

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROMAN HISTORY—Earliest Periods of the History of Rome—Etruscans—
Foundation of Rome—Disputed accounts of—Romulus—Rape of the Sabines—
Origin of the Political Institutions of the Romans—Union with the Sabines—
Numa—His Institutions—Tullus Hostilius—Ancus Martius—Tarquinius
Priscus.

OF the precise era when the country of Italy was peopled, we have no certain accounts, nor any thing beyond probable conjecture. There seem, however, good grounds to believe that this peninsula, enjoying great advantages of situation, soil, and climate, was very early a populous country, and inhabited in one quarter even by a refined and polished nation, many ages before the Roman name was known. This people was known by the appellation of Etrurians or Etruscans, though their more ancient designation is said to have been Tyrrheni, from the name of a Lydian prince who brought with him a colony of his countrymen from the lesser Asia, and planted that part of Italy afterwards called Etruria. Of the early history of this people there remain but a few detached and obscure traces to be found in the ancient authors; but there is reason to believe that, like all other colonies, their progress to civilization was much more rapid than that of an aboriginal people, and that the Etruscans were in a very advanced state of improvement in manners and the arts, while the surrounding nations or tribes in the centre of Italy were yet extremely barbarous. The Roman historians acknowledge this fact. Livy speaks of the Etruscans as a great and opulent people in Italy, powerful both at land and sea, before the origin of the Roman state. Dionysius of Halicarnassus deduces most of the religious institutions of the Romans from Etruria. Augury and divination, which were essential ingredients in most of their ceremonies and mysteries, were certainly derived from that country, as probably were the first dawnings of Roman science and literature. The religion of the Etruscans was polytheism, and many of their deities were com-

mon to them with the Greeks, as those of the latter with the divinities of the Phœnicians and other Asiatic nations. The Roman theogony can easily be traced to those origins. The Cabirian mysteries of the Romans, the Mithriac and Acherontic ceremonies, were all immediately derived from Etruria. The Etruscan alphabet, nearly that of the Phœnicians, was likewise used by the Romans in the early ages of their state. The gradual change from this ancient alphabet to the characters used by the Romans in the latter periods, may be distinctly traced by the series of *inscriptions* yet remaining.

The ancient Etrurians are celebrated for their knowledge of astronomy, which countenances the notion of their Asiatic origin. They had successfully cultivated poetry and music. Scenical representations were in great repute among them; and the first comedians who appeared at Rome were brought from that country, on occasion of a pestilence, either from a superstitious idea of appeasing the wrath of the gods, or the humbler, though not less rational motive of supporting the spirits of the people under the general calamity.

It is probable the Etruscans had made great progress in the fine arts of sculpture and painting, and the practice of these arts presupposes a very high state of civilization. The elegance of the Etruscan vases, and the beautiful painting which decorates them, are subjects of just admiration and of zealous imitation by the moderns. Of this art, the fabric of pottery, the ancient authors agree in attributing the invention to this people,* and none other appears ever to have carried it to so high a pitch of perfection. Architecture, engraving of precious stones, sculpture, and painting, were of high antiquity among the Etruscans at the time when the Greeks were comparatively in a state of barbarism. The Etruscans were a declining people at the time of the foundation of Rome, though possessing many relicks of their ancient grandeur, both in their knowledge of the arts and in their manners. The Romans were mere barbarians; but they had the good sense to copy after and adopt many improvements from their polished neighbors.

The country of Etruria, as we learn from Dionysius, was divided into twelve districts, each of which was ruled by a separate chief, called in the Etruscan language *Lucumo*. Of these *lucumones* we find frequent mention in Livy. Each had a sovereign jurisdiction in his province; but the whole were united in a confederacy, and held a general diet or council on all occasions in which the common interest was concerned. To give greater efficacy to

*Tatianus, in his oration to the Greeks, in which he reproaches them with their vanity in attributing to themselves the invention of all arts, affirms positively that the Etruscans taught them the art of pottery; Clemens Alexandrinus makes the same assertion.

this union, it appears that, at least in time of war, the whole nation obeyed a common chief, who was elected probably by the whole of the *lucumos*. Livy informs us that no single state could engage in war or conclude peace without the consent of the whole Etruscan body. The principal towns of Etruria were Volscinii, Clusium, Cortona, Perugia, Falerii, Tarquinii, and Veii. These, with several others mentioned by Dionysius, were populous and flourishing states before the common era of the foundation of Rome.*

This polished people, inhabiting the centre of Italy, was surrounded by a great number of petty nations, who seem to have been in a state little removed from barbarism. The Umbrians, the Ligurians, the Sabines, the Picentes, the Latins, appear at the time of the supposed foundation of the Roman state to have been a set of independent tribes, who were engaged in constant hostilities with each other. The territory called *Latium* extended in length about fifty miles, and in breadth about sixteen. It contained no less than forty-seven independent communities. The other adjacent provinces were divided in the same manner—a state of society in which constant warfare is unavoidable; a warfare, however, of which conquest or extension of power is not the object, but which arises merely from the spirit of plunder and depredation. Their enterprises, therefore, were limited to ravaging the fields, carrying off the flocks and herds, destroying the harvest of their neighbors, or such like rude and barbarous achievements. The desire of conquest has no place in such a state of society;—for a victory can never be pursued or the conquered territory preserved: as the whole community is obliged to be active for its subsistence, and agriculture is of course suspended while the nation is at war, the soldier must quit his arms for the plough and spade, for a lengthened campaign would produce a famine. It is only where acquired wealth and increased population can afford regular armies of professional soldiers, that conquests can be prosecuted and maintained. The Etruscans seem to have enjoyed these advantages over all the barbarous nations around them, and consequently they were in a capacity to have subdued the whole of

*The Etruscans were, like their Phœnician ancestors, a maritime and mercantile people. Hence the fable invented by the Greeks, and sung by Ovid, that the Tyrrhenians were turned into dolphins. They colonized all along the coast of Italy, and built many large towns, during the splendid period of their history. But this was of short continuance. A dreadful pestilence and famine, as Dionysius informs us, (lib. i. c. 15, 16,) desolated their country about the period of the Trojan war. These calamities were recorded in a poem found on certain tablets of brass, called the Eugubine Tables, which were discovered A. D. 1444, in a subterranean vault near the ancient theatre of Iguvium or Eugubium, now Gubbio, a city of Umbria. The poem is written in Pelasgian characters. This lamentation, with an interpretation by M. Gori, may be found in "Sir William Hamilton's Etruscan Antiquities;" and it is inferred from various circumstances to be 247 years more ancient than the works of Hesiod.

them; but their genius was not warlike: they were fond of and cultivated the arts of peace; and though occasionally engaged in hostilities with the Romans, they appear never to have armed but when attacked.

The gradual increase of population among a warlike tribe may enable them to preserve their conquests, either by garrisoning, or by transplanting a part of the conquered inhabitants into the capital, and replacing them by a colony of citizens. This we shall see was afterwards the policy of the Romans, and thus by degrees they extended their territory and increased their power. But sometimes a flourishing people is compelled to colonize, from an overgrowth of its population. Dionysius of Halicarnassus informs us of the manner in which a state, when it became overstocked, transplanted its colonies. They consecrated to a particular god all the youth of a certain age, furnished them with arms, and after the performance of a solemn sacrifice, dismissed them to conquer for themselves a new country. These enterprises were, no doubt, often unsuccessful; but when they succeeded, and an establishment was obtained, it does not appear that the mother state pretended to have any rights over them, or claims upon the country where they settled.

The origin of the Roman state is involved in great obscurity, and various accounts are given of the foundation of that illustrious city, which differ not only as to the time of its structure, but in all circumstances concerning it. To reconcile in some degree these discrepancies, it is the notion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that there were at different periods several cities which bore the name of Rome; that the Rome founded some time after the Trojan war, was destroyed, and another built in the first year of the seventh Olympiad, that is, 752 B. C.; nay, he pretends to find evidence even of a more ancient Rome than either of these, but in what situation or period of time he does not determine. Whoever wishes to see all the different accounts of this matter, and to be convinced how little certainty there is in any one of them, may consult the learned dissertations of M. Pouilly and of the Abbé Sallier, in the sixth volume of the *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions*. The vulgar and generally received account of the foundation of Rome by Romulus is not upon the whole entitled to any degree of credit superior to the rest; but as it was commonly adopted by the Romans themselves, and has passed current down to modern times, it is proper to be acquainted with it, whatever doubt we may entertain of its authenticity.

Rome, according to the chronology of Archbishop Usher, was founded 752 years before the Christian era. Romulus, at the head of a troop of shepherds, his followers, is said to have built a few huts upon the Palatine Hill, in a part of the territory of Alba; but as it is not very probable that shepherds should assemble to the number of 3000, it is natural to suppose them to have

been banditti or freebooters, accustomed to wander and to ravage; and the increase of their numbers, while it furnished the means, probably suggested the idea, of occupying and fortifying an inclosed territory for themselves. To strengthen the new community, and to fill the space which they had marked out for their city, their chief proclaimed an asylum for all such fugitives and deserters from the neighboring states as chose to put themselves under his protection, and acknowledge his authority.

Hitherto, this new association consisted solely of men; it was necessary they should provide themselves with women. The story of the rape of the Sabines has much the air of romance; though it derives a degree of credit from the festival of the *Consualia*, instituted in honor of the god *Consus*, the protector of plots; a solemnity which was always believed at Rome to have commemorated that exploit. Romulus proclaimed a great festival and games in honor of Neptune, to which he invited all the neighboring states. The Sabines,* Cecinians, Crustuminians, and Antemnates, came thither in great troops. The plan was concerted, and at a certain signal, a chosen band rushed in and carried off a great number of the women. The Sabines, and the nations in their alliance, prepared immediately to avenge this outrage; and the infant commonwealth of Rome was, almost at the moment of its formation, at war with all its neighbors.

The Roman historians, to flatter the vanity of their countrymen, have been extremely lavish of encomium on the high character of Romulus, whom they paint with all the qualities of a consummate politician and legislator. But if even the Greeks, at this time with far greater advantages, were extremely rude and uncivilized, what ideas can we form of the people of Latium, and their knowledge of the arts of government and legislation? There is certainly very little probability that a troop of banditti should all at once assume the form of a regular political structure, or that a great legislator should appear in the person of a freebooter, or of a shepherd, at the age of eighteen. The sounder opinion certainly seems to be, that those wise and politic laws and institutions, commonly ascribed to Romulus, arose gradually from ancient usages and a state of manners prevalent in Italy before the foundation of Rome.

If, however, we can suppose Romulus to have been in fact the founder of this new kingdom, its constitution would certainly prove that he had wise and politic views. He knew, in the first place,

* The Sabines were an ancient people of Italy, situated between Etruria and Latium. Their capital was *Cures*, in the territory now called *Corezze*. The inhabitants of *Cecina*, *Crustumini*, and *Antemna*, were probably either subjects or allies of the Sabine state. From *Cures*, the capital city of the Sabines, the Romans, after their union with that people, took the appellation of *Curites* or *Quirites*.

the character and temperament of the people he governed, and was well aware that their rude and ferocious spirit would not brook the unlimited authority of a despot. It was therefore a judicious plan to admit the people to a share in the government.

He divided the mass of population into *three tribes*, and each tribe into *ten curiæ*. Of the lands belonging to the state, he formed three great portions: one appropriated to the support of religion, which is an essential instrument of good government; another destined for the public service of the state; and the third he distributed equally among the thirty *curiæ*, so that each Roman citizen should have two acres of land. He formed a *senate* or council, composed of a hundred of the elders, to whom he gave power to see the laws enforced, to consult concerning all affairs of state, and to report their opinion to the people in the *comitia* or assemblies, who were invested with the right of final determination in all matters of public importance.

From these first senators (*centum patres*) chosen by Romulus, were descended those families at Rome termed *patrician*; so that in a very little time a great distinction of rank arose from birth among the Romans.

It has indeed been supposed by Dionysius, that the distinction of patricians and plebeians was anterior to the formation of the senate, and that the one title was given to the richer, and the other to the poorer class of citizens. But whence can we suppose this inequality of wealth to have arisen, when the same author admits that there was an equal distribution among the whole citizens of those lands, in which alone their wealth could consist?

Although Romulus gave great weight to the scale of the people in the framing of this new government, yet he reserved to himself, as head of the community, very ample powers. The deliberations and decrees of the senate guided the resolutions of the people, and the king had the power of naming all the senators. He had likewise the privilege of assembling the people, and a right of appeal lay to him in all questions of importance. He had the command of the army, which at first comprehended the whole body of the people. He was chief priest, too, or *pontifex maximus*, and regulated every thing that concerned or was even remotely connected with religion; and, with a very wise policy, he took care that all that regarded the rule and economy of the state was so connected.

Romulus chose for the guard of his person twelve lictors, to whom he afterwards joined a troop of 300 horsemen, named *celeræ*. This was the origin of the *equites*, or Roman knights, who became the second rank in the state after the patricians. From the three tribes into which he divided the people, Romulus selected from each tribe a hundred of the handsomest of the youth, of whom he formed three companies of cavalry. This body of the

equites was augmented by Tarquinius Priscus to 1800; and in that distribution of the citizens which we shall afterwards see was made by Servius Tullius, these eighteen centuries were placed in the first class. These *equites* were at first chosen by the kings alone, as being the royal life-guards; and at the end of the regal government, being now a rank in the state, the consuls, who succeeded to almost the whole of the regal power, filled up the order of *equites* as they did that of the senate. In succeeding times, when the consuls became too much engrossed in military concerns, the function of supplying both those orders devolved on the censors, of whose office I shall speak more particularly when arrived at that period when those magistrates were first instituted. The marks of distinction peculiar to the order of knights were a horse maintained at the public expense, a ring of gold, and a garment with a narrow border of purple, called *angustus clavus*, in distinction from the *latus clavus* of the senators, which had a broader border of purple. It was reckoned a great indecorum for a knight to appear in public without his proper badges. The duties and functions of the *equites* were various in different periods of the republic: they were at first only a military order, and formed the cavalry of the Roman legions; afterwards, in the time of the *gracchi*, we find them a class of civil judges, and no longer a military order. Sylla again, in his arrangement of the republic, deprived the *equites* of their judicial tribunals, and they became the financiers-general of the revenues of the state.

If many of those institutions we have mentioned owed their origin to the political talents of Romulus, several of them plainly appear to have a strong conformity with the general usages of barbarous nations; and others, which argue a more refined policy, were borrowed, in all probability, from the Etruscans: such in particular were those connected with religion.

The religion of ancient Italy was probably near akin to that of the Greeks; though Dionysius tells us that the early religious institutions of the Romans were not contaminated with those fables which disgraced the Greek theogony. The most scrupulous observance of omens and presages seems to have been the chief foundation of their sacred rites, and in this superstition they went far beyond the Greeks. Now divination we know with some certainty to have been adopted by the Romans from the Etruscans. Among that people every thing was construed into a presage; not only the extraordinary phenomena of nature, as thunder, lightning, the *aurora borealis*, or the like, but the most insignificant actions or accidents, such as sneezing, meeting with an animal, slipping a foot, or any of the most common occurrences of life. Among an ignorant and rude nation every thing is attributed to a supernatural agency; but the Etrurians were not a rude nation, and therefore we can assign this natural propensity only to their love of those national habits which they had derived from a remote

antiquity. To a superstitious people, when presages do not offer of themselves, it is a very natural step to go and seek them. The sacrifice of victims presented often different appearances, according to the accidental state of the animal at the time it was killed. The priests employed in the sacrifice, being best acquainted with those appearances, are naturally consulted as to their interpretation. Thus they acquire the reputation of superior wisdom and foresight, and the *augur* and *aruspex* become an established profession. Where a society is once formed, it becomes interested to support itself; the trade is found lucrative, and the science of course is studiously made intricate and obscure, to exclude the attempts of uninitiated pretenders.

As bad omens presented themselves frequently as well as good, it became a desirable object of science to know how to avert the effect of the latter, and to convert them into presages of good fortune. The augurs pretended that they possessed this valuable secret, which gave them still greater influence over the minds of the people. This effect they produced by expiations, which thus became an essential branch of religious ceremonies. Gradually, as the art advanced, a particular set of ceremonies was appropriated to particular occasions. Thus, for example, at the foundation of a city, the priests and all employed in the ceremony first purified themselves by leaping over a fire. Then they made a circular excavation, into which they threw the first fruits of the season, and some handfuls of earth brought from the native city by the founders. The entrails of victims were next consulted, and if favorable, they proceeded to trace the limits of the town with a line of chalk. This track they then marked by a furrow, with a plough drawn by a white bull and heifer. It was not anciently the custom to surround the city with walls, but the limits were defended by towers, placed at regular intervals. In after times, however, the practice became common of fortifying the city by a wall. The ceremony was concluded by a great sacrifice to the tutelar gods of the city, who were solemnly invoked. These gods were termed *Patrii* and *Indigetes*, but their particular names were concealed with the most anxious caution from the knowledge of the people. It was a very prevalent superstitious belief that no city could be taken or destroyed till its tutelar gods abandoned it. Hence it was the first care of a besieging enemy to evoke the gods of the city or entice them out by ceremonies, by promising them superior temples and festivals, and a more respectful worship than they had hitherto enjoyed; but in order to accomplish this evocation, it was necessary to learn the particular names of the deities, which every people therefore was interested to keep secret.

As all the superstitions we have mentioned were common to the nations of Italy before the building of Rome, it was extremely natural that they should be adopted as part of its theology.