

**REGAL ROME: AN
INTRODUCTION
TO ROMAN
HISTORY, PP. 2-171**

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Regal Rome: An Introduction to Roman History, pp. 2-171 by Francis W. Newman

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BY

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P R E F A C E.



IN the last twenty years, so much has been laid before the English public concerning the early Romans, that but few words of introduction are here needed.

Engraved monuments existed from the beginning of Roman story, but they could yield only fragmentary information, not continuous narrative. The actual writing of history came so late, that to recover the early events was an arduous attempt. The writers, in fact, had no critical experience, and were patriotically credulous, even when they aimed at truth. Nor only so, but the aristocracy falsified their family records through vanity, and the Senate garbled their own decrees through party-spirit.

Cicero and Livy were extremely well aware of the untrustworthiness of the ancient Roman tales; but

they treated them with the same respect as the religious mythology, and would have feared to damage patriotism by too irreverent a criticism. The moderns, when a keen zeal for classical study was renewed, were for a long time seduced by the tone of the ancient authorities, into a far more entire belief than that of the Augustan age. Perizonius, according to Niebuhr, eminently took the lead towards a sounder view. But no commanding genius was needed for this: the matter is plain enough to diligent talent. Bayle and Beaufort, knowing nothing of Perizonius, followed in the same course, and a severe shock was given to indiscriminating faith.

Sir Walter Raleigh had shown how false were the military annals of Rome even in the second Punic war; but it was reserved for Niebuhr to demolish effectually all trust in the detailed accounts of Rome's martial successes. It is now clear that the historians thought it a patriotic duty to conceal defeats, or to invent victories which would wipe them out.

A right understanding of the Agrarian laws dates only from Heyne, who, in the first French Revolution published a tract in proof that these laws never touched *private*, but only *public*, land. In fact, this

is so plain in Plutarch and Appian, that it is hard to understand how earlier critics deceived themselves. Although Niebuhr acknowledges himself indebted to Heyne on this subject (vol. ii. p. 133, *trn.*), yet from Niebuhr's language elsewhere, the opinion has gone abroad that he originated this view, and that it needed the deep insight of a rare genius.

I will not conceal, that my strong difference from the conclusions of Niebuhr has been a great impulse to the publication of this small volume: but if I were writing in Germany and not in England, no apology would be needed for the avowal. Niebuhr's erudition and untiring ingenuity have given a vast impulse to inquiry: Roman history is better written, in consequence of his labours: but his successors are very far from tying themselves to his results.

Niebuhr often expresses much contempt for mere incredulous criticism and negative conclusions; and he probably would little value the compliment, that he has aided us to get rid of fable and false theory. Yet, *wisely to disbelieve*, is our first grand requisite, in dealing with materials of mixed worth. When this has been accomplished, a hypothesis to connect and complete the events which remain, may be ventured, and is often convincing. But while we hold

fast an erroneous tradition, the more subtly we pursue its consequences, the worse does our falsehood become.

In attempting to reconstruct the picture of most ancient Rome, much aid is gained from the singular adherence of the Romans to precedent and form in the development of their constitution. This often enables the modern critic to read the ancient state of things, as the print in a rock shows to a geologist the nature of the leaf which marked it.

The learned reader will understand that to acknowledge obligations would be on the part of the writer an absurdity in such a subject. The only originality which can be here pretended, is that of having come with a fresh mind to old discussions.

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