

IMAGINARY CONVERSATION.

P. SCIPIO EMILIANUS, POLYBIUS, PANETIUS.

SCIPIO.

POLYBIUS, if you have found me slow in rising to you, if I lifted not up my eyes to salute you on your entrance, do not hold me ungrateful . . . proud there is no danger that you will ever call me : this day of all days would least make me so : it shews me the power of the immortal gods, the mutability of fortune, the instability of empire, the feebleness, the nothingness, of man. The earth stands motionless ; the grass upon it bends and returns, the same today as yesterday, the same in this age as in a thousand past ; the sky darkens and is serene again ; the clouds melt away, but they are clouds another time, and float like triumphal pageants along the heavens. Carthage is fallen ! to rise no more ! the funereal horns have this hour announced to us that, after eighteen days and eighteen nights of conflagration, her last embers are extinguished.

POLYBIUS.

Perhaps, O Emilianus, I ought not to have come in.

SCIPIO.

Welcome, my friend.

POLYBIUS.

While you were speaking I would by no means interrupt you so idly, as to ask you to whom have you been proud, or to whom could you be ungrateful.

SCIPIO.

To him, if to any, whose hand is on my heart ; to him on whose shoulder I rest my head, weary with presages and vigils. Collect my thoughts for me, O my friend ! the fall

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Excerpt

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of Carthage hath shaken and scattered them. There are moments when, if we are quite contented with ourselves, we never can remount to what we were before.

POLYBIUS.

Panetius is absent.

SCIPIO.

Feeling the necessity, at the moment, of utter loneliness, I despatched him toward the city. There may be (yes, even there) some sufferings which the Senate would not censure us for assuaging. But here he returns. Come, tell me, Polybius, on what are you reflecting and meditating?

POLYBIUS.

After the burning of some village, or the overleaping of some garden-wall, to exterminate a few pirates or highwaymen, I have seen the commander's tent thronged with officers; I have heard as many trumpets around him as would have shaken down the places of themselves; I have seen the horses start from the pretorium, as if they would fly from under their trappings, and spurred as if they were to reach the east and west before sunset, that nations might hear of the exploit, and sleep soundly. And now do I behold in solitude, almost in gloom, and in such silence that, unless my voice prevents it, the grasshopper is audible, him who has levelled to the earth the strongest and most populous of cities, the wealthiest and most formidable of empires. I had seen Rome; I had seen (what those who never saw never *will* see) Carthage; I thought I had seen Scipio: it was but the image of him: here I find him.

SCIPIO.

There are many hearts that ache this day: there are many that never will ache more: hath one man done it? one man's breath? What air, upon the earth, or upon the waters, or in the void of heaven, is lost so quickly! It flies away at the point of an arrow, and returns no more! the sea-foam stifles it! the tooth of a reptile stops it! a noxious leaf suppresses it! What are we in our greatness? whence rises it? whither tends it?

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Merciful gods! may not Rome be what Carthage is? may not those who love her devotedly, those who will look on her with fondness and affection after life, see her in such condition as to wish she were so?

POLYBIUS.

One of the heaviest groans over fallen Carthage burst from the breast of Scipio: who would believe this tale?

SCIPIO.

Men like my Polybius: others must never hear it.

POLYBIUS.

You have not ridden forth, Emilianus, to survey the ruins.

SCIPIO.

No, Polybius: since I removed my tent, to avoid the heat from the conflagration, I never have ridden nor walked nor looked toward them. At this elevation, and three miles off, the temperature of the season is altered. I do not believe, as those about me would have persuaded me, that the gods were visible in the clouds; that thrones of ebony and gold were scattered in all directions; that broken chariots, and flaming steeds, and brazen bridges, had cast their fragments upon the earth; that eagles and lions, dolphins and tridents, and other emblems of power and empire, were visible at one moment, and at the next had vanished; that purple and scarlet overspread the mansions of the gods; that their voices were heard at first confusedly and discordantly; and that the apparition closed with their high festivals. I could not keep my eyes on the heavens: a crash of arch or of theatre or of tower, a column of flame rising higher than they were, or a universal cry, as if none until then had perished, drew them thitherward. Such were the dismal sights and sounds, a fresh city seemed to have been taken every hour, for seventeen days. This is the eighteenth since the smoke arose from the level roofs and from the lofty temples, and thousands died, and tens of thousands ran in search of death.

Calamity moves me; heroism moves me more. That a nation whose avarice we have so often reprehended, should have cast into the furnace gold and silver, from the insuffi-

ciency of brass and iron for arms; that palaces the most magnificent should have been demolished by the proprietor for their beams and rafters, in order to build a fleet against us; that the ropes whereby the slaves hawled them down to the new harbour, should in part be composed of hair, for one lock of which the neighbouring kings would have laid down their diadems; that Asdrubal should have found equals, his wife none . . . my mind, my very limbs, are unsteddy with admiration.

O Liberty! what art thou to the valiant and brave, when thou art thus to the weak and timid! dearer than life, stronger than death, higher than purest love. Never will I call upon thee where thy name can be profaned; and never shall my soul acknowledge a more exalted power than thee.

PANETIUS.

The Carthaginians and Moors have beyond other nations a delicate feeling on female chastity. Rather than that their women should become slaves and concubines, they slay them: is it certain that Asdrubal did not observe or cause to be observed the custom of his country?

POLYBIUS.

Certain: on the surrender of his army his wife threw herself and her two infants into the flames. Not only memorable acts, of what the dastardly will call desperation, were performed, but some also of deliberate and signal justice. Avaricious as we called the people, and unjustly, as you have proved, Emilianus, I will relate what I myself was witness to.

In a part of the city where the fire had subsided, we were excited by loud cries, rather of indignation, we thought, than of such as fear or lament or threaten or exhort; and we pressed forward to disperse the multitude. Our horses often plunged in the soft dust, and in the holes whence the pavement had been removed for missiles, and often reared up and snorted violently at smells which we could not perceive, but which we discovered to rise from bodies, mutilate and half-burnt, of soldiers and horses, laid bare, some partly, some wholly, by the march of the troop. Altho the distance from the place whence we parted to that where we heard the cries, was very short, yet from the incumbrances in that street, and

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from the dust and smoke issuing out of others, we were some time before we reached it. On our near approach, two old men threw themselves on the ground before us, and the elder spake thus. *Our age, O Romans, neither will nor ought to be our protection: we are, or rather we have been, judges of this land; and to the utmost of our power we have invited our countrymen to resist you. The laws are now yours.*

The expectation of the people was intense and silent: we had heard some groans; and now the last words of the old man were taken up by others, by men in agony.

Yes, O Romans! said the elder who had accompanied him that had address us, *the laws are yours; and none punish more severely than you do treason and parricide. Let your horses turn this corner, and you will see before you traitors and parricides.*

We entered a small square: it had been a marketplace: the roofs of the stalls were demolished, and the stones of several columns, not one of which was standing, thrown down to supply the cramps of iron and the lead that fastened them, served for the spectators, male and female, to mount on. Five men were nailed on crosses; two others were nailed against a wall, from scarcity (as we were told) of wood.

Can seven men have murdered their parents in the same year? cried I.

No, nor had any of the seven, replied the first who had spoken. *But when heavy impositions were laid upon those who were backward in voluntary contributions, these men, among the richest in our city, protested by the gods that they had no gold or silver left. They protested truly.*

And they die for this! inhuman, insatiable, inexorable wretch.

Their books, added he, *unmoved at my reproaches, were seized by public authority and examined. It was discovered that, instead of employing their riches in external or internal commerce, or in manufactories, or in agriculture, instead of reserving it for the embellishment of the city, or the utility of the citizens, instead of lending it on interest to the industrious and the needy, they had lent it to foren kings and tyrants, some of whom were waging unjust wars against*

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their neighbours by these very means, and others were enslaving their own country. For so heinous a crime the laws had appointed no specific punishment. On such occasions the people and elders vote in what manner the delinquent shall be prosecuted, lest any offender should escape with impunity, from their humanity or their improvidence. Some voted that these wretches should be cast amid the panthers; the majority decreed them (I think wisely) a more lingering and more ignominious death.

The men upon the crosses held down their heads, whether from shame or pain or feebleness. The sunbeams were striking them fiercely; sweat ran from them, liquefying the blood that, within a few instants, had blackened and hardened on their hands and feet. A soldier stood by the side of each, lowering the point of his spear to the ground; but no one of them gave it up to us. A centurion asked the nearest of them how he dared to stand armed before him.

Because the city is in ruins, and the laws still live, said he. At the first order of the conqueror or of the elders I surrender my spear.

What is your pleasure, O commander? said the elder.

That an act of justice be the last public act performed by the citizens of Carthage, and that the sufferings of these wretches be not abridged. Such was my reply. The soldiers piled their spears, for the points of which the hearts of the crucified men thirsted; and the people hailed us as they would have hailed deliverers.

SCIPIO.

It is wonderful that a city, in which private men are so wealthy as to furnish the armories of tyrants, should have existed so long, and flourishing in power and freedom.

PANETIUS.

It survived but shortly this flagrant crime in its richer citizens. An admirable form of government, spacious and safe harbours, a fertile soil, a healthy climate, industry and science in agriculture, in which no nation is equal to the Moorish, were the causes of its prosperity: there are many of its decline.

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SCIPIO.

Enumerate them, Panetius, with your wonted clearness.

PANETIUS.

We are fond, O my friends! of likening power and greatness to the luminaries of heaven; and we think ourselves quite moderate when we compare the agitations of elevated souls to whatever is highest and strongest on the earth, liable alike to shocks and sufferings, and able alike to survive and overcome them. And truly thus to reason, as if all things around and above us sympathized, is good both for heart and intellect. I have little or nothing of the poetical in my character; and yet from reading over and considering these similitudes, I am fain to look upon nations with somewhat of the same feeling; and, dropping from the mountains and disentangling myself from the woods and forests, to fancy I see in states what I have seen in cornfields. The green blades rise up vigorously in an inclement season, and the wind itself makes them shine against the sun. There is room enough for all of them; none wounds another by collision or weakens by overtopping it; but, rising and bending simultaneously, they seem equally and mutually supported. No sooner do the ears of corn upon them lie close together in their full maturity, than a slight inundation is enough to cast them down, or a faint blast of wind to shed and scatter them. In Carthage we have seen the powerful families, however discordant among themselves, unite against the popular; and it was only when their lives and families were at stake that the people cooperated with the senate.

A mercantile democracy may govern long and widely; a mercantile aristocracy cannot stand. What people will endure the supremacy of those, uneducated and presumptuous, from whom they buy their mats and faggots, and who receive their money for the most ordinary and vile utensils? If no conqueror enslaves them from abroad, they would, under such disgrace, welcome as their deliverer, and acknowledge as their master, the citizen most distinguished for his military achievements. The rich men who were crucified in the weltering wilderness beneath us, would not have employed such criminal means of growing richer, had they never been

persuaded to the contrary, and that enormous wealth would enable them to committ another and a more flagitious act of treason against their country, in raising them above the people, and enabling them to become its taxers and oppressors.

O Emilianus! what a costly beacon here hath Rome before her in this awful conflagration: the greatest (I hope) ever to be, until that wherin the world must perish.

POLYBIUS.

How many Sibylline books are legible in yonder embers!

The causes, O Panetius, which you have stated, of Carthages former most flourishing condition, are also those why a hostile senate hath seen the necessity of her destruction, necessary not only to the dominion, but to the security, of Rome. Italy has the fewest and the worst harbours of any country known to us: a third of her soil is sterile, a third of the remainder is pestiferous: and her inhabitants are more addicted to war and rapine than to industry and commerce. To make room for her few merchants on the Adriatic and Ionian seas, she burns Corinth: to leave no rival in traffic or in power, she burns Carthage.

PANETIUS.

If the Carthaginians had extended their laws and language over the surrounding states of Africa, which they might have done by moderation and equity, this ruin could not have been effected. Rome has been victorious by having been the first to adopt a liberal policy, which even in war itself is a wise one. The parricides who lent their money to the petty tyrants of other countries, would have found it greatly more advantageous to employ it in cultivation nearer home, and in feeding those as husbandmen whom else they must fear as enemies. So little is the Carthaginian language known, that I doubt whether we shall in our lifetime see any one translate their annals into Latin or Greek: and within these few days what treasures of antiquity have been irreparably lost! The Romans will repose at *citrea*¹

¹ I dare not translate the *trabs citrea*, *citron wood*, to which (as we understand the *citron*) it has no resemblance. It was often of great dimensions: it appears from the description of its colour to have been mahogany. The trade

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tables for ages, and never know at last perhaps whence the Carthaginians brought the wood.

SCIPIO.

It is an awful thing to close as we have done the history of a people. If the intelligence brought this morning to Polybius be true², in one year the two most flourishing and most beautiful cities in the world have perished, in comparison with which our Rome presents but the pent-houses of artisans or the sheds of shepherds. With whatever celerity the messenger fled from the neighbourhood of Corinth and arrived here, the particulars must have been known at Rome as early, and I shall receive them ere many days are past.

PANETIUS.

I hardly know whether we are not less affected at the occurrence of two or three momentous and terrible events, than at one; and whether the gods do not usually place them together in the order of things, that we may be awestricken by the former and reconciled to their decrees by the latter, from an impression of their power. I know not what Babylon may have been; but I presume that, as in the case of all other great Asiatic capitals, the habitations of the people (who are slaves) were wretched, and that the magnificence of the place consisted in the property of the king and priesthood, and in the walls erected for the defense of it. Many streets probably were hardly worth a little bronze cow of Myron, such as a stripling could steal and carry off. The case of Corinth and of Carthage was very different. Wealth overspread the greater part of them, competence and content the whole. Wherever there are despotical governments, poverty and industry dwell together; shame dogs them in the public walks; humiliation is among their household gods.

to the Atlantic continent and islands must have been possess by a company, bound to secrecy by oath and interest. The prodigious price of this wood proves that it had ceased to be imported, or perhaps found, in the time of Cicero.

² Corinth in fact was not burnt until some months after Carthage: but as one success is always followed by the rumour of another, the relation is not improbable.

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SCIPIO.

I do not remember the overthrow of any two other great cities within so short an interval.

PANETIUS.

I was not thinking so much of cities or their inhabitants, when I began to speak of what a breath of the gods removes at once from earth. I was recollecting, O Emilianus, that in one Olympiad the three greatest men that ever appeared together were swept off. What is Babylon, or Corinth, or Carthage, in comparison with these! what would their destruction be, if every hair on the head of every inhabitant had become a man, such as most men are! First in order of removal was, he whose steps you have followed and whose labours you have completed, Africanus: then Philopemen, whose task was more difficult, more complex, more perfect: and lastly Hannibal. What he was you know better than any.

SCIPIO.

Had he been supported by his country, had only his losses been filled up, and skilful engineers sent out to him with machinery and implements for sieges, we should not be discoursing here on what he was: the Roman name had been extinguished.

POLYBIUS.

Since Emilianus is as unwilling to blame an enemy as a friend, I take it on myself to censure Hannibal for two things, subject however to the decision of him who has conquered Carthage.

SCIPIO.

The first I anticipate: now what is the second?

PANETIUS.

I would hear both stated and discoursed on, altho the knowledge will be of little use to me.

POLYBIUS.

I condemn, as every one does, his inaction after the battle of Cannæ; and, in his last engagement with Africanus,