

Machiavelli and the Dictators

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(Quotations are from Everyman's edition of *The Prince*)

Nicolo Machiavelli's name is synonymous with the art of perfidious statesmanship. Since the fifteenth century rulers have studied Machiavelli's *Prince* to learn the rules by which they might rise to power, and then hold it. With a cynical disdain of all ethical and moral scruples and viewing religion only as a mask to enable the prince to beguile his ingenious subjects, Machiavelli's treatise set a pattern for rulers and aspirants to power. Rulers were quick to grasp at Machiavelli's precepts, for the rules which he laid down are astute and, in a worldly-wise materialistic sense, most effective.

Both Hitler and Mussolini are professed students of Machiavelli. In their rise to power one can see a close application of Machiavelli's principles. But as Machiavelli said: "He who does not properly manage this business will soon lose what he has acquired, and if he does not hold it he will have endless difficulties and troubles." (p. 20). An examination of the *Prince* seems to indicate that Hitler and Mussolini can no longer apply the Machiavellian formula and, according to the rules of their own game, will eventually face disaster. The specific problem in their case arises from the fact that they have impressed their power on so many and different peoples that the effective rule of them becomes nigh impossible. Like the nemesis of a Greek tragedy their violation of Machiavelli's precepts will bear down harder on the dictators as time goes on. Perhaps we have already reached the climax of this great tragedy and can look forward to the last act. The texts from *The Prince* which follow seem to bear out this argument.

Machiavelli taught "that it is praiseworthy in a prince to keep faith. . . . Nevertheless . . . those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to circumvent the intellect of men by craft, and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word". (p. 140). Both Hitler and Mussolini have consistently broken their pledges. The story of their broken promises, pledges and treaties is a long one, reaching a climax in the Munich agreement. This history of broken

promises is one of the main reasons why England is determined to fight this war to a finish. Yet it cannot be denied that the dictators' method for a long time was effective.

Hitler and Mussolini have, without any qualms of conscience, either killed or exiled all who seemed to be winning the acclaim of the public. Here they followed Machiavelli's advice that, "the prince should exterminate from the country those who have the power to hurt him". (p. 62).

The prince "ought to entertain the people with festivals and spectacles", (p. 182) taught Machiavelli. The dictators have been apt pupils. We see Hitler in his "beer hall" speeches, in his great army manoeuvres, and in haranguing an incited populace on the imaginary injustices done them by England.

"A prince is respected when, without any reservation, he declares himself in favor of one party against the other". (p. 178) "If the prince does not declare himself he will invariably fall a prey to the conqueror Because he who conquers does not want doubtful friends who will not aid him in the time of trial". (p. 179). Nor can the prince expect friendship from the loser for, as Machiavelli went on to say, the loser "will not harbour you because you did not willingly, sword in hand, court his fate" (p. 179). The ruler who procrastinates, then, is out of both camps. At an early date Mussolini declared himself in favor of Hitler and the famous Axis was formed between the traditionally antagonistic German and Italian peoples. When Hitler was winning in the north, Mussolini aided him still further by "plunging a knife in his neighbor's back".

So far the dictators have prospered. They have conquered immense territories and have subjugated many peoples. They have followed the spirit of Machiavelli and it has paid. But now the situation has changed and it is no longer possible for them to conduct their affairs according to their mentor's teachings.

In speaking of ruling different peoples Machiavelli stated: "But when states are acquired in a country differing in language, customs, or laws, there are difficulties, and good fortune and great energy are needed to hold them". (p. 17). Machiavelli's methods for consolidating these gains can best be summed up in his own words, "one of the greatest and most real helps would be that he who has ac-

quired them should go and reside there. . . . The other and better course is to send colonists to one or two places, which may be as keys to that state, for it is necessary either to do this or else to keep there a great number of cavalry or infantry". (p. 18). Since the prince generally can not go himself and to maintain an army is too costly, the only practical way is to plant colonies, which procedure implies dispossessing some of the inhabitants. This Hitler and Mussolini have tried to a limited extent. But it can be seen that it is impracticable for the dictators to follow Machiavelli's advice here. Thus, it will be impossible indefinitely to hold these countries in subjection. Machiavelli further stated: ". . . In republics there is more vitality, greater hatred, and more desire for vengeance, which will never permit them to allow the memory of their former liberty to rest." (p. 40).

"And it has always been the opinion and judgment of wise men that nothing can be so uncertain or unstable as fame or power not founded on its own strength". (p. 112). That is to say, a country should rely on the strength of its own arms. We might deduce from this quotation that even a temporary victory for the dictators would lead to further trouble with Germany and Italy, with Russia and perhaps Japan waiting to pick up the pieces.

Moreover, in their personal conduct the dictators have not been discreet. Machiavelli stated: "A prince ought to take care that . . . he may appear to him who sees and hears him altogether merciful, faithful, humane, upright, and religious. There is nothing more necessary to appear to have than this last quality" (p. 144). While Mussolini made a gesture towards fulfilling this precept some years ago and had his picture taken kneeling in prayer, neither dictator has attempted to follow the teacher here. Both are recognized as enemies of religion and for this reason are opposed by all free Christians.

Is this not a perfect description of both the dictators? "One prince of the present time . . . never preaches anything but peace and good faith, and to both he is most hostile, and either, if he had kept it, would have deprived him of reputation and kingdom many a time". (p. 145).

Other quotations might be cited. These, however, are sufficient to show that the dictators, accepting the assumptions of Machiavelli and rising to success on them, have either failed their master or have been forced, through

external, influences, to abandon his teachings. This points to the dictators' eventual ruin.

In passing, an addendum referring to Machiavelli's opinion of an Italian army may be appropriate. Machiavelli stated in this connection: ". Whenever there has been an army wholly Italian, it has always given a poor account of itself;" (p. 214). Perhaps the Greeks also, have read *The Prince*.

The Late Reverend Thomas Curran

An Appreciation

When the history of St. Dunstan's College will have been written, the name of the Rev. Thomas Curran will loom large in the story. This great priest, whose death occurred last September, was one of those who laboured for many years to further the real interests of education and, in particular, to promote the best interests of the College which he loved so well.

Father Curran was born October 12th, 1864, at Baldwin's Road, P. E. I. He attended Baldwin's Road School and Prince of Wales College; then taught at Bear River, St. George's and Elliotvale. Two years at Ottawa University were followed by six years at the Propaganda in Rome whence he returned, after ordination, 1896, with a Doctor's degree in Philosophy and Theology. On his return from Rome, he was appointed to the staff of the College. Four years later he became Rector of the Institution, which position he occupied for nine years. Four overworked priests constituted the staff at the time. These devoted their time to teaching the fundamentals and to instilling into the minds of their pupils a love of thoroughness and a love of their faith. Sharing in this labour, Father Tom also found time to devote to improvement of the College grounds, to plant trees, to prepare a lawn. Many of the beautiful trees which now grace the College campus, some of them grown to full size, others set out in recent years, will long stand as living monuments to keep his memory green in the hearts of his former associates and students.

From 1909 to 1925, Father Tom was pastor of Kelly's Cross Parish, whence he returned to the College where he remained for fourteen years. The last year of his life was