

POLITICAL PRECEPTS.

1. IF ever, O Menemachus, that saying of Nestor's in Homer,

There is no Greek can contradict or mend
What you have said, yet to no perfect end
Is your speech brought,*

might pertinently be made use of and applied, it is against those exhorting, but nothing teaching nor any way instructing, philosophers. For they do (in this respect) resemble those who are indeed careful in snuffing the lamps, but negligent in supplying them with oil. Seeing therefore that you, being by reason moved to engage yourself in the affairs of the state, desire, as becomes the nobility of your family,

Both to speak and act heroically †

in the service of your country, and that, not having attained to such maturity of age as to have observed the life of a wise and philosophical man openly spent in the transactions of the state and public debates, and to have been a spectator of worthy examples represented not in word but in deed, you request me to lay you down some political precepts and instructions; I think it no ways becoming me to give you a denial, but heartily wish that the work may be worthy both of your zeal and my forwardness. Now I have, according to your request, made use in this my discourse of sundry and various examples.

* II. IX. 55.

† II. IX. 448.

2. First then for the administration of state affairs, let there be laid, as a firm and solid foundation, an intention and purpose, having for its principles judgment and reason, and not any impulse from vain-glory, emulation, or want of other employment. For as those who have nothing grateful to them at home frequently spend their time in the forum, though they have no occasion that requires it; so some men, because they have no business of their own worth employing themselves in, thrust themselves into public affairs, using policy as a divertisement. Many also, having been by chance engaged in the negotiations of the commonweal, and being cloyed with them, cannot yet easily quit them; in which they suffer the same with those who, going on board a ship that they may be there a little tossed, and being after carried away into the deep, send forth many a long look towards the shore, being sea-sick and giddy-headed, and yet necessitated to stay and accommodate themselves to their present fortune.

Past is the lovely pleasure
 They took, when th' sea was calm and weather bright,
 In walking at their leisure
 On the ship's deck,
 Whilst her sharp beak
 With merry gale,
 And full blown sail,
 Did through the surging billows cut its course aright

And these do most of all discredit the matter by their repenting and being discontented, when either hoping for glory they fall into disgrace, or expecting to become formidable to others by their power they are engaged in affairs full of dangers and troubles. But he who on a well grounded principle of reason undertakes to act in the public, as an employ very honorable and most beseeming him, is dismayed by none of these things; nor does he therefore change his opinion. For we must not come to the management of the commonweal on a design of gaining and growing rich by it, as Stratocles and Dromo-

clides exhorted one another to the golden harvest, — so in mirth terming the tribunal, or place of making harangues to the people, — nor yet as seized with some sudden fit of passion, as did heretofore Caius Gracchus, who having, whilst his brothers' misfortunes were hot, withdrawn himself to a retired life most remote from public affairs, did afterwards, inflamed by indignation at the injuries and affronts put on him by some persons, thrust himself into the state, where being soon filled with affairs and glory, when he sought to desist and desired change and repose, he could not (so great was it grown) find how to lay down his authority, but perished with it. And as for those who through emulation frame themselves for the public as actors for the stage, they must needs repent of their design, finding themselves under a necessity of either serving those whom they think themselves worthy to govern, or disobliging those whom they desire to please. Now I am of opinion, that those who by chance and without foresight stumble upon policy, falling as it were into a pit, cannot but be troubled and repent; whereas they that go leisurely into it, with preparation and a good resolution, comfort themselves moderately in all occurrences, as having no other end of their actions but the discharging of their duty with honor.

3. Now they that have thus grounded their choice within themselves, and rendered it immovable and difficult to be changed, must set themselves to contemplate that disposition of the citizens which, being compounded (as it were) of all their natures, appears most prevalent among them. For the endeavoring presently to form the manners and change the nature of a people is neither easy nor safe, but a work requiring much time and great authority. But as wine in the beginning is overcome by the nature of the drinker, but afterwards, gently warming him and mixing itself in his veins, assimilates and changes him who drinks

it into its own likeness, so must a statesman, till he has by his reputation and credit obtained a leading power amongst the people, accommodate himself to the dispositions of the subjects, knowing how to consider and conjecture those things with which the people are naturally delighted and by which they are usually drawn. The Athenians, to wit, are easily moved to anger, and not difficultly changed to mercy, more willing to suspect quickly than to be informed by leisure; and as they are readier to help mean and inconsiderable persons, so do they embrace and esteem facetious and merry speeches; they are exceedingly delighted with those that praise them, and very little offended with such as jeer them; they are terrible even to their governors, and yet courteous to their very enemies. Far other is the disposition of the Carthaginians, severe, rigid, obsequious to their rulers, harsh to their subjects, most abject in their fear, most cruel in their anger, firm in their resolutions, untractable, and hard to be moved by sportive and pleasant discourse. Should Cleon have requested them to defer their assembly, because he had sacrificed to the Gods and was to feast certain strangers, they would not have risen up, laughing and clapping their hands for joy; nor, if Alcibiades, as he was making an harangue to them, had let slip a quail from under his cloak, would they have striven who should catch her and restore her to him again, but would rather have killed them both on the place, as contemning and deriding them; since they banished Hanno for making use of a lion to carry his baggage to the army, accusing him of affecting tyranny. Neither do I think, that the Thebans, if they had been made masters of their enemies' letters, would have foreborne looking into them, as did the Athenians, when, having taken the messengers of Philip who were carrying a letter superscribed to Olympias, they would not so much as open it, or discover the conjugal secrets of an absent husband, written to his wife.

Nor yet do I believe that the Athenians on the other side would have patiently suffered the haughtiness and disdain of Epaminondas, when, refusing to answer an accusation brought against him, he rose up from the theatre, and went away through the midst of the assembly to the place of public exercises. And much less am I of opinion that the Spartans would have endured the contumely and scurrility of Stratocles, who persuaded the people to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to the Gods, as having obtained the victory, and afterwards, when, being truly informed of the loss they had received, they were angry with him, asked them what injury they had sustained in having through his means spent three days merrily.

Courtly flatterers indeed, like to quail-catchers, by imitating the voices and assimilating themselves to the manners of kings, chiefly insinuate into their favors and entrap them by deceit; but it is not convenient for a statesman to imitate the people's manners, but to know them, and make use of those things toward every person by which he is most likely to be taken. For the ignorance of men's humors brings no less disorders and obstacles in commonweals than in the friendships of kings.

4. When therefore you shall have already gotten power and authority amongst the people, then must you endeavor to reform their disposition, treating them gently, and by little and little drawing them to what is better. For the changing of a multitude is a difficult and laborious work. But as for your own manners and behavior, so compose and adorn them, as knowing that you are henceforth to lead your life on an open stage; and if it is no easy task for you wholly to extirpate vice out of your soul, at least take away and retrench those offences which are most notorious and apparent. For you cannot but have heard how Themistocles, when he designed to enter upon the management of public affairs, withdrew himself from drink-

ing and revelling, and fell to watching, fasting, and studying, saying to his intimate friends, that Miltiades's trophy suffered him not to sleep. And Pericles also so changed himself, both as to the comportment of his body and his manner of living, that he walked gravely, discoursed affably, always showed a staid and settled countenance, continually kept his hand under his robe, and went only that way which led to the assembly and the senate. For a multitude is not so tractable as that it should be easy for every one to take it with safety, but it is a service much to be valued, if, being like a suspicious and skittish beast, it can be so managed that, without being frightened either by sight or voice, it will submit to receive instruction.

These things therefore are not slightly to be observed; nor are we to neglect taking such care of our own life and manners that they may be clear from all stain and reprehension. For statesmen are not only liable to give an account of what they say or do in public; but there is a busy enquiry made into their very meals, beds, marriages, and every either sportive or serious action. For what need we speak of Alcibiades, who, being of all men the most active in public affairs, and withal an invincible commander, perished by his irregularity in living and his audaciousness, and who by his luxury and prodigality rendered the state unbenefited by all his other good qualities? — since the Athenians blamed Cimon's wine; the Romans, having nothing else to cavil at, found fault with Scipio's sleeping; and the enemies of Pompey the Great, having observed that he scratched his head with one finger, upbraided him with it. For as a freckle or wart in the face is more prejudicial than stains, maims, and scars in the rest of the body; so little faults, discerned in the lives of princes and statesmen, appear great, through an opinion most men have conceived of government and policy, which they look on as a great and excellent thing, and such as

ought to be pure from all absurdity and imperfection. Therefore not unjustly is Livius Drusus commended, who, when several parts of his house lay open to the view of his neighbors, being told by a certain workman that he would for the expense only of five talents alter and remedy that fault, said: I will give thee indeed ten, to make my whole house so transparent that all the city may see how I live. For he was a temperate and modest man. And yet perhaps he had no need of this perspicuity; for many persons pry into those manners, counsels, actions, and lives of statesmen which seem to be most deeply concealed, no less loving and admiring one, and hating and despising another, for their private than for their public transactions. What then! perhaps you may say: Do not cities make use also of such men as live dissolutely and effeminately? True; for as women with child frequently long for stones and chalk, as those that are stomach-sick do for salt-fish and such other meats, which a little after they spit out again and reject; so also the people sometimes through wantonness and petulance, and sometimes for want of better guides, make use of those that come first to hand, though at the same time detesting and contemning them, and after rejoice at such things spoken against them as the comedian Plato makes the people themselves to say:

Quick, take me by the hand, and hold me fast,
Or I'll Agyrrius captain choose in haste.

And again he brings them in, calling for a basin and feather that they may vomit, and saying,

A chamber-pot by my tribunal stands.

And a little after,

It feeds a stinking pest, foul Cephalus.

And the Roman people, when Carbo promised them something, and (to confirm it) added an oath and execration,

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