

A History of LATIN LITERATURE

BY

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P R E F A C E

IN writing this book I have aimed at tracing the development of Latin Literature, and at setting forth the influences which determined the character of its successive phases. Even more have I desired to give an idea of the personalities and the productions of the great Latin writers, for these are the fruits of the tree, the growth of which it has been my purpose to indicate.

The book is intended for the general reader, and therefore I have dwelt on the broader aspects of the subject more than on details and points of controversy, while for purposes of illustration I have rather sought than shunned famous and familiar passages. For the same reason, and in accordance with the practice followed in this series, all quotations have been given in English. In the case of the great poets, this is a method which has called for some hardihood, and in a few cases I have availed myself of the help of other translators; but for the most part the verse translations are my own.

The question as to when Latin Literature came to an end, may be answered in more ways than one. But it may be said that with Rutilius Namatianus Latin writing

ceased to be national, and that with Boethius it ceased to be literary. These two circumstances have suggested the approximate limits of the present survey. In the seventh century, the nadir, as Hallam calls it, of the human mind in Europe, the classical tradition became for the time extinct, and the revival of Latin scholarship discernible in the eleventh and twelfth centuries died away on the emergence of the modern European literatures without having produced any works of considerable importance. As for the renewed study of classical antiquity which was the main feature of the Renaissance, and the continued though partial use of the Latin language as a means of communication among the learned, which was one of its consequences, it is only by an extended interpretation of the term that they could be included in a history of Latin Literature.

In writing such a book as this I have throughout been conscious of my obligations to other works. Professor Wight Duff's *Literary History of Rome*, which was not published until about a quarter of this book was already in type, has helped me much, if only in directing my attention to points and sources of information which I might otherwise have overlooked. M. René Pichon's *Histoire de la Littérature Latine* is, like the present volume, a comprehensive sketch, and, apart from particular passages in which I have reproduced some of his criticism, I have derived much help from it in estimating the influences which affected the development of Latin Literature, while

in the final chapter, which is something in the nature of a *catalogue raisonné* of authors, I have profited by his guidance in the orientation and, to some extent, the characterisation of writers, mainly ecclesiastical, with whom I have only a limited acquaintance. In treating the Imperial period I have received many suggestions, in some cases as to the selection of passages for illustration, from Mr. H. E. Butler's *Post-Augustan Poets*. Besides these histories of Latin Literature, I should make particular reference to the volumes on *The Roman Poets of the Republic*, *Virgil*, and *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age*, by Professor Sellar; to studies on Latin poetry by M. Patin, M. Plessis, and Professor Tyrrell; to the chapters on Literature in Mommsen's *History of Rome*; and to both series of *Lectures and Essays* by Professor H. Nettleship.

To the above and other works references will be found in footnotes. I have not added a bibliography of Latin Literature because it must have included an impracticably long list of editions of Latin authors. The last remark reminds me of the obligations inevitably incurred by one who attempts a survey of Latin Literature to the commentators who have elucidated the Latin writers. No one can write of Lucretius or Catullus without being aware of his debt to Munro and Robinson Ellis. Without pursuing this subject further, I will not deny myself the pleasure of recognising in connection with Cicero how much I owe to the editions of Professor J. S. Reid, and those two other Cambridge scholars, Professor Wilkins and

Sir J. E. Sandys, who have made the study of Cicero's rhetorical works their especial province. I have to thank Mr. Frowde (Clarendon Press) and Mr. Dent respectively for permission to quote from metrical versions of *Horace's Odes* by Mr. W. E. Marris, and of the *Æneid* by Mr. Fairfax Taylor (Temple Classics Series).

Finally my warmest thanks are due to Professor Bury for his kindness in reading the proof-sheets and making suggestions. But since I allowed him very little time in which to do this I take all responsibility for errors and oversights.

EDITOR'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE vast progress made in all departments of literary scholarship, and the minuteness with which knowledge is now subdivided, threaten to leave the general reader bewildered at the diversity and bulk of what is presented to him. The exact historian of literature concentrates his attention on so narrow a field that he cannot be expected to appeal to a wide class; those who study what he writes are, or must in some measure grow to be, his fellow-specialists. But the more precisely each little area is surveyed in detail, the more necessary does it become for us to return at frequent intervals to an inspection of the general scheme of which each topographical study is but a fragment magnified. It has seemed that of late the minute treatment of a multitude of intellectual phenomena has a little tended to obscure the general movement of literature in each race or country. In a crowd of handbooks, each of high authority in itself, the general trend of influence or thread of evolution may be lost.

The absence of any collection of summaries of the literature of the world has led the Publisher and the Editor of the present series to believe that a succession of attractive volumes, dealing each with the history of

EDITOR'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION

literature in a single country, would be not less welcome than novel. The Editor has had the good fortune to interest in this project a number of scholars whose names guarantee a rare combination of exact knowledge with the power of graceful composition. He has the pleasure of being able to announce that this interest has taken a practical shape, and that already there is being prepared for the press a considerable series of volumes, most of them composed by men pre-eminently recognised for their competence in each special branch of the subject. If there are one or two names less generally familiar to the public than the rest, the Editor confidently predicts that the perusal of their volumes will more than justify his invitation to them to contribute. Great care will be taken to preserve uniformity of form and disposition, so as to make the volumes convenient for purposes of comparison, and so as to enable the literatures themselves to be studied in proper correlation.

In preparing these books, the first aim will be to make them exactly consistent with all the latest discoveries of fact; and the second, to ensure that they are agreeable to read. It is hoped that they will be accurate enough to be used in the class-room, and yet pleasant enough and picturesque enough to be studied by those who seek nothing from their books but enjoyment. An effort will be made to recall the history of literature from the company of sciences which have somewhat unduly borne her down—from philology, in particular, and from political history. These have their interesting and valuable influence upon literature, but she is independent of them, and is strong enough to be self-reliant.

EDITOR'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Hence, important as are the linguistic origins of each literature, and delightful as it may be to linger over the birth of language, little notice will here be taken of what are purely philological curiosities. We shall tread the ground rapidly until we reach the point where the infant language begins to be employed in saying something characteristic and eloquent. On the other hand, a great point will be made, it is hoped, by dwelling on the actions, the counter-influences, of literatures on one another in the course of their evolution, and by noting what appear to be the causes which have led to a revival here and to a decline there. In short, we shall neglect no indication of change or development in an adult literature, and our endeavour will be to make each volume a well-proportioned biography of the intellectual life of a race, treated as a single entity. Literature will be interpreted as the most perfect utterance of the ripest thought by the finest minds, and to the classics of each country rather than to its oddities and rather than to its obsolete features will particular attention be directed.

EDMUND GOSSE.

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A HISTORY OF LATIN LITERATURE

I

THE BEGINNINGS

FOR Horace * Roman literature began with Livius Andronicus—that is to say, it began with the imitation of the Greeks. But despite the fact that it is to a very great extent imitative few will deny that Roman literature is somehow different from Greek. And this difference, while it is to be accounted for partly by other causes—as, for example, that Roman literature is largely the expression of a different national character—seems also to be due to the fact that the two literatures sprang from different roots. The ancestors of the Romans belonged to the Indo-Germanic family ; but it cannot be proved that they belonged to that branch of it which was most nearly related to the Greeks. Philologists tell us that the similarities of language are not such as to show a closer connection between any two members of that family than between any other two. If there be two members of the family which show such important coincidences as to make it probable that they are more nearly connected than the rest, these are not the Italic and the Greek, but the Italic and the Celtic nationalities. It may be that, as

* *Ad nostrum tempus Livi scriptoris ab ævo.*—Hor. *Epp.* II. i. 62.

Mommsen thinks, there was a time when the ancestors of Greek and Roman dwelt together and developed the beginnings of a Græco-Roman civilisation in common; but what is practically certain is that this was not the case as regards literature. "Language knows no Græco-Roman period as far as literature is concerned." * The earliest word in Latin for a ceremonial utterance, *carmen*, is identical with the Sanskrit, *casman*, and has no counterpart in Greek. The characteristic Italian rhythm, of which there are examples in the Latin Oscan and Pelignian dialects, has more affinity to the Indian *çloka* and the Teutonic long line than to the Greek hexameter.† Fragments of verse in this metre exhibit two peculiarities, alliteration and assonance, of which the former is characteristic of early Teutonic poetry, but not of Greek, while the latter does not appear in Greek at all.

While the Saturnian metre did not survive the onset of Hellenic influences, the other two phenomena persisted. Alliteration appears as a literary device in the Latin poets, whether applied rudely, as by Ennius, or with consummate art, as by Virgil. Assonance‡ seen in primitive Italian maxims and in the song of the Arval brothers, and traceable in literary Latin of the best period,§ perhaps maintained an obscure existence in the pasquinades

* Nettleship, *Lectures and Essays*, first series, "The Earliest Latin Literature."

† Though F. Allen has shown that not improbably all three had a common origin (*Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung*, vol. xxiv. 556).

‡ E.g. *Térra péstem tenéto sálus hic manéto*, and *Lúe rúe*, in the *Carmen Arvale*.

§ E.g. Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 695. Virg. *E.* viii. 81. Cf. what F. Myers says of the latest development of Virgilian verse. *Classical Essays*, "Virgil," p. 139.

of the people, and finally emerged in the rhyming hymns of the fourth century after Christ.

For these reasons a consideration of the first beginnings of Roman literature, obscure as they are, is not to be omitted.

A priori there is force in the contention that a nation which, like the Italic, produced genuine poetry at a later stage in its development must have possessed the root of the matter in itself, and the indications of the rudiments of poetic art in Italy, if meagre, are undeniable. Not much, indeed, can be built on the early recognition of *Carmenta*, nymph of the springs and goddess of prophecy, whose predictions were transmitted by prophets (*carmentes*) in the form of a *carmen*, or solemn utterance. But besides *Carmenta* the Latins had also a muse of song, *Casmena*, and, despite what has been urged to the contrary,* there is no reason to doubt that *vates* is from a Latin root, nor to disbelieve the statement of Varro that it was applied of old to poets. And yet one may admit that the Latins had poets without crediting them with much in the way of poetical attainment. If, in the words of Mommsen, "the earliest chant in the view of the Romans was that which the leaves sang to themselves in the green solitude of the forest," and if "the whisperings and pipings of the favourable spirit (*Faunus*) were repeated to men by the singer (*Vates*)," it must be conceded that in the reputed Vaticinia which have been preserved there is little enough of the "beauty born of murmuring sound." They are either pronouncements of an oracular kind, like the directions for ensuring the capture of Veii, preserved in Livy (5, 16), or precepts

* Mommsen, *R. H. I.* 240 n.; Sellar, *Poets of the Roman Republic*, p. 33; but cf. Nettleship, *Lectures and Essays*, first series, p. 53.

of practical wisdom such as that attributed to the *vates* Marcius, "Be first to be silent, last to speak"—precepts not generically different from the maxims of Appius Claudius or of Cato. Earlier than these were charms * and lullabies † and some ancient maxims ‡ of husbandry. In point of fact it is unlikely that the poetical aptitudes of the early Latins were anything but insignificant in view of what we know of them in other ways. They were peasants, absorbed in agriculture or war, dwelling inland, and therefore wanting the stimulus to the imagination which comes of maritime enterprise. They were religious, and, like the Greeks, they personified abstractions: they conceived their gods as men and women; but, unlike them, they did not proceed beyond personification; there was with them no development of legend, and therefore no material for such poetry as that of the Greeks. The form assumed by their religion was a strong sense of reciprocal obligation between themselves and the deities they worshipped. The sentiment of this duty and the care to fulfil all its requirements, scrupulously was what the Romans called *religio*. The minute observance of all the rules of the worship seemed to them the only way to secure the goodwill and assistance of the gods. This being so, it is not surprising that the most important surviving remains of primitive Latin literature are religious litanies.

In March, when, according to the ancient calendar, the new year and the time for warlike operations began, the leaping priests of Mars (*Salii*) performed a war-dance, beating with short sticks on the sacred shields of the

* See p. 2, note †. † *Lálla, lálla, lálla, dórmí aut lácta.*

‡ *Hibérno púlvere vérho lúto
grándia fárra, Camílle, métes.*

god, and accompanying their dance with song. This song consisted of two parts, one addressed to the gods in general, the other consisting of verses addressed to separate deities. The first is lost ; of the latter a few lines remain. Quintilian says that the song of the Salii was hardly understood by the priests themselves; and Horace protests that the admiration professed for it in some quarters was dictated by jealousy of the writers of his own day. Yet these over-indulgent admirers of antiquity may have maintained that the couplet * preserved for us by Terentianus Maurus is not without archaic dignity. The meaning of the words is : " Lord of the light, whenever thou dost thunder, then all men that hear thee thunder tremble because of thee."

More important, because better preserved, is the song of the field brethren (*Fratres Arvales*). Yearly in May, when the crops were ripening, this primitive corporation of twelve members celebrated a three days' festival to *Dea Dia*, the goddess of the country. On the second day of this festival, their heads adorned with garlands made of ears of wheat, they performed a solemn dance in three-time (*tripodantes*), while they sang a song which has been preserved together with the minutes of a meeting of the order in 218 A.D. The six Saturnian lines of which it is composed consist mostly of brief ejaculations, thrice repeated, to the Lares for help, to Marmar or Mars for forbearance, interjected with directions addressed to the dancers individually or collectively.

It was not to be expected that these litanies should possess literary merit. Early stereotyped, religious feeling forbade alteration in their phrasing. Yet the practice of

* *Cume tonas Leucesie præ tet tremonti*
Quot ibi te virei audeisont tonare.

addressing the gods in solemn prayer must have tended to give language a definite and elevated form. The tone of primitive prayer among the Romans is, however, in consequence of their peculiar conception of the relations between gods and men, rather legal than devotional, as it is more devotional than poetical. Such, for instance, is the character of the prayers, perhaps more ancient than the *Carmen Arvale* itself, given by Cato in his work on husbandry. The head of the household, in the form prescribed for visiting the fields in the spring,* prays Mars to "keep off, defend, repel, all plagues seen or unseen," and he who uses the formula for clearing a wood † addresses the Genius of the place in the words "be you goddess, be you god," to avoid the possibility of calling on the wrong deity.

More promising of future development, because more spontaneous, as born of pleasure rather than of fear or calculation, were the beginnings of drama at Rome. In Italy, as in Greece, comedy arose out of country festivals. Horace describes how the stout countrymen of long ago signalled the conclusion of their labours by merry-making, and how, originating in this practice, "the Fescennine licence uttered rustic abuse in alternate lines." The epithet has been derived from *Fescennium*, a village in Etruria, but it is more probably connected with *fascinum*, ‡ the spell of the evil eye. Consistently with this explanation we find that Fescennine verses were uttered at weddings and at triumphs, times of rejoicing at which the influence of the evil eye was especially to be feared. However this may be, in the rustic abuse in alternate lines existed a germ of drama.

* Cato, *De re rustica*, 141.

† *Ibid.* 139.

‡ The adjective *Fescenninus* presupposes the substantive *fescennus*, and the word *fescennus* was used of those *qui fascinum depellere putabantur* (Paulus, § 86).