The Alleged Incapacity of the Romans for Speculative Thought

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Butler University Early Theses Collection

Summary

Volume of Collection
 8 boxes, 154 folders

Collection Dates
1887 – 1911

Scope and Content Note

The collection contains early theses manuscripts from Butler University dating from 1887 until 1911 on subjects including Literature, Religion, Science, Greek and Latin. Until 1897 Butler required all students, including undergraduates, to write a theses statement in order to receive a degree. One year after Butler University joined the University of Indianapolis and became Butler College the theses requirement for undergraduate students was dropped. Postgraduate theses are available in this collection ending in 1911. While the majority of these manuscripts are handwritten, as early as 1908 graduate students were required to type theses statements. The documents are arranged alphabetically by author.
The alleged incapacity of the Romans for speculative thought.

The theory that in a complete state, there should be found for the thinker and the poet, as well as for the warrior and legislator,民众 is Ancient Rome. It was only when he ceased no longer enforced his own ideas that he admitted under the strongest protection, the dignity of the intellectual calling.

Languages like all the rest of all mental culture, and this was especially the case with Greek language was in all respects more, and the artistic literature of the Roman was entirely upon a Greek hand, with Greece in Rome, Italy, Isis Sicily, Greece and Western civilization of human and Greek in Rome, spread by Greek language, employment of Greek prose in the instruction of youths, all these naturally contributed to this Greek, so that the mingling of nature, the Roman gradually gave way to the genius of the Greek, foreign culture. Their chronicles were written in Greek and their public speeches were delivered in Greek. Thus it was under the Greek influence that Roman literature began to develop itself.
The Romans felt duty-bound to either exchange their mother tongue for the Greek, or to refine and adapt it to the changed state of culture and they found themselves dependent on the Greeks for the words, and as the work of elementary instruction was placed in the hands of the Greeks and slaves or freedmen were usually retained as instructors, it the Latin alphabet were very similar to that of the Greek and as the two languages had a deep, close affinity, it was not a very difficult task for a Greek with all his trade and imagination to teach it.

The Romans knew no mode of supplying the want of a more advanced Latin instruction than that of transferring the study of Greek language and literature to the study of Latin. It could be transformed as this were lacking to Romans, and as they had not a great imagination hence, they depended entirely upon the Greeks for this. As latter accused the Romans as much as they were able, but as the Romans were so helpless in this work, and were completely under the influence of the Greeks and as they were learning to raise the standard of their literature, they gladly received every suggestion which the Greeks might offer.
and thus literature and language followed very closely after the style of the Greeks. The next flourishing period of Roman literature was characterized by the predominance of the Greek mind.

The Romans who generally wrote and spoke Greek with ease, much necessity had acquaintance with Greek works in art and science, with their history and plans of manners, and especially with those of the Greeks who had come to Rome and employed as tutors, readers, and teachers of rhetoric. Greek writings were translated and revised in the schools. Public libraries were established by the Romans and as being and accessible committed for literary activity more and more to a severely Greek standard that in every field of thought except that of law, Rome remained strictly rational, the Roman intellect was entirely under the ascendency of the Greeks. The study of history, poetry, philosophy all owed their first impulse to their intellectual contact with the Greeks.

Roman literature properly should have its origin in the interval between the first...
and second Prusia arose, for it was at this time that the Romans could see the wonderful results of Greek culture pointed out to them by the capture of Carthage and especially by the annihilation of Sicily in the hands of Carthage, because then Poetry and Art had an excellent and lasting life. Many of the inhabitants of the conquered provinces went to Rome to live and introduced this art and culture there, and it is from this period that Roman Poetry takes its regular and connected form. But this was also through the influence of the Greeks. Ennius, who called the Father of Roman Poetry, yet he was half Greek and half Roman. He was brought to Rome at an early age, and made his living by teaching Greek and translating plays to the stage. The Romans therefore did not introduce Poetry, they were not an imaginative people, and they followed the form of the Greeks in their Poetry. Alexandria also had a great influence on Roman Poetry, and some of the great critics regard very much the mingling of the two, but if it had not been for the Alexandrines we could not have had Catullus, Horace,
we have known Virgil and Ovid.

Even with these influences, Roman
Poetry did not take its origin from the
modeled emulators of the Orphics, but from the
demands of the school which needed Latin
manuals, and this made their poetry
work.

This school was one of the most ef-
ficacious innovators of the new spirit, because
they used the Latin language in it, but not
withstanding, they spoke in Latin. We did
not have Latin Thoughts, their writing involved
life and being was Greek.

Roman poetry is very much inferior
to Greek poetry, and it is a
work of evenained imitation and not a
creative act. Although they imitated the
Greeks, they were not always successful
in their reproductions. They were especially
inferior in epic and idyllic poetry and in
Philosophical dialogues. They brought nothing
new into the world, and they had only an im-
itative reproduction. They imitated forms
of composition, meter, style, poetic diction,
thought, art, and tradition. But Greek
poetry remained a new world of thoughts and
actions. It sprang from many sources and changed itself in every age and civilization, while Latin poetry remained the same and did not even change in different generations. The Romans did not have a speculative capacity, and thus their poetry does not reflect the light from which the Greek poets of Greece contemplated the wonder and solemnity of life.

Roman poets first learned from the study of Greek poetry to feel the graceful combinations and the musical forms of expression, and were thus encouraged and trained to elicit similar effects from their native language. But Roman poetry seems to be the old Greek art reappearing under new conditions. The Romans were not born original enough to write comedy and tragedy and they were influenced in these by the Greeks and took their subjects from them.

The Roman Drama was a reproduction of the Drama of Greece. The titles and mock of these indicate that they were either definite or translated from the Greek or were founded on the Greek legends and mythology. Not only the titles were taken from the Greeks but also the characters, form, and metre. But with
all this it was impossible for the Roman drama to reproduce, the inner spirit, the noblest type, of the Greek drama to rival its artistic excellence.

The Greek Tragedy was the place in which the vivid fancy and emotions of a primitive age were, and combined with the bright, the social and political life of the greatest era of ancient civilization. It represented the sufferings and sufferings of national heroism, as incident by long observation, in the feelings of many generations, and appealed to all its friends help in danger. This was represented with great solemnity to the Greeks, but it had no meaning whatever to the Romans. The Romans might understand the natural sentiment of a strong will, or might be moved to sympathy with the sufferings of actors, but he would not understand the consolation which comes with the natural sorrow for the more earthly affairs in a great dramatic action, and would he know the inward lesson of self-knowledge and self-mastery and would not have the feeling of awe and mystery which were diffused through the thoughts and imaginations of the Greeks.
The mind most capable of speculative thought is most acute in its appreciation of comedy. But this form of literature had little influence on the style and sentiment of the Romans. In Comedy as in Tragedy the Romans were not active agents of creative beauty, but translators and imitators.

Ancient Rome had more greatness than poets, because lacking imaginative power she could supply its place with the richest elaborations of Rhetoric. The visible city, though not nearly as large, the powers and splendor of imperial Rome, and that not ideal but actual, was a theme fitted to inspire the patriot orator or historian, but not to create the finer susceptibilities of the poet. The contemplation of this splendor and the pride of ownership, such a magnificent city would have limited the Greeks to a lesser mental development in Philosophy and Literature and furnished them with excellent subjects for speculation, while with the Romans their minds went no farther than the subjects of war, national life, eloquence and law, and their writings were limited to a recitation of facts. They were not able to go beyond that, and
and did not even much love in good form.
They had a fine military discipline and their
minds were as truly engaged on the sub-
jects of war and national life that they did
not diverge much on the literary subjects and
the great philosophical questions and their
capacity for reasoning was not increased.
But the Greeks did not think as much years
they cultivated their minds and powers by
applying themselves to the subjects which
required deep thinking and gained great
intellectual capacity and forces of speculative
reasoning.

In prose literature, history was the
first to establish itself, and for a long time
historical composition was more admired
writing, a dry chronological recording until
the rise of the earliest annalists wrote in
Greek, after the second Punic war. Poly-
linus Censor wrote a History of Rome in
Latin from Arneus to his own time. The Romans
had written records from an early date, also
personal experiences, but were not capable
of establishing a great and original historical
school. They acquired a false conception of
history from the Greeks, which injure their
history to such an extent that it could never be reprinted. The Romans thought nothing of
actuare life, that instead of keeping the simple
commentaries of the men who contributed to
make Roman history, they were very indifferent
to these historical documents and were content
with the meagre yearly registers of the mag-
istrates. The only written documents before
the Punic wars were composed of registers,
laws, and hymns.

From the beginning the Roman kept
records in which there obtained the naming
the magistrates for each year and as daily
record of the memorable events. The Libri Latin
breeds containing the lists of magistrates, told
of the treaty between Rome and Carthage and
the treaties made with Ptolemy and Gabii.
Besides these records as a register of the family
was kept by each great house telling of the
honors gained in the performing of great deeds.
All of this shows the nurture of this history.
It was not based on high principles. The
idea of preserving the truth and handing it
down for its own sake was entirely unknown
to them. It was through national pride
that these records were kept. But one may
say that this shows a quality of patriotism to those surviving it in that rude period. Instead of this, it was a selfish motive to make their power stronger and to strengthen that of the city and not for the instruction of mankind.

The Romans regarded all kinds of literature as mere exercises in style. Livy says, "History is simply what is poetry and is written for purposes of narration not proof. Being compared with the modes of transmitting sound and to posterity, it avoids the dulness of continuous narration by the use of rarer words and more paraphrases." A writer was not called an orator unless he had good style. All the documents, essays, memoranda of their public conduct, copies of their speeches etc. were noted by the majority of people unless their author was celebrated or had an elegant style. The thought was not considered, they said nothing for it. Eloquence was the great path to civil honor, and success was not to be sworn with out it." The Romans as a people had great talent for public speaking, but their pronouncements all in their eloquence and not their thought. When boys they were taught to train with their
father in the senate, in the forum, among his agricultural duties, and gained a great knowledge of public business and their form for speaking was obtained by practice, not by rules of art and rhetoric. But these discourses were not put in writing except in
images from or reglative, they did not have the task for writing them. All their religious and legal writings were arranged in rhythmic form and some known by the name of Oratioles that the earliest competence of history into
really, the first prose writers did not write in Latine, but in Greek.

Oratory was practiced for a long time by the Romans without art and method, although
instruction and practice in oratory went with the Roman from youth through his entire political life, but it was only through the influence of Greek rhetoric that the Roman oratory acquired form, system and artistic treatment, both in theory and practice. Public speaking was necessary in every department. The general on field of battle, the senator and magistrate all had to be public speakers. The orator was held far above the folk and oratory was cultivated to a great extent, but it never reached an art. A person.
who wished to gain great public honor, usually began with funeral orations, though in later times it was considered more honorable to begin with public accusation. Cataphatic was the first great orator, he was a successful accuser and in many trials defended himself with distinction. His chief characteristics were force, brevity and getting acuity. He wrote in a rude style and no one studied his writings, his renown was in the power of his eloquence. Thus we see that Rome did not force herself constantly in poetry, history nor eloquence.

The study of Philosophy at Rome had been suspended for some time and it was feared for two reasons. It tended to cause distrust in religion and it devoted many minds from public life in which they were as much interested. After the war with Persia many of the Greek Philosophers won the confidence of the Romans and imparted to them a great many of their own philosophical views. The Roman Deity graded three ideas, but being as inferior to the Greeks, did not have the power to grasp the spirit of argument, but merely the empty form, and so the Roman...
help thinkers they could not carry out the argument, nor from ideas opposite to the Greeks but limited them in philosophy as in everything else.

The object in Greek philosophy was to attain to truth, while the Roman was to apply the truth to government of life. Although the Greek mind was not limited as to calculation, yet the result of their far-reaching thought was not to the formation of a governing principle. The Romans on the other hand did not undertake their love of abstract speculation nor the charm of reasoning for the sake of another end, but it was for the government of self. Iavored a great contempt for philosophers, yet he was not added in Greek philosophy, and with his keen appreciation of the Roman character he saw that his people as well as himself were unfitted for speculative thought; and that so much cause the cultivation of philosophy would only bring forth pedants and Hypocrites.

The Romans remained entirely dependent upon the Greeks in philosophy without pro-ducing anything original. The main point with them was always not the theoretical but the practical side of philosophy. Cicero on the
basis of an acquaintance with the Greek philosophy, wrote a number of philosophical tracts without capacity or need for deep and original speculations. He imitated Plato by putting his writings in the form of dialogue, but he was far from reaching him in thought and argument. In his efforts to establish a certain balance between theory and practice, Cicero showed a preference for the new Academy on account of its sophisms, that being in harmony with the aims of the advocate and orator, also for stoicism on account of its moral tone.

Although Greek philosophy acquired a certain influence over the Romans through the medium of tragic poetry, it was received with an apprehension compounded of some igno-
rance and instinctive misgiving. The Greeks had an influence over the Romans in language, poetry, history, eloquence and philosophy, and the Romans were always ready and willing to receive anything which the Greeks might suggest and often sought their advice and instruction. In their willingness and anxiety to accept and adopt all the help from the Greeks and taking hern-
generally as their powers of thought, the Romans felt that, although their pride never allowed them to publicly acknowledge it, their inferiority to the Greeks in their intellect and form and art. They thought that by their contact with the Greeks they might be able to gain a literary talent and to be able to write and think for themselves. It was not want of ambition that the Romans were not as speculative people but lack of form and imagination.

Roman literature seemed to flourish for some time under this Greek influence and many prominent writers were produced, but this did not last long. There were many forms of art and science which they did not work out. Their imagination was as narrow and their constructive talent so small that they were not able to take up these subjects. Science, poetry, history, philosophy had all been perfected by the Greeks and the Romans felt that they were not able to cope with them.

The fact that the Romans, with their model, the Greeks, a speculative people and the best example which could be found, and entering under their influence, and having advantage of a model with brilliance of thought was unique
in civilized world, and not being able to act in an instance, and seldom to equal the Greeks, and generally very much inferior to them, show that the Romans were not deep thinkers, and were not capable of deep and speculative thought. "Imitation is always a confession of poverty, a want of original genius."

Reth [illegible name]
June 1826