

very speedily compelled Pompey to evacuate Sicily and all his other possessions, and fly into Asia, where he was put to death by the lieutenants of Antony.

Octavius now determined to rid himself of the partners of his power. Lepidus, a man of an indolent character and no talent, had already lost all credit, even with his own troops. The legions under his command, won by the bribes and promises of Octavius, deserted their general, who, sensible of his own insufficiency, sought permission to retire to Circæum, on the Latian coast, where he passed the remainder of his life in quiet obscurity. It has been well remarked of this man, who for some time sustained a high part in the political drama of the times, that he had neither those virtues nor those vices for which the names of men are transmitted with distinction to posterity.

Antony, in the meantime, intoxicated with Eastern luxury and debauchery, was daily sinking in the esteem of his army. In the madness of his passion for Cleopatra, he had proclaimed her queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Africa, and Cælo-Syria; and lavished kingdoms and provinces on the children that were the fruit of her various amours. These shameless proceedings reflected dishonor on the Roman name, and deprived him of the esteem of his best friends; and the imprudent measure he now took in divorcing his wife Octavia, the sister of his colleague, was a justifiable cause for their coming to an open rupture, and appealing to the sword to decide their claim to undivided sovereignty of the empire. Octavius had foreseen this issue, and made formidable preparations, which Antony had supinely neglected. He trusted chiefly to his fleet, and was persuaded by Cleopatra to rest the fortune of the war on a naval engagement, which was fought near Actium in Epirus. In the heat of the battle, which was maintained for some time with equal spirit, Cleopatra, with her Egyptian armament of sixty galleys, took to flight; and what is scarcely conceivable, such was the infatuation of Antony, that he followed her, leaving his fleet to fight for themselves. After a contest of some hours, they yielded to the squadron of Octavius. The army of Antony, which had witnessed this engagement from the land, held out for a few days, in hopes of the return of their commander, but at length seeing their expectation vain, they surrendered to the victor.

The flight of Cleopatra had been attributed by Antony to female timidity; but her subsequent conduct gave full reason to believe it shameful treachery. Octavius pursued the fugitives to Egypt, where Antony, in desperate infatuation, gave himself up entirely to riot and debauchery, still blind to the treacherous character of his paramour, who, in the meantime, was carrying on a secret negotiation with Octavius, on whom she vainly imagined that her personal charms might have such influence as to procure her association in the supreme power and government of the Ro-

man empire. In this view she surrendered to him the sovereignty of Egypt, while, without positively assenting to her terms, Octavius gave her reason to believe that he was not disinclined to an accommodation that would gratify her utmost ambition.

Meantime Octavius advancing with his army to besiege Pelusium, its governor, instructed by Cleopatra, surrendered the city at discretion, and this event was followed by the surrender of the Egyptian fleet. The eyes of Antony were at length opened. He plainly saw that he was betrayed. A report which Cleopatra caused to be spread, that she had put an end to her life, hastened the fate of her injured lover, who died by his own hand; and Cleopatra, soon after, discovering that all arts were lost upon Octavius, who had determined to treat her as a captive, now executed in reality what she had before feigned, and put herself to death by the poison of an asp.

Octavius returned to Italy, sole master of the Roman Empire. He owed his elevation to no manly virtue or heroism of character. A concurrence of happy circumstances, the adoption of the great Julius, the weakness of Lepidus, the folly and infatuation of Antony, the treachery of Cleopatra, and, above all, his own address and artifice, were the instruments of his fortune.

At this remarkable period, the end of the Commonwealth of Rome, it may be well to suspend for a while our historical narrative, and interpose some brief observations on the general character of Roman education; the state of literature at this period; the predominant tastes and passions of this remarkable people; and the system of their military art.

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### CHAPTER III.

On the Genius and National Character of the Romans—System of Roman Education—Progress of Literature—The Drama—Historians—Poets.

IN the present chapter, we are to attend to those particular circumstances which appear most peculiarly to mark the genius, and to have formed the national character of the Romans.

A virtuous but rigid severity of manners was the characteristic of the Romans under their kings, and during the first ages of the republic. The private life of the citizens was frugal, temperate, and laborious, and it reflected its influence on their public charac-

ter. The children imbibed from their infancy the highest veneration for their parents, who, from the extent of the paternal power among the Romans, had an unlimited authority over their wives, their offspring, and their slaves. It is far from natural to the human mind that the possession of power and authority should form a tyrannical disposition. Where that authority, indeed, has been usurped by violence, its possessor may, perhaps, be tempted to maintain it by tyranny; but where it is either a right dictated by nature, or the easy effect of circumstances and situation, the very consciousness of authority is apt to inspire a beneficence and humanity in the manner of exercising it. Thus we find the ancient Romans, although absolute sovereigns in their families, with the *jus vitæ et necis*, the right of life and death over their children, and their slaves, were yet excellent husbands, kind and affectionate parents, humane and indulgent masters. Nor was it until luxury had corrupted the virtuous simplicity of the ancient manners, that this paternal authority, degenerating into tyrannical abuses, required to be abridged in its power, and restrained in its exercise by the enactment of laws.

By an apparent contradiction, so long as the paternal authority was absolute, the slaves and children were happy: when it became weakened and abridged, then it was that its terrors were, from the excessive corruption of manners, most severely felt. Even, however, under the first emperors, the *Patria Potestas* remained in its full force, and the custom of the *patres-familias* sitting at meals with their slaves and children, showed that there still remained some venerable traces of that ancient and virtuous simplicity.\*

Plutarch, in his comparison between Numa and Lycurgus, has bestowed a severe censure on the Roman lawgiver, for his neglecting to establish a system, or to institute any fixed rules for the education of the Roman youth. But the truth is, that although the laws prescribed no such system, or general plan of discipline, like those of Sparta, yet there never existed a people who bestowed more attention on the education of their youth. In the dialogue, *De Oratoribus*,† attributed by some authors to Tacitus, by others to Quintilian, there is a fine passage which shows in a remarkable manner that extreme care bestowed, even in the earliest infancy, to form the manners and disposition of the Roman children. From this passage we learn, that in the earlier ages of the Roman commonwealth, such was that anxious care bestowed on their children by the Roman matrons,—such that jealousy of their receiving any of their earliest impressions from slaves or domestics,—that they

\* "O noctes cœnæque Deum, quibus ipse, meique  
Ante Larem proprium vescor, vernasque procaces  
Pasco libatis dapibus prout cuique libido est."

HORACE.

† *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, cap. xxviii. "Jampridem suus cuique filius," &c

not only educated their own children, but accounted it an honorable employment to superintend and assist in educating the children of their relations.

Nor was this task of the mother confined only to the years of infancy and boyhood: it extended its influence to the more advanced periods of youth. At a much later period of the Roman history, we are informed by Tacitus, in his *Life of Agricola*, that this remarkable man had begun in his youth to pursue too ardently the study of philosophy, but that he was checked by the prudent remonstrances of his mother.\*

To inspire that severe and rigid *virtue* which can alone support a democratic form of government, and to inculcate that exclusive love of our country, before which, in their early ages, every private or personal feeling was constrained to bow, was the first and most sacred duty of these noble matrons. The circumstances in which the commonwealth was situated in its earlier ages made this absolutely necessary. It possessed none of those artificial modes of defence so generally employed by the modern nations. The improvements of modern warfare, which substitute skill so often in the place of valor,—the fortifications of our modern cities, which render them, in some measure, independent of the personal exertions of those who defend them,—had not been introduced amongst this virtuous people. Those refinements, also, in the arts and manufactures which exchange the little enjoyments of private comfort for the higher feelings of public happiness, and even that progress in the sciences, which, however excellent in its general consequences, encourages certainly a spirit of exclusion most uncongenial to public exertion,—all these were either unknown or despised in the severer ages of the Roman republic.

Next to this care of the mother, or the female tutor, in instilling the rigid principle of patriotic virtue, a very remarkable degree of attention appears to have been bestowed by the Romans in accustoming their children to correctness of language and purity of expression. Cicero informs us that the Gracchi were educated *non tam in gremio quam in sermone matris*. And in speaking of Curio, who was one of the best orators of his time, he adds, that without possessing the rules of his art, and without any knowledge of the laws, he had attained to eminence † merely from the elegance and purity of his diction.

This attention to the language of children may appear, in these modern days, an absurd and useless refinement. Among the Romans it was not thought so. They were well aware how much

\* "Memoria teneo solitum ipsum narrare, se in prima juventâ studium philosophiæ ac juris ultra quam concessum Romano ac Senatori haussisse, ni prudentia matris incensum ac flagrantem animum coercuisset." — *Tacitus Agric. Vit.*, c. iv.

† In *Libro de Claris Oratoribus*. Al. edit., folio, vol. ii. p. 257.

the man is influenced by the earliest impressions and habits of infancy. They suspected, and not without just grounds, that they who became familiar with the language and expressions of their slaves, were likely to be initiated also in their vices, and to become reconciled to their ideas of servility and dependence. That *urbanity* upon which this people so much prided themselves in the more advanced periods of the commonwealth, was nothing else than a certain manly elegance which distinguished the Roman citizens from those nations whom they accounted barbarous. This elegance was particularly evinced in their speech and gestures, and it was one of their first objects to form their youth with those qualities in which they most piqued themselves in excelling. To accustom a child to speak in a manly manner is, in fact, no unlikely method of teaching him to act so.\* But this attention to the language of their youth had another source among the Romans. It was by the art of eloquence, by the power which that talent gave them over the minds of the people, and the influence which it possessed in the open deliberations of the popular assemblies, that the young Romans could alone rise to eminence, to office, and to dignity. History is full of examples of men who, by their excellence in this talent alone, had risen from the lowest condition amongst the plebeians, to the highest ranks in the state. To instil, therefore, at an early age, the elements of elocution, and to habituate the youth to those studies properly called *forensic*, was one great object of the Roman education. As an exercise of memory, the children were taught to repeat the laws of the XII Tables, and they were accustomed very early to plead fictitious causes. Plutarch tells us, in his life of the younger Cato, that, among the sports or plays of the Roman children, one was that of pleading causes before a mock tribunal, and accusing and defending a criminal in all the accustomed forms of judicial procedure.

The exercises of the body were likewise particularly attended to. Wrestling, running, boxing, swimming, using the bow and javelin, managing the horse, and, in short, whatever might harden the body and increase its strength and activity, were all reckoned necessary parts of education. Most of these warlike exercises were practised daily in the Campus Martius. The elder Cato not only instructed his son in grammar, and in the study of the law, but taught him also all these athletic accomplishments.

At the age of seventeen, which was the period when the young Roman assumed the *toga virilis*, the youth was committed by his father to the care of one of the masters or public professors of rhetoric, whom he attended constantly to the forum, and there employed himself in taking notes from the speakers, of whose harangues he afterwards gave an account to his preceptor.

\* "Talis hominibus oratio qualis vita." Seneca Epist. 114

It must not appear extraordinary that this mode of education should have been common to all the young patricians, whether their inclination led them to the camp or to the bar; for as every citizen of Rome was a branch of its legislative system, the profession of arms became no apology for the want of that ability of maintaining the rights of the state in the assemblies of the people, which was equally necessary with the capacity of defending them in the field. If a public officer was accused, it was reckoned shameful if he could not himself give an account of his conduct, and plead his own cause. A senator who could not support his opinion by the ingenuity of argument or force of eloquence, was an object of contempt to the people. "Parum fuit in senatu breviter censere, nisi qui ingenio et eloquentia sententiam suam teneretur; disertum haberi, pulchrum et gloriosum, sed contra mutum et elinguem videri deforme habebatur." But it was not alone the cultivation of eloquence which was esteemed a necessary part of education. It was reckoned dishonorable for any person of the patrician rank not to have thoroughly studied the laws and the constitution of his country. In one of the laws of the Roman pandects, an anecdote is recorded of Sulpitius, a gentleman of the patrician order, who had occasion to resort for advice to Quintus Mucius Scævola, then the most eminent lawyer in Rome. Though otherwise an accomplished orator, Sulpitius had neglected the study of the law, and, from ignorance of the technical terms, he did not comprehend the meaning of Scævola's opinion; upon which he received from the lawyer this memorable reproof, "that it was a shame for a patrician, a nobleman, and an orator, to be ignorant of that law in which he was so particularly concerned." Sulpitius felt the reproach, and applied himself to the study of jurisprudence, in which he became so eminent as, in Cicero's opinion, to excel Scævola himself.\*

To be an accomplished gentleman, therefore, it was necessary among the Romans to be an accomplished lawyer and orator; and what were the requisites for attaining eminence in those departments, we may learn from the writings of Cicero, Quintilian, and the younger Pliny. The pains those illustrious men bestowed to arrive at that excellence which distinguished them, appear almost incredible to those bred up in the less laborious efforts of modern literature. Pliny, in speaking of his public orations, which he always committed to writing, describes thus the labor of their revision:—"Nullum emendandi genus omitto; ac primum quæ scripsi mecum ipse pertracto; deinde duobus aut tribus lego, mox aliis trado adnotanda, notasque eorum si dubito cum uno rursus aut altero penso; novissimè pluribus recito; ac si quid mihi credis acerrime emendo; cogito quam sit magnum dare aliquid in manus

\* Digest. lib. i. tit. ii. sec. 43.

hominum, nec persuadere mihi possum non et cum multis et sæpe tractandum quod placere et semper et omnibus cupias.\*

Such were the pains bestowed by Pliny to attain the character of an accomplished writer,—a degree of industry, however, for which he does not seem to claim any extraordinary merit as for a labor uncommon amongst the authors of his time. On the contrary, the same author, speaking of the studies of his uncle the elder Pliny, modestly styles himself an indolent man, when compared to that prodigy of industry and application, with the manner of whose singular life we shall become more intimately acquainted when treating of the state of *philosophy* among the Romans.

When an attention to rhetoric and the art of composition was thus once introduced, the progress of general literature in the Roman republic was singularly rapid; and it may here be made an object of pleasing as well as of useful investigation, to attempt a brief delineation of the progress of literature amongst this remarkable people, from its earliest stages to its highest advancement, shortly remarking, as we proceed, the peculiar genius and character of the principal authors who have become distinguished under its different eras. Superficial, certainly, and imperfect every account of this kind must be, from that brevity which the nature of our plan demands.

The poetical spirit appears almost coeval with the very rudest condition of society. Other branches of human knowledge which have arisen in the gradual progress of improvement, have owed their origin to the wandering and adventurous spirit of the species, or to the wants and sufferings of mankind; but poetry seems to have been created with man, and is contemporaneous with his language; and what is more remarkable, it is in this early age that poetry often assumes its highest character, and arrives at its greatest perfection.

*Language*, in the early periods of every nation, is in a very rude condition, and it is in this imperfection and apparent barrenness of the language that we shall find one cause for the lofty tone assumed by the poetry. The words are few but they are invariably expressive. They are descriptive of the strongest passions, of the deepest feelings of the human heart—of patriotism and valor, of grief and joy, of triumph and despair, of love and hatred;—of such feelings as are to be found amongst every uncultivated people—when nature is certainly comparatively in a savage state; but

\* I neglect no possible mode of correction and emendation; and in the first place, after I have written an oration, I carefully revise it by myself; I then read it over to two or three friends; afterwards I submit it to others for their annotations, and if I doubt the justice of their criticisms, I canvass them with each; lastly, I recite the oration to a large assembly of my friends; and believe, even after this, I carefully reconsider and revise it. I hold it no light matter to come before the public; nor can I persuade myself that less pains are requisite on the part of an orator who aims at general and lasting approbation."

when none of those fantastic and artificial ideas, and therefore none of those low and insipid expressions have been introduced, which invariably accompany the process of luxury and refinement. In the ancient languages of a rude people we find no redundancy of expletives, no unnecessary words, no unmeaning synonymes; because language is formed to describe what passes in the minds, or before the eyes of those who use it. Even in their common discourse, and still more in their war-songs, or their solemn harangues, the speakers were actually compelled to be nervous, concise, and frequently metaphorical. The high-flown and figurative style must have then become as much a matter of necessity, owing to the barrenness of the language, as the effect of taste or imagination. When man first found himself in society, the Almighty, in the language which he created for him, did not furnish him with what was calculated to delineate the minuter feelings of the heart, or the more detailed and delicate scenery of nature; but with that broad and bolder pencil which could describe those conflicting passions which then tore his mind, or those awful solitudes with which he was then surrounded.

In the infancy of any people, and consequently in the infancy of their language, we must also recollect that there are none of those arbitrary rules of composition, which the progress of literature has introduced. The effect of these is often to trammel the flights of genius, and often to shelter the efforts of mediocrity. Those in the community of moderate genius, or comparatively lower talents, are encouraged to intrude their minor efforts into notice, whilst the retired spirits, whose genius and talents fit them for a higher course, will not stoop to such unequal competition.

There is yet one other cause of the excellence of early poetry, which, before proceeding to that of the Romans, we may very briefly notice: I mean that which is generally to be found in the character and habits of the poet himself, and in the circumstance of their poems having been addressed to the whole body of the people. A moment's reflection will show that these two circumstances must, in a great measure, form the style of the national poetry, and, of course, regulate the tone of the national taste.

In reading the Agamemnon of Æschylus, who is there that will not discover that he is perusing the poetry of a warrior, who felt in the memory of the battles in which he has fought, the full force of his own energetic descriptions, who lived in the midst of the scenery which he paints from, and who addressed himself not to any particular set of men who regulated the public taste, not to the senate, to the academy, or to the camp alone, but directed his efforts to the great body of the Athenian people, from whose feelings, and whose taste, he looked for his proudest and most lasting applause. When we dwell with enthusiasm on the sublimity

of the Scandinavian sages, or the eloquence of the North American warriors, we are tracing the very same effects produced by the same causes above enumerated. The poets lived and wrote in the midst of that sublime scenery from which they drew their noblest pictures: they were themselves free, and they felt deeply the passions which agitate the mind in the ruder periods of society, and they addressed their equals in the body of the people, who knew well how to distinguish their errors, and appreciate their success.

The history of this delightful art, in ancient as well as in more modern times, will, as we trace its future progress, be found to exemplify in a striking manner the truth of these remarks. Among all nations, as has been said, the first dawning of the literary spirit is shown in poetical composition. The Roman warrior, like the Indian, or the Gothic, had his war-songs, which celebrated his sagacity in council and his triumphs in the field. But none of these relics of the first Roman poetry have reached our days. After the establishment of a closer political union, and the introduction of a national religion, if the nation subsists, as in the early ages of Rome, by agriculture, their poetry assumes a new character. The verses in praise of the gods, whom they believed to preside over the year, and to regulate the fruitfulness of the seasons, and the rude but joyful songs which commemorated the close of the harvest, were examples of this second style. These last are particularly mentioned by Livy under the name of the *Versus Fescennini*, which were sung alternately by the laborers and which were composed in a strain of rude and mirthful poetry, but not unsparingly tinged with ribaldry and licentiousness.

About the 390th year of Rome, the city had been reduced to extreme distress by a pestilence, and an uncommon method was adopted to appease the wrath of the gods, in sending into Etruria for drolls or stage-dancers. The dances of these Etrurians, according to Livy, were not ungraceful, and the Roman youth readily learned to imitate their performances, adding to them their own fescennine ballads, which they recited to the sound of music with appropriate gestures. Here evidently was the first rise of dramatic performances amongst the Romans; but, as yet, all was rude and imperfect, and they were altogether ignorant of the regular structure of a dramatic composition. This they acquired the first idea of from the Greeks. Euripides and Sophocles had flourished nearly 160 years, and Menander above 50 years, before this period. The dramatic poem was, at this time, in the highest celebrity in Greece, and was at length, about the year of Rome 514, introduced into that commonwealth by Livius Andronicus, a Greek slave.

To Livius Andronicus, whose compositions, in the judgment of Cicero, did not merit a second perusal, succeeded Nævius and

Ennius.\* Nævius, probably, only imitated and improved upon the rude compositions of Andronicus; but *Ennius* was the first who, as Lucretius tells us, deserved a lasting crown from the Muses:—

“———Ennius qui primus amæno  
Detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam.” †

The fragments of Ennius which have come down to our time illustrate strongly the observations which we have above made on the character of the early poetical productions of most rude nations. His poetry is bold and energetic; his sentiments often noble: his diction careless but vigorous; his versification rude and imperfect; he trusted to his genius for his future fame, and left the niceties of art and versification to his more polished descendants. One of these has finely drawn his character in a single line:—

“Ennius ingenio maximus, arte rudis.”  
*Ovid. Trist. book ii. v. 452.*

From the time of Ennius, dramatic poetry made a rapid advancement; for the intercourse with Greece, after the Punic wars, had an almost immediate effect in promoting the literary spirit, which first evinced itself in the improvement of the drama.

“Post Punica bella quietus querere cepit,  
Quid Sophocles et Thespis et Æschylus utile ferrent.”

Then arose *Plautus*, the first who may be said to have proposed to himself nature as his model, but nature in so low and coarse an aspect as to make us feel often more disgusted than delighted with the vulgar fidelity of his pictures. It is, indeed, something like a profanation of the name of nature, to believe that those authors who have studied in the very lowest school of vice and

\* Ennius was a genius of very uncommon powers from nature, and these he had improved by an intimate acquaintance with Greek literature. He composed, in hexameter verse, the *Annals of the Punic War*; a poem on *Scipio*; a book of *Epigrams or Inscriptions*: and above forty dramatic pieces in *Iambic verse*; of all these, nothing but a few fragments remain. Like most original geniuses, he was abundantly conscious of his own merits, as appears from the inscription he composed for a statue of himself:—

“Aspice O cives senis Ennii imaginis formam.  
Hic vestrum panxit maxima facta patrum.  
Nemo me lacrimis decoret, neque funera fletu.  
Faxit. cur? volito vivu per ora virum.”

The following picturesque description of the dead of night, by Ennius, is the production of a sublime imagination:—

“Mundus cæli vastus constitit silentio.  
Ex Neptunus sævus undis asperis pausam detit  
Sol equis iter repressit unguis volantibus;  
Consistere amnes perennès, arbores vento vacant.”

There are many beautiful single lines to be found scattered amongst the fragments which have reached our time, but few perfect passages.

† “Ennius, who robbed the Heliconian fount  
Of the first bays to deck his honored front.”