

BOOK XII

LIBER XII

PROOEMIUM

VENTUM est ad partem operis destinati longe gravissimam. Cuius equidem onus si tantum opinione prima concipere potuissem, quanto me premi ferens sentio, maturius consuluissem vires meas. Sed initio pudor omittendi, quae promiseram, tenuit; mox, quanquam per singulas prope partes labor cresceret, ne perderem, quae iam effecta erant, per omnes
2 difficultates animo me sustentavi. Quare nunc quoque, licet maior quam unquam moles premat, tamen prospicienti finem mihi constitutum est vel deficere potius quam desperare. Fefellit autem quod initium a parvis ceperamus. Mox velut aura sollicitante provecti longius, dum tamen nota illa et plerisque artium scriptoribus tractata praecipimus, nec adhuc
a litore procul videbamus et multos circa velut iisdem
3 se ventis credere ausos habebamus. Iam cum eloquendi rationem novissime repertam paucissimisque

BOOK XII

INTRODUCTION

I NOW come to what is by far the most arduous portion of the task which I have set myself to perform. Indeed had I fully realised the difficulties when I first designed this work, I should have considered betimes whether my strength was sufficient to support the load that now weighs upon me so heavily. But to begin with, I felt how shameful it would be to fail to perform what I had promised, and later, despite the fact that my labour became more and more arduous at almost every stage, the fear of stultifying what I had already written sustained my courage through every difficulty. Consequently ² even now, though the burden that oppresses me is greater than ever, the end is in sight and I am resolved to faint by the wayside rather than despair. But the fact that I began with comparatively trivial details deceived me. Subsequently I was lured still further on my voyage by the temptations of the favouring breeze that filled my sails; but the rules which I was then concerned to give were still of a familiar kind and had been already treated by most writers of rhetorical textbooks: thus far I seemed to myself to be still in sight of shore and I had the company of many who had ventured to entrust themselves to the self-same winds. But presently when ³ I entered on the task of setting forth a theory of

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temptatam ingressi sumus, rarus, qui tam procul a portu recessisset, reperiēbatur. Postquam vero nobis ille, quem instituebamus, orator a dicendi magistris dimissus aut suo iam impetu fertur aut maiora sibi auxilia ex ipsis sapientiae penetralibus petit, quam
4 in altum simus ablati sentire coepimus. Nunc *caelum undique et undique pontus*. Unum modo in illa immensa vastitate cernere videmur M. Tullium, qui tamen ipse, quamvis tanta atque ita instructa nave hoc mare ingressus, contrahit vela inhihetque remos et de ipso demum genere dicendi, quo sit usus perfectus orator, satis habet dicere. At nostra temeritas etiam mores ei conabitur dare et adsignabit officia. Ita nec antecedentem consequi possumus, et longius eundum est, ut res feret. Probabilis tamen cupiditas honestorum et velut tutioris¹ audentiae est temptare, quibus paratior venia est.

I. Sit ergo nobis orator, quem constituimus, is, qui a M. Catone finitur, *vir bonus dicendi peritus*; verum, id quod et ille posuit prius et ipsa natura potius ac maius est, utique vir bonus. Id non eo tantum, quod, si vis illa dicendi malitiam instruxerit, nihil sit publicis privatisque rebus perniciosius elo-

¹ velut tutioris, *Obrecht*: velutioris, *B.*

¹ *Aen.* iii. 193.

² *cp.* I. *Pr.* 9.

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eloquence which had been but newly discovered and rarely essayed, I found but few that had ventured so far from harbour. And finally now that the ideal orator, whom it was my design to mould, has been dismissed by his masters and is either proceeding on his way borne onward by his own impetus, or seeking still mightier assistance from the innermost shrine of wisdom, I begin to feel how far I have been swept into the great deep. Now there is 4

“Nothing before and nothing behind but the sky and the Ocean.”¹

One only can I discern in all the boundless waste of waters, Marcus Tullius Cicero, and even he, though the ship in which he entered these seas is of such size and so well found, begins to lessen sail and to row a slower stroke, and is content to speak merely of the kind of speech to be employed by the perfect orator. But my temerity is such that I shall essay to form my orator's character and to teach him his duties. Thus I have no predecessor to guide my steps and must press far, far on, as my theme may demand. Still an honourable ambition is always deserving of approval, and it is all the less hazardous to dare greatly, when forgiveness is assured us if we fail.

I. The orator then, whom I am concerned to form, shall be the orator as defined by Marcus Cato, “a good man, skilled in speaking.”² But above all he must possess the quality which Cato places first and which is in the very nature of things the greatest and most important, that is, he must be a good man. This is essential not merely on account of the fact that, if the powers of eloquence serve only to lend arms to crime, there can be nothing more pernicious than

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quentia, nosque ipsi, qui pro virili parte conferre aliquid ad facultatem dicendi conati sumus, pessime mereamur de rebus humanis, si latroni comparamus
2 haec arma, non militi. Quid de nobis loquor? Rerum ipsa natura in eo, quod praecipue indulgisse homini videtur quoque nos a ceteris animalibus separasse, non parens, sed noverca fuerit, si facultatem dicendi, sociam scelerum, adversam innocentiae, hostem veritatis invenit. Mutos enim nasci et egere
3 omni ratione satius fuisset quam providentiae muna in mutuam perniciem convertere. Longius tendit hoc iudicium meum. Neque enim tantum id dico, eum, qui sit orator, virum bonum esse oportere, sed ne futurum quidem oratorem nisi virum bonum. Nam certe neque intelligentiam concesseris iis qui, proposita honestorum ac turpium via, peiorem sequi malent, neque prudentiam, cum in gravissimas frequenter legum, semper vero malae conscientiae poenas a semet ipsis improviso rerum exitu induantur.
4 Quodsi neminem malum esse nisi stultum eundem non modo a sapientibus dicitur, sed vulgo quoque semper est creditum, certe non fiet unquam stultus orator. Adde quod ne studio quidem operis pulcherrimi vacare mens nisi omnibus vitiis libera potest: primum quod in eodem pectore nullum est honestorum turpiumque consortium, et cogitare optima simul ac deterrima non magis est unius animi quam

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eloquence to public and private welfare alike, while I myself, who have laboured to the best of my ability to contribute something of value to oratory, shall have rendered the worst of services to mankind, if I forge these weapons not for a soldier, but for a robber. But why speak of myself? Nature herself will have proved not a mother, but a stepmother with regard to what we deem her greatest gift to man, the gift that distinguishes us from other living things, if she devised the power of speech to be the accomplice of crime, the foe to innocency and the enemy of truth. For it had been better for men to be born dumb and devoid of reason than to turn the gifts of providence to their mutual destruction. But this conviction of mine goes further. For I do not merely assert that the ideal orator should be a good man, but I affirm that no man can be an orator unless he is a good man. For it is impossible to regard those men as gifted with intelligence who on being offered the choice between the two paths of virtue and of vice choose the latter, nor can we allow them prudence, when by the unforeseen issue of their own actions they render themselves liable not merely to the heaviest penalties of the laws, but to the inevitable torment of an evil conscience. But if the view that a bad man is necessarily a fool is not merely held by philosophers, but is the universal belief of ordinary men, the fool will most assuredly never become an orator. To this must be added the fact that the mind will not find leisure even for the study of the noblest of tasks, unless it first be free from vice. The reasons for this are, first, that vileness and virtue cannot jointly inhabit in the selfsame heart and that it is as impossible for one and the same mind to harbour good

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