

## THE EARLIEST NARRATIVE POETRY OF ROME.

DESPITE the discredit into which the once famous theory of Niebuhr has long since fallen, it is beginning to appear, both to historians<sup>1</sup> and to students of literature, that Epic poetry was in full process of evolution at Rome before Livius Andronicus was inspired to translate the *Odyssey*. There is, indeed, ample evidence to warrant such a belief; our authorities may most conveniently be considered in two main divisions. The first calls for no more than the barest mention, for it is concerned with those *Naeniae* and *Cantus Coniuviales* the existence of which is not seriously challenged by even the most conservative criticism. They are well attested, and the evidence for their extreme antiquity is familiar to every reader of Cicero.<sup>2</sup> In passing we may mention also Saturnian epitaphs like those of the Scipios, and the Tituli Triumphales set up in the Capitol. Typical lines are:

*Fundit, fugat, prosternit maximas legiones,*

from the inscription of M' Acilius Glabrio, and

*Summas opes qui regum regias refregit*

(which, however, Diomedes appears to quote as from Naevius).

Our second division deals with the other very ancient Saturnian poems which undoubtedly existed quite apart from these earliest songs; of them some were, no doubt, quite short pieces of a ritualistic or religious character,

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the latest volume of de Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*.

<sup>2</sup> The most important passages where these songs are mentioned are as follows: (1) Cic. *Tusc.* I. 11. 3 'Sero igitur a nostris poetae uel cogniti uel recepti. Quamquam est in Originibus solitos esse in epulis canere coniuuias ad tibicinem de clarorum hominum uirtutibus.' (2) Id. *Tusc.* IV. 11 'Grauissimus auctor in Originibus dixit Cato morem apud maiores hunc epularum fuisse ut deinceps qui accubarent, canerent ad tibiam clarorum uirorum laudes atque uirtutes.' (3) Id. *Brut.* XIX. 75 'Atque utinam exstarent illa carmina quae multis saeculis ante suam aetatem in epulis esse cantitata a singulis coniuuiis de clarorum uirorum laudibus in Originibus scriptum reliquit Cato.' (4) Varro *ap. Non. Marcell.* p. 78 'In coniuuiis pueri modesti ut cantarent carmina antiqua, in quibus laudes erant maiorum et assa uoce et cum tibicine.' (5) Val. Max. II. 1. 10 'Maiores natu in coniuuiis ad tibias egregia superiorum opera carmine comprehensa pangebant, quo ad ea imitanda

iuuentutem alacriorem redderent.' (6) Cic. *de Legg.* II. 24. 62 'Honoratorum uirorum laudes in contione memorentur, easque etiam cantus ad tibicinem prosequaretur, cui nomen neniae.' (7) Varro *ap. Non.* p. 145 'Ibi a muliere quae optima uoce esset perquam laudari; dein neniam cantari solitam ad tibias et fides.' (8) Id. p. 66 'Praeficae dicebantur apud ueteres quae adhiberi solerent funeri mercede conductae, ut et flerent et fortia facta laudarent.' Cf. also Tac. *Ann.* III. 5 (on the funeral of Germanicus) 'ubi illa ueterum instituta, propositam toro effigiem, meditata ad memoriam uirtutis carmina, et laudationes et lacrimas.'

Of course this evidence is not all of equal value. Valerius Maximus, perhaps, does not count for much, but Varro is not to be lightly dismissed, and Cato is even more important. He is not likely to have made such a statement without good ground, more especially as it tended to give an air of antique dignity to that art of poetry which he personally despised.

but others show the 'secularization' of the style and its development in the direction of the narrative lay. In his note upon the *Versus Saturnius* Charisius writes as follows: *Hos Saturnios nonnulli uocitatos existimant quod eius temporis imperiti adhuc mortales huiusmodi usi uersibus uideantur suas sententias cluisse, uocibusque pro modo temporum modulatis sollemnibus diebus cecinisse, uel quod eodem defuncto apotheosis eius hac dictione sit celebrata, cuius exemplum adhuc in linteis libris repperitur.*<sup>1</sup> Here we have a definite enough statement that in the fourth Christian century there was still in existence a poem in Saturnians celebrating the glory of a mortal man who became a god. Festus, again, attests the widespread use of the metre: *Versus quoque antiquissimi, quibus Faunus fata cecinisse hominibus uidetur, Saturnii appellantur. Quibus et a Naeuio Bellum Punicum scriptum est, et a multis aliis plura composita sunt.*<sup>2</sup> We may see a faint trace of this activity in the scattered single lines preserved by the grammarians, like:

*Occursatrix artificum, perdita spinturnix,*

and another, *uersus antiquus* as Festus calls it, with a regular epic simile:

*Quasi messor per messim unumquemque spicum.*

Set side by side with this another passage from Festus:<sup>3</sup> *Mamuri Veturi nomen frequenter in cantibus Romani frequentabant.* . . . (Then follows the story of the ancile and the means taken to protect it.) . . . *Probatum opus est maxime Mamuri Veturi, qui praemii loco petiit ut suum nomen inter carmina Salii canerent.* The language of this passage may fairly be taken to imply something more than the bare mention which is all that we can legitimately infer from the reference in Ovid;<sup>4</sup> and it is not impossible that later *cantus* were built up out of the hymn. There is, too, a trace of a poem on Coriolanus preserved in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who says of that hero *ᾄδεται καὶ ὑμνεῖται* (which must mean songs of praise are in circulation about him). The last instance to be considered here depends on a fragmentary and much restored passage of Festus: *<Nauali corona solet donari qui pri>mus in hostium <nauem armatus transilierit cuiusue> opera <manuue nauis hostium capta fuerit. Adeptus> est eam M. <Terentius Varro bello Piratico donant>e Cn. Pom<peio Magno. Item alii inter quos M.> Atilius<sup>5</sup> bello <quod gestum est contra Poenos, ut scrip>tum est in car<mine Saturnio . . .>.*<sup>6</sup> Broken as the passage is, however, it nevertheless proves that a poem of some kind existed. The reference cannot well be to the *Bellum Punicum*, which, as we have seen, was for Festus the stock example of the metre, and would therefore be introduced by its own title, and not in such a casual manner as in the text before us. Is it too much to suggest that Festus had in mind an episode of a separate poem on Regulus, an aristea in fact, dealing with his personal exploits in the first Punic War,

<sup>1</sup> Keil, G.L. I. p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> P. 325, Müller.

<sup>3</sup> P. 131, Müller.

<sup>4</sup> *Fasti* III. 385 sqq.

<sup>5</sup> Atilius for Atilius† is accepted by all editors (except Thewrewk).

<sup>6</sup> The text given is that of O. Müller. Lindsay (following Thewrewk) reads 'scrip>tum est in car<mine . . .>' simply (p. 156, Lindsay).

and possibly the source of the legend immortalized by Cicero and Horace? In the same connexion I might further suggest that in the famous lines of Ennius:

. . . scripsere *alii* rem  
uorsibu' quos olim Fauni Vatesque canebant,

*alii* is a real and not merely a rhetorical plural referring to Naevius only, and that this very Regulus poem may have been before Ennius as he wrote.

Lastly we may consider the evidence for the existence of poems on Romulus himself. We may preface our examination by another passage from the *Tusculans*,<sup>1</sup> which certainly seems to imply some background or material of native legendary history on which Ennius drew: *mortem non interitum esse . . . Ex hoc et nostrorum opinione Romulus in caelo cum dis agit aeternum ut famae adsentiens dixit Ennius*. But more important are the Greek authorities. There is a well-known passage in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, of which too little is often made: οἱ δὲ [that is Romulus and Remus] ἀνδρωθέντες γίνονται κατὰ τε ἀξιώσιν μορφῆς καὶ φρονήματος ὄγκον οὐ συοφορβοῖς καὶ βουκόλοις ἐοικότες, ἀλλ' οἷους ἂν τις ἀξιώσειε τοὺς ἐκ βασιλείου τε φύντας γένους καὶ ἀπὸ δαιμόνων σπορᾶς γενέσθαι νομιζομένους, ὡς ἐν τοῖς πατρίοις ὕμνοις ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ἔτι καὶ νῦν ᾄδεται.<sup>2</sup> With this we may compare a passage in Plutarch's *Life of Numa*, from the speech of Numa in reply to the embassy that comes with an offer of the vacant throne at Rome: καίτοι Ῥωμύλον μὲν οὗτοι [the Romans] παῖδα θεῶν ὕμνοισι φήμαις, καὶ τροφὴν τινα δαιμόνιον αὐτοῦ καὶ σωτηρίαν ἄπιστον ἔτι νηπίου λέγουσι.<sup>3</sup> Here we have evidence which shows beyond all reasonable doubt that poems on the miraculous story of Romulus were actually in existence in Imperial times. It is hard to believe that the categorical statement of Dionysius can be anything but the simple truth, for we must remember that in literary matters his authority is very much greater than that of the ordinary historian. He is a very considerable critic indeed, possibly the author of the *De Sublimitate* itself, certainly, as is abundantly shown in the *De Compositione Verborum* and *The Literary Letters*, a man of wide reading and sympathetic understanding, especially interested in poetry. The reference to the 'traditional lays' is a thoroughly characteristic transference of that interest from Greek to Latin literature, and it would not be in keeping with the author's known tastes to suppose that his statement is taken over *verbatim* from some early annalist.<sup>4</sup> Again, it is quite unreasonable to argue that such valuable evidence must be ruled out of court as a contradiction of the *utinam exstarent* passage already quoted. There is no real discrepancy between the two; the simple explanation is that they refer to different things. Cicero speaks of mere κλέα ἀνδρῶν songs of the earliest and most primitive type, which were probably never written down at all, and so inevitably were forgotten with the lapse of time; whereas Dionysius' poems belong to the

<sup>1</sup> I. 12.

<sup>2</sup> I. 79. A. R.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. 5.

Ville de Mirmont (*Études sur l'Ancienne Poésie latine*, p. 401).

<sup>4</sup> This appears to be the general opinion of the critics. See such statements as those of De

second clearly marked stage in the evolution of epic poetry. They are narrative lays, and not mere *κλέα*. The feature on which both Dionysius and Plutarch lay stress, that is the divine birth, the kingly appearance in Dionysius and the miraculous rescue in Plutarch, surely imply narrative on a fairly elaborate scale. And the further point is to be noted that Cicero nowhere suggests that his *carmina* had any reference to Romulus in particular, while Dionysius states definitely that he was the hero of the *ὑμνοι*. The words *ὑμνοι* and *ὑμνοῦσι* offer no difficulty in this connexion; the precedent of the *Homeric Hymns*, if nothing else, shows that they could be applied to long poems which are, in reality, narrative simply.

At this point I would pause to sum up results. I have suggested:

1. That on the evidence of Cato and Varro *κλέα ἀνδρῶν* existed.
2. That on the evidence of Cicero and Varro *θρῆνοι* existed.
3. That on the evidence of Charisius a poem on the apotheosis of Saturn existed in the fourth century A.D.
4. That on the evidence of Dionysius a poem or poems on Romulus existed in the Augustan age.
5. That on the evidence of Dionysius a poem on Coriolanus existed.
6. That on the authority of Festus a poem on Mamurius Veturius may have existed.
7. That on the authority of Festus a poem on Regulus may have existed.

Incomplete as this evidence may be, it nevertheless suggests that if a school of native ballad poetry did exist, its work developed along lines which on *a priori* grounds we might expect. Beginning with short quasi-lyrical *κλέα* and *θρῆνοι* it passes to poems of a mythological religious character, then to half-legendary, half-historical lays, and finally to poems dealing with well-authenticated historical characters. Such a background would have the great advantage of making Naevius much more readily understandable; he would no longer be a solitary figure without real literary ancestors, for the *Bellum Punicum* at least, as he is without descendant. He would merely be the last of a long line of poets who had been steadily developing native themes in the native manner; his poem would be the swan-song of those *Veteres Casmenae* whom the unnamed author of the *Carmen Priami* invokes.

Yet another fact tells in the same direction. Livius Andronicus was in his day an even greater pioneer than Ennius: he was, moreover, a South Italian Greek by birth, a native of Tarentum, and came to Rome a prisoner of war. He had, therefore, nothing to prejudice him in favour of things Roman, and yet the striking fact remains that, while he began the work of naturalizing Greek metres for his dramas, for his translation of the *Odyssey* he retained the Saturnian. Why in representing Sophocles should he consider it necessary to attempt to reproduce the metres of Sophocles, while in representing Homer he was satisfied to use a native Italian metre? Surely the reason was that Latin offered him nothing that seemed to approximate to the dramatist, but there was something ready to his hand which seemed not unlike the Epic poet.

The fact that he did thus use the Saturnian is one of the strongest indirect proofs possible that the metre had already been considerably developed and used for fairly lengthy poems. Had it been used for nothing but short pieces, it would never have appeared fit to bear the weight of the whole *Odyssey*. Again, Naevius used Saturnians for the *Bellum Punicum*, and that at the very end of his literary career. When he came to it he had behind him the whole of his dramatic experience, in the course of which he had produced some elaborate metrical effects. Yet for narrative he preferred Saturnians, not because he was afraid to try hexameters, but because the metre had already been proved a fit vehicle for narrative on such a scale as to make it seem a not unworthy representative of the metre of Homer.

I would conclude by bringing forward two named poems as representative of the work of the ballad school in its latest or transitional period. Neglected or misconceived as they have been, they are of the utmost interest for our present purpose. For the first, the *Carmen Priami*, we have the authority of Varro, who quotes the title and one line,<sup>1</sup> presumably the first of the poem. Greek in subject, as the title shows it to have been, it was Roman in form, and very significant is the single line which we possess :

*Veteres Casmenas cascām rem uolo profari.*

No doubt it belongs to a date roughly the same as that of the *Odyssey* of Livius; perhaps it set a fashion that Livius followed; at least it serves to crystallize for us the whole conflict between the old and the new. Its author does openly what we infer that Livius did, and his deliberate choice of the *Veteres Casmenae*, the ancient native manner and metre, does not a little to further our argument for the vigour and vitality of the Saturnian tradition which was thus able to impose itself on some part at least of the sacred Tale of Troy.

The second poem, which occupies the same place and has something of the same importance, is the *Carmen Nelei*, known to us only from the references and quotations of Festus and Charisius. It is generally asserted to have been a tragedy, the main argument being that the fragments, five in number, must be iambic trimeters. Were this the fact, indeed, the question would be settled at once, for Baehrens'<sup>2</sup> theory of a narrative poem in iambs deserves no credence. But that it was a narrative poem is perfectly plain from the very title (exactly like that of the *Carmen Priami*), as indeed Baehrens says. I do not stress the word *carmen*, which may mean anything possessing a regular, recognizable form; it could conceivably be applied to a tragedy, though in actual practice the word used is *fabula* and not *carmen*. Nor do I stress the fact that the name is *Neleus* and not *Tyro*, though critics unite in declaring

<sup>1</sup> L.L. VII. 28. The words missing after *quod est* may have conveyed invaluable information as to authorship or date. The reading given is that supported by MSS. authority. The latest editors of Varro have reverted to it, dis-

carding the many unnecessary emendations made by Merula and his successors which served no purpose but to obscure the metre.

<sup>2</sup> F. P. R. p. 53.

that the play was an imitation of the *Tyro* of Sophocles. Such changes of name, though comparatively rare, are not unknown. But the form seems decisive. When the name of the principal character figures in the title it regularly stands in the nominative case;<sup>1</sup> it is inconceivable that any play imitated from the *Tyro* could have borne any name but either *Tyro* or *Neleus*. Cannot we conclude that it really was what its title would imply, and what we might infer from the fact that it is nearly always mentioned in company with the *Odyssey* of Livius or the *Bellum Punicum* of Naevius—namely, a narrative poem in *Saturnians*? The fragments themselves will show that this is, at least, not impossible:

1. Numero : item in Nelei :

Nunquam numero matri faciemus uolup (uolui *codd. corr. F. Orsini*).

2. Stuprum pro turpitudine antiquos dixisse apparet in Nelei Carmine :

Foede stupreque castigor cottidie.

3. Strigores (al. strigones) in Nelei Carmine :

Strigores exerciti.

4. In Nelei Carmine :

Saucia puer [filia] sumam.

5. Topper : cito : sic in Nelei Carmine :

Topper fortunae commutantur hominibus.

The first of these is too short for a trimeter, but it is a perfectly good Saturnian as it stands of Lindsay's type (A) with less common variant of second hemistich.<sup>2</sup> Nos. [3] and [4] are obviously mere fragments of lines, and prove nothing either way. No. [2] is certainly difficult to explain; but for its first half *foede stupreque castigor* we have at least one exact parallel in *Quare lubens te in gremium*.<sup>3</sup> And the addition of a two-syllable word such as *miser* would give us a conclusion of a familiar type, like *fortissimos uiros*.<sup>4</sup> No. [5] also will become Saturnian if we suppose it to be not a single line, but the second half of one followed immediately by the first half of another. We should have a conclusion like :

*Eorum sectam sequuntur || multi mortales,*

and a beginning like :

*Aut in Pylum deueniens || aut ibi ommentans.*

<sup>1</sup> Such a title as *Hectoris Lytra* is, of course, no parallel to *Carmen Nelei*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Am. Jour. Phil.* vol. XIV. 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Allowing the 'half-elision' *te in*, and the resolution of *-into oo* which makes the word group *in-gremium* equivalent to *castigor*.

<sup>4</sup> If we could suppose an original four-syllable second colon, the line would be a Saturnian as it stands. Two lines of Livius suggest the possibility of such a form. They are : *Carnis unumque*

*quod libant || ancilabatur* (which seems a better division of the line than that generally adopted *carnis unumque quod || libant ancilabatur* and *Atque escas habeamus || mentionem* (where *rursus* is generally supplied on the supposition that it is a translation of *Od. IV. 213*. But it may equally well come from *Od. X. 177* where there is no *εἶδ' αὖρις*. The first of these is practically identical, both accentually and quantitatively, with our line.

The generally iambic 'run' of the lines is no bar to their being in reality Saturnians. In fact, the opening half of a Saturnian is nearly always iambic in rhythm; and in the few cases where we have consecutive lines preserved there is an actual majority in which the end of one line read continuously with the beginning of the next will give an iambic trimeter which is at least passable. So close, indeed, is the resemblance that some of the best known Saturnians are actually iambic trimeters as they stand, as for example:

*Transit Melitam Romanus insulam integram,*

and a very large number become trimeters if they are shorn of one word or one syllable. Indeed, Diomedes defines a Saturnian as an iambic trimeter plus an extra syllable.

There is, then, no good ground for declaring that these fragments of the *Carmen Nelei* must be iambs; and so the chief justification for calling the poem a tragedy disappears. As a narrative poem, even if it were translated from some Greek original, it would stand on the same footing as the Latin *Odyssey* as yet another indirect proof of the importance of the native style. If it was in truth inspired by the *Tyro*, the conception of turning a tragedy into a narrative poem would be so bold as to make it essentially an original creation.

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