

# Of Counsel

THE greatest trust, between man and man, is the trust of giving counsel. For in other confidences, men commit the parts of life; their lands, their goods, their children, their credit, some particular affair; but to such as they make their counsellors, they commit the whole: by how much the more, they are obliged to all faith and integrity. The wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness, or derogation to their sufficiency, to rely upon counsel. God himself is not without, but hath made it one of the great names of his blessed Son: The Counsellor. Solomon hath pronounced, that in counsel is stability. Things will have their first, or second agitation: if they be not tossed upon the arguments of counsel, they will be tossed upon the waves of fortune; and be full of inconstancy, doing and undoing, like the reeling of a drunken man. Solomon's son found the force of counsel, as his father saw the necessity of it. For the beloved kingdom of God, was first rent, and broken, by ill counsel; upon which counsel, there are set for our instruction, the two marks whereby bad counsel is for ever best discerned; that it was young counsel, for the person; and violent counsel, for the matter.

The ancient times, do set forth in figure, both the incorporation, and inseparable conjunction, of counsel with kings, and the wise and politic use of counsel by kings: the one, in that they say Jupiter did marry Metis, which signifieth counsel; whereby they intend that Sovereignty, is married to Counsel: the other in that which followeth, which was thus: They say, after Jupiter was married to Metis, she conceived by him, and was with child, but Jupiter suffered her not to stay, till she brought forth, but eat her up; whereby he became himself with child, and was delivered of Pallas armed, out of his head. Which monstrous fable containeth a secret of empire; how kings are to make use of their counsel of state. That first, they ought to refer matters unto them, which is the first begetting, or impregnation; but when they are elaborate, moulded, and shaped in the womb of their counsel, and grow ripe, and ready to be brought forth, that then they suffer not their counsel to go through with the resolution and direction, as if it depended on them; but take the matter back into their own hands, and make it appear to the world, that the decrees and final directions (which, because they come forth, with prudence and power, are resembled to Pallas armed) proceeded from themselves; and not only from their authority, but (the more to add reputation to themselves) from their head and device.

Let us now speak of the inconveniences of counsel, and of the remedies. The inconveniences that have been noted, in calling and using counsel, are three. First, the revealing of affairs, whereby they become less secret. Secondly, the weakening of the authority of princes, as if they were less of themselves. Thirdly, the danger of being unfaithfully counselled, and more for the good of them that counsel, than of him that is counselled. For which inconveniences, the doctrine of Italy, and practice of France, in some kings' times, hath introduced cabinet counsels; a remedy worse than the disease.

As to secrecy; princes are not bound to communicate all matters, with all counsellors; but may extract and select. Neither is it necessary, that he that consulteth what he should do, should declare what he will do. But let princes beware, that the unsecreting of their affairs, comes not from themselves. And as for cabinet counsels, it may be their motto, *plenus rimarum sum*: one futile person, that maketh it his glory to tell, will do more hurt than many, that know it their duty to conceal. It is true there be some affairs, which require extreme secrecy, which will hardly go beyond one or two persons, besides the king: neither are those counsels unprosperous; for, besides the secrecy, they commonly go on constantly, in one spirit of direction, without distraction. But then it must be a prudent king, such as is able to grind with a handmill; and those inward counsellors had need also be wise men, and especially

true and trusty to the king's ends; as it was with King Henry the Seventh of England, who, in his great business, imparted himself to none, except it were to Morton and Fox.

For weakening of authority; the fable showeth the remedy. Nay, the majesty of kings, is rather exalted than diminished, when they are in the chair of counsel; neither was there ever prince, bereaved of his dependences, by his counsel, except where there hath been, either an over-greatness in one counsellor, or an over-strict combination in divers; which are things soon found, and holpen.

For the last inconvenience, that men will counsel, with an eye to themselves; certainly, non inveniet fidem super terram is meant, of the nature of times, and not of all particular persons. There be, that are in nature faithful, and sincere, and plain, and direct; not crafty and involved; let princes, above all, draw to themselves such natures. Besides, counsellors are not commonly so united, but that one counsellor, keepeth sentinel over another; so that if any do counsel out of faction or private ends, it commonly comes to the king's ear. But the best remedy is, if princes know their counsellors, as well as their counsellors know them:

*Principis est virtus maxima nosse suos.*

And on the other side, counsellors should not be too speculative into their sovereign's person. The true composition of a counsellor, is rather to be skilful in their master's business, than in his nature; for then he is like to advise him, and not feed his humor. It is of singular use to princes, if they take the opinions of their counsel, both separately and together. For private opinion is more free; but opinion before others, is more reverent. In private, men are more bold in their own humors; and in consort, men are more obnoxious to others' humors; therefore it is good to take both; and of the inferior sort, rather in private, to preserve freedom; of the greater, rather in consort, to preserve respect. It is in vain for princes, to take counsel concerning matters, if they take no counsel likewise concerning persons; for all matters are as dead images; and the life of the execution of affairs, resteth in the good choice of persons. Neither is it enough, to consult concerning persons *secundum genera*, as in an idea, or mathematical description, what the kind and character of the person should be; for the greatest errors are committed, and the most judgment is shown, in the choice of individuals. It was truly said, *optimi consilarii mortui*: books will speak plain, when counsellors blanch. Therefore it is good to be conversant in them, specially the books of such as themselves have been actors upon the stage.

The counsels at this day, in most places, are but familiar meetings, where matters are rather talked on, than debated. And they run too swift, to the order, or act, of counsel. It were better that in causes of weight, the matter were propounded one day, and not spoken to till the next day; in *nocte consilium*. So was it done in the Commission of Union, between England and Scotland; which was a grave and orderly assembly. I commend set days for petitions; for both it gives the suitors more certainty for their attendance, and it frees the meetings for matters of estate, that they may *hoc agere*. In choice of committees; for ripening business for the counsel, it is better to choose indifferent persons, than to make an indifferency, by putting in those, that are strong on both sides. I commend also standing commissions; as for trade, for treasure, for war, for suits, for some provinces; for where there be divers particular counsels, and but one counsel of estate (as it is in Spain), they are, in effect, no more than standing commissions: save that they have greater authority. Let such as are to inform counsels, out of their particular professions (as lawyers, seamen, mintmen, and the like) be first heard before committees; and then, as occasion serves, before the counsel. And let them not come in multitudes, or in a tribunitious manner; for that is to clamor counsels, not to inform them. A long table and a square table, or seats about the walls, seem things of form, but are things of substance; for at a long table a few at the upper end, in effect, sway all the business; but in the other form, there is more use of the

counsellors' opinions, that sit lower. A king, when he presides in counsel, let him beware how he opens his own inclination too much, in that which he propoundeth; for else counsellors will but take the wind of him, and instead of giving free counsel, sing him a song of placebo.

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