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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

XII. Henry Duke of Guise - Machiavel.

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DIALOGUE XII.

HENRY Duke of GUISE.—MACHIAVEL.

GUISE.

AVAUNT! thou fiend—I abhor thy sight.—I look upon thee as the original cause of my death, and of all the calamities brought upon the French nation, in my father's time and my own.

MACHIAVEL.

I the cause of your death! You surprize me!

GUISE.

Yes:—Your pernicious maxims of policy, imported from Florence with Catherine of Medicis, your wicked disciple, produced in France such a government, such dissimulation, such perfidy, such violent, ruthless counsels, as threw that whole kingdom into the utmost confusion, and ended my life, even in the palace of my sovereign, by the swords of assassins.

MACHIAVEL.

Whoever may have a right to complain of my policy, you, Sir, have not. You owed your greatness to it, and your deviating from it was the real cause of your death. If it had not been for the assassination of admiral Coligni and the massacre of the Huguenots, the strength and power which the conduct of so able a chief would have given to that party, after the death of your father, its most dangerous enemy, would have been fatal to your house: nor could you, even with all the advantage you drew from that *great stroke of Royal policy*, have acquired the authority you afterwards rose to in the kingdom of France, but by pursuing my maxims; by availing yourself of the specious name of religion, to serve the secret purposes of your ambition; and by suffering no restraint of fear or conscience, not even the guilt of exciting a civil war, to check the

necessary progress of your well-concerted designs. But on the day of the *barricades* you most imprudently let the king escape out of Paris, when you might have slain or deposed him. This was directly against the great rule of my politics, *not to stop short in rebellion or treason till the work is fully compleated*. And you were justly censured for it by Pope Sixtus Quintus, a more consummate politician, who said, *you ought to have known, that when a subject draws his sword against his king, he should throw away the scabbard*. You likewise deviated from my counsels, by putting yourself in the power of a sovereign you had so much offended. Why would you, against all the cautions I had given, expose your life in a royal castle to the mercy of that prince? You trusted to his fear; but fear, insulted and desperate, is often cruel. Impute therefore your death, not to any fault in my maxims, but to your own folly in not having sufficiently observed them.

GUISE.

If neither I, nor that prince, had ever practised your maxims in any part of our conduct, he would have reigned many years with honour and peace, and I should have risen by my courage and talents to as high a pitch of greatness, as it consisted with the duty of a subject to desire. But your instructions led us on into those crooked paths, out of which there was no retreat without great danger, nor a possibility of advancing without being detested by all mankind; and *whoever is so bas every thing to fear from that detestation*. I will give you a proof of this in the fate of a prince, who ought to have been your hero, instead of Cæsar Borgia, because he was incomparably a greater man, and, of all who ever lived, seems to have acted most steadily according to the rules laid down by you; I mean Richard III, king of England. He stopped at no crime that could be profitable to him: he was a dissembler, a hypocrite, a murderer in cool blood: after the death of his brother he gained the crown, by cutting off, without pity, all

See Machiavelli's Prince.

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who stood in his way. He trusted no man any further than helped his own purposes, and consisted with his own safety. He liberally rewarded all services done him, but would not let the remembrance of them atone for offences, or save any man from destruction who obstructed his views. Nevertheless, though his nature shrunk from no wickedness which could serve his ambition, he possessed and exercised all those virtues, which you recommend to the practice of *your prince*. He was bold and prudent in war, just and strict in the general administration of his government, and particularly careful, by a vigorous execution of the laws, to protect the people against injuries or oppressions from the great. In all his actions and words there constantly appeared the highest concern for the honour of the nation. He was neither greedy of wealth that belonged to other men, nor profuse of his own: but knew how to give, and where to save. He professed a most edifying sense of religion, pretended great zeal for the reformation of manners, and was really an example of sobriety, chastity, and temperance, in the whole course of his life. Nor did he shed any blood, but of those who were such obstacles in his way to dominion, as could not possibly be removed by any other means. This was a prince *after your heart*: yet, mark his end. The horror his crimes had excited in the minds of his subjects, and the detestation it produced, were so pernicious to him, that they enabled an *exile*, who had no right to the crown, and whose abilities were much inferior to his, to invade his realm and destroy him.

MACHIAVEL.

This example, I own, may seem to be of some weight against the truth of my system. But at the same time it demonstrates, that there was nothing so new in the doctrines I published, as to make it reasonable to charge me with the disorders and mischiefs, which, since my time, any kingdom may have happened to suffer from the ambition of a subject, or the tyranny

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rnany of a prince. Human nature wants no teaching, to render it wicked. In courts more especially there has been, from the first institution of monarchies, a policy practised, not less repugnant than mine to the narrow and vulgar laws of humanity and religion. Why should I be singled out as worse than other statesmen?

GUISE.

There have been, it must be owned, in all ages and all states, many wicked politicians. But thou art the first that ever *taught the science of tyranny*, reduced it to rules, and instructed his disciples how to acquire and secure it, by treachery, perjuries, assassinations, proscriptions; and with a particular caution, not to be stopped in the progress of their crimes by any check of the conscience or feeling of the heart; but to push them as far as they shall judge to be necessary to their greatness and safety. It is this which has given thee a pre-eminence in guilt over all other statesmen.

MACHIAVEL.

If you had read my book with candour, you would have perceived, that I did not desire to render men either tyrants or rebels, but only shewed, if they were so, what conduct, in such circumstances, it would be rational and expedient for them to observe.

GUISE.

When you were a minister of state in Florence, if any chemist, or physician, had published a treatise, to instruct his countrymen in the art of poisoning, and how to do it with the most certain destruction to others and security to themselves, would you have allowed him to plead in his justification, that he did not desire men to poison their neighbours; but, if they would use such evil means of mending their fortunes, there could surely be no harm in letting them know, what were the most effectual poisons, and by what methods they might give them without being discovered? Would you have thought it

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DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD.

a sufficient apology for him, that he had dropped in his preface, or here and there in his book, a sober exhortation against the committing of murder? Without all doubt, as a magistrate concerned for the safety of the people of Florence, you would have punished the wretch with the utmost severity, and taken great care to destroy every copy of so pernicious a book. Yet your own admired work contains a more baneful and more infernal art. It poisons states and kingdoms, and spreads its malignity, like a general pestilence, over the whole world.

MACHIAVEL.

You must acknowledge at least, that my discourse on Livy are full of wise and virtuous maxims and precepts of government.

GUISE.

This, I think, rather aggravates than alleviates your guilt. How could you study and comment upon Livy with so acute and profound an understanding, and afterwards write a book so absolutely repugnant to all the lessons of policy taught by that sage and moral historian? how could you, who had seen the picture of virtue so amiably drawn by his hand, and who seemed yourself to be sensible of all its charms, fall in love with a *fury*, and set up her dreadful image, as an object of worship to princes?

MACHIAVEL.

I was seduced by vanity.—My heart was formed to love virtue. But I wanted to be thought *a greater genius in politics* than Aristotle or Plato. Vanity, sir, is a passion as strong in authors as ambition in princes, or rather it is the same passion exerting itself differently. I was *a duke of Guise* in the republic of letters.

GUISE.

The bad influences of your guilt have reached further than mine, and been more lasting. But, heaven be praised, your credit is at present much declining in Europe. I have been told

told by some shades who are lately arrived here, that the ablest statesman of his time, a king, with whose fame the world is filled, has answered your book, and confuted all the principles of it, with a noble scorn and abhorrence. I am also assured, that in England there is a great and good king, *whose whole life has been a continued opposition to your evil system*; who has hated all cruelty, all fraud, all falsehood; whose word has been sacred, whose honour inviolate; who has made the laws of his kingdom the rules of his government, and good faith and a regard for the liberty of mankind the principles of his conduct with respect to foreign powers; who reigns more absolutely now in the hearts of his people, and does greater things by the confidence they place in him, and by the efforts they make from the generous zeal of affection, than any monarch ever did, or ever will do, by all the arts of iniquity which you recommended.

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DIALOGUE XIII.

VIRGIL.—HORACE.—MERCURY.—SCALIGER THE ELDER.

VIRGIL.

MY dear Horace, your company is my greatest delight, even in the Elysian fields. No wonder it was so when we lived together in Rome. Never had man so genteel, so agreeable, so easy a wit, or a temper so pliant to the inclinations of others in the intercourse of society. And then such integrity, such fidelity, such generosity in your nature! A soul so free from all envy, so benevolent, so sincere, so placable in its anger, so warm and constant in its affections! You were as necessary to Mæcenas, as he to Augustus. Your conversation sweetened to him all the cares of his ministry: your gaiety cheered his drooping spirits; and your counsels assisted him when he wanted advice. For you were capable, my dear Horace, of coun-

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