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With Introduction and Notes by K. M. Westaway
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SELECTIONS FROM PLAUTUS

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SELECTIONS
from PLAUTUS

With INTRODUCTION
and NOTES by

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PREFACE

THIS little book is intended for readers in schools and colleges who are preparing for those examinations in which the Latin unseen translation demands a certain knowledge of Plautus. Hitherto this knowledge has generally been acquired by the complete reading of a single play, probably the *Captivi* or the *Trinummus*. Excellent as both these plays are from the dramatic standpoint, neither of them shows Plautus at his liveliest and best, and neither of them is properly typical of Plautus as a comic writer. Classical teachers have long felt the need of a series of short readings that shall be most representative of Plautus and most attractive to the average reader.

Plautus is not nearly so well known among our students of Latin as he deserves. The result has been a lamentable gap in the survey which the pupil gradually makes, through his translation lessons, of Latin literature. Plautus is the earliest extant Latin writer, and therefore an invaluable source of our knowledge of an age which, apart from him, has left us no literary expression of itself. He is, moreover, master of a form of literature from which we gain a peculiarly intimate acquaintance with the ordinary people of his day. Lastly, Plautus is one of the greatest linguistic monuments which we possess in Latin. His readiness of expression and his fertility of imagination are revealed in every page of every play. Hardly anywhere else do we find such a satisfying insight into the *sermo cotidianus* of the Romans. It is not surprising

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that, without an acquaintance with Plautus, the pupil can gain but a very inadequate notion of Roman ways of thought and expression, and it is hoped that these specimens of Plautine frolic will give him a new and more entertaining idea of what Latin may become to those who have the opportunity to read, and the mind to appreciate, such a treasury of good things. These extracts are offered, not as a substitute for whole plays, but as an introduction and inducement to further reading in the works of one of Rome's most lively and amusing authors.

No attempt is here made at a critical text; in almost every detail the Oxford text of Professor Lindsay has been followed. The notes are intended for readers who are more than beginners in Latin—who are, in fact, already acquainted with Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil, but who are here introduced to Plautus for the first time. It is particularly recommended that they should be made to read the introduction as well as the text and notes: this is a sign of grace which does not always reveal itself even in the mature reader. A short appendix on metre is given. For the details of Plautine prosody and metre (a subject fascinating in itself, but vast and intricate and beyond the needs of the beginner in Plautus), the more enterprising student is referred to the excellent excursus in Lindsay's introduction to the *Captivi* (Methuen, 1900).

K. M. WESTAWAY.

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INTRODUCTION

PLAUTUS is the most ancient of extant Latin writers. It is not surprising that at this distance of time we know little of his life and of the conditions under which he worked, but from Aulus Gellius (a Roman critic of the second century A.D.) we learn the following facts about him.

He was born about 254 B.C., of poor parents, at Sarsina in Umbria (Central Italy), and came to Rome and worked there as a stage-carpenter, or possibly as an actor. In this way he made some money, but he lost it through speculations in foreign trade. He then hired himself to a miller, and in his leisure time wrote plays and sold them. He died in 184 B.C.

His life was thus one of continual hard work and poverty. His hardships were probably all the greater since his career included the whole period of the second Punic war, which devastated Italy and brought warfare practically to the gates of Rome. It was only towards the end of this war that comedies came to be written and acted at Rome at all. Perhaps the relaxation from the prolonged strain of fighting was responsible for the people's newly-discovered aptitude for this form of amusement. Not long before Plautus, Livius Andronicus and Naevius wrote comedies, but their works have not come down to us. Additional value is thus attached to Plautus since he is such a solitary representative of his age and type.

In later ages, a hundred and thirty plays passed under Plautus' name, but Varro (a critic of the first century B.C.) recognised as genuine only twenty-one. Of these, twenty have survived to the present day, and the remaining play, the *Vidularia*, exists for us in inconsiderable fragments. In any case, he seems to have been a most prolific writer.

Plautus' plays are, in the main, translations or adaptations from the [Greek] New Comedy, which was written at Athens by dramatists such as Menander and Philemon, during the years which followed the death of Alexander

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the Great. As the works of all these Greek writers have perished, except for a few fragments, it is impossible to estimate the literalness of Plautus' versions. In every case he appears to retain the Greek scene of his originals, the Greek names of the characters, and many Greek customs. His plays are thus what are technically called *fabulae palliatae* (so-called from the *pallium*, or Greek cloak), as distinct from the *fabulae togatae*, which were the national Roman comedies (deriving their name from the Roman *toga*). There was, in Plautus' day, a strict state-censorship of plays, and this prevented the representation on the stage of politicians and public personalities, or even of Roman social life in any marked degree. Naevius wrote *fabulae togatae*, which, from their very nature, offended against these regulations, and he was imprisoned for his pains. Nevertheless, although Plautus chose the more discreet course of producing *fabulae palliatae*, much of the manner and spirit of his plays is thoroughly Roman, and a perusal of his works gives us an insight into the habits and thoughts of the Rome of his day. Thus, in the extracts in this little book, the accounts of the military exploits of *Amphitruo* and of the *Miles Gloriosus* are highly suggestive of the character of the warfare employed by Rome in that age, and the passage from the *Captivi* contains a portrait of a parasite who was quite as characteristic of Roman social life as of Greek. In stray details, too, the reader will notice many Roman touches (for example, the puns on Italian place-names in the passage from the *Captivi*), which cannot be derived from a Greek author, but must be original to Plautus. Always in reading these plays one may notice the parallel contributions of Greek and Roman thought.

It is not only for his value as practically the sole literary expression of an early age, that we read Plautus. We must needs take a delight in his wonderful gift of fun and frolic. Although a translator, he is the most spontaneous of writers, and although he may not have credit for the varied devices of his plots (for these he derived directly from his originals), yet he

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presents his scenes with a vitality which must be all his own. An analysis of so exuberant a style seems artificial, if not impossible. The reader must observe it for himself, in order to arrive at a personal—which is the only real—appreciation of it. The style is thoroughly colloquial and idiomatic, and is marked by many features characteristic of the native Latin language, e.g. alliteration, assonance, and asyndeton. Plautus frequently enlivens his style by puns, by a wealth of metaphor, and by a most exuberant vocabulary of terms of abuse and endearment. Certainly his language is unique in Latin literature, and yet it is so natural and unforced, that we cannot believe that it was anything but typical of the gifted and versatile people to whom he belonged.

Dramatic representations took place at Rome only on certain occasions, namely, at the public festivals—the *Ludi Megalenses* (April 4–9), *Ludi Apollinares* (July 6), *Ludi Romani* (September 4–12), and *Ludi Plebeii* (November 16–18). Now and again they were given on private occasions, for example at the funeral of a distinguished Roman.

There was no stone theatre at Rome until the time of Pompey, who was responsible for the erection of one in 55 B.C. In Plautus' day plays were acted in temporary wooden theatres, which had no roof and only very simple scenery. The spectators in all probability had to stand to watch the performances. The stage was very wide, but not deep. Generally it represented a street in a Greek town, with two houses, separated by a narrow passage to form the background. The action of each play has therefore to take place in the street. Thus in our first extract (from the *Amphitruo*) Mercury stands outside Amphitruo's house in order to bar the entrance to the slave Sosia; and in our second (from the *Mostellaria*) Tranio talks to his master outside his own house, which has been shut up in accordance with the requirements of the plot. On the Roman stage, the entrance on the left of the spectators was always assumed to lead to the harbour, and that on the right to the market-place.

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The plays were acted only by men. The actors who impersonated women wore masks. It is probable, though not certain, that those who impersonated men wore, not masks, but wigs, and had their faces painted.

The constituent parts of a Roman comedy, apart from the prologue which usually introduces the story, are the *diuerbium*, i.e. the dialogue and colloquial part, e.g. the whole of our extract from the *Miles Gloriosus*; and the *canticum* or lyrical monologue, accompanied by the flute, e.g. the lament of Palaestra in our extract from the *Rudens*. The plays of Plautus contain far more of the latter element than do those of Terence. The flute-player (*tibicen*) contributed much to a Roman dramatic performance, for, besides accompanying the *cantica*, he filled the short intervals in the play during which the stage was empty.