

OF THE THREE SORTS OF GOVERNMENT, MONARCHY,
DEMOCRACY, AND OLIGARCHY.

1. As I was considering with myself to bring forth and propose to the judgment of this worthy company the discourse I held yesterday in your presence, methought I heard political virtue — not in the illusion of a dream, but in a true and real vision — say thus to me :

A golden ground is laid for sacred songs.

We have already laid the foundation of the discourse by persuading and exhorting persons to concern themselves in managing the affairs of the commonweal, and now we proceed to build upon it the doctrine which is due after such an exhortation. For after a man has received an admonition and exhortation to deal in the affairs of the state, there ought consequently to be given him the precepts of government, following and observing which, he may, as much as it is possible for a man to do, profit the public, and in the mean time honestly prosecute his own affairs with such safety and honor as shall be meet for him.

There is first then one point to be discoursed, which, as it is precedent to what we have hereafter to say, so depends on what we have said before. Now this is, what sort of policy and government is best? For as there are many sorts of lives in particular men, so also are there in people and states; and the life of a people or state is its policy and government. It is therefore necessary to declare which

is the best, that a statesman may choose it from among the rest, or, if that is not possible for him to do, he may at least take that which has the nearest resemblance to the best.

2. Now there is one signification of this word policy (*πολιτεια*) which imports as much as *burgess-ship*, that is, a participation in the rights and privileges belonging to a town, city, or borough; as when we say that the Megarians, by an edict of their city, presented Alexander the Great with their *policy*, that is, their *burgess-ship*, and that, Alexander laughing at the offer they made him of it, they answered him, that they had never decreed that honor to any but Hercules and now to himself. This he wondering to hear accepted their present, thinking it honorable inasmuch as it was rare. The life also of a political person, who is concerned in the government of the commonweal, is called policy, as when we praise the policy of Pericles or Bias, that is, the manner of their government, and on the contrary, blame that of Hyperbolus and Cleon. Some moreover there are, who call a great and memorable action performed in the administration of a commonweal a policy, such as is the distribution of money, the suppressing of a war, the introduction of some notable decree worthy to be kept in perpetual memory. In which signification it is a common manner of speaking to say, This man to-day has done a policy, if he has peradventure effected some remarkable matter in the government of the state.

3. Besides all these significations there is yet another, that is, the order and state by which a commonweal is governed, and by which affairs are managed and administered. According to which we say that there are three sorts of policy or public government, — to wit, Monarchy, which is regality or kingship, Oligarchy, which is the government by peers and nobles, and Democracy, which is a popular or (as we term it) a free state. Now all these are

mentioned by Herodotus in his Third Book,* where he compares them one with another. And these seem to be the most general of all; for all other sorts are, as it were, the depravation and corruption of these, either by defect or excess; as it is in the first consonances of music, when the strings are either too straight or too slack.

Now these three sorts of government have been distributed amongst the nations that have had the mightiest and the greatest empire. Thus the Persians enjoyed regality or kingship, because their king had full absolute power in all things, without being liable to render an account to any one. The Spartans had a council consisting of a small number, and those the best and most considerable persons in the city, who despatched all affairs. The Athenians maintained popular government free and exempt from any other mixture. In which administration when there are any faults, their transgressions and exorbitances are styled tyrannies, oppressions of the stronger, unbridled licentiousness of the multitude. That is, when the prince who has the royalty permits himself to outrage whomever he pleases, and will not suffer any remonstrance to be made him concerning it, he becomes a tyrant; when a few lords or senators in whose hands the government is arrive at that arrogance as to contemn all others, they turn oppressors; and when a popular state breaks forth into disobedience and levelling, it runs into anarchy and unmeasurable liberty: and in a word, all of them together will be rashness and folly.

4. Even then as a skilful musician will make use of all sorts of instruments, and play on every one of them, accommodating himself in such manner as its quality can bear and as shall be fit to make it yield the sweetest sound, but yet, if he will follow Plato's counsel, will lay aside fiddles, many-stringed virginals, psalteries, and harps, pre-

* Herod. III. 82.

ferring before all other the lute and bandore ; in like manner, an able statesman will dexterously manage the Laconic and Lycurgian seignory or oligarchy, fitting and accommodating his companions who are of equal authority with him, and by little and little drawing and reducing them to be managed by himself. He will also carry himself discreetly in a popular state, as if he had to deal with an instrument of many and differently sounding strings, one while letting down and remitting some things, and again extending others, as he shall see his opportunity and find it most convenient for the government, to which he will vigorously apply himself, well knowing when and how he ought to resist and contradict ; but yet, if he might be permitted to make his choice from amongst all sorts of government, as from so many musical instruments, he would not, if Plato's advice might be taken, choose any other but monarchy or regal authority, as being that which is indeed alone able to support that most perfect and most lofty note of virtue, without suffering him either by force or by grace and favor, to frame himself for advantage and gain. For all other sorts of governments do in a manner as much rule a statesman as he does them, no less carrying him than they are carried by him ; forasmuch as he has no certain power over those from whom he has his authority, but is very often constrained to cry out in these words of the poet Aeschylus, which King Demetrius, surnamed the Town-taker, often alleged against Fortune, after he had lost his kingdom .

Thou mad'st me first, and now undoest me quite.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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