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### **The Works of George Lord Lyttleton**

**Lyttelton, George <Lord>**

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XXIII. Pericles - Cosmo De Medicis, the First of that Name.

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## DIALOGUE XXIII.

PERICLES.—COSMO DE MEDICIS, the first of that name.

## PERICLES.

IN what I have heard of your character and your fortune, illustrious Cosmo, I find a most remarkable resemblance with mine. We both lived in republics where the sovereign power was in the people; and, by mere civil arts, but more especially by our eloquence, attained, without any force, to such a degree of authority, that we ruled those tumultuous and stormy democracies with an absolute sway, turned the tempests which agitated them upon the heads of our enemies, and after having long and prosperously conducted the greatest affairs, in war and peace, died revered and lamented by all our fellow-citizens.

## COSMO.

We have indeed an equal right to value ourselves on *that noblest of empires*, the empire we gained over *the minds* of our countrymen.—*Force or caprice* may give power, but nothing can give a *lasting authority*, except *wisdom and virtue*. By these we obtained, by these we preserved, in our respective countries, a dominion unstained by usurpation or blood, a dominion conferred on us by the public esteem and the public affection. We were in reality sovereigns, while we lived with the simplicity of private men: and Athens and Florence believed themselves to be free, though they obeyed all our dictates. This is more than was done by Philip of Macedon, or Sylla, or Cæsar. It is the perfection of policy to tame the fierce spirit of popular liberty, not by blows or by chains, but by soothing it into a voluntary obedience, and bringing it to lick the hand that restrains it.

P p p 2

P E R I-

See Plutarch's Life of Pericles, and Thucydides, l. ii. See also Machiavel's History of Florence, from the fourth book to the eighth.

## P E R I C L E S.

The task can never be easy; but the difficulty was still greater to me than to you. For I had a lion to tame, from whose intractable fury the greatest men of my country, and of the whole world, with all their wisdom and virtue, could not save themselves. Themistocles and Aristides were examples of terror, that might well have deterred me from the administration of public affairs at Athens. Another impediment in my way was the power of Cimon, who, for his goodness, his liberality, and the lustre of his victories over the Persians, was much beloved by the people; and, at the same time, by being thought to favour aristocracy, had all the noble and rich citizens devoted to his party. It seemed impossible to shake so well established a greatness. Yet, by the charms and force of my eloquence, which exceeded that of all orators contemporary with me, by the integrity of my life, my moderation, and my prudence, but, above all, by my artful management of the people, whose power I encreased, that I might render it the basis and support of my own, I gained such an ascendant over all my opponents, that, having first procured the banishment of Cimon by ostracism, and then of Thucydides, another formidable antagonist, set up by the nobles against my authority, I became the unrivaled chief, or rather the monarch of the Athenian republic, without ever putting to death, in above forty years that my administration continued, one of my fellow-citizens: a circumstance, which I declared, when I lay on my death-bed, to be, in my own judgement, more honorable to me, than all my prosperity in the government of the state, or the nine trophies, erected for so many victories obtained by my conduct.

## C O S M O.

I had also the same happiness to boast of at my death: and some additions were made to the territories of Florence under my government: but I myself was no soldier, and the commonwealth

monwealth I directed was never either so warlike or so powerful as Athens. I must, therefore, not pretend to vie with you in the lustre of military glory: and I will moreover acknowledge, that to govern a people, whose spirit and pride were exalted by the wonderful victories of Marathon, Mycalé, Salamis, and Plataea, was much more difficult than to rule the Florentines and the Tuscans. The liberty of the Athenians was in your time more imperious, more haughty, more insolent, than the despotism of the king of Persia. How great then must have been your ability and address, that could so absolutely reduce it under your power! yet the temper of my countrymen was not easy to govern: for it was exceedingly factious. The history of Florence is little else, for several ages, than an account of conspiracies against the state. In my youth I myself suffered much by the dissensions which then embroiled the republic. I was imprisoned, and banished; but, after the course of some years, my enemies, in their turn, were driven into exile. I was brought back in triumph; and from that time till my death, which was above thirty years, I governed the Florentines, not by arms, or evil arts of tyrannical power, but with a legal authority; which I exercised so discreetly, as to gain the esteem of all the neighbouring potentates, and such a constant affection of all my fellow-citizens, that an inscription, which gave me the title of *Father of my Country*, was engraved on my monument, by an unanimous decree of the whole commonwealth.

## P E R I C L E S.

Your end was incomparably more happy than mine. For you died, rather of age than any violent illness, and left the Florentines in a state of peace and prosperity procured for them by your counsels. But I died of the plague, after having seen it almost depopulate Athens; and left my country engaged in a most dangerous war, to which my advice, and the power of my eloquence, had excited the people. The misfortune of the pestilence,

pestilence, with the inconveniences they suffered on account of the war, so irritated their minds, that, not long before my death, they condemned me to a fine.

C O S M O.

It is wonderful, that, when once their anger was raised, it went no further against you! A favourite of the people, when disgraced, is in still greater danger than a favourite of a king.

P E R I C L E S.

Your surprise will encrease at hearing, that very soon afterwards they chose me their general, and conferred on me again the principal direction of all their affairs. Had I lived, I should have so conducted the war, as to have ended it with advantage and honour to my country. For, having secured to her the sovereignty of the sea, by the defeat of the Samians, before I let her engage with the power of Sparta, I knew that our enemies would be at length wearied out and compelled to sue for a peace: because the city, from the strength of its fortifications, and the great army within it, being on the landside impregnable to the Spartans, and drawing continual supplies from the sea, suffered not much by the ravages of the country about it, from whence I had before removed all the inhabitants: whereas their allies were undone by the descents we made on their coasts.

C O S M O.

You seem to have understood beyond all other men what advantages are to be drawn from a *maritime power*, and how to make it the surest foundation of *empire*.

P E R I C L E S.

I followed the plan traced out by Themistocles, the ablest politician that Greece had ever produced. Nor did I begin the Peloponnesian war (as some have supposed) only to make myself necessary, and stop an enquiry into my public accounts. I really thought, that the republic of Athens could no longer  
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See Thucydides, l. ii.

defer a contest with Sparta, without giving up to that state the precedence in the direction of Greece, and her own independence. To keep off for some time even a necessary war, with a probable hope of making it more advantageously, at a favourable opportunity, is an act of true wisdom: but not to make it, when you see that your enemy will be strengthened, and your own advantages lost, or considerably lessened, by the delay, is a most pernicious imprudence. With relation to my accounts, I had nothing to fear. I had not embezzled one *drachma* of public money, nor added one to my own paternal estate; and the people had placed so entire a confidence in me, that they had allowed me, against the usual forms of their government, to dispose of large sums for *secret service*, without account. When therefore I advised the Peloponnesian war, I neither acted from private views, nor with the inconsiderate temerity of a restless ambition; but as became a wise statesman, who, having weighed all the dangers that may attend a great enterprise, and seeing a reasonable hope of good success, makes it his option to fight for dominion and glory, rather than sacrifice both to the uncertain possession of an insecure peace.

See Plutarch  
in the Life of  
Pericles, and  
Diodorus Sic-  
culus.

Thucydides,  
l. ii.

## C O S M O.

How were you sure of inducing so volatile a people to persevere in so steady a system of conduct as that which you had laid down; a system attended with much inconvenience and loss to particulars, while it presented but little to strike or inflame the imagination of the public? Bold and arduous enterprises, great battles, much bloodshed, and a speedy decision, are what the multitude desire in every war: but your plan of operation was the reverse of all this; and the execution of it required the temper of the Thebans, rather than of the Athenians.

## P E R I C L E S.

I found indeed many symptoms of their impatience; but I was able to restrain it, by the authority I had gained. For,

during my whole ministry, I never had stooped to court their favour by any unworthy means; never flattered them in their follies, nor complied with their passions against their true interests and my own better judgement; but used the power of my eloquence to keep them in the bounds of a wise moderation, to raise their spirits when too low, and shew them their danger when they grew too presumptuous; the good effects of which conduct they had happily experienced in all their affairs. Whereas those who succeeded to me in the government, by their incapacity, their corruption, and their servile complaisance to the humour of the people, presently lost all the fruits of my virtue and prudence. Xerxes himself, I am convinced, did not suffer more by the flattery of his courtiers, than the Athenians, after my decease, by that of their orators and ministers of state.

C O S M O.

Those orators could not gain the favour of the people by any other methods. Your arts were more noble: they were the arts of a statesman and of a prince. Your magnificent buildings, which in beauty of architecture surpassed any the world had ever seen, the statues of Phidias, the paintings of Xeuxis, the protection you gave to knowledge, genius, and abilities of every kind, added as much to the glory of Athens as to your popularity. And in this I may boast of an equal merit to Florence. For I embellished that city and the whole country about it, with excellent buildings; I protected all arts; and, though I was not myself so eloquent, or so learned as you, I no less encouraged those who were eminent, in my time, for their eloquence or their learning. Marcellus Ficinus, *the second father of the Platonic philosophy*, lived in my house, and conversed with me as intimately as Anaxagoras with you. Nor did I ever forget and suffer him so to want the necessaries of life, as you did Anaxagoras, who had like to have perished by that unfriendly neglect; but, to secure him, at all times,  
from

See Machiavel's History of Florence, l. vii.

See Plutarch's Life of Pericles.

from any distress in his circumstances, and enable him to pursue his sublime speculations unmolested by low cares, I gave him an estate adjacent to one of my favourite villas. I also drew to Florence, Argiropolo, the most learned Greek of those times; that, under my patronage, he might teach the Florentine youth the language and sciences of his country. But with regard to our buildings, there is this remarkable difference: your's were all raised at the expence of the public, mine at my own.

## P E R I C L E S.

My estate would bear no profuseness, nor allow me to exert the generosity of my nature. Your wealth exceeded that of any particular, or indeed of any prince, who lived in your days. The vast commerce, which, after the example of your ancestors, you continued to carry on in all parts of the world, even while you presided at the helm of the state, enabled you to do those splendid acts, which rendered your name so illustrious. But I was constrained to make the public treasure the fund of my bounties; and I thought I could not possibly dispose of it better, in time of peace, than in finding employment for that part of the people which must else have been idle, and useless to the community, introducing into Greece all the elegant arts, and adorning my country with works that are an honour to human nature. For, while I attended the most to these civil and peaceful occupations, I did not neglect to provide, with timely care, against war; nor suffer the nation to sink into luxury and effeminate softness. I kept our fleets in continual exercise, maintained a great number of seamen in constant pay, and disciplined well our land-forces. Nor did I ever cease to recommend to all the Athenians, both by precepts and example, frugality, temperance, magnanimity, fortitude, and whatever could most effectually contribute to strengthen their bodies and minds.

See Plutarch  
in the Life  
of Pericles,  
and Thucy-  
dides, l. ii.

C O S M O.

Yet I have heard you condemned for rendering the people less sober and modest, by giving them a share of the conquered lands, and paying them wages for their necessary attendance in the public assemblies and other civil functions; but more especially for the vast and superfluous expence, you entailed on the state in the theatrical spectacles, with which you entertained them at the cost of the public.

P E R I C L E S.

Perhaps I may have been too lavish in some of those bounties.—Yet, in a popular state, it is necessary, that the people should be amused, and should so far partake of the opulence of the public, as not to suffer any want, which would render their minds too low and sordid for their political duties. In my time the revenues of Athens were sufficient to bear this charge: but afterwards, when we had lost the greatest part of our empire, it became, I must confess, too heavy a burthen; and the continuance of it proved one cause of our ruin.

C O S M O.

It is a most dangerous thing to load the state with largesses of that nature, or indeed with any unnecessary, but popular charges; because to reduce them is almost impossible, though the circumstances of the public should necessarily demand a reduction. But did not you likewise, in order to advance your own greatness, throw into the hands of the people of Athens more power, than the institutions of Solon had entrusted them with, and more than was consistent with the good of the state?

P E R I C L E S.

We are now in the regions where truth presides, and I dare not offend her by playing the orator in defence of my conduct. I must therefore acknowledge, that, by weakening the power of the court of Areopagus, I tore up that anchor, which Solon had

See Plutarch  
in the lives  
of Solon and  
of Pericles.

had wisely fixed, to keep his republic firm against the storms and fluctuations of popular factions. This alteration, which fundamentally injured the whole state, I made, with a view to serve my own ambition, the only passion in my nature which I could not contain within the limits of virtue. For, I knew that my eloquence would subject the people to me, and make them the willing instruments of all my desires: whereas the Areopagus had in it an authority and a dignity which I could not controul. Thus, by diminishing the counterpoise our constitution had settled to moderate the excess of popular power, I augmented my own. But since my death I have been often reproached by the shades of some of the most virtuous and wisest Athenians, who have fallen victims to the caprice or fury of the people, with having been the first cause of the injustice they suffered, and of all the mischiefs perpetually brought on my country, by rash undertakings, bad conduct, and fluctuating councils. They say, I delivered up the state to the government of indiscreet or venal orators, and to the passions of a misguided, infatuated multitude, who thought their freedom consisted in encouraging calumnies against the best servants of the commonwealth, and conferring power upon those who had no other merit than falling in with and soothing a popular folly. It is useless for me to plead, that during my life none of these mischiefs were felt; that I employed my rhetoric to promote none but good and wise measures; that I was as free from any taint of avarice or corruption as Aristides himself. They reply, that I am answerable for all the great evils, occasioned afterwards by the want of that salutary restraint on the natural levity and extravagance of a democracy, which I had taken away. Socrates calls me the patron of Anytus: and Solon himself frowns upon me, whenever we meet.

See Thucydides, l. ii.

C O S M O.

Solon has reason to do so;—for tell me, Pericles, what opinion would you have of the architect you employed in your buildings,

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buildings, if he had made them to last no longer than during the term of your life?

PERICLES.

See Machiavel's History of Florence, l. vii.

The answer to your question will turn to your own condemnation. Your excessive liberalities to the indigent citizens, and the great sums you lent to all the noble families, did in reality *buy* the republic of Florence; and gave your family such a power as enabled them to convert it from a popular state into an absolute monarchy.

COSMO.

See Machiavel's History of Florence.

The Florentines were so infested with discord and faction, and their commonwealth was so void of military virtue, that they could not have long been exempt from a more ignominious subjection to some *foreign power*, if those internal dissensions, with the confusion and anarchy they produced, had continued. But the Athenians had performed very glorious exploits, had obtained a great empire; and were become one of the noblest states in the world, before you altered the balance of their government. And after that alteration they declined very fast, till they lost all their greatness.

PERICLES.

Their constitution had originally a foul blemish in it, I mean *the ban of ostracism*, which alone would have been sufficient to undo any state. For there is nothing of such important use to a nation, as that men who most excel in wisdom and virtue should be encouraged to undertake the business of government. But this detestable custom deterred such men from serving the public, or, if they ventured to do so, turned even their own wisdom and virtue against them; so that in Athens it was safer to be infamous than renowned. We are told indeed, by the advocates for this strange institution, that it was not *a punishment*, but meant as *a guard to the equality and liberty of the state*: for which reason they deem

deem it *an honour* done to the persons, against whom it was used: as if words could change the real nature of things, and make a banishment of ten years, inflicted on a good citizen by the suffrages of his countrymen, no evil to him, or no offence against justice and the natural right every freeman may claim, that he shall not be expelled from any society, of which he is a member, without having first been proved guilty of some criminal action.

C O S M O.

The ostracism was indeed a most unpardonable fault in the Athenian constitution. It placed envy in the seat of justice, and gave to private malice and public ingratitude a legal right to do wrong. Other nations are blamed for tolerating vice; but the Athenians alone would not tolerate virtue.

P E R I C L E S.

The friends to the ostracism say, that too eminent virtue destroys that equality, which is the safeguard of freedom.

C O S M O.

No state is well modeled, if it cannot preserve itself from the danger of tyranny without a grievous violation of natural justice: nor would a friend to *true freedom*, which consists in being governed, not by men, but by laws, desire to live in a country, where a Cleon bore rule, and where an Aristides was not suffered to remain. But, instead of remedying this evil, you made it worse. You rendered the people more intractable, more adverse to virtue, less subject to the laws, and more to impressions from mischievous demagogues, than they had been before your time.

P E R I C L E S.

In truth, I did so;—and therefore my place in Elysium, notwithstanding the integrity of my whole public conduct, and the great virtues I exerted, is much below the rank of those who have governed commonwealths, or limited monarchies,

not

not merely with a concern for their present advantage; but also with a prudent regard to that *balance of power*, on which their permanent happiness must necessarily depend.



## DIALOGUE XXIV.

LOCKE — BAYLE.

BAYLE.

YES; we both were philosophers; but my philosophy was the deepest. You *dogmatized*: I *doubted*.

LOCKE.

Do you make *doubting* a proof of *depth* in philosophy? It may be a good *beginning* of it, but it is a bad *end*.

BAYLE.

No:—the more profound our searches are into the nature of things, the more uncertainty we shall find; and the most subtle minds see objections and difficulties in every system, which are overlooked or undiscoverable by ordinary understandings.

LOCKE.

It would be better then to be no philosopher, and to continue in the vulgar herd of mankind, *that one may have the convenience of thinking that one knows something*. I find that the eyes which nature has given me see many things very clearly, though some are out of their reach, or discerned but dimly. What opinion ought I to have of a physician, who should offer me an eye-water, the use of which would at first so sharpen my sight, as to carry it farther than ordinary vision; but would in the end put them out? Your philosophy, Monsieur Bayle, is to the eyes of the mind what I have supposed the doctor's *nosstrum* to be to those of the body. It actually brought