

Editor's Easy Chair.

THE most suggestive portion of Mr. Louis Dyer's very interesting little book on *Machiavelli and the Modern State* is probably the closing chapter, which he gives to a study of Machiavelli's idea of morals. If one were writing now in the good old times, when Machiavelli was simply regarded as the most malevolent of mankind, it would be only too easy to say here that Machiavelli had no idea of morals, and end the matter with that handy witticism. But the effect of Mr. Dyer's whole essay is to put those good old times farther back, and to forbid one their ready privilege in the case of a man who long perplexed the philosophers and the philanthropists, as an angel of darkness, luridly inculcating civic treachery and cruelty in *The Prince*, whose ideal abominations he had studied in the evil life of Cæsar Borgia, and then was hardly less formidable when he came to be regarded as an angel of light, bent upon teaching liberty, equality, and fraternity, by painting with ironical admiration a typical tyrant in all his wickedness. The notion of the satanic Machiavelli held a long time, and it cannot be claimed that the notion of the satiric Machiavelli ever displaced it in the general mind. This was the pleasing if not too plausible hypothesis of certain Italians who could not imagine a good republican and a just man seriously praising usurpation and oppression, and who decided therefore that *The Prince* was a satire, very subtle and profound, but all the more delightful when you were in the joke of it.

Mr. Dyer is rather of the opinion, first luminously suggested by Macaulay, that Machiavelli was in earnest, but must not be judged as a political moralist of our time and race would be judged. He thinks that Machiavelli was in earnest, as none but an idealist can be, and he is the first to imagine him an idealist immersed in realities, who involuntarily transmutes the events under his eye into something like the visionary issues of reverie. The Machiavelli whom he depicts does not cease to be politically a republican and socially a just man because he

holds up an atrocious despot like Cæsar Borgia as a mirror for rulers. What Machiavelli beheld round him in Italy was a civic disorder in which there was oppression without statecraft, and revolt without patriotism. When a miscreant like Borgia appeared upon the scene and reduced both tyrants and rebels to an apparent quiescence, he might very well seem to such a dreamer the savior of society whom a certain sort of dreamers are always looking for. Machiavelli was no less honest when he honored the diabolical force of Cæsar Borgia than Carlyle was when at different times he extolled the strong man who destroys liberty in creating order. But Carlyle has only just ceased to be mistaken for a reformer, while it is still Machiavelli's hard fate to be so trammelled in his material that his name stands for whatever is most malevolent and perfidious in human nature.

At last, however, even the kindly majority, who have acceptations rather than opinions, and who believe such bad things of people with no more rancor than reason, may well revise, if they do not reject, their prepossessions in the light of Mr. Dyer's theory. He does Machiavelli the justice of recognizing that he was not only an upright man in private life, a good son, husband and father, but an admirable citizen, a faithful Catholic, and a zealous servant of the Republic, uncorrupted if not incorruptible. He ardently desired the good, not only of Florence, but of all Italy, and he believed that Italian unity was such a supreme good that every other good might be provisionally foregone for its sake. He admired Borgia because his wicked work seemed to make for unity as well as tranquillity, but he admired the Swiss republicans no less than the Italian despot, because he believed that he saw reflected in their personal valor and public spirit the antique virtue of the Romans as he had misread it out of Dante. But he was not, like Dante, an imperialist. He did not look forward to the reconstruction of the Italy they

both loved in a state bearing the image and superscription of Cæsar; his patriotism harked back to republican Rome, which his fancy rehabilitated in the likeness of the Swiss federation, and in this ideal of a strong, impersonal commonwealth, demanding and commanding every private sacrifice for the general good, he saw the vision of a potential if not an eventual Italian republic. Such a Machiavelli is an intelligible and by no means improbable figure, and is in some respects attractive as well. The very limitations of the man, as Mr. Dyer frankly yet delicately ascertains them, add to the charm of the figure, and the malevolent, the monstrous Machiavelli of tradition, whom one turned from with abhorrence, ends in becoming a lovable personality, a man full of ingenious and entertaining theory, whom one might be glad to have for one's companion and friend.

There is something very modern in such a Machiavelli; and in his willingness to difference private from public morality we recognize traits of contemporary citizenship, contemporary statesmanship which we find blended with too many amiable qualities to be visited with an indiscriminate condemnation. In fact, it might be said that Machiavelli simply defined and registered the principles which had governed republics as well as princes in all times, and precipitated the emotions if not the motives held in solution from the beginning in every patriotic breast. This is saying indirectly that no state has yet kept the conscience of a Christian and a gentleman, and certainly at times it looks as if every state had hitherto been habitually ruled by incentives of which all but the shabbier sort of private persons, not to specify cheats, robbers, and assassins, would be ashamed to own. The practices of states have been so bad, indeed, that the state itself, bad as it is, is ashamed to own them, and calls them by such decent names as destiny, diplomacy, hostility, strategy. Hardly any respectable person, even though a prince, will take a mean advantage of a weaker person, to deceive or plunder or oppress him. He will not covet his possessions to the extent of driving him

out of his house and home, or if he stays there, subjecting him to his will and caprice. Between man and man it is considered an unneighborly thing for one to reap what another has sown, to burn his barn, or steal his horse, and it is regarded as still worse form to cut his throat, either through frank self-interest, or from a mistaken ideal of self-devotion. These things have been so long regarded as immoral that laws have been enacted against them, and in many cases, perhaps most cases, the laws have been executed upon the offenders. But nations do analogous things with entire impunity, there being no statutes, in such case made and provided, and in spite of the spasmodic, or even frequently recurrent, impulses towards arbitration, there is no immediate hope of them. One does not dwell on these familiar phenomena as if they were fresh discoveries. One notes them because there seems to be some danger of late that the immorality of states, which is founded on greed and might, may infect the ideal if not the conduct of persons. All the friends of civilization should be on their guard against this, lest we should severally turn out as rapacious and unscrupulous as the political collectivities which we are respectively parts of.

Our most precious heritage from the past is the sense of individual responsibility, or to sum it in one word, of conscience, which came into the world, as we now have it, with Christianity. We may talk as we please about morality as the long result of time in human experience; and it is always possible that it has its root, as it has its flower, in the acts and thoughts of men; but it is useless to feign that it does not, sensibly or insensibly, refer itself to a belief in some life after this. A generation bred in that belief may lose its faith, and yet keep on in the strait and narrow path by the impulse given it; but the generation which follows, and which has no impulse of the kind from the past, will falter and fall out of the way. It may be a gross childishness, like being afraid in the dark, to feel that in moments of choice between right and wrong there is a power somewhere that will hold us to account for our choice, and in some other being will let our happiness

or suffering ensue from it. But without this feeling there can be no choice between right and wrong; without it there can be no right or wrong. In the lapse of time it does not matter what a man does in this case or that; it all comes to the same thing in the course of years; but in the lapse of eternity it has hitherto been supposed to be a different matter. If a man does not believe himself destined to a life beyond this, why should he vex himself here as to the effect of his actions? If he sees the effect, and it is disastrous to some other man, that is certainly disagreeable, and he may wish that he had acted differently. But without this ocular demonstration he can have no sense of the harm, which he does not know as sin, or even as evil. At the worst, it is simply a great pity, but he cannot cease to choose selfishly because of it, unless the sight of the suffering he has caused has made him lastingly sorry; and the sufferings of others seldom do that with any man. If, however, he has the standard of right and wrong, mystically delivered from that other world whither he shall repair to answer after death for the deeds done in this, he must, as he would rather be happy than miserable, choose unselfishly, for the unselfish thing is the only thing infallibly and invariably right to his spiritual consciousness, his conscience, and the only that can avail him hereafter.

Beauty may have its own excuse for being, but apparently right has no excuse save through the conscience that lives in man from his assurance of a life hereafter. If he has no soul, then there is neither sinning nor unsinning, there is really no right and no wrong, there is only a convention of morality which he may observe or not as he likes. The convention of morality is continually changing. Sometimes it is severe and sometimes it is lenient. Its state apparently depends not upon anything vital in it, but upon the degree of faith outside of it, upon the general acceptance or rejection of the standard of right and wrong mystically delivered from another world. Oddly enough, however, this lifeless, this merely formal, this altogether superficial and constantly fluctuant convention of morality has power upon the living faith from which it

exists, and it is to be carefully and anxiously guarded because that seems bound up with it. Men seem not so much to sin because they have lost their faith, as to lose their faith because they have sinned, and they do not so much lose their faith because they have themselves sinned with apparent impunity, as because they have seen others sinning with apparent impotence as well as impunity, sinning freely, prosperously, triumphantly, exultantly. The wrong done by a whole community infects and depraves every member of it whose conscience does not force him to deny his share of the common iniquity, to disclaim its advantages as far as he may, and reject its pretensions to honor.

It was the misfortune of Machiavelli, as well as other philosophic observers of his time, that he fell a prey to the glamour of force, and imagined a final good from provisional evil. His delusion was so complete that, good man and good Catholic as he was, he censured Christianity for embodying the spirit of Christ, or, as Mr. Dyer says, "he argues that Christianity, with its life beyond, takes away men's fierceness," and he praised rather the pagan rites, which with what he calls their "bloody and ferocious sacrifice" of animals, "infected the spectators of it with the power of inspiring terror." But in his "protest against the Christian virtue of humility which he held accountable in a measure for the political paralysis of Italy, Spain, and France," Mr. Dyer notes that he was no worse than Dante himself, who "pointedly omitted" in the *Purgatorio* to class with the other Beatitudes that which declared, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." "By his silence," Mr. Dyer holds Dante "pledged to declare with Guicciardini and Machiavelli that the meek shall *not* inherit the earth—at least not in any sense which to them in their day seemed natural and congruous. Dante is therefore no better than Machiavelli in this, and perhaps," our author adds, "it is not in these days of partitions, hinterlands, spheres of influence, and newly assumed colonial responsibilities that either Englishmen or Americans would incline to be very strict with these three great Italians on the score of their

neglect of the cardinal virtue of Christian humility, or to arraign them as the defenders of a revived paganism."

Machiavelli, then, worshipping the ideal of a state become finally virtuous, no matter what means it has used to become sovereign, could very well be a modern patriot of familiar type: the sort of patriot who always sees in his country's aggrandizement a justification of her policy; and he would hardly find himself at odds with the methods of material development. It is one of the effects of the tendency to unite endeavor in the industrial world that both labor and capital have become incorporated and depersonalized. The union and the trust may have rendered each other inevitable, but in their fatal existence the sense of individual responsibility is lost. The acts of the several persons who compose them have become official acts, for which no one holds himself finally accountable to the eternal justice. Their members fancy that in this official quality they have juggled away the moral consequence of their deeds. But in reality they have only multiplied it in the ratio of their number; for there is morally no such thing as a corporate or official entity; whatever is done by all is done by each, so far as each is privy to the deed. This is what faith clearly sees, the faith that is based upon the assurance of a divinity ruling in the affairs of humanity.

But this faith may be lost not only through evil doing, but through the admiration of evil doing. Is this faith worth keeping? Is its mystical insight valuable to mankind? It seems almost blasphemous to ask such questions, in view of what religion has always claimed and still claims. Yet the actions of men in every guise in which they would escape the sense of individual accountability have constantly denied the pretensions of religion in the matter. So far as these actions are the test of the fact there has never been any such faith in the world, except with a comparatively few fanatics and martyrs. In Machiavelli's time the part of religion was taken by Savonarola, but Machiavelli, who could not believe that the meek

would or should inherit the earth, had at the best an ironical smile for Savonarola. In our own time comes a man who simply declares that Christ was in earnest, and the ironical smile of Machiavelli would be the least among the scornings put upon Tolstoy.

This does not mean that Machiavelli was supremely wicked when as a patriot he prized the strenuousness of Borgia above the righteousness of Savonarola; still less does it mean that those who deride Tolstoy are much worse than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It means no more than that by the long tacit or practical denial of Christianity in the economical and political affairs of men, faith has lapsed or is lapsing in the witnesses of worldly success, who necessarily become the worshippers of success when they see it nowhere accountable for its means. Industrial organization through both the union and the trust denies the personal conscience, to and from which faith exists, yet the corporate action of these, if evil, brings a measure of reproach to each of their members. Public opinion, founded upon faith, censures them severally in censuring them collectively; but there is apparently no public opinion which is more sovereign than the national collectivity. Patriotism, therefore, is the thing most to be questioned and dreaded, because it cannot, in the minds of its idolators, commit any errors or crimes; whatever it does is transmuted by the doing into wisdom and virtue. It has but one duty: success. In this view, which we should be the last to insist upon, it may be said that Machiavelli, with his worship of force that was to ultimate in virtue, through whatever means it would, was simply a man in advance of his time. He has suffered, as all the prophets have suffered, for anticipating his epoch. If now the world in realizing the patriotic ideals of antiquity has rounded the cycle back to paganism, Machiavelli would be quite at home in it. The worst that could happen him would be that he might be accused of not being a very original thinker, and people would wonder why he had ever been so much talked of. He would seem a rather belated Carlyle.

Editor's Study.

THERE is an evolution of human genius in quite the same sense that there is evolution in the natural world. Whatever we may regard as our natal inheritance, even our physical traits and temperament, and whatever arises spontaneously in heart and mind, not in any way the result of arbitrary volition, belongs to us as living beings, as denizens in the realm of universal life. We may, and we usually do, limit the term "genius" so as to exclude many entire fields of this spontaneous operation whereby man is one with Nature; we may confine it to the domain of art and literature, or, beyond this, relate it only to such superlative manifestations of the human mind and spirit as seem not to be within the range of ordinary human accomplishment—such, for example, as those which distinguished the career of La Pucelle; but, whatever we exclude, our application of the term never extends beyond the operations of creative life.

Our pride is associated with achievement which has merit because it is the result of conscious effort. No one can take credit to himself for the color of his eyes or any wholly native possession, least of all for those attributes of life which he has in common with the universe, since in that life all action is spontaneous,—doing itself, we may say, under simply permissive conditions. In nature there is no choice of conditions, no conscious adaptation of means to ends, and whatever fitness of things there may be—and indeed always there is the fitness, sure and inevitable,—it is an implication in the creative act itself, not the result of an outwardly imposed harmony. But man glories in those operations which depend upon his choice—which is something quite distinct from that instinctive or subliminal dilection which he has in common with Nature,—he, within a very large range, regulates conditions, imposing arbitrary selection upon plant and animal life, effecting in a single decade transformations which in the natural course would either never be produced at all or only within a long period of time. What in his own development he ac-

complishes through this conscious choice and conscious reaction against difficulty is summed up in what we know as human progress.

Experience is wholly human—the sum of conscious experimentation,—and cherished because it is human. The field of human fallibility, of every sort of accident, farcical and tragical, it is the field also of man's victory and progress. Consciousness itself is developed through its own adventure. In the ant, when its instinctive architecture is interrupted by some obstacle, there is a flash—like that from the breaking of an electric current, which simulates conscious intelligence to an extent sufficient for an adaptive effort; but in human action and reaction the infinite complexity of difficulty, and consequently of the broken currents, develops the constant luminosity of an infinitely complex consciousness.

It is a proud world, but with full justification of its pride, since the consummation of human progress presents phenomena of excellences and complementary defects to which there is nothing comparable or correspondent in the whole universe outside of man—where there is no improvement or betterment, no progress in the human sense, but only spontaneous evolution.

It is not surprising, then, that men should seek to divorce genius from any alliance with Nature, whose elements are so common and rudimentary and who has come to seem so alien and remote, and to associate it only with the progressive development of rational humanity. It has even been defined, as if to identify it with conscious effort, as "a capacity for taking infinite pains." It is indeed true that the capacity for taking infinite pains is one of the prerogatives of genius, whereby it becomes effective in its expression, and it is also true that every singular instance of genius is indelibly associated with some equally distinct era of human development affording the permissive conditions of its emergence in the form we know it by, as Homer is with the period following the Heroic age and Shakespeare with the Elizabethan era. But genius,