

THE EPISTLES OF HORACE, BOOK I

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649028658

The Epistles of Horace, Book I by E. S. Shuckburgh

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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E. S. SHUCKBURGH

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HORACE, BOOK I**

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BOOK I.

0
Pitt Press Series.

THE
EPISTLES OF HORACE
BOOK I.

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

E. S. SHUCKBURGH, M.A.
LATE FELLOW OF EMMANUEL COLLEGE.

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

CAMBRIDGE:
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.
1888

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PREFACE.

AN editor of any part of Horace takes his life in his hand. Horace has been so popular an author for so many centuries that a multitude of traditional interpretations has gathered round his text, some of which are sure to be favourites with some of his thousands of readers, who do not bear easily to have them disturbed. An editor himself is fortunate if he has not himself imbibed many prejudices as to the poet's meaning which will not stand the test of examination. For Horace is essentially one of those writers whose poems become absorbed into our thoughts and language, and his meaning is apt to suffer in the process. I can only say that I have tried to look impartially on the text of the Epistles, and to test my conception of their meaning by comparing the explanations of other editors. The text has been revised by a careful consideration of the testimony of the mss. supplied so fully by Keller and Holder. Orelli's larger edition has been before me while I was writing my notes; which when in type I have compared with those of other editors, especially with the learned and excellent edition of my friend Professor Wilkins (1885). My own edition makes no pretension to a completeness such as his, which is a real credit to English

scholarship; but though I have made some corrections in my commentary by comparing it with his, and have learned from him to modify some of my views, I have not consciously borrowed any illustrative or explanatory matter from him. Such debt as I owe to him I hope he will look upon as a homage to the excellency of his work. I have prefixed a life of Horace, which, though not pretending to give a complete abstract of what may be learnt of the poet from his own poems, may yet I hope in some degree show young readers the way to study a man's life in his works, and give a clear if only an elementary conception of his position and the order of his productiveness.

CAMBRIDGE, 1887.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. LIFE OF HORACE.

A WANT of adequate biographies of the men of letters in Greece and Rome is the most striking defect in ancient literature. Such as we possess are few and meagre, and fail to answer a tithe of the questions which we should be glad to put. Especially conspicuous is the absence of information as to the youth, domestic surroundings, and early training of such men. The short life of Horace which appears in the MSS. and is attributed to Suetonius does not tell us even the name of Horace's mother, or allude in any way to her. And yet the influence of a mother, or the absence of it, has often the most decisive effect upon a boy's career, especially on that of a sensitive and emotional boy such as Horace in all likelihood was. The Roman poets, notably Ovid and Horace, have however partly supplied this deficiency by numerous autobiographical allusions: and it is to our power of piecing such allusions together that we must depend principally for our knowledge of the life of our poet.

Quintus Horatius Flaccus¹ was born at Venusia [mod. Venosa] on the 8th of December B.C. 65². His native town Venusia, picturesquely situated on the slopes of Mount Voltur, was on the borders of Lucania and Apulia, so that he could speak of himself as half Apulian

b. a.c. 65.
Cosa. L. Aurelius Cottus,
L. Manlius Torquatus.

¹ Horace's father being a freedman the nomen Horatius, and probably the prænomen Quintus, was adopted from the patronus who had emancipated him, one of the gens Horatia, we don't know who.

² Sueton. Vit. Hor., cp. Ep. 1, 20, 27. Od. 3, 21, 10 nota mecum canille Manlio.

half Lucanian³. It had been a town of some importance for a considerable time. A Roman colony was placed there in B.C. 262, which stood firm in its loyalty to Rome during the horrors of the Hannibalic invasion. It was then a rich town, though not protected by walls, and suffered proportionally from the wasting of its territory in B.C. 218. But it had recovered sufficiently to receive the remnants of the Roman army after Cannae [B.C. 215], supply them with food and medical treatment and with a considerable sum of money, distributed in various proportions between infantry and cavalry⁴. It had however suffered much, and in B.C. 200 its thinned ranks were supplemented by a new body of Coloni led thither by Terentius Varro, T. Quintius Flamininus, and Publius Cornelius Scipio. Thus reinforced the town once more grew in wealth and importance, and became in the Social War of B.C. 90—88 one of the strongholds of the insurgent Italian States. By the legislation which followed the Social War [*leges Julia* and *Plautia-Papiria*] Venusia like other 'Colonies' obtained the full civitas, and in Strabo's time [about contemporary with Horace] it was still a town of importance⁵; its situation on the Via Appia contributing largely to its rapid recovery from the effects of the Social War.

In this place then, a provincial town of the better class, Quintus Horatius was born a full civis Romanus. His Father was a freedman and a collector of taxes [*exactionum exactor*]⁶. He had a small estate and house, but was by no means rich⁷; but as we shall see he took such pains and went to such expense in his son's education as to earn the boy's respect and the man's lasting gratitude.

Of Horace's early childhood we know absolutely nothing.

³ Sat. 2, 1, 34 *Lucanus an Apulus anceps*.

⁴ Polyb. 3, 90. Livy 22, 54; 27, 6.

⁵ πόλις ἀξιόλογος Strab. 6, 1, 3.

⁶ Sueton. Vit. Hor., cp. Sat. 1, 6, 7.

According to Suet. some declared that he was a dealer in salt fish (*salsamentarius*).

⁷ Sat. 1, 6, 71 *macro pauper agello*. Ep. 1, 20, 20 *me libertinus natum patre et in tenui re*.

There is only one incident which remains embalmed in his own verses. He tells us that he once wandered in the woods of Mount Voltur which looks down upon his native Venusia, and there was found sleeping peaceably, unhurt by bear or serpent, with leaves of bay and myrtle covering him—*non sine dis animus infans*⁸. He feigns to regard this as a presage of his coming fame; but we may dwell on it as a slightly embellished tale of a lost child, often no doubt told him by his mother who had searched for him. It is like the story related by the great-grandson of Sir Thomas More, and piously regarded as a presage of his coming sanctity. 'Once', we are told, 'his nurse riding with him in her arms across some water, the horse stumbled into a hole and put both her and the infant in great danger of drowning. To prevent this she threw the child over a hedge. By God's help escaping too she came to take the child up again expecting to find him killed or maimed, but she found him to have no hurt at all, but the babe sweetly smiled upon her'⁹.

Whatever be the foundation of Horace's childish adventure he seems to have regarded it as one of the four narrow escapes, for which he had had to thank the Muses or the Gods. It is all we know of his childhood. As soon as he was old enough his father, instead of sending him to the local Day School¹⁰ kept by one Flavius, where his schoolfellows would have been sons of centurions and the like, carried him to Rome that he might attend the best schools frequented by the sons of Equites and Senators. Horace speaks of this gratefully, as evidently an act of self-denial on his father's part, who took care that however narrow his means his boy should not be at a disadvantage in point of dress and appearance among his richer schoolmates. The wisdom of this course will perhaps be questioned by some. But those who know by experience the capacity of boys for giving pain will understand the human affection which prompted

⁸ Od. 3, 4, 9—20.

⁹ Life of Sir T. More, by his Great Grandson, p. 6.

¹⁰ Like Shakespeare's schoolboy they go 'satchel on arm' and writing-tablets in hand—*lævo suspensi loculas tabulamque lævæ* (Sca. 1, 6, 74).