SEVEN ROMAN STATESMEN.

Few historical works of recent years equal in interest this little volume. Its author opens by frankly claiming that the constitutional tendencies of the modern Germanic school of history have gone too far and that they bid fair to rob the old-world tales of most of their charm and interest. Therefore he proceeds to hark back, exalts the long-despised Plutarch—the Plutarch of our boyhood—as his model, advances the theory that history is often best studied in the lives of its makers, and plays the reactionist consistently to the end.

On such lines he has selected his *Seven Roman Statesmen,* not merely on the score of the intrinsic charm of their biographies, but bearing clearly in mind their influence upon the transition of the Republic into the Empire. Logically enough he begins with the Gracchi: Tiberius, the dreamer, and Caius, the vindicator. Then, after the Optimate reaction, and omitting the name of Marius, probably because he cannot be classed as a "statesman," he takes up Sulla, the cynical restorer of the aristocracy. In the lassitude and collapse that follow the shock of the first proscriptions rises Crassus, the plutocrat, planting the seed and reaping the harvest of political corruption; then Cato, the mugwump doctrinaire among all the shifting intrigues of the First Triumvirate, and he closes with the final duel between Pompeius, the champion of the fast-failing republic, and Cæsar, the hero of the infant empire.

It is evident that lives could not be better selected (unless, perhaps, by the substitution of Marius J. Cato) to illustrate the trend of events, and it is certain that those chosen could not have been treated in a manner more spirited or fuller of life and charm. A magician blows upon ashes scattered by the winds of time, and presto! they become flesh again; the red blood courses, the dry bones gather themselves together. These are truly men. With but little change, a name here and there, a certain so-called humanising of methods, and they are politicians of our own day, with their battered ideals and their distorted virtues, their insight and their blindness, their brilliant coups and their well-nigh incomprehensible blunders.

It is at this point that my only adverse criticism must be registered. Professor Oman has indeed conjured up his dead, and they have walked, living, in our sight; but there is ever the peril in such conjuring that the senses of perception and the powers of judgment may yield somewhat to the emotions. The author sees and makes us to see, but does he always make us see the men that were, or are not these in some measure the creatures of imagination? In his aim at reviving the charm of Plutarch has he not also, and, in a measure, of necessity, revived that mingling of fiction and history for which the name of his model has come to stand? Professor Oman is a man of broad study and clever—*very* clever—intuitions; but, whether he be right or wrong, there is that disquieting tone of modern English cock-suredness about his *Lives* that, of itself, must give us pause when we come to consider just how unreservedly we are to accept them. There are lapses, too, doubtless the result of carelessness, as witness the tangling of the topography of the Pons Sublicius and the Porta Trigemina on page 84; still, I would emphasise that my general criticism is rather of his attitude than of his conclusions. The students and peoples of all times have disputed over the rights and wrongs of Pompeius and Cæsar, until we are rather startled to find a historian who firmly and unhesitatingly plants each in his place, with apparently a serene assurance that he will "stay put," and who does not deign to cite more than half a dozen authorities in all his three hundred and fifty pages to support statements that settle peremptorily questions upon which the greatest historians have been more or less at issue. This method is regrettable. Few readers are so fresh in their classics as to be able to recall off-hand the pros and cons of many questions, and we become so much absorbed in Professor Oman's presentation that even the least studious could not but welcome an opportunity to delve a little into some of these matters. Though it be truly circumstantial evidence, hearsay, and, in a measure, intuition, upon which the author seems to rely for much that he states as conclusively as if it were the result of mathematical deduction, it is largely because I believe his conclusions to be, in the main, correct, that I regret he has not worked them out a little more fully in view and fortified them by brief summaries of the evidence. A few foot-notes would not stay the swing of his narrative: those who read only, for the story could ignore them, and those who chose might find much added interest.

Professor Oman's pictures of the hopelessly moribund Republic and his statement of the causes of its decay are peculiarly vivid and clear. With a clumsy and antiquated constitution, an aristocracy corrupted by luxury and power, and a democracy spoiled, selfish, pauperised, and unpatriotic, there was no outcome but in revolution, and it is here that his cleverest insight has led him to certain striking, and, as I believe, just estimates. Every one concedes that Cato was an honest, impracticable, harsh-tempered man, supremely self-centered and full of affectations of a dead past; Crassus is not a difficult character to divine; Cæsar, in spite of the deification of the middle ages and Mommsen, stands pretty clearly before the unprejudiced reader of history; while, as for the Gracchi, with little besides Plutarch to count upon, we are not disposed to question severely any clever guess that appeals to our sense of logic.

It is in his estimates of Sulla and Pompeius that Professor Oman is at once most revolutionary and I conceive very near to the truth. His picture of the former is perhaps the best thing in the book; he brushes aside without hesitation all charges and suspicions that either man sought empire for himself, and holds them both to have been aristocrats, frankly devoted to their order and to the commonwealth.

When we come to look at the question, it is seldom, if ever, among the leaders of an Optimate faction that we find a would-be king; and, whatever Pompeius did, or wherever he may have been forced by the trend of events, it seems pretty clear that he had no ambition to be other than the first citizen of the State under its ancient constitution. It is the leader of the mob who aspires to unconstitutional power, and though it is probably the truth, Mommsen to the contrary notwithstanding, that Cæsar the democratic politician did not look forward to Cæsar the emperor, it is equally true that, as the able leader of a degenerate proletariat, he placed himself definitely in the line of succession to a rule too heavy for the hands that were authorised to wield it.

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