

LATIN VERSE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649246977

Latin Verse by Frank Smalley

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Cover @ 2017

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FRANK SMALLEY

LATIN VERSE

L A T I N V E R S E .

144

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144

NEW YORK:

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,

1, 3, AND 5 BOND STREET.

1864.

870.56
S635

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Gift
W. M. Wait
6-7-27

NOTE.

THE aim in this pamphlet is to present at somewhat greater length than usual the details of Latin versification, at least in some of its features.

To the scheme of the lyric metres of Horace is added a detailed scheme of the metres of Catullus and an index to the same.

Credit is generally given *in loco* for material used. In addition several special works have been consulted, as well as the best German, English, and American Latin Grammars. Particular obligation is due Roby's Latin Grammar and Schmidt's "Rhythmic and Metric of the Classical Languages" (White's translation).

F. S.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE Roman poets have suffered, in the estimation of literary critics, from the change in poetical taste which commenced about the beginning of the present century; and, in that of scholars, from the superior attractions of the great epic, dramatic, and lyrical poets of Greece. It is said, with some appearance of plausibility, that Roman poetry is not only much inferior in interest to the poetry of Greece, but that it is a work of cultivated imitation, not of creative art; that other forms of literature were the true expression of the genius of the Roman people; that their poets brought nothing new into the world.

It is, indeed, impossible to claim for Roman poetry the unborrowed glory or the varied inspiration of the earlier art of Greece. It has neither the same novelty nor variety of matter; nor did it adapt itself to the changing phases of human life in different generations and different states, like the epic, lyric, dramatic, and idyllic poetry of Greece. But it may still be answered that the poets of Rome have another kind of value. There is a charm in their language and sentiment different from that which is found in any other literature of the world. If, as we read them, the imagination is not so powerfully stimulated by the revelation of a new world, yet, in the elevated tones of Roman poetry, there is felt to be a permanent affinity with the strength and dignity of man's moral nature; and, in the finer and softer tones, a power to move the heart to sympathy with the beauty, the enjoyment, and the natural sorrows of a bygone life.

Their poetry came to the Romans after their habits were fully formed, as an ornamental addition to their power. Unlike the poetry of Greece, it was not addressed to the popular ear, nor was it an emanation from the popular heart. They drew the materials

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of their art as much from the stores of Greek poetry as from the life and action of their own times. Their art is thus a composite structure, in which old forms are combined with altered conditions; in which the fancies of earlier times reappear in a new language, and the spirit of Greece is seen interpenetrating the grave temperament of Rome and the genial nature of Italy. The poetry of the Romans is their most complete literary monument. It was the living heir, not the lifeless reproduction of the genius of Greece. If it seems to have been a highly trained accomplishment rather than the irrepressible outpouring of a natural faculty, still this accomplishment was based upon original gifts of feeling and character, and was marked by its own peculiar features. It was owing to their gifts of appreciation and their love of labor that the Roman poets succeeded in producing works which, in point of execution, are not much inferior to the masterpieces of Greece.

From one point of view, Roman poetry may be regarded as an imitative reproduction; from another, as a new revelation of the human spirit. For the form and some part of the substance of their works, the Roman poets were indebted to Greece; the spirit, and much also of the substance of their poetry, are native in their origin. They betray their want of inventiveness chiefly in the forms of composition and the metres which they employed; occasionally also in the cast of their poetic diction, and in their conventional treatment of foreign materials. But, in even the least original aspects of their art, they are still national. Although, with the exception of Satire and the poetic Epistle, they struck out no new forms of poetic composition, yet those adopted by them assumed something of a new type, owing to the weight of their contents, the massive structure of the Roman language, the fervor and gravity of the Roman temperament, and the practical bent and logical mould of the Roman understanding.

The metres of Roman poetry are also seen to be adaptations to the Latin language of the metres previously employed in the epic, lyrical, and dramatic poetry of Greece. The Italian race had, in earlier times, struck out a native measure, called the Saturnian (see 86 and 87, foll.), of a rapid and irregular movement, in which their religious emotions, their festive and satiric rallery, and their commemorative instincts found a rude expression. But after this measure had been rejected by Ennius, as unsuited to the gravity of his

greatest work, the Roman poets continued to imitate the metres of their Greek predecessors. But, in their hands, these became characterized by a slower, more stately and regular movement, not only differing widely from the ring of the native Saturnian rhythm, but also, with every improvement in poetic accomplishment, receding further and further from the freedom and variety of the Greek measures. The comic and tragic measures, in which alone the Roman writers observed a less strict rule than their models, never attained among them to any high metrical excellence. The rhythm of the Greek poets, owing in a great measure to the frequency of vowel sounds in their language, is more flowing, more varied, and more richly musical than that of Roman poetry.

Notwithstanding their outward conformity to the canons of a foreign language, the most powerful and characteristic measures of Roman poetry—such as the Lucretian and Vergilian Hexameter and the Horatian Alcaic—are distinguished by a grave, orderly, and commanding tone, symbolical of the genius and the majesty of Rome. In such cases as the Horatian Sapphic and the Ovidian Elegiac, where the structure of the verse is too slight to produce this impressive effect, there is still a remarkable divergence from the freedom and manifold harmony of the early Greek poets to a uniform and monotonous cadence.

It may be added in conclusion that there are four great periods of Roman poetry :

I. The age of Nævius, Ennius, Lucilius, etc., extending from about *n. c.* 240 till about *n. c.* 100.

II. The age of Lucretius and Catullus, whose active poetical career belongs to the last age of the Republic, the decennium before the outbreak of the civil war between Cæsar and Pompey.

III. The Augustan Age.

IV. The whole period of the empire after the time of Augustus.

SELLAR, with changes.

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