

Of the True Greatness Of Kingdoms And Estates

THE speech of Themistocles the Athenian, which was haughty and arrogant, in taking so much to himself, had been a grave and wise observation and censure, applied at large to others. Desired at a feast to touch a lute, he said, He could not fiddle, but yet he could make a small town, a great city. These words (holpen a little with a metaphor) may express two differing abilities, in those that deal in business of estate. For if a true survey be taken of counsellors and statesmen, there may be found (though rarely) those which can make a small state great, and yet cannot fiddle; as on the other side, there will be found a great many, that can fiddle very cunningly, but yet are so far from being able to make a small state great, as their gift lieth the other way; to bring a great and flourishing estate, to ruin and decay. And certainly whose degenerate arts and shifts, whereby many counsellors and governors gain both favor with their masters, and estimation with the vulgar, deserve no better name than fiddling; being things rather pleasing for the time, and graceful to themselves only, than tending to the weal and advancement of the state which they serve. There are also (no doubt) counsellors and governors which may be held sufficient (*negotiis pares*), able to manage affairs, and to keep them from precipices and manifest inconveniences; which nevertheless are far from the ability to raise and amplify an estate in power, means, and fortune. But be the workmen what they may be, let us speak of the work; that is, the true greatness of kingdoms and estates, and the means thereof. An argument fit for great and mighty princes to have in their hand; to the end that neither by over-measuring their forces, they leese themselves in vain enterprises; nor on the other side, by undervaluing them, they descend to fearful and pusillanimous counsels.

The greatness of an estate, in bulk and territory, doth fall under measure; and the greatness of finances and revenue, doth fall under computation. The population may appear by musters; and the number and greatness of cities and towns by cards and maps. But yet there is not any thing amongst civil affairs more subject to error, than the right valuation and true judgment concerning the power and forces of an estate. The kingdom of heaven is compared, not to any great kernel or nut, but to a grain of mustard-seed: which is one of the least grains, but hath in it a property and spirit hastily to get up and spread. So are there states, great in territory, and yet not apt to enlarge or command; and some that have but a small dimension of stem, and yet apt to be the foundations of great monarchies.

Walled towns, stored arsenals and armories, goodly races of horse, chariots of war, elephants, ordnance, artillery, and the like; all this is but a sheep in a lion's skin, except the breed and disposition of the people, be stout and warlike. Nay, number (itself) in armies importeth not much, where the people is of weak courage; for (as Virgil saith) It never troubles a wolf, how many the sheep be. The army of the Persians, in the plains of Arbela, was such a vast sea of people, as it did somewhat astonish the commanders in Alexander's army; who came to him therefore, and wished him to set upon them by night; and he answered, He would not pilfer the victory. And the defeat was easy. When Tigranes the Armenian, being encamped upon a hill with four hundred thousand men, discovered the army of the Romans, being not above fourteen thousand, marching towards him, he made himself merry with it, and said, Yonder men are too many for an embassage, and too few for a fight. But before the sun set, he found them enow to give him the chase with infinite slaughter. Many are the examples of the great odds, between number and courage; so that a man may truly make a judgment, that the principal point of greatness in any state, is to have a race of military men. Neither is money the

sinews of war (as it is trivially said), where the sinews of men's arms, in base and effeminate people, are failing. For Solon said well to Croesus (when in ostentation he showed him his gold), Sir, if any other come, that hath better iron, than you, he will be master of all this gold. Therefore let any prince or state think solely of his forces, except his militia of natives be of good and valiant soldiers. And let princes, on the other side, that have subjects of martial disposition, know their own strength; unless they be otherwise wanting unto themselves. As for mercenary forces (which is the help in this case), all examples show, that whatsoever estate or prince doth rest upon them, he may spread his feathers for a time, but he will mew them soon after.

The blessing of Judah and Issachar will never meet; that the same people, or nation, should be both the lion's whelp and the ass between burthens; neither will it be, that a people overlaid with taxes, should ever become valiant and martial. It is true that taxes levied by consent of the estate, do abate men's courage less: as it hath been seen notably, in the excises of the Low Countries; and, in some degree, in the subsidies of England. For you must note, that we speak now of the heart, and not of the purse. So that although the same tribute and tax, laid by consent or by imposing, be all one to the purse, yet it works diversely upon the courage. So that you may conclude, that no people overcharged with tribute, is fit for empire.

Let states that aim at greatness, take heed how their nobility and gentlemen do multiply too fast. For that maketh the common subject, grow to be a peasant and base swain, driven out of heart, and in effect but the gentleman's laborer. Even as you may see in coppice woods; if you leave your staddles too thick, you shall never have clean underwood, but shrubs and bushes. So in countries, if the gentlemen be too many, the commons will be base; and you will bring it to that, that not the hundred poll, will be fit for an helmet; especially as to the infantry, which is the nerve of an army; and so there will be great population, and little strength. This which I speak of, hath been nowhere better seen, than by comparing of England and France; whereof England, though far less in territory and population, hath been (nevertheless) an overmatch; in regard the middle people of England make good soldiers, which the peasants of France do not. And herein the device of king Henry the Seventh (whereof I have spoken largely in the History of his Life) was profound and admirable; in making farms and houses of husbandry of a standard; that is, maintained with such a proportion of land unto them, as may breed a subject to live in convenient plenty and no servile condition; and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners, and not mere hirelings. And thus indeed you shall attain to Virgil's character which he gives to ancient Italy:

“ Terra potens armis atque ubere glebae.

Neither is that state (which, for any thing I know, is almost peculiar to England, and hardly to be found anywhere else, except it be perhaps in Poland) to be passed over; I mean the state of free servants, and attendants upon noblemen and gentlemen; which are no ways inferior unto the yeomanry for arms. And therefore out of all questions, the splendor and magnificence, and great retinues and hospitality, of noblemen and gentlemen, received into custom, doth much conduce unto martial greatness. Whereas, contrariwise, the close and reserved living of noblemen and gentlemen, causeth a penury of military forces.

By all means it is to be procured, that the trunk of Nebuchadnezzar's tree of monarchy, be great enough to bear the branches and the boughs; that is, that the natural subjects of the crown or state, bear a sufficient proportion to the stranger subjects, that they govern. Therefore all states that are liberal of naturalization towards strangers, are fit for empire. For to think that an handful of people can, with the greatest courage and policy in the world, embrace too large extent of dominion, it may hold for a time, but it will fail suddenly. The Spartans were a nice people in point of naturalization; whereby, while they kept their compass, they stood firm; but when they did spread, and their boughs were becomen too great for their stem, they became a windfall, upon the sudden. Never any state was in this point so open to receive strangers into their body, as were the Romans. Therefore it sorted with them accordingly; for they grew to the greatest monarchy. Their manner was to grant naturalization (which they called *jus civitatis*), and to grant it in the highest degree; that is, not only *jus commercii*, *jus connubii*, *jus haereditatis*; but also *jus suffragii*, and *jus honorum*. And this not to singular persons alone, but likewise to whole families; yea to cities, and sometimes to nations. Add to this their custom of plantation of colonies; whereby the Roman plant was removed into the soil of other nations. And putting both constitutions together, you will say that it was not the Romans that spread upon the world, but it was the world that spread upon the Romans; and that was the sure way of greatness. I have marvelled, sometimes, at Spain, how they clasp and contain so large dominions, with so few natural Spaniards; but sure the whole compass of Spain, is a very great body of a tree; far above Rome and Sparta at the first. And besides, though they have not had that usage, to naturalize liberally, yet they have that which is next to it; that is, to employ, almost indifferently, all nations in their militia of ordinary soldiers; yea, and sometimes in their highest commands. Nay, it seemeth at this instant they are sensible, of this want of natives; as by the Pragmatical Sanction, now published, appeareth.

It is certain that sedentary, and within-door arts, and delicate manufactures (that require rather the finger than the arm), have, in their nature, a contrariety to a military disposition. And generally, all warlike people are a little idle, and love danger better than travail. Neither must they be too much broken of it, if they shall be preserved in vigor. Therefore it was great advantage, in the ancient states of Sparta, Athens, Rome, and others, that they had the use of slaves, which commonly did rid those manufactures. But that is abolished, in greatest part, by the Christian law. That which cometh nearest to it, is to leave those arts chiefly to strangers (which, for that purpose, are the more easily to be received), and to contain the principal bulk of the vulgar natives, within those three kinds,—tillers of the ground; free servants; and handicraftsmen of strong and manly arts, as smiths, masons, carpenters, etc.; not reckoning professed soldiers.

But above all, for empire and greatness, it importeth most, that a nation do profess arms, as their principal honor, study, and occupation. For the things which we formerly have spoken of, are but habilitations towards arms; and what is habilitation without intention and act? Romulus, after his death (as they report or feign), sent a present to the Romans, that above all, they should intend arms; and then they should prove the greatest empire of the world. The fabric of the state of Sparta was wholly (though not wisely) framed and composed, to that scope and end. The Persians and Macedonians had it for a flash. The Gauls, Germans, Goths, Saxons, Normans, and others, had it for a time. The Turks have it at this day, though in great declination. Of Christian Europe, they that have it are, in effect, only the Spaniards. But it is so plain, that every man profiteth in that, he most intendeth, that it needeth not to be stood upon. It is enough to point at it; that no nation which doth not directly profess arms, may look to have greatness fall into their mouths. And on the other side, it is a most certain oracle of time, that those states that continue long in that profession (as the Romans and Turks principally have done) do wonders. And those that have professed arms but for an age, have, notwithstanding, commonly attained that greatness, in that age, which maintained them long after, when their profession

and exercise of arms hath grown to decay.

Incident to this point is, for a state to have those laws or customs, which may reach forth unto them just occasions (as may be pretended) of war. For there is that justice, imprinted in the nature of men, that they enter not upon wars (whereof so many calamities do ensue) but upon some, at the least specious, grounds and quarrels. The Turk hath at hand, for cause of war, the propagation of his law or sect; a quarrel that he may always command. The Romans, though they esteemed the extending the limits of their empire, to be great honor to their generals, when it was done, yet they never rested upon that alone, to begin a war. First, therefore, let nations that pretend to greatness have this; that they be sensible of wrongs, either upon borderers, merchants, or politic ministers; and that they sit not too long upon a provocation. Secondly, let them be prest, and ready to give aids and succors, to their confederates; as it ever was with the Romans; insomuch, as if the confederate had leagues defensive, with divers other states, and, upon invasion offered, did implore their aids severally, yet the Romans would ever be the foremost, and leave it to none other to have the honor. As for the wars which were anciently made, on the behalf of a kind of party, or tacit conformity of estate, I do not see how they may be well justified: as when the Romans made a war, for the liberty of Grecia; or when the Lacedaemonians and Athenians, made wars to set up or pull down democracies and oligarchies; or when wars were made by foreigners, under the pretence of justice or protection, to deliver the subjects of others, from tyranny and oppression; and the like. Let it suffice, that no estate expect to be great, that is not awake upon any just occasion of arming.

No body can be healthful without exercise, neither natural body nor politic; and certainly to a kingdom or estate, a just and honorable war, is the true exercise. A civil war, indeed, is like the heat of a fever; but a foreign war is like the heat of exercise, and serveth to keep the body in health; for in a slothful peace, both courages will effeminate, and manners corrupt. But howsoever it be for happiness, without all question, for greatness, it maketh to be still for the most part in arms; and the strength of a veteran army (though it be a chargeable business) always on foot, is that which commonly giveth the law, or at least the reputation, amongst all neighbor states; as may well be seen in Spain, which hath had, in one part or other, a veteran army almost continually, now by the space of six score years.

To be master of the sea, is an abridgment of a monarchy. Cicero, writing to Atticus of Pompey his preparation against Caesar, saith, *Consilium Pompeii plane Themistocleum est; putat enim, qui mari potitur, eum rerum potiri.* And, without doubt, Pompey had tired out Caesar, if upon vain confidence, he had not left that way. We see the great effects of battles by sea. The battle of Actium, decided the empire of the world. The battle of Lepanto, arrested the greatness of the Turk. There be many examples, where sea-fights have been final to the war; but this is when princes or states have set up their rest, upon the battles. But thus much is certain, that he that commands the sea, is at great liberty, and may take as much, and as little, of the war as he will. Whereas those that be strongest by land, are many times nevertheless in great straits. Surely, at this day, with us of Europe, the vantage of strength at sea (which is one of the principal dowries of this kingdom of Great Britain) is great; both because most of the kingdoms of Europe, are not merely inland, but girt with the sea most part of their compass; and because the wealth of both Indies seems in great part, but an accessory to the command of the seas.

The wars of latter ages seem to be made in the dark, in respect of the glory, and honor, which reflected upon men from the wars, in ancient time. There be now, for martial encouragement, some degrees and orders of chivalry; which nevertheless are conferred promiscuously, upon soldiers and no soldiers; and some remembrance perhaps, upon the scutcheon; and some hospitals for maimed soldiers; and such

like things. But in ancient times, the trophies erected upon the place of the victory; the funeral laudatives and monuments for those that died in the wars; the crowns and garlands personal; the style of emperor, which the great kings of the world after borrowed; the triumphs of the generals, upon their return; the great donatives and largesses, upon the disbanding of the armies; were things able to inflame all men's courages. But above all, that of the triumph, amongst the Romans, was not pageants or gaudery, but one of the wisest and noblest institutions, that ever was. For it contained three things: honor to the general; riches to the treasury out of the spoils; and donatives to the army. But that honor, perhaps were not fit for monarchies; except it be in the person of the monarch himself, or his sons; as it came to pass in the times of the Roman emperors, who did impropriate the actual triumphs to themselves, and their sons, for such wars as they did achieve in person; and left only, for wars achieved by subjects, some triumphal garments and ensigns to the general.

To conclude: no man can by care taking (as the Scripture saith) add a cubit to his stature, in this little model of a man's body; but in the great frame of kingdoms and commonwealths, it is in the power of princes or estates, to add amplitude and greatness to their kingdoms; for by introducing such ordinances, constitutions, and customs, as we have now touched, they may sow greatness to their posterity and succession. But these things are commonly not observed, but left to take their chance.

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