

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

THE modern as opposed to the medieval outlook began in Italy with the movement called the Renaissance. At first, only a few individuals, notably Petrarch, had this outlook, but during the fifteenth century it spread to the great majority of cultivated Italians, both lay and clerical. In some respects, Italians of the Renaissance—with the exception of Leonardo and a few others—had not the respect for science which has characterized most important innovators since the seventeenth century; with this lack is associated their very partial emancipation from superstition, especially in the form of astrology. Many of them had still the reverence for authority that medieval philosophers had had, but they substituted the authority of the ancients for that of the Church. This was, of course, a step towards emancipation, since the ancients disagreed with each other, and individual judgment was required to decide which of them to follow. But very few Italians of the fifteenth century would have dared to hold an opinion for which no authority could be found either in antiquity or in the teaching of the Church.

To understand the Renaissance, it is necessary first to review briefly the political condition of Italy. After the death of Frederick II in 1250, Italy was, in the main, free from foreign interference until the French king Charles VIII invaded the country in 1494. There were in Italy five important States: Milan, Venice, Florence, the Papal Domain, and Naples; in addition to these there were a number of small principalities, which varied in their alliance with or subjection to some one of the larger States. Until 1378, Genoa rivalled Venice in commerce and naval power, but after that year Genoa became subject to Milanese suzerainty.

Milan, which led the resistance to feudalism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, fell, after the final defeat of the Hohenstaufen, under the dominion of the Visconti, an able family whose power was plutocratic, not feudal. They ruled for 170 years, from 1277 to 1447; then, after three years of restored republican government, a new family, that of the Sforza, connected with the Visconti, acquired the government, and took the title of Dukes of Milan. From 1494 to 1535, Milan was a battle-ground between the French and the Spaniards; the Sforza allied themselves sometimes with

one side, sometimes with the other. During this period they were sometimes in exile, sometimes in nominal control. Finally, in 1535, Milan was annexed by the Emperor Charles V.

The Republic of Venice stands somewhat outside Italian politics, especially in the earlier centuries of its greatness. It had never been conquered by the barbarians, and at first regarded itself as subject to the Eastern emperors. This tradition, combined with the fact that its trade was with the East, gave it an independence of Rome, which still persisted down to the time of the Council of Trent (1545), of which the Venetian Paolo Sarpi wrote a very anti-papal history. We have seen how, at the time of the fourth Crusade, Venice insisted upon the conquest of Constantinople. This improved Venetian trade, which, conversely, suffered by the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. For various reasons, partly connected with food supply, the Venetians found it necessary, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to acquire considerable territory on the mainland of Italy; this roused enmities, and led finally, in 1509, to the formation of the League of Cambrai, a combination of powerful States by which Venice was defeated. It might have been possible to recover from this misfortune, but not from Vasco da Gama's discovery of the Cape route to India (1497-8). This, added to the power of the Turks, ruined Venice, which, however, lingered on until deprived of independence by Napoleon.

The constitution of Venice, which had originally been democratic, became gradually less so, and was, after 1297, a close oligarchy. The basis of political power was the Great Council, membership of which, after that date, was hereditary, and was confined to the leading families. Executive power belonged to the Council of Ten, which was elected by the Great Council. The Doge, the ceremonial head of the State, was elected for life; his nominal powers were very restricted, but in practice his influence was usually decisive. Venetian diplomacy was considered exceedingly astute, and the reports of Venetian ambassadors were remarkably penetrating. Since Ranke, historians have used them as among the best sources for knowledge of the events with which they deal.

Florence was the most civilized city in the world, and the chief source of the Renaissance. Almost all the great names in literature, and the earlier as well as some of the later of the great names in art, are connected with Florence; but for the present we are concerned with politics rather than culture. In the thirteenth century, there were three conflicting classes in Florence: the nobles, the rich merchants, and the small men. The nobles, in the main, were Ghibelline, the other two classes Guelf. The Ghibellines were finally defeated in 1266, and during the fourteenth century the party of

the small men got the better of the rich merchants. The conflict, however, led not to a stable democracy, but to the gradual growth of what the Greeks would have called a 'tyranny'. The Medici family, who ultimately became the rulers of Florence, began as political bosses on the democratic side. Cosimo dei Medici (1389-1464), the first of the family to achieve clear pre-eminence, still had no official position; his power depended upon skill in manipulating elections. He was astute, conciliatory when possible, ruthless when necessary. He was succeeded, after a short interval, by his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent, who held power from 1469 till his death in 1492. Both these men owed their position to their wealth, which they had acquired mainly in commerce, but also in mining and other industries. They understood how to make Florence rich, as well as themselves, and under them the city prospered.

Lorenzo's son Pietro lacked his father's merits, and was expelled in 1494. Then followed the four years of Savonarola's influence, when a kind of Puritan revival turned men against gaiety and luxury, away from free-thought and towards the piety supposed to have characterized a simpler age. In the end, however, mainly for political reasons, Savonarola's enemies triumphed, he was executed and his body was burnt (1498). The Republic, democratic in intention but plutocratic in fact, survived till 1512, when the Medici were restored. A son of Lorenzo, who had become a cardinal at the age of fourteen, was elected Pope in 1513, and took the title of Leo X. The Medici family, under the title of Grand Dukes of Tuscany, governed Florence until 1737; but Florence meanwhile, like the rest of Italy, had become poor and unimportant.

The temporal power of the Pope, which owned its origin to Pepin and the forged Donation of Constantine, increased greatly during the Renaissance; but the methods employed by the popes to this end robbed the papacy of spiritual authority. The conciliar movement, which came to grief in the conflict between the Council of Basel and Pope Eugenius IV (1431-47), represented the most earnest elements in the Church; what was perhaps even more important, it represented ecclesiastical opinion north of the Alps. The victory of the popes was the victory of Italy, and (in a lesser degree) of Spain. Italian civilization, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, was totally unlike that of northern countries, which remained medieval. The Italians were in earnest about culture, but not about morals and religion; even in the minds of ecclesiastics, elegant latinity would cover a multitude of sins. Nicholas V (1447-55), the first humanist Pope, gave papal offices to scholars whose learning he respected, regardless of other considerations; Lorenzo Valla, an Epicurean, and the man who proved the Donation of

Constantine to be a forgery, who ridiculed the style of the Vulgate and accused St Augustine of heresy, was made apostolic secretary. This policy of encouraging humanism rather than piety or orthodoxy continued until the sack of Rome in 1527.

Encouragement of humanism, though it shocked the earnest North, might, from our point of view, be reckoned a virtue; but the warlike policy and immoral life of some of the popes could not be defended from any point of view except that of naked power politics. Alexander VI (1492-1503) devoted his life as Pope to the aggrandizement of himself and his family. He had two sons, the Duke of Gandia and Caesar Borgia, of whom he greatly preferred the former. The duke, however, was murdered, probably by his brother; the Pope's dynastic ambitions therefore had to be concentrated on Caesar. Together they conquered the Romagna and Ancona, which were intended to form a principality for Caesar; but when the Pope died Caesar was very ill, and therefore could not act promptly. Their conquests consequently reverted to the patrimony of St Peter. The wickedness of these two men soon became legendary, and it is difficult to disentangle truth from falsehood as regards the innumerable murders of which they are accused. There can be no doubt, however, that they carried the arts of perfidy further than they had ever been carried before. Julius II (1503-13), who succeeded Alexander VI, was not remarkable for piety, but gave less occasion for scandal than his predecessor. He continued the process of enlarging the papal domain; as a soldier he had merit, but not as the Head of the Christian Church. The Reformation, which began under his successor Leo X (1513-21), was the natural outcome of the pagan policy of the Renaissance popes.

The southern extremity of Italy was occupied by the Kingdom of Naples, with which, at most times, Sicily was united. Naples and Sicily had been the especial personal kingdom of the Emperor Frederick II; he had introduced an absolute monarchy on the Mohammedan model, enlightened but despotic, and allowing no power to the feudal nobility. After his death in 1250, Naples and Sicily went to his natural son Manfred, who, however, inherited the implacable hostility of the Church, and was ousted by the French in 1266. The French made themselves unpopular, and were massacred in the 'Sicilian Vespers' (1282), after which the kingdom belonged to Peter III of Aragon and his heirs. After various complications, leading to the temporary separation of Naples and Sicily, they were reunited in 1443 under Alphonso the Magnanimous, a distinguished patron of letters. From 1495 onwards, three French kings tried to conquer Naples, but in the end the kingdom was acquired by Ferdinand of Aragon (1502). Charles VIII, Louis XII,

and Francis I, kings of France, all had claims (not very good in law) on Milan and Naples; all invaded Italy with temporary success, but all were ultimately defeated by the Spaniards. The victory of Spain and the Counter-Reformation put an end to the Italian Renaissance. Pope Clement VII being an obstacle to the Counter-Reformation, and, as a Medici, a friend of France, Charles V, in 1527, caused Rome to be sacked by a largely Protestant army. After this, the popes became religious, and the Italian Renaissance was at an end.

The game of power politics in Italy was unbelievably complex. The minor princes, mostly self-made tyrants, allied themselves now with one of the larger States, now with another; if they played the game unwisely, they were exterminated. There were constant wars, but until the coming of the French in 1494 they were almost bloodless: the soldiers were mercenaries, who were anxious to minimize their vocational risks. These purely Italian wars did not interfere much with trade, or prevent the country from increasing in wealth. There was much statecraft, but no wise statesmanship; when the French came, the country found itself practically defenceless. French troops shocked the Italians by actually killing people in battle. The wars between French and Spaniards which ensued were serious wars, bringing suffering and impoverishment. But the Italian States went on intriguing against each other, invoking the aid of France or Spain in their internal quarrels, without any feeling for national unity. In the end, all were ruined. It must be said that Italy would inevitably have lost its importance, owing to the discovery of America and the Cape route to the East; but the collapse could have been less catastrophic, and less destructive of the quality of Italian civilization.

The Renaissance was not a period of great achievement in philosophy, but it did certain things which were essential preliminaries to the greatness of the seventeenth century. In the first place, it broke down the rigid scholastic system, which had become an intellectual strait jacket. It revived the study of Plato, and thereby demanded at least so much independent thought as was required for choosing between him and Aristotle. In regard to both, it promoted a genuine and first-hand knowledge, free from the glosses of Neoplatonists and Arabic commentators. More important still, it encouraged the habit of regarding intellectual activity as a delightful social adventure, not a cloistered meditation aiming at the preservation of a predetermined orthodoxy.

The substitution of Plato for the scholastic Aristotle was hastened by contact with Byzantine scholarship. Already at the Council of Ferrara (1438), which nominally reunited the Eastern and Western Churches, there was a debate in which the Byzantines maintained

the superiority of Plato to Aristotle. Gemistus Pletho, an ardent Greek Platonist of doubtful orthodoxy, did much to promote Platonism in Italy; so did Bessarion, a Greek who became a cardinal. Cosimo and Lorenzo dei Medici were both addicted to Plato; Cosimo founded and Lorenzo continued the Florentine Academy, which was largely devoted to the study of Plato. Cosimo died listening to one of Plato's dialogues. The humanists of the time, however, were too busy acquiring knowledge of antiquity to be able to produce anything original in philosophy.

The Renaissance was not a popular movement; it was a movement of a small number of scholars and artists, encouraged by liberal patrons, especially the Medici and the humanist popes. But for these patrons, it might have had very much less success. Petrarch and Boccaccio, in the fourteenth century, belong mentally to the Renaissance, but owing to the different political conditions of their time their immediate influence was less than that of the fifteenth-century humanists.

The attitude of Renaissance scholars to the Church is difficult to characterize simply. Some were avowed free-thinkers, though even these usually received extreme unction, making peace with the Church when they felt death approaching. Most of them were impressed by the wickedness of contemporary popes, but were nevertheless glad to be employed by them. Guicciardini the historian wrote in 1529:

'No man is more disgusted than I am with the ambition, the avarice, and the profligacy of the priests, not only because each of these vices is hateful in itself, but because each and all of them are most unbecoming in those who declare themselves to be men in special relations with God, and also because they are vices so opposed to one another, that they can only co-exist in very singular natures. Nevertheless, my position at the Court of several popes forced me to desire their greatness, for the sake of my own interest. But, had it not been for this, I should have loved Martin Luther as myself, not in order to free myself from the laws which Christianity, as generally understood and explained, lays upon us, but in order to see this swarm of scoundrels put back into their proper place, so that they may be forced to live either without vices or without power.'¹

This is delightfully frank, and shows clearly why the humanists could not inaugurate a reformation. Moreover, most of them saw no half-way house between orthodoxy and free-thought; such a position as Luther's was impossible for them, because they no longer had the medieval feeling for the subtleties of theology.

¹ Quoted from Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, part iv, chap. ii.

Masuccio, after describing the wickedness of monks and nuns and friars, says: 'The best punishment for them would be for God to abolish purgatory; they would then receive no more alms, and would be forced to go back to their spades.'¹ But it does not occur to him, as to Luther, to deny purgatory, while retaining most of the Catholic faith.

The wealth of Rome depended only in small part upon the revenues obtained from the papal dominions; in the main, it was a tribute, drawn from the whole Catholic world, by means of a theological system which maintained that the popes held the keys of heaven. An Italian who effectively questioned this system risked the impoverishment of Italy, and the loss of the position in the Western world. Consequently Italian unorthodoxy, in the Renaissance, was purely intellectual, and did not lead to schism, or to any attempt to create a popular movement away from the Church. The only exception, and that a very partial one, was Savonarola, who belonged mentally to the Middle Ages.

Most of the humanists retained such superstitious beliefs as had found support in antiquity. Magic and witchcraft might be wicked, but were not thought impossible. Innocent VIII, in 1484, issued a bull against witchcraft, which led to an appalling persecution of witches in Germany and elsewhere. Astrology was prized especially by freethinkers; it acquired a vogue which it had not had since ancient times. The first effect of emancipation from the Church was not to make men think rationally, but to open their minds to every sort of antique nonsense.

Morally, the first effect of emancipation was equally disastrous. The old moral rules ceased to be respected; most of the rulers of States had acquired their position by treachery, and retained it by ruthless cruelty. When cardinals were invited to dine at the coronation of a pope, they brought their own wine and their own cup-bearer, for fear of poison.² Except Savonarola, hardly any Italian of the period risked anything for a public object. The evils of papal corruption were obvious, but nothing was done about them. The undesirability of Italian unity was evident, but the rulers were incapable of combination. The danger of foreign domination was imminent, yet every Italian ruler was prepared to invoke the aid of any foreign power, even the Turk, in any dispute with any other Italian ruler. I cannot think of any crime, except the destruction of ancient manuscripts, of which the men of the Renaissance were not frequently guilty.

Outside the sphere of morals, the Renaissance had great merits. In architecture, painting, and poetry, it has remained renowned.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, part vi, chap. i.

WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

It produced very great men, such as Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli. It liberated educated men from the narrowness of medieval culture, and, even while still a slave to the worship of antiquity, it made scholars aware that a variety of opinions had been held by reputable authorities on almost every subject. By reviving the knowledge of the Greek world, it created a mental atmosphere in which it was again possible to rival Hellenic achievements, and in which individual genius could flourish with a freedom unknown since the time of Alexander. The political conditions of the Renaissance favoured individual development, but were unstable; the instability and the individualism were closely connected, as in ancient Greece. A stable social system is necessary, but every stable system hitherto devised has hampered the development of exceptional artistic or intellectual merit. How much murder and anarchy are we prepared to endure for the sake of great achievements such as those of the Renaissance? In the past, a great deal; in our own time, much less. No solution of this problem has hitherto been found, although increase of social organization is making it continually more important.

MACHIAVELLI

THE Renaissance, though it produced no important theoretical philosopher, produced one man of supreme eminence in political philosophy: Niccolò Machiavelli. It is the custom to be shocked by him, and he certainly is sometimes shocking. But many other men would be equally so if they were equally free from humbug. His political philosophy is scientific and empirical, based upon his own experience of affairs, concerned to set forth the means to assigned ends, regardless of the question whether the ends are to be considered good or bad. When, on occasion, he allows himself to mention the ends that he desires, they are such as we can all applaud. Much of the conventional obloquy that attaches to his name is due to the indignation of hypocrites who hate the frank avowal of evil-doing. There remains, it is true, a good deal that genuinely demands criticism, but in this he is an expression of his age. Such intellectual honesty about political dishonesty would have been hardly possible at any other time or in any other country, except perhaps in Greece among men who owed their theoretical education to the sophists and their practical training to the wars of petty states which, in classical Greece as in Renaissance Italy, were the political accompaniment of individual genius.

Machiavelli (1467-1527) was a Florentine, whose father, a lawyer, was neither rich nor poor. When he was in his twenties, Savonarola dominated Florence; his miserable end evidently made a great impression on Machiavelli, for he remarks that 'all armed prophets have conquered and unarmed ones failed', proceeding to give Savonarola as an instance of the latter class. On the other side he mentions Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus. It is typical of the Renaissance that Christ is not mentioned.

Immediately after Savonarola's execution, Machiavelli obtained a minor post in the Florentine government (1498). He remained in its service, at times on important diplomatic missions, until the restoration of the Medici in 1512; then, having always opposed them, he was arrested, but acquitted, and allowed to live in retirement in the country near Florence. He became an author for want of other occupation. His most famous work, *The Prince*, was written in 1513, and dedicated to Lorenzo the Second, since he hoped (vainly, as it proved) to win the favour of the Medici. Its

tone is perhaps partly due to this practical purpose; his longer work, the *Discourses*, which he was writing at the same time, is markedly more republican and more liberal. He says at the beginning of *The Prince* that he will not speak of republics in this book, since he has dealt with them elsewhere. Those who do not read also the *Discourses* are likely to get a very one-sided view of his doctrine.

Having failed to conciliate the Medici, Machiavelli was compelled to go on writing. He lived in retirement until the year of his death, which was that of the sack of Rome by the troops of Charles V. This year may be reckoned also that in which the Italian Renaissance died.

The Prince is concerned to discover, from history and from contemporary events, how principalities are won, how they are held, and how they are lost. Fifteenth-century Italy afforded a multitude of examples, both great and small. Few rulers were legitimate; even the popes, in many cases, secured election by corrupt means. The rules for achieving success were not quite the same as they became when times grew more settled, for no one was shocked by cruelties and treacheries which would have disqualified a man in the eighteenth or the nineteenth century. Perhaps our age, again, can better appreciate Machiavelli, for some of the most notable successes of our time have been achieved by methods as base as any employed in Renaissance Italy. He would have applauded, as an artistic connoisseur in statecraft, Hitler's Reichstag fire, his purge of the party in 1934, and his breach of faith after Munich.

Caesar Borgia, son of Alexander VI, comes in for high praise. His problem was a difficult one: first, by the death of his brother, to become the sole beneficiary of his father's dynastic ambition; second, to conquer by force of arms, in the name of the Pope, territories which should, after Alexander's death, belong to himself and not to the Papal States; third, to manipulate the College of Cardinals so that the next Pope should be his friend. He pursued this difficult end with great skill; from his practice, Machiavelli says, a new prince should derive precepts. Caesar failed, it is true, but only 'by the extraordinary malignity of fortune'. It happened that, when his father died, he also was dangerously ill; by the time he recovered, his enemies had organized their forces, and his bitterest opponent had been elected Pope. On the day of this election, Caesar told Machiavelli that he had provided for everything, 'except that he had never thought that at his father's death he would be dying himself'.

Machiavelli, who was intimately acquainted with his villainies, sums up thus: 'Reviewing thus all the actions of the duke [Caesar],

I find nothing to blame, on the contrary, I feel bound, as I have done, to hold him as an example to be imitated by all who by fortune and with the arms of others have risen to power.'

There is an interesting chapter 'Of Ecclesiastical Principalities', which, in view of what is said in the *Discourses*, evidently conceals part of Machiavelli's thought. The reason for concealment was, no doubt, that *The Prince* was designed to please the Medici, and that, when it was written, a Medici had just become Pope (Leo X). In regard to ecclesiastical principalities, he says in *The Prince*, the only difficulty is to acquire them, for, when acquired, they are defended by ancient religious customs, which keep their princes in power no matter how they behave. Their princes do not need armies (so he says), because 'they are upheld by higher causes which the human mind cannot attain to'. They are 'exalted and maintained by God', and 'it would be the work of a presumptuous and foolish man to discuss them'. Nevertheless, he continues, it is permissible to inquire by what means Alexander VI so greatly increased the temporal power of the Pope.

The discussion of the papal powers in the *Discourses* is longer and more sincere. Here he begins by placing eminent men in an ethical hierarchy. The best, he says, are the founders of religions; then come the founders of monarchies or republics; then literary men. These are good, but destroyers of religions, subverters of republics or kingdoms, and enemies of virtue or of letters, are bad. Those who establish tyrannies are wicked, including Julius Caesar; on the other hand, Brutus was good. (The contrast between this view and Dante's shows the effect of classical literature.) He holds that religion should have a prominent place in the State, not on the ground of its truth, but as a social cement: the Romans were right to pretend to believe in auguries, and to punish those who disregarded them. His criticisms of the Church in his day are two: that by its evil conduct it has undermined religious belief, and that the temporal power of the popes, with the policy that it inspires, prevents the unification of Italy. These criticisms are expressed with great vigour. 'The nearer people are to the Church of Rome, which is the head of our religion, the less religious are they. . . . Her ruin and chastisement is near at hand. . . . We Italians owe to the Church of Rome and to her priests our having become irreligious and bad; but we owe her a still greater debt, and one that will be the cause of our ruin, namely that the Church has kept and still keeps our country divided.'

In view of such passages, it must be supposed that Machiavelli's admiration of Caesar Borgia was only for his skill, not for his pur-

¹ This remained true until 1870.

Admiration of skill, and of the actions that lead to fame, was very great at the time of the Renaissance. This kind of feeling has, of course, always existed; many of Napoleon's enemies enthusiastically admired him as a military strategist. But in the Italy of Machiavelli's time the quasi-artistic admiration of dexterity was much greater than in earlier or later centuries. It would be a mistake to try to reconcile it with the larger political aims which Machiavelli considered important; the two things, love of skill and patriotic desire for Italian unity, existed side by side in his mind, and were not in any degree synthesized. Thus he can praise Caesar Borgia for his cleverness, and blame him for keeping Italy disrupted. The perfect character, one must suppose, would be, in his opinion, a man as clever and unscrupulous as Caesar Borgia where means are concerned, but aiming at a different end. *The Prince* ends with an eloquent appeal to the Medici to liberate Italy from the 'barbarians' (i.e. the French and Spaniards), whose domination 'stinks'. He would not expect such a work to be undertaken from unselfish motives, but from love of power, and still more of fame.

The Prince is very explicit in repudiating received morality where the conduct of rulers is concerned. A ruler will perish if he is always good; he must be as cunning as a fox and as fierce as a lion. There is a chapter (XVIII) entitled: 'In What Way Princes Must Keep Faith.' We learn that they should keep faith when it pays to do so, but not otherwise. A prince must on occasion be faithless.

'But it is necessary to be able to disguise this character well, and to be a great feigner and dissembler; and men are so simple and so ready to obey present necessities, that one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived. I will mention only one modern instance. Alexander VI did nothing else but deceive men, he thought of nothing else, and found the occasion for it; no man was ever more able to give assurances, or affirmed things with stronger oaths, and no man observed them less; however, he always succeeded in his deceptions, as he knew well this aspect of things. It is not necessary therefore for a prince to have all the above-named qualities [the conventional virtues], but it is very necessary to seem to have them.'

He goes on to say that, above all, a prince should seem to be religious.

The tone of the *Discourses*, which are nominally a commentary on Livy, is very different. There are whole chapters which seem almost as if they had been written by Montesquieu; most of the book could have been read with approval by an eighteenth-century liberal. The doctrine of checks and balances is set forth explicitly. Princes, nobles, and people should all have a part in the Constitu-

tion; 'then these three powers will keep each other reciprocally in check'. The constitution of Sparta, as established by Lycurgus, was the best, because it embodied the most perfect balance; that of Solon was too democratic, and therefore led to the tyranny of Peisistratus. The Roman republican constitution was good, owing to the conflict of Senate and people.

The word 'liberty' is used throughout as denoting something precious, though what it denotes is not very clear. This, of course, comes from antiquity, and was passed on to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tuscany has preserved its liberties, because it contains no castles or gentlemen. ('Gentlemen' is of course a mistranslation, but a pleasing one.) It seems to be recognized that political liberty requires a certain kind of personal virtue in the citizens. In Germany alone, we are told, probity and religion are still common, and therefore in Germany there are many republics. In general, the people are wiser and more constant than princes, although Livy and most other writers maintain the opposite. It is not without good reason that it is said, 'the voice of the people is the voice of God'.

It is interesting to observe how the political thought of the Greeks and Romans, in their republican days, acquired an actuality in the fifteenth century which it had not had in Greece since Alexander or in Rome since Augustus. The Neoplatonists, the Arabs, and the Schoolmen took a passionate interest in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, but none at all in their political writings, because the political systems of the age of City States had completely disappeared. The growth of City States in Italy synchronized with the revival of learning, and made it possible for humanists to profit by the political theories of republican Greeks and Romans. The love of 'liberty', and the theory of checks and balances, came to the Renaissance from antiquity, and to modern times largely from the Renaissance, though also directly from antiquity. This aspect of Machiavelli is at least as important as the more famous 'immoral' doctrines of *The Prince*.

It is to be noted that Machiavelli never bases any political argument on Christian or biblical grounds. Medieval writers had a conception of 'legitimate' power, which was that of the Pope and the Emperor, or derived from them. Northern writers, even so late as Locke, argue as to what happened in the Garden of Eden, and think that they can thence derive proofs that certain kinds of power are 'legitimate'. In Machiavelli there is no such conception. Power is for those who have the skill to seize it in a free competition. His preference for popular government is not derived from any idea of 'rights', but from the observation that popular

governments are less cruel, unscrupulous, and inconstant than tyrannies.

Let us try to make a synthesis (which Machiavelli himself did not make) of the 'moral' and 'immoral' parts of his doctrine. In what follows, I am expressing not my own opinions, but opinions which are explicitly or implicitly his.

There are certain political goods, of which three are specially important: national independence, security, and a well-ordered constitution. The best constitution is one which apportions legal rights among prince, nobles, and people in proportion to their real power, for under such a constitution successful revolutions are difficult and therefore stability is possible; but for considerations of stability, it would be wise to give more power to the people. So far as regards ends.

But there is also, in politics, the question of means. It is futile to pursue a political purpose by methods that are bound to fail: if the end is held good, we must choose means adequate to its achievement. The question of means can be treated in a purely scientific manner, without regard to the goodness or badness of the ends. 'Success' means the achievement of your purpose, whatever it may be. If there is a science of success, it can be studied just as well in the successes of the wicked as in those of the good—indeed better, since the examples of successful sinners are more numerous than those of successful saints. But the science, once established, will be just as useful to the saint as to the sinner. For the saint, if he concerns himself with politics, must wish, just as the sinner does, to achieve success.

The question is ultimately one of power. To achieve a political end, power, of one kind or another, is necessary. This plain fact is concealed by slogans, such as 'right will prevail' or 'the triumph of evil is short-lived'. If the side that you think right prevails, that is because it has superior power. It is true that power, often, depends upon opinion, and opinion upon propaganda; it is true, also, that it is an advantage in propaganda to seem more virtuous than your adversary, and that one way of seeming virtuous is to be virtuous. For this reason, it may sometimes happen that victory goes to the side which has the most of what the general public considers to be virtue. We must concede to Machiavelli that this was an important element in the growing power of the Church during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, as well as in the success of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. But there are important limitations. In the first place, those who have seized power can, by controlling propaganda, cause their party to appear virtuous; no one, for example, could mention the sins of Alexander

VI in a New York or Boston public school. In the second place, there are chaotic periods during which obvious knavery frequently succeeds; the period of Machiavelli was one of them. In such times, there tends to be a rapidly growing cynicism, which makes men forgive anything provided it pays. Even in such times, as Machiavelli himself says, it is desirable to present an appearance of virtue before the ignorant public.

This question can be carried a step further. Machiavelli is of opinion that civilized men are almost certain to be unscrupulous egoists. If a man wished nowadays to establish a republic, he says, he would find it easier with mountaineers than with the men of a large city, since the latter would be already corrupted.¹ If a man is an unscrupulous egoist, his wisest line of conduct will depend upon the population with which he has to operate. The Renaissance Church shocked everybody, but it was only north of the Alps that it shocked people enough to produce the Reformation. At the time when Luther began his revolt, the revenue of the papacy was probably larger than it would have been if Alexander VI and Julius II had been more virtuous, and if this is true, it is so because of the cynicism of Renaissance Italy. It follows that politicians will behave better when they depend upon a virtuous population than when they depend upon one which is indifferent to moral considerations; they will also behave better in a community in which their crimes, if any, can be made widely known, than in one in which there is a strict censorship under their control. A certain amount can, of course, always be achieved by hypocrisy, but the amount can be much diminished by suitable institutions.

Machiavelli's political thinking, like that of most of the ancients, is in one respect somewhat shallow. He is occupied with great lawgivers, such as Lycurgus and Solon, who are supposed to create a community all in one piece, with little regard to what has gone before. The conception of a community as an organic growth, which the statesmen can only affect to a limited extent, is in the main modern, and has been greatly strengthened by the theory of evolution. This conception is not to be found in Machiavelli any more than in Plato.

It might, however, be maintained that the evolutionary view of society, though true in the past, is no longer applicable, but must, for the present and the future, be replaced by a much more mechanistic view. In Russia and Germany new societies have been created, in much the same way as the mythical Lycurgus was supposed to have created the Spartan polity. The ancient lawgiver

¹ It is curious to find this anticipation of Rousseau. It would be amusing, and not wholly false, to interpret Machiavelli as a disappointed romantic.

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was a benevolent myth; the modern lawgiver is a terrifying reality. The world has become more like that of Machiavelli than it was, and the modern man who hopes to refute his philosophy must think more deeply than seemed necessary in the nineteenth century.