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3. Although no one doubted that the Tarquinii[1] would presently go to war, their attack was delayed beyond all expectation; while a thing men did not fear at all, to wit a treasonable plot, almost cost Rome her liberty. [2] There were among the young men a number of youths, the sons of families not unimportant, whose pleasures had been less confined under the monarchy, who, being of the same age as the young Tarquinii, and their cronies, had grown used to the untrammelled life of princes. [3] This licence they missed, now that all enjoyed equal rights, and they had got into the way of complaining to each other that the liberty of the rest had resulted in their own enslavement. A king was a man, from whom one could obtain a boon, whether it were just or unjust; there was room for countenance and favour; a king could be angry, could forgive, could distinguish between friend and enemy. [4] The law was a thing without ears, inexorable, more salutary and serviceable to the pauper than to the great man; it knew no relaxation or indulgence, if one exceeded bounds; and, inasmuch as man is so prone to blunder, it was dangerous to rely on innocence alone. [5] Thanks to such reflections, they were already infected with disloyalty when envoys from the royal family appeared, who without saying anything about the return of the Tarquinii, sought merely to recover their property. The senate, having given them a hearing, debated the question for several days; for they feared that if they refused to make restitution it would be a pretext for war, if they consented it would be to furnish means and assistance for its prosecution. [6] Meantime the envoys were [p. 229]exerting themselves to a different purpose. Ostensibly[2] seeking to recover the property, they secretly laid their plans for winning back the kingdom; and, as if in furtherance of their apparent object, they went about sounding the disposition of the youthful nobles. [7] To those who gave them a friendly hearing they delivered letters from the Tarquinii, and plotted with them to admit the royal family secretly by night into the City.

1 B.C. 509

2 B.C. 509

Livy. Books I and II With An English Translation. Cambridge. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1919.

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