

## Contributions.

### LUCAN.

ON the title page of his "Conquest of Mexico" Prescott has set a line of Latin poetry as a motto for his story of Cortes: *Victrices aquilas alium laturus in orbem*. It was originally written of Cæsar, to describe him when in 48 B.C. he left the conquered West for the East, to crush Pompey and "bear his victorious eagles into another world." It is a memorable line, picturesque, sonorous and made for quotation, and Lucan wrote it. It is characteristic of its author. He is made for quotation. Now no doubt the *Æneid* lives in men's hearts by reason of a hundred lines once read and never to be forgotten, but there is a difference. The *Æneid* gains by consecutive reading. To-day we read it by the book, and prefer the first half which admits of being read book by book. But read it as a whole, and the second half outweighs the first. With Lucan it is exactly the reverse. The *Pharsalia* as a whole is wearisome—even a single book is tiresome. It is better in extracts, perhaps best in single lines. How is this? The answer is to be found in the nature of the subject and of the writer, and in the character of the age at which it was produced.

A few words about the author first. Lucan was of Spanish birth (39 A.D.) Almost exactly a century before he was born Cicero joked in a Roman court of law about the local poets of Cordova, and no doubt his audience very properly smiled. It was from Cordova the great poet of Rome's next century came. His father, a quiet, retiring man, was the son of a great man and the brother of a greater. The eldest brother was the Gallio who refused to try St. Paul, but the second brother was the peculiar glory of the house—the rhetorical philosopher and courtier Seneca. Lucan, like Romanes, was taken as an infant from the land of his birth to grow up in a larger if not a healthier air. His uncle, Seneca, was guardian and prime minister of the Emperor Nero, and in the reflexion of this greatness Lucan grew up at Rome. He was bred in the Stoicism and the rhetoric of his family, and in view of his circumstances it has been remarked that no

training could have been worse for him. Philosophy had grown didactic in its old age, and was little better than popular preaching. Any one who will have the patience to read a dozen of Seneca's letters will realize how glib, thin and self-conscious a thing stoic philosophy was. It was worse: it was hard, arrogant, inevitably right, and had a tendency to efface natural feeling. It must have had for some men a real value in the ordering of life, for with Marcus Aurelius a century later it is a religion. At this time it was more the profession of religion than the substance. Breed a boy a Stoic philosopher, and he would grow up a prig. But if with such a training he must spend his life in "showing off," what will happen when the other half of his training has been rhetoric? This involved a superficial acquaintance with a lot of things, as our examination systems do, and, like them again, it aimed at producing a person who could on the smallest possible knowledge make the largest possible display—it led to pretence and intellectual dishonesty. A man left his professor of rhetoric able to speak and to speak well, or pleasantly, rather—*ore rotundo*—on any theme that could be suggested—the very counterpart, in fact, of Bunyan's Mr. Talkative. Blend these two methods of training and try them upon a quick, bright boy with a knack for versification, who grows up a prime minister's nephew in a state where there was no opposition, in a society brilliant, witty, fast and unreal, in a coterie whose pet he must become, and the "*Pharsalia*" is the result.

Lucan's was a short life. He held office at an early age, he wrote quantities of verse easily, and became the literary lion of the day. In an evil hour he competed at one of those many-sided festivals the Greeks invented and the Romans reproduced, and won the prize for poetry against the Emperor. The judges, perhaps, had more taste than tact. For an Emperor to be beaten at his own Eisteddfod is a serious thing, and Nero peremptorily forbade Lucan to publish any more poetry, or (what was as bad) to read his poems in public. Now, if Lucan had known, this was a blessing in disguise. It was the fashion at Rome for a poet to gather together his friends and read extracts