# THE ARISTOCRATIC EPOCH IN LATIN LITERATURE

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FREDERICK AUGUSTUS TODD,

*Professor of Latin in the University of Sydney from* 1922 *to* 1944.

# THE ARISTOCRATIC EPOCH IN LATIN LITERATURE

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is an honour not without responsibility to have been invited to deliver the first of these lectures in honour of the memory of the late Professor F. A. Todd. For Professor Todd was a Latin scholar of distinction, who was on the staff of the Department of Latin at this University for forty-one years, and for twenty-two of them until his death he guided the destinies of that Department. They were not easy years for those concerned for the future of classical studies; they called for resolution and sincerity of purpose, if in that changing world something was to be saved of the humanistic spirit in which he believed so deeply. Fortunately for this University those were Professor Todd's great qualities; qualities which showed in all his life, not least in his teaching and his scholarship. In neither would he surrender truth for the gaudy half-truth, hard work for leisured pseudo-learning; and we who follow after him must be grateful for the tradition thus created in the Department whose distinguished Head he was. And, therefore, while the honour done to me tonight is obvious, that honour imposes upon me a responsibility, that this, the foundation stone of the monument that is to do honour to his memory, shall be not unworthy of the man whose memory it will enshrine.

I have chosen for my subject tonight "The Aristocratic Epoch in Latin Literature"; it is a subject of importance for an understanding of the growth and form of Latin literature, to which perhaps insufficient study has been given. But first I must make a few introductory remarks about the historical setting before proceeding to the subject proper.

The second century opened in Rome with the Hannibalic War brought to a successful conclusion and the Roman armies contending against Macedon; by the time of the Gracchi Rome

had twice defeated and finally annexed Macedon, brought Antiochus the Great to heel, added to her responsibilities in Spain, Asia and Greece; had, in fact, assumed a considerable empire and no less considerable imperial responsibilities; in two generations she had become the greatest Mediterranean power, to whom all others deferred; whose very word throughout that world was law. The transition from an Italian to a Mediterranean power was necessarily attended with growing pains; but these in any normal growth may be expected, and had the growth been quite normal, Rome would have outgrown the pains to realize her potentialities. There were, however, attendant circumstances which made a simple process complex. Rome had come perforce into contact with the Greek world, a world that had much both good and bad to offer the less developed Rome; what she should absorb of this and what reject became one of the complicating factors. This alone would have taxed the wisdom of her governors, and it was not alone. The Hannibalic War had left large parts of Italy devastated; it and the wars that followed well nigh exhausted a treasury whose sources were designed to fill a humbler exchequer. The continued wars brought in their train the problem of finding soldiers; and this in its turn compelled the government to consider and reconsider its relations with the Latins and the Italians.

The yeoman farmer's fate, the basis of the state finances, Rome's relations with her allies, these were the problems that clamoured for solution to a government without experience in such novelties, and insufficiently aware of the nucleus of the problems for which she groped for answers. The influx of wealth from the East and the development of business and contracting which the constant wars made necessary, implied a development in the economy of Rome, and gave opportunities for the growth of a class whose wealth was not derived from the land. The transition from a purely agrarian economy to an economy that began to consist largely in taking what one wanted from other people was bound to have profound effects on the social structure of Rome; and



this, too, added to the complications of an already complex situation.

The nerve centre of the government in whose hands lay the fate of Rome was the Senate, and our period is known as that of Senatorial rule. It was under the Senate's guidance and direction that Rome had emerged triumphant from the Hannibalic War, and the prestige and experience which this body had gained during those years assured it a primacy in government that was not seriously challenged until 133 B.C. In foreign affairs, in legislation and in the control—or lack of it—of the new economic influences the Senate's was the controlling voice. No one opposed its rulings, because on the whole its control seemed adequate and prudent; its success, the strength which came from its unrivalled experience, and the support which it enjoyed among the Italian nobility, would have condemned any challenge to failure.

The Senate consisted at this time of 300 members, but the effective control of affairs was within the hands of a small group within this body, the *nobiles*. The old distinction between patrician and plebs had long ceased to have any importance; in its place had grown up a group of families whose ancestors had reached consular rank; the attainment of this office conferred nobility on the family, whose descendants were known as *nobiles*. Beneath them and less exclusive were the families who had attained praetorian rank. Access to the consulship was by now jealously guarded by the *nobiles*; for a *novus homo* to win his way to the office was exceedingly difficult, and, without the active support of some of the *nobiles*, impossible. How tight a hold they kept on the consulship the figures for these years show: during the 100 years preceding the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus, out of 200 consulships 159 went to 26 families, 99 of them to only 10 families. Between 200 and 146 B.C. only 4 *novi homines* forced their way to the highest office, all of them helped by some section of the *nobiles*. The figures for the praetorship tell a not very different tale, though not within quite such narrow restrictions. Since the Senate was in its deliberations necessarily swayed by the

advice and knowledge of those of its members whose experience in public affairs had been greatest, it followed that the effective power was in the hands of a few families, and that almost the only function of the humbler members was to support one or other of its leading personages.

Such in brief was the situation at Rome at the opening of the second century, such the instrument of government, and such the governors. When we survey Rome's literary achievements at this moment, we find little to inspire; Livius Andronicus had translated the Odyssey into Latin Saturnians, and had translated and produced some Greek tragedies and comedies; Naevius had produced tragedies and comedies, based more or less on Greek models; he had introduced a new type of tragedy, the *praetexta,* which depended on Roman historical subjects for its plot; he had also completed the first Roman epic, the *Bellum Punicum,* written in Saturnians; Ennius had been brought to Rome and had begun producing tragedies and comedies. Of literary prose there was nothing; Fabius Pictor's history of Rome, written in Greek, can hardly be counted as Latin literature. During the period with which we are concerned today, 200-133, will be found the great Roman dramatists, Ennius, Pacuvius, Caecilius, Plautus and Terence, Ennius's epic poem, the *Annales,* Lucilius the satirist, and the Senatorial historians. There is little else of literature; and today I wish to enquire into this phenomenon, to see to what extent it was a result of the social life and the ideals of the community, and to what extent, if any, it was the result of limitations imposed by the attitude of the governing class. For, as we shall see, the social controls under the Senate were strict, and a closer inspection of the governing class may help us to an understanding of this problem.

On reading one of Plutarch's lives of late third century or second century Romans, we must be struck by its difference not merely from a comparable Greek life but even from a later Roman life. Whereas in the latter we have personal anecdotes, not infrequently scandalous stories, schemes of motivation based on Plutarch's interpretation of



the character, which he inferred from numerous anecdotes and sayings attributed to the subject, in the former we are confronted with a certain statuesqueness. The narrative is confined almost wholly to the character's public life; there is something of his family, little of his education, seldom an enlightening anecdote; and even in the public life Plutarch hardly ventures beyond the strictly formal narrative of history. For motivation we look almost in vain; Plutarch does his best to explain the character's behaviour; but his explanation seldom goes beyond some abstract idea such as φιλοτιμία, which has to work in a vacuum for lack of true material. We are given an explanation of Fabius's opposition to Scipio's plans for transferring the war to Africa, namely his personal opposition to Scipio and his general policy. But this is exceptional, though the history of these years must have contained many examples of such conflicts between the leading men, whose personal policies were the basis of the Roman policy.

The absence of these elements from the Lives is strange, since we know that elsewhere Plutarch introduces them, and they are in Plutarch's estimation important for an understanding of the character; we can, therefore, only infer that they are missing from these Lives because Plutarch could nowhere light upon the necessary material. If we can discover why such material was not available, we shall go a long way to understanding the attitude and outlook of those who made the history of these years, dictated the social policy, and kept a watchful eye on those who were making a Latin literature. For the sources for such information would have been the contemporary literature of various kinds similar to that upon which he drew for his other Lives.

We must return to the *nobiles,* and ask ourselves whether we can discover their ideals at this time. We are helped in this enquiry by the fact that at Rome the family was a closely knit organization. The family claimed a man's first loyalty, and its different members were bound together by the common religion of the *gens.* The practice of lining the walls of the *atrium* with the *imagines* of the ancestors, with their achieve-

ments outlined in the *tituli* beneath them, contributed to breed a pride in the family, which would be encouraged by the contents of the family archives, wherein would be found *laudationes,* the magisterial notes of holders of office and similar material. This family pride, by no means unjustifiable, had developed by this time until it almost weighed upon the young member of an outstanding family. Polybius has a charming story of the young Scipio Aemilianus's confession of his uneasiness on this score.[1] The two were one day walking along together, when the young Scipio suddenly addressed him as follows: "Why is it, Polybius, that though I and my brother eat at the same table, you address all your conversation to him, and pass me over altogether? Of course you too have the same opinion of me as I hear the rest of the city has. For I am considered by everyone, I hear, to be a mild effete person, and far removed from the true Roman character and ways, because I don't care for pleading in the law courts. And they say the family I come of requires a different kind of representative, and not the sort that I am. That is what annoys me most."

At the funeral of these great men a speech, called a *laudatio,* was spoken to the crowd; in it were outlined the outstanding achievements and virtues of the dead man and of his ancestors; men dressed up and wearing the masks of his ancestors took part in the funeral procession. On the tombs were cut *elogia,* short commemorative verses, outlining the public offices and activities of the dead man. We are fortunate in possessing some of the *elogia* from the tomb of the Scipios, as well as an extract from a *laudatio* pronounced in honour of the Metellus who died in 221 B.C. We will glance at these to see if perhaps we may distil from them the aristocrats' conception of *virtus.*

The earliest of the *elogia* is that in memory of Lucius Scipio, son of Scipio Barbatus, and reads as follows: "Here lies a man amongst good men the very best, most Romans do

[1] XXXI, 23, 8ff. The translation is Shuckburgh's.



agree, Lucius Scipio, Barbatus' son. Consul, censor, aedile was he amongst you. Corsica and Aleria did he take in battle; to the Weather gods gave he in thank-offering a temple he had vowed."[2] It confines itself to the public life, and after listing his offices refers to his most distinguished service to the State and to the gods. The next one, on his father, follows similar lines: "Cornelius Lucius Scipio Barbatus, son of Gnaeus, brave man and wise, whose handsome looks his virtue did quite match; consul, censor, aedile was he amongst you; Taurasium, Cisaunum he captured in Samnium; all Lucania did he o'erwhelm and hostages take off."[3] There is here a greater flexibility of expression; otherwise the two are parallel. The next two belong to a later period, when the Hellenic influence was well-established at Rome; they are both in honour of men who died young, before they could have held major office or excelled in public life; the first one runs thus: "Death brought to pass that all things thine were short, honours, fame, virtue, glory, and talents. Had it been vouchsafed to thee in a long life to make the most of these, featly thy ancestors' feats hadst thou surpassed. Wherefore with goodwill into her bosom, Scipio, doth Earth receive thee, Publius Cornelius called, Publius thy sire."[4] No one can miss the Hellenic influence, but it is confined to externals, turns of phrase and neatness of expression. The Saturnian metre is still employed, in spite of Ennius, and more particularly, the concept of what constituted a good and successful life remains the same. "Honours, fame, virtue, glory and talents" still as a hundred years earlier are the elements of a successful life, and continue so in the next *elogium,* also in honour of a young man: "Great wisdom and many virtues in a short life this tomb contains; life, not honour, deserted the honours of him who is laid here, a man never surpassed in virtue. At twenty years he was laid here to rest; seek not his

[2] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 9. Professor Stuart's translation in "Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography".

[3] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 7. Professor Stuart's translation.

[4] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 10. Professor Stuart's translation.

honours, he was not entrusted with any."[5] We see the constancy of the ideal, consisting still in public honours and public office, to the extent that even where the dead man took no part in public life, the only comment is on what he would have done had he lived longer. In the last one elegiac metre has at last ousted the Saturnian metre. It is preceded by a list of his public offices and then continues: "I added to the virtues of my family by my character, I had children, and sought to equal my father's deeds. I won the praise of my ancestors, so that they are glad that I was one of them; my honours ennobled my stock."[6]

We notice at once throughout all these *elogia* the exclusive concern with public life and office and distinction won in the public service: *fortis, sapiens, honor, fama, virtus, ingenium,* these represent the desirable qualities in their estimation. There is an almost regal tone about the two earliest "I was your consul". In the latest there is perhaps a suggestion of family self-consciousness, which was absent from the earlier ones; their families' pre-eminence was taken for granted. It is a sign that the aristocracy were becoming self-consciously aristocratic, because of attacks on their previously accepted pre-eminence. By this time Cato had been drawing attention to some of their weaknesses; and perhaps more important, the nobles had been subjected to bitter criticism as a result of their earlier incompetence in Spain.

We may now turn to the extract from the *laudatio* of Metellus; after cataloguing all his public offices, it continues:[7] "Metellus wished to be a champion warrior, the best orator, the bravest general, to hold command in the greatest undertakings, to meet with highest official preferment, to be a leader in wisdom, to be deemed the leading Senator, to gain great wealth by honest means, to leave many children, and to be the most distinguished man of the state. These things fell to his lot, and to the lot of no other man since the founding

[5] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 11.
[6] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 15.
[7] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, VII, 43, 139.



of Rome." There is the aristocrat's ideal plain for all to see, to be a leading man in the State's service both in war and in peace. To leave many children is an ideal common to many aristocracies, who fear lest the family may die out. The adoption of children by leading families in our period is a testimony to the liveliness of this sentiment. Two sons of Aemilius Paullus were adopted into great houses: one to become Scipio Aemilianus, the other to become a Fabius. We note also that the possession of wealth was among their ideals and this, too, need not surprise us; a line of Ennius that speaks of "a man of no great substance, yet full trustworthy" illustrates this aspect of the ideal in its assumption that normally a man of no great substance would not be trustworthy.

This aristocratic ideal is to be found embedded even in the fragments of Ennius; such lines as *"qualis consiliis quantumque potesset in armis"*,[8] *"quem nemo ferro potuit superare nec auro"*,[9] *"fortes Romani sunt tamquam caelus profundus"*,[10] or *"moribus antiquis stat res Romana virisque"*,[11] all alike breathe the same ideal, the same high purpose of public service. At the end of our period, when corruption had set in amongst certain of their class, it was against betrayals of this ideal that Lucilius inveighed. For an ideal of public service carries with it a sense of responsibility in the execution of that work; if a class marks itself off as a governing class, then its whole behaviour must be worthy of such a claim; and it was against lapses from this implied code of behaviour, whether in private or in public life, that Lucilius's attacks were directed. Lucilius's own definition of *virtus* states the same ideals, to which the Scipionic circle is vainly trying to recall the weaker nobles. The *elogia*, the fragments of Ennius and of Lucilius all in their different ways presuppose and illustrate this ideal of public service: the *elogia* in the simple pride of a life of

[8] Fr. 271 in *Remains of Old Latin*, I, edited by Warmington (Loeb).
[9] Fr. 209.
[10] Fr. 470.
[11] Fr. 467.

distinguished public service; Ennius in making it the mainspring of his characters' actions, the explanation of Rome's greatness; Lucilius by his criticism of those who had fallen from it, and the implication of its existence as the norm by which he judges his victims.

I call this the aristocratic ideal; others, no doubt, would accept it and maybe try to live up to it in their humbler way; but the pattern was made by the nobles, whose opportunities for public service were so much greater than others'. And ordinary men and women were not constantly aware either of their proud ancestry, because they had none, or of their public service, because their lives were not governed by such considerations. A sepulchral inscription, somewhat later in time, of a youth who died at the age of twenty may serve by contrast with the Scipionic *elogium* on the twenty-year-old to show the cleavage between the nobles and those with no *stemmata* and no ambitions in public life: "Gnaeus Taracius, son of Gnaeus, lived twenty years. His bones are laid here. Alas, alas! Taracius, how bitter the fate to which you were delivered! The years of your life were not all spent when you were given up to death; but at the time when it behoved you to be living in the flower of the age of youth, you passed away and left your mother in grief and sorrow."[12] Here is a perfectly simple epitaph, expressing personal sorrow in simple terms, with no thought of family pride or of public service. We must remember that most men and women at Rome were like this woman; they acknowledged and respected "the quality", allowed their superiority and without demur handed over to them the complicated task of government, expecting in return only such tokens of recognition at election and other times as had become by now almost traditional.

This office-holding nobility, supported in its ideals by the lesser members of the Senate, took a lofty view of its responsibilities in the maintenance of the tone, or *ethos*, of the Roman State; necessarily, because as they identified themselves with

[12] *C.I.L.* I, 2, No. 1603. Warmington's translation in *Remains of Old Latin*, IV.



the State, whose governance they had made so peculiarly their own, the State must conform to their own ideal; their conception of *virtus*, embodied in their own lives, must be reflected in the general tone of the object of their care. Our period saw the great inrush of Hellenic influence in the form of literature, philosophy, art, and by no means least the Greeks themselves. Such influences were in no way new to Rome; Etruria had profoundly influenced Rome in art, architecture and religion since the time of the kings; and though the influence of Etruria was no longer felt at Rome, she had learnt from this experience how to adopt and to adapt. More important for our purpose was the influence of Magna Graecia; this influence had been at first indirect, by way of Etruria and Southern Latium; but since the Pyrrhic War and the capture of Tarentum Rome had come into direct contact with the highly developed Greek culture of Southern Italy, and from this contact had already learnt and absorbed much. We may regard as a symbol of this new, direct influence the bringing to Rome, as a slave, of Livius Andronicus, captured at Tarentum, who became the father of Latin literature and the first teacher at Rome. During the Punic War Sicily had been one of the important theatres of combat; there the Roman army had been brought into close contact with a flourishing Greek civilization, and at Syracuse with a city which had attained a high level of culture, and whose buildings and private houses were of a beauty and luxury quite unknown at Rome. The story of Marcellus's sack of Syracuse need not be repeated here; sufficient to recall the plundering of public and private buildings, the vast booty shipped to Rome, consisting of works of art of all kinds, to show that the work of the Greek artistic genius was not unknown to Rome by 200 B.C.

When, therefore, the Romans first came into direct contact with Greece itself, they were not ignorant barbarians, tasting for the first time a higher and more artistic civilization; the Philhellenism of Scipio or Flamininus in 200 B.C. would in that case be inexplicable; it was this earlier acquaintance

with an art and literature to which Rome had no counterpart that aroused among the better minds an appreciation for these things and made them ready to steep themselves more deeply in them should opportunity offer. They approached Greece as Philhellenes; their contact with Greece served only to modify and moderate their earlier enthusiasms.

The fruits of this contact between Rome and Greece after 200 B.C. I am not here concerned to describe; the Hellenic influence on art and literature and on the social life of Rome is known to most persons in general terms at least. But it is easy to form an exaggerated idea of its effects; to see it in its true perspective is less easy. The aspect to which I wish to draw attention today is the limit of their absorption, from which we may be able to discover the reasons why the boundary mark was set in one place and not in another. I will begin by taking two examples from the realm of religion.

In the year 205 B.C. a fresh outburst of *religio* on the part of the people demanded some fresh action from the government. The people had been prone to these outbursts throughout the Hannibalic War, and the government had been compelled to resort to all sorts of religious contrivances in an effort to allay the panic. On this occasion they made their usual approach to the Sibylline books, and returned with the inspired answer that any foreign foe that had invaded Italy would be driven out and defeated if the Romans brought to Rome the Idaean Mother from Pessinus. This was a clear attempt to allay the present panic by the introduction of a novelty, since the old cures had begun to be less effective. Both Delphi and Scipio himself supported this idea, and a suitably appointed embassy was sent to King Attalus, through whose good offices they hoped to become possessed of the goddess. The envoys called at Delphi on the way, were encouraged and told to see that the best man at Rome welcomed her on arrival. The Senate decided that P. Scipio was the "best of good men" at Rome, and he accordingly went to meet the ship at Ostia, together with the leading matrons, whose duty it was to accompany the goddess on the journey from Ostia



to Rome. The "goddess" consisted of a black meteoric stone, who was duly received by Scipio and escorted to Rome by the matrons, who took turns to carry her, while the people burned incense at their doors as the procession passed.

Thus the Magna Mater came to Rome, to stay a passing panic. But very soon the Senate discovered that orgiastic rites were connected with her worship, and their reaction was quick and firm: it was ordained by a *senatus consultum* that no Roman should take part in her service. The inference is clear; they had been quite ready to humour the people by the introduction of a fresh goddess, while they thought that her presence would not affect the Roman *ethos*; but as soon as the unpleasant truth was realized that connected with her worship were rites that conflicted with the *mos maiorum*, they at once sought to prevent its evil effects by banning the orgiastic ritual to Romans.

My second case may be dealt with more briefly. In 186 B.C. the Senate discovered that the worship of Dionysus had reached disquieting proportions throughout Italy; that in the course of this worship secret societies were formed, orgiastic ritual indulged in and strange oaths taken. The Senate acted with a firmness that may surprise our modern tolerance; regarding it as subversive activity, and considering such activity in social matters to be no less dangerous than in political, by a legal fiction it pronounced the whole affair *"coniuratio"*, rebellion, in this case against the established ways of Rome, the *mos maiorum*. With the help of the allies the worship was suppressed, though those who sincerely wished to continue in the practice were allowed to do so, provided that not more than six persons collected in any one group.

Again we see the Senate prepared to make concessions to the people, provided only that Rome remained Roman, that the Roman *ethos* was not destroyed. When we reflect on the increasing number of foreign slaves and South Italians who were finding their way to Rome, and the manifold influences which were conspiring to change or upset the Roman and Italian outlook after the turmoil of war, the contacts during

service with other ways of life, especially in the East, the economic and social changes already in process, we can perceive that the government was dealing with a twofold problem of absorption, one of people and one of ideas.

The realm of philosophy shows the Senate applying similar limitations. The better Romans were attracted to Greek philosophy, and not seldom visited Athens to meet the leading philosophers; a visit to Athens began to form part of the education of the young noble. Titus Flamininus had spent time at Athens; Aemilius Paullus had the library of King Perseus brought to Rome for the use of his growing sons. It might have seemed in such an atmosphere that Greek philosophers would be welcome visitors to Rome. Yet we are at first sight perplexed at the apparently inconsistent behaviour of the Senate; at one moment they seem friendly, at the next they appear to be narrowly prejudiced against those very people at whose feet their sons would gladly sit in Athens or elsewhere. In the year 161 B.C. philosophers and *rhetores* were banished from Rome; in 154 B.C. Diogenes, Critolaus and Carneades, who were representing Athens as ambassadors to Rome, were hustled untimely out of Rome, their business having been rushed through the Senate at Cato's instigation. Yet at this same time Polybius was living with Scipio, and about ten years later Panaetius, the distinguished Stoic, was to spend two years with Scipio, without protest from anyone.

This might seem strange at first; but let us look briefly at Plutarch's description of the second incident, the riddance of the embassy.[13] "The charm", he says, "of Carneades especially, which had boundless power, and a fame not inferior to its power, won large and sympathetic audiences and filled the city, like a rushing mighty wind, with the sound of his praises. Report spread far and wide that a Greek of amazing talent, who disarmed all opposition by the magic of his eloquence, had infused a tremendous passion into the youth of the city, in consequence of which they forsook their other pleasures

[13] Plutarch, *Cato*, XXII, 2. Perrin's translation in Loeb series.



and pursuits and were 'possessed' of philosophy . . . . Cato, at the very outset, when this zeal for discussion came pouring into the city, was distressed, fearing lest the young men, by giving this direction to their ambition, should come to love a reputation based on mere words more than one achieved by martial deeds. And when the fame of the philosophers rose yet higher in the city . . . . Cato determined on some pretext or other to rid and purge the city of them all. So he rose in the Senate . . . and said: 'We ought to make up our minds one way or another . . . in order that these men may return to their schools and lecture to the sons of Greece, while the youth of Rome give ear to their laws and magistrates, as heretofore'."

The fact that this suggestion was complied with shows that Cato was not alone in his uneasiness. The last sentence gives the clue to Cato's and the Senate's uneasy feelings; they wanted the youth of Rome to continue to obey the laws and the magistrates. Obedience to the constituted authority, *disciplina*, was the foundation of the Roman State; their early history was filled with improving stories in illustration of this virtue; the greatness of the Roman army depended upon this absolute obedience to higher authority, and disobedience was sternly punished. It was safe enough for the nobles themselves to learn the art of thinking and questioning accepted views, and this they had done and were to continue to do, for they could on the whole trust themselves to pay that deference to one another which was required of a private citizen to a magistrate; and since they were the class from whom the senior magistrates came, loyalty to their class was a sufficient safeguard. But these philosophers and rhetoricians had at Rome not confined themselves to the nobles; they had been giving lectures to which anyone could listen, and the result had been that the young men were beginning to question the traditional conceptions of duty, right and wrong. This appeared to strike at the very root of the Roman *ethos*, and further, at the root of the power of the *nobiles*, for by now the two had become interdependent, each deriving part of its

strength from the other. The very cleverness of Carneades was his undoing and the nobles' reaction was to remove these disturbing elements from the people's midst.

But if we can understand in what these philosophers sinned, can we appreciate why Polybius and Panaetius were so welcome? The answer is that in both cases they interpreted history and philosophy in terms agreeable to the Roman *ethos*. Polybius's history was an interpretation of Roman history according to the aristocratic ideal, for which he had a profound admiration. Even when it became clear to him that the ideal state was ceasing to be, he failed to discern the social and economic causes that were ending the nobles' régime through their failure resolutely to grapple with them, and found it in the falling away of individual nobles from their own ideal. The qualities he singles out in his character sketches are just those which the aristocratic ideal valued most highly: scrupulous honesty, comparative poverty in spite of opportunity for acquiring wealth; duty to the family and so forth.[34] And it is the lack of such qualities which he notes as characteristic of some of the nobles in the latter part of our period, the time when he had seen the first signs of the breakdown of his ideal form of government. His whole interpretation of Roman history presupposes the existence of a dominant nobility, and the praise which he bestows on them both as a class and individually is a testimony to his approval of their existence and their behaviour.

The case of Panaetius was very similar. To this great philosopher Rome was indebted for the philosophical interpretation of her character and her aims. He made possible the humanization of Roman law, to become the first legal system to embrace within its comprehensive conception the whole human race. Yet his immediate success and subsequent influence were due to his sympathetic approach to the Roman mind and character. Equipped with the intellectual arms of

[34] See, for instance, his description of Aemilius Paullus and Scipio Aemilianus, XVIII, 35, 4ff. and XXXI, 25ff.



Greece, endued with the panoply of Stoicism, he might have found a welcome no warmer than did Carneades. But in his way he was a greater man; by his sympathetic understanding of the Roman character and their ideals he was able to win the confidence of the Romans. He did not seek to dazzle by the brilliance of his logic; he was content to adapt his Stoicism to Roman needs. He took the Roman *ethos* and the aristocratic ideal and gave them a philosophical basis; Stoicism and the ideal became fused in his interpretation. Nothing of the essential elements was changed, nothing was added; the ideal and the *ethos* remained as before, but now they seemed to have a basis in the order of the world, whereas before their only appeal had been to tradition and *mos maiorum*.

Poseidonius in the first century continued in this tradition, and it is interesting to observe the degree to which Stoicism and the ideal had become one. Tiberius Gracchus was supposed to have been advised and encouraged in his plans for reform by Blossius, a Stoic, though not, it seems, in the tradition of Panaetius. The aims of the Gracchi must, it would have seemed, have commended themselves to a Stoic. Yet Poseidonius in his history of Rome adopted a hostile attitude towards the Gracchi, and his criticisms make clear the reason for this hostility: their precipitate action had brought into jeopardy the established government of the nobles, and had begun the movement which was to lead through demagogues and dictators to Empire. When Poseidonius wrote, the movement was under way, and though he might not foresee the end he could see the irreparable damage done to the aristocratic ideal.

Such was the attitude of the Roman nobility towards religion and philosophy, based as we have seen on their position as the effective governors of the State, to whose continuance as a Roman state, in the narrow sense in which they interpreted that conception, their energies and power were directed. Having noted the manner in which they sought to control undesirable intrusions into the realm of religious and philosophic beliefs, we may now turn to examine their

attitude to literature, to see if a similar censorship was maintained in the sphere of letters, and if so, how and to what degree it influenced the course of Latin letters. We must deal separately with prose and poetry, since owing to the different content of the two forms the nobles adopted correspondingly different attitudes.

We will deal first with poetry. We have seen that their ideal was one of public service; such an ideal left little opportunity for the professional poet, and in earlier times little chance to appreciate a poet's works. "Men used not to respect the poet's art; anyone that gave his attention to it or spent his time at parties was called a 'vagabond'." Thus wrote Cato[15] in the first half of the second century, and the time to which he is referring is not a misty past but a comparatively recent one. The poet and the parasite at that time were equally the object of scorn and contempt. That attitude had changed; under the influence of Hellenism they had come to appreciate poetry, but they themselves took no active part in it. True, we find during our period aristocrats composing poems, such as Mummius, brother of the man who sacked Corinth; but they were not to be taken seriously. They were merely a sign of an educated man, one of his accomplishments. Suetonius tells us[16] that as a result of Crates's visit to Rome in 159 B.C. men dug out from their obscurity old poems of their own or their friends, carefully revised them and read them before circles of friends for criticism and comment. The story is in itself sufficient to give us the picture of the amateur poets of the time, regarding verse-making as an educated refinement, at which it behoved the cultured man to try his hand. Suetonius tells us that apart from Scipio Aemilianus and Laelius, Q. Fabius Labeo, C. Sulpicius Galba and M. Popilius were all persons who might have helped Terence in writing his plays. This statement reveals two facts: first, that some

[15] Cato (Jordan), *Carmen de Moribus*, 2.
[16] *De Grammaticis*, 2.



aristocrats were thought to be able poets; second, that though they were, it would have been unbecoming in them to produce plays under their own name, and that they would therefore have cloaked their Muse under the name of Terence.

But if such was their attitude towards the profession of poet in their own persons, they did not necessarily despise the poet as such, nor condemn his works. Livius had been the first Roman poet: he had translated the *Odyssey* into Saturnians, and had thus produced a national Italian epic. For the story of Odysseus and his wanderings had far closer association with Italy than with Greece, and Odysseus was something, therefore, of an Italian hero. Naevius and Ennius had gone further and produced instead of Italian Roman epics. All three had helped to bring their readers to a consciousness of their country, the latter two of their destiny and their inherent greatness. Livius also produced plays for the Roman stage; at this time the connexion between religion and the stage was close, and the production of plays was a contribution towards the changing ritual of Roman religion. He was called upon in the critical later stage of the Hannibalic War to write a religious hymn, and in token of his services to the State was founded what was later known as the Collegium Poetarum on the Aventine. We may see how the nobility were not slow to reward the ex-slave for his service to the State.

Naevius, too, wrote for the Roman stage; and in comedy the example of the old Attic comedy was to hand, with all its free criticism of leading personalities and of politics; and the Latin spirit was by no means opposed to this freedom. It was not therefore surprising that this freedom of speech and criticism should be imitated at Rome, and in fact it was, by Naevius. We are told that he criticized leading men, and we still possess a fragment[17] in which the youthful follies

[17] Gellius, VII, 8, 5.

of the great Scipio are retailed: it runs as follows:

> Even him whose hand did oft
> Accomplish mighty exploits gloriously,
> Whose deeds wane not, but live on to this day,
> The one outstanding man in all the world,
> Him, with a single mantle, his own father
> Dragged from a lady-love's arms.[18]

We are further told that because of his boldness Naevius was imprisoned, and was released through the intervention of a tribune, and that after giving further offence of a like kind he was finally banished. That was the beginning and the end of the spirit of old comedy on the Roman stage in our period, and we may pause a moment here to note the significance of Naevius's treatment.

The stage was the one means of communicating, so to speak, with the Roman people at large. The reading public was a very small one, confined naturally to the educated classes; and these were chiefly the governing classes. In these circumstances censorship of literature was not felt to be necessary. But persistent criticism of the nobles and their policy from the stage could only end in cheapening them in the eyes of the people, and was likely to lead eventually to a lack of obedience towards the constituted authorities. Its first manifestation was therefore silenced, and the successors of Naevius were too wise to attempt its resuscitation. At the end of our period we come upon direct criticism of the nobles in the satires of Lucilius, but we must not lightly conclude that they therefore allowed unbridled criticism. Lucilius's satires were for a reading public, and further were written under the aegis of the leading statesman of the day, Scipio Aemilianus. Their first audience was the Scipionic circle, their second the nobles whom he castigated; at no time was there any danger that the weaknesses of the nobles would become reading matter for the general public; indeed, it is probably true that Scipio himself, a great upholder of the aristocratic

[18] Warmington's translation, in *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 139.



tradition, encouraged him to his work, for the express object of recalling the peccant nobles to a sense of their duties and responsibilities as members of the governing class.

It is not surprising therefore that Plautus preferred to restrict his activities to the *fabula palliata*. And even within this sphere he knew what the nobles wanted and what would give displeasure. He was too wise to make Rome the scene of any of his plays. Not merely does he adapt Greek plays, but he is most careful to keep the whole colouring Greek, to leave no doubt that what he is depicting on the stage could not have happened at Rome. The impudent slaves, the dishonest sons, could be laughed at by the Roman audience because they were completely foreign to Rome, and therefore the morals of Rome were not impugned. It would never have done to suggest that the Roman *paterfamilias* was outwitted by his son, or that slaves were for ever scoring off their masters. When comedies in Roman settings began to be written, Donatus tells us[19] that the role of the slave had to be toned down, because Roman sentiment would not have tolerated a master being outwitted by his slave. For similar reasons Plautus had to tread carefully in his portrayal of female character; the *hetaera* could not be shown on the Roman stage as a generous character, since the Roman matrons would have objected; he was therefore compelled to make her an inferior character with little to commend her. In his whole approach we find Plautus accepting the limitations which the governing class insisted on imposing on all aspects of public life. Within those limitations he could and did work freely; as a professional playwright he could not afford to run counter to the sentiments of the governing class, and his genius succeeded in producing plays which both pleased his audience and satisfied the conditions imposed.

Titinius first attempted to bring the scene to Italy, though not to Rome; he wrote *fabulae togatae*, in which he laid the scenes in small Italian townships. It is perhaps not unimpor-

[19] Donatus, Ter. *Eun.* 57.

tant to note that he did not make Rome the scene; Mommsen supposed that the author of *togatae* was obliged to confine his activities to cities with Latin rights, and that the presentation of Rome or cities with full citizenship was forbidden. The result was that as the citizenship gradually expanded so did the area in which a scene might be laid contract. Whether it was expressly forbidden we cannot say, nor does it matter; it is sufficient that we realize that such was the position, and we need not be surprised that it was so. A class that was so concerned for the maintenance of the Roman *ethos* was unlikely to look with equanimity at plays whose plot revolved around the loose morals of Roman citizens, or in which slaves were called upon to help their masters' sons in some deception at the expense of the *paterfamilias*. And even in the atmosphere of the small Italian towns care must needs be exercised, since Rome depended on their friendship and support, and their ruling classes seem to have been in close alliance with the Roman nobles. Unfortunately we have none of Titinius's plays, but it seems that he paid particular attention to his female characters who would presumably take the place of the Greek *hetaera* for which the Roman stage had no place. He further, we are told, toned down the impudence of the slave, and we may be tolerably certain that sons were not so able at deceiving their fathers.

With Terence we need not concern ourselves at length. He enjoyed the patronage of Scipio, who took a lively interest in his work. With Terence we begin to feel that the literary quality of the play is the author's first consideration; the humanism which infuses all his work reveals a sensitive nature which had no wish to compete with tight rope walkers, even if it could. But the fact that the Roman public's taste was becoming cruder just when the leading aristocrat was interesting himself in the work of Rome's leading playwright suggests a certain artificiality in the play *qua* play. Its first object was to be a good play judged by literary standards, and its spirit was to be that of the humanism of the Scipionic circle. But there was not and could not be any question of



conflict between the playwright and the government; they were now in open alliance.

It is not perhaps mere accident that nearly all the dramatists were non-Romans by birth, and some of them ex-slaves. The fact that most of them depended on their success as playwrights or on patronage to eke out an existence gave the governing class a hold on their work, which they did not hesitate to exercise. The Romans themselves were unable to write plays at this time; the educated class turned deliberately away from the practice of letters, while the rest of Rome lived in an atmosphere of practical life which did not encourage the native genius to find expression in literature. Personal poetry does not flourish in a closely-welded society; there must be an atmosphere of individualism, even if it is in resistance to social restraints, before there can be individual expression; and at Rome in the second century there was not that atmosphere. A foreigner may write a play for others; he cannot express their inmost thoughts for them. Epic there might have been, but for that, too, the atmosphere was no longer suitable. The defeat of Carthage had impressed the Romans no less than the rest of the world; they had felt they were called to some destiny on this earth. Naevius and Ennius had given expression to that feeling, and helped the Romans to perceive their destiny. But that feeling had gone; true, the better Romans were still conscious of a responsibility and a destiny; but things went too well; without the death struggle against Hannibal to sustain them and make them feel their purpose, how could they be filled with a sense of destiny? Their only concern was with the routine of office and empire. Not until a century of upheaval and civil war had made them feel their failure, could another epic interpret Rome's high destiny, when after the stormy passage they seemed to be in port, and they needed encouragement to put to sea once more.

Such other poetry as the nobles did encourage was in their own praise. The story of how Fulvius Nobilior took Ennius with him to Ambracia in order that he might write up his accomplishments is known to all. Scipio, too, used Ennius

to sing his praises; and Accius composed some verses in honour of Brutus Gallaecus, which were inscribed on a temple he had erected. The form of tragedy, *fabula praetexta*, which dealt with Roman themes of history, served its purpose too; there was no mockery or criticism; the central figure was a hero, held up for the edification of the people, while that part of Roman history with which it dealt was depicted in such a way as to evoke the pride of the people who had helped to make it; and this would contribute towards an approval of the aristocratic policy that lay behind it. Thus and thus only might Rome and Romans appear upon the stage.

The nobles' attitude to poetry is thus clear: they would not give their own efforts to it, though they allowed others to, provided what they wrote supported or at least did not conflict with the *ethos* of Rome as they interpreted it. The *mos maiorum*, the Roman character and the underlying assumptions concerning the organization of the State and the duties of the different classes within it were alike topics about which there was no compromise; support or silence was the only choice open to the poet; and it followed that the leading personalities of the State were sacrosanct.

But with prose the case was different. Latin prose was not at the beginning of our period the flexible instrument for communicating the whole gamut of human thought and emotions that it later became under Cicero's influence. It was stiff, unyielding, and was used chiefly for purposes of business, the chronicling of laws, of treaties, and all the purposes of State; there was a nascent oratory, hardly less stiff and unadorned. Men did not yet turn to this medium in which to express any but the most concrete of sentiments. One form of prose composition did, however, develop during this period, that of historical composition. Rome, when she was engaged with Hannibal, felt the need to make her motives known to the world of Greece; and when that war was over, the need became even greater. Once they were inextricably involved with that world, whose culture and civilization they admitted to be superior to their own, and of whose goodwill they stood in



need, the necessity to show the purity of their motives to nations brought up to believe only in wiles and tricks became even more pressing; especially when they wanted to be friendly —on their own terms, we agree—with parts at any rate of the Greek world. The Greeks were scornful of barbarians and lesser breeds; and those Greeks that had taken the trouble to try to understand Rome's motives had formed an adverse opinion of her intentions. The interpretation of Roman institutions in Rome and confederate institutions in Italy must therefore come from Rome; and since the aims and policy which required interpretation and explanation to the Greeks were those of the nobles, who fashioned Roman policy, it was natural that the interpretation, too, should come from them. They alone had the secret, and the wish, and hence arose that group of Senatorial historians who described for the Greek world in the Greek tongue Roman and Italian institutions and the Senatorial policy. The same intention lay behind the letters which we know Scipio Africanus and later Scipio Nasica wrote to foreign kings, describing in detail recent Roman campaigns.

It is true that family ambition found an outlet in these histories, and that the authors did not scruple to exaggerate the achievements of their ancestors, perhaps at the expense of other families. But that is not to say either that they criticized other families, or that what they wrote was read by the ordinary Roman citizen, and hence any criticism implicit or explicit was not dangerous. Further, these historians restricted themselves to public life; their accounts were not embellished by sordid or fanciful stories of private life in the manner of some of the Greek historians; any distortion there might have been did not extend beyond the military or public achievements of rivals. Thus arose the one branch of letters to which the educated class gave their time during our period, and that not primarily from a love of letters but for the strictly practical purpose of explaining their own motives to a foreign world.

When the elder Cato took up his pen to compose his *Origines,* the first to use the Latin tongue for Roman history, he, too, had a clear objective, to make the Italian cities conscious of their common destiny with Rome. His whole political career was one of opposition to the leading nobles; a *novus homo,* who affected to despise the Hellenic culture, he represented to a marked degree the Italian element in Roman politics, and thus of necessity found himself in opposition to those who laid great store by Hellenism. The first of his family to attain high office, he had no patience with those who claimed such office as a birthright, men whose concern for the honour of their family was such that in their histories they even falsified the true account. These considerations shaped the form and content of the *Origines*; the essential unity of Italy and of Italian and Roman history was made apparent by the scheme of the work; and his refusal to name commanders other than by their rank, while at the same time naming a military tribune or an elephant which had earned distinction by some act of bravery, was a direct snub to the Senatorial historians who had been only too ready to parade the names of their illustrious family members. But it, too, was not intended for the ordinary Roman public; its readers were the educated classes in the Italian cities, the governing classes in their communities, whose co-operation and support Cato saw clearly were essential for the orderly progress of Rome.

Of oratory we need make here no mention; it grew out of the needs of State, out of the need for a man to persuade his fellows, to convince his opponents, or to express his country's policy before the ambassadors of other countries. Its first purpose was to be spoken, not written; and although speeches were undoubtedly committed to writing during our period, the main purpose of this practice was that there might be an enduring record of the policies and opinions expressed. We are confronted therefore once more with motives similar to those which prompted the writing of history; and if the Roman people did not read the one, it is quite certain they would not read the other. Publication of these speeches would serve their



more immediate political purposes in two ways: first by providing a permanent record of their policy; and secondly—and here we are particularly concerned with speeches made in political prosecutions and defences—by committing to permanent record their attacks on their opponents. This second purpose, of course, equally subserved political ends, and this was probably the first consideration in publishing them; and though the speeches may have had literary qualities, it was not those qualities which induced their publication.

There was during our period no other prose worthy of the name; such as there was had a utilitarian object, and was designed for the small educated public of the time. We can now see therefore the extent to which the aristocracy dominated the literary scene of their day. Cultured as they were, their upbringing and traditions designed them for men of action in the State; this was their first concern and on this their ambitions centred. The life of contemplation and literature was for them a pastime or a means of relaxation; in no circumstances was it their main goal. The consequence was that though they might and did encourage poets, yet poetry was bound to depend on men from outside for its expression, since the one class with sufficient education at Rome deliberately restricted its exercise to the fireside. And the limits within which Roman poetry might be written by non-Romans were fairly narrow, and were confined to dramatic poetry, which, since it was not strictly a native product and depended largely on Greek influence for its inspiration, was the preserve of any person with a knowledge of the Latin tongue. And even in this sphere the nobles' concern for the maintenance of the Roman *ethos*, and their identification of themselves with the State of which they were the governors and guardians, imposed limitations on the poets' freedom, and faced them with problems hardly less great than that of amusing the people. We need not then be surprised that the atmosphere was uncongenial to poetry, and that the Roman education with its emphasis on the practical, the growing materialism of the age and the lack of a Roman

literature all conspired with the aristocrats' conception of their own duty to prevent the growth of any such poetry as the changed conditions of the first century B.C. made possible. And as with poetry, so with prose. That same outlook which forbade the nobles to become poets compelled them to turn historian, and since the exigencies of their position did not compel them to set their pens to any other form of prose composition, history remained their one form of literary production. Throughout the nobles are the dominant factor, and if the literature of this period is restricted in scope and somewhat uninspired in content, the blame rests with them.

We may now return to the Lives of Plutarch, with which we began. The reason for that statuesque quality which we note in the Lives of this period is not far to seek; the intimate anecdotes and the motivation which would have enlivened these Lives as they do others are almost wholly absent, because the aristocratic ideal was strongly opposed to such matters being made public, and the nobles successfully prevented any attempt to bruit them abroad. How they dealt with Naevius we have seen, and there was no need to repeat the lesson. The very occasional glimpses of less pleasant aspects, such as the story of Lucius Flamininus and the Gaul, serve to illustrate the point by their exceptional nature. We know of this affair only because Cato—the *novus homo*—when as censor he expelled L. Flamininus from the Senate, made a speech explaining his reasons for this action. The affair could not therefore be concealed. But there must have been equally unpleasant incidents in many a noble's life, of which we know nothing. As for motivation, Plutarch's task was impossible, when his only sources were histories and biographies through whose pages the subjects strode with all the majesty of beings not cursed with human frailties. Only from the historians could some sort of motivation come—such as we have at the end of the *Fabius*. Such motivation does from time to time break in, because the historians with their family differences would have allowed the intrusion of so much. But more than that we are not vouchsafed.



'By the end of our period the situation had changed. The moral decline of the aristocracy, which had begun as the exceptional behaviour of a few individuals in Cato's earlier days, had become by now fairly general. The absolute power which as magistrates they exercised in Italy and the provinces, the increased opportunities for the acquisition of wealth from the provinces, and the freedom from foreign danger which might have recalled them to their higher purposes, all conspired to corrupt the high ideals with which they had begun the century. The inefficient conduct of the Spanish war was a sign of the Senatorial inability to manage properly the affairs of State, for which the only solution proved to be the irregular election of Scipio to the command. The better nobles were aware of this, but they were ineffectual to cure.

Polybius could see the trend of things. Although he had described the Roman constitution as depending on the happy balance between the higher magistrates, the Senate and the people, and had shown the strength that the State derived from this interdependence, yet he was later compelled to admit that even a perfect polity was liable to decay from within. "When a commonwealth", he says, "after warding off many great dangers, has arrived at a high pitch of prosperity and undisputed power, it is evident that, by the lengthened continuance of great wealth within it, the manner of life of its citizens will become more extravagant; and that the rivalry for office, and in other spheres of activity, will become fiercer than it ought to be. And as this state of things goes on more and more, the desire of office and the shame of losing reputation, as well as the ostentation and extravagance of living, will prove the beginning of a deterioration . . . . And the people will demand to have all or far the greatest themselves. And when that comes to pass, the constitution will receive a new name, which sounds better than any other in the world, liberty or democracy; but, in fact, it will become that worst of all governments, mob-rule."[20] Again, when he

[20] VI, 57, 5ff. Shuckburgh's translation.

speaks of Scipio Aemilianus's early years he says that he was anxious to maintain a character for chastity, and to be superior to the standard observed in that respect among his contemporaries. "This was a glory", he continues, "which was not hard to gain at that period in Rome, owing to the general deterioration of morals . . . . This dissoluteness had as it were burst into flame at this period: in the first place, from the prevalent idea that, owing to the destruction of the Macedonian monarchy, universal dominion was now secured them beyond dispute; and in the second place, from the immense difference made, both in public and private wealth and splendour, by the importation of the riches of Macedonia into Rome."[21] It had become clear to him that the ideal State was ceasing to be, and that the fault lay with the nobles themselves, who, corrupted by unchallenged power and wealth, were falling away from their own ideals.

Scipio, too, could see the trend, not without concern; Lucilius's attacks on the defaulting nobles represent Scipio's feelings towards the traitors to the ideal. He attacks their gluttony and luxury at table,[22] holds up to ridicule those who resented Scipio's firm handling of the Roman army encamped about Numantia, where men idled away their time in hot baths, or spent their leisure with the less desirable acquisitions of the camp, which to their great disgust Scipio expelled;[23] he does not hesitate to refer to the dishonesty of particular persons, or to the failures of incompetent generals;[24] he describes the daily scene in the Forum, where senators and people alike hurry about, concerned only to cheat where they can, to outstrip each other in flattery, to give an appearance of honesty, and to lie in wait as though everyone were everyone else's enemy.[25] He states in unadorned language in what virtue consisted, and we may quote it here: "Virtue is being

[21] XXXI, 25, 3ff. Shuckburgh's translation.
[22] In Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin*, III, ll. 200-210; 465-6.
[23] *loc. cit.*, ll. 429-431.
[24] *loc. cit.*, ll. 440-2; 499-500.
[25] *loc. cit.*, ll. 1145-51.



able to pay in full a fair price in our business dealings and in the affairs which life brings us; virtue is knowing what each affair has within it for a man; virtue is knowing what is right and useful and honourable for a man and what things are good and again what are bad, what is shameful, useless, dishonourable; virtue is knowing the means and the end of seeking a thing, virtue is being able to pay in full the price from our store; virtue is giving that which in all truth is due to honour, being an enemy and no friend of bad men and manners, and on the other hand being a defender of good men and manners; prizing greatly the latter, wishing them well and being a life-long friend to them; and besides all this, thinking our country's interests to be foremost of all, our parents' next, and then thirdly and lastly our own."[26] Therein, according to them, lay virtue; but neither Scipio's example nor Lucilius's satire had power to turn men from a mode of behaviour which seemed good because it was profitable.

The Gracchi in literature as in all else mark a turning point. The aristocratic ideal had found its basis and its justification during our period; new influences had been made to refine and rationalize a traditional conception, which would otherwise under the impact of new ideas and customs have seemed inadequate or baseless. Yet, like all political ideals, in the moment of its triumph it lost its flexibility, its power of self-adjustment. The aristocrats' refined conception of *virtus* was not—perhaps could not be—modified to suit the changing conditions. And the profound social and economic changes during our period imperiously required a progressive reinterpretation of their ideals in terms of the new situation which was developing. They proved false to their own code when in their attempts to adjust their incomes to new needs and to find an outlet for their newly won capital, by their ruinous agrarian policy they destroyed their own peasants and filled the countryside with slaves. And then by leaving the new economic conditions to be exploited largely by men not of

[26] *loc. cit.*, ll. 1196-1208.

their ranks they allowed the growth of a class whose wealth and influence in time came near to equalling their own, but who, while not imbued with their ideals, had seen their unscrupulous conduct in the acquisition and management of their estates. The intrusion of this class more and more into the public life of the State contributed to the progressive deterioration of public morality for which the aristocrats by their refusal to apply their own principles to the circumstances of moneyed wealth were in the first place responsible. They remained essentially a landowning aristocracy; Cato's *De Agri Cultura* shows to what extent their ruthless standards of business betrayed their own ideal. There is a Gresham's law of morals; and when the nobles should have been striving to improve the moral code of business, they allowed themselves with the State to risk submersion beneath the brackish waters of their own degraded code of money making. Yet if they could not expand their ideal to include business and commerce, they had no choice; for wealth they must have, from whatever source. More and more they found themselves out of tune with their environment, which their own conquests had changed, and yet knowing it they were powerless; for twenty years and more a social and economic problem had called for their statesmanship; and when in 133 B.C. it became a crisis which challenged the breadth, the very *humanitas* of their ideals, and gave them a last opportunity to show their worthiness to be Rome's sole governors, they elected miserably to act in their own interests.

The individual had been slowly breaking his bonds throughout our period, but until the Gracchi the code of honour among the nobles had prevented any breakaway by the individual in opposition to the opinion of the majority. There had been an uneasy moment when Laelius made his tentative suggestions for reform; but true to the ideal he had withdrawn his project rather than split the nobles. The Gracchi did not withdraw. But the desertion of the Gracchi was not the cause of the nobles' downfall; it was a symptom of their inadequacy. And their continued failure to adapt themselves



to new conditions resulted in the Gracchi being the first only of the great individualists. Their code was no longer obeyed even by their own members; they were exclusive merely, claiming the right to govern without showing their worthiness to do so. The Gracchi and their successors down to Caesar took the first place in Rome; history concerned itself with them. Politics became personal, biographies and autobiographies began to be written. By the time of Sulla a law of libel was necessary, but still the pamphlets came. The age of individualism released the floodgates of individual literature; no aristocracy could impose its limitations; and with the increasing class of educated persons and the gradual multiplication of books there grew a Latin literature which was to culminate in the glories of the Augustan age. A civilization that was only dimly aware of the effect of social and economic conditions on men's lives attributed correspondingly more to the individual, and hence all eyes were turned on the men that moulded and seemed to create events. It is not an accident that Plutarch's Lives of the Gracchi have all the elements we found lacking in the earlier *Lives*; the Gracchi are the first to live and move like men, the first of these Romans we feel we know and can understand.