

Young Folks' History of Rome

by

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1. Italy

I am going to tell you next about the most famous nation in the world. Going westward from Greece another peninsula stretches down into the Mediterranean. The Apennine Mountains run like a limb stretching out of the Alps to the south eastward, and on them seems formed that land, shaped somewhat like a leg, which is called Italy.

Round the streams that flowed down from these hills, valleys of fertile soil formed themselves, and a great many different tribes and people took up their abode there, before there was any history to explain their coming. Putting together what can be proved about them, it is plain, however, that most of them came of that old stock from which the Greeks descended, and to which we belong ourselves, and they spoke a language which had the same root as ours and as the Greek. From one of these nations the best known form of this, as it was polished in later times, was called Latin, from the tribe who spoke it.

About the middle of the peninsula there runs down, westward from the Apennines, a river called the Tiber, flowing rapidly between seven low hills, which recede as it approaches the sea. One, in especial, called the Palatine Hill, rose separately, with a flat top and steep sides, about four hundred yards from the river, and girdled in by the other six. This was the place where the great Roman power grew up from beginnings, the truth of which cannot now be discovered.

There were several nations living round these hills—the Etruscans, Sabines, and Latins being the chief. The homes of these nations seem to have been in the valleys round the spurs of the Apennines, where they had farms and fed their flocks; but above them was always the hill which they had fortified as strongly as possible, and where they took refuge if their enemies attacked them. The Etruscans built very mighty walls, and also managed the drainage of their cities wonderfully well. Many of their works remain to this day, and, in especial, their monuments have been opened, and the tomb of each chief has been found, adorned with figures of himself, half lying, half sitting; also curious pottery in red and black, from which something of their lives and ways is to be made out. They spoke a different language from what has become Latin, and they had a different religion, believing in one great Soul of the World, and also thinking much of rewards and punishments after death. But we know hardly anything about them, except that their chiefs were called Lucumos, and that they once had a wide power which they had lost before the time of history. The Romans called them Tusci, and Tuscany still keeps its name.

The Latins and the Sabines were more alike, and also more like the Greeks. There were a great many settlements of Greeks in the southern parts of Italy, and they learnt something from them. They had a great many gods. Every house had its own guardian. These were called Lares, or Penates, and were generally represented as little figures of dogs lying by the hearth, or as brass bars with dogs' heads. This is the reason that the bars which close in an open hearth are still called dogs. Whenever there was a meal in the house the master began by pouring out wine to the Lares, and also to his own ancestors, of whom he kept figures; for these natives thought much of their families, and all one family had the same name, like our surname, such as Tullius or Appius, the daughters only changing it by making it end in *a* instead of *us*, and the men having separate names standing first, such as Marcus or Lucius, though their sisters were only numbered to distinguish them.

Each city had a guardian spirit, each stream its nymph, each wood its faun; also there were gods to whom the boundary stones of estates were dedicated. There was a goddess

of fruits called Pomona, and a god of fruits named Vertumnus. In their names the fields and the crops were solemnly blest, and all were sacred to Saturn. He, according to the old legends, had first taught husbandry, and when he reigned in Italy there was a golden age, when every one had his own field, lived by his own handiwork, and kept no slaves. There was a feast in honor of this time every year called the Saturnalia, when for a few days the slaves were all allowed to act as if they were free, and have all kinds of wild sports and merriment. Afterwards, when Greek learning came in, Saturn was mixed up with the Greek Kronos, or Time, who devours his offspring, and the reaping-hook his figures used to carry for harvest became Time's scythe. The sky-god, Zeus or Deus Pater (or father), was shortened into Jupiter; Juno was his wife, and Mars was god of war, and in Greek times was supposed to be the same as Ares; Pallas Athene was joined with the Latin Minerva; Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, was called Vesta; and, in truth, we talk of the Greek gods by their Latin names. The old Greek tales were not known to the Latins in their first times, but only afterwards learnt from the Greeks. They seem to have thought of their gods as graver, higher beings, further off, and less capricious and fanciful than the legends about the weather had made them seem to the Greeks. Indeed, these Latins were a harder, tougher, graver, fiercer, more business-like race altogether than the Greeks; not so clever, thoughtful, or poetical, but with more of what we should now call sterling stuff in them.

At least so it was with that great nation which spoke their language, and seems to have been an offshoot from them. Rome, the name of which is said to mean the famous, is thought to have been at first a cluster of little villages, with forts to protect them on the hills, and temples in the forts. Jupiter had a temple on the Capitoline Hill, with cells for his worship, and that of Juno and Minerva; and the two-faced Janus, the god of gates, had his upon the Janicular Hill. Besides these, there were the Palatine, the Esquiline, the Aventine, the Cælian, and the Quirinal. The people of these villages called themselves Quirites, or spearmen, when they formed themselves into an army and made war on their neighbors, the Sabines and Latins, and by-and-by built a wall enclosing all the seven hills, and with a strip of ground within, free from houses, where sacrifices were offered and omens sought for.

The history of these people was not written till long after they had grown to be a mighty and terrible power, and had also picked up many Greek notions. Then they seem to have made their history backwards, and worked up their old stories and songs to explain the names and customs they found among them, and the tales they told were formed into a great history by one Titus Livius. It is needful to know these stories which every one used to believe to be really history; so we will tell them first, beginning, however, with a story told by the poet Virgil.

2. The Wanderings Of Æneas

You remember in the Greek history the burning of Troy, and how Priam and all his family were cut off. Among the Trojans there was a prince called Æneas, whose father was Anchises, a cousin of Priam, and his mother was said to be the goddess Venus. When he saw that the city was lost, he rushed back to his house, and took his old father Anchises on his back, giving him his Penates, or little images of household gods, to take care of, and led by the hand his little son Iulus, or Ascanius, while his wife Creusa followed close behind, and all the Trojans who could get their arms together joined him, so that they escaped in a body to Mount Ida; but just as they were outside the city he missed poor Creusa, and though he rushed back and searched for her everywhere, he never could find her. For the sake of his care for his gods, and for his old father, he is always known as the pious Æneas.

In the forests of Mount Ida he built ships enough to set forth with all his followers in quest of the new home which his mother, the goddess Venus, gave him hopes of. He had adventures rather like those of Ulysses as he sailed about the Mediterranean. Once in the Strophades, some clusters belonging to the Ionian Islands, when he and his troops had landed to get food, and were eating the flesh of the numerous goats which they found climbing about the rocks, down on them came the harpies, horrible birds with women's faces and hooked hands, with which they snatched away the food and spoiled what they could not eat. The Trojans shot at them, but the arrows glanced off their feathers and did not hurt them. However, they all flew off except one, who sat on a high rock, and croaked out that the Trojans would be punished for thus molesting the harpies by being tossed about till they should reach Italy, but there they should not build their city till they should have been so hungry as to eat their very trenchers.

They sailed away from this dismal prophetic, and touched on the coast of Epirus, where Æneas found his cousin Helenus, son to old Priam, reigning over a little new Troy, and married to Andromache, Hector's wife, whom he had gained after Pyrrhus had been killed. Helenus was a prophet, and gave Æneas much advice. In especial he said that when the Trojans should come to Italy, they would find, under the holly-trees by the river side, a large white old sow lying on the ground, with a litter of thirty little pigs round her, and this should be a sign to them where they were to build their city.

By his advice the Trojans coasted round the south of Sicily, instead of trying to pass the strait between the dreadful Scylla and Charybdis, and just below Mount Etna an unfortunate man came running down to the beach begging to be taken in. He was a Greek, who had been left behind when Ulysses escaped from Polyphemus' cave, and had made his way to the forests, where he had lived ever since. They had just taken him in when they saw Cyclops coming down, with a pine tree for a staff, to wash the burning hollow of his lost eye in the sea, and they rowed off in great terror.

Poor old Anchises died shortly after, and while his son was still sorrowing for him, Juno, who hated every Trojan, stirred up a terrible tempest, which drove the ships to the south, until, just as the sea began to calm down, they came into a beautiful bay, enclosed by tall cliffs with woods overhanging them. Here the tired wanderers landed, and, lighting a fire, Æneas went in quest of food. Coming out of the forest, they looked down from a hill, and beheld a multitude of people building a city, raising walls, houses, towers, and temples. Into one of these temples Æneas entered, and to his amazement he found the walls sculptured with all the story of the siege of Troy, and all his friends so perfectly represented, that he burst into tears at the sight.

Just then a beautiful queen, attended by a whole troop of nymphs, came into the temple. This lady was Dido; her husband, Sichæus, had been king of Tyre, till he was murdered by his brother Pygmalion, who meant to have married her, but she fled from him with a band of faithful Tyrians and all her husband's treasure, and had landed on the north coast of Africa. There she begged of the chief of the country as much land as could be enclosed by a bullock's hide. He granted this readily; and Dido, cutting the hide into the finest possible strips, managed to measure off with it ground enough to build the splendid city which she had named Carthage. She received Æneas most kindly, and took all his men into her city, hoping to keep them there for ever, and make him her husband. Æneas himself was so happy there, that he forgot all his plans and the prophecies he had heard, until Jupiter sent Mercury to rouse him to fulfil his destiny. He obeyed the call; and Dido was so wretched at his departure that she caused a great funeral pile to be built, laid herself on the top, and stabbed herself with Æneas' sword; the pile was burnt, and the Trojans saw the flame from their ships without knowing the cause.

By-and-by Æneas landed at a place in Italy named Cumæ. There dwelt one of the Sybils. These were wondrous virgins whom Apollo had endowed with deep wisdom; and when Æneas went to consult the Cumæan Sybil, she told him that he must visit the under-world of Pluto to learn his fate. First, however, he had to go into a forest, and find there and gather a golden bough, which he was to bear in his hand to keep him safe. Long he sought it, until two doves, his mother's birds, came flying before him to show him the tree where gold gleamed through the boughs, and he found the branch growing on the tree as mistletoe grows on the thorn.

Guarded with this, and guided by the Sybil, after a great sacrifice, Æneas passed into a gloomy cave, where he came to the river Styx, round which flitted all the shades who had never received funeral rites, and whom the ferryman, Charon, would not carry over. The Sybil, however, made him take Æneas across, his boat groaning under the weight of a human body. On the other side stood Cerberus, but the Sybil threw him a cake of honey and of some opiate, and he lay asleep, while Æneas passed on and found in myrtle groves all who had died for love, among them, to his surprise, poor forsaken Dido. A little further on he found the home of the warriors, and held converse with his old Trojan friends. He passed by the place of doom for the wicked, Tartarus; and in the Elysian fields, full of laurel groves and meads of asphodel, he found the spirit of his father Anchises, and with him was allowed to see the souls of all their descendants, as yet unborn, who should raise the glory of their name. They are described on to the very time when the poet wrote to whom we owe all the tale of the wanderings of Æneas, namely, Virgil, who wrote the *Æneid*, whence all these stories are taken. He further tells us that Æneas landed in Italy just as his old nurse Caiëta died, at the place which is still called Gaëta. After they had buried her, they found a grove, where they sat down on the grass to eat, using large round cakes or biscuits to put their meat on. Presently they came to eating up the cakes. Little Ascanius cried out, "We are eating our very tables;" and Æneas, remembering the harpy's words, knew that his wanderings were over.

3. The Founding Of Rome, B.C. 753—713

Virgil goes on to tell at much length how the king of the country, Latinus, at first made friends with Æneas, and promised him his daughter Lavinia in marriage; but Turnus, an Italian chief who had before been a suitor to Lavinia, stirred up a great war, and was only captured and killed after much hard fighting. However, the white sow was found in the right place with all her little pigs, and on the spot was founded the city of Alba Longa, where Æneas and Lavinia reigned until he died, and his descendants, through his two sons, Ascanius or Iulus, and Æneas Silvius, reigned after him for fifteen generations.

The last of these fifteen was Amulius, who took the throne from his brother Numitor, who had a daughter named Rhea Silvia, a Vestal virgin. In Greece, the sacred fire of the goddess Vesta was tended by good men, but in Italy it was the charge of maidens, who were treated with great honor, but were never allowed to marry under pain of death. So there was great anger when Rhea Silvia became the mother of twin boys, and, moreover, said that her husband was the god Mars. But Mars did not save her from being buried alive, while the two babes were put in a trough on the waters of the river Tiber, there to perish. The river had overflowed its banks, and left the children on dry ground, where, however, they were found by a she-wolf, who fondled and fed them like her own offspring, until a shepherd met with them and took them home to his wife. She called them Romulus and Remus, and bred them up as shepherds.

When the twin brothers were growing into manhood, there was a fight between the shepherds of Numitor and Amulius, in which Romulus and Remus did such brave feats that they were led before Numitor. He enquired into their birth, and their foster-father told the story of his finding them, showing the trough in which they had been laid; and thus it became plain that they were the grandsons of Numitor. On finding this out, they collected an army, with which they drove away Amulius, and brought their grandfather back to Alba Longa.

They then resolved to build a new city for themselves on one of the seven low hills beneath which ran the yellow river Tiber; but they were not agreed on which hill to build, Remus wanting to build on the Aventine Hill, and Romulus on the Palatine. Their grandfather advised them to watch for omens from the gods, so each stood on his hill and watched for birds. Remus was the first to see six vultures flying, but Romulus saw twelve, and therefore the Palatine Hill was made the beginning of the city, and Romulus was chosen king. Remus was affronted, and when the mud wall was being raised around the space intended for the city, he leapt over it and laughed, whereupon Romulus struck him dead, crying out, "So perish all who leap over the walls of my city."

Romulus traced out the form of the city with the plough, and made it almost a square. He called the name of it Rome, and lived in the midst of it in a mud-hovel, covered with thatch, in the midst of about fifty families of the old Trojan race, and a great many young men, outlaws and runaways from the neighboring states, who had joined him. The date of the building of Rome was supposed to be A.D. 753; and the Romans counted their years from it, as the Greeks did from the Olympiads, marking the date A.U.C., *anno urbis conditæ*, the year of the city being built. The youths who joined Romulus could not marry, as no one of the neighboring nations would give his daughter to one of these robbers, as they were esteemed. The nearest neighbors to Rome were the Sabines, and the Romans cast their eyes in vain on the Sabine ladies, till old Numitor advised Romulus to proclaim a great feast in honor of Neptune, with games and dances. All the people in the country round came to it, and when the revelry was at its height each of the unwedded Romans seized on a Sabine maiden and carried her away to his own house. Six hundred

and eighty-three girls were thus seized, and the next day Romulus married them all after the fashion ever after observed in Rome. There was a great sacrifice, then each damsel was told, "Partake of your husband's fire and water;" he gave her a ring, and carried her over his threshold, where a sheepskin was spread, to show that her duty would be to spin wool for him, and she became his wife.

Romulus himself won his own wife, Hersilia, among the Sabines on this occasion; but the nation of course took up arms, under their king Tatius, to recover their daughters. Romulus drew out his troops into Campus Martius, or field of Mars, just beneath the Capitol, or great fort on the Saturnian Hill, and marched against the Sabines; but while he was absent, Tarpeia, the daughter of the governor of the little fort he had left on the Saturnian Hill, promised to let the Sabines in on condition they would give her what they wore on their left arms, meaning their bracelets; but they hated her treason even while they took advantage of it, and no sooner were they within the gate than they pelted her with their heavy shields, which they wore on their left arms, and killed her. The cliff on the top of which she died is still called the Tarpeian rock, and criminals were executed by being thrown from the top of it. Romulus tried to regain the Capitol, but the Sabines rolled down stones on the Romans, and he was stunned by one that struck him on the head; and though he quickly recovered and rallied his men, the battle was going against him, when all the Sabine women, who had been nearly two years Roman wives, came rushing out, with their little children in their arms and their hair flying, begging their fathers and husbands not to kill one another. This led to the making of a peace, and it was agreed that the Sabines and Romans should make but one nation, and that Romulus and Tatius should reign together at Rome. Romulus lived on the Palatine Hill, Tatius on the Tarpeian, and the valley between was called the Forum, and was the market-place, and also the spot where all public assemblies were held. All the chief arrangements for war and government were believed by the Romans to have been laws of Romulus. However, after five years, Tatius was murdered at a place called Lavinium, in the middle of a sacrifice, and Romulus reigned alone till in the middle of a great assembly of his soldiers outside the city, a storm of thunder and lightning came on, and every one hurried home, but the king was nowhere to be found; for, as some say, his father Mars had come down in the tempest and carried him away to reign with the gods, while others declared that he was murdered by persons, each of whom carried home a fragment of his body that it might never be found. It matters less which way we tell it, since the story of Romulus was quite as much a fable as that of Æneas; only it must be remembered as the Romans themselves believed it. They worshipped Romulus under the name of Quirinus, and called their chief families Quirites, both words coming from *ger* (a spear); and the she-wolf and twins were the favorite badge of the empire. The Capitoline Hill, the Palatine, and the Forum all still bear the same names.

4. Numa And Tullus, B.C. 713—618

It was understood between the Romans and the Sabines that they should have by turns a king from each nation, and, on the disappearance of Romulus, a Sabine was chosen, named Numa Pompilius, who had been married to Tatia, the daughter of the Sabine king Tadius, but she was dead, and had left one daughter. Numa had, ever since her death, been going about from one grove or fountain sacred to the gods to another offering up sacrifices, and he was much beloved for his gentleness and wisdom. There was a grove near Rome, in a valley, where a fountain gushed forth from the rock; and here Egeria, the nymph of the stream, in the shade of the trees, counselled Numa on his government, which was so wise that he lived at peace with all his neighbors. When the Romans doubted whether it was really a goddess who inspired him, Egeria convinced them, for the next time he had any guests in his house, the earthenware plates with homely fare on them were changed before their eyes into golden dishes with dainty food. Moreover, there was brought from heaven a bronze shield, which was to be carefully kept, since Rome would never fall while it was safe. Numa had eleven other shields like it made and hung in the temple of Mars, and, yearly, a set of men dedicated to the office bore them through the city with songs and dances. Just as all warlike customs were said to have been invented by Romulus, all peaceful and religious ones were held to have sprung from Numa and his Egeria. He was said to have fixed the calendar and invented the names of the months, and to have built an altar to Good Faith to teach the Romans to keep their word to one another and to all nations, and to have dedicated the bounds of each estate to the Dii Termini, or Landmark Gods, in whose honor there was a feast yearly. He also was said to have had such power with Jupiter as to have persuaded him to be content without receiving sacrifices of men and women. In short, all the better things in the Roman system were supposed to be due to the gentle Numa.

At the gate called Janiculum stood a temple to the watchman god Janus, whose figure had two faces, and held the keys, and after whom was named the month January. His temple was always open in time of war, and closed in time of peace. Numa's reign was counted as the first out of only three times in Roman history that it was shut.

Numa was said to have reigned thirty-eight years, and then he gradually faded away, and was buried in a stone coffin outside the Janicular gate, all the books he had written being, by his desire, buried with him. Egeria wept till she became a fountain in her own valley; and so ended what in Roman faith answered to the golden age of Greece.

The next king was of Roman birth, and was named Tullus Hostilius. He was a great warrior, and had a war with the Albans until it was agreed that the two cities should join together in one, as the Romans and Sabines had done before; but there was a dispute which should be the greater city in the league and it was determined to settle it by a combat. In each city there was a family where three sons had been born at a birth, and their mothers were sisters. Both sets were of the same age—fine young men, skilled in weapons; and it was agreed that the six should fight together, the three whose family name was Horatius on the Roman side, the three called Curiatius on the Alban side, and whichever set gained the mastery was to give it to his city.

They fought in the plain between the camps, and very hard was the strife until two of the Horatii were killed and all the three Curiatii were wounded, but the last Horatius was entirely untouched. He began to run, and his cousins pursued him, but at different distances, as one was less hindered by his wound than the others. As soon as the first came up. Horatius slew him, and so the second and the third: as he cut down this last he

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