Classic Poetry Series

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- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Pharsalia - Book 1

The Crossing of the Rubicon

Wars worse than civil on Emathian plains,
And crime let loose we sing; how Rome's high race
Plunged in her vitals her victorious sword;
Armies akin embattled, with the force
Of all the shaken earth bent on the fray;
And burst asunder, to the common guilt,
A kingdom's compact; eagle with eagle met,
Standard to standard, spear opposed to spear.

Whence, citizens, this rage, this boundless lust To sate barbarians with the blood of Rome? Did not the shade of Crassus, wandering still, Cry for his vengeance? Could ye not have spoiled, To deck your trophies, haughty Babylon? Why wage campaigns that send no laurels home? What lands, what oceans might have been the prize Of all the blood thus shed in civil strife! Where Titan rises, where night hides the stars, 'Neath southern noons all quivering with heat, Or where keen frost that never yields to spring In icy fetters binds the Scythian main: Long since barbarians by the Eastern sea And far Araxes' stream, and those who know (If any such there be) the birth of Nile Had felt our yoke. Then, Rome, upon thyself With all the world beneath thee, if thou must, Wage this nefarious war, but not till then.

Now view the houses with half-ruined walls Throughout Italian cities; stone from stone Has slipped and lies at length; within the home No guard is found, and in the ancient streets so Scarce seen the passer by. The fields in vain, Rugged with brambles and unploughed for years, Ask for the hand of man; for man is not. Nor savage Pyrrhus nor the Punic horde E'er caused such havoc: to no foe was given To strike thus deep; but civil strife alone Dealt the fell wound and left the death behind. Yet if the fates could find no other way For Nero coming, nor the gods with ease Gain thrones in heaven; and if the Thunderer Prevailed not till the giant's war was done, Complaint is silent. For this boon supreme Welcome, ye gods, be wickedness and crime; Thronged with our dead be dire Pharsalia's fields, Be Punic ghosts avenged by Roman blood; Add to these ills the toils of Mutina; Perusia's dearth; on Munda's final field The shock of battle joined; let Leucas' Cape

Shatter the routed navies; servile hands Unsheath the sword on fiery Etna's slopes: Still Rome is gainer by the civil war. Thou, Caesar, art her prize. When thou shalt choose, Thy watch relieved, to seek divine abodes, All heaven rejoicing; and shalt hold a throne, Or else elect to govern Phoebus' car And light a subject world that shall not dread To owe her brightness to a different Sun; All shall concede thy right: do what thou wilt, Select thy Godhead, and the central clime Whence thou shalt rule the world with power divine. And yet the Northern or the Southern Pole We pray thee, choose not; but in rays direct Vouchsafe thy radiance to thy city Rome. Press thou on either side, the universe Should lose its equipoise: take thou the midst, And weight the scales, and let that part of heaven Where Caesar sits, be evermore serene And smile upon us with unclouded blue. Then may all men lay down their arms, and peace Through all the nations reign, and shut the gates That close the temple of the God of War. Be thou my help, to me e'en now divine! Let Delphi's steep her own Apollo guard, And Nysa keep her Bacchus, uninvoked. Rome is my subject and my muse art thou!

First of such deeds I purpose to unfold
The causes -- task immense -- what drove to arms
A maddened nation, and from all the world
Struck peace away.

By envious fate's decrees Abide not long the mightiest lords of earth; Beneath too heavy a burden great the fall. Thus Rome o'ergrew her strength. So when that hour, The last in all the centuries, shall sound The world's disruption, all things shall revert To that primaeval chaos, stars on stars Shall crash; and fiery meteors from the sky Plunge in the ocean. Earth shall then no more Front with her bulwark the encroaching sea: The moon, indignant at her path oblique, Shall drive her chariot 'gainst her brother Sun And claim the day for hers; and discord huge Shall rend the spheres asunder. On themselves Great powers are dashed: such bounds the gods have placed Upon the prosperous; nor doth Fortune lend To any nations, so that they may strike The sovereign power that rules the earth and sea,

The weapons of her envy. Triple reign And baleful compact for divided power -- Ne'er without peril separate before -- Made Rome their victim. Oh! Ambition blind, That stirred the leaders so to join their strength In peace that ended ill, their prize the world! For while the Sea on Earth and Earth on Air Lean for support: while Titan runs his course, And night with day divides an equal sphere, No king shall brook his fellow, nor shall power Endure a rival. Search no foreign lands: These walls are proof that in their infant days A hamlet, not the world, was prize enough To cause the shedding of a brother's blood.

Concord, on discord based, brief time endured, Unwelcome to the rivals; and alone Crassus delayed the advent of the war. Like to the slender neck that separates The seas of Graecia: should it be engulfed Then would th' Ionian and Aegean mains Break each on other: thus when Crassus fell, Who held apart the chiefs, in piteous death, And stained Assyria's plains with Latian blood, Defeat in Parthia loosed the war in Rome. More in that victory than ye thought was won, Ye sons of Arsaces; your conquered foes Took at your hands the rage of civil strife. The mighty realm that earth and sea contained, To which all peoples bowed, split by the sword, Could not find space for two . For Julia bore, Cut off by fate unpitying, the bond Of that ill-omened marriage, and the pledge Of blood united, to the shades below. Had'st thou but longer stayed, it had been thine To keep the husband and the sire apart, And, as the Sabine women did of old, Dash down the threatening swords and join the hands. With thee all trust was buried, and the chiefs Could give their courage vent, and rushed to war.

Lest newer glories triumphs past obscure, Late conquered Gaul the bays from pirates won, This, Magnus, was thy fear; thy roll of fame, Of glorious deeds accomplished for the state Allows no equal; nor will Caesar's pride A prior rival in his triumphs brook; Which had the right 'twere impious to enquire; Each for his cause can vouch a judge supreme; The victor, heaven: the vanquished, Cato, thee. Nor were they like to like: the one in years Now verging towards decay, in times of peace Had unlearned war; but thirsting for applause Had given the people much, and proud of fame His former glory cared not to renew, But joyed in plaudits of the theatre, His gift to Rome: his triumphs in the past, Himself the shadow of a mighty name. As when some oak, in fruitful field sublime, Adorned with venerable spoils, and gifts Of bygone leaders, by its weight to earth With feeble roots still clings; its naked arms And hollow trunk, though leafless, give a shade; And though condemned beneath the tempest's shock To speedy fall, amid the sturdier trees In sacred grandeur rules the forest still. No such repute had Ceesar won, nor fame; But energy was his that could not rest --The only shame he knew was not to win. Keen and unvanquished, where revenge or hope Might call, resistless would be strike the blow With sword unpitying: every victory won Reaped to the full; the favour of the gods Pressed to the utmost; all that stayed his course Aimed at the summit of power, was thrust aside: Triumph his joy, though ruin marked his track. As parts the clouds a bolt by winds compelled, With crack of riven air and crash of worlds, And veils the light of day, and on mankind, Blasting their vision with its flames oblique, Sheds deadly fright; then turning to its home, Nought but the air opposing, through its path Spreads havoc, and collects its scattered fires.

Such were the hidden motives of the chiefs; But in the public life the seeds of war Their hold had taken, such as are the doom Of potent nations: and when fortune poured Through Roman gates the booty of a world, The curse of luxury, chief bane of states, Fell on her sons. Farewell the ancient ways! Behold the pomp profuse, the houses decked With ornament; their hunger loathed the food Of former days; men wore attire for dames Scarce fitly fashioned; poverty was scorned, Fruitful of warriors; and from all the world Came that which ruins nations; while the fields Furrowed of yore by great Camillus' plough, Or by the mattock which a Curius held, Lost their once narrow bounds, and widening tracts By hinds unknown were tilled. No nation this To sheathe the sword, with tranquil peace content And with her liberties; but prone to ire; Crime holding light as though by want compelled:

And great the glory in the minds of men,
Ambition lawful even at point of sword,
To rise above their country: might their law:
Decrees are forced from Senate and from Plebs:
Consul and Tribune break the laws alike:
Bought are the fasces, and the people sell
For gain their favour: bribery's fatal curse
Corrupts the annual contests of the Field.
Then covetous usury rose, and interest
Was greedier ever as the seasons came;
Faith tottered; thousands saw their gain in war.

Caesar has crossed the Alps, his mighty soul Great tumults pondering and the coming shock. Now on the marge of Rubicon, he saw, In face most sorrowful and ghostly guise, His trembling country's image; huge it seemed Through mists of night obscure; and hoary hair Streamed from the lofty front with turrets crowned: Torn were her locks and naked were her arms. Then thus, with broken sighs the Vision spake: "What seek ye, men of Rome? and whither hence Bear ye my standards? If by right ye come, My citizens, stay here; these are the bounds; No further dare." But Caesar's hair was stiff With horror as he gazed, and ghastly dread Restrained his footsteps on the further bank. Then spake he, "Thunderer, who from the rock Tarpeian seest the wall of mighty Rome; Gods of my race who watched o'er Troy of old; Thou Jove of Alba's height, and Vestal fires, And rites of Romulus erst rapt to heaven, And God-like Rome; be friendly to my quest. Not with offence or hostfie arms I come, Thy Caesar, conqueror by land and sea, Thy soldier here and wheresoe'er thou wilt: No other's; his, his only be the guilt Whose acts make me thy foe.' He gives the word And bids his standards cross the swollen stream. So in the wastes of Afric's burning clime The lion crouches as his foes draw near, Feeding his wrath the while, his lashing tail Provokes his fury; stiff upon his neck Bristles his mane: deep from his gaping jaws Resounds a muttered growl, and should a lance Or javelin reach him from the hunter's ring, Scorning the puny scratch he bounds afield.

From modest fountain blood-red Rubicon In summer's heat flows on; his pigmy tide Creeps through the valleys and with slender marge Divides the Italian peasant from the Gaul. Then winter gave him strength, and fraught with rain The third day's crescent moon; while Eastern winds Thawed from the Alpine slopes the yielding snow. The cavalry first form across the stream ' To break the torrent's force; the rest with ease Beneath their shelter gain the further bank. When Csesar crossed and trod beneath his feet The soil of Italy's forbidden fields, "Here," spake he, "peace, here broken laws be left; Farewell to treaties. Fortune, lead me on; War is our judge, and in the fates our trust." Then in the shades of night he leads the troops Swifter than Balearic sling or shaft Winged by retreating Parthian, to the walls Of threatened Rimini, while fled the stars, Save Lucifer, before the coming sun, Whose fires were veiled in clouds, by south wind driven, Or else at heaven's command: and thus drew on The first dark morning of the civil war.

Now stand the troops within the captured town, Their standards planted; and the trumpet clang Rings forth in harsh alarums, giving note Of impious strife: roused from their sleep the men Rush to the hall and snatch the ancient arms Long hanging through the years of peace; the shield With crumbling frame; dark with the tooth of rust Their swords; and javelins with blunted point. But when the well-known signs and eagles shone, And Caesar towering o'er the throng was seen, They shook for terror, fear possessed their limbs, And thoughts unuttered stirred within their souls. "O miserable those to whom their home Denies the peace that all men else enjoy! Placed as we are beside the Northern bounds And scarce a footstep from the restless Gaul, We fall the first; would that our lot had been Beneath the Eastern sky, or frozen North, To lead a wandering life, rather than keep The gates of Latium. Brennus sacked the town And Hannibal, and all the Teuton hosts. For when the fate of Rome is in the scale By this path war advances." Thus they moan Their fears but speak them not; no sound is heard Giving their anguish utterance: as when In depth of winter all the fields are still, The birds are voiceless and no sound is heard To break the silence of the central sea. But when the day had broken through the shades Of chilly darkness, lo! the torch of war! For by the hand of Fate is swift dispersed All Caesar's shame of battle, and his mind

Scarce doubted more; and Fortune toiled to make His action just and give him cause for arms. For while Rome doubted and the tongues of men Spoke of the chiefs who won them rights of yore, The hostile Senate, in contempt of right, Drove out the Tribunes. They to Caesar's camp With Curio hasten, who of venal tongue, Bold, prompt, persuasive, had been wont to preach Of Freedom to the people, and to call Upon the chiefs to lay their weapons down. And when he saw how deeply Caesar mused, "While from the rostrum I had power," he said, To call the populace to aid thy cause, By this my voice against the Senate's will Was thy command prolonged. But silenced now Are laws in war: we driven from our homes; Yet is our exile willing; for thine arms Shall make us citizens of Rome again. Strike; for no strength as yet the foe hath gained. Occasion calls, delay shall mar it soon: Like risk, like labour, thou hast known before, But never such reward. Could Gallia hold Thine armies ten long years ere victory came, That little nook of earth? One paltry fight Or twain, fought out by thy resistless hand, And Rome for thee shall have subdued the world: 'Tis true no triumph now would bring thee home; No captive tribes would grace thy chariot wheels Winding in pomp around the ancient hill. Spite gnaws the factions; for thy conquests won Scarce shalt thou be unpunished. Yet 'tis fate Thou should'st subdue thy kinsman: share the world With him thou canst not; rule thou canst, alone.' As when at Elis' festival a horse In stable pent gnaws at his prison bars Impatient, and should clamour from without Strike on his ear, bounds furious at restraint, So then was Caesar, eager for the fight, Stirred by the words of Curio. To the ranks He bids his soldiers; with majestic mien And hand commanding silence as they come. "Comrades," he cried, "victorious returned, Who by my side for ten long years have faced, 'Mid Alpine winters and on Arctic shores The thousand dangers of the battle-field --Is this our country's welcome, this her prize For death and wounds and Roman blood outpoured? Rome arms her choicest sons; the sturdy oaks Are felled to make a fleet; -- what could she more If from the Alps fierce Hannibal were come With all his Punic host? By land and sea Caesar shall fly! Fly? Though in adverse war

Our best had fallen, and the savage Gaul Were hard upon our track, we would not fly. And now, when fortune smiles and kindly gods Beckon us on to glory! -- Let him come Fresh from his years of peace, with all his crowd Of conscript burgesses, Marcellus' tongue And Cato's empty name! We will not fly. Shall Eastern hordes and greedy hirelings keep Their loved Pompeius ever at the helm? Shall chariots of triumph be for him Though youth and law forbad them? Shall he seize On Rome's chief honours ne'er to be resigned? And what of harvests blighted through the world And ghastly famine made to serve his ends? Who hath forgotten how Pompeius' bands Seized on the forum, and with glittering arms Made outraged justice tremble, while their swords Hemmed in the judgment-seat where Milo stood? And now when worn and old and ripe for rest, Greedy of power, the impious sword again He draws. As tigers in Hyrcanian woods Wandering, or in the caves that saw their birth, Once having lapped the blood of slaughtered kine, Shall never cease from rage; e'en so this whelp Of cruel Sulla, nursed in civil war, Outstrips his master; and the tongue which licked That reeking weapon ever thirsts for more. Stain once the lips with blood, no other meal They shall enjoy. And shall there be no end Of these long years of power and of crime? Nay, this one lesson, e'er it be too late, Learn of thy gentle Sulla -- to retire! Of old his victory o'er Cilician thieves And Pontus' weary monarch gave him fame, By poison scarce attained. His latest prize Shall I be, Caesar, I, who would not quit My conquering eagles at his proud command? Nay, if no triumph is reserved for me, Let these at least of long and toilsome war 'Neath other leaders the rewards enjoy. Where shall the weary soldier find his rest? What cottage homes their joys, what fields their fruit Shall to our veterans yield? Will Magnus say That pirates only till the fields alight? Unfurl your standards; victory gilds them yet, As through those glorious years. Deny our rights! He that denies them makes our quarrel just. Nay! use the strength that we have made our own. No booty seek we, nor imperial power. This would-be ruler of subservient Rome We force to quit his grasp; and Heaven shall smile On those who seek to drag the tyrant down.'

Thus Caesar spake; but doubtful murmurs ran Throughout the listening crowd, this way and that Their wishes urging them; the thoughts of home And household gods and kindred gave them pause: But fear of Caesar and the pride of war Their doubts resolved. Then Laelius, who wore The well-earned crown for Roman life preserved, The foremost Captain of the army, spake: "O greatest leader of the Roman name, If 'tis thy wish the very truth to hear 'Tis mine to speak it; we complain of this, That gifted with such strength thou did'st refrain From using it. Had'st thou no trust in us? While the hot life-blood fills these glowing veins, While these strong arms avail to hurl the lance, Wilt thou make peace and bear the Senate's rule? Is civil conquest then so base and vile? Lead us through Scythian deserts, lead us where The inhospitable Syrtes line the shore Of Afric's burning sands, or where thou wilt: This hand, to leave a conquered world behind, Held firm the oar that tamed the Northern Sea And Rhine's swift torrent foaming to the main. To follow thee fate gives me now the power: The will was mine before. No citizen I count the man 'gainst whom thy trumpets sound. By ten campaigns of victory, I swear, By all thy world-wide triumphs, though with hand Unwilling, should'st thou now demand the life Of sire or brother or of faithful spouse, Caesar, the life were thine. To spoil the gods And sack great Juno's temple on the hill, To plant our arms o'er Tiber's yellow stream, To measure out the camp, against the wall To drive the fatal ram, and raze the town, This arm shall not refuse, though Rome the prize."

His comrades swore consent with lifted hands And vowed to follow wheresoe'er he led. And such a clamour rent the sky as when Some Thracian blast on Ossa's pine-clad rocks Falls headlong, and the loud re-echoing woods, Or bending, or rebounding from the stroke, In sounding chorus lift the roar on high.

When Csesar saw them welcome thus the war And Fortune leading on, and favouring fates, He seized the moment, called his troops from Gaul, And breaking up his camp set on for Rome.

The tents are vacant by Lake Leman's side;

The camps upon the beetling crags of Vosges No longer hold the warlike Lingon down, Fierce in his painted arms; Isere is left, Who past his shallows gliding, flows at last Into the current of more famous Rhone, To reach the ocean in another name. The fair-haired people of Cevennes are free: Soft Aude rejoicing bears no Roman keel, Nor pleasant Var, since then Italia's bound; The harbour sacred to Alcides' name Where hollow crags encroach upon the sea, Is left in freedom: there nor Zephyr gains Nor Caurus access, but the Circian blast Forbids the roadstead by Monaecus' hold. And others left the doubtful shore, which sea And land alternate claim, whene'er the tide Pours in amain or when the wave rolls back --Be it the wind which thus compels the deep From furthest pole, and leaves it at the flood; Or else the moon that makes the tide to swell, Or else, in search of fuel for his fires, The sun draws heavenward the ocean wave; --Whate'er the cause that may control the main I leave to others; let the gods for me Lock in their breasts the secrets of the world.

Those who kept watch beside the western shore Have moved their standards home; the happy Gaul Rejoices in their absence; fair Garonne Through peaceful meads glides onward to the sea. And where the river broadens, neath the cape Her quiet harbour sleeps. No outstretched arm Except in mimic war now hurls the lance. No skilful warrior of Seine directs The scythed chariot 'gainst his country's foe. Now rest the Belgians, and the Arvernian race That boasts our kinship by descent from Troy; And those brave rebels whose undaunted hands Were dipped in Cotta's blood, and those who wear Sarmatian garb. Batavia's warriors fierce No longer listen for the bugle call, Nor those who dwell where Rhone's swift eddies sweep Saone to the ocean; nor the mountain tribes Who dwell about its source. Thou, too, oh Treves, Rejoicest that the war has left thy bounds. Ligurian tribes, now shorn, in ancient days First of the long-haired nations, on whose necks Once flowed the auburn locks in pride supreme; And those who pacify with blood accursed Savage Teutates, Hesus' horrid shrines, And Taranis' altars cruel as were those Loved by Diana, goddess of the north;

All these now rest in peace. And you, ye Bards, Whose martial lays send down to distant times The fame of valorous deeds in battle done, Pour forth in safety more abundant song. While you, ye Druids , when the war was done, To mysteries strange and hateful rites returned: To you alone 'tis given the gods and stars To know or not to know; secluded groves Your dwelling-place, and forests far remote. If what ye sing be true, the shades of men Seek not the dismal homes of Erebus Or death's pale kingdoms; but the breath of life Still rules these bodies in another age --Life on this hand and that, and death between. Happy the peoples 'neath the Northern Star In this their false belief; for them no fear Of that which frights all others: they with hands And hearts undaunted rush upon the foe And scorn to spare the life that shall return. Ye too depart who kept the banks of Rhine Safe from the foe, and leave the Teuton tribes Free at their will to march upon the world.

Caesar, with strength increased and gathered troops New efforts daring, spreads his bands afar Through Italy, and fills the neighbouring towns. Then empty rumour to well-grounded fear Gave strength, and heralding the coming war In hundred voices 'midst the people spread. One cries in terror, "Swift the squadrons come Where Nar with Tiber joins: and where, in meads By oxen loved, Mevania spreads her walls, Fierce Caesar hurries his barbarian horse. Eagles and standards wave above his head, And broad the march that sweeps across the land." Nor is he pictured truly; greater far More fierce and pitiless -- from conquered foes Advancing; in his rear the peoples march. Snatched from their homes between the Rhine and Alps, To pillage Rome while Roman chiefs look on. Thus each man's panic thought swells rumour's lie: They fear the phantoms they themselves create. Nor does the terror seize the crowd alone: But fled the Fathers, to the Consuls first Issuing their hated order, as for war; And doubting of their safety, doubting too Where lay the peril, through the choking gates, Each where he would, rushed all the people forth. Thou would'st believe that blazing to the torch Were men's abodes, or nodding to their fall. So streamed they onwards, frenzied with affright, As though in exile only could they find

Hope for their country. So, when southern blasts From Libyan whirlpools drive the boundless main, And mast and sail crash down upon a ship With ponderous weight, but still the frame is sound, Her crew and captain leap into the sea, Each making shipwreck for himself. 'Twas thus They passed the city gates and fled to war. No aged parent now could stay his son; Nor wife her spouse, nor did they pray the gods To grant the safety of their fatherland. None linger on the threshold for a look Of their loved city, though perchance the last.

Ye gods, who lavish priceless gifts on men, Nor care to guard them, see victorious Rome Teeming with life, chief city of the world, With ample walls that all mankind might hold, To coming Caesar left an easy prey. The Roman soldier, when in foreign lands Pressed by the enemy, in narrow trench And hurried mound finds guard enough to make His slumber safe; but thou, imperial Rome, Alone on rumour of advancing foes Art left a desert, and thy battlements They trust not for one night. Yet for their fear This one excuse was left; Pompeius fled. Nor found they room for hope; for nature gave Unerring portents of worse ills to come. The angry gods filled earth and air and sea With frequent prodigies; in darkest nights Strange constellations sparkled through the gloom: The pole was all afire, and torches flew Across the depths of heaven; with horrid hair A blazing comet stretched from east to west And threatened change to kingdoms. From the blue Pale lightning flashed, and in the murky air The fire took divers shapes; a lance afar Would seem to quiver or a misty torch; A noiseless thunderbolt from cloudless sky Rushed down, and drawing fire in northern parts Plunged on the summit of the Alban mount. The stars that run their courses in the night Shone in full daylight; and the orbed moon, Hid by the shade of earth, grew pale and wan. The sun himself, when poised in mid career, Shrouded his burning car in blackest gloom And plunged the world in darkness, so that men Despaired of day -- like as he veiled his light From that fell banquet which Mycenae saw The jaws of Etna were agape with flame That rose not heavenwards, but headlong fell In smoking stream upon the Italian flank.

Then black Charybdis, from her boundless depth, Threw up a gory sea. In piteous tones Howled the wild dogs; the Vestal fire was snatched From off the altar; and the flame that crowned The Latin festival was split in twain, As on the Theban pyre in ancient days; Earth tottered on its base: the mighty Alps From off their summits shook th' eternal snow. In huge upheaval Ocean raised his waves O'er Calpe's rock and Atlas' hoary head. The native gods shed tears, and holy sweat Dropped from the idols; gifts in temples fell: Foul birds defiled the day; beasts left the woods And made their lair among the streets of Rome. All this we hear; nay more: dumb oxen spake; Monsters were brought to birth and mothers shrieked At their own offspring; words of dire import From Cumae's prophetess were noised abroad. Bellona's priests with bleeding arms, and slaves Of Cybele's worship, with ensanguined hair, Howled chants of havoc and of woe to men. Arms clashed; and sounding in the pathless woods Were heard strange voices; spirits walked the earth: And dead men's ashes muttered from the urn. Those who live near the walls desert their homes, For lo! with hissing serpents in her hair, Waving in downward whirl a blazing pine, A fiend patrols the town, like that which erst At Thebes urged on Agave, or which hurled Lycurgus' bolts, or that which as he came From Hades seen, at haughty Juno's word, Brought terror to the soul of Hercules. Trumpets like those that summon armies forth Were heard re-echoing in the silent night: And from the earth arising Sulla's ghost Sang gloomy oracles, and by Anio's wave All fled the homesteads, frighted by the shade Of Marius waking from his broken tomb.

In such dismay they summon, as of yore, The Tuscan sages to the nation's aid. Aruns, the eldest, leaving his abode In desolate Luca, came, well versed in all The lore of omens; knowing what may mean The flight of hovering bird, the pulse that beats In offered victims, and the levin bolt. All monsters first, by most unnatural birth Brought into being, in accursd flames He bids consume. Then round the walls of Rome Each trembling citizen in turn proceeds. The priests, chief guardians of the public faith, With holy sprinkling purge the open space

That borders on the wall; in sacred garb Follows the lesser crowd: the Vestals come By priestess led with laurel crown bedecked, To whom alone is given the right to see Minerva's effigy that came from Troy Next come the keepers of the sacred books And fate's predictions; who from Almo's brook Bring back Cybebe laved; the augur too Taught to observe sinister flight of birds; And those who serve the banquets to the gods; And Titian brethren; and the priest of Mars, Proud of the buckler that adorns his neck; By him the Flamen, on his noble head The cap of office. While they tread the path That winds around the walls, the aged seer Collects the thunderbolts that fell from heaven, And lays them deep in earth, with muttered words Naming the spot accursed. Next a steer, Picked for his swelling neck and beauteous form, He leads to the altar, and with slanting knife Spreads on his brow the meal, and pours the wine. The victim's struggles prove the gods averse; But when the servers press upon his horns

He bends the knee and yields him to the blow. No crimson torrent issued at the stroke, But from the wound a dark empoisoned stream Ebbed slowly downward. Aruns at the sight Aghast, upon the entrails of the beast Essayed to read the anger of the gods. Their very colour terrified the seer; Spotted they were and pale, with sable streaks Of lukewarm gore bespread; the liver damp With foul disease, and on the hostile part The angry veins defiant; of the lungs The fibre hid, and through the vital parts The membrane small; the heart had ceased to throb; Blood oozes through the ducts; the caul is split: And, fatal omen of impending ill, One lobe o'ergrows the other; of the twain The one lies flat and sick, the other beats And keeps the pulse in rapid strokes astir.

Disaster's near approach thus learned, he cries -"Whate'er may be the purpose of the gods,
'Tis not for me to tell; this offered beast
Not Jove possesses, but the gods below.
We dare not speak our fears, yet fear doth make
The future worse than fact. May all the gods
Prosper the tokens, and the sacrifice
Be void of truth, and Tages
Have vainly taught these mysteries." Such his words

Involved, mysterious. Figulus, to whom For knowledge of the secret depths of space And laws harmonious that guide the stars, Memphis could find no peer, then spake at large: "Either," he said, "the world and countless orbs Throughout the ages wander at their will; Or, if the fates control them, ruin huge Hangs o'er this city and o'er all mankind. Shall Earth yawn open and engulph the towns? Shall scorching heat usurp the temperate air And fields refuse their timely fruit? The streams Flow mixed with poison? In what plague, ye gods, In what destruction shall ye wreak your ire? Whate'er the truth, the days in which we live Shall find a doom for many. Had the star Of baleful Saturn, frigid in the height, Kindled his lurid fires, the sky had poured Its torrents forth as in Deucalion's time, And whelmed the world in waters. Or if thou, Phoebus, beside the Nemean lion fierce Wert driving now thy chariot, flames should seize The universe and set the air ablaze. These are at peace; but, Mars, why art thou bent On kindling thus the Scorpion, his tail Portending evil and his claws aflame? Deep sunk is kindly Jupiter, and dull Sweet Venus' star, and rapid Mercury Stays on his course: Mars only holds the sky. Why does Orion's sword too brightly shine? Why planets leave their paths and through the void Thus journey on obscure? 'Tis war that comes, Fierce rabid war: the sword shall bear the rule Confounding justice; hateful crime usurp The name of virtue; and the havoc spread Through many a year. But why entreat the gods? The end Rome longs for and the final peace Comes with a despot. Draw thou out thy chain Of lengthening slaughter, and (for such thy fate) Make good thy liberty through civil war."

The frightened people heard, and as they heard His words prophetic made them fear the more. But worse remained; for as on Pindus' slopes Possessed with fury from the Theban god Speeds some Bacchante, thus in Roman streets Behold a matron run, who, in her trance, Relieves her bosom of the god within.

"Where dost thou snatch me, Paean, to what shore Through airy regions borne? I see the snows Of Thracian mountains; and Philippi's plains Lie broad beneath. But why these battle lines,

No foe to vanguish -- Rome on either hand? Again I wander 'neath the rosy hues That paint thine eastern skies, where regal Nile Meets with his flowing wave the rising tide. Known to mine eyes that mutilated trunk That lies upon the sand! Across the seas By changing whirlpools to the burning climes Of Libya borne, again I see the hosts From Thracia brought by fate's command. And now Thou bear'st me o'er the cloud-compelling Alps And Pyrenean summits; next to Rome. There in mid-Senate see the closing scene Of this foul war in foulest murder done. Again the factions rise; through all the world Once more I pass; but give me some new land, Some other region, Phoebus, to behold! Washed by the Pontic billows! for these eyes Already once have seen Philippi's plains!"

The frenzy left her and she speechless fell.

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus