

ROMAN TOLERANCE TOWARD THE GREEK LANGUAGE.

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IN empires consisting of different nationalities, the language question always has played a great part. The ruling people generally considers its own language as far superior to that of the other nationalities and very often is intolerant toward other languages, even if these languages are not those of savages, not yet fixed in literature, but are languages which have been fixed in literature long ago connected with a high civilization. Probably very few ruling peoples have not shown intolerance in this respect.

In this connection it is interesting to consider the attitude of ancient Rome toward the languages of the peoples becoming subject to them, especially toward the Greek language, the most widely used in the Roman Empire besides the Latin. It is that of the greatest tolerance.

In order that philologists and historians may not say, that I am carrying owls to Athens, i. e., that this is long ago known, I must give a reason for my writing this. I have found out that this is really not so generally known as we think it is. Why this defective historical information, I do not know. In these latter years of national hostility also other things have rushed into print which show a lack of historical information. A few years ago the president of a noted American scientific association published an article in a well-known American scientific journal, to show that the Germans in fact had done very little in scientific research and discovery, etc. Among other things he said that the Germans cannot show up in physical and astronomical science such men as Galilei, Newton and Kepler. In a private note I called his attention to the fact that Kepler was a German. He admitted his mistake with the excuse that he intended to say in that sentence "Prussians" instead of

"Germans." That mistake was on a par with another historical mistake that rushed into print. A certain writer called *Deutschland*, *Deutschland über Alles* "a new catchy song, a product of the new German empire," with the implication that the words meant Germany is to take everything. I informed the writer, that the author of the song, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, lived in the time before the new German Empire came into existence, and had even undergone punishment for his political opinions from the side of a narrow government, and that the implication attached to the words rested on a false knowledge of German. But enough of examples of defective historical information. I ought not to take away too much of the space allotted to me.

The Greek language had long ago, before the Romans came into power, been spread along the coasts of the Mediterranean, in Italy, Sicily, Gaul, Spain, North Africa, through colonies sent out by the Greeks; besides those established on the coasts of Asia Minor, Thrace and the coasts of the Euxine. Through the conquests of Asia and Egypt by Alexander the Great and his successors the Greek language had also spread more inland, through colonies established and cities built everywhere by Greeks, even to the confines of India. Greek had become a sort of universal language even among non-Greeks, serving as a medium of intercourse between these peoples. Not even the most exclusive peoples, as the Jews in Palestine, could escape the contact of the Greek language, on account of the numerous Greek cities on the northern borders of Palestine, the district of the Decapolis, and on account of Alexandria, Egypt, between which and Palestine there was always a continuous intercourse. Nor even the most exclusive classes, as the Babylonian priests and theologians could escape the knowledge of Greek. Berossus wrote the Babylonian traditions in Greek, and the Jewish priests and theologians translated their sacred books into the language which was not only the international one but also the language of learning. If they wished to be heard, they had to write in Greek, for "a Greek work," as Mommsen says in his Roman history, "found an entirely different (and we might add a greater) public than a Latin one." In later times similarly two other Jews, likewise of priestly extraction, Philo and Josephus, wrote their works in Greek. Now what was the attitude the Romans took toward this wide-spread language among their subjects? While they extended the Latin language and civilization among the conquered Italian peoples of kindred stock, and among the Iberic and Celtic barbarian peoples through Roman colonies and garrisons and

Roman law, they did not touch the Hellenic language and civilization in the many Greek cities of Italy, Sicily, Gaul and Spain, though they were incorporated into the empire. Greek in these cities had the same right as Latin. There was many a city *bilinguis*, as Horace calls Canusium, founded by the Greeks in Apulia (*Sat.* I. 10, 30), in Italy, Sicily, Gaul and Spain. Even after the downfall of the Western empire, Greek was still spoken in Tarentum, though it had long ago been made a Roman colony, and it was long one of the chief strongholds of the Byzantine empire in the South of Italy. (Smith, *Classical Dictionary*, 1871, art. "Tarentum.")

But not only did the Romans not repress the Greek language and civilization in the West, but in such countries as Asia Minor, where Greek was especially much spoken, Roman governors even gave judicial decisions in Greek, and even in the several Greek dialects, not only the common Greek, as Mommsen gives an especial case. Foreign ambassadors were allowed to address the proud Roman Senate in Greek, a proof how tolerant the Romans were toward Greek and how they themselves took pains to acquire Greek, and that this language was considered by them as a language fully equal to their own. For all these statements and many following I refer to *Römische Geschichte* (Vol. II, chaps. 12 and 13, and Vol. III, chaps. 11 and 12, Berlin, 1857), by Theodore Mommsen, one of the greatest authorities, if not the greatest, on Roman history. It is well known that he spent his whole lifetime mainly in Roman historical research.

As further examples that cases were brought before the Roman governors in Greek, I quote the trial of Paul before Festus and Felix. Paul pleaded in Greek, while, on the other hand, Josephus during the time of one of these governors, Felix, pleaded the case of certain fellow priests before the Roman Emperor (Josephus, *Life* § 3) likewise very probably in Greek, for Latin was practically little known and spoken in the East, while Rome, as Mommsen says, was swarming with Greek slaves, literati, instructors and lecturers, and Greek therefore heard almost as much as Latin. The same was probably the case when Philo headed an embassy from Alexandria to Caligula, in order to procure a revocation of the decree which exacted from the Jews divine honors to the statue of the emperor, as foreign embassies were allowed to speak in Greek. The Hellenic civilization was acknowledged as throughout equal to the Roman, yes earlier and better privileged, as Mommsen says. The same historian writes: "It is a wonderful accident that the same man who definitely conquered the Hellenic nation.

Lucius Aemilius Paullus, was at the same time one of the first who fully acknowledged the Hellenic civilization as being that, which it has since then uncontradictorily remained, the civilization of the ancient world."

The study of Greek was encouraged in every way at Rome, besides the many opportunities to hear Greek every day. For an educated Greek slave as much as \$14,000 was paid. It was not only a fashion or fad, that to Greek studies such a preponderance was given, but a necessity, for in the departments of philosophy, science, art, literature, rhetoric, history, the Greeks were everywhere the masters and the Romans the learners. Latin literature was at all times essentially dependent upon Greek school education and remained so. Whoever wanted to amount to something, heard Greek philosophy in Athens and Greek rhetoric in Rhodes, and made a literary journey through Asia Minor. Cæsar gave the citizenship to all teachers of the free sciences and to all physicians of the capital, and these were mainly Greek. He further decided on founding a public Greek and Roman library in Rome and appointed as head librarian the most learned Roman of his time, Marcus Varro. "We unmistakably see in this the purpose," says Mommsen, "to unite with the world-monarchy also the world-literature."

The letters written in that time show to what extent Greek words and phrases had penetrated the conversational language. In spite of the modern purism, which expelled all foreign words from poetry, Lucretius, as Ennius had done, rather uses the Greek term, instead of a weak and unclear Latin word. The house of Lucullus and other Romans of rank was almost like the Alexandrian *Museion*: a seat of Greek culture, and a gathering-place of Greek literati: every educated man, and especially every Greek, was welcome.

And not only in Rome was Greek encouraged, but even in inland Spain, and on the borders of the empire. In Spain we find noted Greek instructors settled on the Guadalquivir and in the school of Osca. Where the Roman legionary came, the Greek schoolmaster followed, in his way not less a conqueror. "The higher Roman education itself," says Mommsen, "was indeed throughout nothing else but the preaching of the great gospel of Hellenism in the Italian idiom." The Middle Ages, when the knowledge of Greek had been almost entirely lost in western Europe, would have been barren in thought in many respects if Greek knowledge and thought had not been transmitted to them in some extent through the medium of the Latin. Because the Romans not only encouraged Hellenism in Rome but also on the borders of the em-

pire, "the Greeks, therefore, everywhere saw in Rome," as Mommsen puts it, "the shield of Hellenism, and most decidedly just there where national feeling was the purest and strongest, that is on the borders, threatened by barbarian denationalization, for example in Massalia, on the northern coast of the Euxine, on the Euphrates and Tigris. In fact, the founding of cities in the far East by Pompey took up the work of Alexander after centuries of interruption. The Roman Empire was an Italian-Hellenic empire with two languages. Cæsar promulgated every enactment in Latin, but for the Greek-speaking countries besides in Greek. "It was a Greek historian, Polybius, who portrayed the position of Rome in such a way," says Mommsen, "that all later generations, and we also, are indebted to him for all that is best, which we know about the development of Rome. He comprehended Rome's historical mission more clearly than the Romans of that time themselves could do it. He rather alone saw the streams, which had flown separately so long, join in one bed, and the history of the Mediterranean states go together in the one leading position of Roman power and Greek civilization."

The part which Greek played in the empire till up to the time of Cæsar did not wane after him. History teaches that it continued. Macenas, Horace, the emperors Tiberius, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius, Pliny the younger, and a host of others, all were well acquainted with Greek literature, and even used Greek very well themselves.

From all the foregoing we see that the otherwise haughty Roman conqueror could not be accused of being illiberal and intolerant to his Greek subjects. In many respects he had to acknowledge the superiority of Hellenism, so that occasionally exponents of it, as Polybius, were even envied by such men as Scipio Aemilianus, who otherwise valued him, as altogether did the first men in Rome.

In certain respects we may even speak of a reign of the Greeks over the Romans, says Mommsen. He remarks that the reign of the Greek footman over the Roman monarchs is as old as the monarchy. The first one of these individuals is the intimate servant of Pompey, Theophanes of Mitylene, who, through his power over his weak master, has probably contributed more than any one else to the war between Pompey and Cæsar. It was the Greek footman who introduced the reign of the gentleman of the privy chamber of the times of the emperors.

But aside from this evil influence over the Roman monarchs,

it was a blessing for the world that the Roman victory did not proscribe the Greek muses in Rome, thus continuing the ill feeling between the vanquished and the victor, in this way showing more tolerance than does the modern world and even our own country. It repaid the Roman that he did not stretch his nationalism too far, but opened his mind to everything that was valuable in Hellenism, thus escaping the dangers of a onesided civilization inimical to true humanity.