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NATURAL HISTORY OF PLINY.

VOL. IV.

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THE
NATURAL HISTORY
OF
PLINY.

TRANSLATED,
WITH COPIOUS NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

BY THE LATE
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VOL. IV.

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NATURAL HISTORY OF PLINY.

BOOK XVIII.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF GRAIN.

CHAP. 1. (1.)—TASTE OF THE ANCIENTS FOR AGRICULTURE.

WE now pass on to the Natural History of the various grains, of the garden plants and flowers, and indeed of all the other productions, with the exception of the trees and shrubs, which the Earth, in her bounteousness, affords us—a boundless field for contemplation, if even we regard the herbs alone, when we take into consideration the varieties of them, their numbers, the flowers they produce, their odours, their colours, their juices, and the numerous properties they possess—all of which have been engendered by her with a view to either the preservation or the gratification of the human race.

On entering, however, upon this branch of my subject, it is my wish in the first place to plead the cause of the Earth, and to act as the advocate of her who is the common parent of all, although in the earlier¹ part of this work I have already had occasion to speak in her defence. For my subject matter, as I proceed in the fulfilment of my task, will now lead me to consider her in the light of being the producer of various noxious substances as well; in consequence of which it is that we are in the habit of charging her with our crimes, and imputing to her a guilt that is our own. She has produced poisons, it is true; but who is it but man that has found them out? For the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, it is sufficient to be on their guard against them, and to keep at a distance from them. The elephant, we find, and the urus, know how to

¹ In B. ii. c. 63.

sharpen² and renovate their teeth against the trunks of trees, and the rhinoceros against rocks; wild boars, again, point their tusks like so many poniards by the aid of both rocks and trees; and all animals, in fact, are aware how to prepare themselves for the infliction of injury upon others; but still, which is there among them all, with the exception of man, that dips his weapons in poison? As for ourselves, we envenom the point of the arrow,³ and we contrive to add to the destructive powers of iron itself; by the aid of poisons we taint the waters of the stream, and we infect the various elements of Nature; indeed, the very air even, which is the main support of life, we turn into a medium for the destruction of life.

And it is not that we are to suppose that animals are ignorant of these means of defence, for we have already had occasion to point out⁴ the preparations which they make against the attacks of the serpent, and the methods they devise for effecting a cure when wounded by it; and yet, among them all, there is not one that fights by the aid of the poison that belongs to another, with the sole exception of man. Let us then candidly confess our guilt, we who are not contented even with the poisons as Nature has produced them; for by far the greater portion of them, in fact, are artificially prepared by the human hand!

And then besides, is it not the fact, that there are many men, the very existence of whom is a baneful poison, as it were? Like that of the serpent, they dart their livid tongue, and the venom of their disposition corrodes every object upon which it concentrates itself. Ever vilifying and maligning, like the ill-omened birds of the night, they disturb the repose of that darkness which is so peculiarly their own, and break in upon the quiet of the night even, by their moans and wailings, the only sounds they are ever heard to emit. Like animals of inauspicious presage, they only cross our path to

² Of course this is only mere declamation; it is not probable that the animals have any notion at all of *sharpening* the weapons that nature has given; in addition to which, this mode of sharpening them against hard substances would only wear away the enamel, and ultimately destroy them. The acts of animals in a moment of rage or frenzy have evidently been mistaken here for the dictates of instinct, or even a superior intelligence.

³ See B. xxv. c. 25, and B. xxvii. c. 76.

⁴ In B. viii. c. 36. 41, 42. The works of the ancients, Fée remarks, are full of these puerilities.

prevent us from employing our energies or becoming useful to our fellow-men; and the only enjoyment that is sought by their abominable aspirations is centred in their universal hatred of mankind.

Still, however, even in this respect Nature has asserted her majestic sway; for how much more numerous⁵ are the good and estimable characters which she has produced! just in the same proportion that we find her giving birth to productions which are at once both salutary and nutritious to man. It is in our high esteem for men such as these, and the commendations they bestow, that we shall be content to leave the others, like so many brakes and brambles, to the devouring flames of their own bad passions, and to persist in promoting the welfare of the human race; and this, with all the more energy and perseverance, from the circumstance that it has been our object throughout, rather to produce a work of lasting utility than to ensure ourselves a widely-spread renown. We have only to speak, it is true, of the fields and of rustic operations; but still, it is upon these that the enjoyment of life so materially depends, and that the ancients conferred the very highest rank in their honours and commendations.

CHAP. 2. (2.)—WHEN THE FIRST WREATHS OF CORN WERE USED
AT ROME.

Romulus was the first who established the Arval⁶ priesthood at Rome. This order consisted of the eleven sons of Acca Larentia, his nurse,⁷ together with Romulus himself, who assumed the appellation of the twelfth of the brotherhood. Upon this priesthood he bestowed, as being the most august distinction that he could confer upon it, a wreath of ears of corn, tied together with a white fillet; and this, in fact, was the first chaplet that was ever used at Rome. This dignity is only ended with life itself, and whether in exile or in captivity, it

⁵ This sentiment is not at all akin to the melancholy view which our author takes of mankind at the beginning of B. vii. and in other parts of this work. It is not improbable that his censures here are levelled against some who had endeavoured to impede him in the progress of his work.

⁶ "Arvorum sacerdotes," the priests of the fields.

⁷ Or foster-mother. It has been suggested that the Rogations of the Roman church may have possibly originated in the Ambarvalia, or ceremonial presided over by the Arval priesthood.

always attends its owner. In those early days, two jugera of land were considered enough for a citizen of Rome, and to none was a larger portion than this allotted. And yet, at the present day, men who but lately were the slaves of the Emperor Nero have been hardly content with pleasure-gardens that occupied the same space as this; while they must have fishponds, forsooth, of still greater extent, and in some instances I might add, perhaps, kitchens even as well.

Numa first established the custom of offering corn to the gods, and of propitiating them with the salted⁸ cake; he was the first, too, as we learn from Hemina, to parch spelt, from the fact that, when in this state, it is more wholesome as an aliment.⁹ This method, however, he could only establish one way: by making an enactment, to the effect that spelt is not in a pure state for offering, except when parched. He it was, too, who instituted the Fornacalia,¹⁰ festivals appropriated for the parching of corn, and others,¹¹ observed with equal solemnity, for the erection and preservation of the "termini," or boundaries of the fields: for these termini, in those days, they particularly regarded as gods; while to other divinities they gave the names of Seia,¹² from "sero," "to sow," and of Segesta, from the "segetes," or "crops of standing corn," the statues of which goddesses we still see erected in the Circus. A third divinity it is forbidden by the rules of our religion to name even¹³ beneath a roof. In former days, too, they would not so much as taste the corn when new^lv cut, nor yet wine when just made, before the priests had made a libation of the first-fruits.

CHAP. 3. (3.)—THE JUGERUM OF LAND.

That portion of land used to be known as a "jugerum,"

⁸ Made of salt and the meal or flour of spelt. Salt was the emblem of wisdom, friendship, and other virtues.

⁹ This, Féé observes, is not the case with any kind of wheat; with manioc, which has an acrid principle, the process may be necessary, in order to make it fit for food.

¹⁰ Or Feast of the Furnace or Oven. See Ovid's *Fasti*, B. ii. l. 5—25.

¹¹ Called the Terminalia. See Ovid's *Fasti*, B. ii. l. 641, *et seq.*

¹² Tertullian, *De Spect.* i. 16, calls this goddess by the name of Sessia.

¹³ Coelius Rhodiginus, Turnebus, and Vossius, conjecture that the name of this goddess, who might only be named in the field, was Tutelina. Hardouin thinks that it was Segesta, here mentioned.

which was capable of being ploughed by a single "jugum," or yoke of oxen, in one day; an "actus"¹⁴ being as much as the oxen could plough at a single spell, fairly estimated, without stopping. This last was one hundred and twenty feet in length; and two in length made a jugerum. The most considerable recompense that could be bestowed upon generals and valiant citizens, was the utmost extent of land around which a person could trace a furrow with the plough in a single day. The whole population, too, used to contribute a quarter¹⁵ of a sextarius of spelt, or else half a one, per head.

From agriculture the earliest surnames were derived. Thus, for instance, the name of Pilumnus was given to him who invented the "pilum," or pestle of the bake-house, for pounding corn; that of Piso was derived from "piso," to grind corn; and those of Fabius, Lentulus, and Cicero, from the several varieties¹⁶ of leguminous plants in the cultivation of which respectively these individuals excelled. One individual of the family of the Junii received the name of "Bubuleus,"¹⁷ from the skill he displayed in breeding oxen. Among the sacred ceremonials, too, there was nothing that was held more holy than the marriage by confarreation,¹⁸ and the woman just married used to present a cake made of spelt.¹⁹ Careless cultivation of the land was in those times an offence that came under the cognizance of the censors; and, as we learn from Cato,²⁰ when it was said that such and such a man was a good agriculturist or a good husbandman, it was looked upon as the very highest compliment that could be paid him. A man came to be called "locuples," or "rich," from being "loci plenus," or "full of earth." Money, too, received its name of "pecunia,"²¹ from "pecus," "cattle." At the present

¹⁴ Four Roman feet in width, and 120 in length.

¹⁵ Quartarius.

¹⁶ "Faba," a bean; "Lens," a lentil; and "Cicer," a chick-pea.

¹⁷ A "bubus," from "oxen." Caius Junius Bubuleus was twice Consul, and once Master of the Horse.

¹⁸ "Farreum" was a form of marriage, in which certain words were used, in presence of ten witnesses, and were accompanied by a certain religious ceremony, in which "panis farreus" was employed; hence this form of marriage was called "confarreatio."

¹⁹ Farreum.

²⁰ De Re Rust. Preface.

²¹ See B. xxxiii. c. 13.

day, even, in the registers of the censors, we find set down under the head of "pascua," or "pasture lands," everything from which the public revenues are derived, from the fact that for a long period of time pasture lands were the only sources of the public revenue. Fines, too, were only imposed in the shape of paying so many sheep or so many oxen; and the benevolent spirit of the ancient laws deserves remark, which most considerately enjoined that the magistrate, when he inflicted a penalty, should never impose a fine of an ox before having first condemned the same party to the payment of a sheep.

Those who celebrated the public games in honour of the ox received the name of Bubetii.²² King Servius was the first who impressed upon our copper coin²³ the figures of sheep and oxen. To depasture cattle secretly by night upon the unripe crops on plough lands, or to cut them in that state, was made by the Twelve Tables²⁴ a capital offence in the case of an adult; and it was enacted that the person guilty of it should be hanged, in order to make due reparation to the goddess Ceres, a punishment more severe, even, than that inflicted for murder. If, on the other hand, the offender was not an adult, he was beaten at the discretion of the prætor; a penalty double the amount of the damage was also exacted.

The various ranks, too, and distinctions in the state had no other origin than the pursuits of agriculture. The rural tribes held the foremost rank, and were composed of those who possessed lands; while those of the city, a place to which it was looked upon as ignominious to be transferred, had the discredit thrown upon them of being an indolent race. Hence it was that these last were only four in number, and received their names from the several parts of the City which they respectively inhabited; being the Suburræ, the Palatine, Coline, and Exquiline tribes. Every ninth day²⁵ the rural tribes used to visit the city for the purpose of marketing, and it was for this reason that it was made illegal to hold the comitia upon

²² St. Augustin, De Civ. Dei., mentions a goddess, Bubona, the tutelar divinity of oxen. Nothing seems to be known of these games.

²³ See B. xxxiii. c. 13. Macrobius says that it was Janus.

²⁴ Table vii. s. 2.

²⁵ On the "Nundinæ," or ninth-day holiday: similar to our market-days. According to *our* mode of reckoning, it was every *eighth* day.

the Nundinæ; the object being that the country people might not be called away thereby from the transaction of their business. In those days repose and sleep were enjoyed upon straw. Even to glory itself, in compliment to corn, the name was given of "adorea."²⁶

For my own part, I greatly admire²⁷ the modes of expression employed in our ancient language: thus, for instance, we read in the Commentaries of the Priesthood to the following effect:—"For deriving an augury from the sacrifice of a bitch,²⁸ a day should be set apart before the ear of corn appears from out of the sheath,²⁹ and then again before it enters the sheath."

CHAP. 4.—HOW OFTEN AND ON WHAT OCCASIONS CORN HAS SOLD AT A REMARKABLY LOW PRICE.

The consequence was, that when the Roman manners were such as these, the corn that Italy produced was sufficient for its wants, and it had to be indebted to no province for its food; and not only this, but the price of provisions was incredibly cheap. Manius Marcius, the ædile³⁰ of the people, was the first who gave corn to the people at the price of one as for the modius. L. Minutius Augurinus,³¹ the same who detected, when eleventh tribune of the people, the projects of Spurius Mælius, reduced the price of corn on three market days,³² to one as per modius; for which reason a statue was erected in honour of him, by public subscription, without the Trigeminian Gate.³³ T. Seius distributed corn to the people,

²⁶ From "ador," the old name for "spelt:" because corn was the chief reward given to the conqueror, and his temples were graced with a wreath of corn.

²⁷ In the first place, it is difficult to see what there is in this passage to admire, or "wonder at," if that is the meaning of "admiror;" and then, besides, it has no connection with the context. The text is probably in a defective state.

²⁸ See c. 69 of this Book.

²⁹ "Vagina." The meaning of this word here has not been exactly ascertained. It has been suggested that the first period alludes to the appearance of the stalk from its sheath of leaves, and the second to the formation of the ear.

³⁰ A.U.C. 298.

³¹ See B. xxxiv. c. 11. A.U.C. 317.

³² Nundinis.

³³ On the road to Ostia. It was said to have received its name from the Horatii and Curiatii.

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