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Auintus Horatius Flaccus, Epicurean Stoic

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To fully appreciate the character and work of a great man, we must first visualize his life environment and contemporary history. Such details may seem tiresome, as indeed they are, but that does not prevent them from having a tremendous influence upon such a character and such work. To the reader, dates and facts of history become very boring, so we will endeavor to eliminate them from BY study, as much as possible.

In Venusia, a small town of southern Italy, on December 8, 65 B.C. ANTHONY B. CAFFREY: Flaccus was born. His parents, like all parents, must have entertained great hopes for the future of this little country child.

A Thesis submitted partially to fulfill the requirements for have pictured to themselves the heights to which their son would rise. If the success of some millionaire or prominent **The Degree of Bachelor of Arts** us applaud, so much more should the success of Horace, who rose from a village to immortal fame, not by harbar or oratory, but by charming the hearts of men with winged words of song.



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To fully appreciate the character and work of a great man, we must first visualize his life environment and contemporary history. Such details may seem tiresome, as indeed they are, but that does not prevent them from having a tremendous influence upon such a character and such work. To the reader, dates and facts of history become very boring, so we will endeavor to eliminate them from our study, as much as possible.

In Venusia, a small town of southern Italy, on December 8, 65 B.C., Quintus Horatius Flaccus was born. His parents, like all parents, must have entertained great hopes for the future of this little country child. But in their wildest dreams of fancy, they could scarcely have pictured to themselves the heights to which their son would rise. If the success of some millionaire or prominent statesman of humble origin makes us applaud, so much more should we approve the phenomenal success of Horace, who rose from a rustic village to immortal fame, not by barter or oratory, but by charming the hearts of men with winged words of song.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no record of Horace's mother. It is assumed that she died at or soon after the poet's birth. But of his father we have considerable knowledge, for Horace is continually singing his praises. Horace's father was a freedman with a small farm. The portrait of him painted by his son, is a beautiful example of filial devotion. The poet writes that every good quality he himself possesses, he owes to his father.

This poor peasant seems to have been the embodiment of father, teacher, guide, and companion in the younger days of the poet's life.

His devotion to the interests of his son, his desire for his proper education, his kindly guidance and careful guardianship of the lad's morality, make us understand why it is that Horace, in his later life, remained free of the coarseness which characterized Roman society of his day. This devotion of his father shows itself mainly in the education provided for his son. Horace, after attending the elementary school at Venusia, was taken to Rome and there entered in the schools which were patronized by the sons of knights and senators. To prevent the boy from being looked down upon by his companions, he was furnished with slaves and clothing befitting the son of a wealthy man. In Rome, Horace studied Homer and the works of other Greek Poets and classic Romans. Oratory, both the writing and delivery of speeches was considered an essential part of the education of a young student.

As the standards of education came from Greece, Horace's father provided for his son's stay in Athens, where as a classmate of the son of Cicero, he studied philosophy, and became imbued with the culture of Greek Literature and Art. In these as well as in philosophy, Greece dominated Rome. It was to the self sacrificing spirit of his father that Horace owes his Athenian polish. However, it was the study of philosophy which chiefly attracted students to Athens at this time. The four

schools, the Academy, the Peripatetic, the Epicurean, and the Stoic continued to flourish long after the independence of Greece was lost. Horace gives us no picture of his life in Greece but the student of his works cannot fail to realize that the young poet did not waste his time while there. His writings are colored with reference to Greek literature, mythology, and philosophy. This life at Athens was interrupted in the year 44 B.C. when Marcus Junius Brutus, having fled from Rome to Greece, after the assassination of Caesar, began to assemble and recruit forces there. Through the influence of someone unknown, young Horace was given a commission as military tribune under Brutus, and served under that general until the disastrous battle of Phillipi.

After Phillipi, he obtained pardon and returned to Rome, to find his father dead and his lands confiscated by the state. He obtained a position in the government as quaestor's clerk. The appointment, though relatively unimportant, brought him into contact with persons of importance with the result that, having now begun to fashion verses, he was regarded with favor by Vergil and Varius with whom he formed a companionship. Vergil introduced the young quaestor's clerk to Maecenas, a wealthy patron of letters. Maecenas was drawn toward him and presented him, about the year 33 B.C. with a little farm in the Sabine Hills. This gift rendered the poet financially independent and gave him more

leisure to write. out of this patronage of Maecenas, not

There seems to be good evidence that Horace could have entered upon a brilliant political career under the regime of Octavian, but he had already made his decision to devote his life "to teaching Grecian numbers to run in Latin measure."

Whatever the case, Horace spent the remainder of his life either in Rome or at his Sabine farm. His poems continually refer to this delightful retreat in the hills where the poet was wont to go to write or to play at farming.

In Rome, he would join the little group which gathered at the house of Maecenas. These gatherings always included Vergil, Varius, Propertius and a few other writers of less distinction. A kindred spirit, friendly discussion and pleasant intercourse marked these occasions.

Informality always characterized Horace's relations with Maecenas. In one of his writings, he sets forth this easy companionship in his description of a journey to Brundisium, when his wealthy patron, traveling on some diplomatic mission, took with him several of his literary friends. Comments during the journey were made about some puffed up minor official at Fundi. When they stopped for rest, Maecenas amused himself by playing ball, but Horace and Vergil, having no taste for such a violent pastime, in the heat of the day, prefer to spend the time in slumber. The three discuss little everyday things such as, the mosquitoes, the drinking water, the poor fare at the place where they are stopping, much the same as a group of modern business men would chat while riding in a Pullman train.

Horace made out of this patronage of Maecenas, not a mercenary thing but a relationship that had its own beauty. He showed by example, how the union between patron and protege could develop into intimate friendship with mutual advantage to both. Patron and client should be mutually generous and forbearing and should practise that tact and geniality in which the fine art of living consists.

After the inauguration of the new era of peace and reconstruction fostered by Augustus, Horace played no small part in the reshaping of the destinies of the Empire. He did no actual political work but lent his aid by extolling in verse the glory of Rome and her illustrious ruler. In his second book of Epistles and in a collection of lyric poems appearing in 23 B.C., he pays glowing tribute to the work of Augustus for the State. In several later poems he expresses solicitude for the safety of the ship of State and the internal dangers to the nation caused by increasing wealth, corrupted family life and effeminate youth. He prays that some savior, wishing to have his name emblazoned in history will come to check this civil strife and curb licentious passion.

About this time, Horace wrote to Maecenas, saying that his lyre was not tuned to themes of war. But in a later poem, he declares that he is full of plans for a lofty national theme in which he will "emblazon the name of Caesar forever in the stars." In six odes at executed at the express request of the Emperor, much of such work was spontaneous. In his third book of Odes, the

the beginning of his third book, he carries out his intentions. These poems hold up to the youth of the state, "virginibus puerisque," high ideals of civic virtue. The poet sets forth the blessings of frugality and the simple life as contrasted with the cares that attend the duties of office holding and the maintenance of elaborate homes. The strenuous life of the military man and the courage of the warrior and honorable deeds; all these Horace praises, to the heavens. As an inspiration to the youth of the nation, he depicts the glorious position of the Emperor, who has attained the lofty citadels of the gods by strictly adhering to the principals of justice and firmness.

Horace In this period of his career, it is a far different Horace than the hotblooded youth who had so ardently followed Brutus in his attempt to shake off the "tyrants yoke." Horace, by now, had come to realize the immense benefits Octavian was conferring upon the State by his comprehensive plans for social and political reorganization. After a long period of wavering, he had finally been converted to the standard of "Imperialism," and to make amends for his previous defection seems to have redoubled his efforts towards promoting the aims of the Emperor. Many critics have doubted his sincerity in the new role he was playing, but a careful study of the frank character of the poet seems to show that he believed in the new doctrine of Imperialism that he now taught to the youth of Rome. Although some of his poems handling national themes were executed at the express request of the Emperor, much of such work was spontaneous. In his third book of Odes, the

poet himself recognizes, how far he has advanced from his position at Phyllipi, in a welcome home to Augustus after the latter's victories in Spain.

How much Horace had risen in the esteem of the Emperor is shown when in 17 B.C. Augustus, about to solemnize his reign by a revival of the great religious festival, the "Ludi Saeculares," invited Horace to write the formal hymn to the gods which would be sung by a chorus of boys and girls. This resulted in Horace's majestic *Carmen Saeculare*. Such a consideration of the relation of Horace to the Emperor shows how he was reconciled to the new regime and had come to recognize the value of Augustus to the State. Horace was now virtually the poet laureate of the Empire.

To call Horace an Epicurean Stoic is not a contradiction, he is neither or both. He is the national interpreter of the philosophy of Rome in his time. The masses of Italy did not recognize themselves as adhering to Stoicism or Epicureanism or for that matter, to any other school. Their code of life was vigorous common sense gained through experience, not from any religious study of books. Horace himself, although he had formally studied philosophy at Athens, although he professed faith in philosophy as an advantageous guide to young or old, rich or poor, was a consistent follower of neither Stoic nor Epicurean Schools. The virtues of each system attracted him but their weaknesses repelled him. In his own words, he confesses this wavering allegiance. "And lest you enquire under what guide or to what hearth I look for safety, I will tell you that I am sworn to obedience in no master's

formula, but am a guest in whatever haven the tempests
sweeps me to. Now I am full of action, and deep in the
waves of civic life, an unswerving follower and guardian
of the true virtue, now I secretly backslide to the pre-
cepts of Aristippus and try to bend circumstance to my-
self, not myself to circumstance." (Showerman: Horace
and his Influence.)

But Epicureanism with Horace's definition of duty
and pleasure differs little in practise from Stoicism.
He professes himself an Epicurean; in practise he is a
Stoic. His life exhibits qualities common to both. It
does not admit of a name. It is not a strait-laced system.
The basis for Horatian philosophy was the habits of char-
acter which he acquired while yet a boy in his native
village of Venusia by association with his father and
neighbors, and later by his contact with the ordinary
people in Rome. He occasionally makes use of the phraseology of the
schools, but this should not mislead the reader. In a humorous
satiric invitation to his friend Tibullus to visit him on
his farm he says, "When you want a good laugh, come and see
me; you will find me fat and sleek and my skin well cared
for, a pig from the sty of Epicurus", this might be the
confession of an Epicurean, but it is more probably the jest
of a Stoic. A good part of Horace's charm lies in the fact that
he takes the role of spectator. His attitude toward the
play of life is that of the onlooker. He maintains an air
of tolerant amusement for the drama unfolding before his

eyes, and as he looks down upon the scurrying lives of men he remarks, "Nothing is sweeter than to dwell in the lofty citadels secure in the wisdom of the sages, thence to look down upon the rest of mankind, blindly wandering in mistaken paths in the search for the way of life, striving one with another in the contest of wits, emulous in distinction of birth, seeking at length to arrive at the heights of power and become lords of the world."

But Horace is not always a mere onlooker, watching the rest of mankind. He is also a spectator of himself. Horace the philosopher contemplates Horace the man, with the same understanding amusement with which he regards the rest of humanity. He uses himself as a model to illustrate his philosophy, the need of hard work as well as genius; the possibility of happiness without wealth.

Besides being a spectator Horace is a critic. Not a carping critic. His position is more to be thought of as that of a judge, not that of a prosecutor. His verdicts are seldom harsh. Vice and unmanliness in all forms receive his sternest censure. But he merely laughs at those who are guilty of the ordinary shortcomings of human life. That Horace is a satirist at all is more because of the fact that he is a spectator than by virtue of any intention on his part: "To look upon life with the eye of understanding is to see men the prey to passions and delusions--the very comment on which can be nothing less than satire. (Grant Showerman).

Contentment with his lot is the keynote of Horace's Philosophy of life. But it is not a merely passive philosophy. He is not a cheerless skeptic nor a despairing pessimist. In

looking out upon a world of discontented and restless humanity, he sees the soldier, the farmer, the lawyer, the trader all swept along in the race for gain. Each is dissatisfied. Some seek gold, others political prestige, but whatever their objective, it is always selfish.

By reason of this slavish attachment to greed for wealth, political power, or the satisfaction of their own passions and appetites, "Dark Care" dogs at their footsteps. They are never free of it. It pursues men in every walk of life; in the palaces of the rich and in the huts of the poor. It rides with the general into battle and follows the senator thru the streets of the city. No man rich or poor can escape this tormenter.

Likewise, are all men subject to the whims of Fortune. Today man rides the crest of the waves; tomorrow he is in the depths. The uncertainty of Fate can overthrow the work of a life time of ambition. Death unforeseen and unexpected lurks in a thousand corners. Some men are drowned at sea. Others fall in battle. *Whatever his station man must some day greet cruel Proserpina. Her summons is delivered impartially at the huts of the poor and the palaces of the rich. Prince and peasant must one day cross that stream and in the land of eternal exile, "Black Care" still pursues.

Though the future is dark, the conclusion should not be that the philosophy of Horace is one of gloom. He agrees with the pessimist that life contains striving and pain. But life with its pains and its inevitable end can be made happy thru the use of many things. Patience makes lighter the burden which we can scarcely lift. Literature and song can help to

drive away dull care. The limitless riches of philosophy are a solace to many. The noisy crowd distracts the mind bowed low with worry. There are the never ending delights of town and country. And above all there are our friends who will stand by us when all else fails. Why should man be unhappy in the midst of such a world.

The wise man will recognize the many possibilities about him and grasp them before they fade. Seize the present day and rejoice, lest perhaps you have not been allotted a tomorrow. Accept the gifts of the passing hour. Unless we enjoy the goods of existence here and now, we will never enjoy them, for when "Pale Death" knocks at our door we follow her empty handed, leaving all behind.

Horace's Epicureanism is more nearly that of Epicurus himself who taught that, "To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough." Truly a philosophy of contentment. Plain living is both a duty and a source of happiness. Because of the lives of some of his too liberal disciples the name of Epicurus has become associated with profligate living. Horace is not among these disciples. He considers that the highest purpose in life is the extraction of the honey of enjoyment, but the purpose could not be realized without the exercise of discrimination, moderation and spiritual culture.

Horace is for the most part serious. He is somewhat of a preacher, correcting the youth of the age. He exemplifies the popular definition of a Stoic, and not at all the popular definition of an Epicurean.

His praise of wine and his evident familiarity with wine of all grades and many names, both Greek and Italian are not

the ravings of one ravings of one given wholly to riotous and boisterous living. He is neither a wine bibber nor a total abstainer. The vine was the gift of the gods. The poet believed too thoroughly in his own doctrine of moderation in all things, especially in pleasures, to become himself a castaway thru undue indulgence. If wine becomes a curse it is not so because of itself, but because of its excessive use. The cup was made for pleasure, only barbarians quarrel over it. Pleasure obtained only thru pain is an evil.

Horace's views on the prevalent Roman habits of gluttony also reflect his doctrine of moderation. Whereas he makes but slight reference to foppishness and display in matters of toilet, he devotes whole satires to the evils of the sins of the table. In Rome elaborate dinners lasting several hours had become the fashion. The Poet in an ironic mood pictures the careful preparations and methods of serving such a banquet. The innumerable dishes served and the placing of the guests, all the ostentatious magnificence. In contrast to that he describes a meal in his own home to which he returns after strolling about the city in his easy Bohemian manner. "Then I go back to a meal of leeks, and peas and a cake; my dinner is served by three boys; a white marble table holds two goblets and a ladle, a cheap sea urchin, flask and patera all Campanian ware". In another picture he shows us the emptiness of the elaborate banquetings by picturing in contrast, the sun-burned wife of an industrious farmer who welcomes her husband back from his day's toil in the fields, with a bright hearth-fire who milks the cattle in the folds and then serves supper and wine, the products of the farm, and gives her tired man something more precious than Lucrine oysters or im-

ported guinea-fowls. There are better objects upon which to spend wealth than the table; the poor, temples of the gods, the country. But sometimes Horace displays a delightful inconsistency when he admits with disarming self irony that he is so pleased even with a late invitation to dinner at the palace of Maecenas that he rushes off, leaving his own humble board and expectant guests.

Davus his servant reproaches his master for praising a care free diet only when he is not invited out to a more elaborate meal. But Horace was large enough to laugh at his own inconsistency and held up an ideal standard to which he did not always attain. His real quarrel was with exaggeration in gluttony. He held no dislike for pleasant dinners where friends met and talked. Even reveling over the wine-cups dispelled care and smoothed the anxious brow.

In his views on ethics and morality he seems to echo the spirit of the times when he declares, "It is not disgraceful to have played, but it is disgraceful not to stop playing. Horace was not a saint but his standards were considerably above those of the average Roman. It is true that in his earlier years in the capital he shows some evidence of developing into a prototype of the gay Francois Villon, but the companionship of Virgil, Varius, and Maecenas served to mellow his ardent spirit. In later poems he expresses sincere regret for the indiscretions of his youth and proves the sincerity of his warnings to the youths and maidens of the State.

Even in his earlier love poems Horace does not descend to the coarse brutalities of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. And in other poems he treats on love in exquisite light society verse.

Individualized by melodious Greek names his dainty figures dance

before us like figures on a vase. Pyrrha of the fiery hair, Glycera whose beauty shines more purely than Parian marble, soft voiced Lalage, timid Chloe, Sparton haired Lyde. The very fancy of their names suggest their unreality and yet some critics would make them real characters in the life of the poet. Elizabeth Hazleton; Horace and His Art of Enjoyment.

On the whole woman's place in the works of Horace is a lofty one. Roman women can back their fighting men as mother and betrothed of the enemy do, by their devoted thoughts of some hard pressed warrior. The poet makes of woman one of the most influential elements in the life of a nation.

When everything has been said about him it all narrows down to this: His appeal lies not in his philosophy of life; not in the sterling qualities he exhibits; not in the doctrine of moderation that he preaches; not in his delightfully intimate manner by which he makes his reader feel that he is conversing directly with him; not in the exquisite turning of his lyrical phrases. Not in any of these. It is in the combination of all these qualities. A joyously blended compound perfectly balanced, and agreeable to the palate of the most exacting connoisseur. It is also the secret of his winning his way into the hearts of generation after generation. He is always modern. His range of interests are wide and his accomplishments are many. He is a lover of the city and of the country. He is a good fellow among friends. He is human. Truly did he prophecy when he declared, "Exegi monumentum aere perennius."

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