

BRUTUS;

OR,

REMARKS ON EMINENT ORATORS.

ARGUMENT.

THIS treatise was the fruit of Cicero's retirement, during the remains of the civil war in Africa, and was composed in the form of a dialogue. It contains a few short, but very masterly sketches of all the speakers who had flourished either in Greece or Rome, with any reputation of eloquence, down to his own time; and as he generally touches the principal incidents of their lives, it will be considered, by an attentive reader, as a *concealed epitome of the Roman history*. The conference is supposed to have been held with Atticus, and their common friend Brutus, in Cicero's garden at Rome, under the statue of Plato, whom he always admired, and usually imitated in his Dialogues.

I. WHEN I had left Cilicia, and arrived at Rhodes, word was brought me of the death of Hortensius. I was more affected with it than, I believe, was generally expected; for, by the loss of my friend, I saw myself for ever deprived of the pleasure of his acquaintance, and of our mutual intercourse of good offices. I likewise reflected, with concern, that the dignity of our college must suffer greatly by the decease of such an eminent augur. This reminded me that *he* was the person who first introduced me to the college, where he attested my qualification upon oath, and that it was *he* also who installed me as a member; so that I was bound by the constitution of the order to respect and honour him as a parent. My affliction was increased, that, in such a deplorable dearth of wise and virtuous citizens, this excellent man, my faithful associate in the service of the public, expired at the very time when the commonwealth could least spare him, and when we had the greatest reason to regret the want of his prudence and authority. I can add, very sincerely, that in *him* I lamented the loss, not (as most people imagined) of a dangerous rival who opposed my reputation, but of a generous associate who engaged with me in the pursuit of fame. For if we have instances in history, though in studies of less

importance, that some distinguished poets have been greatly afflicted at the death of their contemporary bards, with what tender concern should I honour the memory of a man with whom it is more glorious to have disputed the prize of eloquence, than never to have combated as an antagonist, especially as he was always so far from obstructing *my* endeavours, or *I his*, that, on the contrary, we mutually assisted each other with our credit and advice ! But as *he*, who had a perpetual run of felicity,¹ left the world at a happy moment for himself, though a most unfortunate one for his fellow-citizens,—and died when it would have been much easier for him to lament the miseries of his country than to assist it, after living in it as long as he *could* have lived with honour and reputation,—we may, indeed, deplore his death as a heavy loss to *us* who survive him. If, however, we consider it merely as a personal event, we ought rather to congratulate his fate than to pity it ; that, as often as we revive the memory of this illustrious and truly happy man, we may appear at least to have as much affection for him as for ourselves. For if we only lament that we are no longer permitted to enjoy him, it must, indeed, be acknowledged that this is a heavy misfortune to *us* ; which it however becomes us to support with moderation, lest our sorrow should be suspected to arise from motives of interest, and not from friendship. But if we afflict ourselves, on the supposition that *he* was the sufferer, we misconstrue an event, which to *him* was certainly a very happy one.

II. If Hortensius were now living, he would probably regret many other advantages in common with his worthy fellow-citizens. But when he beheld the forum, the great theatre in which he used to exercise his genius, no longer accessible to that accomplished eloquence which could charm the ears of a Roman or a Grecian audience, he must have felt a pang of which none, or at least but few, besides himself could be susceptible. Even *I* indulge heartfelt anguish, when I behold my country no longer supported by the talents, the wisdom, and the authority of law,—the only weapons which I have

¹ *Quoniam perpetuâ quâdam felicitate usus ille, cessit à vitâ, suo magis quam suorum civium tempore.* This fine sentiment, conveyed in such elegant language, carries an allusion to the conversation of Solon with Croesus, in which the former maintained the seeming paradox, that he alone can be deemed happy who meets a happy death. See Herod. Clio, 32.

learned to wield, and to which I have long been accustomed, and which are most suitable to the character of an illustrious citizen, and of a virtuous and well-regulated state. But if there ever was a time when the authority and eloquence of an honest individual could have wrested their arms from the hands of his distracted fellow-citizens, it was then when the proposal of a compromise of our mutual differences was rejected, by the hasty imprudence of some and the timorous mistrust of others. Thus it happened, among other misfortunes of a more deplorable nature, that when my declining age, after a life spent in the service of the public, should have reposed in the peaceful harbour, not of an indolent and total inactivity, but of a moderate and honourable retirement, and when my eloquence was properly mellowed and had acquired its full maturity;—thus it happened, I say, that recourse was then had to those fatal arms, which the persons who had learned the use of them in honourable conquest could no longer employ to any salutary purpose. Those, therefore, appear to me to have enjoyed a fortunate and happy life, (of whatever state they were members, but especially in *ours*,) who, together with their authority and reputation, either for their military or political services, are allowed to enjoy the advantages of philosophy; and the sole remembrance of them, in our present melancholy situation, was a pleasing relief to me, when we lately happened to mention them in the course of conversation.

III. For, not long ago, when I was walking for my amusement in a private avenue at home, I was agreeably interrupted by my friend Brutus and Titus Pomponius, who came, as indeed they frequently did, to visit me,—two worthy citizens, who were united to each other in the closest friendship, and were so dear and so agreeable to me, that on the first sight of them, all my anxiety for the commonwealth subsided. After the usual salutations, “Well, gentlemen,” said I, “how go the times? What news have you brought?” “None,” replied Brutus, “that you would wish to hear, or that I can venture to tell you for truth.” “No,” said Atticus; “we are come with an intention that all matters of state should be dropped, and rather to hear something from you, than to say anything which might serve to distress you.” “Indeed,” said I, “your company is a present remedy for my sorrow; and your letters, when absent, were so encouraging, that they first revived

my attention to my studies." "I remember," replied Atticus, "that Brutus sent you a letter from Asia, which I read with infinite pleasure; for he advised you in it like a man of sense, and gave you every consolation which the warmest friendship could suggest." "True," said I; "for it was the receipt of that letter which recovered me from a growing indisposition, to behold once more the cheerful face of day; and as the Roman state, after the dreadful defeat near Cannæ, first raised its drooping head by the victory of Marcellus at Nola, which was succeeded by many other victories, so, after the dismal wreck of our affairs, both public and private, nothing occurred to me, before the letter of my friend Brutus, which I thought to be worth my attention, or which contributed, in any degree, to ease the anxiety of my heart." "That was certainly my intention," answered Brutus; "and if I had the happiness to succeed, I was sufficiently rewarded for my trouble. But I could wish to be informed what you received from Atticus, which gave you such uncommon pleasure." "That," said I, "which not only entertained me, but I hope has restored me entirely to myself." "Indeed!" replied he; "and what miraculous composition could that be?" "Nothing," answered I, "could have been a more acceptable or a more seasonable present than that excellent treatise of his, which roused me from a state of languor and despondency." "You mean," said he, "his short and, I think, very accurate abridgement of universal history." "The very same," said I; "for that little treatise has absolutely saved me."

IV. "I am heartily glad of it," said Atticus; "but what could you discover in it which was either new to you or so wonderfully beneficial as you pretend?" "It certainly furnished many hints," said I, "which were entirely new to me; and the exact order of time which you observed through the whole, gave me the opportunity I had long wished for, of beholding the history of all nations in one regular and comprehensive view. The attentive perusal of it proved an excellent remedy for my sorrows, and led me to think of attempting something on your own plan, partly to amuse myself, and partly to return your favour by a grateful, though not an equal, acknowledgment. We are commanded, it is true, in that precept of Hesiod, so much admired by the learned, to return with the same measure we have received, or, if possible, with a larger. As to a friendly inclination, I shall certainly

return you a full proportion of it; but as to a recompense in kind, I confess it to be out of my power, and therefore hope you will excuse me; for I have not, as husbandmen are accustomed to have, gathered a fresh harvest out of which to repay the kindness¹ I have received; my whole harvest having sickened and died, for want of the usual manure; and as little am I able to present you with anything from those hidden stores which are now consigned to perpetual darkness, and to which I am denied all access, though formerly I was almost the only person who was able to command them at pleasure. I must, therefore, try my skill in a long-neglected and uncultivated soil; which I will endeavour to improve with so much care, that I may be able to repay your liberality with interest; provided my genius should be so happy as to resemble a fertile field, which, after being suffered to lie fallow a considerable time, produces a heavier crop than usual."

"Very well," replied Atticus, "I shall expect the fulfilment of your promise; but I shall not insist upon it till it suits your convenience, though, after all, I shall certainly be better pleased if you discharge the obligation." "And I also," said Brutus, "shall expect that you perform your promise to my friend Atticus; nay, though I am only his voluntary solicitor, I shall, perhaps, be very pressing for the discharge of a debt which the creditor himself is willing to submit to your own choice." V. "But I shall refuse to pay you," said I, "unless the original creditor takes no further part in the suit." "This is more than I can promise," replied he; "for I can easily foresee that this easy man, who disclaims all severity, will urge his demand upon you, not indeed to distress you, but yet with earnestness and importunity." "To speak ingenuously," said Atticus, "my friend Brutus, I believe, is not much mistaken; for as I now find you in good spirits for the first time, after a tedious interval of despondency, I shall soon make bold to apply to you; and as this gentleman has promised his assistance to recover what you owe me, the least I can do is to solicit, in my turn, for what is due to him." "Explain your meaning," said I. "I mean," replied he, "that you must write something to amuse us; for your pen has been

¹ *Non enim ex novis, ut agricolæ solent, fructibus est, unde tibi reddam quod accepi.* The allusion is to a farmer, who, in time of necessity, borrows corn or fruit of his more opulent neighbour, which he repays in kind as soon as his harvest is gathered home. Cicero was not, he says, in a situation to make a similar return.

totally silent this long time; and since your treatise on politics, we have had nothing from you of any kind, though it was the perusal of that which fired me with the ambition to write an abridgement of universal history. But we shall, however, leave you to answer this demand when and in what manner you shall think most convenient. At present, if you are not otherwise engaged, you must give us your sentiments on a subject on which we both desire to be better informed." "And what is that?" said I. "A work which you had just begun," replied he, "when I saw you last at Tusculanum,—the History of Eminent Orators,—when they made their appearance, and *who* and *what* they were; which furnished such an agreeable train of conversation, that when I related the substance of it to *your*, or I ought rather to have said *our common*, friend Brutus, he expressed an ardent desire to hear the whole of it from your own mouth. Knowing you, therefore, to be at leisure, we have taken the present opportunity to wait upon you; so that, if it is really convenient, you will oblige us both by resuming the subject." "Well, gentlemen," said I, "as you are so pressing, I will endeavour to satisfy you in the best manner I am able." "You are *able* enough," replied he; "only unbend, or rather, if possible, set at full liberty your mind." "If I remember right," said I, "Atticus, what gave rise to the conversation was my observing that the cause of Deiotarus, a most excellent sovereign and a faithful ally, was pleaded by our friend Brutus, in my hearing, with the greatest elegance and dignity."

VI. "True," replied he; "and you took occasion, from the ill-success of Brutus, to lament the loss of a fair administration of justice in the forum." "I did so," answered I, "as indeed I frequently do; and whenever I see you, my Brutus, I am concerned to think where your wonderful genius, your finished erudition, and unparalleled industry will find a theatre to display themselves. For after you had thoroughly improved your abilities, by pleading a variety of important causes, and when my declining vigour was just giving way and lowering the ensigns of dignity to your more active talents, the liberty of the state received a fatal overthrow, and that eloquence, of which we are now to give the history, was condemned to perpetual silence." "Our other misfortunes," replied Brutus, "I lament sincerely, and I think I ought to lament them; but as to eloquence, I am not so fond of the influence and the glory

it bestows, as of the study and the practice of it, which nothing can deprive me of, while you are so well disposed to assist me; for no man can be an eloquent speaker who has not a clear and ready conception. Whoever, therefore, applies himself to the study of eloquence, is at the same time improving his judgment, which is a talent equally necessary in all military operations." "Your remark," said I, "is very just; and I have a higher opinion of the merit of eloquence, because, though there is scarcely any person so diffident as not to persuade himself that he either has or may acquire every other accomplishment which formerly could have given him consequence in the state, I can find no person who has been made an orator by the success of his military prowess. But that we may carry on the conversation with greater ease, let us seat ourselves." As my visitors had no objection to this, we accordingly took our seats in a private lawn, near a statue of Plato. Then resuming the conversation,—“To recommend the study of eloquence,” said I, “and describe its force, and the great dignity it confers upon those who have acquired it, is neither our present design, nor has any necessary connexion with it. But I will not hesitate to affirm, that whether it is acquired by art or practice, or the mere powers of nature, it is the most difficult of all attainments; for each of the five branches of which it is said to consist, is of itself a very important art; from whence it may easily be conjectured how great and arduous must be the profession which unites and comprehends them all.

VII. “Greece alone is a sufficient witness of this; for though she was fired with a wonderful love of eloquence, and has long since excelled every other nation in the practice of it, yet she had all the rest of the arts much earlier; and had not only invented, but even completed them, a considerable time before she was mistress of the full powers of elocution. But when I direct my eyes to Greece, your beloved Athens, my Atticus, first strikes my sight, and is the brightest object in my view; for in that illustrious city the *orator* first made his appearance, and it is there we shall find the earliest records of eloquence, and the first specimens of a discourse conducted by rules of art. But even in Athens there is not a single production now extant which discovers any taste for ornament, or seems to have been the effort of a real orator, before the time of Pericles (whose name is prefixed to some orations which still

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