

# The Rosebush of War

(c.1483)

Louis XI of France

THE ROSEBUSH OF WAR *was composed near the end of King Louis XI's life in 1483, to instruct his son and heir Charles in the principles and impulse which guided Louis in creating France as history's first nation-state commonwealth.*

*The excerpts translated here—of the first third, and the conclusion, of the treatise—dealing with general principles of statecraft, are the first English renderings of any portion of this work to be published. The remaining two-thirds of the treatise address the issues of war; in accordance with his general principles, Louis advises to avoid war if at all possible; but, if war be necessary, he reviews how to wage it with the utmost seriousness, greatest skill, and most decisive speed.*

THE ROSEBUSH *has been deliberately ignored by most modern historians of the French and English schools, because it presents the most elegant disproof of much of the shoddy historiography and lies they retail about Louis XI. For example, today's schoolchildren are taught the vicious slander, that Louis was a cruel and deceptive king who, despite—or perhaps, owing to—his malevolent nature, forged the modern nation of France, creating order out of chaos. Nothing concerning the person of Louis could be further from the truth, as the reader will readily see expressed through the principles he sets forth here for the ruling of a nation.*

The “rosebush” of Louis’ title *evokes the traditional medieval image of the rose—whose beauty, as the beauty of life itself, must include dangerous thorns amongst its great joys. In 1611, I. D’Espagnet, a privy councillor to King Henry IV and President of the Parliament of Bordeaux, suggested that the choice of title stemmed from Louis’ familiarity with the Platonist scholar and Arabist Raymond Lull (1235-1316), one of whose works also bears the title THE ROSEBUSH.*

FIRST CHAPTER, WHICH IS PROLOGUE

## Touching the Reasons for This Rosebush

Because matters which are known and understood by experience are better learned, and of them we can better speak the truth, than those which we know only by hearsay, after we have contemplated and brought to memory those things which in our time came to pass in our Realm of France, touching on the government, the care and defense of the same, as much including the life and reign of our late father of noble memory King Charles the Seventh of that name, may God give him

absolution, as our own; and after having looked over and counterweighed the events of the times of our predecessor Kings of France, and those coming before and after them, as the Chronicles put it; and desiring that those, who after us will come and rule, especially our very dear and well-loved son Charles Dauphin of Viennais, so that he might well profit, reign, and triumph, in the growth of our said Realm; we have wished to have drawn up and assembled in a small volume several good and notable teachings aiming at the care, defense, and government of a Realm, which we have named *The Rosebush of War*. And because we have found of our own life and knowledge, that nothing has occurred which similarly may not have happened before; and that the recording of the past is quite prof-

itable, as much to console, counsel, and comfort us against adversity as to steer clear of those troubles against which others have stumbled, and so enliven and drive us to do good like the best of men; we have wished to append abridged Chronicles, from the times of our predecessors the first Kings of France up to our own coronation, because it is both a great pleasure as well as a good pastime to recite past events, how and in which manner and in what sort of time they occurred, such as losses and conquests, or subjugations of towns or the country.

## SECOND CHAPTER, CONTAINING THREE SECTIONS

### On the World, Death, And the Soul

#### *On the World*

**T**he greatest care a wise man must have in this transitory world is for his soul, which is perpetual and which bears the charge for the activities of the body, which shall rot upon death, which spares neither the great nor insignificant, noble nor villain, strong nor weak, rich man nor poor, old nor young—all are equal before it, and so it gives no more time or better forewarning to one than to the other; for which reason each should seek to have a good soul, and not put his heart too much in the world or its goods which he must leave finally behind. And it is a passage through which have passed and will pass all valiant warriors, all wise men, all saints, and all of those who from Adam and Eve descended and will descend, and none will remain, but only the renown of their acts will remain, those for the good in benediction, for evil in malediction; for which reason, each in his estate and his calling must hold and conduct himself such that, when the trumpet of retreat sounds, of which the hour is uncertain, we be so provided as to give good account and balances when presented before the great Judge.

This world is compared to a well-lit fire, in that a small one is good to light the way and lead us, but who takes too much of it, is burned.

The world will easily consume him who relies too much on it.

The world, which lives not in equity, is but delight for one hour, and sorrow for several days.

The world teaches those who live in it, by those who have left it.

He who takes great pleasure in this world, cannot but be unfortunate in one of two things: that is, to not have what he coveted, or to lose that which he has won through great effort.

He who looks at and considers the span of his life, will find that he will have had more affliction than peace in this world.

We must not love this world except in doing good, because life in this world is brief and affliction endless, which shall be brought upon those who have not lived rightly.

Man cannot but have affliction and toil in his life. If he eats not, he dies, and if he eats little he becomes feeble, and if he eats too much, he injures himself and becomes sick and cannot sleep. Thus is it a hard thing for a man to be hungry long.

The estates of this world and the end are represented by the game of chess, wherein each personage is in the place and degree which behooves his estate as long as the game lasts; but when it is done, everything is put into a bag without order or any difference; thus it is with all estates of this world: While life lasts, each holds the status which is ordained to him, but when life ends in death, which separates the body from the soul, all are put into the earth, or into a tomb, which is the same thing.

#### *On Death*

**D**eath is a light thing to him who is certain that after him good will come of it: for who lives a good life, will die a good death.

Death is the rest of the covetous, because the longer he lives, the greater his afflictions and yearnings multiply, and thus to him death is more agreeable than a long life.

The death of an evil man gives great respite to the good who has recompense of his good works; and to the evil man as well, such that he will do no more evil nor sin against anyone.

None should fear death, having defended the common good, for therein is merit. As well we are bound to fight for our country.

#### *On the Soul*

**W**ho wishes to die a good death, must seek to have a good soul.

A good soul is a delight and joy among good men, but among evil men it is sorrow: it loves the good and commands it be done. The good soul plants good and its fruit is salvation; the evil plants evil and its fruit is damnation. The good one defends itself, and others are saved by it; and the evil loses itself, and others are lost through it. The good receives truth and the evil receives lies; for there is no lesson so small that a good soul might not profit, while the evil is unable to profit from any good lesson which one might put before it.

Who wishes the life of his soul must not fear corporal death. For when a reasoning soul changes itself to the nature of a beast for lack of reason, even though it be an incorruptible substance, it is taken for dead, for it loses its intellectual life.

Since everything, including our creation, comes from God, we must desire that our souls return to Him, by doing such good works that the memory of them will be in perpetual benediction. It is a good and charitable thing to risk one's life to defend the common good which concerns all estates: that is, the commonweal of the Realm, which the Pope Zachariah prescribed to the nobles of France, who had sent him an embassy to advise them on why the Kings who had long reigned in France were content to reign in name alone; for the magistrates of the Royal house governed and led wars.\* "He," said he, "who governs the commonwealth well, and who understands that he governs for more than his own profit, is worthy of being called King."

### THIRD CHAPTER

## *On the Estate and Duty of Kings And Princes*

Consider the duty of Kings and princes and their cavaliers,† that their estate and vocation is to defend the common good, both ecclesiastic and secular, to uphold justice and peace among their subjects, and to do good. They will have good in both this world and the next; and if they do evil only, affliction will come, and it shall come to pass some day that one must leave the world to go and give account of one's undertakings and receive one's reward. And to risk their lives for another, which among all other estates of the world is most to be praised and honored. And because the common good which concerns many, which is the commonweal of the Realm, is more praiseworthy than the particular, which often has frustrated the common good, we have freely put into writing

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\* Pope Zachariah was Pope during the reign of Pepin, Charlemagne's father.

† *Chevalier*. Louis is not referring merely to the knights or noblemen who composed the mounted forces of the army, but is speaking more broadly of a new *national military*. The breakthroughs effected by Joan of Arc and Jacques Coeur in using free commoners as archers and cannon artillerymen in war-fighting, was carried to its farthest extent during Louis' reign. This was the first time in history that a *national military* acted as the defender of a nation-state. In other portions of the *Rosebush*, Louis stresses the importance of training soldiers to fight for the whole nation, rather than their local region alone. To avoid confusion with the feudal order of knighthood, *chevalier* is here rendered as "cavalier"; similarly, *chevalerie* is later rendered as "cavalry."

the acts of the princes and the cavaliers, and all good doctrines which serve their estate.

I have seen nothing which so destroyed and annihilated the power of the Romans, as when they betook themselves more to the particular than to the common good.

## *On Justice*

When Justice reigns in a realm, the common good is well guarded, and so is the particular: for Justice is that virtue which defends human company and community of life, such that each may well use common things as common; and the particular as particular.

Who wishes to follow Justice, must love and fear God, so that he may be loved by Him; but one cannot love Him better than to do good to each man and evil to none, and then the people will acclaim him just and follow him, and revere and love him.

Who would be just, it is not enough to not do harm to others, but one must also oppose those who seek to do harm to others:

Thus, a man is just who brings about peace and tranquility.

Of justice, two things appertain: the will to benefit all men, and to do injury to no man.

When evil acts began to multiply in the world dangerously, in order that the evil-doers be punished, men submitted their necks to the service of the lords, who were thus instituted to defend right among them.

According to the nature of the people and the countries, the Kings established laws in their lands, through which their lands and Realms were and would be maintained. Thus in this one is a cavalier, the other a merchant, and another a laborer. And since the profit of one empire is by gaining of another, wars and hatred would arise and be the destruction of men, if there were no Justice, which defends and guards the community of life and of which the power is so great, that evil-doers altogether wish that justice be withheld from among them.

A King is good and noble, who in his Kingdom removes a bad law, in favor of a good one, and takes care not to break a law which is profitable to the people, for the people will always obey a benefactor.

The greater and sovereign good, which a King could have in his Realm, is the obedience of his subjects, for God requires no more of His creatures.

Through the observation of the law, Kings and princes do for the people that which they must and are bound to do, and remove that which they are bound to remove.

When Kings have no regard for the law, they deny to

the people what they ought to have left to them, and do not give them that which they should have, and in so doing make the people serfs and lose the name of King: for no man should be called King, but he who rules and has seignery over free men; for free men of their nature love their lords, while serfs naturally hate them, like slaves their masters. A King ruling in right and justice is King of his people, and if he reign in iniquity and violence, however much his subjects hold him for King, their will and courage are inclined toward another. For the King is like a great river, from which come small rivers and streams, and if it is calm and clean, the small rivers and small streams are calm and clean, and if turbulent and dirty, they are turbulent and dirty.

When the King wields his seignery otherwise than he ought, envy grows about him, from which falsehood is born, and after, hate; and then injustice, from which battle is born, through which law and justice perish, and thus his possessions and domain are lost to him. But when the King wields his seignery as he ought, truth grows in his Kingdom, from which will come justice; of justice, love; of love, great gifts and services, by which the law will be maintained and guarded and defended, and so his people will flourish in peace and unity.

The subjects of the King are to the King, as wind is to fire: For when the fire is lit, where there is no wind, it is slow to reach any intensity.

The King must think of the condition of his people and visit them often, as a good gardener does his garden; for just as it appertains to the people to be subject and obedient to the King, thus also does it appertain to the King, to diligently see to the government of his people, and that must be his chief care. For the good which he obtains from them, is to hold and govern his people in peace and justice.

The King is with his people, as the soul is with the body: If the soul inclines itself toward evil, the body follows it, according to the common proverb, "As is the lord, so is his servant."

No one could be better loved of his people nor have a durable lordship, but by doing them good; for in grieving them, since he has lordship over their bodies, hardly could he have lordship of their spirit. Much would do little in that case, to be loved; and much danger has often arisen from enraging them, for anger bears hatred, and the populace's hatred often subjects the populace to the tricks of his enemies.

Kings are honored by the teaching of good laws, by the conquest of Regions, and by the populating of deserted lands.

It behooves a conquering King to establish and defend good justice in the Realms and lands which he has acquired; for, however much difficulty it was to conquer them, so much more difficult is it to defend them well.

A King must always make use of and act by counsel and by good and ripe deliberation; for the greater his power, the more dangerous is it for him and his Realm, to follow his will without counsel.

It is a greater thing to know how to be lord over one's will, than to be lord of the world from East to West.

Who has good and loyal counsellors and gives them credence, his Realm and power grow and flourish, like an

orchard well watered; for, as the orchard through dryness and lack of water cannot bear fruit, neither can a Prince, or his Realm, bear fruit, if he does not have good and loyal counsellors, or does not believe them.

A wise King with good understanding, uplifts and gives worth to his counsellors.

When a King knows that one of his subjects has committed a crime against him, he must rapidly and without waiting inquire into the truth of the matter, and the enormity of the crime, and if he acted with aforethought or by ignorance, and also if he is accustomed to doing so, and if it is established true let him make amends, and on each of these points give remedy immediately.

And when a King of good discretion has two urgent things to do, he must begin with the most noble and beneficial: and if both are of the same standing, he must



*Louis XI of France*

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begin with that which he could least recover in the future.

If a King holds in as great love those who are disloyal and evil as he does good men, one must not hold him for King, nor should he rule for long.

A King must commit his cares to him whose judgment, faith, and governance he has tested; and, if such a one he cannot find, let him take one who has always conversed with wise men, and not at all with his enemies.

A King must not trust in him who spites him; in a man who is covetous; in one who has leapt from great poverty to great wealth; in him whom he has deprived of his goods and lands; nor in him who has some knowledge or friendship with some of his enemies. Who would do otherwise, puts himself at the mercy of his enemy: And above all, he should beware of a reconciled enemy, for that one, could he but find an opportunity to avenge himself, he could not but satisfy his bloodlust.

A King must not be deceived, if some men offer themselves to him in his prosperity, nor forget to honor his cavalry\* and give them high wages, however much he may think to have few enemies; for whatever place he might be, he will always have something to do with them.

A good King should resemble a good and beautiful flowing river, which brings benefit to each man. The good King takes pride in his good cavalry and in his good people; for his Realm is defended by the cavalry, and by his people, he and his cavalry have all that they require. And yet the King must give more attention to address himself to maintaining his people in peace and justice, than to abandoning himself to his cavalry; for without the people, the cavalry cannot be maintained; and insofar as the people are well governed, more so will they be more obedient; nor is there anything which more behooves a Prince, than to covet the love of his people.

A good King is he who takes pains to protect his subjects as he would himself, and who is not so rigorous nor oppressive that he force them to leave his lordship; and also is not so easygoing towards them, that they make light of his authority.

If a King is merciful, his ministrations will be a great good; if he is prudent and truthful, his people will rejoice with him; and if he is just, his reign will endure.

A King must not be too strict to correct the faults of men, for men cannot always prevent themselves from failings, by which it betimes behooves him to pardon errors; and if he must deliver punishment, he must show that he does it by necessity of redress, and not in the semblance of revenge.

The King, when he knows one who loves him, must keep him well: for in losing one friend, one wins several enemies.

The best King who could be, is he who is not subject to his willfulness, and who does all things which are good and beneficial for his people, and has his eye and heart more to the good governance of his Realm, than to the delights of his own body, or to his whims.

The King must never commit to another the tasks of his Kingdom which are necessary for him to do; for any one of the tasks of his Kingdom which is small, does not pertain to him to do; but that which is difficult, does pertain to him to do, without committing it to someone else.

Thus if he commits to another the great tasks of the Realm, and if he occupies himself with the small, he will soon see what sorrow will come to him in the future.

And if the King makes light of or leaves aside some of those small things which he ought to do, he will freely leave aside the greater ones. And so he is lost and destroyed bit by bit, as a small illness grows and destroys the body, if a good cure is not effected in time.

And if the King is lazy or careless in seeking out and inquiring into the doings of his cavalry and his people and his enemies, one day, he will not be secure in his Realm.

The greatest benefit that a King might do for his Realm is to remove malefactors and reward good men; for, if he gives to evil men what they do not deserve, he removes the spirit to do good from the others, and in a short time there will be such a fill of worthless men, that he will not be able to be free of them.

A King must better love crude words which are beneficial and true, than sweet words of shame and flattery; and especially, he must not heed sweet words from his enemy. For thus, like some who put poison in a sweet drink, similarly under sweet words are often hidden shame and treason; whence the saying of Cato, "The birdcatcher plays his flute sweetly when he wishes to deceive the bird."

In this case, the King must be wise, prudent like the snake called asp, which closes its ears so it may never hear the enchantment by which one wishes to deceive it. And consider that, as medicines, which often give health, are bitter and of a strange taste, so also does a crude speaker often give better counsel than a sweet-talker.

And always, as gold is more precious than any manner of metal, so is the science of speaking more noble than any art in the world; of which Tullus said, the highest science of governing people, is thus rhetoric, which is the science of speaking well; for, if speech had never been

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\* *chevalerie*. See previous footnote on *chevalier*.

summoned, there would be no establishment of justice, nor of human company.

Of which, one must know that speeches and sayings are given in four ways:

For some men are armed with great sensibility and good speaking, which is the flower of the world; others are devoid of good speaking and sensibility, which is a great mishap.

Some men are devoid of great sensibility but are very beautiful talkers, which is a great danger, from whom the King must protect himself sovereignly.

Yet others are full of sense, but they remain quiet for poverty of their speech, and thus require aid.

In good speaking there is use and art which are full of great lessons; and learning is nothing else but the knowledge which comprehends things as they are, and can foresee them, and give them a definite end and measure; and when knowledge is joined with rhetoric, nothing but good can come of it.

We read of King Alexander, who when his father the King was near death had him crowned and made King of his Realm and made him sit on the Royal throne, and the Princes and lords were content with that; nonetheless, after the death of his father, to draw to himself the hearts of his men and subjects, he said among other beautiful words: Good lords, I wish to have no seignery over you, but to be as one of you, and, I wish that it please you to accept me. I would love what you love and hate what you hate. I do not wish in any manner to be in opposition to you or your acts. But I, who hate frauds and malice and have always loved you when my father was alive, and still do and will always, counsel and pray you that you fear God and obey Him as sovereign Lord, and elect that one as King, whom you see the most obedient to God; who will best think of the good standing of the people; who will be most easy-going and merciful to the poor; who will protect justice and right among the weak as much as the strong; who most will expose his own body for the commonweal; who for no delectations nor delights will be slow to protect and defend you; who most boldly places himself in danger of death to destroy your enemies; and who by means of his good works protects you from evil. For such a man must be elected King, and none other.

And when his men had heard his reasoning and recognized his great discretion and subtle understanding, they were greatly surprised and responded to him: We have heard your reasoning and have accepted and accept your counsel, so we supplicate you and wish that you reign and have lordship always over us, and we hold that no other has so well deserved to be our King. And so they

elected him seigneur and King, and crowned him, and gave him their blessing, and prayed to God that He keep him. To them he said: I have heard the prayer which you have made for me, and how of good heart you have made me King, so I ask humbly of God, that He confirm His love for me in your spirit, that it be His desire that He not suffer me to do anything but what is profitable to you, and honorable to me.

We read as well of King Solomon, whom the people feared greatly for the great judgments he made. And also several others, whose lives must be as a light for those who come after.

### *On the Common Good of the Realm*

**T**he first laws of the princes deal with the common good, which is the commonweal of the Realm, and the Knight is principally created for the defense of this common good, as are the cities and the realm.

At the beginning of the century, when cities and towns were first made, rural life, deprived of men, was shared with the community of dumb and wild beasts.

And cities were, from the first, the name for the common good or the commonwealth.

A city is the assembly of people to inhabit one place, to live under one law; and thus, as people and their habitations are diverse, so also are appearances and the laws diverse throughout the world; and accordingly are there diverse lordships to guard the common good, so that the strong do not harm the weak, and each one may have what is his, which he may employ by right and reason.

The government of the Realm must from the beginning be firm, and rest upon three pillars.

The first is justice, which must be fixed and established within the heart of the King, who must render to each his right, and lean neither to the right nor to the left.

Solomon said that, "A just King will never have mishap."

The second pillar is reverence, which the people must have, in the way of the Apostle, who said, "Honor thy Lord." That is the only thing in the world which seeks the merits of faith, and which overcomes all sacrifices.

The third pillar is love, which must be in the one and in the other. For the King must love his subjects with a great heart and a dear faith, and seek day and night the common profit of the Realm, and of all his subjects; and also must they love their King with a right heart and true intention, and give him counsel and aid in upholding his estate and seignery. It is said, that one is a good cavalier and loved by God, who loyally loves him who reigns by authority over him.

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## On the Things Which the Prince Must Do and Consider In His Seigneury

**T**he Prince must remember at all times to keep in his mind the law and the Commandments, and must not forget God nor His saints, and go often to church and pray to God for himself and his subjects. For, if God does not keep guard over the city, those who would guard it labor for nothing.

He must honor the pastors of the church, for God said of them with His mouth: "Who receiveth you, receiveth me."

He must be religious and show a straight faith, because there is no more beautiful thing in a Prince than to have a straight faith and an upright belief.

When the just King sits on his throne, no evil can befall him.

He must protect the churches, the houses of God, widowed women, and orphans, in right and in justice. However much all men—great, small, and in-between—be under his care, among all of them always widows and orphans have great need of succor.

He must defend the common property, to give and have given to each man that which is his, and provide with his power that there be no hate nor discord among his subjects; and if there is, provide that he not favor more the demands of one side or the other, nor otherwise give credence to all lightly made reports.

He must ensure as much as possible that he have good judges and good captains: discreet, and wise, and strong, and straight, and just, and of good faith and good religion toward God and the Holy Church. But if one cannot find them so accomplished and of such virtue, since not every white bird is a swan, let them be at least loyal, firm, and established, so that they be not corrupted, nor too simple, nor entangled with bad vices.

Thus, as the ship is governed by its sails, in the same way is the city led by the sensibility and knowledge of its judge.

Therefore, when the Prince finds a good judge, he must not leave him, not for gold nor silver, and he must listen diligently to pleas and complaints, and give sentence on small quarrels quickly and lightly, without hesitation.

Otherwise, the Prince must provide for maintenance of the public works and edifices, and make improvements and repairs on the roads, the bridges, the ports, the walls, the moats, and the other things in his towns and castles which are necessary, in such a manner that the

people be not aggrieved; and by this create committed loyal men.

And he must suffer no malefactor to escape without penalty.

Murderers, traitors, those who force women and young girls, highwaymen, and those who commit other crimes, one must sentence very strongly, according to the law and custom of the country. For that judge is damned who absolves the criminal.

One does not punish the criminal for the crime, but to give example to others, that they not embolden themselves, but have fear to do evil. For the escape from pain gives habit to sin and to commit crime in the towns and cities.

The Prince must also hold his officers in such manner that they do no wrong, nor irk anyone.

And he must have about him good counsellors, wise and loyal to him and to reason.

And he must be such, that he seems terrifying to evil men and agreeable to good ones. And he must not be too familiar, nor of too light bearing, in his acts and edicts.

In men there are two impulses, one of the body and the other of the spirit. In that of the body, one must beware that one's gait be not too sluggish from tarrying. For, it is necessary to have a superb countenance, and let it not be too hasty, causing heavy breathing and change of complexion, since such things signify that the man be not stable.

The impulse of the spirit is double: The one is the thought of reason, and the other is the desire of the will. Thought of reason is to inquire into truth, and desire causes things to happen.

Thus must one hold, that reason be given the lead, and that desire obey; for, if the will which is naturally submitted to reason is not obedient, it will often trouble such spirits.

By the words proffered, by the bearing, and the countenance, can one know the desires of the will.

And because all men have their eye more on a Prince than on another; and because he, in a high place, is more known and contemplated than he of low status; the Prince must be a mirror and example to others of all virtues; so must he uphold and govern all things as his estate requires. And thus will he be loved of God and the world, and at his wish all his needs will be met.

Three things which make a King reign and be rich and have renown and perpetual benediction:

To guard well and augment his domain.

To hold good justice, and his army in good order and in fear.

To guard and augment the commonweal of his Realm.

*—translated by Katherine Notley*