Discourse on Voluntary Servitude

The Discours sur la servitude volontaire

of

Étienne de La Boétie,

1548

Rendered into English by

HARRY KURZ

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DEDICATION

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This call to freedom ringing down the corridors of four centuries is sounded again here for the sake of peoples in all totalitarian countries today who dare not freely declare their thought.

It will also ring dear and beautiful in the ears of those who still live freely and who by faith and power will contribute to the liberation of the rest of mankind from the horrors of political serfdom.

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HARRY KURZ

Queens College February, 1942

INTRODUCTION

Unique Qualities of This Discourse

La Boétie's essay against dictators[1] makes stirring reading. A clear analysis of how tyrants get power and maintain it, its simple assumption is that real power always lies in the hands of the people and that they can free themselves from a despot by an act of will unaccompanied by any gesture of violence. The astounding fact about this tract is that in 1948 it will be four hundred years old. One would seek hard to find any writing of current times that strips the sham from dictators more vigorously. Better than many modern political thinkers, its author not only reveals the contemptible nature of dictatorships, but he goes on to show, as is aptly stated by the exiled Borgese [2] "that all servitude is voluntary and the slave is more despicable than the tyrant is hateful." No outraged cry from the past or present points the moral more clearly that Rome was worthy of her Nero, and by inference, Europe of her present little strutters and the agony in which they have engulfed their world. So appropriate to our day is this courageous essay that one's amazement is aroused by the fact that a youth of eighteen really wrote it four centuries ago, with such far-sighted wisdom that his words can resound today as an ever-echoing demand for what is still dearest to mankind.

Life of the Author

La Boétie [3] was born at Sarlat, southwestern France, on November 1, 1530. He came from the provincial nobility, his father being an assistant to the governor of Perigord. His uncle, a priest, gave him his early training and prepared him for entrance to the School of Law at the University of Toulouse, where in 1553 he received his degree with special honors. During these years of study he steeped himself also in the classics so that later he translated from the Greek and composed poetry in Latin. Early in this period he wrote his immortal essay, presumably in 1548. His reputation as a scholar procured for him at graduation, although he was under age, appointment as a judge attached to the court of Bordeaux. He was named to a post vacated by an illustrious predecessor, Longa,[4] who was summoned as justice to Paris. During the next ten years we find La Boétie's name on the official records of the court in connection with a number of difficult cases.

A justice of that day had to perform a wide variety of duties. La Boétie was called in as literary critic and censor when the Collège de Guyenne wanted official sanction for the presentation of some plays. A little later he was entrusted with the delicate mission of traveling to Paris to petition the king, Henry II, for special financial arrangements for the regular payment of the salaries of the court. He was successful in this quest and brought back also a personal message from the great Chancellor of France, Michel de l'Hospital, who was trying to pacify Catholics and Protestants and prevent fratricidal bloodshed. By the age of thirty our magistrate had achieved considerable renown as a specialist in arranging compromise between these religious factions, with a scrupulous fairness that inspired confidence. For the next three years, till 1563, he was extremely active at Agen, a hotbed of angry dispute where churches were violently entered and images destroyed. La Boétie was himself a devout Catholic with a liberal point of view. His sense of fairness generally led him to assign to the disputants different churches, and, in towns with only one place of worship, different hours for religious services. He wrote an approving Mémoire when the great Chancellor in 1562 issued an edict conferring greater freedom of worship upon the Huguenots.

La Boétie's efforts might have borne fruit, but at one of his trips to Agen while some form of dysentery was raging in that region, he caught the germ, as his great friend Montaigne believes. This was in the spring of 1563. By August of that year our judge was far from well and decided to go for a rest to Médoc. Despite his illness he set out from Bordeaux but he was able to travel only a few kilometers. At Germignan, in the home of a fellow magistrate, he took to bed and grew rapidly worse. A week later, on August 14, he made his will, leaving all his papers and books to Montaigne, who courageously stood by him to the moment of his death. These deeply moving final hours are related by Montaigne in a touching letter written to his own father. A superb testimony to a Christian death, it is worthy to take its place beside other great documents of supreme farewell to life. In the early morning of Wednesday, August 18, 1563, La Boétie left this world at the very youthful age of less than thirty-three years.

Friendship of Two Men

The relationship between Montaigne and La Boétie is so impressive that their coming together seems, according to the former, to have been predestined. So irresistibly were they drawn to each other that, when they met, their earlier careers appeared as paths converging toward their union.

Michel de Montaigne succeeded his father at the court of Périgueux just before this court was merged with the one at Bordeaux. When in September, 1561, Montaigne began his judicial functions in Bordeaux, La Boétie had already served the tribunal there for eight years. It was natural for Montaigne, who was two years younger, to look up to the colleague whose tract on Voluntary Servitude he had already read in manuscript. In his essay on Friendship [5] he tells us of his feeling: "If I am urged to say why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be put into words; there is beyond any observation of mine a mysterious, inexplicable and predestined force in this union. We sought each other before we had met through reports each had heard about the other, which attracted our affections more singularly than the nature of the situation can suggest. I believe it was some dispensation from Heaven. When we met we embraced each other as soon as we heard the other's name.... We found we were so captivated, so revealed to each other, so drawn together, that nothing ever since has been closer than one to the other."

In various Latin epistles addressed to his friend, La Boétie pays similar tribute. And even in the essay on Voluntary Servitude, written before they met, we get a glimpse of what friendship could mean to a man whose spirit habitually dwelt on a high plane of integrity. Thereafter, these two made a perfect exchange of exalted love in a relationship for which their joined +-+names have become a symbol. It is small wonder then that Montaigne will add to his immortal essay, some twenty-five years after the death of his friend, his sad but beautiful conclusion to the ineffable nature of their friendship: "We loved each other because it was he, because it was I." There is nothing left to say.

We can begin to understand what the loss of such a friend meant to Montaigne. During the earlier years of mourning he languishes. Pleasure revives his pain for he wants his friend to share it at his side. His work at the court of Bordeaux becomes distasteful and he finally gives up his post to dedicate himself to his departed friend and to perpetuate his memory. First he prepares for publication all the manuscripts left him by La Boétie. [6] Very gradually he welcomes solitude and gives himself to the slow elaboration of his own sagacious essays.

It is to the honor of Montaigne that all his life he showed his gratitude for this unique friend bestowed upon him; and it is to the glory of La Boétie that he fully deserved the immortality into which their two names are forever fused by love.

Curious History of the Essay

Between 1560 and 1598 there were many outbreaks of religious war in France. Three brothers were crowned kings of France during this time, Francis II (1559-1560), Charles IX (1560-1574), and Henry III (1574- 1589). That all three were ineffective rulers is largely due to the machinations of their mother, Catherine de Medici, who finally contrived the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572. It was only after the Bourbon Henry IV abjured his Protestant faith a second time and entered Paris that some semblance of order was gradually restored, eventuating in the famous Edict of Nantes, 1598, that granted freedom of worship in the realm. Such was the period during which the Servitude volontaire was to play an extraordinary role.

Montaigne tells us it was composed in 1548, a date he later changed to 1546. In all likelihood La Boétie wrote it as a literary essay inspired by his Greek and Latin studies and conceived in the nature of a tribute to the classical spirit. There was no immediate event which drove the young author to this cry for freedom. It was circulated among friends at the University of Toulouse and copies of it were presumably made. When in 1563 Montaigne inherited the original among other books and papers, he placed these precious relics in his own library. These memorabilia must have spoken to him, he must have fingered them as he composed his own essay on Friendship in the years just before 1580. He had already in 1571 published most of these manuscripts, but it occurred to him that the Servitude volontaire would make a fitting pendant to his chapter on Friendship and reveal to the world the heart and mind of his friend. He says at the beginning of his Chapter XXVIII: "It is a treatise which he entitled Voluntary Servitude, but those who did not know this have neatly renamed it Anti-One. He wrote it in his early youth, before reaching his eighteenth year, as a sort of discourse in honor of liberty opposed to tyranny. It has for some time been circulated among people of culture and not without great and deserved appreciation, for it is as pleasing and spirited as possible.... But of his writing there remained only this discourse (and even that by accident, for I believe he never saw it after it got away from his hands) and certain remarks on the Edict of January, famous during our civil wars, which will find their place elsewhere.[7] That is all I could find in the papers he left except the volume of his works that I have already published. I am myself especially indebted to the essay on Servitude, for it became the means of our first acquaintance. It was shown to me before I met him and gave me my first knowledge of his name...." Montaigne then goes on to

celebrate the virtues of friendship, cites examples of it, and after speaking touchingly of his own attachment to his departed friend, he summons the young author of eighteen to speak. Then, suddenly, he adds: "Because I have discovered that this work has since been published, and with an evil purpose, by those who seek to disturb and change the form of our government without caring whether they better it, and who mixed it in with other grist from their own mills, I have decided not to print it here.' Instead he substitutes a sequence of twenty-nine sonnets already printed in the earlier volume of La Boétie's works, sonnets in honor of a lady.[8]

The essay was thus suppressed by the man who had the original in his hands and was therefore most capable of giving an authoritative version. This is to be regretted, as pirated editions had appeared. We must concede that Montaigne had ample justification for a decision taken merely to keep the good name of La Boétie out of civil strife. The fact is that the Servitude volontaire had appeared anonymously in print five times between 1574 and 1578,[9] largely as an instrument in the hands of Protestants to foment rebellion after the massacre of St. Bartholomew. No wonder then that Montaigne decided to withhold this document and the observations on the Edict of January, 1562, because, as he said, of the "brutal unpleasant atmosphere of this most disagreeable season." These writings officially included by Montaigne in his own pages might have added fuel to the flame and wronged the reputation of his friend, whose inmost nature was opposed to violence. La Boétie was very far from imagining when he composed his classical discourse that it would transform its author ten years after his death into a champion of Huguenot resistance.

After Henry IV succeeded in quieting the realm by granting freedom of worship, the Servitude volontaire seemed to have ended its unexpected role. It was still mentioned in connection with Montaigne's chapter on Friendship but readers were forgetting why the essayist had decided not to print it. Richelieu, in the early seventeenth century, was curious enough to want to read it but he had great difficulty in procuring a copy. A book dealer finally detached it from the Protestant Mémoires into which it had been set, and bound it separately for the Cardinal. We have no record of Richelieu's impressions, but we can surmise that he must have smiled at the impetuous eloquence against tyranny. Throughout the century nothing further is heard of the essay. But in 1727, in Geneva, when the publisher Coste was getting out a five volume edition of Montaigne, he had the bright idea of adding La Boétie's discourse as a tailpiece in the last volume. His

example has since been followed in all the better editions of the Essais. The Servitude volontaire thus became again generally available to readers. An English translation, the only one before the rendering contained in this book, appeared in London in 1735. The editor has discovered only one copy of this in the United States.[10] It is not without emotion that one picks up this early tribute to liberty, which antedates our Revolution. Since this London edition, the Servitude volontaire has appeared twice in Italian and in French many times at peculiar dates, 1789, 1835, 1845, 1863 — in periods marked by agitation preceding popular revolt. In this way, it would seem that the mildest and most just of men has become through one inspired essay an instigator of revolution, a role that has been the historic mission of other humble spirits dedicated to peace.

The translation given here is not based upon the rather inaccurate printings of the essay in the sixteenth century but upon the manuscript once possessed by Henri de Mesmes (1532-1596), Privy Counsellor to Henry II. De Mesmes, then active in behalf of conciliation between Christian sects, had read this copy of the Servitude and had written comments in the margin. The manuscript [11] may well be the original once owned by Montaigne and lent to his friend Henri de Mesmes, to whom he also dedicated one of the fragments of La Boétie's works in the volume he published. The previous English translation was based upon the Protestant version printed in 1577. The differences are matters of detail rather than of spirit.

Interpretation of the Essay

This manifesto from a free spirit fits very well into its century, a period of geographical exploration, mental inquiry, political dispute, and religious warfare. The turbulent second half of the sixteenth century, with its growing Protestantism and its spreading Renaissance, can be viewed as a gathering effort at emergence from the intellectual trammels of the Middle Ages. We can discern in France not only authors like Rabelais, Ronsard, and Montaigne, who all present a new vitality in thought, but also political protesters, pleading for a larger measure of individual freedom in the state. There were tracts like the Franco-Gallia (1573) of François Hotman, who tries to show that in becoming hereditary the French monarchy deviated from the principles of its founding; the Republique (1576) of Jean Bodin, who proposes an enlightened Catholic government; the Vindiciae contra tyrannos (1578) of Hubert Languet, wherein royal policies are vigorously attacked; the Discours politiques et militaires (1587) of the one-armed sea captain François de la Noue, who found time between campaigns for Henry

IV to preach tolerance. A little later Milton and Hobbes in England will be discussing similar political questions, Milton with devastating effect in his Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649). La Boétie would appear as an inspired ancestor to this distinguished line of political pamphleteers.

Most scholars are agreed that the Servitude volontaire is not to be considered a transitory political document written to fit some particular emergency. It seems to be instead a serious contemplation of man's relation to government, which fact makes it indeed the living document it is today and ever will be. Just as Machiavelli's system may be termed autocratic, and Calvin's theocratic, La Boétie's is obviously one of the earliest Christian demonstrations of a new ideal in government, the democratic, for the author clearly states that men are born free and equal. The title he chose for his tract, Voluntary Servitude, proves that he considers the people responsible for their enslavement to a despot. He feels scorn for the tyrant but also contempt for the nation submitting to him. La Boétie's genius consists in realizing and stating succinctly to his times the idea of the inalienable rights of the people, the very rights claimed for us in the Preamble to our American Constitution. The entire discourse breathes with this sentiment of the dignity and intrinsic independence of the individual.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider La Boétie a firebrand intentionally inciting to revolt against oppression. He has taken every precaution to prevent the application of his thinking to the government of France. His terms of deference are too sincere to permit any notion of hypocritical subservience. The truth is he was not a rebel. We know not only from his words but also from his judicial record that he was the declared enemy of violence. His method of redress against dictators is much more subtle and effective than violence, and might be substantially described as "passive resistance." He sought political reform not by overt deeds involving bloodshed, but by a refusal of obedience to the orders of tyrants. Pastor Niemöller of Germany would be the perfect modern exponent of the doctrine of the discourse, which teaches essentially a peaceful method of obtaining liberty by the use of a moral weapon against which no dictator can prevail. La Boétie paints in lurid and clownish colors the complexion of tyranny, explains its unstable and contemptible basis, and then shows serenely the way to its overthrow by patience, passive resistance, and faith in God.

It is not too much to assert that, if this four hundred-year-old essay could be placed in the hands of the oppressed peoples of our day, they would find a sure way to a rebirth of

freedom, a manifestation of a new spirit that would almost automatically obliterate the obscurantist strutters who today throttle their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

ANTI-DICTATOR

I see no good in having several lords;
Let one alone be master, let one alone be king.

These words Homer puts in the mouth of Ulysses,[1] as he addresses the people. If he had said nothing further than "I see no good in having several lords," it would have been well spoken. For the sake of logic he should have maintained that the rule of several could not be good since the power of one man alone, as soon as he acquires the title of master, becomes abusive and unreasonable. Instead he declared what seems preposterous: "Let one alone be master, let one alone be king." We must not be critical of Ulysses, who at the moment was perhaps obliged to speak these words in order to quell a mutiny in the army, for this reason, in my opinion, choosing language to meet the emergency rather than the truth. Yet, in the light of reason, it is a great misfortune to be at the beck and call of one master, for it is impossible to be sure that he is going to be kind, since it is always in his power to be cruel whenever he pleases. As for having several masters, according to the number one has, it amounts to being that many times unfortunate. Although I do not wish at this time to discuss this much debated question, namely whether other types of government are preferable to monarchy,[2] still I should like to know, before casting doubt on the place that monarchy should occupy among commonwealths, whether or not it belongs to such a group, since it is hard to believe that there is anything of common wealth in a country where everything belongs to one master. This question, however, can remain for another time and would really require a separate treatment involving by its very nature all sorts of political discussion.

For the present I should like merely to understand how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him; who is able to harm them only to the extent to which they have the willingness to bear with him; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to put up with him rather than contradict him.[3] Surely a striking situation! Yet it is so common that one must grieve the more and wonder the less at the spectacle of a million men serving in wretchedness, their necks under the yoke, not constrained by a greater multitude than they, but simply, it would

seem, delighted and charmed by the name of one man alone whose power they need not fear, for he is evidently the one person whose qualities they cannot admire because of his inhumanity and brutality toward them. A weakness characteristic of human kind is that we often have to obey force; we have to make concessions; we ourselves cannot always be the stronger. Therefore, when a nation is constrained by the fortune of war to serve a single clique, as happened when the city of Athens served the thirty Tyrants,[4] one should not be amazed that the nation obeys, but simply be grieved by the situation; or rather, instead of being amazed or saddened, consider patiently the evil and look forward hopefully toward a happier future.

Our nature is such that the common duties of human relationship occupy a great part of the course of our life. It is reasonable to love virtue, to esteem good deeds, to be grateful for good from whatever source we may receive it, and, often, to give up some of our comfort in order to increase the honor and advantage of some man whom we love and who deserves it. Therefore, if the inhabitants of a country have found some great personage who has shown rare foresight in protecting them in an emergency, rare boldness in defending them, rare solicitude in governing them, and if, from that point on, they contract the habit of obeying him and depending on him to such an extent that they grant him certain prerogatives, I fear that such a procedure is not prudent, inasmuch as they remove him from a position in which he was doing good and advance him to a dignity in which he may do evil. Certainly while he continues to manifest good will one need fear no harm from a man who seems to be generally well disposed.

But O good Lord! What strange phenomenon is this? What name shall we give to it? What is the nature of this misfortune? What vice is it, or, rather, what degradation? To see an endless multitude of people not merely obeying, but driven to servility? Not ruled, but tyrannized over? These wretches have no wealth, no kin, nor wife nor children, not even life itself that they can call their own. They suffer plundering, wantonness, cruelty, not from an army, not from a barbarian horde, on account of whom they must shed their blood and sacrifice their lives, but from a single man; not from a Hercules nor from a Samson, but from a single little man. Too frequently this same little man is the most cowardly and effeminate in the nation, a stranger to the powder of battle and hesitant on the sands of the tournament; not only without energy to direct men by force, but with hardly enough virility to bed with a common woman! Shall we call subjection to such a leader cowardice? Shall we say that those who serve him are

cowardly and faint-hearted? If two, if three, if four, do not defend themselves from the one, we might call that circumstance surprising but nevertheless conceivable. In such a case one might be justified in suspecting a lack of courage. But if a hundred, if a thousand endure the caprice of a single man, should we not rather say that they lack not the courage but the desire to rise against him, and that such an attitude indicates indifference rather than cowardice? When not a hundred, not a thousand men, but a hundred provinces, a thousand cities, a million men, refuse to assail a single man from whom the kindest treatment received is the infliction of serfdom and slavery, what shall we call that? Is it cowardice? Of course there is in every vice inevitably some limit beyond which one cannot go. Two, possibly ten, may fear one; but when a thousand, a million men, a thousand cities, fail to protect themselves against the domination of one man, this cannot be called cowardly, for cowardice does not sink to such a depth, any more than valor can be termed the effort of one individual to scale a fortress, to attack an army, or to conquer a kingdom. What monstrous vice, then, is this which does not even deserve to be called cowardice, a vice for which no term can be found vile enough, which nature herself disavows and our tongues refuse to name?

Place on one side fifty thousand armed men, and on the other the same number; let them join in battle, one side fighting to retain its liberty, the other to take it away; to which would you, at a guess, promise victory?

Which men do you think would march more gallantly to combat — those who anticipate as a reward for their suffering the maintenance of their freedom, or those who cannot expect any other prize for the blows exchanged than the enslavement of others? One side will have before its eyes the blessings of the past and the hope of similar joy in the future; their thoughts will dwell less on the comparatively brief pain of battle than on what they may have to endure forever, they, their children, and all their posterity. The other side has nothing to inspire it with courage except the weak urge of greed, which fades before danger and which can never be so keen, it seems to me, that it will not be dismayed by the least drop of blood from wounds. Consider the justly famous battles of Miltiades,[5] Leonidas,[6] Themistocles,[7] still fresh today in recorded history and in the minds of men as if they had occurred but yesterday, battles fought in Greece for the welfare of the Greeks and as an example to the world. What power do you think gave to such a mere handful of men not the strength but the courage to withstand the attack of a fleet so vast that even the seas were burdened, and to defeat the armies of so many

nations, armies so immense that their officers alone outnumbered the entire Greek force? What was it but the fact that in those glorious days this struggle represented not so much a fight of Greeks against Persians as a victory of liberty over domination, of freedom over greed?

It amazes us to hear accounts of the valor that liberty arouses in the hearts of those who defend it; but who could believe reports of what goes on every day among the inhabitants of some countries, who could really believe that one man alone may mistreat a hundred thousand and deprive them of their liberty? Who would credit such a report if he merely heard it, without being present to witness the event? And if this condition occurred only in distant lands and were reported to us, which one among us would not assume the tale to be imagined or invented, and not really true? Obviously there is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refuses consent to its own enslavement: it is not necessary to deprive him of anything, but simply to give him nothing; there is no need that the country make an effort to do anything for itself provided it does nothing against itself. It is therefore the inhabitants themselves who permit, or, rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude. A people enslaves itself, cuts its own throat, when, having a choice between being vassals and being free men, it deserts its liberties and takes on the yoke, gives consent to its own misery, or, rather, apparently welcomes it. If it cost the people anything to recover its freedom, I should not urge action to this end, although there is nothing a human should hold more dear than the restoration of his own natural right, to change himself from a beast of burden back to a man, so to speak. I do not demand of him so much boldness; let him prefer the doubtful security of living wretchedly to the uncertain hope of living as he pleases. What then? If in order to have liberty nothing more is needed than to long for it, if only a simple act of the will is necessary, is there any nation in the world that considers a single wish too high a price to pay in order to recover rights which it ought to be ready to redeem at the cost of its blood, rights such that their loss must bring all men of honor to the point of feeling life to be unendurable and death itself a deliverance?

Everyone knows that the fire from a little spark will increase and blaze ever higher as long as it finds wood to burn; yet without being quenched by water, but merely by finding no more fuel to feed on, it consumes itself, dies down, and is no longer a flame. Similarly, the more tyrants pillage, the more they crave, the more they ruin and destroy;

the more one yields to them, and obeys them, by that much do they become mightier and more formidable, the readier to annihilate and destroy. But if not one thing is yielded to them, if, without any violence they are simply not obeyed, they become naked and undone and as nothing, just as, when the root receives no nourishment, the branch withers and dies.

To achieve the good that they desire, the bold do not fear danger; the intelligent do not refuse to undergo suffering. It is the stupid and cowardly who are neither able to endure hardship nor to vindicate their rights; they stop at merely longing for them, and lose through timidity the valor roused by the effort to claim their rights, although the desire to enjoy them still remains as part of their nature. A longing common to both the wise and the foolish, to brave men and to cowards, is this longing for all those things which, when acquired, would make them happy and contented. Yet one element appears to be lacking. I do not know how it happens that nature fails to place within the hearts of men a burning desire for liberty, a blessing so great and so desirable that when it is lost all evils follow thereafter, and even the blessings that remain lose taste and savor because of their corruption by servitude. Liberty is the only joy upon which men do not seem to insist; for surely if they really wanted it they would receive it. Apparently they refuse this wonderful privilege because it is so easily acquired.

Poor, wretched, and stupid peoples, nations determined on your own misfortune and blind to your own good! You let yourselves be deprived before your own eyes of the best part of your revenues; your fields are plundered, your homes robbed, your family heirlooms taken away. You live in such a way that you cannot claim a single thing as your own; and it would seem that you consider yourselves lucky to be loaned your property, your families, and your very lives. All this havoc, this misfortune, this ruin, descends upon you not from alien foes, but from the one enemy whom you yourselves render as powerful as he is, for whom you go bravely to war, for whose greatness you do not refuse to offer your own bodies unto death. He who thus domineers over you has only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers dwelling in your cities; he has indeed nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any

power over you except through you? How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you? What could he do to you if you yourselves did not connive with the thief who plunders you, if you were not accomplices of the murderer who kills you, if you were not traitors to yourselves? You sow your crops in order that he may ravage them, you install and furnish your homes to give him goods to pillage; you rear your daughters that he may gratify his lust; you bring up your children in order that he may confer upon them the greatest privilege he knows — to be led into his battles, to be delivered to butchery, to be made the servants of his greed and the instruments of his vengeance; you yield your bodies unto hard labor in order that he may indulge in his delights and wallow in his filthy pleasures; you weaken yourselves in order to make him the stronger and the mightier to hold you in check. From all these indignities, such as the very beasts of the field would not endure, you can deliver yourselves if you try, not by taking action, but merely by willing to be free. Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.

Doctors are no doubt correct in warning us not to touch incurable wounds; and I am presumably taking chances in preaching as I do to a people which has long lost all sensitivity and, no longer conscious of its infirmity, is plainly suffering from mortal illness. Let us therefore understand by logic, if we can, how it happens that this obstinate willingness to submit has become so deeply rooted in a nation that the very love of liberty now seems no longer natural.

In the first place, all would agree that, if we led our lives according to the ways intended by nature and the lessons taught by her, we should be intuitively obedient to our parents; later we should adopt reason as our guide and become slaves to nobody. Concerning the obedience given instinctively to one's father and mother, we are in agreement, each one admitting himself to be a model. As to whether reason is born with us or not, that is a question loudly discussed by academicians and treated by all schools of philosophers. For the present I think I do not err in stating that there is in our souls some native seed of reason, which, if nourished by good counsel and training, flowers into virtue, but which, on the other hand, if unable to resist the vices surrounding it, is stifled and blighted. Yet surely if there is anything in this world clear and obvious, to which one cannot close

one's eyes, it is the fact that nature, handmaiden of God, governess of men, has cast us all in the same mold in order that we may behold in one another companions, or rather brothers. If in distributing her gifts nature has favored some more than others with respect to body or spirit, she has nevertheless not planned to place us within this world as if it were a field of battle, and has not endowed the stronger or the cleverer in order that they may act like armed brigands in a forest and attack the weaker. One should rather conclude that in distributing larger shares to some and smaller shares to others, nature has intended to give occasion for brotherly love to become manifest, some of us having the strength to give help to others who are in need of it. Hence, since this kind mother has given us the whole world as a dwelling place, has lodged us in the same house, has fashioned us according to the same model so that in beholding one another we might almost recognize ourselves; since she has bestowed upon us all the great gift of voice and speech for fraternal relationship, thus achieving by the common and mutual statement of our thoughts a communion of our wills; and since she has tried in every way to narrow and tighten the bond of our union and kinship; since she has revealed in every possible manner her intention, not so much to associate us as to make us one organic whole, there can be no further doubt that we are all naturally free, inasmuch as we are all comrades. Accordingly it should not enter the mind of anyone that nature has placed some of us in slavery, since she has actually created us all in one likeness.

Therefore it is fruitless to argue whether or not liberty is natural, since none can be held in slavery without being wronged, and in a world governed by a nature, which is reasonable, there is nothing so contrary as an injustice. Since freedom is our natural state, we are not only in possession of it but have the urge to defend it. Now, if perchance some cast a doubt on this conclusion and are so corrupted that they are not able to recognize their rights and inborn tendencies, I shall have to do them the honor that is properly theirs and place, so to speak, brute beasts in the pulpit to throw light on their nature and condition. The very beasts, God help me! if men are not too deaf, cry out to them, "Long live Liberty!" Many among them die as soon as captured: just as the fish loses life as soon as he leaves the water, so do these creatures close their eyes upon the light and have no desire to survive the loss of their natural freedom. If the animals were to constitute their kingdom by rank, their nobility would be chosen from this type. Others, from the largest to the smallest, when captured put up such a strong resistance by means of claws, horns, beak, and paws, that they show clearly enough how they cling to what they are losing; afterwards in captivity they manifest by so many evident signs

their awareness of their misfortune, that it is easy to see they are languishing rather than living, and continue their existence more in lamentation of their lost freedom than in enjoyment of their servitude. What else can explain the behavior of the elephant who, after defending himself to the last ounce of his strength and knowing himself on the point of being taken, dashes his jaws against the trees and breaks his tusks, thus manifesting his longing to remain free as he has been and proving his wit and ability to buy off the huntsmen in the hope that through the sacrifice of his tusks he will be permitted to offer his ivory as a ransom for his liberty? We feed the horse from birth in order to train him to do our bidding. Yet he is tamed with such difficulty that when we begin to break him in he bites the bit, he rears at the touch of the spur, as if to reveal his instinct and show by his actions that, if he obeys, he does so not of his own free will but under constraint. What more can we say?

"Even the oxen under the weight of the yoke complain,
And the birds in their cage lament,"

as I expressed it some time ago, toying with our French poesy. For I shall not hesitate in writing to you, O Longa,[8] to introduce some of my verses, which I never read to you because of your obvious encouragement which is quite likely to make me conceited. And now, since all beings, because they feel, suffer misery in subjection and long for liberty; since the very beasts, although made for the service of man, cannot become accustomed to control without protest, what evil chance has so denatured man that he, the only creature really born to be free, lacks the memory of his original condition and the desire to return to it?

There are three kinds of tyrants; some receive their proud position through elections by the people, others by force of arms, others by inheritance. Those who have acquired power by means of war act in such wise that it is evident they rule over a conquered country. Those who are born to kingship are scarcely any better, because they are nourished on the breast of tyranny, suck in with their milk the instincts of the tyrant, and consider the people under them as their inherited serfs; and according to their individual disposition, miserly or prodigal, they treat their kingdom as their property. He who has received the state from the people, however, ought to be, it seems to me, more bearable and would be so, I think, were it not for the fact that as soon as he sees himself higher than the others, flattered by that quality which we call grandeur, he plans never to relinquish his position. Such a man usually determines to pass on to his children the

authority that the people have conferred upon him; and once his heirs have taken this attitude, strange it is how far they surpass other tyrants in all sorts of vices, and especially in cruelty, because they find no other means to impose this new tyranny than by tightening control and removing their subjects so far from any notion of liberty that even if the memory of it is fresh it will soon be eradicated. Yet, to speak accurately, I do perceive that there is some difference among these three types of tyranny, but as for stating a preference, I cannot grant there is any. For although the means of coming into power differ, still the method of ruling is practically the same; those who are elected act as if they were breaking in bullocks; those who are conquerors make the people their prey; those who are heirs plan to treat them as if they were their natural slaves.

In connection with this, let us imagine some newborn individuals, neither acquainted with slavery nor desirous of liberty, ignorant indeed of the very words. If they were permitted to choose between being slaves and free men, to which would they give their vote? There can be no doubt that they would much prefer to be guided by reason itself than to be ordered about by the whims of a single man. The only possible exception might be the Israelites who, without any compulsion or need, appointed a tyrant.[9] I can never read their history without becoming angered and even inhuman enough to find satisfaction in the many evils that befell them on this account. But certainly all men, as long as they remain men, before letting themselves become enslaved must either be driven by force or led into it by deception; conquered by foreign armies, as were Sparta and Athens by the forces of Alexander [10] or by political factions, as when at an earlier period the control of Athens had passed into the hands of Pisistrates.[11] When they lose their liberty through deceit they are not so often betrayed by others as misled by themselves. This was the case with the people of Syracuse, chief city of Sicily (I am told the place is now named Saragossa [12]) when, in the throes of war and heedlessly planning only for the present danger, they promoted Denis,[13] their first tyrant, by entrusting to him the command of the army, without realizing that they had given him such power that on his victorious return this worthy man would behave as if he had vanquished not his enemies but his compatriots, transforming himself from captain to king, and then from king to tyrant.

It is incredible how as soon as a people becomes subject, it promptly falls into such complete forgetfulness of its freedom that it can hardly be roused to the point of regaining it, obeying so easily and so willingly that one is led to say, on beholding such

a situation, that this people has not so much lost its liberty as won its enslavement. It is true that in the beginning men submit under constraint and by force; but those who come after them obey without regret and perform willingly what their predecessors had done because they had to. This is why men born under the yoke and then nourished and reared in slavery are content, without further effort, to live in their native circumstance, unaware of any other state or right, and considering as quite natural the condition into which they were born. There is, however, no heir so spendthrift or indifferent that he does not sometimes scan the account books of his father in order to see if he is enjoying all the privileges of his legacy or whether, perchance, his rights and those of his predecessor have not been encroached upon. Nevertheless it is clear enough that the powerful influence of custom is in no respect more compelling than in this, namely, habituation to subjection. It is said that Mithridates[14] trained himself to drink poison. Like him we learn to swallow, and not to find bitter, the venom of servitude. It cannot be denied that nature is influential in shaping us to her will and making us reveal our rich or meager endowment; yet it must be admitted that she has less power over us than custom, for the reason that native endowment, no matter how good, is dissipated unless encouraged, whereas environment always shapes us in its own way, whatever that may be, in spite of nature's gifts. The good seed that nature plants in us is so slight and so slippery that it cannot withstand the least harm from wrong nourishment; it flourishes less easily, becomes spoiled, withers, and comes to nothing. Fruit trees retain their own particular quality if permitted to grow undisturbed, but lose it promptly and bear strange fruit not their own when ingrafted. Every herb has its peculiar characteristics, its virtues and properties; yet frost, weather, soil, or the gardener's hand increase or diminish its strength; the plant seen in one spot cannot be recognized in another.

Whoever could have observed the early Venetians,[15] a handful of people living so freely that the most wicked among them would not wish to be king over them, so born and trained that they would not vie with one another except as to which one could give the best counsel and nurture their liberty most carefully, so instructed and developed from their cradles that they would not exchange for all the other delights of the world an iota of their freedom; who, I say, familiar with the original nature of such a people, could visit today the territories of the man known as the Great Doge, and there contemplate with composure a people unwilling to live except to serve him, and maintaining his power at the cost of their lives? Who would believe that these two groups of people had an identical origin? Would one not rather conclude that upon

leaving a city of men he had chanced upon a menagerie of beasts? Lycurgus,[16] the lawgiver of Sparta, is reported to have reared two dogs of the same litter by fattening one in the kitchen and training the other in the fields to the sound of the bugle and the horn, thereby to demonstrate to the Lacedaemonians that men, too, develop according to their early habits. He set the two dogs in the open market place, and between them he placed a bowl of soup and a hare. One ran to the bowl of soup, the other to the hare; yet they were, as he maintained, born brothers of the same parents. In such manner did this leader, by his laws and customs, shape and instruct the Spartans so well that any one of them would sooner have died than acknowledge any sovereign other than law and reason.

It gives me pleasure to recall a conversation of the olden time between one of the favorites of Xerxes, the great king of Persia, and two Lacedaemonians. When Xerxes[17] equipped his great army to conquer Greece, he sent his ambassadors into the Greek cities to ask for water and earth. That was the procedure the Persians adopted in summoning the cities to surrender. Neither to Athens nor to Sparta, however, did he dispatch such messengers, because those who had been sent there by Darius his father had been thrown, by the Athenians and Spartans, some into ditches and others into wells, with the invitation to help themselves freely there to water and soil to take back to their prince. Those Greeks could not permit even the slightest suggestion of encroachment upon their liberty. The Spartans suspected, nevertheless, that they had incurred the wrath of the gods by their action, and especially the wrath of Talthybios,[18] the god of the heralds; in order to appease him they decided to send to Xerxes two of their citizens in atonement for the cruel death inflicted upon the ambassadors of his father. Two Spartans, one named Sperte and the other Bulis, volunteered to offer themselves as a sacrifice. So they departed, and on the way they came to the palace of the Persian named Hydarnes, lieutenant of the king in all the Asiatic cities situated on the sea coasts. He received them with great honor, feasted them, and then, speaking of one thing and another, he asked them why they refused so obdurately his king's friendship. "Consider well, O Spartans," said he, "and realize by my example that the king knows how to honor those who are worthy, and believe that if you were his men he would do the same for you; if you belonged to him and he had known you, there is not one among you who might not be the lord of some Greek city."

"By such words, Hydarnes, you give us no good counsel," replied the Lacedaemonians, "because you have experienced merely the advantage of which you speak; you do not know the privilege we enjoy. You have the honor of the king's favor; but you know nothing about liberty, what relish it has and how sweet it is. For if you had any knowledge of it, you yourself would advise us to defend it, not with lance and shield, but with our very teeth and nails."

Only Spartans could give such an answer, and surely both of them spoke as they had been trained. It was impossible for the Persian to regret liberty, not having known it, nor for the Lacedaemonians to find subjection acceptable after having enjoyed freedom.

Cato the Utican,[19] while still a child under the rod, could come and go in the house of Sylla the despot. Because of the place and family of his origin and because he and Sylla were close relatives, the door was never closed to him. He always had his teacher with him when he went there, as was the custom for children of noble birth. He noticed that in the house of Sylla, in the dictator's presence or at his command, some men were imprisoned and others sentenced; one was banished, another was strangled; one demanded the goods of another citizen, another his head; in short, all went there, not as to the house of a city magistrate but as to the people's tyrant, and this was therefore not a court of justice, Page 17 of 34 but rather a resort of tyranny. Whereupon the young lad said to his teacher, "Why don't you give me a dagger? I will hide it under my robe. I often go into Sylla's room before he is risen, and my arm is strong enough to rid the city of him." There is a speech truly characteristic of Cato; it was a true beginning of this hero so worthy of his end. And should one not mention his name or his country, but state merely the fact as it is, the episode itself would speak eloquently, and anyone would divine that he was a Roman born in Rome at the time when she was free.

And why all this? Certainly not because I believe that the land or the region has anything to do with it, for in any place and in any climate subjection is bitter and to be free is pleasant; but merely because I am of the opinion that one should pity those who, at birth, arrive with the yoke upon their necks. We should exonerate and forgive them, since they have not seen even the shadow of liberty, and, being quite unaware of it, cannot perceive the evil endured through their own slavery. If there were actually a country like that of the Cimmerians mentioned by Homer, where the sun shines otherwise than on our own, shedding its radiance steadily for six successive months and then leaving humanity to drowse in obscurity until it returns at the end of another half-year, should we be

surprised to learn that those born during this long night do grow so accustomed to their native darkness that unless they were told about the sun they would have no desire to see the light? One never pines for what he has never known; longing comes only after enjoyment and constitutes, amidst the experience of sorrow, the memory of past joy. It is truly the nature of man to be free and to wish to be so, yet his character is such that he instinctively follows the tendencies that his training gives him.

Let us therefore admit that all those things to which he is trained and accustomed seem natural to man and that only that is truly native to him which he receives with his primitive, untrained individuality. Thus custom becomes the first reason for voluntary servitude. Men are like handsome race horses who first bite the bit and later like it, and rearing under the saddle a while soon learn to enjoy displaying their harness and prance proudly beneath their trappings. Similarly men will grow accustomed to the idea that they have always been in subjection, that their fathers lived in the same way; they will think they are obliged to suffer this evil, and will persuade themselves by example and imitation of others, finally investing those who order them around with proprietary rights, based on the idea that it has always been that way.

There are always a few, better endowed than others, who feel the weight of the yoke and cannot restrain themselves from attempting to shake it off: these are the men who never become tamed under subjection and who always, like Ulysses on land and sea constantly seeking the smoke of his chimney, cannot prevent themselves from peering about for their natural privileges and from remembering their ancestors and their former ways. These are in fact the men who, possessed of clear minds and far- sighted spirit, are not satisfied, like the brutish mass, to see only what is at their feet, but rather look about them, behind and before, and even recall the things of the past in order to judge those of the future, and compare both with their present condition. These are the ones who, having good minds of their own, have further trained them by study and learning. Even if liberty had entirely perished from the earth, such men would invent it. For them slavery has no satisfactions, no matter how well disguised.

The Grand Turk was well aware that books and teaching more than anything else give men the sense to comprehend their own nature and to detest tyranny. I understand that in his territory there are few educated people, for he does not want many. On account of this restriction, men of strong zeal and devotion, who in spite of the passing of time have preserved their love of freedom, still remain ineffective because, however numerous

they may be, they are not known to one another; under the tyrant they have lost freedom of action, of speech, and almost of thought; they are alone in their aspiration. Indeed Momus, god of mockery, was not merely joking when he found this to criticize in the man fashioned by Vulcan, namely, that the maker had not set a little window in his creature's heart to render his thoughts visible. It is reported that Brutus, Cassius, and Casca, on undertaking to free Rome, and for that matter the whole world, refused to include in their band Cicero,[20] that great enthusiast for the public welfare if ever there was one, because they considered his heart too timid for such a lofty deed; they trusted his willingness but they were none too sure of his courage. Yet whoever studies the deeds of earlier days and the annals of antiquity will find practically no instance of heroes who failed to deliver their country from evil hands when they set about their task with a firm, whole-hearted, and sincere intention. Liberty, as if to reveal her nature, seems to have given them new strength. Harmodios and Aristogiton,[21] Thrasybulus,[22] Brutus the Elder,[23] Valerianus,[24] and Dion[25] achieved successfully what they planned virtuously: for hardly ever does good fortune fail a strong will. Brutus the Younger and Cassius were successful in eliminating servitude, and although they perished in their attempt to restore liberty, they did not die miserably (what blasphemy it would be to say there was anything miserable about these men, either in their death or in their living!). Their loss worked great harm, everlasting misfortune, and complete destruction of the Republic, which appears to have been buried with them. Other and later undertakings against the Roman emperors were merely plottings of ambitious people, who deserve no pity for the misfortunes that overtook them, for it is evident that they sought not to destroy, but merely to usurp the crown, scheming to drive away the tyrant, but to retain tyranny. For myself, I could not wish such men to prosper and I am glad they have shown by their example that the sacred name of Liberty must never be used to cover a false enterprise.

But to come back to the thread of our discourse, which I have practically lost: the essential reason why men take orders willingly is that they are born serfs and are reared as such. From this cause there follows another result, namely that people easily become cowardly and submissive under tyrants. For this observation I am deeply grateful to Hippocrates, the renowned father of medicine, who noted and reported it in a treatise of his entitled Concerning Diseases. This famous man was certainly endowed with a great heart and proved it clearly by his reply to the Great King,[26] who wanted to attach him to his person by means of special privileges and large gifts. Hippocrates answered

frankly that it would be a weight on his conscience to make use of his science for the cure of barbarians who wished to slay his fellow Greeks, or to serve faithfully by his skill anyone who undertook to enslave Greece. The letter he sent the king can still be read among his other works and will forever testify to his great heart and noble character.

By this time it should be evident that liberty once lost, valor also perishes. A subject people shows neither gladness nor eagerness in combat: its men march sullenly to danger almost as if in bonds, and stultified; they do not feel throbbing within them that eagerness for liberty which engenders scorn of peril and imparts readiness to acquire honor and glory by a brave death amidst one's comrades. Among free men there is competition as to who will do most, each for the common good, each by himself, all expecting to share in the misfortunes of defeat, or in the benefits of victory; but an enslaved people loses in addition to this warlike courage, all signs of enthusiasm, for their hearts are degraded, submissive, and incapable of any great deed. Tyrants are well aware of this, and, in order to degrade their subjects further, encourage them to assume this attitude and make it instinctive.

Xenophon, grave historian of first rank among the Greeks, wrote a book [27] in which he makes Simonides speak with Hieron, Tyrant of Syracuse, concerning the anxieties of the tyrant. This book is full of fine and serious remonstrances, which in my opinion are as persuasive as words can be. Would to God that all despots who have ever lived might have kept it before their eyes and used it as a mirror! I cannot believe they would have failed to recognize their warts and to have conceived some shame for their blotches. In this treatise is explained the torment in which tyrants find themselves when obliged to fear everyone because they do evil unto every man. Among other things we find the statement that bad kings employ foreigners in their wars and pay them, not daring to entrust weapons in the hands of their own people, whom they have wronged. (There have been good kings who have used mercenaries from foreign nations, even among the French, although more so formerly than today, but with the quite different purpose of preserving their own people, considering as nothing the loss of money in the effort to spare French lives. That is, I believe, what Scipio [28] the great African meant when he said he would rather save one citizen than defeat a hundred enemies.) For it is plainly evident that the dictator does not consider his power firmly established until he has reached the point where there is no man under him who is of any worth.

Therefore there may be justly applied to him the reproach to the master of the elephants made by Thrason and reported by Terence:

Are you indeed so proud
Because you command wild beasts? [29]

This method tyrants use of stultifying their subjects cannot be more clearly observed than in what Cyrus [30] did with the Lydians after he had taken Sardis, their chief city, and had at his mercy the captured Croesus, their fabulously rich king. When news was brought to him that the people of Sardis had rebelled, it would have been easy for him to reduce them by force; but being unwilling either to sack such a fine city or to maintain an army there to police it, he thought of an unusual expedient for reducing it. He established in it brothels, taverns, and public games, and issued the proclamation that the inhabitants were to enjoy them. He found this type of garrison so effective that he never again had to draw the sword against the Lydians. These wretched people enjoyed themselves inventing all kinds of games, so that the Latins have derived the word from them, and what we call pastimes they call ludi, as if they meant to say Lydi. Not all tyrants have manifested so clearly their intention to effeminize their victims; but in fact, what the aforementioned despot publicly proclaimed and put into effect, most of the others have pursued secretly as an end. It is indeed the nature of the populace, whose density is always greater in the cities, to be suspicious toward one who has their welfare at heart, and gullible toward one who fools them. Do not imagine that there is any bird more easily caught by decoy, nor any fish sooner fixed on the hook by wormy bait, than are all these poor fools neatly tricked into servitude by the slightest feather passed, so to speak, before their mouths. Truly it is a marvelous thing that they let themselves be caught so quickly at the slightest tickling of their fancy. Plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures, and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny. By these practices and enticements the ancient dictators so successfully lulled their subjects under the yoke, that the stupefied peoples, fascinated by the pastimes and vain pleasures flashed before their eyes, learned subservience as naively, but not so creditably, as little children learn to read by looking at bright picture books. Roman tyrants invented a further refinement. They often provided the city wards with feasts to cajole the rabble, always more readily tempted by the pleasure of eating than by anything else. The most intelligent and understanding amongst them would not have

quit his soup bowl to recover the liberty of the Republic of Plato. Tyrants would distribute largess, a bushel of wheat, a gallon of wine, and a sesterce: [31] and then everybody would shamelessly cry, "Long live the King!" The fools did not realize that they were merely recovering a portion of their own property, and that their ruler could not have given them what they were receiving without having first taken it from them. A man might one day be presented with a sesterce and gorge himself at the public feast, lauding Tiberius and Nero for handsome liberality, who on the morrow, would be forced to abandon his property to their avarice, his children to their lust, his very blood to the cruelty of these magnificent emperors, without offering any more resistance than a stone or a tree stump. The mob has always behaved in this way — eagerly open to bribes that cannot be honorably accepted, and dissolutely callous to degradation and insult that cannot be honorably endured. Nowadays I do not meet anyone who, on hearing mention of Nero, does not shudder at the very name of that hideous monster, that disgusting and vile pestilence. Yet when he died — when this incendiary, this executioner, this savage beast, died as vilely as he had lived — the noble Roman people, mindful of his games and his festivals, were saddened to the point of wearing mourning for him. Thus wrote Cornelius Tacitus,[32] a competent and serious author, and one of the most reliable. This will not be considered peculiar in view of what this same people had previously done at the death of Julius Caesar, who had swept away their laws and their liberty, in whose character, it seems to me, there was nothing worth while, for his very liberality, which is so highly praised, was more baneful than the crudest tyrant who ever existed, because it was actually this poisonous amiability of his that sweetened servitude for the Roman people. After his death, that people, still preserving on their palates the flavor of his banquets and in their minds the memory of his prodigality, vied with one another to pay him homage. They piled up the seats of the Forum for the great fire that reduced his body to ashes, and later raised a column to him as to "The Father of His People." [33] (Such was the inscription on the capital.) They did him more honor, dead as he was, than they had any right to confer upon any man in the world, except perhaps on those who had killed him.

They didn't even neglect, these Roman emperors, to assume generally the title of Tribune of the People, partly because this office was held sacred and inviolable and also because it had been founded for the defense and protection of the people and enjoyed the favor of the state. By this means they made sure that the populace would trust them completely, as if they merely used the title and did not abuse it. Today there are some

who do not behave very differently: they never undertake an unjust policy, even one of some importance, without prefacing it with some pretty speech concerning public welfare and common good. You well know, O Longa, this formula which they use quite cleverly in certain places; although for the most part, to be sure, there cannot be cleverness where there is so much impudence. The kings of the Assyrians and even after them those of the Medes showed themselves in public as seldom as possible in order to set up a doubt in the minds of the rabble as to whether they were not in some way more than man, and thereby to encourage people to use their imagination for those things which they cannot judge by sight. Thus a great many nations who for a long time dwelt under the control of the Assyrians became accustomed, with all this mystery, to their own subjection, and submitted the more readily for not knowing what sort of master they had, or scarcely even if they had one, all of them fearing by report someone they had never seen. The earliest kings of Egypt rarely showed themselves without carrying a cat, or sometimes a branch, or appearing with fire on their heads, masking themselves with these objects and parading like workers of magic. By doing this they inspired their subjects with reverence and admiration, whereas with people neither too stupid nor too slavish they would merely have aroused, it seems to me, amusement and laughter. It is pitiful to review the list of devices that early despots used to establish their tyranny; to discover how many little tricks they employed, always finding the populace conveniently gullible, readily caught in the net as soon as it was spread. Indeed they always fooled their victims so easily that while mocking them they enslaved them the more.

What comment can I make concerning another fine counterfeit that ancient peoples accepted as true money? They believed firmly that the great toe of Pyrrhus,[34] king of Epirus, performed miracles and cured diseases of the spleen; they even enhanced the tale further with the legend that this toe, after the corpse had been burned, was found among the ashes, untouched by the fire. In this wise a foolish people itself invents lies and then believes them. Many men have recounted such things, but in such a way that it is easy to see that the parts were pieced together from idle gossip of the city and silly reports from the rabble. When Vespasian,[35] returning from Assyria, passes through Alexandria on his way to Rome to take possession of the empire, he performs wonders: he makes the crippled straight, restores sight to the blind, and does many other fine things, concerning which the credulous and undiscriminating were, in my opinion, more blind than those cured. Tyrants themselves have wondered that men could endure the

persecution of a single man; they have insisted on using religion for their own protection and, where possible, have borrowed a stray bit of divinity to bolster up their evil ways. If we are to believe the Sybil of Virgil, Salmoneus,[36] in torment for having paraded as Jupiter in older to deceive the populace, now atones in nethermost Hell:

> **He suffered endless torment for having dared to imitate**
> **The thunderbolts of heaven and the flames of Jupiter.**
> **Upon a chariot drawn by four chargers he went, unsteadily**
> **Riding aloft, in his fist a great shining torch.**
> **Among the Greeks and into the market-place**
> **In the heart of the city of Elis he had ridden boldly:**
> **And displaying thus his vainglory he assumed**
> **An honor which undeniably belongs to the gods alone.**
> **This fool who imitated storm and the inimitable thunderbolt**
> **By clash of brass and with his dizzying charge**
> **On horn-hoofed steeds, the all-powerful Father beheld,**
> **Hurled not a torch, nor the feeble light**
> **From a waxen taper with its smoky fumes,**
> **But by the furious blast of thunder and lightning**
> **He brought him low, his heels above his head. [37]**

If such a one, who in his time acted merely through the folly of insolence, is so well received in Hell, I think that those who have used religion as a cloak to hide their vileness will be even more deservedly lodged in the same place.

Our own leaders have employed in France certain similar devices, such as toads, fleurs-de-lys, sacred vessels, and standards with flames of gold.[38] However that may be, I do not wish, for my part, to be incredulous, since neither we nor our ancestors have had any occasion up to now for skepticism. Our kings have always been so generous in times of peace and so valiant in time of war, that from birth they seem not to have been created by nature like many others, but even before birth to have been designated by Almighty God for the government and preservation of this kingdom. Even if this were not so, yet should I not enter the tilting ground to call in question the truth of our traditions, or to examine them so strictly as to take away their fine conceits. Here is such a field for our French poetry, now not merely honored but, it seems to me, reborn through our Ronsard, our Baïf, our Bellay.[39] These poets are defending our language

so well that I dare to believe that very soon neither the Greeks nor the Latins will in this respect have any advantage over us except possibly that of seniority. And I should assuredly do wrong to our poesy — I like to use that word despite the fact that several have rimed mechanically, for I still discern a number of men today capable of ennobling poetry and restoring it to its first lustre — but, as I say, I should do the Muse great injury if I deprived her now of those fine tales about King Clovis, amongst which it seems to me I can already see how agreeably and how happily the inspiration of our Ronsard in his Franciade [40] will play. I appreciate his loftiness, I am aware of his keen spirit, and I know the charm of the man: he will appropriate the oriflamme to his use much as did the Romans their sacred bucklers and the shields cast from heaven to earth, according to Virgil.[41] He will use our phial of holy oil much as the Athenians used the basket of Ericthonius;[42] he will win applause for our deeds of valor as they did for their olive wreath which they insist can still be found in Minerva's tower. Certainly I should be presumptuous if I tried to cast slurs on our records and thus invade the realm of our poets.

But to return to our subject, the thread of which I have unwittingly lost in this discussion: it has always happened that tyrants, in order to strengthen their power, have made every effort to train their people not only in obedience and servility toward themselves, but also in adoration. Therefore all that I have said up to the present concerning the means by which a more willing submission has been obtained applies to dictators in their relationship with the inferior and common classes.

I come now to a point which is, in my opinion, the mainspring and the secret of domination, the support and foundation of tyranny. Whoever thinks that halberds, sentries, the placing of the watch, serve to protect and shield tyrants is, in my judgment, completely mistaken. These are used, it seems to me, more for ceremony and a show of force than for any reliance placed in them. The archers forbid the entrance to the palace to the poorly dressed who have no weapons, not to the well armed who can carry out some plot. Certainly it is easy to say of the Roman emperors that fewer escaped from danger by the aid of their guards than were killed by their own archers. It is not the troops on horseback, it is not the companies afoot, it is not arms that defend the tyrant. This does not seem credible on first thought, but it is nevertheless true that there are only four or five who maintain the dictator, four or five who keep the country in bondage to him. Five or six have always had access to his ear, and have either gone to him of their

own accord, or else have been summoned by him, to be accomplices in his cruelties, companions in his pleasures, panders to his lusts, and sharers in his plunders. These six manage their chief so successfully that he comes to be held accountable not only for his own misdeeds but even for theirs. The six have six hundred who profit under them, and with the six hundred they do what they have accomplished with their tyrant. The six hundred maintain under them six thousand, whom they promote in rank, upon whom they confer the government of provinces or the direction of finances, in order that they may serve as instruments of avarice and cruelty, executing orders at the proper time and working such havoc all around that they could not last except under the shadow of the six hundred, nor be exempt from law and punishment except through their influence.

The consequence of all this is fatal indeed. And whoever is pleased to unwind the skein will observe that not the six thousand but a hundred thousand, and even millions, cling to the tyrant by this cord to which they are tied. According to Homer, Jupiter boasts of being able to draw to himself all the gods when he pulls a chain. Such a scheme caused the increase in the senate under Julius,[43] the formation of new ranks, the creation of offices; not really, if properly considered, to reform justice, but to provide new supporters of despotism. In short, when the point is reached, through big favors or little ones, that large profits or small are obtained under a tyrant, there are found almost as many people to whom tyranny seems advantageous as those to whom liberty would seem desirable. Doctors declare that if, when some part of the body has gangrene a disturbance arises in another spot, it immediately flows to the troubled part. Even so, whenever a ruler makes himself a dictator, all the wicked dregs of the nation — I do not mean the pack of petty thieves and earless ruffians[44] who, in a republic, are unimportant in evil or good — but all those who are corrupted by burning ambition or extraordinary avarice, these gather round him and support him in order to have a share in the booty and to constitute themselves petty chiefs under the big tyrant. This is the practice among notorious robbers and famous pirates: some scour the country, others pursue voyagers; some lie in ambush, others keep a lookout; some commit murder, others robbery; and although there are among them differences in rank, some being only underlings while others are chieftains of gangs, yet is there not a single one among them who does not feel himself to be a sharer, if not of the main booty, at least in the pursuit of it. It is dependably related that Sicilian pirates gathered in such great numbers that it became necessary to send against them Pompey the Great,[45] and that they drew into

their alliance fine towns and great cities in whose harbors they took refuge on returning from their expeditions, paying handsomely for the haven given their stolen goods.

Thus the despot subdues his subjects, some of them by means of others, and thus is he protected by those from whom, if they were decent men, he would have to guard himself; just as, in order to split wood, one has to use a wedge of the wood itself. Such are his archers, his guards, his halberdiers; not that they themselves do not suffer occasionally at his hands, but this riff-raff, abandoned alike by God and man, can be led to endure evil if permitted to commit it, not against him who exploits them, but against those who like themselves submit, but are helpless. Nevertheless, observing those men who painfully serve the tyrant in order to win some profit from his tyranny and from the subjection of the populace, I am often overcome with amazement at their wickedness and sometimes by pity for their folly. For, in all honesty, can it be in any way except in folly that you approach a tyrant, withdrawing further from your liberty and, so to speak, embracing with both hands your servitude? Let such men lay aside briefly their ambition, or let them forget for a moment their avarice, and look at themselves as they really are. Then they will realize clearly that the townspeople, the peasants whom they trample under foot and treat worse than convicts or slaves, they will realize, I say, that these people, mistreated as they may be, are nevertheless, in comparison with themselves, better off and fairly free. The tiller of the soil and the artisan, no matter how enslaved, discharge their obligation when they do what they are told to do; but the dictator sees men about him wooing and begging his favor, and doing much more than he tells them to do. Such men must not only obey orders; they must anticipate his wishes; to satisfy him they must foresee his desires; they must wear themselves out, torment themselves, kill themselves with work in his interest, and accept his pleasure as their own, neglecting their preferences for his, distorting their character and corrupting their nature; they must pay heed to his words, to his intonation, to his gestures, and to his glance. Let them have no eye, nor foot, nor hand that is not alert to respond to his wishes or to seek out his thoughts.

Can that be called a happy life? Can it be called living? Is there anything more intolerable than that situation, I won't say for a man of mettle nor even for a man of high birth, but simply for a man of common sense or, to go even further, for anyone having the face of a man? What condition is more wretched than to live thus, with nothing to

call one's own, receiving from someone else one's sustenance, one's power to act, one's body, one's very life?

Still men accept servility in order to acquire wealth; as if they could acquire anything of their own when they cannot even assert that they belong to themselves, or as if anyone could possess under a tyrant a single thing in his own name. Yet they act as if their wealth really belonged to them, and forget that it is they themselves who give the ruler the power to deprive everybody of everything, leaving nothing that anyone can identify as belonging to somebody. They notice that nothing makes men so subservient to a tyrant's cruelty as property; that the possession of wealth is the worst of crimes against him, punishable even by death; that he loves nothing quite so much as money and ruins only the rich, who come before him as before a butcher, offering themselves so stuffed and bulging that they make his mouth water. These favorites should not recall so much the memory of those who have won great wealth from tyrants as of those who, after they had for some time amassed it, have lost to him their property as well as their lives; they should consider not how many others have gained a fortune, but rather how few of them have kept it. Whether we examine ancient history or simply the times in which we live, we shall see clearly how great is the number of those who, having by shameful means won the ear of princes — who either profit from their villainies or take advantage of their naïveté — were in the end reduced to nothing by these very princes; and although at first such servitors were met by a ready willingness to promote their interests, they later found an equally obvious inconstancy which brought them to ruin. Certainly among so large a number of people who have at one time or another had some relationship with bad rulers, there have been few or practically none at all who have not felt applied to themselves the tyrant's animosity, which they had formerly stirred up against others. Most often, after becoming rich by despoiling others, under the favor of his protection, they find themselves at last enriching him with their own spoils.

Even men of character — if it sometimes happens that a tyrant likes such a man well enough to hold him in his good graces, because in him shine forth the virtue and integrity that inspire a certain reverence even in the most depraved — even men of character, I say, could not long avoid succumbing to the common malady and would early experience the effects of tyranny at their own expense. A Seneca, a Burrus, a Thrasea, this triumvirate [48] of splendid men, will provide a sufficient reminder of such misfortune. Two of them were close to the tyrant by the fatal responsibility of holding in

their hands the management of his affairs, and both were esteemed and beloved by him. One of them, moreover, had a peculiar claim upon his friendship, having instructed his master as a child. Yet these three by their cruel death give sufficient evidence of how little faith one can place in the friendship of an evil ruler. Indeed what friendship may be expected from one whose heart is bitter enough to hate even his own people, who do naught else but obey him? It is because he does not know how to love that he ultimately impoverishes his own spirit and destroys his own empire.

Now if one would argue that these men fell into disgrace because they wanted to act honorably, let him look around boldly at others close to that same tyrant, and he will see that those who came into his favor and maintained themselves by dishonorable means did not fare much better. Who has ever heard tell of a love more centered, of an affection more persistent, who has ever read of a man more desperately attached to a woman than Nero was to Poppaea? Yet she was later poisoned by his own hand.[47] Agrippina his mother had killed her husband, Claudius, in order to exalt her son; to gratify him she had never hesitated at doing or bearing anything; and yet this very son, her offspring, her emperor, elevated by her hand, after failing her often, finally took her life.[48] It is indeed true that no one denies she would have well deserved this punishment, if only it had come to her by some other hand than that of the son she had brought into the world. Who was ever more easily managed, more naive, or, to speak quite frankly, a greater simpleton, than Claudius the Emperor? Who was ever more wrapped up in his wife than he in Messalina,[49] whom he delivered finally into the hands of the executioner? Stupidity in a tyrant always renders him incapable of benevolent action; but in some mysterious way by dint of acting cruelly even towards those who are his closest associates, he seems to manifest what little intelligence he may have.

Quite generally known is the striking phrase of that other tyrant who, gazing at the throat of his wife, a woman he dearly loved and without whom it seemed he could not live, caressed her with this charming comment: "This lovely throat would be cut at once if I but gave the order." [50] That is why the majority of the dictators of former days were commonly slain by their closest favorites who, observing the nature of tyranny, could not be so confident of the whim of the tyrant as they were distrustful of his power. Thus was Domitian [51] killed by Stephen, Commodus by one of his mistresses,[52] Antoninus by Macrinus,[53] and practically all the others in similar violent fashion. The

fact is that the tyrant is never truly loved, nor does he love. Friendship is a sacred word, a holy thing; it is never developed except between persons of character, and never takes root except through mutual respect; it flourishes not so much by kindnesses as by sincerity. What makes one friend sure of another is the knowledge of his integrity: as guarantees he has his friend's fine nature, his honor, and his constancy. There can be no friendship where there is cruelty, where there is disloyalty, where there is injustice. And in places where the wicked gather there is conspiracy only, not companionship: these have no affection for one another; fear alone holds them together; they are not friends, they are merely accomplices.

Although it might not be impossible, yet it would be difficult to find true friendship in a tyrant; elevated above others and having no companions, he finds himself already beyond the pale of friendship, which receives its real sustenance from an equality that, to proceed without a limp, must have its two limbs equal. That is why there is honor among thieves (or so it is reported) in the sharing of the booty; they are peers and comrades; if they are not fond of one another they at least respect one another and do not seek to lessen their strength by squabbling. But the favorites of a tyrant can never feel entirely secure, and the less so because he has learned from them that he is all powerful and unlimited by any law or obligation. Thus it becomes his wont to consider his own will as reason enough, and to be master of all with never a compeer. Therefore it seems a pity that with so many examples at hand, with the danger always present, no one is anxious to act the wise man at the expense of the others, and that among so many persons fawning upon their ruler there is not a single one who has the wisdom and the boldness to say to him what, according to the fable, the fox said to the lion who feigned illness: "I should be glad to enter your lair to pay my respects; but I see many tracks of beasts that have gone toward you, yet not a single trace of any who have come back."

These wretches see the glint of the despot's treasures and are bedazzled by the radiance of his splendor. Drawn by this brilliance they come near, without realizing they are approaching a flame that cannot fail to scorch them. Similarly attracted, the indiscreet satyr of the old fables, on seeing the bright fire brought down by Prometheus, found it so beautiful that he went and kissed it, and was burned; so, as the Tuscan [54] poet reminds us, the moth, intent upon desire, seeks the flame because it shines, and also experiences its other quality, the burning. Moreover, even admitting that favorites may at times escape from the hands of him they serve, they are never safe from the ruler who comes

after him. If he is good, they must render an account of their past and recognize at last that justice exists; if he is bad and resembles their late master, he will certainly have his own favorites, who are not usually satisfied to occupy in their turn merely the posts of their predecessors, but will more often insist on their wealth and their lives. Can anyone be found, then, who under such perilous circumstances and with so little security will still be ambitious to fill such an ill-fated position and serve, despite such perils, so dangerous a master? Good God, what suffering, what martyrdom all this involves! To be occupied night and day in planning to please one person, and yet to fear him more than anyone else in the world; to be always on the watch, ears open, wondering whence the blow will come; to search out conspiracy, to be on guard against snares, to scan the faces of companions for signs of treachery, to smile at everybody and be mortally afraid of all, to be sure of nobody, either as an open enemy or as a reliable friend; showing always a gay countenance despite an apprehensive heart, unable to be joyous yet not daring to be sad!

However, there is satisfaction in examining what they get out of all this torment, what advantage they derive from all the trouble of their wretched existence. Actually the people never blame the tyrant for the evils they suffer, but they do place responsibility on those who influence him; peoples, nations, all compete with one another, even the peasants, even the tillers of the soil, in mentioning the names of the favorites, in analyzing their vices, and heaping upon them a thousand insults, a thousand obscenities, a thousand maledictions. All their prayers, all their vows are directed against these persons; they hold them accountable for all their misfortunes, their pestilences, their famines; and if at times they show them outward respect, at those very moments they are fuming in their hearts and hold them in greater horror than wild beasts. This is the glory and honor heaped upon influential favorites for their services by people who, if they could tear apart their living bodies, would still clamor for more, only half satiated by the agony they might behold. For even when the favorites are dead those who live after are never too lazy to blacken the names of these man- eaters with the ink of a thousand pens, tear their reputations into bits in a thousand books, and drag, so to speak, their bones past posterity, forever punishing them after their death for their wicked lives.

Let us therefore learn while there is yet time, let us learn to do good. Let us raise our eyes to Heaven for the sake of our honor, for the very love of virtue, or, to speak wisely, for the love and praise of God Almighty, who is the infallible witness of our deeds and

the just judge of our faults. As for me, I truly believe I am right, since there is nothing so contrary to a generous and loving God as dictatorship — I believe He has reserved, in a separate spot in Hell, some very special punishment for tyrants and their accomplices.

Notes in the Introduction:

[1] The title now generally given is Discours sur la servitude volontaire ou Contr'un. See p. xv, below.

[2] G. A. Borgese, Goliath, or the March of Fascism, Viking, New York, 1937.

[3] The name of the author should be pronounced with the "t" sounding like "ss" and riming with "poesy" accented on the last syllable.

[4] William de Sur, known as Longa among his associates at Bordeaux.

Mention is made here of this judge because La Boétie revered him and refers to him by name twice in the course of his essay.

[5] Book I of the Essays, Chapter XXVIII.

[6] In 1571, eight years after La Boétie's death, Montaigne published these manuscripts with dedicatory epistles at the head of each, inscribed to those who had known his friend and could appreciate his rare qualities. He kept out only two of these documents, the Mémoire on the Edict of 1562, and the Voluntary Servitude.

[7] They did indeed, for they disappeared entirely from all ken till they turned up in 1917 and were then published by Paul Bonnefon, the greatest of La Boétie scholars.

[8] Available in a beautiful English rendering by Louis How, Twenty-nine Sonnets of La Boétie, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1915.

[9] The first time in Latin, a fragment incorporated into the Dialogues of Eusebio Philadelpho Cosmopolito, Edimburgi (Basel?), 1574; the second, almost complete, in French, Le Réveille-Matin des François, Paris, 1574; the third, fourth, and fifth, in three successive editions of the Mémoires de I'estat de France sous Charles neufiesme,

Meidlebourg, 1577- 78. All but the second edition were put out under Protestant auspices as an incitement to revolt.

[10] Listed as x 27.20.56 in the rare bookroom of the Widener Library of Harvard University.

[11] Available in the Bibliothèque Nationale as Number 839 in the Department of Manuscripts.

Notes in the Main Text:

[1] Iliad, Book II, Lines 204-205.

[2] Government by a single ruler. From the Greek monos (single) and arkhein (to command).

[3] At this point begins the text of the long fragment published in the Reveille-Matin des François. See Introduction, p. xvii.

[4] An autocratic council of thirty magistrates that governed Athens for eight months in 404 B.C. They exhibited such monstrous despotism that the city rose in anger and drove them forth.

[5] Athenian general, died 489 B.C. Some of his battles: expedition against Scythians; Lemnos; Imbros; Marathon, where Darius the Persian was defeated.

[6] King of Sparta, died at Thermopylae in 480 B.C., defending the pass with three hundred loyal Spartans against Xerxes.

[7] Athenian statesman and general, died 460 B.C. Some of his battles: expedition against Aegean Isles; victory over Persians under Xerxes at Salamis.

[8] See Introduction, p. x.

[9] The reference is to Saul anointed by Samuel.

[10] Alexander the Macedonian became the acknowledged master of all Hellenes at the Assembly of Corinth, 335 B.C.

[11] Athenian tyrant, died 527 B.C. He used ruse and bluster to control the city and was obliged to flee several times.

[12] The name Syracuse is derived from Syraca, the marshland near which the city was founded. The author is misinformed about "Sarragousse," which is the Spanish Zaragoza, capital of Aragón.

[13] Denis or Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, died in 367 B.C. Of lowly birth, this dictator imposed himself by plottings, putsches, and purges.

The danger from which he saved his city was the invasion by the Carthaginians.

[14] Mithridates (c. 135-63 B.C.) was next to Hannibal the most dreaded and potent enemy of Roman Power. The reference in the text is to his youth when he spent some years in retirement hardening himself and immunizing himself against poison. In his old age, defeated by Pompey, betrayed by his own son, he tried poison and finally had to resort to the dagger of a friendly Gaul. (Pliny, Natural History, XXIV, 2.) [15] This passage probably suggested to Montaigne that his friend would have been glad to see the light in Venice. See Essays, Book I, Chapter XXVIII.

[16] A half-legendary figure concerning whose life Plutarch admits there is much obscurity. He bequeathed to his land a rigid code regulating land, assembly, education, with the individual subordinate to the state.

[17] The Persian fleet and army under Xerxes or Ahasuerus set out from Sardis in 480 and were at first successful, even taking Athens and driving the Greeks to their last line of defense in the Bay of Salamis.

Darius, the father of Xerxes, had made a similar incursion into Greece but was stopped at Marathon.

[18] The messenger and herald of Agamemnon in the Iliad.

[19] Marcus Porcius Cato, often called the Utican from the city where in 46 B.C., after reading the Phaedo of Plato, he ended his life. He was an uncompromising reformer and

relentlessly attacked the vicious heirs to the power of Lucius Cornelius Sylla, the Roman dictator (136-78 B.C.).

The Utican, born in 95 B.C., was only seventeen years old when Sylla died.

[20] Cited from Plutarch's Life of Cicero.

[21] Tradition made of Harmodios and Aristogiton martyrs for Athenian liberty. They plotted the death of the tyrant Hippias but were betrayed and put to death by torture, c. 500 B.C.

[22] Athenian statesmen and general (died 388 B.C.) who ousted the Thirty Tyrants from power in Athens and restored the government to the people.

[23] Lucius Junius Brutus was the leader of the Roman revolution which overthrew the tyranny of Tarquinius Superbus, c. 500 B.C., and established the republic under the two praetors or consuls. As one of these magistrates it became his dolorous duty to condemn to death his two sons because they had plotted for the return of the Tarquins.

[24] Publius Licinius Valerianus was a brilliant military leader chosen by his troops to be Emperor during a time of great anarchy. He met his death in Persia (260 A.D.).

[25] Dion of Syracuse (400-354? B.C.) was famous for his protection of Plato in Sicily and for his expedition in 357, which freed his city from the tyranny of Denis.

[26] Artaxerxes.

[27] The Hieron, a youthful didactic work, consisting of a dialogue between Simonides and the Tyrant of Syracuse. The latter confesses his inner doubts and misgivings, his weariness at the dangers constantly besetting him, his sadness at not being loved by anyone. Even if he gave up his power, he would be in danger from the many enemies he has made.

Simonides advises him to mend his ways and try kindness and generosity as a way of government.

[28] Publius Cornelius Scipio (235-183 B.C.) led the brilliant campaign in Africa which caused Hannibal's recall from Italy and his final defeat.

[29] The Eunuch, Act III, Scene 1.

[30] Cyrus the Great (died 528 B.C.), founder of the Persian Empire, attacked Croesus before the latter could organize his army, and drove him in mid-winter out of his capital of Sardis. The episode here mentioned is related in Herodotus, Book I, chap. 86.

[31] A Roman coin (semis-half, tertius-third) of variable value, originally of silver, later of bronze.

[32] In his Histories (Book I, chap. 4) which cover the period (69-96 A.D.) from the fall of Nero to the crowning of Nerva.

[33] Suetonius, Life of Caesar, paragraphs 84-88.

[34] The great dreamer of empire whose costly victory at Asculum wrecked his hopes of world domination. He was finally killed (272 B.C.) by a tile dropped on his head by an old woman. This story of the toe conies from Plutarch's Life of Pyrrhus.

[35] Titus Flavius Vespasianus left his son Titus to complete the capture of Jerusalem while he, newly elected Emperor by his armies, turned back to Rome after the death of Galba in 69 A.D. The reference here is found in Suetonius, Life of Vespasian, Chapter VII.

[36] In Greek mythology, Salmoneus, King of Elis, was the son of Aeolus and the brother of Sisyphus. He was reckless and sacrilegious and claimed to be the equal of Zeus by imitating his thunderbolts. Zeus threw him into Hades.

[37] Aeneid, Chapter VI, verses 585 et seq.

[38] These are references to heraldic emblems of royalty. The sacred vessel contained the holy oil for the coronation of the kings of France, said to have been brought by an angel from heaven for the crowning of Clovis in 496. The fleur-de-lis is the well-known heraldic flower dating from the 12th century. In its earlier forms it has other elements besides petals, such as arrow tips, spikes, and even bees and toads. The oriflamme or standard of gold was also adopted by French royalty.

Originally it belonged to the Abbey of St. Denis and had a red background, dotted with stars surrounding a flaming sun. Some scholars have noted in the three branches of the

fleur-de-lis a heraldic transformation of toads which formed presumably the totem of the ancient Francs.

[39] These three were the most inspired of the Pléiade, a group of seven poets of the Renaissance in France. La Boétie's boast is impulsive but natural when one thinks of the vigor and hope of this period. Du Bellay (1548) published a Defense of the French Language which explained the literary doctrines of the group. The reference in the text to this Defense helps date the Contr'un.

[40] This unfinished epic has only four cantos; it attempts to relate how to Francus, son of Hector, is revealed the glorious future of France. He beholds a visionary procession of her kings descending from him all the way to Charlemagne. King Clovis (465-511), of whom many tales are told, was baptized after the miracle of Tolbiac and founded the Merovingian dynasty. Although the poem was not published till a few days after the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, Ronsard had spoken of his project more than twenty years before. He had even read the finished Prologue to Henry II in 1550. La Boétie's early reference bespeaks his close relations with the poets of his day.

[41] Aeneid, Canto viii, verse 664.

[42] Ericthonius, legendary King of Athens (1573-1556 B.C.) was the son of the earth. He is at times represented in the guise of a serpent carried by the Cecropides maidens to whom Athens had entrusted him as a child. The allusion here is to the Panathenaea festival when maidens carried garlanded baskets on their heads. Races were also held for which the winners received olive wreaths as prizes.

[43] Under Caesar the power of the Senators was greatly reduced and military leaders were permitted to share with them legislative and judicial powers.

[44] The cutting off of ears as a punishment for thievery is very ancient. In the middle ages it was still practiced under St. Louis. Men so mutilated were dishonored and could not enter the clergy or the magistracy.

[45] Plutarch's Life of Pompey.

[46] Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.) was exiled from Rome to Corsica for eight years by the intrigues of Messalina, wife of Claudius.

Agrippina had him recalled and entrusted to him jointly with Burrus the education of her son Nero. Seneca ended his life some fifteen years later when Nero, suspecting him of conspiracy, ordered him to die. Burrus similarly tried to restrain the tyrant but he lost his power after the murder of Agrippina, a crime which he had prevented once before. He died in 62 A.D. suspecting he had been poisoned. Thrasea, unlike these two teachers of Nero, refused to condone the crime of matricide. He attacked Nero in the Senate but finally in 66 A.D. he was condemned by that august body and, after a philosophic discourse celebrated with his friends by his side, he opened his veins.

[47] She was really killed by a kick, according to Suetonius (Life of Nero, chap. 35) and Tacitus (Annals, Book XVI, chap. 6). She abetted Nero in many of his crimes; the murder of his mother, of his gentle wife Octavia. After the brutal death inflicted on Poppaea, Nero shed many tears.

[48] Suetonius, op. cit., chap. 34, and Tacitus, op. cit., Book XII, chap. 67.

[49] Messalina (15-48 A.D.) was the fifth wife of the emperor Claudius.

At first honorable, mother of two children, she suddenly turned to vice and has transmitted her name to the ages as a synonym for the lowest type of degraded womanhood. While still the wife of Claudius, she married a favorite with his connivance. The Emperor, finally convinced of her treachery, permitted the killing of his wife and her lover. He then married Agrippina who persuaded him to adopt Nero as his son, thereby signing his own death warrant, for his new wife, by giving him a plate of poisonous mushrooms, opened the way for her son's succession to the throne.

[50] Suetonius, Life of Caligula, Chapter 33.

[51] Suetonius, Life of Domitian, Chapter 17. The tyrant died in 96 A.D.

after three years of bestial government inspired by abject fear of conspirators. Finally Domitia, his wife, hatched the plot which led an imperial slave to stab his royal master to death.

[52] Herodian, Book I, chap. 54. Commodus (161-192 A.D.) unworthy son of Marcus Aurelius, had planned to put to death his concubine, Marcia. She poisoned him first.

[53] Ibid., Book IV, chap. 23. The reference is to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Bassianus, better known as Caracalla, who was killed (217 A.D.) in a plot arranged by his own praetor, Macrinas, who succeeded him to power, lasted a year, and was killed in his turn by his own soldiers.

[54] Petrarch, Canzoniere, Sonnet XVII. La Boétie has accurately rendered the lines concerning the moth.