

Why the Princes of Italy Have Lost Their States

When the things written above have been observed prudently, they make a new prince appear ancient and immediately render him more secure and steady in his state than if he had grown old in it. For a new prince is observed much more in his actions than a hereditary one; and when they are recognized as virtuous, they take hold of men much more and obligate them much more than ancient blood. For men are much more taken by present things than by past ones, and when they find good in the present, they enjoy it and do not seek elsewhere; indeed they will take up every defense on behalf of a new prince if he is not lacking in other things as regards himself. And so he will have the double glory of having made the beginning of a new principality, of having adorned it and consolidated it with good laws, good arms, good friends,¹ and good examples, just as he has a double shame who, having been born prince, has lost it through his lack of prudence.

And if one considers those lords in Italy who have lost their states in our times, like the king of Naples,² the duke of Milan,³ and others, one will find in them, first, a common defect as to arms, the causes of which have been discussed at length above; then, one will see that some of them either had a hostile people or if they had friendly peoples, did not know how to secure themselves against the great. For without these defects, states that have enough nerve to put an

1. Most MSS omit "good friends."

2. Frederick of Aragon, expelled from Naples in 1501 by Ferdinand the Catholic and Louis XII, and dethroned.

3. Ludovico Sforza; see Chapter 3.

army into the field are not lost. Philip of Macedon, not the father of Alexander but the one who was defeated by Titus Quintius,⁴ did not have much of a state with respect to the greatness of the Romans and of Greece, who attacked him; nonetheless, because he was a military man and knew how to deal with the people and secure himself against the great, he kept up a war against them for many years; and if at the end he lost dominion over several cities, his kingdom remained to him nonetheless.

Therefore, these princes of ours who have been in their principalities for many years may not accuse fortune when they have lost them afterwards, but their own indolence; for, never having thought that quiet times could change (which is a common defect of men, not to take account of the storm during the calm), when later the times became adverse, they thought of fleeing and not of defending themselves. And they hoped that their peoples, disgusted with the insolence of the victors, would call them back. This course is good when others are lacking; but it is indeed bad to have put aside other remedies for this one. For one should never fall in the belief you can find someone to pick you up. Whether it does not happen or happens, it is not security for you, because that defense was base and did not depend on you. And those defenses alone are good, are certain, and are lasting, that depend on you yourself and on your virtue.

4. On Philip V of Macedonia (237–179 B.C.), see *Discourses on Livy* II 4, 10; III 10, 37.

How Much Fortune Can Do in Human Affairs, and in What Mode It May Be Opposed

It is not unknown to me that many have held and hold the opinion that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God, that men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all; and on account of this they might judge that one need not sweat much over things but let oneself be governed by chance. This opinion has been believed more in our times because of the great variability of things which have been seen and are seen every day, beyond every human conjecture. When I have thought about this sometimes, I have been in some part inclined to their opinion. Nonetheless, so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern. And I liken her to one of these violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It happens similarly with fortune, which demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order¹ to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes

1. lit.: ordered.

have not been made to contain her. And if you consider Italy, which is the seat of these variations and that which has given them motion, you will see² a country without dams and without any dike. If it had been diked by suitable virtue, like Germany, Spain, and France, either this flood would not have brought the great variations that it has, or it would not have come here.

And I wish that this may be enough to have said about opposing fortune in general.³ But restricting myself more to particulars, I say that one sees a given prince be happy today and come to ruin tomorrow without having seen him change his nature or any quality. This I believe arises, first, from the causes that have been discussed at length in the preceding, that is, that the prince who leans entirely on his fortune comes to ruin as it varies. I believe, further, that he is happy who adapts his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unhappy whose procedure is in disaccord with the times. For one sees that in the things that lead men to the end that each has before him, that is, glories and riches, they proceed variously: one with caution,⁴ the other with impetuosity; one by violence, the other with art; one with patience, the other with its contrary—and with these different modes each can attain it. One also sees two cautious persons, one attaining his plan, the other not; and similarly two persons are equally happy with two different methods, one being cautious, the other impetuous. This arises from nothing other than from the quality of the times that they conform to or not in their procedure. From this follows what I said, that two persons working differently come out with the same effect; and of two persons working identically, one is led to his end, the

2. Both *you's* in this sentence are the formal or plural *you*.

3. lit.: universal.

4. lit.: respect; *rispetto* is translated usually as "caution" and "hesitation," occasionally as "regard."

other not. On this also depends the variability of the good: for if one governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his government is good, he comes out happy; but if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding. Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it. And so the cautious man, when it is time to come to impetuosity, does not know how to do it, hence comes to ruin: for if he would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change.

Pope Julius II proceeded impetuously in all his affairs, and he found the times and affairs so much in conformity with his mode of proceeding that he always achieved a happy end. Consider⁵ the first enterprise that he undertook in Bologna, while Messer Giovanni Bentivoglio was still living. The Venetians were not content with it; nor was the king of Spain; with France he was holding discussions⁶ on that enterprise; and nonetheless, with his ferocity and impetuosity, he personally put that expedition into motion. This move made Spain and the Venetians stand still in suspense, the latter out of fear and the other because of the desire he had to recover the whole kingdom of Naples. From the other side he pulled the king of France after him; because when that king saw him move, and since he desired to make Julius his friend in order to bring down the Venetians, he judged he could not deny him his troops without injuring him openly. Julius thus accomplished with his impetuous move what no other pontiff, with all human prudence, would ever have accomplished, because if he had

5. The formal or plural you should be understood here.

6. lit.: reasonings.

waited to depart from Rome with firm conclusions and everything in order, as any other pontiff would have done, he would never have succeeded. For the king of France would have had a thousand excuses and the others would have raised in him a thousand fears. I wish to omit all his other actions, since all have been alike and all succeeded well. And the brevity of his life did not allow him to feel the contrary, because if times had come when he had needed to proceed with caution, his ruin would have followed: he would never have deviated from those modes to which nature inclined him.⁷

I conclude, thus, that when fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their modes, men are happy while they are in accord, and as they come into discord, unhappy. I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity.

7. See *Discourses on Livy* III 9.

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Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians

Thus, having considered everything discussed above, and thinking to myself whether in Italy at present the times have been tending to the honor of a new prince, and whether