CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES, II: ROMAN ANTIQUITIES

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A. S. WILKINS

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CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES.

II.

ROMAN ANTIQUITIES.

BY

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ROMAN ANTIQUITIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROMAN CHARACTER.

THE great deeds of the Roman people, and the growth of their empire, from the little cluster of shepherd's huts on the hills by the Tiber's bank, out to the furthest bounds of the civilized world, have been told already in another of the books of this series, the *Primer of Roman History*. But, if we wish to know aright the life of any nation, it is not enough that we should learn the battles that they fought, and the lands which they conquered, or even the lives of the great and wise men that lived among them. We need to be able to picture them to ourselves as they went about in their daily life. We want to know about the houses that they lived in, the food they ate, the dress they wore. We have to learn how they spent their days; what trades and professions were common among them; and how they behaved to their women, their children, and their servants. Above all, we have to do our best to enter into their ways of thinking about their lives and the proper ways of spending them, about their duties to their neighbours, to other nations, and to the Unseen Powers. Whatever the country is of which we are reading, it is not well to pass by things like these, which help to make the life of the people much more real and vivid to us. But least of all can we afford to do so in the case of the Greeks

and Romans. Here, more than anywhere, there is a danger that we should have vague and shadowy notions of the life that was really lived in the days that seem so far away. We talk of the languages spoken then as "dead languages," and so in a sense they are; that is to say, the forms in which they are spoken now are very different from those of earlier times. But we are apt to forget that there is nothing in the world more really living to-day than the thoughts which spring from the poems and the sculptures of Greece, from the laws and the government of Rome. And so in the mists and darkness of a distant past, we lose all sense of a life that was like our own in its homely daily cares and occupations.

The chief purpose of this little book will be, then, to give some help towards picturing afresh that old Roman life, and clothing what are too often the ghostly shadows of history with forms of flesh and blood, that may bring them nearer to ourselves.

2. **The national Roman character.**—We first catch sight of the people of Rome at the time when their settlement by the bank of the Tiber began to be lifting its head above the rest of the Latin towns, the youngest but the strongest of them all. Rome was built by a band of Latin colonists on a group of hills of no great height, rising close together on the southern bank of the Tiber. Its site seems to tell us of itself what was the purpose of its founding. As you sail up the Tiber from its mouth, the hills of Rome are plainly seen to be the nearest place to the sea where a fortress could be built to shelter the Latin traders from the Etruscan foes to the north of them. We see, then, that first and foremost we must think of the city of Rome as a fortified trading outpost for the towns of the Latin league. But it did not long remain so. The stories of its earliest days—little as we can trust to the legends that they tell us—and many of the customs of a later time appear to point us to a union of two separate towns