# EXTRACTS FROM LIVY; PART I, THE CAUDINE DISASTER

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Extracts from Livy; Part I, The Caudine disaster by Titus Livius & H. Lee-Warner



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TITUS LIVIUS & H. LEE-WARNER

# EXTRACTS FROM LIVY; PART I, THE CAUDINE DISASTER

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## DATES IN ROMAN HISTORY.

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# INTRODUCTION.

The series of which this little volume forms the first instalment is meant to illustrate the principal features of Rome's external history, and of Livy's manner of dealing with it. The Caudine Disaster, Hannibal's Campaign in Italy, and the Roman Subjugation of Macedonia, are typical events in the three periods of the history of the Roman republic—the struggle for dominion over Italy, for dominion over the Western Seas, for dominion over the civilised world. Papirius, Hannibal, and Aemilius are characters worth studying. And though as treated by Livy it cannot be denied that there is a certain sameness in the rhetorical manner in which they all express their views, this is not a fault of style so much as of the age in which he lived. We can easily excuse where we are so deeply interested. Livy's narrative, glowing with all the colours of fancy, can no more deceive us into mistaking it for a page of history, than we could mistake Henry V in Shakespeare for Henry V in Holinshed. In writing, his main object is to be effective. He shows causes only so far as they help to give colour to a deduction which he has already drawn in his own mind, and chooses his facts only as materials for eloquence. If we want to find the philosophy of history as conceived by Livy, we must look in the discourses. The bitter regrets expressed by the conquered nations, as they felt her yoke, contain our historian's views as to why they were conquered; the exhortations of the generals as they led their men into the field are as much addressed to the Romans of the Augustan age as they could have been to the practical yeomen of earlier times; the broken heart of a Hannibal pours out its laments against the imbecility of the home-government as the Greeks of old times told out their dreams to the sun.

And so too with his narrative. The oratorical element never deserts him. As M. Taine has well remarked, if we read only six lines of Livy, involuntarily our voice gets louder, our tones more argumentative; we defend a cause; we deliver an harangue.

Less diffuse than Herodotus, less measured than Xenophon, less manly than Caesar, less critical than Thucydides, Livy stands in a place of his own; he is the orator-historian.

The history of the Latin and Samnite Wars is the counterpart of the history of our own border warfare. Dressed up in Livy's uncritical but graphic style, the family tales of Rome's best blood, whilst they do not bear upon them the impress of candour and truth, still owe as much to the declamation schools of the Augustan age, as the early history of England does to Shakespeare's dramas. The myths of Romulus and Numa cannot but remind us of Lear and Cymbeline; the forced oratory of Postumius and Pontius, evidently educated in the same school of rhetoric, recalls to us the John and Philip of our own poet; and the scorn for the tribunes and contempt of the people which Livy's history breathes, are as necessary to the complete development of his style as the intemperate pride of Coriolanus and the un-Roman eloquence of Mark Antony are indispensable to Shakespeare's Roman trilogy. It is therefore not surprising that Livy is best at depicting martial events like the following; individual heroism and brilliant generosity are best seen in the uneven flow of tempestuous scenes; the grand epic of the war with Hannibal, and the tale of this second Samnite War must have been read by the young Papirii and Nerones with the same zest with which we have all read the 'Tales of a Grandfather.' Possibly, too, they blushed for their countrymen, as they read the treatment of Pontius and his countrymen, and were proud to point in preference to these latter as the ancestors of the united empire of Italy, in the same way that English boys extend their sympathies to William Wallace and Robert the Bruce. The author of the 'Lex Plautia Papiria' certainly did more for his country than Papirius Cursor, and if the strong centralisation of Roman ideas had not fettered the minds of the Augustan age of writers, Livy might have found Pontius a more manageable hero than Postumius.

The few chapters reprinted in the following pages narrate the most striking events in the Samnite War, a contest which, lasting full fifty years (343–290 B.C.), was only interrupted by occasional truces, and may be fairly styled the heroic age of Rome. The struggle with Veii about fifty years before (395 B.C.), was the first occasion of the Romans organizing a standing army and paying their troops. The subjugation of the Samnites now, heralded by the dissolution of the Latin confederacy (340 B.C.), was the first step to the Italian empire. 'Maiora hinc bella narranda sunt,' says Livy, as he approaches the subject, and certainly the perseverance of the Samnites, the generalship and tactics which they brought into the field, merit this preface. Both sides aimed *at each other's* hearts, the Samnites indeed with a strange want of *settled purpose, and not* sufficiently assisted by the other nationalities

in whose interest also they were fighting, the Romans remorselessly pushing on, and never losing any ground which they once had gained. Once conquered, the territory became their own; the dismal swamps of the Pontine Marsh, and the wild passes of the Matese were made to feel the grasp of the Roman gauntlet just as tightly as the Latin tillers or the Samnite shepherds. The Via Appia (312 B.C.) was not the least element in the greatness of purpose and solidity of execution with which Rome held down the communes of the Samnite confederacy.

The Umbrian, or Eastern stock, of whom the Samnites were as decidedly the superior people as the Latins were of the Western, had advanced towards the south of Italy, rather later than the Latins, keeping in general upon the heights, because they found the Latins in possession of the plains. In some cases even, as along the Apulian coast, they had left the native population, the Iapygians, with no more than occasional molestation. The banks of the rivers Sagrus and Tifernus, the region of Beneventum, the frontiers of Apulia, the borders of lake Fucinus, were all secluded parts of Italy; and to this seclusion was probably owing the growth of these people, who were thus saved from collision with the Etruscans by Rome, with the Latins by their mountain heights, with the Greeks by their want of seaboard. Thus, with little or no political connection with one another, except in times of danger from without, and in a state of complete isolation from the rest of Italy, they had exercised no influence hitherto on the history of the Peninsula.

It must have been long evident, however, to both Samnite and Roman, that they would have sooner or later to contest the supremacy of Italy Whether the Samnites or the Romans were most aggressive on the Liris or whether the Liris or the Greek city of Palaeopolis was the first scene of their complications, matters little: it was quite certain that the limestone ridges of the Matese, commanding, as they did, the quickest approach to Apulia and the South, would be an object of desire to the Roman legions. On these hills, then, most of which rise as high as Scafell and Helvellyn, and, clothed in beechwood forests, remind us of the Jura range, the duel for the leadership of Italy was being fought, at the time when Alexander the Great was winning his battles in Asia.

*Rugby, Aug.* 1873.

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