duty it is to examine the night before what you print the next day. You have pens, write; but remember this: **I claim, for myself and my representatives, the right to judge when I shall be attacked**. No subtleties. When you attack me, I shall be aware of it and you yourselves will be well aware of it; in such a case, I will do justice myself, not at once, for I want to proceed circumspectly; I shall warn you once, twice; **the third time your papers will be suppressed**."

MONTESQUIEU. I see with astonishment that it is not exactly the journalist who is hit in this system; **it is the newspaper, the ruin of which includes the interests that are grouped about it**.

MACHIAVELLI. Let them group themselves elsewhere! We do not bother about such trifles. As I have just told you, my administration will not interfere with the sentences passed by the court. **Two convictions in one year will automatically bring about the suppression of the paper**. I would not rely on that alone, I would

{p. 149} say to the newspapers, in a decree or a law: "Reduced to the greatest caution in matters that concern you, do not expect to arouse opinion by commentaries on the debates in my chambers; **I forbid you to give an accurate account of legislative proceedings**, I forbid you to give even an accurate account of the judiciary debates in connection with the press. Nor must you count on making an impression on the public by imaginary news from abroad; I shall punish false news by corporal punishment whether they are published in good or in bad faith."

MONTESQUIEU. That seems to me a little hard, since newspapers, being no longer able, without the greatest of dangers, to give themselves up to political valuations, will not be able to exist except by news. Now, when a paper publishes some news, it seems to me very difficult to insist on its veracity, since very often the paper can answer for it only to a certain extent, and when it is morally sure of its truth, material proof may be lacking.

MACHIAVELLI. Then **they will look twice before stirring up the public - that is as it should be**.

MONTESQUIEU. But I see something else. If you cannot be fought by newspapers in the country, **they can fight you by papers abroad**. All the dissatisfactions, all the hatred will be written at the gates of your kingdom; **they will throw across the frontier fiery newspapers and pamphlets**.

MACHIAVELLI. Ah, here you touch upon a point which I expect to take care of in the most rigorous manner, because **the foreign press is indeed very dangerous**. First of all, **the introduction or circulation in the kingdom of unauthorized papers or pamphlets will be punished by imprisonment**, and the sentence will be sufficiently severe to do away with any desire for it. Then, **those of my subjects convicted of having written abroad anything against the government will be sought out**, upon their return to the kingdom, **and severely punished**. It is really an infamy to write against the government when one is out of the country.

MONTESQUIEU. That depends. But the foreign press of the bordering states will have something to say.

{p. 150} MACHIAVELLI. You think so? We are supposing that I am reigning over a great kingdom. The little states which border my frontier will tremble before me, I assure you. In case of attack against my government, by the press or otherwise, I shall make them surrender the laws which cover their own nationals.

MONTESQUIEU. I see that I was right in saying, in the *Esprit des Lois*, that the frontiers of a despot ought to be laid waste. Civilization ought not penetrate. **Your subjects, I am sure, will not know their history**. According to Benjamin Constant, **you will make of the kingdom an island** where one will be ignorant of what goes on in Europe, and you will make of the capital another island where one will be ignorant of what goes on in the provinces.

MACHIAVELLI. I do not want my kingdom to be disturbed by noises from abroad. **How could foreign news arrive? By a few agencies** which centralize the news which is transmitted to them from the four quarters of the globe. Well, I suppose **these agencies could be paid**, and then they would give out no news except by order of the government.

MONTESQUIEU. That is a good idea; now you may go on to the regulation of books.

MACHIAVELLI. That bothers me very little, for in a period where journalism has assumed such tremendous proportions, hardly anyone reads books any more. But I don't by any means intend to give them a free hand. In the first place, I shall oblige those who wish to exercise the profession of **printer, editor or librarian to secure** a seal, that is, **an authorization** which the government may always withdraw, either directly or by decisions of the court.

MONTESQUIEU. But, in that case, **these business people will be public officials**. The instruments of thought will become the instruments of power!

MACHIAVELLI. You will not complain, I imagine, for things were like that in your time, too, under parliamentary rule; one must keep old customs when they are good. I will return to fiscal

{p. 151} measures; **I will extend to books the stamp which affects the newspapers**, or rather **I shall impose the burden of a stamp on those books which have not a certain number of pages**. A book, for instance, which **has not two or three hundred pages** will not be a book, it will be only a brochure. I believe that you readily grasp the advantage of this scheme: on one hand I reduce, by this tax, **the swarm of little writings which are like the appendages of journalism**; on the other hand, **I force those who wish to escape the tax to write long and costly compositions which will scarcely sell or which will barely be read** in this form. Nowadays there are hardly any but a few poor devils who have the conscience to write books; they will give it up. The economic question will discourage literary vanity and penal law will disarm printing itself, for **I shall make the publisher and the printer criminally responsible for the contents of the books**. If there are writers daring enough to write books against the government, they must **not be able to find anyone to publish them**. The effects of this wholesome intimidation will **indirectly re-establish a censor** that the government itself could not exercise because of the disrepute into which this preventive measure has fallen. Before publishing new works, the printers and the publishers will consult one another, they will be informed; they will produce books which are in demand, and in this manner the government will always be usefully informed of the publications which are being prepared against it; it will bring about a preliminary attachment when it deems necessary and will report the authors to the courts.

MONTESQUIEU. You told me you would not touch civil rights. You do not seem to doubt that it is the freedom of industry that you have just hit by this legislation; the right of property, too, is involved - that will come in its turn.

MACHIAVELLI. These are but words.

MONTESQUIEU. Then you are through with the press, I gather.

MACHIAVELLI. Oh, not at all!

MONTESQUIEU. Why, what is there left?

MACHIAVELLI. The other half of the task.

{p. 152} TWELFTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. Up to now **I have showed you only the defensive part**, so to speak, of the organic regime which I would impose on the press; now I must make you understand that I would know how to employ this institution to the advantage of my power. I dare say that **no government, up to the present, has had a bolder conception than the one of which I am going to speak to you**. In parliamentary countries, it is almost always because of the press that the governments fail; well, I foresee the possibility of counteracting the press by the press itself. Since **journalism is such a great force**, do you know what **my government** would do? It **would turn journalist**, it would become journalism incarnate.

MONTESQUIEU. Truly, you treat me to strange surprises! It is a panorama of infinite variety that you spread out before me; I am very curious, I must admit, to see how you will go about putting into effect this new program.

MACHIAVELLI. Much less effort of imagination is necessary than you think. **I shall count the number of newspapers which represent what you call the opposition. If there are ten for the opposition, I shall have twenty for the government**; if there are twenty, I shall have forty; if there are forty, I shall have eighty. You can readily understand now to what use I will put the faculty which I reserved for myself to authorize the creation of new political papers.

MONTESQUIEU. Really, that is very simple.

MACHIAVELLI. Not quite as simple as you think, though, because **the masses must have no suspicion of these tactics**; the scheme would lose its point, public opinion would shy at newspapers which openly defended my policies. **I shall divide in three or four categories the papers devoted to my power. In first rank** I shall put a certain number of newspapers whose tone will be **frankly official** and which, at any en-

{p. 153} counter, will **defend my deeds to the death**. I tell you right from the start, these will not be the ones which will have the greatest influence on public opinion. **In the second rank** I shall place another series of newspapers the character of which will be no more than officious and the purposes of which will be to **rally** to my power that mass of **luke-warm and indifferent persons** who accept without scruple what is established but who do not go beyond that in their political faith.

It is **in the newspaper categories which follow** that will be found the most powerful supporters of my power. Here, **the official or officious tone is completely dropped, in appearance**, that is, for the newspapers of which I am going to speak will all be **attached by the same chain to my government, a chain visible for some, invisible for others**. I shall not attempt to tell you how many of them there will be, for I shall count on a devoted organ in each opinion, in each party; **I shall have an aristocratic organ in the aristocratic party, a republican organ in the republican party, a revolutionary organ in the revolutionary party**, an anarchist organ, if necessary, in the anarchist party. Like the god **Vishnu** my press will have **a hundred arms**, and these arms will stretch out their hands to all the possible shades of opinion over the whole surface of the country. Everyone will be of my party whether he knows it or not. **Those who think they are speaking their own language will be speaking**

**mine**, those who think they are agitating their own party will be agitating mine, those who think they are marching under their own flag will be marching under mine.

MONTESQUIEU. Are these conceptions realizable or merely phantasmagoria? It is enough to make one dizzy.

MACHIAVELLI. Spare your strength, for you have not yet come to the end.

MONTESQUIEU. I am only wondering how you will be able to direct and rally all these military forces of publicity secretly hired by your government.

MACHIAVELLI. That is only a question of organization, you must

{p. 154} understand; **I shall institute, for instance, under the title of division of printing and the press, a center of operation to which one will come for orders.** So, for those who will be only half in on the secret of this scheme, it will be a strange spectacle: they will see **sheets, devoted to my government, which will attack me**, which will shout, which will stir up a turmoil of confusion.

MONTESQUIEU. This is beyond me; I no longer follow.

MACHIAVELLI. And yet it is not too difficult to understand; you will notice that **the foundation and the principles of my government will never be attacked** by the newspapers of which I am speaking; they will never go in for anything more than a **polemic skirmish, a dynastic opposition** within the narrowest limits.

MONTESQUIEU. And what advantage do you find in that?

MACHIAVELLI. Your question is rather ingenuous. The result, considerable enough, will be to **make the greatest number say: "But you see, one is free, one may speak under this regime, it is unjustly attacked; instead of repressing, as it might do, it tolerates these things!"** Another result, not less important, will be to provoke, for instance, such observations as these: "You see to what point the foundations and principles of this government commands the respect of all; **here are newspapers which allow themselves the greatest freedom of speech; well, they never attack the established institutions.** They must be above the injustices of human passions, since **the very enemies of the government cannot help rendering homage to them."**

MONTESQUIEU. That, I confess, is truly machiavellian.

MACHIAVELLI. You do me a great honor, but something better is yet to come: With the aid of the **secret loyalty of these public papers**, I may say that **I can direct at will the general opinion** in all questions of internal or external politics. I arouse or lull the minds, I reassure or disturb them, I plead for and against, true and false. I have a fact announced and I have it refuted, according to the circumstances; in this way **I plumb public thought, I gather the impression produced.** I try combinations, projects, sudden decisions; in other words, I send out what you call in

{p. 155} France feelers. I fight my enemies as I please without ever compromising my power, since, after having the papers make certain statements, I may, when necessary, deny them most energetically; I solicit opinion on certain resolutions, I urge it on or I hold it back, I always have my finger on its pulse; it reflects, without knowing it, my personal impressions, and it occasionally is astonished at being so constantly in accord with its sovereign. Then they say that I have the feeling for the people, that there is a secret and mysterious sympathy which unites me to the movements of my people.

MONTESQUIEU. These various projects seem to be ideally perfect. Nevertheless I should like to comment on something, but very timidly this time: **If you depart from the silence of China**, if you permit, for the furthering of your designs, the provisional opposition which you have just spoken of on the part of your army of newspapers, I really do not understand **how you can prevent the non-affiliated newspapers from answering**, by overwhelming thrusts, the provocations the source of which they will guess. **Do you not think that they will finally succeed in raising some of the veils** which cover so many mysterious forces? When they will learn the secret of this comedy, will you be able to stop them from laughing at it? The game seems to me a little dangerous.

MACHIAVELLI. Not at all; I must tell you that I have spent a good part of my time at this point to examine the strength and the weakness of these schemes; I am well informed on all that has to do with the conditions of existence of the press in parliamentary countries. You must know that **journalism is a sort of free-masonry**; those who live by it are all more or less **attached to one another** by the bonds of professional discretion; like the ancient soothsayers, they do not readily divulge the secret of their oracles. They would gain nothing by betraying one another, for the majority of them have some more or less shameful secrets. It is quite probable, I agree, that at the heart of the capital, within a certain radius of people, these things will be no mystery; but,

{p. 156} everywhere else, no one will suspect, and the great majority of the nation will follow, with the utmost confidence, the trail of the leaders which I will have given them.

What does it matter to me that, in the capital, a certain set will be aware of the tricks of my journalism? **It is in the provinces that the greatest part of its influence will be felt.** There I shall always have the barometer of opinion which is necessary for me, and there every one of my strokes will have the desired effect. **The provincial press will belong to me entirely**, there can be no contradiction nor discussion as to that; from **the center of the administration** where I shall hold court, they **will transmit regularly to the governor of each province the order to have the newspapers speak in such and such a way**, so that **at the same moment**, all over the country, such and such an influence will be produced, such and such an impulse will be given, often even before the capital becomes cognizant of it. You see by this that **the opinion of the capital is not enough to**

**preoccupy me. When necessary, it will learn too late about the external movement which would surround it** without its knowledge.

MONTESQUIEU. The chain of your ideas carries everything away with such force that you make me lose the consciousness of a last objection which I wanted to refer to you. The fact still remains, in spite of all you have just said, that **there still is in the capital a certain number of independent newspapers**. It will be practically impossible for them to talk politics, that is certain, but they may still wage a war of details. Your administration will not be perfect; the development of absolute power brings with it a quantity of grievances of which even the sovereign is not the cause; for all the acts of your representatives which will touch private interests, you will be held guilty; they will complain, they will attack your representatives, you will necessarily be considered responsible for them, and esteem for you will decrease gradually.

MACHIAVELLI. I am not afraid of that.

MONTESQUIEU. It is true that you have increased to such an ex-

{p. 157} tent the means of repression that you have but to choose your method.

MACHIAVELLI. That is not what I was going to say; I do not even wish to be obliged to have ceaseless recourse to repression: **I wish, through a simple injunction, to make it possible to put an end to any discussion on a subject concerning the administration.**

MONTESQUIEU. And how do you expect to go about that?

MACHIAVELLI. **I shall oblige the newspapers to put at the head of their columns the corrections which the government will impart to them**; the representatives of the administration will give them notes in which they will be told categorically: "You have asserted such and such a fact, it is not exact; you made such and such a criticism, you were unjust, you were improper, you were wrong, do not forget it." That will be, as you see, a loyal and open censure.

MONTESQUIEU. To which, of course, there will be no reply.

MACHIAVELLI. Obviously not; discussion will be closed.

MONTESQUIEU. In this way you will always have the last word, and you will have it without the use of violence - it is very ingenious. You put it very well a short time ago when you said your government is journalism incarnate.

MACHIAVELLI. Just as **I do not wish the country to be disturbed** by rumors from abroad, so I do not wish it to be so **by rumors from within**, even the simplest private news. When there will be some extraordinary suicide, some big money question a little too suspicious, some misdeed by a public official, **I shall forbid the papers to write of it**. Silence about these things shows more respect for public honesty than does scandal.

MONTESQUIEU. And during this time you yourself will be a journalist with a vengeance?

MACHIAVELLI. I must. To make use of the press, to make use of it in all its forms: such is, today, the law of the powers which wish to exist. It is very singular, but it is so. And I shall engage in it to a much greater extent than you can imagine. In order to understand the breadth of my system, it is neces-

{p. 158} sary to see how the language of my press is called to co-operate with the official acts of my politics: I wish, suppose, to bring to light the solution to a certain external or internal complication; this solution, recommended by my newspapers which for several months have been guiding public opinion each in its own way, is brought forth one fine day as an official event. You know with what discretion and what ingenious consideration authoritative documents must be drawn up on important matters: the problem to be solved in such a case is to give a certain amount of satisfaction to each party. Well, then, every one of my newspapers, according to its tendency, will strive to persuade its party that the resolution that has been made is the one which favors itself most. That which will not be written in an official document, will be brought to light by means of interpretation; that which is only indicated, the officious newspapers will construe more openly, and the democratic and revolutionary papers will shout from the housetops; and while they are disputing and giving the most varied interpretations to my acts, my government will always be able to answer to one and all: "You are mistaken about my intentions, you have misconstrued my declarations; I only meant this or that." **The main thing is never to be found in contradiction with oneself.**

MONTESQUIEU. What! After what you have just told me, you make such a claim?

MACHIAVELLI. Certainly, and your astonishment proves that you did not understand me. **It is necessary to make words, rather than deeds, harmonize**. How do you expect the masses of the people to judge if it is reason which rules its government? It is sufficient to tell it to them. I wish, then, that **the various phases of my policies be presented as the development of a single thought clinging to an unchanging goal**. Every event, foreseen or unforeseen, will be a result wisely brought about, the deviations of direction will only be the different facets of the same question, the **various roads which lead to the same goal**, the diversified means to an identical solution pursued unceasingly in the face of

{p. 159} obstacles. The most recent event will be given as the logical conclusion to the previous ones.

MONTESQUIEU. In truth, you are admirable! What strength of mind! What activity!

MACHIAVELLI. Every day my newspapers will be filled with official speeches, with accountings, with references to the ministers and references to the sovereign. I shall not forget that I am living in a period where it is believed that all social problems may be settled by

industry, and where the amelioration of the fate of the working classes is constantly being sought. I shall interest myself all the more in these questions inasmuch as they are a very fortunate counter-irritant to absorption in internal politics. When it comes to the peoples of the south, the governments must appear to be unceasingly occupied; **the masses are satisfied to be inactive on condition that those who govern them give them the spectacle of a continual activity**, a sort of fever; that they constantly attract their attention by novelties, surprises, theatrical strokes. That is strange, perhaps, but, once more, it is so.

I would comply with these indications, point by point; consequently, I would, in matters of commerce, industry, arts, and even administration, **look into all sorts of projects, plans**, combinations, changes, alterations, and improvements the fame of which in the press would cover the voices of the most numerous and most prolific publicists. Political economy has, it is said, made a fortune in France; well, I should leave to your theorists, to your utopians, to the most impassioned declaimers of your schools nothing to invent, nothing to publish, nothing even to say. The good of the people would be the sole and unchanging object of my public confidences. Whether I speak myself, or whether I have my ministers or my writers speak, one would never exhaust the subject of the grandeur of the country, of its prosperity, of the majesty of its purpose and of its destiny; one would never cease to support it for its great principles of modern law, for the great problems which arouse humanity. The most enthusiastic,

{p. 160} the most universal liberalism would breathe through my writings. The people of the occident love the oriental style, and so the style of all official speeches, of all official manifestoes should always be adorned with images, always pompous, full of loftiness and reflections. **The people do not like atheistic governments**; in my communications with the public I should not fail to **put my acts under the invocation of the Divinity**, while tactfully associating my own star with that of the nation.

I should like the acts of my reign to be compared at every moment with those of past governments.

It would be the best way to bring out my good deeds and to arouse the gratitude which they deserve. It would be very important to **place in relief the mistakes of those who preceded me**, to show that I have always known how to avoid those mistakes. In this way, **people would entertain toward the regimes which preceded my power a sort of antipathy**, aversion even, which would end by becoming irreparable as an atonement.

Not only would I give to a certain number of newspapers the mission of continually exalting the glory of my reign, of throwing back upon governments other than mine the responsibility of the errors of European politics, but I should like most of these eulogies to appear to be echoes of foreign papers from which articles would be reproduced, true or false, which would render striking homage to my own policies. Besides, **I would have, abroad, some paid newspapers** whose support would be all the more efficacious since I would give them **an appearance of opposition on several points of detail**.

My principles, my ideas, my acts would be represented with the halo of youth, with the prestige of the new law in contrast to the decrepitude and decay of ancient institutions.

I realize that safety valves are necessary for public spirit, that intellectual activity, driven back at one point, is necessarily carried over to another. That is why I would not be afraid to throw the

{p. 161} nation into all sorts of theoretical and practical speculations about the industrial regime.

Outside of politics, moreover, I assure you that I would be a very good prince, that **I would peacefully allow the people to stir up philosophical or religious questions. Concerning religion, the doctrine of free examination** has become a sort of monomania. One must not oppose this tendency, in fact, it could not be done without danger. In those countries of Europe which are furthest advanced in civilization, **the invention of printing ended by giving birth to a literature that is insane, furious, unrestrained**, almost unclean - it is a great misfortune. Well, it is sad to say, but, to satisfy this rage of writing which possesses your parliamentary countries, it is almost enough merely not to thwart it.

**This pestiferous literature**, the course of which cannot be obstructed, and the platitude of writers and political men who would be at the head of journalism, would not fail to form **a shocking contrast to the dignity of the language which would fall from the steps of the throne**, with the vivacious and colorful dialectic upon which care would be taken to rest all the manifestations of power. You understand, now, why **I wished to surround the prince with this host of publicists, administrators, lawyers, business men and attorneys** who are essential to the drawing up of this quantity of official communications of which I have spoken to you, and the impression of which on public opinion would always be very strong.

Such, in brief, is the general disposition of my regime concerning the press.

MONTESQUIEU. Then you are through with it?

MACHIARELLI. Yes, and to my regret, for I was much more brief than I should have been. But our moments are counted and we must move rapidly.

{p. 162} THIRTEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. I need to recover a little from the emotions which you have caused me to undergo. What fertility of resource, what strange conceptions! There is poetry in all that and a certain fatal beauty which the modern Byrons would not deny; one finds there the scenic talent of the author of *Mandragore*.

MACHIARELLI. You think so, Monsieur de Decondat? Yet something tells me that you are not so certain in your irony; you are not sure that these things are impossible.

MONTESQUIEU. If it is my opinion which interests you, you shall have it; I await the conclusion.

MACHIAVELLI. I have not yet reached it.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, then, continue.

MACHIAVELLI. I am at your service.

MONTESQUIEU. At the outset, you outlined a formidable legislation concerning the press. You extinguished all voices, with the exception of your own. Here are the mute parties before you - **do you fear no conspiracies?**

MACHIAVELLI. No, for I should not be very foresighted if, with one twist of the hand, I did not disarm them all at once.

MONTESQUIEU. In that case, what are your methods?

MACHIAVELLI. **I would begin by deporting by the hundreds those who, with gun in hand, greeted the accession of my power.** I have been told that in Italy, in Germany and in France, **it was through secret societies that the agitators who conspired against the government were recruited.** I would tear to pieces the obscure threads which are woven like spider webs in dens.

MONTESQUIEU. And then?

MACHIAVELLI. The organization of a secret society, or affiliation with one, will be severely punished.

MONTESQUIEU. Good enough for the future; but the existing societies?

MACHIAVELLI. I shall expel, for public safety, all those who have

{p. 163} been definitely known to have been members. Those whom I do not reach will remain under a continual threat, for I shall put through a law which will **permit the government to deport**, by administrative means, **all who may have been affiliated with such societies.**

MONTESQUIEU. That is, without judgment.

MACHIAVELLI. Why do you say: without judgment? Is not the decision of a government a judgment? You may rest assured that there will be little pity for sedition-mongers. In countries continually troubled by civil discord, peace must be brought about by implacable acts of vigor; if there is a reckoning of victims to be made in order to insure tranquillity, it will be made. After that, the appearance of the one who commands becomes so imposing that no one dares to make an attempt on his life. **After having covered Italy with blood, Sylla may reappear in Rome as a private individual; no one would touch a hair of his head.**

MONTESQUIEU. I see that you are in a period of terrible execution; I hardly dare to make an observation. However, it seems to me that, even in following your plans, you could be less severe.

MACHIAVELLI. If my clemency were called upon, I should see. I can even confide to you that a portion of the severe provisions which I shall write into the law will become purely comminatory, on condition, however, that I am not forced to use them otherwise.

MONTESQUIEU. And that is what you call comminatory! Nevertheless your clemency reassures me a little; there are moments when, if some mortal were to hear you, you would freeze his blood.

MACHIAVELLI. Why? I lived very close to the Duke of Valentino who left behind him a terrible reputation, which he well deserved, for he had his pitiless moments; yet I assure you that once the necessity for execution was passed, he was good-tempered enough. The same could be said of almost all the absolute monarchs; at bottom they are good, especially so when it comes to children.

{p. 164} MONTESQUIEU. I am not sure that I do not prefer you at the height of your wrath: your gentleness is more frightening. But to return. You have destroyed the secret societies.

MACHIAVELLI. Don't go so fast: I did not do that: you will cause some confusion.

MONTESQUIEU. What and how?

MACHIAVELLI. **I prohibited secret societies the character and actions of which would escape the supervision of my government**, but I did not mean to deprive myself of a means of information, a secret influence which can be considerable if one knows how to make use of it.

MONTESQUIEU. What can you be thinking of in that connection?

MACHIAVELLI. I foresee the possibility of **giving to a certain number of these societies a sort of legal existence** or, rather, **to centralise them all under a single one the supreme head of which will be appointed by myself.** In this way **I shall hold in my hand the various revolutionary elements in the country.** The people who make up these societies **belong to all nations, to all classes, to all ranks;** I shall be kept informed of the most obscure political intrigues. It will be like a branch of my police force about which I shall soon tell you. This subterranean world of secret societies is filled with empty heads to which I shall not pay much attention, but there are directions to be given there, forces to move. If something is stirring, it is my hand which moves it; **if a plot is being prepared, I am the head of it:** I am the chief of the league.

MONTESQUIEU. And you believe that these hordes of democrats, these republicans, these anarchists, these terrorists will allow you to approach and break bread with them; you can believe that those who wish no human domination at all will accept a guide who will really be a master!

MACHIAVELLI. That is because you do not understand, Montesquieu! How much impotence and even simplicity is to be found among the majority of the men of European demagogism. **These tigers have the souls of sheep, heads full of wind**; one need

{p. 165} only speak their language to be admitted to their ranks. Besides, **almost all their ideas** have an incredible affinity with the doctrines of **absolute power**. **Their dream is** the absorption of the individual into **a symbolic unity**. They **demand** the complete realization of equality by virtue of **a power which can**, after all, **be in the hands of only a single man**. You see that even here I am the head of their school! And then it must be said that they have no choice. Secret societies will exist under the conditions that I have just described to you or they will not exist at all.

MONTESQUIEU. The finale of sic volo sic jubeo is never long in coming, with you. I see definitely that you are well guarded against conspiracies.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for it is just as well to tell you that **the legislation will not permit reunions or secret meetings which exceed a certain number of persons**.

MONTESQUIEU. How many?

MACHIAVELLI. You insist upon details? **No group of more than fifteen or twenty people**, if that satisfies you.

MONTESQUIEU. What! Friends numbering more than fifteen or twenty will not be able to dine together?

MACHIAVELLI. You are already becoming alarmed, I see, in the name of gallic gayety. Well, yes, **they may gather**, for my rule will not be as savage as you think, but **with one condition - that politics is not discussed**.

MONTESQUIEU. They may discuss literature?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, but **on condition that under cover of literature they do not gather for a political purpose**, for it is possible not to talk politics at all and still give to a banquet a character which will be understood by the public. That must not happen.

MONTESQUIEU. Alas! in such a system it is difficult for the citizens to live without being suspected by the government!

MACHIAVELLI. You are mistaken then; **none but rebels will suffer from these restrictions; no one else will be aware of them**. It goes without saying that here I have nothing to do with acts of rebellion against my power, or of attempts to overthrow

{p. 166} it, or of attacks either against the person of the prince or against his authority or his institutions. These are veritable crimes which are restrained by the common law of all legislations. They would be foreseen and punished in my kingdom according to classification and according to definitions which would not permit of the slightest direct or indirect attempt against the order of established things.

MONTESQUIEU. Permit me to have full confidence in you in this matter and not to inquire about your methods. Still it is not enough to establish a Draconian legislation; one must have a magistracy which is willing to apply it; that point is not without its difficulties.

MACHIAVELLI. There are no difficulties there.

MONTESQUIEU. Then you are going to destroy the judicial organization?

MACHIAVELLI. I destroy nothing: I modify and I initiate.

MONTESQUIEU. Then you are going to establish martial or provost's courts, exceptional tribunals?

MACHIAVELLI. No.

MONTESQUIEU. What then?

MACHIAVELLI. It is well for you to know first of all that I shall not need to decree a great many severe laws whose application I shall follow up. Many of them will already exist and will still be in force; for **all governments, liberal or absolute, republican or royalist, come up against the same difficulties; they are obliged, in critical moments, to have recourse to rigorous laws** some of which remain, others of which are weakened, depending on the needs which cause them. One must make use of both; concerning the latter, one must remember that they have not been explicitly abrogated, that they were perfectly good laws, and that **the return of the abuses which they anticipated makes their application necessary**. In this way the government seems to be performing nothing but an act of good administration, which is often the case. You see that it is only a question of giving a little elasticity to the action of the courts, which is always easy in centralized

{p. 167} countries where the magistracy is in direct contact with the administration, by means of the ministry upon which it depends. As for the new laws which will be enacted under my reign and which, for the most part, will have been given out in the form of simple decrees, the application will perhaps not be quite so easy, because in those countries where the magistrate has a life-appointment, he may oppose by himself, in the interpretation of the law, the too direct action of power. But I believe I have found a plan very ingenious, very simple, apparently perfectly lawful, which, without affecting the permanence of the magistracy, will modify what is too absolute in the consequences of the principle. **I shall issue a decree that the magistrates must retire when they reach a certain age**. I

do not doubt that here, too, I shall have opinion on my side, for it is a painful spectacle to see, as is frequently the case, that the judge, who is called upon to decide the loftiest and most difficult questions, falls into a decrepitude of mind which renders him incapable.

MONTESQUIEU. But, if you will permit, I have some ideas about the things of which you speak. The fact which you bring out does not at all conform to experience. With those men who live by the continual exercise of the mind, the intelligence does not weaken as you mention; that, if I may say so, is the privilege of thought in those people where it becomes the principal element. If, in the case of some magistrates, the faculties become unsettled with age, in the case of the greater number, they are preserved and their light continually increases; there is no need to replace them, for death causes in their ranks the natural voids which are necessary; but even if there were, indeed, among them as many examples of decadence as you claim, it would still be a thousand times more worthwhile, in the interests of justice, to tolerate that evil than to accept your remedy.

MACHIAVELLI. I have reasons superior to yours.

MONTESQUIEU. Reasons of state?

MACHIAVELLI. Perhaps. You may be sure of one thing: in this

{p. 166} new organization the magistrates will not deviate more than formerly in purely civil questions.

MONTESQUIEU. How do I know? For, according to your words, I already see that they will deviate in political questions.

MACHIAVELLI. They will not deviate; they will do their duty as they must do it, for, in political matters, it is necessary, in the interest of order, that the judges be always on the side of power. It would be the worst thing in the world if a sovereign could be affected by seditious decrees against the government which the whole country would seize upon at once. Of what value would it be to have forced the press to be silent if the judgments of the courts were free?

MONTESQUIEU. Under a modest appearance, your method is quite powerful, is it not? Since you attach such importance to it.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for it causes this spirit of resistance to disappear, this esprit de corps which is always so dangerous in judiciary companies which have conserved the memory, perhaps the cult, of past governments. It introduces in their midst a mass of new elements the influence of which are wholly favorable to the spirit which animates my reign. Every year twenty, thirty, or forty posts of magistrates which become vacant by retirement bring about **a change in the whole personnel of the courts** which may in this way be renewed from top to bottom every six months. One single vacancy, you know, may entail fifty appointments by the successive effect of the heads of different ranks who are being moved up. You can imagine what will take place when there are thirty or forty vacancies at once. It is not only that the collective spirit disappears in what politics there may be, but one becomes more closely united to the government, with disposes of a greater number of places. There are young men who are desirous to start their careers, who are no longer stopped by the perpetuity of those who precede them. They know that the government likes order, that the country likes it also, and it becomes a question merely of serving the two, in doing justice, when order plays its part.

{p. 169} MONTESQUIEU. But, except for incredible blindness, you will be accused of arousing in the magistracy a spirit of competition fatal to the judiciary bodies. I shall not show you what are the consequences of this, since I know that that would not stop you.

MACHIAVELLI. I make no claim to escape criticism; it is of little importance to me, provided that I do not hear it. In all things I shall have for a principle **the irrevocability of my decisions**, in spite of murmurings. A prince who acts thus is always sure of **gaining respect for his will-power**.

#### FOURTEENTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. I have already told you many times, and I repeat it once more, that I have no need to create and to organize everything; that I find in the institutions already existing a great many of the instruments of my power. Do you know what is the constitutional guarantee?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, and I am sorry for your sake, because, without meaning to, I deprive you of a surprise which you would perhaps not have been angry to prepare for me, with the cleverness of setting which is your strong point.

MACHIAVELLI. Of what are you thinking?

MONTESQUIEU. I am thinking of what is true, at least, for France, of which you seem to be speaking; and that is, that it is a law of circumstance which must be modified, if not made to disappear completely, under a regime of constitutional liberty.

MACHIAVELLI. I consider you very moderate on this point. According to your ideas, it is simply one of the most tyrannical restrictions in the world. What! When private persons will be injured by representatives of the government in the exercise of their duties, and they will bring them before the courts, the judges will have to answer them: "We cannot decide for you, the door of the praetorium is closed; go to the administration to ask for the authorization to bring suit against its officials." But

{p. 170} that would be a veritable denial of justice. How often will it happen that the government will authorize such suits?

MONTESQUIEU. What are you complaining of? It seems to me that that would satisfy you very well.

MACHIAVELLI. I only told you that in order to show you that, in states where justice comes across such obstacles, a government has not much to fear from the tribunals. It is always as provisional agreements that such exceptions are inserted into the law, but once the period of transition is passed, the exceptions remain, and that is as it should be, for as long as order reigns, they disturb no one, and when times are troubled, they are necessary.

There is another modern institution which serves the operation of central power with no less efficacy: that is the creation, in connection with the tribunals, of **a great magistracy which you call the public ministry** and which used to be called, with much more reason, the ministry of the King, because this office is essentially removable and revocable at the will of the Prince. I have no need to describe to you the influence of this magistrate over the courts close to which he has his bench; suffice it to say that it is considerable. Remember all this carefully. Now I am going to speak to you of the highest court of appeal which plays a considerable role in the administration of justice.

**The court of appeal is** more than a judiciary body; it is, to a certain extent, **a fourth power in the state, because it has the last word in the interpretation of the law.** So I shall repeat what I believe I told you concerning the Senate and the legislative assembly: such a court of justice which would be completely independent of the government would, in view of its sovereign and almost discretionary power of interpretation, be **able to overthrow it if it so wished.** It would suffice merely to restrain or to extend systematically, in the direction of liberty, the provisions of laws which regulate the exercise of political rights.

MONTESQUIEU. And apparently it is just the contrary that you are going to ask of it?

MACHIAVELLI. I shall ask nothing of it; it will itself do what is

{p. 171} suitable for it to do. For it is here that the different causes of influence which I mentioned above will cooperate the most strongly. The nearer the judge is to power, the more it belongs to him. The conservative spirit of the reign will develop here to a greater degree than anywhere else, and the laws of strict police politics will receive, at the hands of this great assembly, an interpretation so favorable to my power, that I shall be relieved of a multitude of restrictive measures which, without that, would become necessary.

MONTESQUIEU. One would really say, to hear you, that **laws are capable of the most fantastic interpretations. Are the legislative texts not clear and precise,** that they lend themselves to extensions or restrictions such as you intimate?

MACHIAVELLI. Surely it is not to the author of the *Esprit des Lois*, to the experienced magistrate who must have rendered so many excellent decisions, that I can hope to teach the meaning of jurisprudence. **There is no text, no matter how clear, which is not capable of receiving the most contrary interpretations,** even in pure civil law; but I beg you to remember that we are talking of political matters. Now, it **is a habit common to legislators of all times to draw up certain of their provisions in a manner elastic enough** to regulate cases or, according to circumstances, to introduce exceptions which it would not have been prudent to explain more precisely.

I am well aware that I must give you examples, for without that my proposition would seem too vague to you. The difficulty for me is to find one of so general a character as to dispense with entering into long details. Here is one which I take by preference, since a short time ago we touched upon it.

In speaking of the constitutional guarantee, you were saying that this exceptional law should be modified in a free country.

Well, I am supposing that this law exists in the state which I govern, I am supposing that it was modified; therefore I imagine that before me a law was promulgated which, in electoral

{p. 172} matters, permitted the prosecution of representatives of the government without the authorization of the Council of State.

The question comes up under my rule which, as you know, has introduced great changes in public equity. Someone wishes to bring suit against an official on the occasion of an electoral act; the magistrate of the public ministry rises and says: "The protection you wish to take advantage of can't be applied; it is no longer compatible with present institutions. The old law which dispenses with the authorization of the Council of State in such a case has been **tacitly abrogated.**" The courts answer yes or no, in the end the discussion is brought before the court of appeals and this high tribunal thus defines public equity on this point: "The old law is tacitly abrogated; **the authorization of the Council of State is necessary to prosecute public officials, even in electoral matters.**"

Here is another example, somewhat more special, it is borrowed by the police from the press: I have been told that in France there was a law which required, under penal sanction, that all those who made a living distributing and peddling pamphlets must be provided with an authorization given out by the public official who is, in each province, entrusted with the general administration. The law wished to regulate peddling and to subject it to strict supervision; that is the essential aim of this law; but the text of the provision reads, I suppose: "All distributors or peddlers must be provided with an authorization, etc."

Well, the court of appeals, if the question arises, will be able to say: "It is not only the professional act that the respective law had in view. It is any act whatsoever of distribution or peddling. Consequently, **even the author of a pamphlet or of a work,** several copies of which are distributed, even as gifts, without preliminary authorization, is party to distribution and peddling; therefore he comes under the threat of the penal provision."

You see at once what results from such an interpretation; instead of a simple police law, you have **a law which restricts the right to publish one's thoughts by means of the press.**

{p. 173} MONTESQUIEU. All you needed was to be a jurist.

MACHIAVELLI. That is absolutely necessary. **How are governments overthrown these days? By legal distinctions,** by the subtleties of constitutional law, by opposing to the ruling power all the means, all the weapons, all the contrivances which are not directly prohibited by law. And you expect that the ruling power would not make use of these stratagems of law which the parties employ with such obstinacy against the power? But then the struggle would not be equal, resistance would not even be possible; it would be necessary to abdicate.

MONTESQUIEU. You have so many stumbling-blocks to avoid that it would be a miracle if you anticipated all of them. The courts are not bound by their judgments. With a jurisprudence such as that which would be applied under your rule, you will have many lawsuits on your hands. The persons amenable to a tribunal will not weary of knocking at the door of the courts to demand other interpretations from them.

MACHIAVELLI. In the beginning that is possible; but when **a certain number of arrests will have definitely put jurisprudence in its proper place**, no one will continue to do what it forbids, and the source of the lawsuits will be exhausted. Public opinion would, in fact, be so much satisfied that when it came to a question of the meaning of laws, it would be referred to the official counsel of the administration.

MONTESQUIEU. And how, may I ask?

MACHIAVELLI. At certain critical times when there is fear that some difficulty may arise over such and such a point of legislation, the administration will declare, in the form of a notice, that such and such an act comes under the application of the law, that the law covers such and such a case.

MONTESQUIEU. But those are merely declarations which in no way bind the courts.

MACHIAVELLI. Undoubtedly, but these declarations have, none the less, a very great influence on the decisions of the courts of justice, coming as they do from an administration as powerful as

{p. 174} the one I have organized. They will particularly have great control over individual resolutions and, in many cases (not to say always), they will forestall annoying lawsuits; people will refrain from them.

MONTESQUIEU. The farther we advance, the more I see that **your government is becoming more and more paternal**. What you are speaking of are judiciary customs almost patriarchal. It does indeed seem impossible that you should not be credited with a solicitude which displays itself under so many ingenious forms.

MACHIAVELLI. You must, nevertheless, realize that **I am very far from the barbarous processes of government** which you seemed to attribute to me at the beginning of this conversation. You see that **violence plays no role**; I take my point of support where everyone takes it nowadays—from the law.

MONTESQUIEU. From the law of the strongest.

MACHIAVELLI. The law which is obeyed is always the law of the strongest: I know of no exception to this rule.

#### FIFTEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. Although we have surveyed a great sphere and you have organized almost everything, I need not conceal from you that there still remains much for you to do in order to reassure me completely as to the continuance of your power. **That which astonishes me the most in the world is that you have based it on universal suffrage**, that is, the most inconsistent element of its nature of which I am aware. Let us understand one another perfectly; you told me that you were king?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, king.

MONTESQUIEU. For life, or hereditary?

MACHIAVELLI. I am king as one is king in all the kingdoms of the world, **hereditary king with a succession from male to male**, in order of issue, with the perpetual exclusion of women.

MONTESQUIEU. You are not gallant.

{175} MACHIAVELLI. Pardon me, but I am prompted by the traditions of the Salian and Frankish monarchy.

MONTESQUIEU. You will, no doubt, explain to me how you expect to reconcile heredity with, for instance, the democratic suffrage of the United States?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes.

MONTESQUIEU. What! With this principle **you hope to bind the will of future generations?**

MACHIAVELLI. Yes.

MONTESQUIEU. For the present what I should like to see is the way you would manage with this suffrage when it is a question of applying it to the nomination of public officers.

MACHIAVELLI. What public officers? You know very well that, in monarchical states, it is the government which appoints the officials of all ranks.

MONTESQUIEU. That depends on which officials. Those which have to do with the administration of the townships are, in general, elected by the inhabitants, even under monarchical governments.

MACHIAVELLI. That will be changed by a law; in the future they will be appointed by the government.

MONTESQUIEU. And you will also appoint the representatives of the nation?

MACHIAVELLI. You know that that is not possible.

MONTESQUIEU. Then I pity you, for if you leave the voting to itself, if you do not arrange for some new plan, the assembly of the representatives of the people will not be long, under the influence of the parties, in filling up with deputies hostile to your power.

MACHIAVELLI. Just for that reason I had not the slightest intention of leaving the voting to itself.

MONTESQUIEU. I expected that. But what plan will you adopt?

MACHIAVELLI. The first point is to link to the government those who wish to represent the country. I shall impose upon the candidates the solemnity of the oath. Here it is not a question of an

{176} oath to the nation, as your revolutionaries of '89 understood it; I want **an oath of loyalty to the prince himself and to his constitution.**

MONTESQUIEU. But since in politics you do not fear to violate your own, how can you expect that they should be more scrupulous than yourself on this point?

MACHIAVELLI. I count little on the political conscience of men; I count on the power of opinion: no one will dare to debase himself before it by openly proving false to his sworn oath. They will dare still less since **the oath which I shall place upon them will precede the election** instead of following it, and they will be without any excuse for seeking votes, under these conditions, if they are not decided in advance to serve me. Now it is necessary to give to the government the means of resisting the influence of the opposition, of preventing them from making deserters of those who wish to defend it. At election time, the parties are in the habit of announcing their candidates and placing them before the government; I shall do as they do, I shall have candidates announced and I shall place them before the parties.

MONTESQUIEU. If you were not all-powerful, the method would be odious, for, while openly offering combat, you provoke blows.

MACHIAVELLI. I expect the agents of my government, from first to last, to see to it that my candidates are successful.

MONTESQUIEU. That goes without saying.

MACHIAVELLI. Everything is of the greatest importance in this matter. "The laws which establish suffrage are fundamental; the manner in which suffrage is granted is fundamental; the law which determines the manner of granting permits to vote is fundamental." (Esprit des Lois, page 12 et seq., Book II, et seq., Chapter II, et seq.) Was it not you who said that?

MONTESQUIEU. I do not always recognize my language when it passes through your lips; it seems to me that the words which you cite were applied to democratic government.

MACHIAVELLI. Undoubtedly, and you have already been able to see that my essential policy was to trust myself to the people, and

{p. 177} that although I wear a crown, my real and declared purpose is to represent it. Trustee of all the powers which it has delegated to me, I alone, after all, am its true representative. What I wish, it wishes; what I do, it does. Accordingly, it is indispensable that at the time of the elections the factions should not be able to substitute their influence for that of which I am the armed personification. Therefore I have found still other means to paralyze their efforts. You must know, for instance, that **the law which forbids gatherings will naturally apply to those which might be formed in view of the elections.** In this way, the parties will neither be able to plan together nor to make secret arrangements.

MONTESQUIEU. Why do you always put the parties first? Under pretext of putting shackles on them, do you not really put them on the voters themselves? The parties, in short, are only masses of voters; if the voters are not permitted to become enlightened through gatherings, through conferences, how will they be able to vote with a thorough knowledge of the matter?

MACHIAVELLI. I see that you do not know with what infinite art, with what guile, political passions frustrate prohibitive measures. Do not concern yourself with the voters - those who are animated by good intentions will always know for whom to vote. Besides, I shall use tolerance; not only shall I not forbid the gatherings which are formed in the interest of my candidates, but **I shall go so far as to close my eyes to the actions of some popular candidates who will agitate noisily in the name of liberty;** only I may as well tell you that **those who shout the loudest will be my own men.**

MONTESQUIEU. And how are you going to regulate the voting?

MACHIAVELLI. First of all, concerning the country people, I do not want the voters to go to vote in the great centers where they might come in contact with the spirit of opposition of the cities or towns and, from there, receive the pass-word which would come from the capital; I want them to vote by communes. The result of this plan, which seems so simple, will nonetheless be considerable.

MONTESQUIEU. That is easy to understand; you force the country vote to be divided among insignificant notoriety or, for lack of familiar names, to fall back on the candidates designated by your government. I should be very much surprised if, under this system, many capable or talented men were produced.

MACHIAVELLI. Public order has less need of talented men than of men devoted to the government. Great ability holds sway from the throne and among those who surround it - elsewhere it is useless; it is almost harmful even, for it can only act against the power.

MONTESQUIEU. Your aphorisms cut like a sword; I have no arguments to oppose you. Please let us go on with the rest of your electoral regulations.

MACHIAVELLI. For the reasons which I have just deduced for you I also do not want the vote by ticket which falsifies the election and which permits the coalition of men and of principles. Besides I shall divide the electoral colleges into a certain number of administrative districts in which there will be **room for the election of but a single deputy** and where, consequently, each voter will be able to place only one name on his voting paper. In addition, there must be the possibility of neutralizing the opposition in the districts where it makes itself too strongly felt. Thus, let us suppose that in the previous elections a district has been noted for the majority of its hostile votes, or that one may reasonably suppose that it will declare itself against the government candidates, nothing is easier than to remedy that: if this district has only a small population, it may be attached to a district nearby or far away, but of greater expanse, in which its votes will be drowned and its political spirit lost. If the hostile district, on the contrary, has a large population, it may be divided up into several parts and annexed to neighboring districts in which it will be completely destroyed. You understand that I am passing over a mass of details which are only accessories to the whole. Thus, when necessary, I divide the colleges into sections of colleges in order to give more oppor-

{p. 179} tunity for administrative action, and I have the colleges and the divisions of colleges presided over by municipal officers whose nominations depend upon the government.

MONTESQUIEU. I notice, with a certain surprise, that you are not making use of a measure which you recommended during the time of Leo X, and which consists of the substitution of votes by investigators after the elections.

MACHIAVELLI. That would perhaps be too difficult in these days, and I believe that this method should not be used except with the greatest caution. Besides, a clever government has so many other resources! Without directly buying the vote, with out-and-out money, nothing is easier than to influence the vote of the masses through administrative concessions, by promising here a port, there a market, further on a road, a canal; and inversely, by doing nothing for the cities and towns where the vote is unfavorable.

MONTESQUIEU. I have no objection to make to the profundity of these plans; but are you not afraid that people will say that sometimes you corrupt and sometimes you oppress popular suffrage? Are you not afraid of compromising your power in the struggles in which it will be so directly engaged? The slightest success obtained over your candidates will be a brilliant victory which will be a severe blow to your government. What keeps me constantly worried for you is that I see you always obliged to succeed in all things if you wish to avert a disaster.

MACHIAVELLI. You speak the language of fear, calm yourself. At the point to which I have arrived, I have succeeded in so many things that I cannot perish because of extremely small things. Bossuet's grain of sand is not made for true statesmen. I am so advanced in my career that I could, without danger, brave even storms; what, then, signify the minute difficulties of administration of which you speak? Do you believe that I claim to be perfect? Do I not know very well that more than one blunder will be committed around me? No, there is no doubt that I shall not be able to prevent a certain amount of pillage and scandal here

{p. 180} and there. Is that sufficient to hinder the whole thing from progressing? The main thing is not so much to make no errors as to accept the responsibility with an attitude of energy which commands respect from the slanderers. And, what is more, if the opposition should succeed in introducing some orators into my chamber, what difference does it make to me? I am not one of those who wish to reckon without the necessity of their times. One of my great principles is to oppose like to like. Just as I make use of the press by the press, I would make use of the courts by the courts; so I would have as many men as necessary ready and capable of speaking several hours without a stop. The chief thing is to have a compact majority and a reliable president. There is a particular art in conducting debates and carrying off the vote. And, besides, would I need to make use of the cunning of parliamentary strategy? **Nineteen-twentieths of the Chamber would be my own men who would vote on orders**, while I would pull the strings of an artificial and clandestinely recruited opposition; after that, let them make beautiful speeches: they will go into the ears of my deputies as the wind enters the keyhole of a lock. Now do you want me to speak to you of my Senate?

MONTESQUIEU. No, I know from Caligula what that will be like.

#### SIXTEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. One of the salient points of your politics is the annihilation of parties and the destruction of collective forces. You have certainly not failed in this program; yet I see all around you some things which you have not even touched upon. **You have not dealt with the clergy nor the University nor the bar nor the national militia nor the commercial corporations**; and yet it seems to me that there is more than one dangerous element in all that.

MACHIAVELLI. I cannot tell everything at once. Let us turn at once to the national militia so that I need not be bothered about it no

{p. 181} further. Their dissolution was, of necessity, one of the first acts of my power. The organization of a civilian guard cannot be reconciled with the existence of a regular army, since citizens in arms may, at a given time, be transformed into rebels. Nevertheless, this point is not without its difficulty. The national guard is a useless institution, but it bears a popular name. In military states it flatters the puerile instincts of certain bourgeois classes which, by a rather ridiculous eccentricity, unites to commercial habits the taste for warlike demonstration. It is a harmless prejudice which it would be all the more ill-advised to go counter to, since the prince must never have the semblance of separating his interests from those of the city which thinks it has found a guarantee in the arming of its inhabitants.

MONTESQUIEU. But you mentioned that you would break up this militia.

MACHIAVELLI. I would break it up in order to reorganize it upon other lines. The main thing is to put it under the immediate orders of the agents of civil authority and to relieve it of the prerogative of recruiting its chiefs by means of elections; that is what I am going to do. Besides, I shall organize it only in the proper places, and I reserve the right to dissolve it again and to re-establish it upon still other lines, if circumstances require. I have nothing more to say to you on this point. As for the **University**, the present order of things is practically

satisfactory. You are aware, of course, that these great bodies of instruction are no longer organized as they formerly were. I am assured that almost everywhere they have **lost their autonomy** and are no longer anything more than public services in care of the State. Now, as I have told you more than once, where the State is, the prince is; the moral direction of the public establishments is in his hands; it is his agents who inspire the spirit of youth. The heads as well as the members of the teaching body of all degrees are appointed by the government; they are attached to it, they depend upon it, that suffices; if here and there some traces of independent organization remain in any public school or academy whatsoever, it is easy to bring it

{p. 182} back to the common center of unity and direction. It is only a question of a regulation or even of a simple ministerial order. At full speed I pass over the details which need no closer attention. Yet I must not leave this subject without telling you that I consider it very important to **proscribe the studies of constitutional politics in the teaching of law.**

MONTESQUIEU. Indeed you have good reasons for that.

MACHIAVELLI. My reasons are simple enough; I do not wish the young people, on leaving school, to busy themselves with politics at random; at the age of eighteen, one goes about making constitutions as one makes tragedies. Such teaching can only give false ideas to the youth and initiate it prematurely into matters which are beyond the limits of its reasoning. It is with these notions poorly digested and poorly understood that unsound statesmen are prepared, utopians the temerity of whose spirit is later translated into temerity of action. The generations which are born under my reign must be brought up in the respect of established institutions, in the love of the prince; for this purpose I should make an ingenious use of the power of management of instruction: I believe that in general a great mistake is made in the school - contemporary history is neglected. It is at least just as essential to know one's own time as the time of Pericles; I should like to have the history of my reign, of myself while living, taught in the schools. That is how a new prince enters into the heart of a generation.

MONTESQUIEU. That would, of course, be a continual apology for all your deeds?

MACHIAVELLI. It is obvious that I would not have myself disparaged. The other method which I would use would have for a goal the reaction against free instruction, which cannot be directly proscribed. The universities contain armies of professors whose leisure time may be used for the propagation of good doctrines. I would have them give free courses in all the important towns, and in this way I would mobilize the education and the influence of the government.

{p. 183} MONTESQUIEU. In other words, **you absorb, you confiscate for your profit even the last gleams of independent thought.**

MACHIAVELLI. I confiscate nothing at all.

MONTESQUIEU. Are you going to permit professors other than your own to popularize science by the same methods, without license or authorization?

MACHIAVELLI. What! Do you expect me to sanction clubs?

MONTESQUIEU. No. Let us go on to something else.

MACHIAVELLI. Among the multitude of customary measures which the safety of my government requires, you have called my attention to **the bar**; that means going further than is necessary for the moment; besides, here I touch upon civil interests and you know that, in this matter, my rule of conduct is to abstain as much as possible. In the states where the bar is composed of a corporation, those amenable to a tribunal consider the independence of this institution as a guarantee inseparable from the right of the defense before the courts, and that it is a question of their honor, their interest, or their life. It is a serious thing to intervene here, for public opinion could be aroused at a cry which would not fail to cast aside the whole corporation. Nonetheless, I am aware that this order will be a center of influences constantly hostile to my power. **This profession** - and you know it better than I, Montesquieu - **develops characters which are cold and stubborn** in their principles, it develops spirits whose tendency is to **seek in the acts of power the element of pure legality**. The lawyer has not the lofty sense of social necessities to the same degree as has the magistrate; he sees the law from too near and from angles too petty to allow of just sentiment, whereas the magistrate. ...

MONTESQUIEU. Spare me the apology.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for I am not forgetting that I am face to face with a descendant of the great magistrates who upheld the throne of the monarchy in France with such brilliance.

MONTESQUIEU. And who rarely lent themselves to the registration of decrees when they violated the law of the state.

{p. 184} MACHIAVELLI. That is how they ended by overthrowing the state itself. I do not want my courts of justice to be parliaments and the lawyers, under immunity of their gowns, to play politics there. The greatest man of the century to whom your country had the honor of giving birth, said: "I should like to cut the tongue of a lawyer who has anything to say against the government." Modern customs are milder; I should not go so far. On the first day, and in fitting circumstances, I shall limit myself to doing a very simple thing: I shall issue a decree which, while respecting the independence of the corporation, will nevertheless **arrange for the lawyers to receive the investiture of their profession from the sovereign**. In the expose of the motives of my decree, it will not, I believe, be very difficult to show the people that they will find in this method of appointment a more weighty guarantee than when the corporation draws upon itself, that is, with the elements necessarily a little confused.

MONTESQUIEU. It is only too true that one may lend to the most detestable measures the language of reason! But look here, what are you going to do now in connection with the **clergy**? Here is an institution which depends on the state only on one side and which is **set off by a spiritual power** the seat of which is not with you. I know of nothing more dangerous to your power, I declare, than this power which **speaks in the name of heaven and the roots of which are all over the earth**: do not forget that the Christian word is a word of liberty. Undoubtedly the laws of the state have established a profound demarcation between religious and

political authority; undoubtedly the word of the ministers of the cult cannot be heard except in the name of the Gospel; but the divine spiritualism which is evolved from it is the stumbling-block of political materialism. It is **this book, so humble and so gentle, which has destroyed by itself the Roman empire and Caesarism** and its power. Those nations which are frankly Christian will always escape despotism, for **Christianity raises the dignity of man too high for despotism to reach**, since it develops moral forces upon which human power has no hold.

{p. 185} (Esprit des Lois, page 371, Book XXIV, Chapter I et seq.) **Beware of the priest: he depends only upon God, and his influence is everywhere**, in the sanctuary, in the family, in the school. You can do nothing to him: his hierarchy is not yours, he obeys a constitution which is decided neither by the law nor by the sword. If you reign over a Catholic nation and you have the clergy for enemy, you will perish sooner or later, even if all the people were for you.

MACHIAVELLI. I am not quite sure why you are pleased to **make of the priest an apostle of liberty**. I have never seen that, neither in ancient nor in modern times; **I have always found in the priesthood a natural support of absolute power**. Note this: if, in the interests of my establishment, I had to make concessions to the democratic spirit of my epoch, if I took universal suffrage as the foundation of my power, it is only a stratagem required by the times. **I claim the benefit of divine right nonetheless, I am king by the grace of God** nonetheless. In view of this, the clergy must support me, for my principles of authority conform to their own. If, however, they show themselves rebellious, if they take advantage of their influence to carry on an underhand war against my government ...

MONTESQUIEU. Well, what then?

MACHIAVELLI. You who speak of the **influence of the clergy**, do you not know to what point it was able to make itself unpopular in certain Catholic states? **In France, for instance, journalism and the press defamed it** to such an extent before the masses, they ruined its mission so greatly, that if I reigned in its kingdom, do you know what I could do?

MONTESQUIEU. What?

MACHIAVELLI. **I could provoke a schism in the Church** which would break all the bonds **which attach the clergy to the court of Rome**, for that is the Gordian knot. Through my press, through my publicists, through my statesmen I would have the following words circulated: "Christianity is independent of Catholicism; what Catholicism forbids, Christianity permits; the inde-

{p. 186} pendency of the clergy, its submission to the court of Rome, are purely Catholic dogmas; such an order of things is a continual menace to the safety of the state. **The loyal subjects of the kingdom should not have a foreign prince as their spiritual leader**; that is to leave internal order to the discretion of a power which might become hostile at any moment; this hierarchy of the Middle Ages, this protectorate of the people as children can no longer be reconciled with the virile genius of modern civilization, with its wisdom and its independence. Why go to Rome to seek a director of conscience? Why should the head of the political authority not be at the same time the head of the religious authority? **Why should the sovereign not be pontiff?**" Those are the words I would have circulated by the press, especially by the liberal press, and, what is very probable, the masses of the people would hear them with joy.

MONTESQUIEU. If you can believe that and if you dared to attempt such an undertaking, you would learn promptly and terribly **the power of Catholicism**, even among the nations where it seems to be weakened. (Esprit des Lois, Page 393, Book XXV, Chapter XII.)

MACHIAVELLI. Attempt it, great God! But I ask pardon, on my knees, of our divine master for having as much as described this sacrilegious doctrine, inspired by the hatred of Catholicism; but God, who has instituted human power, does not forbid it to protect itself against the enterprises of the clergy, who violate the precepts of the Gospel when they show insubordination to the prince. I know that they will not conspire except because of an imperceptible influence, but I would find the way to arrest the intention which directs the influence, even at the heart of the court of Rome.

MONTESQUIEU. How?

MACHIAVELLI. It would suffice for me to point out at the Holy See the moral condition of my people, trembling under the yoke of the Church, aspiring to cast it off, capable of detaching itself

{p. 187} from the Catholic unity and of throwing itself into the schism of the Greek or Protestant Church.

MONTESQUIEU. Threat instead of action!

MACHIAVELLI. How mistaken you are, Montesquieu, and how you disregard my respect for the pontifical throne! The only role that I wish to play, the sole mission which belongs to me as Catholic sovereign would be just that of defending the Church. In the present day, you know, temporal power is gravely threatened, both by irreligious hate and by the ambition of the countries north of Italy. Well, **I would say to the Holy Father: "I shall support you against all of them, I shall save you** - it is my duty, it is my mission. But at least do not attack me - **support me with your moral influence.**" Would that be too much to ask when I would endanger my popularity by holding myself up to those who are called the European democracy as defender of temporal power which is, alas! completely discredited at present. This danger would not stop me. Not only would I check any enterprise against the sovereignty of the Holy See on the part of the neighboring states, but if, by misfortune, it were attacked, **if the Pope were to be driven out of the Papal States**, as has already happened, **my bayonets alone would bring him back** and would keep him there always as long as I live.

MONTESQUIEU. That would indeed be a master stroke, for if you kept a perpetual garrison at Rome, you would practically have the Holy See at your command, as if it were in some province of your kingdom.

MACHIAVELLI. Do you think that after such a service rendered to the papacy, it would refuse to uphold my power; that the Pope himself, at need, would refuse to come to consecrate me in my capital? Are such events unexampled in history?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, examples of everything can be found in history. But if, instead of finding a Borgia or a Dubois on Saint Peter's throne, as you seem to expect, **you should find a pope who resisted your intrigues and braved your anger, what would you do?**

{p. 188} MACHIAVELLI. In that case, **under pretext of defending the temporal power, I would bring about his fall.**

MONTESQUIEU. You have what is called genius!

#### SEVENTEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. I said that you had genius; in truth, a certain type of it is necessary to conceive and to execute so many things. **Now I understand the apologue of the god Vishnu; you have a hundred arms** like the Hindu idol and each one of your fingers **touches a spring**. In the same way that you touch everything, are you also able to see everything?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for I shall **make of the police an institution so vast** that in the heart of my kingdom **half of the people shall see the other half**. May I give you some details on the organization of my police?

MONTESQUIEU. Go ahead.

MACHIAVELLI. I shall begin by creating a ministry of police which will be the most important of my ministries and which will centralize, as much for the exterior as for the interior, the numerous functions which I give over to that part of my administration.

MONTESQUIEU. But if you do that, your subjects will see immediately that they are caught in a prodigious net.

MACHIAVELLI. If this ministry incurs displeasure, I shall abolish it and I shall call it, if that pleases you better, the ministry of state. Besides, I shall organize in other ministries corresponding functions the greater part of which will be quietly blended in with what you call nowadays the ministry of the interior and the ministry of foreign affairs. You understand perfectly that here I am not interested in diplomacy but only in the proper means to assure my security against the factions, foreign as well as domestic. Well then, you may believe me that, in this connection, I shall find the majority of monarchs about in the same situation as myself, that is, very much disposed to second my views, which would

{p. 189} consist in creating **international police services in the interest of mutual safety**. If, as I scarcely doubt, I succeed in attaining this result, here are some of the forms by which my police would manifest themselves abroad: **Men of pleasure and good company in the foreign courts, to keep an eye on** the intrigues of the **princes and** of the **exiled pretenders; proscribed revolutionaries**, some of whom I would not despair of being able to persuade, with money, to be of service to me as agents of transmission in regard to the secret practices of underhand demagogy; the establishment of **political newspapers** in the great capitals, **printers and book stores** placed in the same conditions and **secretly subsidized** in order to follow more closely, by means of the press, the direction of public thought.

MONTESQUIEU. It is no longer the factions of your kingdom but the very soul of humanity that you will end up by conspiring against.

MACHIAVELLI. You know that I do not take fright at big words. I want to arrange that **every politician who goes abroad to plot can be observed**, noted from one point to another, **until his return to my kingdom, where he will be imprisoned** for good and all so that he will no longer be in a position to plot again. In order to have well in hand the thread of revolutionary intrigues, I am dreaming of a plan which would, I think, be rather clever.

MONTESQUIEU. Good God, what may that be!

MACHIAVELLI. I should like to have a prince of my house, seated on the steps of my throne, who would **play at being a malcontent**. His mission would be to **hold himself up as a liberal, a slanderer of my government and thus to rally** (in order to observe them more closely) those who, in the highest ranks of my kingdom, might go in a little for demagogy. Riding above domestic and foreign intrigues, the prince to whom I would confide this mission would thus play the game of dupe to those who would not be in the secret of the comedy.

MONTESQUIEU. What! You would entrust to a prince of your house powers which you yourself class as befitting the police?

MACHIAVELLI. And why not? I know of reigning princes who,

{p. 190} while in exile, were attached to the secret police of certain cabinets.

MONTESQUIEU. If I continue to listen to you, Machiavelli, it is only to have the last word of this shocking wager.

MACHIAVELLI. Do not be so indignant, M. de Montesquieu; in the *Esprit des Lois* you called me a great man. (*Esprit des Lois*, Page 68, Book VI, Chapter V.)

MONTESQUIEU. You are making me atone dearly for that; it is to punish myself that I listen to you. Pass as quickly as you can over so many sinister details.

MACHIAVELLI. At home I am obliged to re-establish the black cabinet.

MONTESQUIEU. Re-establish ...

MACHIAVELLI. Your best kings made use of it. The secrecy of letters must not be permitted to serve as a covering for plots.

MONTESQUIEU. It is that which makes you tremble; I understand it

MACHIAVELLI. You are mistaken, for there will be plots under my reign; there must be.

MONTESQUIEU. What now?

MACHIAVELLI. There will perhaps be real plots, I cannot answer for that; but certainly **there will be simulated plots**. At certain times it may be an excellent method to **arouse the sympathy of the people in favor of the prince, when his popularity is waning**. In intimidating public spirit, certain severe measures may be obtained when necessary, or those which already exist may be maintained. False conspiracies which, of course, must be made use of only with the greatest caution, have still another advantage: they permit the discovery of real plots by giving rise to investigations which lead to a thorough search for traces of whatever one suspects. Nothing is more precious than the life of the sovereign: it must be surrounded by innumerable guarantees, that is, innumerable agents, but at the same time it is necessary that this **secret militia** be concealed so cleverly that **the sovereign seems to show**

{p. 191} **no fear when he shows himself in public**. I have been told that in Europe the precautions in this connection were so perfected that a prince who goes out into the streets might seem to be a simple citizen who is taking a walk, unguarded, among the crowd, whereas **he is really surrounded by two or three thousand protectors**. In addition, I expect that **my police will be interspersed in all ranks of society**. There will be no secret meeting, no committee, no salon, no intimate hearth where there will not be **an ear to hear what is said in every place, at every hour**. Alas, for those who have wielded power it is an astonishing phenomenon with what facility men denounce one another. What is still more astonishing is the faculty of observation and of analysis which is developed in those who make up **the political police**; you have no idea of their ruses, their disguises, their instincts, the passion which they bring to their researches, their patience, their impenetrability; there are men of all ranks who go in for this profession through - how shall I say it? - a sort of love of the art.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah! Draw the curtain!

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for at the very bottom of power there are secrets which terrify the eye. I spare you the description of more somber things which you have not heard. With the system that I shall organize, **I shall be so completely informed** that I shall be able to tolerate even guilty actions because at any moment of the day I will have the power to stop them.

MONTESQUIEU. Tolerate them? And why?

MACHIAVELLI. Because in European states **the absolute monarch must not use force indiscreetly**; because, in the depths of society, there are always secret activities about which nothing can be done when they are not formulated; because it is necessary to **take the greatest care to avoid alarming public opinion** concerning the security of power; because the parties are satisfied with murmurs, with harmless teasing, when they are reduced to impotence, and to claim to disarm them even of their temper would be folly. They will, then, be heard complaining here and there, in news-

{p. 192} papers and books; they will attempt allusions against the government in speeches and addresses; under various pretexts, they will make some small manifestations of their existence; all that will be very timid, I swear to you, and the public, if informed, will be tempted only to laughter. I will be considered very good to support it, **I shall pass for too good-natured; that is why I shall tolerate** what seems to me to be without any danger: I do not even wish my government to be considered suspicious.

MONTESQUIEU. This language reminds me that you have left a gap, and a very serious one, in your decrees.

MACHIAVELLI. Which one?

MONTESQUIEU. **You have not touched individual liberty.**

MACHIAVELLI. **I shall not touch it.**

MONTESQUIEU. You think not? If you have reserved the faculty of toleration, you have also reserved the right to prevent all that appears dangerous to you. If the interest of the state, or even something slightly important, requires that a man be arrested in your kingdom at a particular moment, how can it be done **if the law of habeas corpus exists in the legislation**; if individual arrest is preceded by certain formalities, by certain guarantees? While the procedure is going on, time will be passing.

MACHIAVELLI. Allow me to state that even if I respect individual liberty, I did not forbid the judiciary organization to make some useful modifications in this regard.

MONTESQUIEU. I was well aware of that.

MACHIAVELLI. Oh! Do not be so superior, it will be the easiest thing in the world. Who is it who generally makes the laws on individual liberty in your parliamentary states?

MONTESQUIEU. It is a council of magistrates, the number and independence of whom are the guarantee of those brought before the courts.

MACHIAVELLI. It is certainly a vicious organization, for how do you expect that, with the slowness of the deliberations of a council, justice can have the necessary rapidity of apprehension of evil-doers?

{p. 193} MONTESQUIEU. Which evil-doers?

MACHIAVELLI. I am speaking of those who commit murder, robbery, crimes and misdemeanors which come under the common law. This tribunal must be given the unity of action which is necessary to it; **I replace your council by a single magistrate, charged with making laws concerning the arrest of criminals.**

MONTESQUIEU. But it is not a question now of criminals; with the aid of this regulation, you threaten the liberty of all the citizens. At least make a distinction in the cause of accusation.

MACHIAVELLI. That is just what I do not wish to do. Is the one who undertakes something against the government not as guilty as, if not more so than, the one who commits an ordinary crime or misdemeanor? Passion or misery mitigates many faults, but who forces people to busy themselves with politics? So I wish no distinction between the misdemeanors of common law and the political misdemeanors. Where, then, is the mentality of modern governments, to set up a sort of criminal court of justice for their slanderers? In my kingdom, **the insolent journalist will mingle in the prisons with the plain thief** and will appear at his side before the correctional jurisdiction. **The conspirator will be seated before the criminal jury, side by side with the counterfeiter and the murderer.** That is an excellent legislative modification, you must notice, for public opinion, seeing the conspirator treated as the equal of the ordinary criminal, will end up by **confusing the two types in the same scorn.**

MONTESQUIEU. You are ruining the very foundation of moral sense; but what does that matter to you? What surprises me is that you are keeping a criminal jury.

MACHIAVELLI. In those states which are centralized like mine, the public officials are the ones who appoint the members of the jury. In a question of a simple political misdemeanor, my minister of justice can always, when necessary, compose the chamber of judges who are well versed in such things.

MONTESQUIEU. Your internal legislation is irreproachable; it is time to pass to other matters.

{p. 194} EIGHTEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. Up to now you have occupied yourself only with the forms of your government and the rigorous laws necessary to maintain it. That is a great deal, and yet it is nothing. There still remains the most difficult of all problems for a sovereign who wishes to exert absolute power in a European state accustomed to representative customs.

MACHIAVELLI. And what is this problem?

MONTESQUIEU. **The problem of your finances.**

MACHIAVELLI. That question has not been foreign to my calculations, for I remember having told you that **everything resolved itself into a question of figures.**

MONTESQUIEU. All very well, but here it is the very nature of the thing which will resist you.

MACHIAVELLI. You disturb me, I confess, for I date from a century of barbarism concerning political economy and I understand very little of those things.

MONTESQUIEU. I am setting my mind at rest for you. In any case allow me to ask you a question. I remember having written, in the *Esprit des Lois*, that **the absolute monarch was forced**, by the principle of his government, **to impose only minor taxes** on his subjects. (*Esprit des Lois*, Page 80, (Chapter X, Book XIII.) Will you give your subjects at least this satisfaction?

MACHIAVELLI. I do not promise that and I know nothing, in truth, more debatable than the proposition which you put forth there. How do you expect the machinery of monarchical power, the brilliance and the representation of a great court to exist without imposing heavy sacrifices on the nation? Your theory might be true in Turkey, in Persia, heaven knows where! in small countries without industry, where the people have no means to pay the tax; but **in European societies, where wealth overflows** the sources of labor and may be taxed in so many varied forms, where luxury is a means of government, where the upkeep and

{p. 195} the expense of all the public services are centralized in the hands of the state, where all the great posts, all the powers, are very highly salaried, how do you expect one to limit himself to moderate taxes, especially when one is sovereign master?

MONTESQUIEU. That is very true and I abandon my theory, the real meaning of which seems to have escaped you. Your government, then, will be expensive; it is evident that it will cost more than a representative government.

MACHIAVELLI. It is possible.

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, but it is just here that the difficulty begins. I know how the representative governments provide for their financial needs, but I have no idea of the means of existence of absolute power in modern societies. If I question the past, I see very clearly that it can exist only under the following conditions: in the first place, the absolute monarch must be a military chief. You undoubtedly understand that?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes.

MONTESQUIEU. In addition he must be a victor, for it is from war that he must demand the principal resources which are necessary to maintain his pomp and his armies. If he demanded them by taxation, he would crush his subjects. You see by this that it is not because the absolute monarch spends less that he must husband his resources, but because the law of his subsistence is elsewhere. Now, today, war no

longer brings in profits to those who wage it: it ruins the victors as well as the vanquished. That is a source of revenue which is out of your reach.

Taxes are left, but, of course, the absolute prince must be able to do without the consent of his subjects in this regard. **In the despotic states, there is a legal fiction** which permits them to tax at will: **in law, the sovereign is supposed to possess all the goods of his subjects.** When he takes something from them, he is only taking back what belongs to him. Thus, no resistance.

And finally the prince must be able to dispose of the resources procured for him by taxes without discussion as well as without control. Such are the inevitable steps of absolutism; you must

{p. 196} agree that there would be much to do in order to achieve that. If the people of the present day are as indifferent as you say to the loss of their liberties, that does not mean that they will be so when it comes to their interests; their interests are bound to an economic regime exclusive of despotism: if you are not arbitrary in finances, you cannot be so in politics. Your whole reign will be overthrown because of the budget.

MACHIAVELLI. I am very calm on that point, as I am on all the rest.

MONTESQUIEU. That is what we shall have to see; let us come to the point. The vote on taxes, by the representatives of the nation, is the fundamental rule of modern states: **will you accept the vote on taxation?**

MACHIAVELLI. Why not?

MONTESQUIEU. Take care! This principle is the most express consecration of the sovereignty of the nation: for **to grant it the right to vote taxes means also granting it the right to refuse them, to limit them,** to reduce to nothing the prince's possibilities of action and consequently to destroy the prince himself, if need be.

MACHIAVELLI. You are categorical. Continue.

MONTESQUIEU. **Those who vote the taxes are themselves taxpayers.** Here their interests are strictly united to those of the nation, at a point where it will necessarily keep its eyes wide open. Thus you are going to find its representatives as little accommodating in connection with legislative credit as you found them yielding in connection with liberties.

MACHIAVELLI. It is here that the weakness of the argument is revealed; will you be good enough to note two considerations which you have forgotten. In the first place **the representatives of the nation receive salaries;** taxpayers or no, they are personally disinterested in the vote of taxes.

MONTESQUIEU. I agree that the idea is practical and the observation wise.

MACHIAVELLI. You see the disadvantage of considering the

{p. 197} things too systematically; the smallest, clever modification suffices to change everything. **You would perhaps be right if I based my power on the aristocracy or on the bourgeois classes which might,** at a given moment, **refuse me their cooperation;** but, in the second place, **as a basis of action I have the proletariat of whom the mass possesses nothing.** The burdens of the state scarcely weigh upon them and I would even arrange that these expenses should not touch them at all. **Fiscal measures will trouble the working classes very little.**

MONTESQUIEU. If I understand correctly, that is all very clear: **the possessors will be forced to pay by the sovereign will of those who possess nothing.** That is the ransom exacted of wealth by numbers and poverty.

MACHIAVELLI. Is that not just?

MONTESQUIEU. It is not even true, for in present-day society, from the economic point of view, there are neither rich nor poor. The artisan of yesterday is the bourgeois of tomorrow, by virtue of the labor law. If you strike at the territorial or industrial bourgeoisie, do you know what you are doing? In reality you are making emancipation through labor more difficult, **you are retaining a greater number of workers in the bonds of the proletariat.** It is an aberration to believe that the proletariat can profit by blows struck at production. By impoverishing, through fiscal laws, those who have possessions, unnatural situations are created and, in time, even those who possess nothing become still poorer.

MACHIAVELLI. Those are pretty theories, but I have just as pretty ones to offer in contradiction, if you wish.

MONTESQUIEU. No, for you have not yet solved the problem which I placed before you. First you must obtain what you need to meet the expense of absolute sovereignty. It will not be as easy as you think, even with a legislative chamber in which you will have an assured majority, even with the omnipotence of popular mandate with which you are invested. Tell me, for instance, how you can bend the financial mechanism of the modern states to the

{p. 198} demands of absolute power. I repeat, it is the very nature of things which is in opposition. **The civilized peoples of Europe have surrounded the administration of their finances with guarantees** so binding, so jealous, so multiple, that they leave no more room for collection than for the arbitrary use of public funds.

MACHIAVELLI. And what is this marvelous system?

MONTESQUIEU. That can be shown in few words. The perfection of the financial system in modern times rests on two fundamental bases - control and publicity. In these essentials lies the guarantee of the taxpayers. A sovereign cannot meddle with it without saying indirectly

to his subjects: "You have order, I wish disorder, I wish obscurity in the management of public funds; I need that because there is a mass of expenditures which I desire to be able to make without your approval, **deficits which I desire to be able to conceal**, receipts which I desire to have the means of disguising or of increasing according to circumstances."

MACHIAVELLI. Your beginning is good.

MONTESQUIEU. In free, industrial countries, everybody is familiar with the finances, by necessity, by interest and by trade, and your government can deceive no one in this regard.

MACHIAVELLI. Who told you that I wish to deceive anyone?

MONTESQUIEU. The entire work of the financial administration, no matter how vast and how complicated it may be in its details, in the last analysis comes down to two very simple operations - **receiving and spending**. It is around these two kinds of financial acts that gravitate the multitude of laws and special regulations which, in themselves, have a very simple end in view: to act so that the taxpayer pays only the necessary and regularly established taxes, and to act so that **the government cannot apply public funds to expenditures other than those approved by the nation**. I leave aside all that relates to the assessment and to the method of collecting the taxes, to the practical means of assuring the completeness of the collection, the order and the precision in the

{p. 199} fluctuations of public funds; these are but accounting details which I have no intention of discussing with you. I only wish to show you how **publicity moves along with control** in the best organized systems of political finance in Europe.

One of the most important problems to be solved was to bring forth from obscurity, to make visible to all eyes, the elements of collection and expenses upon which is based the use of the public fortune in the hands of the government. This result has been attained by the creation of what is called in modern language **the state budget**, which is the estimate of the receipts and the expenses, anticipated not for a period of remote time, but each year for use the following year. The annual budget is, then, the main point and, in a way, the generator of the financial situation which improves or becomes worse in proportion to the established results. The items of which it is composed are prepared by the various administrators in the department, who are appointed for that purpose. As the foundation of their work they take the allocations of previous budgets introducing the necessary modifications, additions and retrenchments. The whole is given to the minister of finance who centralizes the documents which are transmitted to him, and who presents to the legislative assembly what is called the plan of the budget. This great public work, printed, reproduced in a thousand newspapers, **reveals to all eyes the internal and external politics of the state**, the civil, judicial and military administration. It is examined, discussed and voted upon by the representatives of the country, after which it is executed in the same manner as the other laws of the state.

MACHIAVELLI. Allow me to admire with what clarity of deduction and what propriety of terms, completely modern, the illustrious author of the *Esprit des Lois* has been able, in financial matters, to get away from the somewhat vague theories and the occasionally rather ambiguous terms in the great work which has made him immortal.

MONTESQUIEU. The *Esprit des Lois* is not a financial treatise.

MACHIAVELLI. Your sobriety on this point deserves to be praised

{p. 200} all the more, since you could have discussed it very competently. Be good enough to continue; I am listening with the greatest interest.

## NINETEENTH DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. The creation of the budgetary system has brought with it, one may say, all the other financial guarantees which are today the share of well-regulated political societies.

Thus, the first law which the economy of the budget necessitates is that **the funds required correspond with the existing resources**. That is a balance which must always be openly expressed by real and authentic figures, and recourse has been made to a very wise measure in order better to assure this important result and in order that the legislator who votes on the propositions submitted to him should not be carried away by his ardor. The general budget of the state is divided into two distinct budgets: **the budget of expenditures and the budget of revenue, which must be voted upon separately**, each by a special law.

In this way, the attention of the legislator is forced to concentrate, in turn, separately, on the active and passive situation, and his decisions are not influenced in advance by the general balance of revenue and expenses.

He scrupulously controls these two elements and it is, in the last analysis, by their comparison, by their strict harmony, that the general vote on the budget is produced.

MACHIAVELLI. That is all very well, but are the expenditures by any chance impassably limited by the legislative vote? Is that possible? Can a chamber, without paralyzing the exercise of the executive power, forbid its sovereign to provide for unforeseen expenses through emergency measures?

MONTESQUIEU. I see that that disturbs you, but I cannot regret it.

MACHIAVELLI. Even in constitutional states is it not expressly reserved for **the sovereign to set up, through decrees, supple-**

{p. 201} **mentary or unusual credits** in the interval between legislative sessions?

MONTESQUIEU. That is true, but on one condition, which is that these decrees are converted into laws at the meeting of the chambers. Their approval must intervene.

MACHIAVELLI. If it intervenes after the expenditure is pledged, in order to ratify what is done, I should not be averse to it.

MONTESQUIEU. I believe you; but, unfortunately, they do not stop there. The most advanced modern financial legislation forbids acting contrary to the normal anticipations of the budget, other than by laws leading to the opinion of supplementary and extraordinary credits. Expenses cannot be pledged without the intervention of the legislative power.

MACHIAVELLI. But in that case one can no longer even govern.

MONTESQUIEU. It seems that one can. The modern states have reflected that the legislative vote of the budget would end by becoming illusory, with the abuses of **supplementary and extraordinary credits**; that, in short, the expenses must be capable of being limited when the resources were so; that political events were not able to vary financial facts from one moment to another, and that the intervals between the sessions were not long enough to make it impossible to provide advantageously for them by an extra-budgetary vote.

They went still farther - they wished to arrange that once the resources were voted for such and such purposes, they might revert to the treasury if they were not used; they thought that the government, while remaining within the limits of allotted credits, must **not be able to use the funds of one purpose to appropriate them for another**, to cover this, to uncover that, by means of **switching funds from one ministry** to another through decrees; for that would be to evade their legislative destination and to return, by an ingenious detour, to arbitrary finance.

For this purpose they conceived what is called **the specifying of funds by subjects**, that is, that the vote of expenditures takes place through special subjects containing only correlative purposes

{p. 202} and of the same nature for all the ministries. Thus, for instance, topic A will include, for all the ministries, expenditure A; topic B expenditure B; and so on. The result of this plan is that the funds which are not used must be annulled in the accounts of the various ministries and carried over as revenue in the budget of the following year. I need not tell you that the ministerial responsibility is the sanction of all these measures. The crown of the financial guarantees is the establishment of an accounting chamber, a sort of supreme court in its way, permanently charged with the exercise of the functions of jurisdiction and control over the accounts, the manipulation and the use of public funds, even having as its mission to point out those parts of financial administration which could be improved from the double point of view of expenditures and of revenue. These explanations are sufficient. Do you not find that with such an organization, absolute power would be in an embarrassing position?

MACHIAVELLI. I am still overwhelmed, I admit, by this financial inroad. You have taken me at my weak point: I told you that I understood very little of these matters but, you may believe me, I would have ministers who could refute all that and point out the danger of the majority of these measures.

MONTESQUIEU. Could not you yourself do that a little?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, I could. I leave to my ministers the trouble of making pretty theories; that will be their principal occupation. As for myself, **I shall talk finance to you rather as a statesman than an economist**. There is one thing which you are too inclined to forget, and that is that the question of finances is, of all the divisions of politics, the one which most easily lends itself to the maxims of the treatise of The Prince. Those states which have budgets so methodically ordered and official writings so well regulated, impress me as do the business men who have their **books perfectly kept and who are, after all, wholly ruined**. Why, who has greater budgets than your parliamentary governments? What is it that costs more than the democratic republic of the United States, or than the royal republic of England? It is true

{p. 203} that the immense resources of this last-named power are used in the service of the most profound and the most widespread politics.

MONTESQUIEU. You have gotten away from the question. What are you trying to bring out?

MACHIAVELLI. This: **the rules of the financial administration of the states have no relation to those of domestic economy**, which seems to be the type of your conceptions.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah! the same distinction as between politics and morals?

MACHIAVELLI. Well, yes; is it not universally recognized and practiced? Were things not the same even in your time, although much less advanced in this respect, and was it not you yourself who said that the states permitted themselves certain financial digressions which would put to shame even the most intemperate gentleman's son?

MONTESQUIEU. It is true I said that, but if you draw from it an argument favorable to your thesis, that is a real surprise for me.

MACHIAVELLI. You mean, no doubt, that one must not glory in what is done but in what should be done.

MONTESQUIEU. Precisely.

MACHIAVELLI. I reply that one must desire the possible and that what is done universally cannot but be done.

MONTESQUIEU. That is pure practice, I agree.

MACHIAVELLI. And I have an idea that if we were to balance the accounts, as you say, my government, absolute as it is, would cost less than yours; but let us drop this discussion which would be without interest. You are really mistaken if you believe that I am troubled by the perfection of the financial systems which you have just explained to me. I rejoice with you over the regularity of the collection of the taxes,

of the completeness of the revenue; I rejoice over the exactitude of the accounts, I rejoice very sincerely. Do you really believe that I think it necessary that the absolute sovereign must dip his hands into the state coffers, that he must handle the public funds.... This luxury of precautions is truly puerile. Is the danger there? Once more, all the better if

{p. 204} the funds are gathered, set in motion and circulated with the miraculous precision which you described. I am counting precisely on all these marvels of accounting, all these organic beauties of financial matter, to aid in the splendor of my reign.

MONTESQUIEU. You have the vis comica. The most astonishing thing to me about your financial theories is that they are directly opposed to what you say about them in the treatise of The Prince, where you strictly recommend not only economy in finance but even avarice. (The Prince, Page 106, Chapter XVI.)

MACHIAVELLI. If you are astonished, you have no reason to be, for times are no longer the same from this point of view, and one of the most important of my principles is to adjust myself to the times. Let us get back and for a while set a little aside what you told me of your department of accounts: does this institution belong to the judiciary order?

MONTESQUIEU. No.

MACHIAVELLI. Then it is a purely administrative body. I suppose it to be irreproachable. But **when all the accounts are verified, it can make advances!** Does that prevent funds from being voted, expenditures from being made? Its decisions of verification are no more informative of the situation than the budgets. It is a department of registry without remonstrance, it is an ingenious institution. I shall keep it up just as it is, without anxiety.

MONTESQUIEU. You will keep it up, you say! So you expect to touch upon the other parts of the financial organization?

MACHIAVELLI. You guessed as much, I suppose. **After a political coup d'etat, is not a financial coup d'etat inevitable?** Shall not take advantage of power for that as well as for the rest? What is the magic virtue which would preserve your financial regulations? I am like that giant of some fairy tale or other whom the pigmies had bound with fetters during his sleep; on arising, he broke them without even noticing their existence. On the day following my accession, there will be no question of voting upon the budget; I shall issue a special decree, I shall dictatorially

{p. 205} open the necessary accounts and I shall have them approved by my council of state.

MONTESQUIEU. And you expect to continue in this manner?

MACHIAVELLI. Not at all. Beginning with the following year I shall return to legality, for I do not intend to destroy anything directly, as I have already told you several times. Rules have been made before me, I shall make rules in my turn. You spoke to me of the vote of the budget by two distinct laws: I consider that a bad measure. One understands a financial situation much better when he **votes the budget of revenue and the budget of expenditures at the same time**. My government is a diligent government; the precious time of public deliberations must not be lost in useless discussions. Henceforth the budget of revenue and of expenditures will be included in a single law.

MONTESQUIEU. Good. And the law which forbids the appropriation of supplementary funds other than by a preliminary vote of the Chamber?

MACHIAVELLI. I abrogate it; you understand the reason for that.

MONTESQUIEU. Yes.

MACHIAVELLI. It is a law which would be inapplicable under any regime.

MONTESQUIEU. And the specifying of funds, the vote by topics?

MACHIAVELLI. It is impossible to maintain that: the budget of expenditures will no longer be voted by topics but by ministries.

MONTESQUIEU. That seems to me a mountainous undertaking, for the vote by ministry only gives each one of them a total to examine. It is like using a bottomless cask instead of a strainer to sift public expenditures.

MACHIAVELLI. That is not exact, for each account, as a whole, presents distinct elements, topics as you call them; if desired they will be examined, but they will be voted upon by ministries, with the right to change from one topic to another.

MONTESQUIEU. And from one ministry to another?

MACHIAVELLI. No, I do not go that far; I wish to remain within the limits of necessity.

{p. 206} MONTESQUIEU, Your moderation is faultless, and you believe that these financial innovations will not throw the country into a state of alarm?

MACHIAVELLI, Why should that alarm them more than my other political measures?

MONTESQUIEU. Why, because this touches the material interests of everyone.

MACHIAVELLI. Oh! those are very subtle distinctions.

MONTESQUIEU. Subtle! The word is well chosen. But do not put any subtlety into it yourself, and say frankly that a country which cannot defend its liberties cannot defend its money.

MACHIAVELLI. What can they complain of, since I have kept the essential principles of public law in financial matters? Are taxes not regularly established, regularly collected, funds regularly voted? Is it not true that **here, as elsewhere, everything is based upon popular suffrage?** No, without a doubt, my government is not reduced to indigence. The people who have acclaimed me not only easily tolerate the pomp of the throne, but they desire it, they seek it in a prince who is the expression of its power. The people really hate only one thing, and that is the wealth of their equals.

MONTESQUIEU. Do not escape once more; you have not yet come to the end; I lead you back inflexibly to the budget. No matter what you say, its very organization checks the development of your power. It is a frame the boundaries of which may be broken through, but not without risk and peril. It is published, its component parts are known, it remains as barometer of the situation.

MACHIAVELLI. Let us finish up this point, since you wish it.

#### TWENTIETH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. The budget is a frame, you say; yes, but it is an elastic frame which stretches as far as desired. I shall always be within it, never outside it.

MONTESQUIEU. What do you mean?

{p. 207} MACHIAVELLI. Is it for me to teach you how things come about, even in the states where the budgetary organization is pushed to its highest point of perfection? Perfection consists precisely in knowing how, by ingenious stratagems, to get out of a system of limitation which in reality is purely fictitious.

**Just what is your annually voted budget? Nothing but** a provisional regulation, **an estimate** of the principal financial occurrences. The situation is never definite until after the completion of expenditures made necessary during the course of the year. In your budgets **there are** I know not how many types of **accounts which correspond to all the possible eventualities; complementary, supplementary, extraordinary, temporary, exceptional.** And each one of these accounts by itself forms as many distinct budgets. Now, this is how things work out: the general budget, the one which is voted at the beginning of the year, comes to a total amount of, let us say, 800 millions. **When half of the year is gone, the financial facts already no longer correspond to the first estimates;** so what is called **a rectifying budget is presented** to the Chambers, and this budget adds 100 millions, 150 millions to the original figure. Then comes the supplementary budget: it adds 50 or 60 millions; **finally comes the liquidation** which adds 15, 20 or 30 millions. In short, in the general reckoning, **the total of the unforeseen expenses forms one-third of the estimated expenditures.** It is upon this last figure that the legislative vote of the Chambers falls as a form of confirmation. In this way, **at the end of ten years the budget can be doubled and even tripled.**

MONTESQUIEU. That this accumulation of expenditures could be the result of your financial improvements, I do not doubt, but no such thing will happen in the states where your proceedings are avoided. Moreover, you have not yet finished: after all, **the expenditures must be in proportion to the revenues. How will you handle that?**

MACHIAVELLI. Everything, it may be said, consists in the art of grouping figures and in certain distinctions of expenditures, by

{p. 208} aid of which the necessary latitude is obtained. Thus, for instance, the distinction between the ordinary budget and the extraordinary budget may be of great help. **Under cover of this word extraordinary one may easily pass off certain debatable expenditures and certain more or less problematic revenues.** I have here, for instance, 20 millions in expenses; it must be met by 20 millions in revenue: I produce as revenue a war indemnity of 20 millions, not yet collected, but which will be later, or else **I bring forth as revenue an increase of 20 millions in the proceeds of taxation which will be realized next year.** So much for your revenues; I need not multiply the examples. As for the expenditures, one may have recourse to the opposite procedure: instead of adding, you subtract. Thus, for instance, you remove the cost of tax collection from the budget of expenses.

MONTESQUIEU. And under what pretext, may I ask?

MACHIAVELLI. One may say, and with reason, I believe, that it is not a state expense. And for the same reason it may also be arranged to omit from the budget of expenditures the cost of provincial and communal service.

MONTESQUIEU. As you see, I dispute nothing of all that; but **what will you do with the revenues which are deficits,** and the expenditures which you eliminate?

MACHIAVELLI. The big thing in this question is the distinction between the ordinary budget and the extraordinary budget. The expenditures which are absorbing you at present must be included in the extraordinary budget.

MONTESQUIEU. But after all these two budgets are finally totaled and the definite figure of expenditures is made known.

MACHIAVELLI, **No total must be made;** on the contrary. The ordinary budget appears alone; the extraordinary budget is an appendant which is provided for by other means.

MONTESQUIEU. And what are they?

MACHIAVELLI. Do not make me anticipate. You see first of all that there is a particular manner of presenting the budget, of concealing, if necessary, the growing increase. There is no gov-

{p. 209} ernment which is not forced to act thus; there are inexhaustible resources in industrial countries but, as you noticed, these countries are miserly and suspicious; they argue over the most necessary outlays. Financial politics cannot, any more than other politics, play with open cards: at every step one would be hindered; but after all and, I admit, thanks to the perfecting of the budgetary system, everything is found again, everything is classified, and if the budget has its mysteries, it also has its lights.

MONTESQUIEU. But only for the initiated, I have no doubt. I see that you will surround financial legislation with a formalism as impenetrable as the judiciary procedure among the Romans, at the time of the twelve tables. But let us go on. **Since your expenditures increase, your resources must increase in the same proportion.** Will you, like Julius Caesar, find a value of two thousand million francs in the state coffers, or will you discover the Potosi mines?

MACHIAVELLI. Your darts are very ingenious; **I shall do what all possible governments do, I shall borrow.**

MONTESQUIEU. It is to this very point that I wished to lead you. It is certain that there are few governments who are not obliged to have recourse to borrowing; but it is also certain that they are obliged to make use of them sparingly; they could not, without immorality and without danger, **encumber future generations with exorbitant burdens**, out of all proportion to probable resources. **How are loans made? By the issue of bonds containing an obligation on the part of the government to pay a yearly interest** proportionate to the capital which has been deposited. **If the loan is at 5 percent, for instance, the state, at the end of twenty years, has paid a sum equal to the capital borrowed; at the end of 40 years, a double amount; at the end of 60 years, a triple amount, and yet it always remains debtor for the total of the same capital.** It may be added that if the state increased its debt indefinitely, doing nothing to diminish it, it would be driven either to the impossibility of further borrowing or to **bankruptcy**. These results are easy to comprehend; there is no country where they are not under-

{p. 210} stood. **The modern states wished to put a necessary limitation to the increase of taxes.** So they conceived what is called the system of **amortization**, a scheme truly admirable for its simplicity and for its very practical method of execution. **A special fund was created, the capitalized resources of which are meant to be a permanent redemption of the public debt** by successive fractions; so that **every time that the state borrows, it must endow the sinking fund with a certain capital for the purpose of liquidating the new debt** at a given time. You see that this method of limitation is indirect and it is that which makes it so powerful. By means of **amortization**, the nation says to its government: "Borrow if you must, but you will have to find a way to meet the new obligation that you are contracting in my name." When one is continually obliged to **amortize**, one thinks twice before borrowing. If you **amortize** regularly, your loans will be passed.

MACHIAVELLI, And what makes you think that I expect to **amortize**? In which states is **amortization** a regular thing? Even in England it is suspended. Your example falls flat: what is done nowhere, cannot be done.

MONTESQUIEU, Then you would abolish **amortization**?

MACHIAVELLI, I did not say that, far from it; I shall allow this mechanism to function, and my government will make use of the funds which it produces; this plan presents a great advantage. At the presentation of the budget, from time to time the proceeds of the **amortization** of the following year may be made to figure as revenue.

MONTESQUIEU. And the following year it will figure as expenditures.

MACHIAVELLI. I do not know, that will depend on circumstances, for I will very much regret that this financial institution should not be able to continue regularly. My ministers will explain themselves in this connection in an extremely sorrowful manner. Great heavens, I do not claim that my administration will have nothing to be criticized from the financial point of view, but when the facts are properly presented, one gets by with many things. The

{p. 211} administration of finances is also largely a matter of the press, it must not be forgotten.

MONTESQUIEU. How is that?

MACHIAVELLI. Did you not yourself say that the very essence of the budget was publicity?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes.

MACHIAVELLI, Well, are budgets not accompanied by detailed accounts, by reports, by all sorts of official documents? What resources do these public communications not give to the sovereign if he is surrounded by clever men! I expect my minister of finance to talk the language of numbers with an admirable clarity and to have a literary style of impeccable purity.

It is well to repeat continually this truth, that "the management of public funds at the present time is handled in the open."

This incontestable statement must be presented in a thousand forms; I intend to have written such phrases as the following:

"Our system of accounting, fruit of long experience, is distinguished by the clarity and the certitude of its procedures. It obstructs abuses and gives to no one, from the smallest official to the chief of the state himself) the means of diverting the least sum from its original purpose, or of making irregular use of it."

Your language will be kept: could one do better? and I shall have it said:

"The excellence of the financial system rests on two bases; control and publicity. Control which prevents a single farthing from leaving the hands of the taxpayers to enter the public treasury, to pass from one counting-house to another, and to be given into the hands of a creditor of the state, without the legitimacy of its collection, the regularity of its movements, the rightfulness of its use, being controlled by responsible agents, judicially verified by permanent magistrates, and finally sanctioned in the legislative accounts of the Chamber."

MONTESQUIEU, O Machiavelli! You are always jeering, but your mockery has something infernal in it.

MACHIAVELLI, You forget where we are.

{p. 212} MONTESQUIEU. You defy heaven.

MACHIAVELLI. God fathoms the heart.

MONTESQUIEU. Continue.

MACHIAVELLI. At the beginning of the budgetary year, the comptroller of finances will declare: "Up to now, nothing alters the provisions of the present budget. Without being the victim of illusions, there are serious reasons to hope that, for the first time in years, **the budget, in spite of loans, will present a real balance.** This desirable result, obtained in exceptionally difficult times, is the best proof that the upward movement of the public fortunes has never slowed down." Is that properly done?

MONTESQUIEU. Go on.

MACHIAVELLI. In this connection there will be talk of this **amortization** which absorbed you a short time ago, and they will say: "Soon **amortization** will function. If the project which has been conceived in this connection will be realised, if the state revenues continue to progress, it is not impossible that, in the budget which will be presented in five years, the public accounts will be liquidated by a surplus of revenue."

MONTESQUIEU. Your hopes are long-dated; but a propos of the **amortization**, if, after having promised to start it functioning, nothing is done, what will you say?

MACHIAVELLI. If necessary, it will be boldly acknowledged. Such frankness does honor to the government and touches the people when it comes from a strong power. But, in return, my finance minister will use all his efforts to remove all significance from the heightened figure of expenses. He will say, and it will be true: "Actual practice in matters of finance shows that deficits are never entirely confirmed, that a certain quantity of new resources arise unexpectedly during the course of the year, notably through the increase of the proceeds of taxes; that, moreover, a considerable portion of funds which have been voted are put to no use and are annulled."

{p. 213} MONTESQUIEU. Will that happen?

MACHIAVELLI. Sometimes, you know, in finance there are words ready made, stereotyped phrases, which have a great effect on the public, calming and reassuring the people. Thus, in artfully presenting such and such a debt, one says: **this figure is not at all exorbitant - it is normal, it conforms to previous budgets - the figure of the floating debt is very reassuring.** There is a host of similar locutions which I shall not mention because there are other more important practical stratagems to which I wish to call your attention. First, in all official documents it is necessary to insist upon the development of prosperity, of commercial activity and of the ever increasing progress of consumption.

The taxpayer is less aroused by the disproportion of the budget when these things are repeated to him, and they may be repeated to satiety without his ever becoming suspicious, to such an extent do authentic accounts produce a magic effect upon the mind of bourgeois fools. **When the budget can no longer be balanced** and one wishes to prepare public spirit for some disappointment for the following year, **one says in advance, in a report, next year the deficit will only be so and so much.**

If the deficit is less than the estimate, it is a veritable triumph; if it is greater, one says: "the deficit was greater than was estimated, but it was still higher last year; altogether the situation is better, because less has been spent and yet we have gone through exceptionally difficult circumstances: war, poverty, epidemics, unforeseen subsistence crises, etc.

"But, next year, the increase of revenues will, in all probability, permit the attainment of a balance which has been so long sought: the debt will be reduced, the budget suitably balanced. This progress will continue, it may be hoped, and, save for extraordinary events, balance will become the custom of our finances, as it is the rule."

MONTESQUIEU. That is high comedy; the custom will be like the

{p. 214} rule, it will never work, for I imagine that, under your reign, there will always be some extraordinary circumstance, a war, a crisis.

MACHIAVELLI. I do not know whether there will be subsistence crises; one thing is certain and that is that I shall hold the banner of national dignity very high.

MONTESQUIEU. That is the very least you could do. If you gather glory, one need not be grateful to you, for in your hands it is only a means of government; it is not that which will liquidate the debts of your state.

## TWENTY-FIRST DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. I am afraid that **you are somewhat prejudiced against loans; they are valuable for more than one reason: they attach families to the government; they are excellent investments for private people**, and modern economists today expressly recognize that, **far from impoverishing the state, public debts enrich it.** Will you allow me to explain how?

MONTESQUIEU. No, for I believe I know those theories. Since you are always talking of borrowing and never of repaying, I should first of all like to know from whom you will ask so much capital, and for what reason you will ask it.

MACHIAVELLI. For that, foreign wars are a great help. In the great states, they permit the borrowing of five or six hundred millions; one manages so as to spend only the half or two-thirds, and the rest finds its place in the treasury for domestic expenditures.

MONTESQUIEU. Five or six hundred millions, you say! And who are the bankers of modern times who can negotiate loans the amount of which would constitute the whole fortune of certain states?

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! You are still concerned with these rudimentary procedures of the loan? If you will permit me to say

{p. 215} so, that is almost barbarian, in a matter of financial economy. **Nowadays one no longer borrows of bankers.**

MONTESQUIEU. Of whom, then?

MACHIAVELLI. Instead of striking bargains with capitalists who come to an agreement amongst themselves to frustrate any bidding and whose limited number destroys all competition, **one appeals to all his subjects: to the rich, to the poor, to the artisans, to the business men**, to whomever has a cent to dispose of; one opens what is called **a public subscription, and so that each one can buy shares**, it is divided into coupons of very small sums. They sell for from five to ten francs a share to 100,000, a million francs' worth of shares. The day after their issue the value of these shares is rising, is at a premium, as they say: everyone knows it, and they rush from all sides to buy; one would think them delirious. **In several days the chests of the treasury are crammed**; so much money is received that one hardly knows where to put it; however, arrangements are made to accept it, because if the subscription exceeds the capital of the stock issued, a great effect can be made upon public opinion.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah!

MACHIAVELLI. Defaulters are returned their money. That is done with much talk, with the help of the press. It is a striking event, carefully handled. Sometimes the surplus comes to two or three hundred millions: you may judge for yourself to what point public spirit is affected by this public confidence in the government.

MONTESQUIEU. Confidence which is mingled with a spirit of unrestrained stock-jobbing, as far as I can see. I have, indeed, already heard of this scheme, but everything, on your lips, is truly phantasmagoric. All right, then, let us say you have your hands full of money, but ...

MACHIAVELLI. I would have even more than you think, because among the modern nations, **there are great banking institutions which are able to lend directly to the state one or two hundred millions at the usual rate of interest**; the large cities may also

{p. 216} lend. Among these same nations there are other institutions which are called savings institutions: these are savings banks, sick funds, pensions. The state is accustomed to demand that their capital, which is immense, sometimes as much as five or six hundred millions, must be deposited in the public treasury where it operates with the common stock, allowing a small **interest** for those who deposit it. **Besides, governments may procure funds just as bankers do**. They make out sight drafts on their treasury for the sum of two or three hundred millions, **a sort of letter of exchange upon which they draw** before they have entered into circulation.

MONTESQUIEU. Permit me to stop you: you speak of nothing but borrowing or of drawing on letters of exchange; are you never interested in paying something?

MACHIAVELLI. It is well to let you know that, in case of need, **the domains of the state may be sold**.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah, now you are selling! But will you never concern yourself with paying?

MACHIAVELLI. Without a doubt; now is a good time to tell you how to meet debts.

MONTESQUIEU. You say, to meet debts; I should like a more exact expression.

MACHIAVELLI. I use this expression because I consider it absolutely exact. **It is not always possible to liquidate a debt, but it is always possible to meet it**; the word is, in fact, very energetic, for a debt is a formidable enemy.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, how shall you meet it?

MACHIAVELLI. There are various methods: **first of all is taxes**.

MONTESQUIEU. That is, debt is used to pay the debt.

MACHIAVELLI. You speak to me as an economist and not as a financier. Do not confuse the two. One may really pay with the proceeds of a tax. I know that taxes cause talk; if the one that has been established is inconvenient, another may be found, or the same one re-established under another name. There is a great art, you know, in finding the weak points of taxable material.

{p. 217} MONTESQUIEU. You will soon have wiped them out, I imagine.

MACHIAVELLI. There are other ways: there is what is called **conversion**.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah!

MACHIAVELLI. This has to do with the debt which is called **consolidated**, that is, the one which accrues from the issue of loans. One says to the stockholders of the state, for instance: **up till now I have paid you five percent on your money; that was the rate of interest on your shares. From now on I expect to pay no more than four or four and one-half percent.** Agree to this reduction or be reimbursed for the capital which you loaned me.

MONTESQUIEU. But if the money is really returned, I consider the procedure quite honest so far.

MACHIAVELLI. Without a doubt it will be returned if requested; but very few will bother about that; stockholders have their habits; their funds are placed, they have confidence in the state; **they prefer a smaller income** and a certain investment. If everyone demanded his money it is evident that the treasury would be in a fix. That never happens and **in this way one gets rid of a debt of several hundred millions.**

MONTESQUIEU. That is an immoral measure, no matter what you say; **a forced loan which lowers public confidence.**

MACHIAVELLI. You do not know stockholders. Here is another plan which has to do with another type of debt. I was just saying to you that **the state had at its disposition the funds of the savings institutions** and that it made use of them by paying their **interest**, subject to returning them at the first request. If, after having handled them a long time, it is no longer prepared to return them, it consolidates the debt which fluctuates in its hands.

MONTESQUIEU. I know what that means; **the state says to the depositors: "You want your money, I no longer have it; here is an annual income."**

MACHIAVELLI. Exactly, and it consolidates in the same way all the debts to which it no longer feels equal. It consolidates treasury bonds, debts to the cities, to the banks, in short all those which

{p. 218} compose what is so picturesquely called the floating debt, because it is made up of debts which have no definite assessment and which arrive at maturity at about the same time.

MONTESQUIEU. You have singular methods of freeing the state.

MACHIAVELLI. With what can you reproach me if I do only what the others are doing?

MONTESQUIEU. Oh! if everyone does it, one would, indeed, have to be very severe to reproach Machiavellifor it.

MACHIAVELLI. I am suggesting to you not even the thousandth part of the plans which may be used. Far from fearing the increase of perpetual stocks, **I should like the entire public wealth to be in stocks**; I would arrange that the towns, the communes, the public establishments convert into stocks their real estate or their personal capital. It is the very interest of my dynasty which would force me to these financial measures. There would not be in my kingdom a single farthing which would not be **attached by a thread to my existence.**

MONTESQUIEU. But even from this point of view, from this fatal point of view, will you reach your goal? Are you not marching in the most direct manner to your ruin across the ruin of the state? Do you not know that among all the nations of Europe **there are huge markets of public funds where the prudence, the wisdom, the probity of the governments are auctioned off?** According to the way in which you direct your finances, your funds would have the worst of it in foreign markets and would fall to the lowest market price, even on the Exchange of your own kingdom.

MACHIAVELLI. That is a flagrant error. A glorious government such as mine would be, cannot but enjoy great credit abroad. At home, its vigor would dominate all apprehensions. Besides, I do not intend that the credit of my state should depend upon the fears of a few candle-grease merchants; I would dominate the Exchange by the Exchange.

MONTESQUIEU. What now?

MACHIAVELLI. **I would have gigantic establishments of credit**

{p. 219} **instituted apparently for the purpose of lending money to industry, but whose real function would be to uphold the stock. Capable of placing 400 or 500 millions of shares on the market**, or of rarefying the market in the same proportions, these financial monopolies would always be masters of the Exchange. What do you think of this scheme?

MONTESQUIEU. A fine business your ministers, your favorites, your mistresses are going to do in these firms! So your government is going to play on the Exchange with the secrets of state?

MACHIAVELLI. What are you saying!

MONTESQUIEU. Then explain in some other way the existence of these firms. So long as you were only in the domain of doctrines, one might be mistaken about the true name of your politics; since you have arrived at the application, one can no longer be mistaken. Your government will be unique in history; one will never be able to slander it.

MACHIAVELLI. If someone in my kingdom presumed to say what you hint at, he would disappear as if by a thunderbolt.

MONTESQUIEU. A thunderbolt is fine evidence; you are fortunate to have it at your disposal. Have you finished with the financial aspects?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes.

MONTESQUIEU. Time is passing rapidly.

## TWENTY-SECOND DIALOGUE

MONTESQUIEU. Before having heard you, I was not very familiar with either the spirit of laws, or the spirit of finances. I am indebted to you for having taught me both. **You hold in your hands the greatest power of modern times, money.** You are able to procure practically as much of it as you wish. With such prodigious resources you will undoubtedly do great things; here is finally an opportunity of showing that good may come from evil.

MACHIAVELLI. That is, indeed, what I expect to show you.

{p. 220} MONTESQUIEU. Well, let us see.

MACHIAVELLI. The greatest of my good deeds will be, first of all, that of **having given domestic peace to my people. Under my reign** the wicked passions are restrained, **the good people are reassured and the bad ones tremble.** I render liberty, dignity, strength to a country torn by factions before my time.

MONTESQUIEU. After having changed so many things, will you not end by changing the meaning of words?

MACHIAVELLI. **Liberty does not consist in license**, no more than dignity and strength consist in insurrection and disorder. **My empire, peaceful at home, will be glorious abroad.**

MONTESQUIEU. How?

MACHIAVELLI. **I shall wage war in the four quarters of the globe.** I shall cross the Alps, like Hannibal; I shall fight in India, like Alexander; in Libya, like Scipio; I shall go from the Atlas to the Taurus, from the shores of the Ganges to the Mississippi, from the Mississippi to the river Amur. The great wall of China will fall before my name; my victorious legions will defend the tomb of the Saviour in Jerusalem and the Pope in Rome; in Peru their feet will trample the dust of the Incas; in Egypt the ashes of Rameses; in Mesopotamia, of Nebuchadnezzar. Descending from Ccesar, from Augustus and from Charlemagne, on the shores of the Danube I shall avenge the defeat of Varus; on the shores of the Adige, the rout at Cannes; on the Baltic, the outrages of the Normans.

MONTESQUIEU. Be good enough to stop, I beg of you. If you thus avenge the defeats of all the great leaders, you will not be equal to it. I shall not compare you to Louis XIV, to whom Boileau said: "Great king, cease conquering or I cease writing." This comparison would humiliate you. I grant that no hero of ancient or of modern times could be compared to you.

But it is not at all a question of that: war in itself is an evil; it serves in your hands to support a still greater evil, slavery; but where in all this is the good which you promised me to do?

MACHIAVELLI. This is not the time to equivocate; glory is already

{p. 221} a great good in itself; it is the most powerful of accumulated capitals; a sovereign who has glory has all the rest. He is the terror of the neighboring states, the arbiter of Europe. His credit forces itself insurmountably, for, in spite of what you have said of the sterility of victories, force never abdicates its rights. One pretends to a war of ideas, one makes a show of disinterestedness and, one fine day, one concludes by seizing a coveted province and by imposing a tribute of war upon the conquered.

MONTESQUIEU. In such a system it is the best thing to do, if one can; otherwise, the military career would be too foolish.

MACHIAVELLI. That's something like it! You see that our ideas are beginning to come a little closer together.

MONTESQUIEU. Yes, like the Atlas and the Taurus. Let us see the other great things of your reign.

MACHIAVELLI. I do not disdain as much as you seem to believe a parallel with Louis XIV. I would have more than one characteristic in common with this monarch; like him **I would have gigantic constructions made;** however, in this connection, my ambition would much exceed his and that of the most famous potentates; I should like to show to the people that the monuments whose construction used to require centuries, could be rebuilt by me in several years. The palaces of the kings my predecessors would fall under the hammer of the wreckers to rise again rejuvenated by new forms; I would overthrow whole towns to reconstruct them upon more regular plans, to obtain more beautiful perspectives. You cannot imagine to what point **buildings attach the people to the monarch.** One may say that people easily pardon the destruction of their laws on condition that houses are built for them. Besides, you will see in a moment that buildings serve particularly important objects.

MONTESQUIEU. After the buildings, what will you do?

MACHIAVELLI. You are going very rapidly: the number of great deeds is not boundless. Will you be good enough to tell me if, between Rameses II and Louis XIV, or Peter I, the two cardinal points of great reigns have not always been war and constructions.

{p. 222} MONTESQUIEU. It is true, and yet we have seen absolute sovereigns who have busied themselves with giving good laws, improving the customs, introducing simplicity and decency. We have seen some who have occupied themselves with order in finances, with economy; who have dreamed of leaving behind them order, peace, lasting institutions, sometimes even liberty.

MACHIAVELLI. Oh! all that will happen. You see that, according to yourself, absolute sovereigns have some good in them.

MONTESQUIEU. Alas! not too much. However, try to prove the contrary to me. Have you something good to tell me?

MACHIAVELLI. I would give prodigious scope to the spirit of enterprise; **my reign would be the reign of business. I would launch speculation into directions new and hitherto unknown.** My administration would even unlock some of its links. **I would free a host of industries from regulations;** the butchers, the bakers and the theatrical managers would be free.

MONTESQUIEU. Free to do what?

MACHIAVELLI. Free to make bread, free to sell meat and free to organize theatrical enterprises, **without the permission of the authority.**

MONTESQUIEU. I do not know what that signifies. **Liberty of industry** is a common right among modern peoples. Have you nothing better to tell me?

MACHIAVELLI. I would be constantly occupied with the condition of the people. **My government would procure work for them.**

MONTESQUIEU. Let the people find it themselves, that is much better. The political powers have not the right to become popular with the money of their subjects. Public revenues are nothing but a collective subscription the proceeds of which should be used only for general services; the working classes which have been accustomed to depend on the state fall into degradation; they lose their energy, their vigor, their funds of intellectual industry. Being paid by the state casts them into a sort of bondage from which they can never raise themselves except by destroying the state itself. Your constructions swallow up enormous sums in non-

{p. 223} productive expenditures; they make capital scarce, kill the small industry, destroy credit in the lower levels of society. Hunger is at the end of all your schemes. Make economies first, build afterward. Govern with moderation, with justice, govern the least possible and the people will have nothing to ask of you because they will have no need of you.

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! you look upon the miseries of the people so cold-bloodedly! The principles of my government are far different; I bear in my heart the suffering human beings, the little ones. **I am indignant when I see the wealthy ones procure pleasures inaccessible to the majority. I shall do all that I can to improve the material condition of the workers,** the laborers, those who bow beneath the weight of social necessity.

MONTESQUIEU. Well, begin by giving them the resources which you are appropriating for the salaries of your grand dignitaries, your ministers, your consular personages. Set aside for them the bounties which you lavish recklessly upon your pages, your courtesans, your mistresses.

Still better, remove the purple, the sight of which is an affront to the equality of men. Get rid of your titles of Majesty, Highness, Excellency, which enter proud ears like pointed steel. Call yourself protector as Cromwell did, but do the deeds of the apostles; go to live in the hut of the poor, as Alfred the Great did, sleep in hospitals, stretch yourself on sickbeds like godly Louis. It is too easy to do evangelical charity when one passes his life in the midst of feasts, when one rests on sumptuous beds, with beautiful women, when, upon rising and upon going to sleep, one has great personages who rush to put on one's shirt. Be head of the **family** and not despot, patriarch and not prince.

If this role does not suit you, be the chief of a democratic republic, grant liberty, introduce it into the habits of the people, by force if that is your temperament. Be Lycurgus, be Agesilaus, be a Gracchus; but I do not know what it is in this soft civilization where everything bends, where everything fades near a prince, where every spirit is cast in the same mould, every soul in the

{p. 224} same uniform; I can understand that one aspires to reign over men but not over automatons.

MACHIAVELLI, Here is a flood of eloquence I cannot stop. It is with such phrases that governments are overthrown.

MONTESQUIEU. Alas! You never have any other preoccupation than the one of maintaining your position. In order to put to the proof your love of the public welfare, one would have only to ask you to descend from the throne in the name of the safety of the state. The people, whose choice you are, would have only to express its will to you in this regard in order to know how you esteem its sovereignty.

MACHIAVELLI. What a strange question! Is it not for its own good that I would oppose it?

MONTESQUIEU. What do you know of that? If the people is above you, by what right do you subordinate its will to yours? If you are freely accepted, if you are not right but only necessary, why do you expect so much from force and nothing from reason? You are wise to tremble incessantly for your reign, for you are of those who last a single day.

MACHIAVELLI. **A single day! I shall last all my life, and my descendants after me perhaps.** You are acquainted with my political, economic and financial system. Do you wish to know the last means by the aid of which I shall shoot forth the roots of my dynasty to the deepest layers of the earth?

MONTESQUIEU, No.

MACHIAVELLI. You refuse to listen to me. Then you are vanquished, you, your principles, your school and your century.

MONTESQUIEU. Speak, since you insist, but let this talk be the last.

## TWENTY-THIRD DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI, I am not answering any of your bursts of oratory. The enthusiasms of eloquence have nothing to do here. To say to a sovereign: "Will you be kind enough to descend from your

{p. 225} throne for the happiness of your people?" Is that not madness? To say to him: "Since you are an emanation of popular suffrage, give yourself up to these fluctuations, let yourself be discussed." Is that possible? Is not the first law of all constituted power to defend itself not only in its own interest but also in the interest of the people which it governs? Have I not made the greatest sacrifice which it is possible to make to the principles of equality of modern times? After all, is not a government which has sprung from universal suffrage the expression of the will of the majority? You will tell me that this principle is destructive of public liberties; what can I do about it? When this principle has entered into the customs of the people, do you know how to tear it out? And, if it cannot be torn out, do you know how to realize it in the great European societies other than by the arm of a single man? You are severe in your judgment of the methods of government: point out to me another means of execution and, if there is no other than absolute power, tell me how this power can separate itself from the special imperfections to which its principle condemns it.

No, I am not a Saint Vincent de Paul, for my subjects need not an evangelical soul, but an arm; and I am not an Agesilaus, nor a Lycurgus, nor a Gracchus, for I am neither among the Spartans nor among the Romans; **I am in the heart of voluptuous societies** which ally the fury of pleasures to that of arms, the transports of force to those of the senses, **which no longer desire divine authority, paternal authority, religious restraint.** Is it I who have created the world in the midst of which I live? I am such because it is such. Would I have the power to stop its inclination? No, I can only prolong its life because it would dissolve still more quickly if it were left to itself. I take this society by its vices because it presents only vices to me; if it had virtues, I should take it by its virtues.

But if austere principles can affront my power, can they disregard the real services that I render, my genius and even my grandeur?

I am the arm, I am the sword of the Revolutions which the

{p. 226} harbinger breath of final destruction is leading astray. **I contain insane forces which have no other motive power,** at bottom, **than the brutality of the instincts,** which hunt plunder under the veil of principles. If I discipline these forces, if I arrest their expansion in my country, even for only a century, have I not deserved well of it? Can I not even claim the gratitude of the European states which turn their eyes toward me **as toward Osiris who alone has the power to captivate these trembling crowds?** Raise your eyes higher and bow before one who bears on his brow the fatal sign of human predestination.

MONTESQUIEU. Exterminating angel, grandson of Tamerlane, reduce the people to slavery, yet you will not prevent that somewhere there will be free souls who will brave you, and their disdain will suffice to safeguard the rights of the human conscience rendered imperceptible by God.

MACHIAVELLI. God protects the strong.

MONTESQUIEU. Please get to the last links of the chain which you have forged. Lock it well, use the anvil and the hammer, you can do all. God protects you, it is He Himself who guides your star.

MACHIAVELLI. I have difficulty in understanding the animation which now rules your words. **Am I really so hard, I who have taken as final policy, not violence, but self-effacement?** Calm yourself, I bring you more than one unexpected consolation. Only allow me to take a few more precautions which I consider necessary to my safety; you will see that with those with which I surround myself a prince has nothing to fear of circumstances.

Our writings have more than one resemblance, in spite of what you say, and I believe that a despot who wishes to be complete must certainly not dispense with reading you. For instance, you wisely remark in the *Esprit des Lois* that an absolute monarch must have a large praetorian guard (*Esprit des Lois*, Book X, Ch. XV, Page 127); the advice is good, I shall follow it. My guard would be about one-third of the strength of my army. I am a great lover of conscription which is one of the finest inventions of French genius, but I believe that this institution must be perfected by

{p. 227} trying to retain in the army the greatest possible number of those who have completed their period of compulsory service. I would succeed, I believe, by resolutely taking possession of the kind of traffic which is carried on in some States, as in France for instance, in connection with voluntary service for money. I would suppress this shocking transaction and I myself would carry it on honestly in the form of a monopoly by creating an endowment fund for the army which would call to arms, by the enticement of money, those who would like to devote themselves exclusively to the military state, and would keep them there by the same means.

MONTESQUIEU. Then they would be types of mercenaries that you hope to form in your own country!

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, party hatred will say that, when I am moved only by the good of the people and by the interest, certainly very legitimate, of my preservation which is the common good of my subjects. Let us go on to other subjects. What is going to astonish you is that I am returning to structures. I warned you that we would be led back to that. You are going to see the political idea which springs up from the vast system of construction that I have undertaken; through that I realize an economic theory which has caused many disasters in certain States of Europe, the theory of **the organization of permanent work for the laboring classes. My reign promises them an indefinite salary.** Myself dead, my system abandoned, no more work; the people are on strike and rise to assault the wealthy classes. They are in the midst of **a peasant rising: industrial perturbation, overthrow of credit, insurrection in my State, revolt around it; Europe is aflame.** I pause. Tell me if the privileged classes, which very naturally tremble for their fortunes, will not make common cause, very close cause, with the working classes to maintain me, me or my dynasty, if, on the other hand, the interest of European tranquillity does not attach to it all the powers of the first rank.

**The question of building** which seems slight is in reality, as you see, **a colossal one.** When it is a question of an object of this

{p. 228} importance, no sacrifice must be spared. Have you noticed that almost all my political conceptions are lined with a financial plan? That is just what happens here, too. **I shall institute a fund of public works** which I shall endow with several hundred millions by the aid of which I shall invite constructions over the entire surface of my kingdom. You have guessed my aim: **I shall support the rising of the working classes;** that is the other army which I need against the factions. But this mass of proletarians which is in my

hand must not be able to turn against me on the day when it will be without bread. I take care of that by the buildings themselves, for the unusual part of my plans is that each one at the same time furnishes its corollaries. **The worker who builds for me** at the same time builds the necessary means of defense against himself. Without knowing it, he drives himself from the great centers where his presence would disturb me; he **makes forever impossible the success of revolutions which are made in the street**. The result of great buildings is, indeed, to rarefy the space in which the artisan may live, to force him to the suburbs, and soon to cause him to leave even those; for living expenses increase with the increase in rent. My capital will hardly be habitable for those who live by their daily work except at the very outskirts. It certainly is not in the neighborhood of the seat of authority that insurrections can be formed. Undoubtedly, there will be an immense laboring population around the capital, formidable in a day of wrath; but the constructions that I would raise would all be conceived according to a strategic plan, that is, they would make way for great passages where, from one end to the other, cannons could circulate. The extremity of these great passages would be attached to a number of barracks, fortresses, so to speak, full of arms, soldiers and munitions. My successor would have to be a simple old man or a child to fall before an insurrection, for, at the motion of his hand, some bits of powder would sweep the uprising twenty leagues away from the capital. But the blood which courses in my veins is ardent and my race has all the signs of strength. Are you listening to me?

{p. 229} MONTESQUIEU. Yes.

MACHIAVELLI. But you understand that I do not expect to make material life difficult for the working population of the capital, and there I encounter an incontestable stumbling-block; but the fertility of resources that my government must have suggests an idea to me; that would be to **build for the people huge cities where the rent would be very low** and where the masses would find themselves reunited by bands as in great families.

MONTESQUIEU. Mouse-traps!

MACHIAVELLI. Oh! the spirit of disparagement, the unbridled hatred of the parties will not fail to vilify my institutions. They will say what you say. That matters little to me; if this method does not succeed another will be found.

I must not leave the chapter on constructions without mentioning a detail insignificant in appearance, but what is insignificant in politics? The innumerable edifices that I shall construct must be marked with my name, they must contain attributes, bas-reliefs, groups, which recall a theme of my history. My arms, my monogram, must be woven in everywhere. In one place, there will be angels who support my crown, in another, statues of justice and wisdom which bear my initials. These points are of the utmost importance, I consider them essentials.

It is by these signs, by these emblems that the person of the sovereign is always present; one lives with him, with his memory, with his thought. The feeling of his absolute sovereignty enters into the most rebellious spirits as the drop of water which falls unceasingly from the rock hollows out even granite. For the same reason I want my statue, my bust, my portraits to be in every public establishment, especially in the auditorium of the courts; I would be represented in royal costume or on horseback.

MONTESQUIEU. Beside the image of Christ.

MACHIAVELLI. Not at all, but opposite it; for sovereign power is an image of divine power. My image is thus allied with that of Providence and of justice.

{p. 230} MONTESQUIEU. Justice itself should wear your livery. You are not a Christian, you are a Greek emperor of the Lower Empire.

MACHIAVELLI. I am a Catholic, Apostolic and Roman emperor. For the same reasons as those which I have just pointed out to you, **I wish my name, the name Royal, to be given to every public establishment**. Royal Tribunal, royal Court, royal Academy, royal Legislative Body, royal Senate, royal Council of State; as often as possible this same term will be given to the officials, the agents, the official personnel which surrounds the government. Lieutenant of the king, archbishop of the king, comedian of the king, judge of the king, attorney of the king. In short, the name of royal will be imprinted on whatever will represent a sign of power, whether it be men or things. Only my birthday will be a national holiday and not a royal one. I must add that, whenever possible, streets, public places, squares, must bear names which recall historic memories of my reign. If one carefully follows these indications, whether he be Caligula or Nero, he is certain to impress himself forever upon the memory of the people and to transmit his prestige to the most distant posterity. How many things I have yet to add! I must limit myself.

For who could say everything without a mortal tedium? (This sentence is found in the preface of the *Esprit des Lois*, P. I. - Editor's note.)

Here I am at petty means; I regret it, for these things are perhaps not worthy of your attention, but, for me, they are vital.

Bureaucracy is, they say, an evil of monarchic governments; I do not believe that. They are thousands of servants who are naturally attached to the order of existing things. I have an army of soldiers, an army of judges, an army of workers, I desire an army of employees.

MONTESQUIEU. You no longer take the pains to justify anything.

MACHIAVELLI. Have I time for that?

MONTESQUIEU. No, go on.

MACHIAVELLI. In the states which have been monarchic, and they all have been at least once, I have observed that there is a

{p. 231} veritable frenzy for decorations, for ribbons. These things cost the prince scarcely anything and he can make happy people, and, even better, loyal ones, by means of some pieces of stuff, some baubles in silver or gold. In truth, I would need little persuasion to decorate without exception those who would ask it of me. **A man decorated is a man bought**. I would make of these marks of distinction a rallying sign for devoted subjects; I really believe I would have, at this price, nine-tenths of my kingdom. In this way I realize, as far as possible, the instincts of equality of the nation. Note carefully **the more a nation in general sticks to equality, the more the**

**individual has a passion for distinctions.** Here, then, is a means of action which it would be too stupid to deprive oneself of. Therefore far from giving up titles, as you advise me, I would multiply them around me as often as I would the dignities. In my court I want the etiquette of Louis XIV, the domestic hierarchy of Constantine, a severe diplomatic formalism, an imposing ceremonial; these are the infallible methods of government upon the spirit of the masses. Against all that, the sovereign appears like a God.

I am assured that in the states which seem most democratic in ideas, the ancient monarchic nobility has lost practically nothing of its prestige. I would have as chamberlains the gentlemen of the oldest school. Many ancient names would no doubt be extinct; by virtue of my sovereign power, I would bring them to life again with titles, and the greatest names in history since Charlemagne would be found at my court.

It is possible that these conceptions seem odd to you, but I insist that they will do more for the consolidation of my dynasty than the wisest laws. The cult of the prince is a sort of religion and, like all possible religions, this cult prescribes contradictions and mysteries beyond reason (*Esprit des Lois*, Book XXV, Chap. II, p. 386). Each of my acts, inexplicable as it may seem, proceeds from a calculation the sole object of which is my safety and the safety of my dynasty. As I have mentioned in *The Prince*, **what is really difficult is to acquire power; but it is easy to keep**

{p. 232} **it**, for all that is necessary is to remove that which is harmful and to establish that which protects. The essential characteristic of my policy, as you have been able to notice, was to make myself indispensable (*The Prince*, Chap. IX, p. 63); I have destroyed as many organized forces as was necessary so that nothing could proceed without me, so that even the enemies of my power would tremble at the thought of overthrowing it.

All that now remains for me to do consists only in the development of the moral methods which are sprouting in my institutions. My reign is a reign of pleasures; you will not forbid me to cheer my people by games, by festivals; that is how I expect to modify the customs. One cannot conceal that this century is a century of money; needs have doubled, **luxury is ruining families**; on every hand people aspire to material pleasures; a sovereign would have to be not of his times not to know how to turn to his profit this universal passion for money and this sensual ardor which consumes men nowadays. **Misery clamps them as in a vice, luxury crushes them**; ambition devours them, they are mine. But when I speak thus, at bottom it is the interest of my people which guides me. Yes, I shall call forth good from evil; I shall exploit materialism to the profit of concord and civilization; I shall extinguish the political passions of men by satisfying their ambitions, their desires and their needs. I claim to have as servants of my reign those who, under previous governments, will have made the most noise in the name of liberty. The most austere virtues are like that of the wife of Giocondo; all that is necessary is always to double the price of defeat. Those who resist money will not resist honors; those who resist honors will not resist money. In seeing those whom it believes the purest fall in their turn, public opinion will weaken so much that it will end up by abdicating completely. How could one complain after all? I shall not be severe except for that which has reference to politics; I shall persecute only this passion; I shall even secretly favor the others by the thousand underground ways which absolute power has at its disposal.

{p. 233} MONTESQUIEU. After having destroyed political conscience, you ought to undertake to destroy moral conscience; you have killed society, now you are killing man. May it please God that your words should resound to the very earth; never could a more striking refutation of your own doctrines strike human ears.

MACHIAVELLI. Allow me to finish.

#### TWENTY-FOURTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. I have now only to indicate to you certain particulars concerning my method of action, certain habits of conduct which will give my government its final countenance.

In the first place, **I wish my aims to be impenetrable even to those who are closest to me.** I would be, in this manner, like Alexander VI and the Duke of Valentinois, of whom it was said proverbially in the court of Rome, of the former, **"that he never did what he said"**; of the latter, **"that he never said what he did."** I would only communicate my projects when I gave the command for execution and **I would always give my orders at the very last moment.** Borgia never acted otherwise; **his ministers themselves knew nothing** and everyone about him was always reduced to simple conjecture. I have the gift of immobility: there is my goal; I look to one side, and when it is within my reach, I turn suddenly and swoop upon my prey before it has time even to cry out.

You cannot believe what prestige such a power of dissimulation gives to the Prince. When it is combined with vigorous action, a supersubtulous respect surrounds him, his counsellors ask one another secretly what he will think of next, the people place their confidence only in him; he personifies in their eyes the Providence whose ways are inscrutable. When the people see him pass, they **think with involuntary terror** what he could do by a nod of his head; the neighboring States are always fearful and overwhelmed

{p. 234} him with marks of deference, for they never know if some enterprise already prepared will not descend on them from one day to the other.

MONTESQUIEU. You are powerful in the face of your people because you are holding them under your feet, but if you deceive the States with whom you have relations the way you deceive your subjects, **you will soon be strangled in the arms of a coalition.**

MACHIAVELLI. You force me to leave my subject, for **I am interested here only in my interior policies**; but if you wish to know one of the principal means by the aid of which I would **keep in check the coalition of foreign hatred**, here it is: I reign over a powerful kingdom, I have told you; well! I would seek among the surrounding States some great nation now decayed and attempting to recover itself; **I would help it recover entirely by means of some general war, as has been done in Sweden, in Prussia, and as could be done from one day to another in Germany or in Italy**; and this nation, which would only exist through me, which would be nothing but the work of my existence, would give me, as long as I am in power, three hundred thousand more men against an armed Europe.

MONTESQUIEU. And the welfare of your State by the side of which you would thus **elevate a powerful rival and possible enemy** after a given time?

MACHIAVELLI. Before all else I protect myself.

MONTESQUIEU. Thus you have nothing, not even a care for the destiny of your kingdom? (One cannot conceal the fact that here Machiavelli contradicts himself, for he says formally, Chap. IV, page 26, "that the Prince who makes another powerful works for his own ruin." Editor's Note.)

MACHIAVELLI, Who says that? If I watch out for my own welfare am I not at the same time watching out for the welfare of my kingdom!

MONTESQUIEU. Your royal aspect is standing out more and more; I would like to see it in its entirety.

MACHIAVELLI. Then please do not interrupt me.

{p. 235} It is quite necessary for a Prince, no matter what his force of intellect, always to find within himself the necessary mental resources. One of the greatest talents of a statesman is that of appropriating the advice that he hears around him. Very often one finds enlightening advice in his entourage. **I would therefore assemble my council very often, I would make it argue, debate before me the most important questions.** When the sovereign is not sure of his desires, or has not enough resources of language to veil his real thought, he must remain silent or must not speak except to prolong the discussion. It is very rare that, in a well-formed council, the real plan of action in a given situation is not formulated in one way or another. It is snatched up and very often one of these who had given his advice very obscurely is quite surprised to see it carried into action the next day.

You have been able to see in my institutions and my acts what attention I have always given to **the creating of appearances; words are as necessary as actions.** The height of cleverness is to create a belief in franchise, when one has a Punic faith. Not only will my aims be impenetrable, but **my words will nearly always signify the opposite of what they will seem to indicate.** Only the initiated will be able to penetrate the sense of the characteristic phrases that I will drop from the heights of my throne: **when I will say: My reign means peace, it means there will be war;** when I will say that I call upon moral means, it means I will use methods of force. Do you hear me?

MONTESQUIEU. Yes.

MACHIAVELLI. You have seen that **my press has a hundred voices** and that they speak incessantly of the grandeur of my reign, of the enthusiasm of my subjects for their sovereign; that at the same time they put into the mouths of the public the opinions, the ideas and even the formulas of phrase that must support their conversations; you have also seen that my ministers continually astonish the public by the incontestable testimony of their work. As for me, **I will speak rarely, only once a year,** besides occasional important

{p. 236} situations. Thus each of my manifestations will be hailed, not only in my kingdom, but in the whole of Europe, as an event.

A Prince whose power is founded upon a democratic base, must speak carefully, albeit popularly. If necessary he must not fear to speak like a demagogue, for after all he is the people, and he must have its passions. There must be for him certain attentions, certain flatteries, certain demonstrations of tenderness which will have their place on occasion. It matters little that these methods may seem mean and puerile in the eyes of the world, the people will not look so closely and the effect will be produced.

In my book I recommend to the Prince to take for an example some great man of the past, in whose footsteps he must follow as much as possible. (The Prince, Chap. XIV, page 98.) The historical similarities have a great effect on the masses; one increases in their imagination, one is given in life the place that posterity is reserving for you. Besides, one finds in the biography of these great men certain comparisons, certain useful hints, sometimes identical situations, from which one can gather precious lessons, for all great political lessons rest in history. When one has found a great man with whom he has some likeness, he can do even better. You know that the people love a Prince who has a cultivated spirit, who has a taste for literature, who even has talent. Well, the Prince could not use his leisure to better advantage than to write, for instance, the biography of the great man of the past whom he has taken as a model. A severe philosophy could tax such things with weakness. When the sovereign is powerful he is pardoned, and is even endowed with I know not what grace.

Certain weaknesses, and even certain vices, moreover, serve the Prince as much as virtues do. You could recognize the truth of these observations according to **the use I have had to make sometimes of duplicity, sometimes of violence.** It must not be believed, for example, that the vindictive character of the sovereign could injure him; quite the contrary. If it is often opportune to employ clemency or magnanimity, **it is necessary that at certain moments his anger should bear down in a terrible manner.** Man is the image

{p. 237} of God, and divinity has no less rigorous blows than mercy. When I would have resolved upon the loss of my enemies, I would therefore wipe them out until there remained only their dust. Men revenge themselves only for light injuries; they can do nothing for the great ones. (The Prince, Chap. III, page 17.) That is what I expressly say in my book. The Prince has only the choice of instruments which must serve his wrath; he will always find judges ready to sacrifice their conscience to **projects of vengeance or hate.**

Do not fear that the people will ever be moved by the things I do to it. First, it loves to feel the vigor of the arm that commands, and then it hates by nature whoever rises above it, and it instinctively rejoices when one strikes above it. Perhaps you do not know, moreover, with what facility one forgets. When the moment of rigorous action is past, hardly even those who have been struck remember. In Rome, during the time of the Lower Empire, Tacitus reports that the victims ran with joy to meet their tortures. You understand perfectly that there is no question of anything like that in modern times; customs have become far softer; several proscriptions, some imprisonments, the forfeiture of civic rights, those are rather light punishments. It is true that, **to arrive at sovereign power, it was necessary to spill blood and to violate many rights;** but, I repeat, everything will be forgotten. The least cajolery on the part of the Prince, several kind actions on the part of his ministers or his agents, will be accepted with the marks of the greatest gratitude.

If it is indispensable to punish with an inflexible ruthlessness, it is necessary to recompense with the same punctuality; that is what I shall never fail to do. Whoever renders a service to my government will be recompensed the very next day. Positions, distinctions, the highest dignities, will form so many certain steps for whoever will be occupied in serving my government usefully. In the army, in the magistrature, in all public works, advancement will be calculated upon the shade of opinion and the degree of zeal for my government. You are silent.

{p. 238} MONTESQUIEU. Continue.

MACHIAVELLI. I return to certain vices and even to certain whims which I think necessary for a Prince. The management of power is an enormous thing. However able the sovereign may be, however infallible his glance and however ruthless his decisions, there is still an immense alea in his existence. It is necessary to be superstitious. Do not think that this is of little consequence. There are, in the lives of Princes, situations so difficult, moments so grave, that human prudence counts for little. In such cases, one must almost cast the die to make decisions. The method that I refer to, and which I shall follow, consists, in certain critical moments, in becoming attached to historical dates, consulting happy anniversaries, making such and such a bold resolution under the auspices of a day on which one has won a victory, or made a lucky stroke. I must tell you that superstition has another very great advantage; the people know this tendency. These augural ideas often succeed; they must also be used when one is sure of success. The people, who only judge by results, accustom themselves to believe that each act of the sovereign corresponds to certain celestial signs, that historic coincidences force the hand of fortune.

MONTESQUIEU. The last word has been said; you are a gambler.

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, but I have unheard-of luck, and I have a hand so sure, a mind so fertile that fortune cannot turn against me.

MONTESQUIEU. Since you are painting your portrait, you must have still other vices and other virtues to exhibit.

MACHIAVELLI. I ask you to forgive luxury. The passion for women serves a sovereign far more than you think. Henri IV owed a part of his popularity to his incontinence. Men are so made that this propensity among those who govern them pleases them. Dissolute habits have at all times been a passion, a gallant career in which the Prince must surpass his equals, as he surpasses his soldiers before the enemy. These ideas are French, and I do not think that they are too displeasing to the illustrious author of the *Lettres Persanes*. I am not permitted to fall into reflections that are too vulgar, but nevertheless I cannot refrain from telling

{p. 239} you that the most real result of the Prince's gallantry is to attract the sympathy of the more beautiful half of his subjects.

MONTESQUIEU. You are composing madrigals.

MACHIAVELLI. One can be serious and yet gallant: you have furnished the proof. I do not diminish my idea in any way. The influence of women on the public mind is considerable. In good politics, the Prince is condemned to be gallant, even when at heart he cares little for it; but that situation will be rare.

I can assure you that if I carefully follow the rules that I have just laid down, liberty will be little desired in my kingdom. They will have a strong sovereign, dissolute, filled with the spirit of chivalry, adroit in all the physical exercises: he will be loved. The austere will do nothing about it; they will follow the crowd; and more important, the independent men will be placed on the index: people will keep away from them. No one will believe either in their character or in their disinterest. They will pass for malcontents who wish to be bought. If, here and there, I do not encourage talent, it will be repulsed on all sides, and consciences will be walked on as would pavements. But at bottom, I shall be a moral Prince; I shall not permit people to go beyond certain limits. I will respect public modesty, in all places where I see that it wishes to be respected. Contaminations will not reach me, for I will give over to others the unpleasant parts of the administration. The worst that can be said of me is that I am a good Prince who has bad advisers, that I desire the good, that I desire it ardently, that I will always do what is right when it is pointed out to me.

If you knew how easy it is to govern when one has absolute power. There are no contradictions at all, no resistance; one can carry out one's designs at leisure, one has the time to correct one's mistakes. One can make the people happy without opposition, for that is what always preoccupies me. I can assure you that people will never be bored in my kingdom; minds will be always occupied with a thousand different things. I will give the people the spectacle of my equipages and the pomp of my Court; great ceremonies will be prepared; I will lay out gardens; I will offer my

{p. 240} hospitality to Kings; I will have embassies from the most distant countries brought here. Sometimes there will be rumors of war, sometimes diplomatic complications which will be discussed for months; I will even go so far as to satisfy the monomania of liberty. The wars which will be waged during my reign will be undertaken in the name of the liberty of men and the independence of nations, and, while the people acclaim me on my travels, I will whisper secretly into the ears of the absolute monarchs: Fear nothing, I am with you, I wear a crown like you and I intend to conserve it: I embrace European liberty, but only to strangle it. One thing alone could perhaps compromise my fortune at some moment; that will be the day when it is realized on every side that my policies are not honest, that my every act is marked by the stamp of cunning.

MONTESQUIEU. Who will be the blind who will not see that?

MACHIAVELLI. My entire people, excepting several groups of which I fear little. I have moreover formed about me a school of politicians of a very great relative strength. You cannot believe to what point Machiavellism is contagious, and how easy its precepts are to follow. In every branch of government there will be men of no consequence, or of very little consequence, who will be veritable Machiavellis in miniature who will scheme, who will dissimulate, who will lie with an imperturbable cold-bloodedness; truth will not be able to see light anywhere.

MONTESQUIEU. If you have not done anything but jest from one end to the other of this conversation, as I think you have, Machiavelli, I regard this irony as your most magnificent work.

MACHIAVELLI. Irony! You are deceiving yourself if you think that. Do you not understand that I have spoken without veiling my meaning, and that it is the terrible violence of truth that gives my words the color you think you see!

MONTESQUIEU, You have finished.

MONTESQUIEU. Not yet.

MONTESQUIEU. Then finish.

{p. 241} TWENTY-FIFTH DIALOGUE

MACHIAVELLI. **I will reign for ten years under these conditions**, without changing anything in my legislation; this is the only price of definite success. Nothing, absolutely nothing, must make me change during this period; the lid of the boiler must be of iron and lead; it is during this time that the phenomena of destruction of the dissatisfied spirit are elaborated. You think perhaps that the people will be unhappy, that they will complain. Ah! I would be inexcusable if that were so; but **when the springs have been the most violently tensed**, when I will weigh with the most terrible heaviness upon the chest of my people, this is what they will say: **We have only what we deserve, let us suffer.**

MONTESQUIEU. You are quite blind if you take that as an apology for your reign, if you do not understand that expression of these words is a violent regret of the past. That is a stoic saying that announces to you the day of chastisement.

MACHIAVELLI. You embarrass me. The hour has come to loosen the bonds, I will return the liberties.

MONTESQUIEU. A thousand times better the excess of your oppression. Your people will answer you: "Keep what you have taken."

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! How well I recognize implacable partisan hatred in that. To admit nothing to one's political adversaries, nothing, not even the benefits.

MONTESQUIEU. No, Machiavelli, nothing with you, nothing! The sacrificed victim receives no benefits from his executioner.

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! How easily I could penetrate the secret thought of my enemies in that matter. They flatter themselves, they hope that the force of expansion that I compress will sooner or later hurl me into space. The fools! They will only know me well at the end. In politics what is necessary to prevent any danger with the greatest possible repression? An imperceptible opening. And it will be found.

{p. 242} I will most certainly not return considerable liberty; well, see however to what point absolutism will have already penetrated into custom. I can wager that at the first noise of these liberties, there will be built around me rumors of alarm. My ministers, my councillors will cry that I am abandoning the rudder, that all is lost. I will be begged, in the name of the good of the State, in the name of the whole country, to do nothing about it; the people will say: "What is he thinking about? His genius is diminishing"; the indifferent will say: "He has come to the end of his tether"; the hateful will say: "He is dead."

MONTESQUIEU. And they will all be right, for a modern journalist (Benjamin Constant. Editor's Note.) has said with great truth: "Does one wish to despoil men of their rights? Nothing must be done by halves. Whatever is left will be of use to them to help regain what has been taken away. The hand that is still free unties the other from its bonds."

MACHIAVELLI. That is very well thought out; it is very true; I know that I am exposing myself very much. You see that people are unjust to me, that I love liberty more than they say. You asked me a moment ago if I knew self-denial, if I would sacrifice myself for my people, relinquish the throne if necessary: now you have my answer, I can relinquish it as a martyr.

MONTESQUIEU. You have become very tender-hearted. What liberties would you return?

MACHIAVELLI. I would permit my legislative chamber to inform me each year, at the new year, of their wishes in a petition.

MONTESQUIEU. But since the great majority of the chamber is devoted to you, what can you have if not thanks and messages of admiration and love?

MACHIAVELLI. Well, yes. Will not these messages be natural?

MONTESQUIEU. Are these all the liberties?

MACHIAVELLI. But this first concession is important, no matter what you say. Nevertheless I will not hold myself to that alone. There exists in Europe today a certain intellectual movement against centralization, not among the masses, but among the en-

{p. 243} lightened classes. I will decentralize, that is to say, I will give my governors of the provinces the right to decide on many of the little local questions hitherto submitted for the approval of my ministers.

MONTESQUIEU. You only make tyranny more insupportable if the municipal element counts for nothing in this reform.

MACHIAVELLI. That is the fatal precipitation of those who demand reforms: it is necessary to progress by prudent steps along the road of liberty. I do not, however, keep myself there: I will give commercial liberties.

MONTESQUIEU. You have already spoken of that.

MACHIAVELLI. It is because the industrial question always affects me: I do not wish it said of me that my legislation goes, by an excess of suspicion in the direction of the people, so far as to hinder it from providing for its own subsistence. It is for that reason that I will have presented to the chambers laws that have for their object to lessen a little the prohibitive resolutions of association. Besides, the tolerance of my government has rendered this measure quite useless, and since, in the final account, one must not disarm oneself, nothing will be changed in the law, except perhaps the form of its phrasing. We have today in the chambers deputies who lend themselves very well to these innocent strategies.

MONTESQUIEU. Is that all?

MACHIAVELLI. Yes, for it is a great deal, too much perhaps; but I think I can reassure myself; my army is enthusiastic, my magistrature faithful, and my penal legislation functions with the regularity and the precision of those all-powerful and terrible mechanisms that modern science has invented.

MONTESQUIEU. Thus, you will not touch the laws concerning the press?

MACHIAVELLI. You would not wish it.

MONTESQUIEU. Nor concerning municipal legislation?

MACHIAVELLI. Is that possible?

MONTESQUIEU. Nor your system of protectorate of the electorate?

MACHIAVELLI. No.

{p. 244} MONTESQUIEU. Nor the organization of the Senate, nor that of the legislative body, nor your interior system, nor your foreign policy, nor your economic regime, nor your financial regime?

MACHIAVELLI. I will not change anything besides what I have told you. To put it correctly, **I have left the period of terror, and I am entering the way of tolerance**; I can do it without danger; I could even give real liberties to the people, for one must be quite lacking in political sense not to realize that at this imaginary period my legislation has borne all its fruits. I have fulfilled the goal that I announced to you; the character of the nation has changed; the unimportant powers that I have given back have been for me the plumb with which I have measured the depth of the result. All is done, all is completed, there is no longer any possible resistance. There is no danger, there is nothing! And nevertheless I will return nothing. You have said that there lies practical truth.

MONTESQUIEU. Hasten to finish, Machiavelli. May my shadow never meet you again, and may God obliterate from my memory the last trace of all that I have just heard!

MACHIAVELLI. Take care, Montesquieu; before the moment that begins falls into eternity you will seek my footsteps with anguish and the memory of this conversation will desolate your soul through eternity.

MONTESQUIEU. Speak!

MACHIAVELLI. Let us return, then. I have done all that you know; by these concessions to the liberal spirit of my times, I have disarmed partisan hatred.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah! you will not drop this mask of hypocrisy with which you have covered heinous crimes that no human language has words for. You wish, then, that I leave the eternal night to disgrace you! Ah! Machiavelli! you yourself had not taught to degrade humanity to such a point! You did not conspire against conscience, you had not conceived the thought of making the human soul a mire in which the divine Creator Himself would recognize nothing.

{p. 245} MACHIAVELLI. That is true, I am surpassed.

MONTESQUIEU. Flee! do not prolong this talk one moment longer.

MACHIAVELLI. Before the shadows that advance tumultuously over there have reached this dark ravine which separates them from us, I will have finished; before they have arrived you will see me no longer and you will call me in vain.

MONTESQUIEU. Then finish, this will be the expiation of the sin I have committed in accepting this sacrilegious wager.

MACHIAVELLI. Ah! Liberty! So this is with what strength you hold some souls when the people scorn you or console themselves with baubles. Permit me to give you a very short defense of this subject:

Dion speaks of the Roman people being indignant against Augustus because of certain very harsh laws that he had promulgated, but, as soon as he had brought back the comedian Piladus, and the dissatisfied had been expelled from the city, discontent ceased.

That is my defense. Now here is the conclusion of the author, for it is an author whom I cite:

"Such a people felt tyranny more deeply when a dancer was exiled than when all its laws had been taken away." (Esprit des Lois~ Book XIX, Chap. II, p. 253.)

Do you know who wrote that?

MONTESQUIEU. It makes little difference.

MACHIAVELLI. Recognize yourself, then, it was you. I can see only boors round about me, what can I do? Dancers will not be lacking in my reign, and they would have to be very bad before I decided to expel them.

MONTESQUIEU. I do not know whether you have quoted me exactly; but here is a citation that I can guarantee you: it will revenge through eternity the people you libel:

"The habits of the Prince contribute as much to liberty as the laws. He can, like them, make men beasts, and beasts men; if he loves free souls, he will have subjects, if he loves boors, he will have slaves." (Page 173, Chap. XXVII, Book XII.)

{p. 246} That is my reply, and if I had to add something to this quotation today, I would say:

"When public honesty is banished from the heart of the courts, when corruption spreads there without shame, yet it will never penetrate save in the hearts of those who have access to a bad Prince; love of virtue still lives in the hearts of the people, and the power of this principle is so great that the bad Prince has only to disappear in order that, by the very force of things, honesty will return in the practice of government at the same time as liberty."

MACHIAVELLI. That is very well written, in a very simple manner. There is only one thing wrong in what you have just said, that, in the mind as in the soul of my people, I personify virtue, and more, I personify liberty, do you hear, as **I personify revolution, progress, the modern spirit, all that is good at the bottom of modern civilization. I do not say that I am respected**, I do not say that I am loved, I say that I am venerated, I say that the people adore me; that if I wished it, I could have altars erected to me, for, explain it as you wish, I have the fatal gifts that work upon the masses. In your country **Louis XVI was guillotined, he who wished only good for his people**, who desired it with all the faith, all the ardor of a sincerely honest soul, and, several years before, altars had been erected to Louis XIV who cared less for the people than the least of his mistresses; who, at the slightest shake of a head, would have the mob cannonaded while he played dice with Lauzun. But I, I am much more than Louis XIV, with the popular suffrage that is the base of my government; I am Washington, I am Henri IV, I am Saint Louis, Charles-le-Sage, I take your best kings, to honor you. I am a king of Egypt and Asia at the same time, **I am Pharaoh, I am Cyrus, I am Alexander**, I am Sardanapalus; the soul of the people expands when I pass; it runs drunkenly in my footsteps; I am an object of idolatry; the father points me out to his son, the mother invokes my name in her prayers, the maiden looks at me with sighs and dreams that if my glance fell upon her by chancel she could perhaps lie for a

{p. 247} moment on my couch. When the unhappy is oppressed, he says: If the king but knew; when someone desires revenge, **when he hopes for help, he says, The king will know**. Besides, I will never be approached without being found with my hands filled with **gold**. Those who surround me, it is true, are hard, violent, they deserve the stick at times, but it is necessary to have things thus; for their hateful despicable character, their cheap cupidity, their dissoluteness, their shameful wastefulness, their crass avarice make a contrast with the sweetness of my character, my simple bealing, my inexhaustible generosity. They will invoke my name, I tell you, like that of a god; in storms, in periods of want, in great fires, I hasten to them, the people throw themselves at my feet, they would carry me to the heavens in their arms, if God gave them wings.

MONTESQUIEU. All of which would not stop you from crushing it with cannonshot at the least sign of resistance.

MACHIAVELLI. That is true, but love does not exist without fear.

MONTESQUIEU. Has this frightful vision ended?

MACHIAVELLI. Vision! Ah! Montesquieu! you will shed tears for a long time: tear up the Esprit des Lois, beg God to give you forgetfulness for your part in heaven; for here is the terrible truth of which you already have the foreboding; there was no vision in what I have just told you.

MONTESQUIEU. What are you telling me?

MACHIAVELLI. What I have just described, this gathering of monstrous things before which the mind recoils in fright, this work that only hell itself could accomplish, all this is fact, **all this exists, all this prospers in the face of the sun, at this very moment**, in a part of the globe which we have left.

MONTESQUIEU. Where?

MACHIAVELLI. No, that would be to inflict upon you a second death.

MONTESQUIEU. Ah! Speak, in the name of heaven!

MACHIAVELLI. Well! ...

{p. 248} MONTESQUIEU. What?

MACHIAVELLI. The time has passed! Do you not see that the whirlwind is carrying me away?

MONTESQUIEU . Machiavelli!!

MACHIAVELLI. See those shadows which pass by not far from you, covering their eyes; do you recognize them? They are the glories that called forth the envy of the whole world. Now, they beseech the Lord to render them their fatherland! ...

MONTESQUIEU. Eternal God, what have you permitted! ...