

profligacy, who have copied human manners in their most degraded condition, have had nature for their model. These observations are particularly applicable to the dramatic works of Plautus, who has described nature not as she really was, but as transfigured by the vice and impurity of man. The general Latinity of Plautus is nervous and concise. It is pure, it is sometimes, perhaps, elegant, when we understand purity in opposition to the being florid or figurative; but it is too crowded with Græcisms, and the wit is too coarse and licentious, not to reflect somewhat of the same character on the style.

It is unfortunate that we have no remains of the dramatic works of Cæcilius, an author who improved so highly on the comedy of Plautus, that Cicero declares him perhaps the best of the comic writers.

Terence made his first appearance when Cæcilius was at the height of his reputation. It is said that, when he offered his first play to the Ædiles, they sent him with it to Cæcilius for his judgment of the piece. Cæcilius was then at supper; and as the young bard was very meanly dressed, he was bid to sit behind on a low stool, and to read his composition. Scarcely, however, had he read a few sentences, when Cæcilius desired him to approach, and placed him at the table next to himself. His reputation arose at once to such a height, that his "Eunuchus," on its first appearance, was publicly performed twice each day.*

There is in the comedy of Terence a tone of truth and nature which distinguishes all its parts. It is discernible in the general simplicity of the plot, in the feelings and sentiments of his characters, in the perfect purity and familiar elegance of his language. But what Terence wanted was that strong command of ludicrous imagery, that *vis comica*, or comic energy, which is frequently to be traced in Plautus.

There were four different species of comedy among the Romans:—the *Comædia Togata*, or *Prætextata*; the *Comædia Tabernaria*; the *Atellanæ*; and the *Mimi*. The *Togata* or *Prætextata* admitted serious personages, and was probably of the nature of the modern sentimental comedy. The comedies of Terence may probably be numbered in this class. The *Comædia Tabernaria* was a representation of ordinary life, and had nothing of dignity in its composition, though it did not descend to buffoonery. The *Comædiæ Atellanæ* were pieces which were not committed to writing. The actors had the outlines of the comedy prescribed to them, and the subject of the different scenes; but they filled

* Terence was contemporary with Scipio and Lælius, and is said to have owed a great deal to their conversation and critical advice. Nay, Cicero tells us that it was rumored that some of these comedies which pass under the name of Terence were actually written by Scipio and Lælius, particularly the *Heautontimoumenos*, and the *Adelphi*.

up the dialogue from their own imaginations, in the same manner as in the pieces of Italian comedy performed at Paris in the last century. This species of representation, as it required more true genius in the actor than any other department of dramatic performance, was appropriated to the higher classes of the Roman youth, who would not permit the ordinary comedians to attempt it.

The *Mimi* have been particularly described in an earlier part of this work, in treating of the state of the dramatic art amongst the Greeks. They consisted of pieces of comedy of the very lowest species, more properly farces or entertainments of buffoonery, from which all dignity, and not unfrequently all decorum was banished; yet as the desire of variety in the compositions of art will excite to new experiments, we find the Roman actors would, in the middle of the performance of a *mimus*, surprise and delight their audience by some unexpected stroke of the pathetic. The Roman tragedy had arrived, we are informed by some authors, at a very high pitch of excellence, more particularly in the works of Attius and Pacuvius. Of these, unfortunately, not a vestige has been preserved, and all of this species of poetry which have reached our time, are some very indifferent tragedies published under the name of Seneca.

We see from this short review of the origin of literature amongst the Romans, that its earliest efforts were exclusively confined to dramatic composition.* The Romans, in a word, borrowed their literature from Greece, and first attempted the species of literature then most popular in Greece; if, indeed, their Plautus and Terence, and the rest, did more than translate or adapt the then most popular pieces of the Greek stage. It was not until the golden age of Augustus, that, by the revolutions which then took place in the public taste, the other high departments of literature were introduced at Rome. It has been observed by Paterculus, that

* Some of the Roman actors were men of the most respectable character. *Æsopus* was the Garrick of Rome, and enjoyed, like him, the countenance and friendship of the most respectable men of his country. He excelled in tragedy, and was in this department the most celebrated actor that had ever appeared on the Roman stage. Cicero experienced the advantages of his friendship and talents, during his exile; for *Æsopus* being engaged in a part wherein there were several passages that might be applied to Cicero's misfortunes, this excellent tragedian pronounced them with so peculiar and affecting an emphasis that the whole audience immediately took up the allusion, and it had a better effect, as Cicero himself acknowledges, than any thing his own elocution could have expressed for the same purpose. But it is not in this instance alone that Cicero was obliged to *Æsopus*, as it was by the advantage of his precepts and example that he laid the foundation of his oratorical fame, and improved himself in the art of elocution. The high value which the Romans set upon the talents of this pathetic actor appears by the immense estate which he acquired in his profession: he died worth nearly 200,000*l.* He left a son behind him, whose remarkable extravagance is recorded by Horace, *Sat.* 3. b. ii. v. 239.

the era of the perfection of Roman literature was the age of Cicero, but this he extends to take in all those authors of the preceding age whom Cicero might have seen, and all the succeeding period who might have seen him. But the era of the highest literary splendor amongst the Romans was, in truth, not of such long duration. It continued above a century. We shall take a brief review of the most celebrated both of the prose and poetic writers, beginning with the former.

Pliny, Cicero, and Quintilian have all spoken in very high terms of the writings of the elder Cato. His principal works were historical, but of these nothing remains. Many of his fragments, however, have come down to us, and of these the most entire are some parts of his treatise *De Re Rusticâ*, in which he was imitated by Varro, one of the earliest of the good writers amongst the Romans.

The works of Varro were extremely voluminous. They consisted of many treatises on subjects of morals, politics, and natural history; of these, only his books *De Re Rusticâ* have reached the present time, and these are chiefly valuable, not for any particular merit attaching either to the style or to the composition, but for their curious and accurate details on the subject of Roman agriculture.*

Amongst the most eminent prose writers, Sallust, in point of time, comes next to Varro. As to the matter of his writings, they have been, both by his own age and by the judgment of the present day, declared excellent. There is to be discerned in them a depth of judgment, a shrewdness of remark resulting from his accurate knowledge of human nature, and an admirable talent for the delineation of character, which are all qualifications eminently requisite in a good historian. But in regard to the manner adopted in his works, it is impossible to speak favorably. In his anxiety to imitate the energetic brevity of Thucydides, he has fallen into an overstrained conciseness of expression, an affectation of uncommon idioms, and a studied adoption of antiquated phraseology, which render his style frequently obscure, and always unnatural. This is the more unpardonable, as he lived in those times in which the Roman language was in its highest purity. All imitations in style are objectionable, and indicate a servility and littleness of mind rarely found united to real talent. But to imitate in one language the peculiar idiom or particular style of any favorite author who writes in another, is of all imitations the most unnatural, and the least likely to be attended with success.

Infinitely superior to the manner of writing which we find in

* Cicero, however, speaks highly of the other works of Varro. "Tu ætatem patriæ, tu descriptiones temporum, tu sacrorum jura, tu sacerdotam, tu domesticam, tu bellicam disciplinam, tu sedem regionum, locorum, tu omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum, nomina, genera, officia, causas aperuisti."

Sallust, is that of Cæsar. Endowed by nature with what we may truly term genius, this extraordinary man was destined to excel in every thing to which he turned the powers of his mind. Unrivalled in military enterprise, of first rate talents as a public speaker, engrossed incessantly in those various and agitating occupations which attend the life of an active general and intriguing politician, he still found time to compose those celebrated Commentaries, which, in their own style as military annals, have never been excelled. To require in the writings of Cæsar those qualifications which we look for in the graver productions of a professed historian, would be to mistake entirely the character of the work. Composed in the midst of the bustle of a camp, and written probably in those few hurried hours which fill up the intervals occurring in military operations, they aim at no higher merit than that of being a faithful delineation of his campaigns in Gaul. As such, in that interest which is created by the talents and success of their author, as well as in perspicuity of narration and elegance and purity of style, they have ever remained unrivalled.

Different from any of the prose writers above spoken of, but combining more excellent virtues than are to be found in them all, was Titus Livius, the father, as he has been called, of Roman history. Of one hundred and forty books which he had completed, only thirty-five have reached our time. There is certainly to be found in this writer a gravity, it might almost be called a majesty, throughout his narration—a sagacity in his remarks, although not frequently intruded—and a finished eloquence in the speeches not unsparingly scattered through his history, which countenance, in a great degree, those high eulogiums which Quintilian, and in a later age Casaubon, have pronounced on him. There is not, indeed, to be found amongst the Greeks any historian, who, with equal political judgment, perspicuity of arrangement, and a happy selection of the most important facts, possesses so wonderful an eloquence of expression.*

In the decline of Roman literature, we find many historians—but amongst these, few of great character: yet Tacitus alone would suffice to make the age he belonged to, illustrious in literature. This great writer, however, (although his merits as an historian have been universally acknowledged,) has some prominent

* May, our old English poet, in his tragedy of Agrippina, has the following beautiful eulogium of historical composition, which cannot be applied to any author with more propriety than to Livy.

"His style is full and princely,
Stately and absolute beyond what'er
These eyes have seen; and Rome, whose majesty
Is there described, in after times shall owe
For her memorial to that learned pen
More than to all those fading monuments
Built with the riches of the spoiled world."

faults. In the narrative of those great events with which his history is occupied, he ascribes too much to the operation of deep and artful schemes of policy. His ingenious and intriguing mind is ever restlessly searching in the regions of conjecture for some dark or mysterious motive of conduct, ascribing too little to the influence of more simple and apparent causes, and eager to grasp at every shadow of a reason, provided it be sufficiently uncommon or unnatural. Too often mere probabilities are stated as demonstratively certain, and bare conjectures assume the tone of decided truths. In addition to this fault, which resulted from a desire of being more than commonly acute, in accounting for even the most trifling events, there is in Tacitus an unnecessary brevity, and mysteriousness of style, which reminds us sometimes of the same affectation in Sallust. It is by no means to be wondered at that an author whose train of thought is so uncommon, and whose language is generally so concise, should not unfrequently require a considerable effort to be understood at all. And it would be well if all authors would recollect that they are writing for posterity, as well as for their own age; that their works, if intrinsically valuable, will be read when time shall have deprived future nations of that deep and critical knowledge of the language in which they were written which belongs to their contemporaries; and, therefore, that the most simple and unambiguous style will ever be the most lasting. Still, however, Tacitus is, in many respects, an unrivalled historian, and it is the effect even of that fault above mentioned, that he has penetrated with more acuteness into the secret springs of human policy, and developed with more sagacity the causes of great events than most others.

Let us now attend to the character and merits of the most celebrated of the Roman poets.

In addition to the dramatists whom we have already adverted to, the only poets who wrote during the period of the commonwealth were Lucretius and Tibullus. A philosophic poem is, of all literary productions, the least likely to be successful; and Lucretius, so far as philosophy is concerned, is ponderous and verbose in his expression, perplexed in his meaning, rugged in his versification. He had in him, however, the materials of a true poet; and not unfrequently, where he has shaken himself loose of his unfortunate subject, he rises into passages of uncommon brilliancy. But the misfortune is, that that luxuriance of imagination which is the very soul of poetry, appears folly and absurdity when applied to philosophy. The Cardinal de Polignac, in his *Anti-Lucretius*; Buchanan in his poem *De Sphæra*; and Darwin, in his various botanical, mechanical, and philosophic rhapsodies, have all strongly corroborated the truth of this observation. All of them—and in no common degree the first—have scattered throughout the rugged materials of their works the real gems of poetry; all of them evince what they could have been by splendid passages; but

all of them have been tied down, by the nature of their subject, to a species of dry ratiocination, or of tedious particularity, which is either too dull to be convincing, or too detailed to be poetical. Lucretius himself, perhaps, owes his IMMORTALITY to some two or three hundred glorious lines, altogether parenthetical as regards his main design.

Catullus was the contemporary of Lucretius. The characteristics of his poetry, which consisted of odes, epigrams, and idylliums, (and which was entirely formed on the model of the Greek school,) appear to be a learned purity of diction, a certain elegance and suavity in his sentences, a virulent and biting strain of satire, and, in his amatory pieces, a voluptuous and highly colored imagery, which too often degenerates into broad licentiousness.

In the succeeding age of Augustus, the poetic genius of the Romans attained to the pitch of its highest elevation. Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Tibullus, were all contemporaries; and it may be safely asserted that these poets, in their several departments, were never equalled in any one of the succeeding ages of the empire.

To offer here a minute criticism upon the poetry of Virgil would be both unnecessary and impertinent. Every one, on this head, has read, thought, and felt for himself. Rising into the sublime in many places where his subject naturally demands it; tender and pathetic in others, where the situation of his characters calls necessarily for these touches; luxuriant yet terse in his descriptions of scenery; grave, moral, and eloquent in his sentiments, and at the same time combining and regulating all these uncommon excellences by the utmost purity and correctness of taste, it was impossible but that the poet, who united in himself such various and uncommon powers, should have been the admiration of his own, and the model to succeeding, ages.

Horace, the friend and contemporary of Virgil, is to be considered in three different lights,—as a lyric poet, a satirist, and a critic. In all he is excellent. In his odes, he has greater *variety* than any of his Greek predecessors appear to have attained; and he has probably equalled the most of them in their several departments. The great charm, however, is in the varied turn of his expressions, that *curiosa felicitas* (to use a term of Petronius) which no other lyric poet has ever reached. His satires, on the other hand, possess a gentlemanlike slyness and obliquity of censure which distinguish them *toto cælo* from the keen and cutting sarcasm of Juvenal.*

* To form a just estimate of the comparative merits of Juvenal and Horace as satirists, we have only to compare those satires where the two poets profess to treat the same topics, as the eighth of Juvenal with the sixth of the 1st Book of Horace, where the subject is a discussion on true nobility, or the tenth of Juvenal with the first of the 1st Book of Horace.

As a critic, the rules which Horace has given are almost entirely borrowed from Aristotle; but he has arranged them with that acute and admirable judgment, and illustrated them with that aptitude of imagery which are conspicuous in the rest of his poetical compositions.

Ovid is the next and last of that constellation of poets which formed the honor of the Augustan age. In what we term *genius*, he is decidedly inferior both to Virgil and Horace. He is deficient in grandeur of conception, in simplicity of expression, and in that high-wrought and ardent imagination which is the accompaniment of the more lofty kinds of genius. But if he wants all this, he possesses still many excellences. His invention is astonishing: in variety of story, in ingenuity of connection, in the profusion and facility of his versification, he cannot be surpassed. He is, in these respects, a kind of Ariosto amongst the ancients. But even these great qualities have led him into errors. He is generally too diffuse to be grand or forcible—too particular, too much a lover of the detail of description, ever to reach the sublime. He is, in the words of Quintilian, *nimum amator sui ingenii*—too fond of his own ingenuity. His learning becomes too often tedious, his narration prolix, his invention puerile. He possesses, in short, more of those minor qualifications which are necessary to constitute a true poet than any of his contemporaries:—he can be tender, harmonious, pathetic, and sometimes eloquent;—but if he is ever great, it is only in a few insulated passages, which are scattered through his works. It is more, perhaps, the effect of chance or of imitation, than of that steady ray of genius which illuminates the nobler work of his friend and contemporary Virgil.

The elegies of Tibullus are elegant, but generally insipid. They never offend, but they seldom move; he is a pleasing, but not an original poet, and, owing to an extreme poverty of fancy, he is constantly pacing the same beaten track, *eodem pæne gyro concluditur*.

The last of the Roman poets whom we may call truly excellent in his own department is *Martial*. The sense which the ancients appear to have affixed to the term "epigram," appears to have been very different from its common acceptation in the present day. By epigram we generally understand some happy or amusing conceit, some sudden ebullition of wit, or humor, expressed in a short and sententious distich. According to the meaning of the ancients, however, there was no limitation as to these qualities. Any happy turn of thought, whether playful or serious, expressed in poetical language, was denominated an epigram. It is for this reason that, amongst the Anthologies of the Greeks, we meet with epigrams which are alternately written in a jocose or serious strain, and which, if they are often smart and humorous, are as frequently tender and pathetic. Such is in truth the real character of the Epigrams of Martial; and the execution of these, to whatever

class they belong, is for the most part peculiarly happy. Yet he has many faults. His ingenuity and quickness have often betrayed him into overstrained and artificial conceits. Conscious of a peculiar talent in discerning remote, though often ludicrous analogies, he is ever too anxious to display this. He plays too much upon the sense, and puns too frequently on the sound and meaning of his words; and he has that unpardonable fault, so common to the age in which he wrote, of introducing an obscenity and licentiousness into his verses, which, although it recommended them to that degraded people for whom he wrote, is fortunately too gross to produce any serious mischief, or to create any other feeling than that of disgust.

The first symptom of the corruption of writing is a species of false and inflated style, a luxuriance of ornament, and a fondness for quaint and pointed terms of expression. This was discernible even in Martial. When these succeed to, or rather usurp, the place of the chaste, manly, and simple mode of expression—of that style which attends more to the sense which it conveys, than to the terms or manner in which it is constructed, it is a certain indication of the decay of a just and genuine taste. Even in the end of the reign of Augustus, poetry seems to have been rather on the decline; and in the succeeding age, if we except the compositions of Martial and Juvenal, nature and simplicity had almost entirely given place to bombast and affectation. Although in Lucan we find some scattered examples of genuine poetic imagery, and in Persius several happy strokes of keen and animated satire, yet they hardly repay the trouble of wading through the unnatural fustian of the one, or the affected obscurity of the other—who, however, we should remember, wrote the pieces which remain to us in early youth.

CHAPTER IV.

Roman Philosophy—Public and Private Manners.

IN the present chapter, I shall consider, in the first place, the state of philosophy, amongst the Romans, and afterwards proceed to the subject of their public and private manners. In the early ages of the republic, the Romans, occupied in continual wars with the states of Italy, or, in the short intervals of respite from these,