he was able to carry on the war against them for many years. And although he eventually lost control of some cities, he still kept his Kingdom.

Therefore, those of our rulers who lost their principalities, after having ruled them for many years, should not lament their bad luck but should blame their own indolence. For in quiet times they never thought that things could change (it is a common human failing when the weather is fine not to reckon on storms). When difficult times came, they thought only of fleeing and not of defending themselves; and they hoped that the people, angered by the arrogant conduct of the conquerors, would restore them to power. This policy is sound if no other is possible, but it is very bad to neglect other policies and choose this one. A man should never risk falling because he thinks it likely that he will be rescued. This may not happen, but even if it does it will not make you secure; such a defence is weak and cowardly, because it is outside your control. Only those defences that are under your control and based on your own ability are effective, certain and lasting.

Chapter xxv

How much power fortune has over human affairs, and how it should be resisted

I am not unaware that many have thought, and many still think, that the affairs of the world are so ruled by fortune and by God [1] that the ability of men cannot control them. Rather, they think that we have no remedy at all; and therefore it could be concluded that it is useless to sweat much over things, but let them be governed by fate. This opinion has been more popular in our own times because of the great changes that have taken place [2] and are still to be seen even now, which could hardly

[1] ignavia: see M.'s sharp comments on the habits of Italian rulers at the end of Bk VII of the Art of War.
[2] M. refers to the rulers of Naples and Milan just mentioned, particularly to Ludovico il Moro.
[3] e du Dio: these words are not in the early Charlecote MS, and may have been inserted posthumously, when the book was published in 1532; as J. H. Whitfield (Discours on Machiaveli, p. 222) notes, there are no other references to God in this chapter.
[4] i.e., since 1494, when the invasions of Italy began.

have been predicted. When I think about this, I am sometimes inclined, to some extent, to share this opinion. Nevertheless, so as not to eliminate human freedom, I am disposed to hold that fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but that it lets us control roughly the other half.

I compare fortune to one of those dangerous rivers [3] that, when they become enraged, flood the plains, destroy trees and buildings, move earth from one place and deposit it in another. Everyone flees before it, everyone gives way to its thrust, without being able to halt it in any way. But this does not mean that, when the river is not in flood, men are unable to take precautions, by means of dykes and dams, so that when it rises next time, it will either not overflow its banks or, if it does, its force will not be so uncontrolled or damaging.

The same happens with fortune, which shows its powers where no force has been organised to resist it, and therefore strikes in the places where it knows that no dykes or dams have been built to restrain it. And if you consider Italy, which has been the seat of these changes, and which has given rise to them, you will see a countryside devoid of any embankments or defences. If it had been protected by proper defences, like Germany, Spain and France, the flood would not have caused such great changes or would not have occurred at all. But I have said enough in general terms about resisting fortune.

Considering the matter in more detail, I would observe that one sees a ruler flourishing today and ruined tomorrow, without his having changed at all in character or qualities. I believe this is attributable, first, to the cause previously discussed at length, [4] namely, that a ruler who trusts entirely to luck comes to grief when his luck runs out. Moreover, I believe that we are successful when our ways are suited to the times and circumstances, and unsuccessful when they are not. For one sees that, in the things that lead to the end which everyone aims at, that is, glory and riches, men proceed in different ways: one man cautiously, another impetuously; one man forcefully, another cunningly; one man patiently, another impatiently, and each of these

[1] The power of fortuna varies according to how much virtù there is in a country. Germany, Spain and France were well equipped in this respect, whereas Italy was not.
[2] i.e., mountain torrents.
[3] M. alludes to the ambitious conduct of Ludovico il Moro (who encouraged the intervention of Charles VIII; see also Ist. for. VIII, 36), and later that of Alexander VI and Julius II.
different ways of acting can be effective. On the other hand, of two
cautious men, one may achieve his aims and the other fail. Again, two
men may both succeed, although they have different characters, one
acting cautiously and the other impetuously. The reason for these
different outcomes is whether their ways of acting conform with the
conditions in which they operate. Consequently, as I have said, two
men, acting differently, may achieve the same results; and if two men
act in the same way, one may succeed and the other fail. From this,
again, arise changes in prosperity; because if a man acts cautiously and
patiently, and the times and circumstances change in ways for which his
methods are appropriate, he will be successful. But if the times and
circumstances change again, he will come to grief, because he does not
change his methods. And one does not find men who are so prudent
that they are capable of being sufficiently flexible: either because our
natural inclinations are too strong to permit us to change, or because,
having always fared well by acting in a certain way, we do not think it a
good idea to change our methods. Therefore, if it is necessary for a
cautious man to act expeditiously, he does not know how to do it; this
leads to his failure. But if it were possible to change one’s character to
suit the times and circumstances, one would always be successful.

Pope Julius II always acted impetuously, and found the times and
circumstances so suited to his ways that he was always successful.
Consider the first expedition he made to Bologna, while messer
Giovanni Bentivoglio was still alive. The Venetians were opposed to it,
and so was the King of Spain; there were also discussions with the King
of France about such an enterprise. Nevertheless, acting with his usual
indomitable spirit and impetuosity, he led the expedition personally.
This initiative caught the King of Spain and the Venetians off guard
and constrained them to be passive spectators, the latter through fear
and the former because of his desire to recover the whole of the
Kingdom of Naples. On the other hand, Julius involved the King of
France: for that King saw the Pope moving and, because he wanted to
cultivate the Pope’s friendship with a view to reducing the power of
Venice, he decided that he could not refuse him troops without offend-
ning him very openly. With this swift initiative, then, Julius achieved
what no other pope, acting with consummate prudence, could have
attained. If he had not left Rome until everything had been agreed and

settled, as any other pope would have done, he would never have
succeeded. For the King of France would have contrived to find
countless excuses, and the others would have produced countless
reasons why the Pope should hesitate. I shall not discuss his other
actions, which were similar in character, and all turned out well for
him. The shortness of his pontificate did not permit him to taste of
failure. But if circumstances had changed so that it was imperative to
act cautiously, he would have been undone; for he would never have
deviated from the methods that were natural to him.

I conclude, then, that since circumstances vary and men when acting
lack flexibility, they are successful if their methods match the circum-
cstances and unsuccessful if they do not. I certainly think that it is better
to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you
want to control her, it is necessary to treat her roughly. And it is clear
that she is more inclined to yield to men who are impetuous than to
those who are calculating. Since fortune is a woman, she is always well
disposed towards young men, because they are less cautious and more
aggressive, and treat her more boldly.

CHAPTER XXVI

Exhortation to liberate Italy from
the barbarian yoke

Bearing in mind all the matters previously discussed, I ask myself
whether the present time is appropriate for welcoming a new ruler in
Italy, and whether there is matter that provides an opportunity for a
far-seeing and able man to mould it into a form that will bring honour
to him and benefit all its inhabitants. It seems to me that so many things
are propitious for a new ruler that I am not aware that there has ever
been a more appropriate time than this.

I have maintained that the Israelites had to be enslaved in Egypt

[1 vita: lit., ‘life’. See also p. 41.]  [1 As Julius was.]
[1 The idea that fortuna is a friend of young men is also expressed in M.’s play Cilia, IV,
1.]
[1 See p. 20.]
before the ability of Moses could be displayed, the Persians had to be oppressed by the Medes before Cyrus’s greatness of spirit could be revealed, and the Athenians in disarray before the magnificent qualities of Theseus could be demonstrated. Likewise, in order for the valour and worth of an Italian spirit to be recognised, Italy had to be reduced to the desperate straits in which it now finds itself: more enslaved than the Hebrews, more oppressed than the Persians, more scattered than the Athenians, without an acknowledged leader, and without order or stability, beaten, despoiled, lacerated, overrun, in short, utterly devastated. And although recently a spark was revealed in one man that might have led one to think that he was ordained by God to achieve her redemption, yet it was seen that he was struck down by misfortune at the highest point of his career. Thus, remaining almost lifeless, Italy is waiting for someone to heal her wounds, and put an end to the ravaging of Lombardy, to the extortions in the Kingdom of Naples and Tuscany, and to cure the sores that have been festering for so long. Look how Italy beseeches God to send someone to rescue her from the cruel and arrogant domination of the foreigners. Again, see how ready and willing she is to rally to a standard, if only there is someone to lead the way.

There is no one in whom Italy can now place any hope except your illustrious family which (because it is successful and talented, and favoured by God and by the Church, of which it is now head) can take the lead in saving her. It will not be very difficult, if you bear in mind the deeds and lives of the men named above. Although they were exceptional and remarkable men, they were still only human, and all of them had less favourable opportunities than the one that now exists, for their causes were not more righteous than this one, nor easier, nor more favoured by God. This is a very righteous cause: ‘Iustum enim est bellum quibus necessarium, et pia arma ubi nulla nisi in armis spe est.‘ Circumstances are now very favourable indeed, and the difficulties to be confronted cannot be very great when the circumstances are propitious, if only your family will imitate the methods of the men I have proposed as exemplars. Moreover, very unusual events, which are signs

from God, have recently been observed here: the sea has opened; a cloud has shown you the way; water has flowed from the rock; manna has rained down here. Everything points to your future greatness. But you must play your part, for God does not want to do everything, in order not to deprive us of our freedom and the glory that belong to us.

It is not very surprising that none of the Italians previously mentioned was able to achieve what it is hoped your illustrious family will achieve, or that in all the great changes that have occurred in Italy and all the military campaigns, it always seems as if Italian military skill and valour no longer exist.

The reason for this is that our old military practices were unsound, and there has been nobody capable of devising new ones. Nothing brings so much honour to a new ruler as new laws and new practices that he has devised. Such things, if they are solidly based and conducive to achieving greatness, will make him revered and admired; and in Italy there is no lack of matter to shape into any form.

Here individuals have great skill and valour; it is the leaders who lack these qualities. Look how in duels and combats between several men Italians are superior in strength, skill and resourcefulness. But when it comes to fighting in armies, they do not distinguish themselves. And all this stems from the weakness of the leaders: those who are capable are not followed, and everyone thinks that he knows best. Until now nobody has had sufficient ability or luck to succeed in imposing himself to such an extent that the other leaders have recognised his superiority. The outcome has been that, for a long time, in all the wars that have been fought during the last twenty years, any armies composed only of Italian troops have always fared badly. What happened on the Taro, and at Alessandria, Capua, Genoa, Vailà, Bologna and Mestre all confirm this judgement.

If your illustrious family, then, wants to emulate those great men,

[¹ All these images recall the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.]
[² E.g., Francesco Sforza and Cesare Borgia (see p. 23).]
[³ M. probably had esp. in mind the famous combat in 1503, at Barletta in Apulia, in which thirteen Italian knights defeated thirteen Frenchmen.]
[⁴ M. alludes to the battle of Fornovo, on the river Taro (1495), where Charles VIII’s army succeeded in escaping, and returned to France; Alessandria was conquered by the French in 1499; Capua was sacked by the French in 1501; Genoa surrendered to the French in 1507; Bologna was taken by the French in 1511; Mestre was destroyed by the Spaniards in 1513.]
[⁵ Moses, Theseus and Cyrus.]
who saved their countries, it is essential above all else, as a sound basis for every campaign, to form an army composed of your own men, for there can be no soldiers more loyal, more reliable or better. Even if each of these soldiers individually is brave, they will combine to form a better fighting force if they are led by their own ruler, and honoured and well treated by him. Hence, if Italian skill and courage is to protect us from foreign enemies, it is essential to form an army of this kind.

Although the Swiss and Spanish infantry are considered very formidable, both have weaknesses, so a different kind of army could not only fight them, but be confident of defeating them. For the Spaniards are very vulnerable against cavalry, and the Swiss lack confidence against infantry that fight as strongly as they do themselves. Thus, it has been seen, and experience will confirm it, that the Spaniards are very vulnerable against the French cavalry, and the Swiss have a fatal weakness against the Spanish infantry. And although there is no proof of the latter weakness, some evidence is provided by the battle of Ravenna, when the Spanish infantry fought against the German battalions, which fight in the same way as the Swiss. In this battle, the Spaniards, using their agility and helped by their use of bucklers, penetrated under the long German pikes, and were able to inflict great damage. The Germans were unable to repel them, and if the cavalry had not attacked the Spaniards, the Germans would all have been killed. Once the weaknesses of both the Spanish and the Swiss infantry are recognised, then, it will be possible to form a new kind of infantry, which should be able to resist cavalry charges and not be intimidated by infantry. It will be possible to do this by the right choice of weapons and by changing battle formations. It is the introduction of such new methods of fighting that enhances the reputation of a new ruler, establishing him as a great leader.

This opportunity to provide Italy with a liberator, then, after such a long time, must not be missed. I have no doubt at all that he would be received with great affection in all those regions that have been inundated by the foreign invasions, as well as with a great thirst for revenge, with resolute fidelity, with devotion and with tears of gratitude. What gate would be closed to him? What people would fail to obey him? What envious hostility would work against him? What Italian would deny him

[† See Ch. XIII.] [† 11 April 1512.]
[† 'Small round shields usually held by a handle' (C.O.D.).]
APPENDIX A

Letters relevant to The Prince

1. Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, then Florentine envoy to the Holy See, 10 December 1513

This letter was written in response to a letter by Vettori, dated 23 November, in which Vettori described his life in Rome. Machiavelli describes how he spends his mornings on his property, supervising work, and reading poets such as Dante, Petrarch, Tibullus and Ovid, and his afternoons in the nearby tavern, drinking and playing cards; then he turns to his work in the evenings.

When evening comes, I return home and enter my study; before I go in I remove my everyday clothes, which are very muddy and soiled, and put on clothes that are fit for a royal court. Being thus properly clad, I enter the ancient courts of the men of old, in which I am received affectionately by them and partake of the food that properly belongs to me, and for which I was born. There I do not hesitate to converse with them, and ask them why they acted as they did; and out of kindness they respond. For four hours I experience no boredom, I forget all my troubles and my fear of poverty, and death holds no more terrors for me: I am completely absorbed in them.

Since Dante says that there can be no real knowledge if what has been learned is not retained, I have written down what has been valuable in their conversations, and have composed a little book On Principalities, in which I delve as deeply as I can into this subject, and discuss what a principality is, how many different types there are, how they are gained, how they are held,

[1 Dante, Paradiso, V, 41–2: ‘ché non la scienza, senza lo ricercar, avere inteso.’]
[1 De principibus.]

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