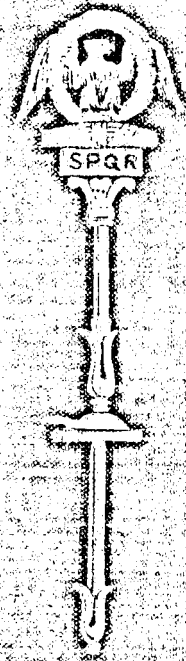


**ROMAN LIFE
UNDER THE
CÆSARS** 



EMILE THOMAS

1676

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VIEW OF EXCAVATED POMPEII
(From a photograph)

[Frontispiece.]

ROMAN LIFE
UNDER THE
CÆSARS ❖ ❖ ❖

BY
EMILE THOMAS
PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LILLE

ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS



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PREFACE



WE shall never attain to a perfect knowledge of Roman antiquity. It is too far removed from us, and the greater part of the evidence which might have preserved its memory has, unfortunately, perished. What is left to us has either faded or else fails almost entirely to reflect any of the essential features of Roman life. Add to these losses our own prejudices and bias; when we try to reconstruct a picture of the ancient world, we inevitably falsify it by introducing into it too much of the modern spirit. Each succeeding generation flatters itself that, by dint of repeated efforts, it has succeeded in rendering the picture more faithful, unconscious of the fact that it is merely following the caprices of a passing fashion, and is, in the majority of instances, swayed by the evanescent influences of its own standard of taste. Thanks to recent excavations, and to the advance achieved in the comparatively modern sciences of epigraphy and archæology, we have mastered a few

points of detail and are proud of our progress ; but it seems very doubtful whether we shall ever arrive at a clear and accurate general conception of the ancient world such as we should like to acquire. How can we restore to these lifeless texts the vital force and accent which once animated them ? How ever hope to recall, even by the utmost effort of the imagination, the original colour and pristine beauty of these faded frescoes, these mutilated statues, these crumbling bas-reliefs. Shall we ever succeed in tracing anything more than a faint and faltering image of the true Rome which we feel lies hidden beneath all these books and monuments ?

If I, in my turn, attempt the task, I do so with my eyes open to the difficulties before me. The picture I am about to draw will be necessarily an incomplete one. I am sure to fall into many errors in the course of these pages. The reader will perhaps forgive them, if he bears in mind that it has been my object to write a popular, and, if possible, a lifelike book ; that while I have not failed to profit wherever I could by recent researches, I have, on the other hand, endeavoured to avoid excessive detail in order that I might penetrate as far as possible into the life of the Romans as we conceive it to have been—and what a gulf there is between our conception of it and that of our fathers ! Our children will, in their turn, see it in quite a different light, future discoveries making it necessary to add or suppress some feature in one part or other of the picture. What matters it ? We need not hesitate to exert a single one of our faculties, whether of criticism, memory, or imagination,

to the utmost if we may hope from this day forward to arrive at some positive conclusion and to form a mental picture of Roman antiquity, which though perhaps inaccurate and imperfect in its details, shall be nevertheless well defined in its main outlines.

Undoubtedly our main difficulty lies in the fact that we are obliged to extract from monuments and books something which, strictly speaking, they cannot be said to contain. The Romans were like all other races; they did not trouble themselves to represent or record details which lay within the common knowledge of all;¹ now, it is precisely these details of which we are often ignorant and which, since they are most characteristic of ancient customs, would prove of the utmost value to us. We must therefore seek to re-discover them, if need be, by guessing at them.

I do not mind confessing that in more than one part of the present work I have realised how many things I was deficient in, which, had I possessed them, would have helped me to make this volume as correct in form and solid in foundation as I could have desired. In one place I wanted to be an archæologist, in another an epigraphist, and in numerous instances I should have liked to study in greater detail and at more leisure some problem of which I was able to divine the interest. But regrets

¹ Vegetius, i. 8, makes a similar remark on the subject of military education: "Illi res gestas . . . tantum scripsere, . . . ista quæ quærimus nota relinquentes." (Authors confine themselves to the statement of events, omitting, as being well known, those very details which we desire to know.)

of this nature are inseparable from any general review of a large subject. I have sought in every direction for anything which might help the reader to form an impression of the life of the ancients. I have sedulously avoided hackneyed phrases and fictions of every kind ; unless I am much mistaken, Gallus and Camulogenes have had their day. Even schoolboys themselves have lost their liking for these scholastic fables ; their curiosity no longer requires to be stimulated by such methods ; they will, in my opinion, be fully justified if they demand that no factitious barrier of this kind shall be placed between the modern reader and ancient life.

Should any one object, however, that the chapters of this book and the facts contained in them are not closely enough linked together, I know of a noble framework in which they might be set, and which would worthily hold nearly the whole material of the present work ; I would take my readers straight to that villa of Hadrian near Tibur, which fell into ruins at the close of the Empire and has since been so pitilessly ransacked by one generation after another, that hardly the bare bones of it now remain,¹ though scholars and artists of the present day are doing their best to restore it.

We know that the emperor in question, a worthy and learned, if somewhat eccentric man, had erected there a sort of microcosm in which the characteristics of the most diverse regions were duly reflected ; in its

¹ Cf. Juvenal, viii. 90, "*Ossa vides rerum vacuis exsucta medullis.*" ("Thou beholdest the bones of things from which the very marrow has been sucked.")

"Poecile" we find the refinements of Greece, in its "Canopus" the weird customs of Egypt, in its "Hades" a crystallisation of popular superstitions, in its theatres the essence of the Greek and Roman character; in its baths every form of public amusement, every refinement of private luxury which characterised the age. Where can we hope to find a more fitting frame in which to set our reconstruction of the life of the ancients?

From the spoils of this villa which are scattered broadcast at Naples, in Rome, and elsewhere, we know that it must have been enriched by all the magnificences of that period. We may people it as we please; in its chambers and under its porticoes we may introduce a seething crowd of consuls, orators, tribunes and senators, poets and philosophers—these latter had a chamber to themselves, just as an alley was reserved for them at Chantilly; through this motley throng the emperor passes, a man of a strong though somewhat inconsistent character. In a corner by himself sits young Marcus Aurelius, a serious youth,¹ and very sincere;² he is perhaps meditating over one of his future tests of conscience in the light of one's experience of things and men,³ and doubtless estimates in a single glance all the vanities before him at their true worth.

¹ Capitolinus, ii. 1, "a primâ infantîâ *gravis*." ("Of a serious mien from his earliest childhood.")

² *Ibid.* i. 10, Hadrian called him *Verissimus* (a punning allusion to the name of his father, *Annius Verus*).

³ *Medit.*, x. 27: "συνεχῶς ἐπινοεῖν, πῶς πάντα τοιαῦτα ὅποια νῦν γίνετα, καὶ πρόσθεν ἐγίνετο . . . Καὶ ὅλα δράματα καὶ σκηνάς

These are some of the results which may readily be attained by a little groping among the ashes of archæology and history. But after all, even when surrounded by these ruins, we must fall back, in the long run, on imagination, and imagination cannot carry us far across their confused remains. I shall, therefore, most certainly refrain from guiding the reader even to the threshold of the villa, and shall merely content myself by naming one or two excellent guides for those who are not repelled by difficulties of detail.¹

In an essay like the present, we shall, I think, be well advised if we adopt a totally different method. We must not confine ourselves in too narrow a space or too short a period. The documents at our disposal would probably be too scanty, and we should fail to obtain that general view of Roman life at the beginning of the Empire of which we are especially in quest.

To endeavour to include in this small volume every form of life at Rome under the Empire, would be to attempt the impossible; Rome changed inces-

ὄμοιεις ὅσα ἐκ πείρας τῆς σῆς, ἢ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας ιστορίας ἔγνωσ, πρὸ ὀμμάτων τίθεσθαι, οἷον ἀλλήν ἕλην Ἀδριανοῦ ("Forget not that in times gone by everything has already happened just as it is happening to-day. . . . Place before thine eyes whole dramas with the same endings, the same scenes, just as thou knowest them *by thine own experience* or from earlier history, *such, for example, as the whole court of Hadrian.*")

¹ Cf. Boissier, *Rome and Pompeii*, or the work recently published in German by a member of the German Institute at Rome, H. Winnefeld, Berlin, Reimer, 1895, containing thirteen plates and forty-three engravings.

santly as years went by and new generations came on the scene: we must be satisfied to grasp the trend of these movements and to seize a few of their aspects. This must be our aim in the following chapters; in each of them we shall be transported into some well-known spot which has been fully explored, or we shall pause to examine some department of Roman life which has been made the subject of careful study and which may help us to form some idea of the remainder; within the narrow limits of Pompeii we shall learn what the excavations have to teach us concerning the everyday life of the ancients; the African contingent must be made to represent the other legions of the Roman army; and Pliny the Younger will have to sit to us as the model of a Roman gentleman of literary tastes at the close of the first century. I have naturally chosen my types from among those places, men, and institutions of which we possess the fullest knowledge.

I have avoided quotations wherever possible. It will be noticed, however, that I frequently quote from the *Historia Augusta*, a storehouse of information which is perhaps less generally known than others that might be named. I am quite conscious that it is not safe for the historian to draw too recklessly on this source.¹ I cannot, however regard this as a good reason for allowing a host of characteristic touches which throw a searching light on customs and institutions, to lie buried in these poor biographies: for our present purpose it matters but

¹ I have read and am greatly pleased with M. H. Peters' curious book, *Scriptores Historia Augusta*, Teubner, 1892.

little whether they were re-written by some writer of the fifth century, or drawn entirely from some ancient source.

In regard to the archæological portion of the work, I have in every case confined myself to a general view, leaving details and controversial matter on one side. To quote the words used by Stendhal¹ in reference to the baths of Caracalla, "There are times when these deserted ruins are a source of much pleasure; but, to my mind, they lose rather than gain in interest from complicated description." How many ruins and monuments there are to which even now—or, if you will, more especially now—the same remark may be applied.

¹ *Promenades dans Rome*, i. 209.





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ment of large bodies of auxiliaries did not suffice to save the empire—Promotion of barbarians to responsible posts in the army—The barbarians as represented by Ammianus Marcellinus and Sidonius Apollinaris.

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II. Pliny and Trajan—Pliny's visit to *Centumcellæ*—Panegyrics : a source of most valuable information in regard to the history of this period—Correspondence between Pliny and Trajan, in the 10th Book of the Epistles—In these letters Trajan has all the best of it.

III. The other letters—All have been carefully revised and edited—Valuable details which Pliny has handed down to us in regard to his uncle and the reign of Domitian—Lawsuit between Priscus and Classicus—Regulus—Pliny's character—Some of his failings strike us as very singular ; his vanity and credulity ; he is somewhat narrow-minded ; others of his failings, however, we are almost tempted to class as virtues—Among other good qualities he possessed one more valuable than all the rest, viz., good-nature.

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