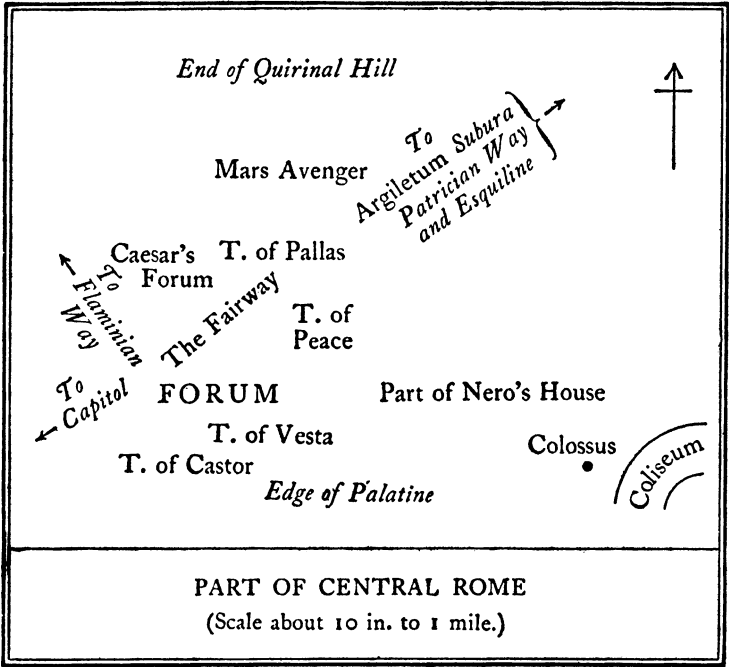


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# MARTIAL'S EPIGRAMS

TRANSLATIONS AND IMITATIONS

BY

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## P R E F A C E

MARTIAL stands alone in his age as the poet of friendship, private life and simple emotions. Modest, simple and affectionate, he is as much at home in idyll or elegy as in epigram; the latter in a sarcastic sense is rare with him. For his flattery of patrons we may blame his want of spirit but shall not question his sincerity. He saw no doubt the best side of their characters. His eulogies of Regulus or Sulpicia may be exaggerated but have a truer ring than the studied phrases of the *Agricola*.

Literature as a political force had died with Augustus. Lucan's attempt to revive it was grotesque, and Tacitus and Juvenal had not yet come. Martial himself is no republican, and (like Thackeray) accepts society as he finds it. With his tongue in his cheek he calls Domitian the "mighty Thunderer" and accepts provisionally that craze of his about Hercules which reads so curiously now, as well as society phrases like *rex et dominus*, *dominus et deus noster* (not *meus*) applied to human beings. This matter will be more fully considered below.

Some modernisms in the translations perhaps need apology. They have, we may say, Dryden's authority. A phrase of Shakespeare, a sporting allusion, or a proper name unknown to the classics may be pardoned if in the spirit of the original. Once or twice a frank imitation has crept in where it had no business, but these are few and are easily skipped.

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A. L. F.

H. F. T.

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## ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR

THERE is little known about the life of Martial except that he was born at Bilbilis in Spain, and was thus a compatriot of Seneca, Juvenal and Lucan, that he wrote in Rome during the reigns of Titus, Domitian, Nerva and Trajan, and that he returned to Spain three years after the death of Domitian and ended his life there on an estate given him by a certain Marcella, perhaps his second wife. At Rome he had the rank of a knight as well as other privileges properly bestowed on men with families\*.

The first nine books of the epigrams were published under Domitian (the first after the second as is seen by the first epigram of either book), the tenth under Nerva, the two final books succeeded a period of idleness and were written under Trajan, the last in Spain.

Tacitus is very unkind in the opening of the *Agricola* where he alludes to the literary silence of the fifteen years of Domitian. Neither he nor Juvenal wrote during that time, but Martial was writing all the while. Perhaps neither read the other's works. On the other hand Pliny the Younger, who is by no means a flatterer, admires him as *homo ingeniosus acutus acer* and especially mentions his *candor*—a word implying what has been called “faithful dealing”—together with a kind heart†.

The friendship was reciprocal as may be seen from Ep. 522; what may be blamed in Martial is that he is too indiscriminate, for instance in his compliments not only to the emperor but to such informers as the “good” Regulus. This sanctimonious impostor is well exposed by Pliny who disliked him‡, but Martial's attitude is not without parallels. The case of Domitian

\* Ep. 108.

† Ep. 3, 31.

‡ Ep. 4, 2, 7.

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is more flagrant; the flattery is “gross, open, palpable,” but for that very reason it differs essentially from the underhand and malignant flattery associated with tyrants and their victims. Lucan went much further and was less sincere; *i.e.* he hated in his heart that which he praised. But a great deal of this nonsense about the emperor’s divinity etc. was conventional. When Domitian changed the head of Hercules for his own nobody laughed at him, and so the allusion could be made with no more shame than saying “your grace” to a duke, indeed it would be expected, to refuse would be not only unsafe but rude. And silence was no alternative. Every now and then the question arose as to whether death was better. Martial approves of Decianus’ choice (Ep. 5)—to “live and live unblamed,” like the Matius of Caesar’s day rather than the Brutus. And so he allows himself most high-flown language about “Hercules the Greater,” without malice certainly, and one may hope with a little disgust. More displeasing perhaps are the compliments paid to Domitian’s military successes, which were not unmixed. It is curious that Martial had failed to recognize Domitian’s really valuable work (Bury) on the Taunus boundary (Ep. 3).

The temptation to over-politeness in an author is difficult to realize for us to whom even “gentle reader” is out of date. Books were no dearer then than they are now, and readers beyond comparison fewer, so that it was impossible for an author to support himself. If a poor man, he must become the client of a “patron.”

This meant, besides a strained vocabulary, a wearisome attendance sometimes lasting all day, but at least beginning with a call in the early morning in the white toga, in all weathers and at any distance. Each patron had many clients and *vice versa*. Great assiduity might secure an invitation to dinner, but the usual substitute was a “dole” of 25 ases or about half a

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crown. The abuses which followed when the patron was ill-bred form a stock subject of Martial and Juvenal; that Martial himself gradually won a better position may be partly gathered from expressions in later books; *e.g.* his farm at Nomentum is “a barren waste” in Ep. 83, but in Ep. 297 is “a suburban snug recess,” unless indeed the latter is a new acquisition, which amounts to the same thing; or even from his language in accepting the tiny present of Ep. 601, which, whatever it might have been, was probably worth having. A description of his engagements in Ep. 561 does not include morning attendance on patrons, although he has to call for his “dole” still at dinner time.

The worst excesses of flattery came to an end with the death of Domitian. Martial is glad of the relief, but in the epigram (563) “In vain you stand, soft Flattery” there is no unkind feeling expressed to the dead, only satisfaction at freedom from the strain of courtly language. But he was tired of a life of dependence, and the gift of an estate in Spain by Marcella led to his permanent withdrawal to that country.