

ROME AT THE END OF THE PUNIC WARS BY POLYBIUS

THE THREE kinds of government, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, were all found united in the commonwealth of Rome.

The consuls, when they remain in Rome, before they lead out the armies into the field, are the masters of all public affairs. They introduce ambassadors into the senate. They propose also to the senate the subjects of debates; and direct all forms that are observed in making the decrees.

To the senate belongs, in the first place, the sole care and management of the public money. For all returns that are brought into the treasury, as well as all the payments that are issued from it, are directed by their orders. To the senate also is referred the cognizance of all the crimes, committed in any part of Italy, that demand a public examination and inquiry: such as treasons, conspiracies, poisonings, and assassinations. Add to this, that when any controversies arise, either between private men, or any of the cities of Italy, it is the part of the senate to adjust all disputes.

There is, however, a part still allotted to the people; and, indeed, the most important part. For, first, the people are the sole dispensers of rewards and punishments. The public magistrates are allotted also by the people to those who are esteemed worthy of them. To the people belongs the power of approving or rejecting laws and, which is still of greater importance, peace and war are likewise fixed by their deliberations. When any alliance is concluded, any war ended, or treaty made; to them the conditions are referred, and by them either annulled or ratified.

It now remains to be considered, in what manner each several form is enabled to counteract the others, or to cooperate with them. When the consuls, invested with the power that has been mentioned, lead the armies into the field, though they seem, indeed, to hold such absolute authority as is sufficient for all purposes, yet are they in truth so dependent both on the senate and the people, that without their assistance they are by no means able to accomplish any design. It is well known that armies demand a continual supply of necessities. But neither corn, nor habits, nor even the military stipends, can at any time be transmitted to the legions unless by an express order of the senate. Nor is it less necessary, on the other hand, that the consuls, howsoever far they may happen to be removed from Rome, should be careful to preserve the good affections of the people. For the people, as we have already mentioned, annuls or ratifies all treaties...And thus these magistrates can at no time think themselves secure, if they neglect to gain the approbation both of the senate and the people.

In the same manner the senate also, is bound to yield a certain attention to the people. With regard especially to those offences that are committed against the state, and which demand a capital punishment, no inquiry can be perfected, nor any judgment carried into execution, unless the people confirm what the senate has before decreed. For if a law should at any time be proposed to lessen the received authority of the senators, to detract from their honors and pre-eminence, or even deprive them of a part of their possessions, it belongs wholly to the people to establish or reject it. And thus the senate, on account of all these reasons, is forced to cultivate the favor and gratify the inclinations of the people.

Thus, while each of these separate parts is enabled either to assist or obstruct the rest, the government is so well secured against every accident, that it seems scarcely possible to invent a more perfect system. For when the dread of any common danger constrains all the orders of the state to unite together, and co-operate with joint assistance. Thus the government, by the very form and peculiar nature of its constitution, is equally enabled to resist all attacks, and to accomplish every purpose. For whenever either of the separate parts of the republic attempts to exceed its proper limits, excites contention and dispute, and struggles to obtain a greater share of power, than that which is assigned to it by the laws that since no one single part is in itself supreme or absolute, but that on the contrary, the powers which are assigned to each are still subject to reciprocal control.