

# ON TEACHING THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

By NORMAN H. BAYNES

MANY teachers must have found that it is far easier to awake interest in Greek history than in the history of Rome. Greek history affords much greater variety; it is full of the doings of men who stand out as clear-cut individualities, while those who fashioned the Republic of Rome are all surprisingly similar each to the other: they remind one of the portraits of the early Scottish kings of Holyrood. But perhaps an even greater difficulty lies in the fact that our text-books of Roman history are, naturally enough, planned chronologically, and thus the writers are forced to relate the whole contemporaneous development in many spheres of the nation's life. Constitutional, economic, military, and social history must all advance together as parts of a single narrative. The student's interest is distracted, and he is prevented from following up a single line of thought. *Divide et impera* is a good Roman maxim, and I feel that we should do well to follow Roman practice in our teaching of Roman history. Mr. Maurice Baring within the covers of a single book has recently four times recounted the history of Mary Queen of Scots: the four Mariés attendant on the queen tell, each in her own way, of the same series of events. It would be an interesting experiment to narrate the history of Rome in one and the same book in several different ways, regarding that history in each case from a single standpoint. Thus would be secured that unity of view which it is impossible for the ordinary text-book to maintain. What, we may ask ourselves, would be our varied angles from which successively to approach the history of the Roman Republic?<sup>1</sup> Here there is wide scope for the expression of a teacher's personality; my own chapters would be written round some such headings as:

1. The Roman and the land.
2. The Roman army.

<sup>1</sup> I have in this paper limited myself to a consideration of the Republican period as being that part of Roman history which is most frequently studied. But within the same framework the story would be prolonged to embrace the history of the early empire.

3. The Roman conception of the *Imperium*.
4. The Roman senate.
5. The debt of Rome to the foreigner.
6. The building of the Empire.

Under these headings could, I think, be brought most of what is really significant in the earlier history of Rome. May I briefly illustrate my conception of the content of these chapters?

1. That the Roman was a landsman, a peasant farmer, must, I am persuaded, be put in the forefront of all our teaching of Roman history. The native Roman religion is deeply rooted in the Italian country-side: from the country-side as a starting-point it can best be studied. It is about the farmer's house and his fields that the shadowy impersonal *numina* of the primitive faith perform their homely tasks. In this setting, too, the traditional stories of the early Roman heroes find their natural place. They are a faithful reflection of the Roman's love for the land which he tilled. These stories can be contrasted with Israel's traditions of nomadic patriarchs or with that characteristically Greek hero Odysseus, the man who had travelled over the wet ways of the Mediterranean and had in his voyaging seen many folk and many cities. The Roman was no wanderer: he was from the first *adscriptus glebae*, and that fact determined his outlook and his desires. It is the question of land distribution, of appropriation of arable land by patricians after a successful war, which sustains the plebeians in their long-drawn struggle with the aristocracy, the struggle which we know as the 'Conflict of the Orders'. The plebeian farmer must secure access to the *imperium* that he may control the policy of a state which is founded on agriculture. It is by land-roads, not by sea, that the territories of Rome are linked up with the capital: it is by land-grants to her colonists that Rome holds her conquests. What Rome asks from the conquered peoples of Italy is agricultural land and the protection of that land from attack through the man-power of the vanquished: there is no justification for reading into the story a money-tribute of which our sources give no hint. The prospect of gaining good agricultural land in Sicily must have had no small influence upon the fateful decision which led to Rome's first transmarine

conquest. The most permanent damage which Hannibal inflicted upon Rome was the ruin of Roman agriculture in southern Italy which resulted from the Carthaginian occupation; as a consequence of that occupation there followed a relapse from agriculture to stock-breeding, from the husbandry of peasant-farmers to the labour of slave-gangs. The resultant accumulation of Italian land in the possession of capitalist owners of large estates created the problem which the Gracchi sought to solve. In the last century of the Republic the settlement of veterans discharged from the army does but present the land problem in a new form: the discontent alike of the Sullan dispossessors and of the dispossessed united both classes in support of Catiline, while political rivals exploited land bills to serve their personal ends. The land bill of Rullus and that of Caesar in 59 B.C. are but instances of the political significance of the land problem in Roman history. Cato's advice to Roman farmers will provide the background for the teacher's picture, while the new era of peace inaugurated by Augustus will be mirrored in Virgil's *Eclogues* and in the intensely Roman spirit which inspires the *Georgics*. It is in this setting that the student can best appreciate the essential originality of Virgil's work: Greek models have played their part in the creation of the poems, but it is from Italian soil that the poet's inspiration is drawn. The land remains throughout the supreme interest of the Roman: trade and mercantilism play but a small part in the history of the Roman Republic.<sup>1</sup> It was always in land or in loans advanced on the security of land that the Roman chose to invest his money. There is surely every reason for placing the land in the forefront of our teaching of Roman history.

2. It was by arms that the Roman won his empire, although it was by other means that his conquests were secured. The history of Rome is reflected in the story of Rome's army. It was because the state had need of the common man for the defence

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tenney Frank, *Roman Imperialism*, Macmillan, New York, 1914. The financial exploitation of Roman conquests by the equestrian order dates only from the period of the Gracchi. For the study of the history of the Roman *equites* the teacher might find suggestive material in Mr. Gretton's essay on *The Middle Class*, Bell, 1918 (out of print).

of Rome that the plebeian was first able to challenge the supremacy of the patrician. The army, in Rome as in Greece, was the school of democracy. The popular assembly in Rome was the gathering of her warriors, and its divisions were originally determined by the kind of service which men were competent to render in the field. It was for the army that the Roman roads were built; the Roman colonies of Italy were planted as strategic outposts of the Roman state. The citizen-soldier is the pioneer of Romanism. The great turning-point in the history of the Roman Republic is the Second Punic War, and it was the army and military needs which were the decisive factors in that decisive period. At the end of the war with Pyrrhus it might have seemed that the aristocratic republic was in a fair way to become something which a Greek would have recognized as a democracy: that Rome did not so develop was largely the result of the Second Punic War. The struggle with Hannibal turned the senate into a war cabinet, and on the prestige which the chamber had gained as a war cabinet it established the supremacy which it exploited in the second century. It was the demands made by the army upon the Roman citizen in the period after the Second Punic War which were in large measure responsible for the extension of slave labour in Italy: the slave was not liable to military conscription. While the Roman soldier was winning the Greek East for Rome, the slave was taking his place in the Italian home-land. Marius, by giving to the volunteer his opportunity to serve in the Roman legions, created the new type of army which was to enable its general to achieve his political ends: Sulla possessed the military support which the Gracchi had lacked. The troubled period of the last years of the Republic is thus characterized by the attempts of politicians to secure the control of an army: the political life of the capital is dominated by the thought of the absent general at the head of his troops and by the fear of what might happen on his return. *Differunt vos in adventum Cn. Pompei*—‘wait and see’: the decision rests with the master of the legions. In the eighties it is Sulla in the East, in the seventies it is Pompey in Spain, in the later sixties it is Pompey in the East, and in the fifties it is Caesar in Gaul.

Where the army is, there is the centre of men's interest. We read the story of the political struggles in the capital during this period and we are at times tempted to ignore the influence of the absent general, but such forgetfulness is dangerous, for the army and its commander are the constant elements in the political kaleidoscope of Rome. And after the civil wars it is as commander-in-chief that Augustus achieves his task, and withdraws the legions from the heart of the empire to post them on the distant frontiers: the troops are no longer to be the abettors of political rivalries, they are recalled to their true function as defenders of the *Pax Romana*. If out of the complexity of the whole history of the Roman Republic we can isolate the part played in that history by the army of Rome, we shall give to our students a clue which can hardly fail to make that history of greater significance and wider interest.

3. It is not easy to find a single idea which may help to unify the study of Roman constitutional history, but perhaps that which may best serve our purpose is the essentially Roman concept of legitimate authority, the *imperium* conferred upon its mandatory by the Roman state. Through this concept of constitutional authority the early kingship of Rome is linked to the consulship, the consulship to the Principate, and the Principate to the absolutism of the Byzantine Basileus. The *imperium* of Rome's public life had its parallel in the *patria potestas* of the head of the Roman family, and in each case the depository of these wide powers was under the obligation to exercise them only with deliberate discretion. The father of the family was in duty bound to consult the family council: the holder of the *imperium* was expected to seek the advice of the council of state, the senate. When the Greek overthrew the kingship in his city, he divided the functions of the king amongst several officials to each of whom was attributed some definite part of the royal prerogative: polemarch, archon, king archon had each his respective province in the administration of the *polis*. When the Roman put an end to the kingship, he retained undiminished the range of the king's *imperium*: military, judicial, administrative, and religious functions were simply transferred to the two consuls, subject only to the

limitations of yearly tenure and collegiate office. Two magistrates were thus annually created, possessing the same powers and the same duties. Perhaps nothing more clearly illustrates the political moderation and common sense of the Roman than the fact that this paradoxical solution of the constitutional problem did actually *work* for centuries—that the dead-lock of Caesar's consulship had not been through the centuries a recurrent feature of Roman public life. It is strange that this political miracle has been so rarely emphasized in our text-books of Roman history. And having set the precedent of the appointment of magistrates possessing the undiminished *imperium*, the Romans proceeded to follow that precedent: the Roman praetor, so far as his powers are concerned, is but another consul, although in the presence of the consul he occupies a subordinate position. Thus it is that most of Rome's constitutional struggles can be brought without violence into relation with the *imperium*. The creation of the tribunate, the recognition of the *ius auxilii* and of the right of appeal in capital trials are all limitations of the *imperium* of the magistrate. The tribune's right to veto the acts of the constitutional executive permanently concedes a revolutionary privilege to the representatives of the plebs, but once more Roman moderation and common sense triumph, and at length this revolutionary element is fitted into the normal constitutional life of the Roman state. The Twelve Tables are but another limitation of the *imperium*, an invasion of the judicial discretion of the Roman magistrate. Since all power rests in the hands of the holders of the *imperium*, if the plebeians would control Roman policy they must perforce break down the patrician monopoly. For in Rome there was never room for the Athenian  $\delta\eta\mu\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\acute{o}\varsigma$  directing the policy of the state through his influence with the ecclesia, though, it might be, holding no public office. The Roman comitia never secured political initiative, never won the  $\pi\alpha\rho\rho\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$  of the Athenian assembly. The 'Conflict of the Orders' is essentially the long-sustained struggle of the plebeians to secure access to the *imperium*. Italy was unified either through incorporation of the conquered into the citizen body, or through a policy of federation, but, when Rome had in the

First Punic War acquired the island of Sicily, the city-state was faced with a new imperial problem. For the solution of that problem no novel precedent was created: Rome simply sent to Sicily a holder of the historic and traditional *imperium*. Thereby the whole future of Roman provincial administration was determined. Here in the Roman province, where an effective check upon arbitrary government was most necessary, the collegiate limitation completely failed. The governor, clothed with the undiminished *imperium*, stood without a peer. Unsupported by a trained civil service he had need of the endowments of an Admirable Crichton, and, as the empire extended, the supply of Admirable Crichtons was unequal to the demand. Thus one could trace the influence of this single concept throughout the history of the Republic down to the time when the grant of the *imperium* for whole periods of years undermined the constitution. The Roman practice had been to trust the magistrates of the state and not to challenge their administration until the expiry of their term of office. The aristocratic Roman commonwealth knew nothing of the democratic remedy of the recall of unpopular statesmen: the Gracchan challenge to Octavius was from the standpoint of constitutional practice a revolutionary proceeding. Thus the grant to a general of *imperium* for a continuous period of years was tantamount to a renunciation by the Roman state of the right to control its own mandatory. Such a grant pointed to that continuous delegation on which the authority of the Princeps was later to be founded. Even when the Principate had given place to absolutism, when the military and civil powers were put into different hands, still in the person of the Byzantine Basileus there remained a holder of the undiminished *imperium*. As it had been in the beginning, so it was at the end of the Roman story. Every teacher would be well advised to write his own essay upon the *imperium*, the spinal cord of Rome's constitutional development.

It will be unnecessary in this brief paper to outline the way in which the remaining themes might be treated. It is obvious that we must try to give to our students some connected view of the relation of the senate to the constitutional executive of the

Roman state and endeavour to show how a purely advisory chamber came in practice to control that executive and determine policy. In contrast with the authority of a chamber which was a permanent reservoir of political experience must be exemplified the weakness of the *comitia* as an organ of government. The Roman state, it has been said, was 'une démocratie manquée'. If this is true, if Roman history is indeed, like Roman literature, an aristocratic affair, that fact can best be illustrated by a study of the history of the Roman senate.

Rome possessed a gift which is invaluable to any imperial power, the capacity to learn from others and to adapt that lesson to her own purposes. Rome did not merely borrow, she appropriated. And when Rome had made anything her own, that thing was a new creation, because henceforth it bore the Roman stamp. Thus it is of importance to consider Rome's debt to the foreigner, and in particular to the Etruscan and the Greek. The former debt has often of recent years been over-emphasized: many a sweeping statement will not withstand a critical examination. Here caution is in place: 'it would be idle to deny that Rome borrowed from Etruria, but no less idle to represent Roman culture as Etruscan.'<sup>1</sup> In studying Rome's debt to Greece the teacher must fill in the gap which yawns in most text-books of Roman history: some account must be given of that civilization which was developed in the Hellenistic kingdoms which arose from the ruins of Alexander's empire. The Greece of Panaetius and Posidonius, the Greece of Alexandrian scholarship, is neither the Greece of Pericles nor that of Demosthenes, and it is essential that we should attempt to define that difference. And here the devout Hellenist who is also a teacher of Roman history must keep his head: too often Rome is dismissed as though she were some provincial Nazareth. If we describe the culture of all the lands subject to Rome by the single term 'Hellenismus', we are begging the question: we have already implicitly denied to Rome that gift of appropriation which puts the borrowed talent out to interest. Loyalty to Hellas need not mean that we blind ourselves to the originality and the value of the creative work of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Last, see *Cambridge Ancient History*, vii (1928), pp. 383-7.



Last, we must sketch Rome's work as empire-builder and thus prepare the way for a study of the Principate. We must illustrate Rome's use of her victories. It is in that crucial test, the use of victory, that Rome demonstrated her peculiar gifts. If the unification of Italy is the greatest triumph of the Republic, the Romanization of western Europe is the proudest achievement of the Roman Empire. As teachers we fail irreparably if we do not explain for our students something of the historic mission of the city *in gremium victos quae sola recepit*:

'Alone she gathers to her bosom those  
whom late she vanquished; citizens not foes  
she calls them now. Their conqueror they proclaim  
mother, not mistress. So her general name  
enfellowships mankind, makes fast, with bands  
of love devout, the far-off daughter lands,  
that wheresoe'er we range, 'tis all one race—  
debtors to her by whose peacemaking grace  
no place is strange, but everywhere a home—  
one world-wide family all akin with Rome.'<sup>1</sup>

And the conclusion of the whole matter: let us, each and all, form for ourselves our own Companion Volume to the textbooks of Roman history.

<sup>1</sup> Phillimore's translation of Claudian, *De cons. Stilichonis*, iii. 150-60.