

## MINOR EMENDATIONS IN PLINY AND TACITUS

### I

Under cover of gentle rebuke Pliny lent encouragement to an author still reluctant to publish, although hendecasyllable verses from the versatile consular had announced the book. Ever considerate and helpful, he confesses to Suetonius Tranquillus that he is himself prone to be dilatory:

Sum et ipse in edendo haesitator, tu tamen meam quoque cunctationem tarditatemque vicisti. proinde aut rumpe iam moras aut cave ne eosdem istos libellos, quos tibi hendecasyllabi nostri blanditiis elicere non possunt, convicio scazontes extorqueant (5.10.20).

Standard texts print the word 'haesitator' with no sign of distrust.<sup>1</sup> A slight improvement is called for, such as anyone might produce when quoting the phrase from memory. That is, easy and painless: 'sum et ipse in edendo haesitantior.'

The tone of the whole missive confirms. Pliny goes on to utter an ostensible threat: 'rumpe iam moras', otherwise 'blanditiae' will be converted into invective. 'Rumpe moras', thus spoke the envoys sent by Jupiter and by Juno (*Aen.* 4.569; 9.13). The epic tag will not be misconstrued. A 'minitatio' artfully reinforces the bland and amicable injunction.

The 'scripta' of Tranquillus excited urgent demand: 'adpellantur cotidie, efflagitantur.' Their scope and nature need not detain.<sup>2</sup> More instructive his diffidence, already on show when Tranquillus took alarm from a dream (1.18), when he drew back from a military tribunate (3.8)—and perhaps in the late sequel to impair and curtail his capacity as a high government official.<sup>3</sup>

For present purposes, something needs to be said about the word 'haesitator'. By paradox, Sidonius Apollinaris contributes to condemn it. At the outset he modestly avows his model, 'Gai Plinii disciplinam maturitatemque vestigiis praesumptuosis insecuturus' (*Epp.* 1.1.1). In a later letter he comes out with a clear echo of Pliny to Tranquillus. His friend Tonantius kept asking for a poem, which he can no longer defer: 'sedulo exposcis, ut me eius edendi diutius habere non possis haesitatore' (9.13.4).

The word 'haesitator' happens to be found in no other Latin author. Not indeed that one should propose to emend Sidonius into the bargain. On this theme it may be suitable to conclude with another coincidence, namely 'haesitabundus'. Pliny has it, once only and in a serious context: 'expalluit notabiliter, quamvis palleat semper, et haesitabundus', etc. (1.5.13). Now Sidonius, shortly after naming Pliny, again expresses diffidence: 'nos nunc perquam haesitabundos in hoc deinceps famae pelagus impellis' (1.1.3). No other specimen is registered in *TLL*.

<sup>1</sup> M. Schuster (Teubner, 1933); Sir Roger Mynors (OCT, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> According to Sherwin-White in his commentary (1966) ad loc., 'the implication favours a volume of verses, rather than

the lost prose work *De Viris Illustribus*.'

<sup>3</sup> The reason alleged for his dismissal in the *Historia Augusta* (*Hadr.* 11.3) is highly dubious—and probably comes from Marius Maximus.

## II

The necrological notices in the *Annales* repay inspection, on multiple counts. The earliest pair of honorands joins the first consul of the Volusii (suff. 12 BC) to Sallustius Crispus, the grandnephew of the 'rerum Romanarum florentissimus auctor' (3.30). In the third hexad that device occurs only twice, each to the detriment of the person named first, and, more of a surprise, each attended with perplexities.

The one evokes two orators, Domitius Afer and M. Servilius. Of the latter, the historian states:

diu foro, mox tradendis rebus Romanis celebris et elegantia vitae, quam clariorem effecit, ut par ingenio, ita morum diversus (14.19).

The feeble and peculiar parenthesis 'quam clariorem effecit' has aroused disquiet from time to time. There is much to be said for the remedy of Acidalius, to expunge it.

Brief mention must suffice in this place.<sup>4</sup> The other notice contrasts Caninius Rebilus, the jurist of evil life, with an excellent man, L. Volusius Saturninus (suff. AD 3):

at L. Volusius egregia fama concessit, cui tres et nonaginta anni spatium vivendi praecipuaeque opes bonis artibus, inoffensa tot imperatorum amicitia fuit (13.30.2).

As transmitted by Mediceus II, one word was seen erroneous at an early stage: Lipsius substituted 'amicitia' for 'malitia'. Something further solicits attention. The phrase 'praecipuaeque opes bonis artibus' is harsh and abrupt. A parallel passage concerning blameless enrichment offers guidance. Recording the decease of Lentulus the Augur, the historian registers 'bene tolerata paupertas, dein magnae opes innocenter partae et modeste habitae' (4.44.1).

It will therefore be permissible to insert a word in the notice about Volusius: 'opes bonis artibus <partae>'. The family was known to Cornelius Tacitus (*pr.* 88) through two coeval aristocrats, consuls in 87 and 92. His first obituary notice went to their first consul, styled the 'primus adcumulator' of their vast fortune (3.30.1); and, composing a speech for Nero, he has Nero, in airy deprecation of money or bounties, refer to the old man recently deceased: 'quantum Volusio longa parsimonia quaeisivit' (14.56.1).

To amass riches without reproach, that is an engaging notion—and, to use a phrase of the *Historia Augusta*, 'rarum atque difficile'. How proceed? In the first place no doubt through matrimony and inheritances. Profit from the land will not be neglected. The Gaditane agronomer heard from the lips of old Volusius a useful precept.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See further *Hermes* 92 (1964), 423 f. = *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (1970), pp. 107 ff.; H. Fuchs, *Mus. Helv.* 22 (1965), 115 f.; E. Koestermann in his commentary (1968) ad loc.

I had registered with some approbation the neglected emendation of Beatus Rhemanus ('quae' for 'quam') but concluded thus: 'the parenthetic explanation is feeble. A concise writer would do without

it. Perhaps Acidalius was right.' Neither Fuchs nor Koestermann seem to have paid sufficient attention to the direction of my arguments. The former scholar even stated 'Syme allerdings hielt es für möglich dass Tacitus selbst die Worte *quae clariorem effecit* hinzugefügt habe.' Not at all: I had raised objection against 'effecit'.

<sup>5</sup> Columella 1.7.5. The villa and estate of the Volusii (with barracks for many

In conclusion reference may be made to peculiar features in the two pairs of obituary notices—and also in the isolated notice on Memmius Regulus (14.47.1), after which the historian drops the practice.<sup>6</sup> Some suspect that he did not live to complete the third hexad—or even to revise the extant books.

*Wolfson College, Oxford*

RONALD SYME

slaves) has been discovered near Lucus Feroniae. For the inscriptions, cf. J. M. Reynolds, *JRS* 61 (1971), 142 ff.

*Ten Studies in Tacitus* (1970), pp. 83 f.  
One example is the failure to state that Volusius was Prefect of the City until the day of his death (Pliny, *N.H.* 7.72).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. remarks in *AJP* 79 (1958), 23 f. =