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TACITUS
CORNELII TACITI
DE VITA
IULII AGRICOLAE,
DE ORIGINE ET MORIBUS
GERMANORUM

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CORNELII TACITI

DE VITA
IULII AGRICOLAE,
DE ORIGINE ET MORIBUS
GERMANORUM

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

IN view of the vast amount of labour expended by generations of scholars upon the *Agricola* and the *Germania* of Tacitus, it is hardly possible nowadays to propound novel, yet sane, interpretations of the numerous difficulties which they contain. The present book at least disclaims any attempt to accomplish such a feat. It merely endeavours to put together in a convenient and handy form what is necessary for the understanding of these famous monographs, avoiding, so far as possible, long discussions of doubtful and often indeterminable questions and attending rather to the practical needs of student and teacher. So many English editions of the *Agricola* are now available that an apology seems almost needed for adding another to the list; but the *Germania* has been less frequently edited in this country, and recent archaeological and palaeographical discoveries have provided a certain amount of new matter for the elucidation of both treatises.

At the outset I would refer to the inestimable debt which, in common with all students of Tacitus, I owe to Mr Furneaux. His editions of the *Agricola* and the *Germania* may fairly be said to supersede all previous expositions of these works, and they are long likely to remain the standard commentaries, especially on the linguistic side. The editions of Wex, Kritz, Draeger,

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Zernial, Schweizer-Sidler and other German scholars I have constantly consulted, but Furneaux seems always to sum up what is best in them, and thanks to the soundness of his judgment seldom gives an unconvincing explanation. I desire to make the fullest acknowledgment of what my notes owe to Mr Furneaux. I wish also to express my indebtedness to Mr H. M. Stephenson, who has previously edited these treatises in the Pitt Press Series, to those indefatigable Tacitean scholars, Messrs Church and Brodribb, and, among more recent English and American editors of the *Agricola*, to Professor Flamstead Walters, Mr J. W. E. Pearce and Professor D. R. Stuart. I have several times quoted Mr W. H. Fyfe's translation. Dr Schanz' *Geschichte der römischen Litteratur* has been of great help to me in preparing parts of my Introduction.

Since Mr Furneaux wrote, the discovery of new manuscripts has led to some amendment in the texts of the treatises, particularly in that of the *Agricola*, though unhappily several of the greater textual riddles still remain unsolved. In this connexion scholars owe a deep debt of gratitude to Professor Cesare Annibaldi, who has so carefully edited and criticised the text of E, and to Professors Leuze and F. F. Abbott, who have recorded the readings of T. I have found Paolo Fossataro's critical edition of the *Agricola* most useful.

In recent years excavation has thrown a good deal of light upon Agricola's operations in Britain, and it is to be hoped that further work with the spade will increase yet more our knowledge of his campaigns. For what we already know we have mainly to thank Mr Curle, Dr Macdonald and Professor Haverfield, my debt to all of whom, particularly the last named, will appear sufficiently from my

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notes. For British antiquities I have constantly consulted Dr Rice Holmes' great work, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*. For German archaeology and ethnology my main sources have been Dr E. Schwyzer's invaluable edition of the *Germania* (based upon that of Schweizer-Sidler) and the writings of our eminent English authority, Professor H. M. Chadwick.

The maps inserted in the present volume are new. In preparing them I derived much assistance from the maps of Britain and Germany in Mr Murray's series and from the map of Germany in Schwyzer's edition, as well as from the geographical disquisitions of Professor Chadwick in his *Origin of the English Nation*.

My obligations to other writers are, I trust, adequately acknowledged in the notes. In conclusion I desire to thank Professor Summers for so often putting his great knowledge of Silver idiom at my disposal and giving me his opinion on difficult passages; Mr H. L. White for assistance in scientific and other matters; and the officials of the University Press not only for correcting many errors but also for suggesting a number of extremely valuable improvements in my notes.

J. H. SLEEMAN.

SHEFFIELD,
August, 1914.

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INTRODUCTION

§ 1. *Life of Tacitus.*

Our information about the life of Cornelius Tacitus is somewhat meagre. There is uncertainty even as to his name. Ancient authors generally call him Cornelius Tacitus without a praenomen, in accordance with a practice which became common in the first century A.D., of describing persons by gentile name and cognomen alone. Sidonius Apollinaris¹, a writer of the fifth century, and certain late manuscripts speak of him as Gaius, but the name Publius given him by Codex Mediceus I, a manuscript of the highest authority, is generally accepted as correct². The place of his birth is unknown³, the date can only be conjectured. Pliny the younger⁴ mentions him as a close contemporary, —the two are *aetate propemodum aequales*,—but adds that he himself was still quite a youth when Tacitus had already made his name as an orator. Pliny was born in 61 or 62 A.D. Tacitus⁵ describes himself as having been *iuvenis admodum* in 74 A.D., the dramatic date of the *dialogus de oratoribus*, and we know that he was quaestor in or about 80 A.D., the earliest legal age for the tenure of that office

¹ *ep.* IV. 14 and 22.

² An inscription found at Mylasa in Caria, describing Tacitus as proconsul of Asia, was at first thought to be decisive in favour of the name Publius, but the original editors of the inscription seem to have misread certain letters.

³ The tradition that he was born at Interamna (Terni) arises from the fact that his namesake and admirer, the Emperor M. Claudius Tacitus (275 A.D.), was a native of the place. Its inhabitants built a tomb in the historian's honour, which survived to the latter part of the sixteenth century, when it was destroyed by order of Pope Pius V because of Tacitus' hostility to Christianity (Furieux, *Ann.* Vol. I. p. 5).

⁴ *ep.* VII. 20. 3.

⁵ *dial.* I.

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LIFE OF TACITUS

being 25. So we may fairly conclude that 54 or 55 A.D. was the date of his birth. His father is identified by some with Cornelius Tacitus, procurator of Belgic Gaul, whose son was personally known to Pliny the elder¹. The identification is chronologically probable, and anyhow the procurator is likely to have been a relative of the historian. That he came of good family is shown by his whole political and social career.

In his youth, according to the fashion of the time, he devoted himself to the study of oratory. The Ciceronian manner of his first work, the *dialogus*, lends some slight plausibility to the suggestion that he, like his friend the younger Pliny, was a pupil of Quintilian, the leader of the Ciceronian reaction. We know from his own account that he attached himself to Marcus Aper and Julius Secundus, the leaders of the Roman bar in Vespasian's time, and prosecuted his forensic studies with all the enthusiasm of youth².

In 77 A.D., when about 23 years of age, he was betrothed to the daughter of the consul Agricola. He married her perhaps early in the following year, immediately before his father-in-law was appointed to Britain³. His official career, as he tells us himself⁴, began under Vespasian, probably in 79, the last year of his principate, and was continued under Titus (79-81) and Domitian (81-96). Under the Empire the *cursus honorum* was generally (1) military tribunate, a subordinate legionary command, (2) vigintivirate, a civil office with police, judicial and other functions, (3) quaestorship, (4) aedileship or tribunate, (5) praetorship, (6) consulship. According to the generally accepted view, Tacitus held one or both of the first two minor offices under Vespasian; he was quaestor and *ipso facto* member of the

¹ *N. H.* vii. 17. 76.² *dial.* 2.³ *Agr.* 9. 7.

⁴ *hist.* i. 1. 4 *dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim.* Some think that *dignitatem...inchoatam* refers to the quaestorship, not to the minor offices mentioned above. If Tacitus was quaestor in 79, he cannot have been born later than 54.

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Senate in 80 or 81 under Titus, and tribune or aedile in the early years of Domitian's reign. In 88 he was praetor and a member of the priestly college of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* who had charge of the Sibylline books. In this dual capacity he assisted at the celebration of Domitian's Secular Games¹.

After his praetorship he was absent from Rome for four years² (89–93), doubtless as governor of a province. This could not have been one of the senatorial provinces, to which appointments were made for one year only. It was perhaps an imperial province of the second rank, for instance Gallia Belgica, where he might well have acquired his interest in German peoples and customs. When Agricola died in 93, he was still absent from Rome³, but he returned the same year. He received no more promotion from Domitian, but remained a silent spectator of the horrors of the tyrant's closing years. The memories of this dreadful time have coloured his whole outlook upon history. In 97 he was consul under Nerva, and in this year delivered a funeral oration over the aged Verginius Rufus⁴, who as legate of upper Germany twenty-nine years before had crushed the revolt of Vindex. In 100 he and Pliny at the solicitation of the African provincials successfully prosecuted their extortionate governor Marius Priscus. In speaking of the trial Pliny mentions the peculiar dignity of Tacitus' oratory⁵. The last biographical fact which we know of Tacitus is that about 112 A.D. he was proconsul of Asia⁶, thus attaining to one of the highest and most important administrative posts under the Senate's control. His death is supposed to have occurred soon after the accession of Hadrian (117 A.D.).

¹ *ann.* XI. 11. 3.² *Agr.* 45. 5.³ *Agr.* 45. 4.⁴ Pliny, *ep.* II. 1. 6 *laudatus est a consule Cornelio Tacito; nam hic supremus felicitati eius cumulus accessit, laudator eloquentissimus.*⁵ Pliny, *ep.* II. 11. 17 *respondit Cornelius Tacitus eloquentissime et, quod eximium orationi eius inest, σεμνὸς.*⁶ See p. ix, note 2.

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xii *TACITUS' LITERARY CAREER*

Eleven of Pliny's *Letters* are addressed to Tacitus, but they do not throw much light upon the historian's personal characteristics. In one¹ Pliny prophesies immortality for Tacitus' *Histories* and hopes that he may find a place in them. Two² which describe the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 were written in response to Tacitus' request for an account of the death of the elder Pliny, a victim of the catastrophe. In a letter to his friend Maximus³, Pliny tells with infinite satisfaction an anecdote of Tacitus, which better than all the dry details of biography makes the man live before us. At the games in the Circus Tacitus was sitting next to a Roman knight, who after some learned conversation asked him, "Are you an Italian or a provincial?" "You know me," said Tacitus, "from my writings." Whereupon the stranger replied, "Are you Tacitus or Pliny?"

§ 2. *Tacitus' literary career.*

Tacitus' career as an author fell mainly in the reign of Trajan (98–117 A.D.). His first work, the *dialogus de oratoribus*, an inquiry into the causes of the decline of oratory, professes to reproduce a conversation between eminent literary men, at which he had been present in his youth. Its periodic structure, and lively, copious and even redundant style, are distinctly Ciceronian and probably reflect Tacitus' early oratorical training under masters who, like Quintilian, thought that 'to admire Cicero greatly was to have made good progress.' The date of the appearance of the *dialogus* is much disputed. There are internal objections to assigning it to the reigns of either Titus or Domitian, and recent critics incline to the belief that it was written and published after Domitian's death, i.e. in 97 or 98 A.D. If this view be correct, it is very remarkable that within a few months Tacitus produced works so entirely different in style as the smoothly flowing Ciceronian *dialogus* and the terse, epigrammatic

¹ VII. 33. 1.

² VI. 16 and 20.

³ IX. 23. 2.

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Agricola and *Germania*. Still we must remember that contemporary taste demanded different manners for history and for oratory¹, and we must look for the antecedents of Tacitus' historical style not in the *dialogus* but in Sallust and Virgil, in Curtius and other writers with marked Silver characteristics. The words *vel incondita ac rudi voce* in c. 3 of the *Agricola* suggest that the historical work upon which Tacitus was then engaged was his first attempt in an unfamiliar style.

The *Agricola* and the *Germania* can be definitely assigned to the first year of Trajan's principate, 98 A.D.², the former, as is suggested by its introduction, appearing earlier than the latter. While composing the *Agricola* Tacitus was already engaged on a history of the reigns of Domitian and Nerva³. Subsequently he somewhat altered the scope of his work, and probably at intervals between 104 and 109 A.D. published his *Histories*, covering the years 69–96 A.D. Of the 14 books into which the *Histories* seem to have been divided, 1–4 and part of 5 are extant. Tacitus' latest and most remarkable work, the *Annals*, or, to give it its original title, *ab excessu divi Augusti*, deals with the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero (14 A.D. to Jan. 1st 69 A.D., where the *Histories* begin). The work comprised 16 books, of which 1–4, part of 5, 6, 11–15 and part of 16 survive.

§ 3. *The Agricola; its contents, purpose and characteristics.*

The *Agricola* opens with some observations upon biographical writing and in particular its dangers and practical extinction during the tyranny of Domitian. Even under the happy auspices of Nerva and Trajan Tacitus has to lament a widespread hostility to good men which compels him to ask indulgence for offering to the world a biography

¹ See Pliny, *ep.* v. 8. 9, and Schanz, *Gesch. der röm. Litt.* 2 Teil, 2 Hälfte, p. 295.

² See *Agr.* 3. 1 note, *Germ.* 37. 2.

³ See on *Agr.* 3. 3.

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of Agricola (cc. 1–3). He then plunges at once into his subject, narrating Agricola's parentage and early life, his education at Massilia, his military apprenticeship in Britain under Suetonius Paulinus, his marriage with Domitia Decidiana, his quaestorship, tribunate and praetorship (cc. 4–6). Next we hear in somewhat more detail how he espoused the cause of Vespasian, commanded the 20th legion in Britain, governed Aquitania, was elevated to the consulship and appointed to the governorship of Britain (cc. 4–9).

At this point occurs a long interlude, occupying about a sixth of the work and comprising a description of Britain (cc. 10–12) and a sketch of its conquest up to the time of Agricola (cc. 13–17). This interlude serves as an introduction to the most important chapter of Agricola's life, his successes in Britain. He signalises his arrival about mid-summer by defeating the Ordovices and reducing Mona, though his troops were expecting no further operations that year (c. 19). Then follows an account of his equitable government and administrative reforms, his strategic skill, and his efforts to Romanise the country, together with a brief military sketch of the Roman advance northwards, a reference to Ireland and Agricola's designs upon it, and a description of operations against the Caledonians, who after some indecisive fighting combined for a final effort to repel the invaders (cc. 19–27). Here the thread of the biography is again interrupted by an account of the mutiny and subsequent adventures of a cohort of Usipi (c. 28). The artistic purpose of this interlude is to emphasise Agricola's crowning achievement, the slaughter of the Caledonians at Mons Graupius, by definitely marking it off from the preceding narrative. Before the battle Calgacus, the Caledonian general, and Agricola address their troops (cc. 30–34). The battle is then described in some detail (cc. 35–37). A summary of the results of the victory, an account of Agricola's withdrawal into winter quarters and a brief reference to the circumnavigation of the north of Scotland by the Roman fleet, close this section of the *Agricola* (c. 38).

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The third part of the biography begins with Agricola's recall by Domitian who was suspicious of his success. Though awarded the usual triumphal honours, he was coldly received by the Emperor and sought to avoid further suspicion by living in retirement (cc. 39–40). Even so, his enemies constantly whispered accusations against him into the Emperor's ears (c. 41), and, acting apparently on an imperial hint, persuaded him to decline the offer of the proconsulate of Asia or Africa (c. 42). His death in 93 A.D. excited general sympathy, which was increased by the rumour that it was due to poison. While refusing to commit himself to a definite statement that Agricola was poisoned by Domitian's orders, Tacitus does his best to leave the reader with an impression of the Emperor's guilt (c. 43).

Agricola's personal characteristics and worldly circumstances are then briefly touched upon. He is shown to have deserved the epithet 'happy,' in that he died at the height of his fame and prosperity and was spared the sight of Domitian's worst atrocities (cc. 44–45). The *Agricola* closes with a magnificent apostrophe to the dead and an assurance that he will live for ever in the hearts of men (cc. 45–46).

Much has been written about the purpose of the *Agricola* and the precise kind of literary composition to which it belongs. It is certainly to be regarded as what it professes to be, 'the life of one who has passed away,' 'a work intended to do honour to Agricola,' 'an expression of filial regard.'¹ Had Tacitus been in Rome at Agricola's death, in accordance with custom he would doubtless have delivered a funeral oration over him. As he was absent, five years afterwards he wrote a biography. But though the work is primarily a biography, in places it diverges into history, as in the description of Britain and the earlier stages of its

¹ See 1. 4, 3. 4. Cp. 46. 4. See Schanz, pp. 298 ff., for excellent summaries of the views which have been held as to the literary form and purpose of the *Agricola* and the *Germania*.

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conquest, the episode of the Usipi and the elaborate account of the battle at Mons Graupius.

Gudeman¹ calls the *Agricola* a biographical encomium, a species of composition belonging to the γένος ἐπιδεικτικόν (*genus laudativum*) and developed out of the panegyric, especially the λόγος ἐπιτάφιος (*laudatio funebris*). He shows from Menander, Hermogenes and other Greek rhetoricians that the encomium was naturally divided under six heads, (1) introduction, (2) the hero's parentage, birth and education, (3) his personal characteristics and pursuits, (4) his achievements, (5) a comparison of him with others, (6) epilogue. It cannot be said that the *Agricola* harmonises very well with this scheme. Agricola's 'personal characteristics' have no separate section to themselves but appear at intervals throughout the work, though Gudeman insists that the majority of them are mentioned in the chapters immediately following the 'education,' and that they are identical with those which the Greek authorities name as indispensable to the hero of a biographical encomium. The presence of the geographical excursus in close proximity to the 'achievements' of the hero Gudeman explains by the fact that Agricola was the first to conquer Britain completely and so to win a thorough firsthand knowledge of the land and its people. The greatest weakness in Gudeman's theory is that there is no 'comparison with others' (σύγκρισις). The account of previous British governors certainly cannot be regarded as such, and the isolated phrases quoted by Gudeman (e.g. *quae vel incuria vel intolerantia priorum*, c. 20. 1) do very little to supply its place. Gudeman in fact, while pointing out interesting analogies to the orthodox Greek encomium, has not succeeded in bringing the *Agricola* within the four corners of that species of composition.

Some, like Andresen, have argued that Tacitus had by him at Agricola's death an account of Britain and its conquest, already written for his contemplated treatise on

¹ See the introduction to his German edition of the *Agricola*.

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Domitian's reign, and that he subsequently worked part of this material into a biography. But there is nothing to show that Tacitus had planned a historical work as early as 93 A.D., nor is the *Agricola* so incoherent a collection of snippets that it needs any such hypothesis for its explanation. If the episodic and more or less irrelevant features of the *Agricola* require defence, parallels may be found in Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha*, the plans of which Tacitus probably had in his mind when writing the *Agricola*. All three works, for instance, have introductions, accounts of the early life of the chief actors, digressions and episodes (cp. especially the description of Africa in *Jug.* 17–19), long speeches and full narratives of decisive battles¹. An additional reason for the *Agricola's* excursions into history may perhaps be found in Tacitus' admitted concentration upon historical studies at the time of its composition.

For Tacitus to write a biography of Agricola was in some respects a difficult and delicate undertaking. When the work was composed, an extremely bitter feeling prevailed in senatorial circles not only against Domitian but against all who had served under him, and this both the biographer and his hero had done. Tacitus was praetor and governor of a province under Domitian (see p. xi). Agricola had been his faithful general in Britain, and when recalled in 85 A.D., instead of revolting against the tyrant with his four victorious legions, as he might well have done, he meekly obeyed the summons². His subsequent life of retirement in Rome, with its one object of avoiding the Emperor's displeasure³, would naturally be regarded with some contempt

¹ See Furneaux, p. 16, where a good summary of the resemblances is given. There is one important difference, that neither of Sallust's treatises has epilogues.

² See on 39. 4.

³ With Agricola's withdrawal from affairs cp. Seneca's conduct after his dismissal by Nero. "Seneca thanked him, the usual end of an interview with a despot. But he entirely altered the practices of his former greatness; he kept the crowds of his visitors at a distance, avoided trains of followers, seldom appeared in Rome, as

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xviii *PURPOSE OF THE AGRICOLA*

by the more uncompromising members of the senatorial opposition, who admired a Rusticus or a Senecio¹. These hostile prejudices explain Tacitus' appeal for indulgence in c. 1. 3 and his outburst in c. 42. 5: "Be it known unto those whose custom it is to admire lawlessness that even under evil emperors there can be great men, and that obedience and submission, when accompanied by industry and energy, may attain to as high a degree of distinction as many have attained by dangerous paths but with no benefit to the state, winning fame by an ostentatious death."

Tacitus gives us to understand that it was only by the exercise of extreme caution that Agricola was able to escape the consequences of Domitian's hate for so long as he did. It is not easy to avoid the suspicion that in order to clear Agricola's reputation from the taint of servility and cowardice Tacitus may have exaggerated the Emperor's hostility to him and the necessity of his withdrawal from public affairs in the interests of his own safety. However that may be, the evidence that Agricola's death was due to poison administered by the Emperor's order must have been of the slightest. Tacitus has no material on which to frame a definite charge. He makes up for the lack of it by giving play to his almost diabolical faculty of innuendo and thereby manages to leave us with perhaps a worse impression of the Emperor than a direct accusation would have created. Some authors have gone so far as to maintain that the *Agricola* is in essence an apology for its hero and implicitly for its author. This view clearly overemphasises one aspect of the work. Still the *Agricola's* apologetic vein is strong enough to suggest that it may have caused some distortion of historical perspective.

though weak health or philosophical studies detained him at home."
 (*Ann.* XIV. 56, C. and B.'s Trans.)

¹ See on 2. 1, 4, 4.

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§ 4. *The Germania; its contents, purpose, sources and value.*

The *Germania* is divided into two main parts, the first (cc. 1-27) being a general account of the country and its customs, the second (cc. 28-46) a special description of particular tribes. Beginning with the boundaries of Germany, the origin and characteristics of its inhabitants, its climate and products (cc. 1-5), Tacitus proceeds to a comprehensive survey of German institutions, embracing war, political and religious usages, the *comitatus*, houses and villages, clothing, marriage, rules of succession, the blood feud, habits of intemperance, food and drink, gambling, status of slaves and freedmen, land tenure and agriculture, and burial customs (cc. 6-27). In the second or special part he gives brief accounts of the separate nations of Germany, emphasising in each case the peculiarities which distinguished them from other Germans. He first deals with the German and non-German tribes of the Rhine frontier and then with those of western and north-western Germany (cc. 28-36). The mention of Rome's ancient enemies, the Cimbri, leads to a digression on the stubborn resistance which the Germans had offered to Rome for more than two centuries (c. 37). Next the various tribes of the Suebi are described, first those of central Germany, then those to the south, which are enumerated from west to east along the line of the Danube, and lastly those of the eastern and north-eastern districts, including Scandinavia (cc. 38-45). The book concludes with an account of the tribes of doubtful race on the eastern frontier and a reference to fabulous peoples beyond (c. 46).

From the above summary it seems clear that the purpose of the *Germania* was simply to describe the geography, ethnography and social condition of Germany. Being occupied, as we know, with a work of contemporary history, Tacitus naturally studied a country which was bound to

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xx *PURPOSE OF THE GERMANIA*

figure largely in it¹, and we may imagine that as the results of his researches increased in bulk he decided to work them up into a separate monograph and issue them independently of the larger work. The circumstances of the moment may have helped him to this decision. Germany at the time was attracting a large measure of public attention. The Emperor Trajan, who had been at Cologne when Nerva died, was still away in the north, strengthening the frontier defences and attempting to establish friendly relations with German tribes. Rome, always alive to the northern danger, realised it all the more keenly owing to the Emperor's prolonged absence. Hence the time was particularly appropriate for the appearance of a work on Germany. Led by these considerations, many scholars, notably Müllenhoff, have argued that Tacitus' purpose in writing the *Germania* was not ethnographical and sociological, but political, that he intended to represent the Germans as Rome's most formidable foes, to justify Trajan's defensive measures and to show that they required his active supervision on the spot. Now the *Germania* contains only two 'political' passages, one, the famous prayer in c. 33, that "among the nations of Germany may endure if not love for us, yet at least hatred for each other, since, while the doom of the Empire presses hard upon it, fortune can bestow no greater blessing than discord among our foes"; the other, the lengthy digression in c. 37 on the 210 years of war between Germany and Rome; "so long does the conquest of Germany take." Nowhere else do we find a hint of any such purpose as Müllenhoff supposes. From the fact that Tacitus expresses apprehension of the Germans in two passages and that Trajan at the moment was occupied with the affairs of Germany, we cannot fairly conclude that Tacitus wrote his monograph solely, or even primarily, to awaken Rome to the German peril (of which she was already well aware), or to stamp

¹ Cp. his studies of Britain in the *Agricola*, and of the Jews in *Hist. v. 1-12*.

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with his approval Trajan's cautious policy. All that we are entitled to say is that its publication was opportunely timed.

The view that the *Germania* was written as a 'mirror of morals' for the Romans is now antiquated, but deserves some consideration because of the facts which gave rise to it. The hypothesis itself is at once put out of court by the work's elaborate geography and ethnography, which would be irrelevant in a moral tract. Besides Tacitus by no means regards the Germans as patterns of morality; he sharply emphasises their intemperance, quarrelsomeness and sloth. Still the fact remains that he is continually drawing contrasts, explicit or implicit, between the luxury and immorality of Rome and the stern simplicity of Germany, where "no one laughs at vice and to corrupt and be corrupted is not called the spirit of the age" (19. 3). This tendency is not, however, peculiar to the *Germania*; it is almost equally visible in other Roman accounts of foreign countries. The truth is that writers trained in the rhetorical schools of the Empire, where ethical themes were constantly set as declamatory exercises, could not resist the opportunity presented by foreign customs for edifying moral comparisons, which at the same time added interest and point to their descriptions. Interest in primitive peoples was to some extent fostered by Stoicism with its doctrines of the brotherhood of man and of 'the life according to nature.' Such peoples were apt to be idealised, and the Germans in particular. Thus Seneca¹ admires their bravery, their devotion to arms and their

¹ *dial.* III. 11. 3. The passage is worth quoting for its resemblances to the *Germania*: *Germanis quid est animosius? quid ad incursum acrius? quid armorum cupidius, quibus innascuntur innutriunturque, quorum unica illis cura est in alia negligentibus? quid induratius ad omnem patientiam, ut quibus magna ex parte non tegimenta corporum provisae sint, non suffugia adversus perpetuum caeli rigorem? hos tamen Hispani Gallique et Asiae Syriaeque molles bello viri, antequam legio visatur, caedunt ob nullam aliam rem opportunos quam iracundiam. aegedum, illis corporibus illis animis delicias luxum opes ignorantibus da rationem, da disciplinam: ut nihil amplius dicam, necesse erit certe nobis mores Romanos repetere.*

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xxii *SOURCES OF THE GERMANIA*

endurance, "men who to a large extent have no covering for their bodies, no shelter against the unceasing rigour of their climate." The one fault he finds in them is their passionateness. "Only add discipline and reason," he exclaims, "to those bodies and minds which know not sensuality, luxury or wealth, and, to say the least, we shall have to resume the old Roman character." Scherer¹ well observes that "the unbroken might of this people was regarded by the Stoic as an ideal of moral strength, by the member of the aristocratic opposition as an ideal of freedom, by the diplomatist as an imminent danger." In ancient writers it is idle to look for that rigidly scientific interest in primitive races which distinguishes the modern anthropologist.

The sources of Tacitus' information upon Germany were literary and oral. There is nothing to show that he ever visited Germany and saw what he described. The concluding words of the general part of the *Germania*, "such is the account we have *received*," seem definitely to prove the contrary. First-hand evidence he could get through numerous channels, traders doing business with Germany, Roman officers stationed on the frontier or in charge of expeditionary forces, German prisoners at Rome or Germans in the Roman army. The remarkable story of the annihilation of a German tribe in c. 33 clearly came from a Roman eye-witness, though Tacitus need not have been the first to commit it to writing. Literary authorities existed in plenty. In c. 28. 1 Tacitus refers to Caesar as *summus auctorum*, and there can be little doubt that he carefully studied the relevant sections of the *Bellum Gallicum*. In a few places he seems to echo Caesar's words, in others silently, yet deliberately, to correct him². One or two passages show

¹ Quoted by Schanz, p. 309.

² The question is elaborately discussed by Karl Eymér in *Neue Jahrbücher*, 1913, pp. 24-47. Eymér shows how differences between the accounts of Tacitus and Caesar can be explained partly by increased acquaintance with Germany, partly by social developments in the interval.

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faint reminiscences of the section on Germany in Pomponius Mela's geography of the world, a work published apparently in Claudius' reign. Other writings, now lost, which Tacitus probably used, are Sallust's *Histories*, surviving fragments of which show that it contained some account of the Germans, the 104th book of Livy, which included a description of German geography and customs¹, Aufidius Bassus' history of Rome's wars with Germany (? published under Tiberius), and most important of all, the elder Pliny's work in 20 books on the same subject, particularly valuable because the author had himself seen service in Germany. Schwyzer does well to remind us of the great wall-map of the Roman Empire and neighbouring countries constructed in Rome by Augustus from the materials collected by M. Vipsanius Agrippa; "it treated Germany to the Vistula as the Roman sphere of influence and represented it with Raetia and Noricum as the tenth region of the Empire."

There is doubtless truth in the remark that if Tacitus' sources for the *Germania* had been preserved rather than the *Germania* itself, archaeology would have been the gainer and literature the loser². Yet Tacitus' account of Germany is remarkably comprehensive, in spite of a brevity and conciseness which no modern author of a descriptive work would dare to emulate. Its general accuracy too is thoroughly corroborated by the discoveries of archaeologists, by philological evidence and by later documentary records. Some indeed of his statements have given rise to acute controversy, particularly those in regard to the German system of land tenure and the *pagus* with its hundred picked fighting-men and hundred jurors. Some of the developments or supposed developments of institutions described by Tacitus unhappily do not throw much light upon the *Germania*, though the *Germania* may throw a good

¹ According to the Epitome *prima pars libri situm Germaniae moresque continet*, with which cp. the titles of the *Germania* as given in the MSS. See p. lii.

² See Schwyzer's edition, p. xii.

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xxiv *GEOGRAPHY OF THE GERMANIA*

deal of light upon them. In excuse for the obscurities in Tacitus' account we may plead that he could not be expected to display the thirst for pure fact or the critical judgment of our present-day anthropologists, and that, being primarily a literary artist, he did not wish to spoil the unity and proportion of his work by explanations of inordinate length. We may perhaps regret that ancient authors were not acquainted with the use of footnotes. Archaeology has shown that the *Germania* is specially reliable in regard to dwellings, dress, weapons and tribal customs. On the purely geographical side it is weaker, though the weakness is not the fault of Tacitus but of his age. We venture to quote what Mr Tozer says on Roman knowledge of the topography of Germany :

“The acquaintance of the Romans with Germany derived from personal observation decreased rather than otherwise after the time of Augustus. The rule which was laid down by that emperor to the effect that the Roman arms should not advance beyond the Elbe was strictly adhered to by his successors ; indeed, so little did they attempt to penetrate into the country at all, that Tacitus [*Germ.* 41. 2] speaks of that river as being known to his contemporaries only by hearsay. At the same time there arose a growing intercourse between the two peoples, and from this was derived the enlarged knowledge of the inhabitants of Germany which we find existing at a later period....Much of this was embodied in the *Germania* of Tacitus ; but that treatise, interesting as it is from an ethnographical point of view, furnishes us with but little information about the physical features of the country, and even as to the situation of the various tribes. It is noticeable, as a proof of the ignorance which prevailed with regard to the north-eastern part of the country, that the name of so important a river as the Viadrus (Oder) does not occur in any writer before Ptolemy [c. 150 A.D.] ; and though the Vistula was known at an earlier period, and was regarded as the boundary of Germany on its eastern side towards Sarmatia, yet this was probably due to the trade-route from the Baltic which passed through

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Pannonia, rather than to any intelligence derived from Germany itself¹.”

§ 5. *Tacitus' literary style and the influences which moulded it.*

It has been well said that Tacitus was born to be a tragic poet. A note of tragedy pervades almost all that he wrote. His inborn pessimism, aggravated by Domitian's cruel persecution of the Senate, led him in his writings to dwell upon the wickedness of the Emperors and the corruption of Roman society, to the almost complete exclusion of the brighter elements in the Empire, the high efficiency of its government and the general well-being of its subjects. The prologue to the *Agricola* is perhaps the bitterest and most passionate expression of this attitude towards history to be found in his works. Not even the hopes aroused by Nerva's accession could make him forget his pessimism or check his gloomy vaticinations regarding the Empire's impending doom. His unscrupulous habit of innuendo is an outcome of this spirit of bitterness and readiness to believe the worst. He delights to suggest the truth of insinuations which he himself admits to rest upon no certain evidence. This tendency is found in his portraiture of Domitian in the *Agricola*, but reaches its height in the *Annals*, particularly in his treatment of Tiberius.

The writer to whom Tacitus owed most was undoubtedly Sallust. Akin to him in moral earnestness and pessimistic outlook upon life, he closely imitated the Sallustian literary manner. Sallust, says Professor Wight Duff², introduced into Latin prose “an unprecedented union of rapidity brevity and variety....His variety is far more than linguistic. It was not merely that he broke away from the Ciceronian balance of phrase and of grammatical form. He was a free

¹ *Hist. of Ancient Geography*, p. 289. For Roman information about Jutland, the Baltic and Scandinavia see notes on *Germ.* 37. 1, 44. 1-2. In 46. 2 there is some weak geography.

² *Literary History of Rome*, p. 422.

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artist, quick to see new values in a juxtaposition of elements drawn from history, rhetoric, psychology, geography and ethics." Interest in all the subjects which go to make up this 'variety' was fostered by the rhetorical schools of the Empire. A romantic geography, such as we meet with in various passages of the *Agricola* and the *Germania*, figured largely in oratorical exercises upon the heroes of old, particularly Alexander, whose oriental exploits afforded free scope to the imagination¹. Take for instance the following passage from the elder Seneca's First *Suasoria*, § 2:

tempus est Alexandrum cum orbe et cum sole desinere. quod noveram vici: nunc concupisco quod nescio. quae tam ferae gentes fuerunt quae non Alexandrum posito genu adorarint? qui tam horridi montes quorum non iuga victor miles calcaverit? ultra Liberi patris tropaea consistimus, non quaerimus orbem sed amittimus. immensum et humanae intemplatum experientiae pelagus, totius orbis vinculum terrarumque custodia, inagitata remigio vastitas, litora modo saeviente fluctu inquieta, modo fugiente deserta: taetra caligo fluctus premit et nescio qui quod humanis natura subduxit oculis aeterna nox obruit.

These sounding phrases, turgid though their rhetoric may be, certainly succeed in creating an atmosphere of strangeness and mystery. Curtius produces similar effects in his history of Alexander. Thus Tacitus is only following precedent when he invests with an air of romance the northern expeditions of Agricola. The danger of wild beasts is another favourite rhetorical theme, and it is somewhat disappointing to think that the remark in *Agr.* 34. 2 is probably not based on information received from Agricola himself about the bears, wolves, boars and other beasts which then roamed the hills and forests of the north, but is merely an orator's commonplace².

The strong ethical motive in Tacitus, which reaches its climax in the *Germania*, deserves some discussion, as its

¹ See on *Agr.* 10. 6.

² Cp. Curtius III. 8. 10, IX. 3. 8.

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purport has sometimes been misapprehended. It has been held that in the *Germania* an ethical rather than a historical purpose guides Tacitus' selection of facts, and that his description for instance of the amber of the Baltic is introduced merely to permit a sarcastic allusion to Roman luxury. This may be gravely doubted. It would be fairer to say that, thanks to a rhetorical training, no writer of Tacitus' age, even though his purpose be purely descriptive, can ever resist an opportunity to make a moral point. Thus Curtius cannot mention the pearls of India without adding

neque alia illis maior opulentiae causa est, utique postquam vitiorum commercium vulgavere in exteras gentes: quippe aestimantur purgamenta exaestuantis freti pretio quod libido constituit (VIII. 9. 19)¹.

In fact, throughout his account of India Curtius is constantly harping upon the vices and luxury of its inhabitants². Hardly a page of the elder Pliny's *Natural History*, as scientific a work as the age can show, is without its moralising. Thus Pliny embellishes his account of unguents with a story of a proscribed person whose hiding-place was revealed by the scent which he used; *quis enim non merito iudicet peritisse tales?* (XIII. 3. 25). He deplores the fact that even worms which attack the bark of trees have become instruments of luxury, *atque etiam farina saginati hi quoque altiles fiunt* (XVII. 24. 220). Or again, after briefly describing two wooden semi-circular theatres, placed back to back, which by an ingenious mechanical contrivance could, while the spectators kept their seats, be wheeled together so as to form a single circular amphitheatre, he launches out into more than a page of indignant protest:

en hic est ille terrarum victor et totius domitor orbis, qui gentes, regna diribet, iura exteris mittit, deorum quaedam immortalium generi humano portio, in machina pendens et ad periculum suum plaudens and much more to the same

¹ Pearls give Tacitus a similar opportunity in *Agr.* 12. 7.

² VIII. 9. 23, 29 (*ne quid perditis moribus desit*), 31.

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xxviii TENDENCY TO MORALISE

effect (xxxvi. 15. 118)¹. In short we may say that the words 'vice,' 'corruption' and 'luxury' run like some haunting refrain through practically all the literature of the Tacitean period. Everywhere that tendency was at work which found its consummation in the beast-books of the Middle Ages, where natural history was treated simply as a vehicle for moral or religious edification.

It cannot be said that the ethical colouring of the *Germania* is always appropriate or free from exaggeration. This is particularly noticeable in the section on the relations between the sexes. Thus in *Germ.* 18. 1², in one of those efforts to make an artistic transition which distinguish the work, Tacitus after alluding to a slight freedom, as it appeared to a Roman, in the costume of German ladies, continues "*in spite of this* the marriage bond is strictly observed among them." Again, as Mr Mackail³ points out, the fine epigram *nemo illic vitia ridet*, etc. (19. 3) "concludes a passage in which Tacitus gravely suggests that the invention of writing is fatal to moral innocence." Though the *Agricola* and the *Germania* contain some of Tacitus' most brilliant and unforgettable epigrams, yet so far he has hardly attained that unerring skill in their manufacture and disposition which he reveals in the *Annals*⁴.

The speeches in the *Agricola* are noble examples of generals' addresses after the traditional model. They can have no claim to be considered historical. It is evident from both the matter and the style of the Caledonian chieftain's address that it could only have been delivered by one trained in the Roman schools of declamation. Calgacus, who was apparently introduced by Tacitus simply to make a speech, betrays a familiarity with Roman customs and

¹ My attention was called to this and the preceding passage by Prof. Summers.

² See note *ad loc.*

³ *Latin Literature*, p. 211.

⁴ Even the smoothly flowing *dialogus* has a sprinkling of fine epigrams in the characteristic Tacitean manner; cp. e.g. 18. 3 *vitio autem malignitatis humanae vetera semper in laude, praesentia in fastidio esse.*

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Roman history¹ which would hardly have been looked for in a barbarian dwelling at the world's end. His description of the Romans as *raptores orbis*² has parallels in both Sallust and Curtius, and in other of his remarks vague reminiscences of Sallust are thought to be traceable. Agricola's speech again is held to contain echoes of Sallust and Livy. The composition of generals' addresses was undoubtedly a favourite exercise in the rhetorical schools, and a stereotyped style had been evolved based on Sallust, Livy and the 'fair copies' of distinguished professors.

The account of Agricola's final battle clearly contains rhetorical elements. Thus the turning of the foe in 37. 2 is modelled upon Sallust, *Jug.* 101. 11³. But though Tacitus is often said to sacrifice accuracy to style in his battle-pieces, there is little reason to doubt that the main outlines of this engagement are historical. The numbers of the foe, 30,000 (29. 4) and of the slain, 10,000 (37. 6), do not seem excessive. It may be tentatively suggested that the mention of "Aulus Atticus, commander of a cohort," among the dead is due to a desire not so much to give immortality to this gallant young officer as to follow what may possibly have become a traditional manner. We are reminded of Caesar, who in *B.G.* v. 15 after an account of a battle against the Britons adds *eo die Q. Laberius Durus, tribunus militum, interficitur*.

The epilogue to the *Agricola* has the character of a *consolatio*, a common Greek and Roman literary form, and it is only natural that Tacitus' noble sentences should find numerous parallels in surviving specimens of that style of composition. The resemblances have been carefully worked out by Gudeman. Reminiscences of Cicero's account of the

¹ *Agr.* 31. 3, 32. 4.

² 30. 6. Cp. Sall. *Hist. frag.* IV. 22 and Curt. VII. 8. 34. 19 (Gudeman). See also on *Agr.* 32. 2.

³ *tum spectaculum horribile in campis patentibus, sequi, fugere, occidi, capi...omnia qua visus erat constrata telis, armis, cadaveribus et inter ea humus infecta sanguine.*

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death of the orator Crassus in *de Oratore* III. 2. 8 are particularly noticeable. But everywhere Tacitus stamps his borrowings with the impress of his own inimitable style. It is no question of plagiarism. The Roman reader would experience the same pleasure in detecting echoes of earlier masterpieces of his country's literature that the Englishman finds in reminiscences of Shakespeare or the Bible. Only in Roman literature, particularly under the Empire, literary reminiscences were employed to a greater extent and with more elaborate art than they are nowadays. Virgil's borrowings from Ennius are perhaps the best Roman example of the custom. And as Virgil borrowed from Ennius, so did subsequent writers, of prose as well as of poetry, borrow constantly from Virgil.

In speaking of contemporary oratory, Tacitus tells us that jurymen always liked to take home with them from the courts "something brilliant and worth remembering"; they would tell all their friends

sive sensus aliquis arguta et brevi sententia effulsit, sive locus exquisito et poetico cultu enituit. exigitur enim iam ab oratore etiam poeticus decor, non Accii aut Pacuvii veterno inquinatus, sed ex Horatii et Vergilii et Lucani sacrario prolatus (dial. 20. 4 f.).

These remarks upon oratory are equally applicable to history. Even Cicero holds that history was *opus unum oratorium maxime* (*de legg.* I. 2. 5) and that Roman historians failed because they narrated without adornment (*non exornatores rerum sed tantummodo narratores fuerunt, de or.* II. 12. 54). Later historians set themselves to remedy this defect by taking over from poetry its warmth of colouring and elevation of language. In Livy we see the old boundaries between prose and poetry broken down, not only in his striking and varied phraseology but in his freer and less rigid syntax. To realise the change produced by the introduction of *poeticus decor* into history we have only to compare the glowing prose of Livy with the succinct, business-like narrative of Caesar. Virgil's influence upon