

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY
OF THE ROMANS

Helene A. Guerber

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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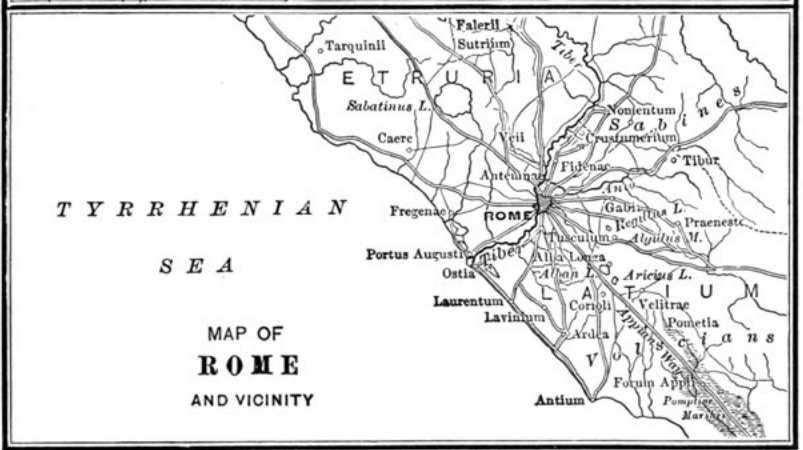
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The Story of the Romans

BY

H. A. GUERBER



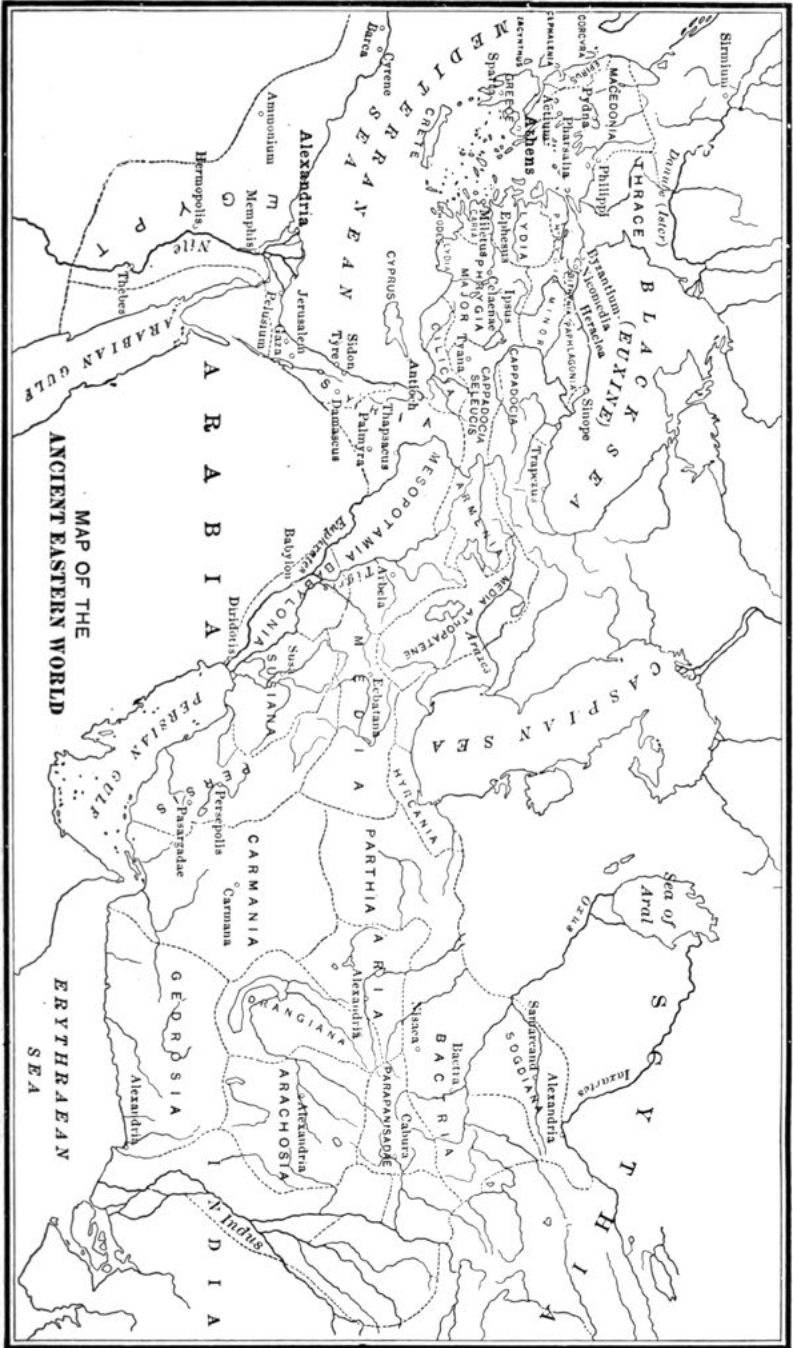


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MAP OF THE
ANCIENT EASTERN WORLD

The First Settlers

YOU are now going to hear about the building of Rome, the capital of Italy, in Europe. By looking at your maps, you will soon find in Europe a peninsula, shaped somewhat like a boot, and surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas. This peninsula is Italy. To the north are the snow-topped Alps, a chain of high mountains which separate this country from the rest of Europe; and through the peninsula run the Apennines, a less lofty mountain range.

As Italy is in the southern part of Europe, it has a very mild and delightful climate. The tall mountains in the north prevent the cold winds from sweeping down upon it, and many plants which you see here in hothouses grow there in the open ground.

Orange and almond trees, camellias and pomegranates, are all covered with fruit or flowers, and the vine and olive both yield rich harvests in this beautiful land. The soil is so rich that people do not need to work very hard in order to have fine crops, and, as the weather is generally clear, they can live out of doors almost all the year round.

As the climate is so pleasant, the land so fertile, the skies so blue, and the views so beautiful, travelers have always liked to visit Italy, and have spoken about its charms to all they met. It is no wonder, therefore, that many people have gone to settle there, and you will easily understand that the whole country was occupied long, long ago.

So many years ago that no one can really tell when it was, Italy was already inhabited by a people who, judging from what we have heard of them, must once have lived in Central Asia. These people were probably crowded at home, and left their native land in search of good pasture for their cattle, and a fertile country where they might dwell.

They traveled on and on, day after day, and coming finally to the great mountains, some of them climbed up to see what was

on the other side. When they beheld the green valleys of Italy, and saw how beautiful the country was, they told their companions, and all made haste to cross the mountains.

These people traveled on foot, with their families, cattle, and all their household goods; and they were very rude and uncivilized. Little by little, however, they learned to build houses, to cook their food, to make rude pottery from the clay they found in the valleys, to spin and weave the wool from their sheep, and to fashion this homemade stuff into garments.

Although each family at first lived by itself, they soon discovered that if several families joined together, they could cultivate the ground better, could hunt more successfully, and that in time of danger they could more easily defend themselves.

Thus several families would form a tribe under the strongest and cleverest man among them, whom they chose as their leader. These leaders selected the best place for them to settle in, told them what to do in time of war, and thus became chiefs or kings over their own tribes.

There were a number of such little kingdoms scattered throughout Italy, and as the people grew richer, wiser, and more numerous, they occupied more and more land.

Now it was from some of these tribes that the Romans were mostly descended. Their city became in time the greatest in the world, and many histories have been written about it; but none of them were begun until several centuries after Rome was founded. Hardly any records had been kept of the distant past, and the best that could be done was to write down some stories that had been told by parents to their children, and thus had been preserved from generation to generation. These had become much changed by being told so many times, and they were connected and rounded out by pure guesswork; but the whole was soon accepted as true, and was believed in by every one for ages.

You will now read the story from the beginning, as the Romans themselves told it. Many of the events in the first part of it never

really happened; but no one can tell exactly where the mere stories leave off, and the true history begins. And every well-educated person is expected to know the whole story.

The Escape from the Burning City

IN the days when the Greeks were fighting against Troy,—that great city in Asia Minor which they besieged for ten years,—the people in Italy were divided into several small kingdoms, among which were those of the Etruscans and the Latins.

The Etruscans occupied the northern part of Italy, or the top of the boot, and called their country Etruria, while the Latins dwelt farther south, in a province named Latium. Each of these kingdoms had its own leader or king, whom all the people obeyed.

Now the King of Latium in those days was Latinus. He had a beautiful daughter called Lavinia, and as soon as she was old enough to marry, he thought of getting her a good husband. One night King Latinus dreamed that the gods of his country came and spoke to him, telling him to be sure and give his daughter in marriage to a stranger whom they would send to Latium.

When Latinus awoke, he was very much troubled, because his wife was anxious that Lavinia should marry Turnus, a neighboring king. The queen soon persuaded Latinus to allow this engagement to take place, but he insisted that the marriage should be postponed for some time longer.

In the mean while the city of Troy had at last fallen into the hands of the Greeks. The brave Trojans were attacked by night, and only a few among them managed to escape death.

Among these few, however, there was a prince named Æneas. His father was Anchises, the cousin of the King of Troy, and his mother was Venus, the goddess of beauty. As Venus did not want

her son to die with the rest of the Trojans, she appeared to him during the fatal night when the Greeks had secretly entered Troy, and were plundering and burning the houses. She showed him that resistance would be useless, and bade him flee from the city, with all his family.

Æneas had been taught to obey every word the gods said; so he at once stopped fighting, and hurried back to his house. Then he lifted his poor old father up on his back, took his little son Iulus by the hand, and called to his wife and servants to follow him.

This strange group of fugitives quickly passed out of the city, where the flames were now rising on all sides, and, under cover of the darkness, made their way to a temple near by. Here they paused to rest, and Æneas counted his followers to make sure that they were all there.

Imagine his sorrow when he found that his beloved wife was missing! He rushed back into the burning city, and searched everywhere for her, calling her name aloud, in spite of the danger. At last he met some one who told him that his wife had been killed, and that she wished him to escape to a better country, where he should found a new kingdom, and where a new wife should take her place, and make him happy once more.

Æneas sorrowfully turned back, and at the temple found that his followers had been joined by others who had managed to escape unseen amid the smoke and darkness. He led the way to a place of safety, and not long afterwards set sail with his little band of faithful Trojans, who all promised to obey and follow him wherever he went.

The ships drifted aimlessly for a long time, because Æneas had no idea where he was to found his new kingdom. Twice he tried to settle down, but each time something happened to drive him away. Finally he asked the advice of his father, Anchises, a wise and pious old man, who had snatched up his gods when he left his house, and had brought them with him on the ship.

The old man now said that he would consult these images, and he offered them a sacrifice. The next night Æneas dreamed that the

gods spoke to him and told him that he should go to Italy, a land whence one of his ancestors had come to Troy.

The little band therefore sailed for the west, although it was foretold that they would have to suffer many hardships ere they could reach Italy, and that they would not be able to settle until they had eaten the very boards upon which their food was served.

As Æneas was a brave man, the prospect of a terrible famine did not fill his heart with despair, and he calmly sailed on in search of a home. There are almost countless islands in that part of the Mediterranean, and thus the boats were seldom out of sight of land. They stopped from time to time, but Æneas did not dare to settle anywhere, because he thought the gods opposed it; and he always urged his people to embark again and sail on.

The Trojans were by this time very tired of sailing, but they loved Æneas so well that they gladly followed him, although they would have liked to make their homes in the islands they visited.

The Clever Trick

AFTER many days of sailing thus on the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and after much suffering in the different islands where they stopped to rest, Æneas and his companions came at last to the island of Sicily. This, as you will see on your maps, is a three-cornered piece of land, near the toe of the boot formed by the Italian peninsula. While the Trojans were resting here, poor old Anchises died, and was buried by his sorrowing son. But as soon as the funeral rites were ended, Æneas prepared to sail away, for he knew that this was not the place where he was to make his new home.

Unfortunately for Æneas, some of the gods whom his people had so long worshiped had taken a dislike to all the Trojan race. It was these gods who made him suffer so much, and one of them now stirred up a terrible tempest.

The boats were tossed up and down on the waves, and driven apart by the fierce winds, and some of them sank under the water. The other vessels would have been dashed to pieces, and all the men on board would have perished, had not a second god interfered in favor of Æneas, and suddenly stilled the awful storm.

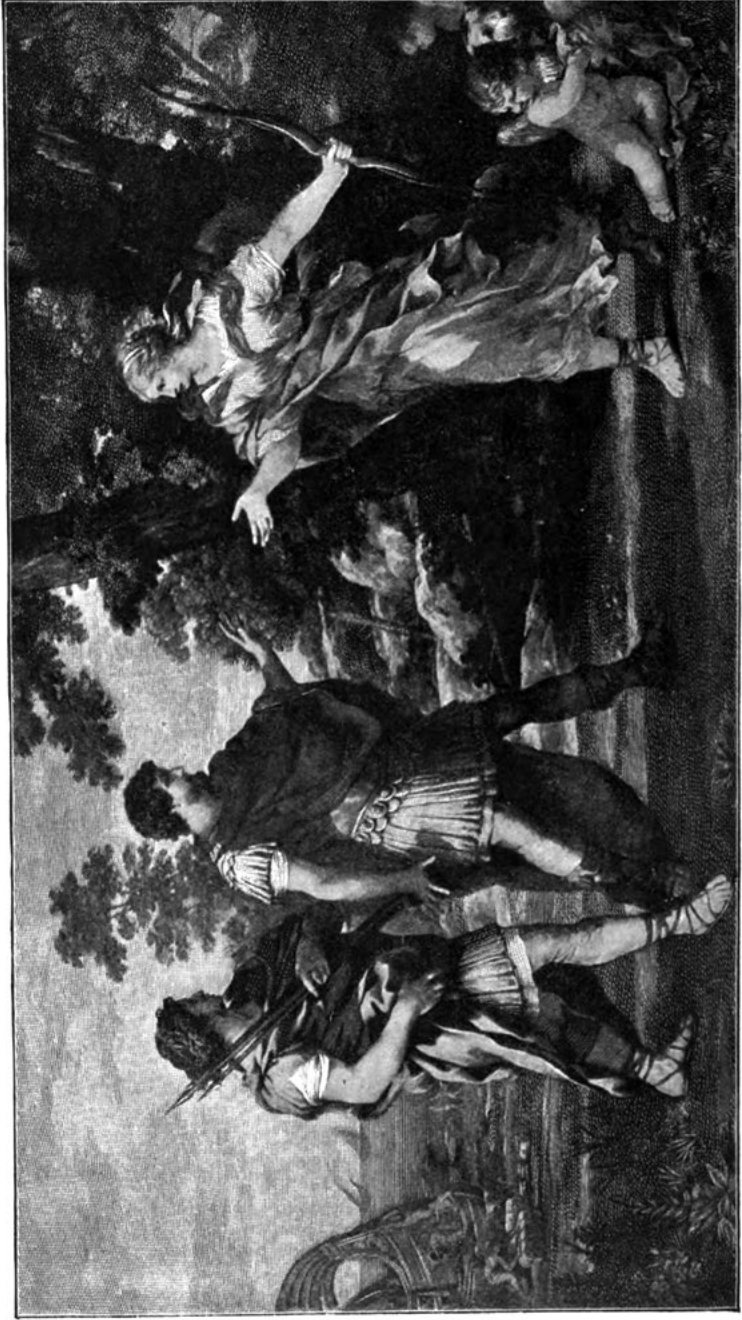
The wind was so high, the darkness so great, and the lightning flashes so blinding, that Æneas had lost his bearings. When the storm was over, he sailed for the nearest land, and came to the coast of what is now Tunis; but he had no idea where he was. He therefore bade his companions remain on the ships, while he went ashore with only one man,—the faithful Achates, who always went with him, and was his devoted friend. So these two men started out and began cautiously to explore the country where they had landed, trying to find some one who could tell them where they were.

Before long they met a beautiful woman. This was Venus, the mother of Æneas, in disguise. She had come there to tell her son all about the place where he had landed, and to give him some good advice; but she did not wish to have him know her at first.

Venus, therefore, began to speak to Æneas as if he were a stranger, and in answer to his questions said that he had landed in Africa, near the new city of Carthage. This town, she said, was ruled by Dido, a beautiful queen, who had also come from the coast of Asia, but from a spot southeast of the ruined city of Troy.

Dido's husband had been murdered by her brother, and she had fled in the night, upon one of her vessels, carrying off all her treasures; for she knew that her brother would soon try to kill her also. Many of her faithful subjects followed her, swearing that they would settle wherever she wished, and promising to help her found a new kingdom of which she should be queen.

When Dido reached the coast of Africa, near the present city of Tunis, and saw how beautiful the country seemed, she wished to settle there; but the people refused to sell her the land on which to build a city. She tried in vain to persuade them, and finally made up her mind to secure the land by a clever trick. She therefore



MEETING OF ÆNEAS AND VENUS.

asked the people if they would be willing to sell her as much land as an oxhide would inclose. The rude people were quite ready to part with a few measures of dirt; so the bargain was at once made.

Imagine their surprise, however, when Dido had a large ox skin cut up into very narrow strips, drew these around a vast tract of land, and claimed it as her own! As the land had certainly been inclosed by an oxhide, they could not dispute her right to it, and Dido at once began to build a beautiful city, about which you will hear many tales.

The Boards Are Eaten

VENUS went away after telling her son the story of the oxhide and of the founding of Carthage; and Æneas, following her advice, then walked on to the city. Here he was kindly received by the beautiful queen, who made him and all his companions welcome in her palace. While there Æneas told her all about the long siege of Troy, the taking of the city, his escape by night, his long wanderings on the sea, and his shipwreck near her city.

These stories greatly interested Dido, and she kept Æneas in her palace almost a whole year. As she had fallen in love with him, she would have liked to keep him there always; but the gods had decided that Æneas should again set sail, and one day they sent him orders to depart at once.

Æneas knew that Dido would do her best to keep him in Carthage, so he stole away while she slept, without even bidding her good-by. When she awoke and asked for him his ships were almost out of sight.

In her grief at his departure, Dido made up her mind to die. She gave orders that all the things he had used during his visit should be placed on a great pile of wood. Then she set fire to it with her own hand, and, stabbing herself, sprang into the flames, where she died.

Of course we know that such a deed is a crime; but in the days of Queen Dido, people had not learned many of the things that are now taught even to children, and they thought it was very brave to take one's own life.

Æneas and his companions, having left Carthage, now sailed back to Sicily, where they visited the tomb of Anchises just one year after his death. To show respect for his father's memory, Æneas ordered the celebration of games, as was the custom among the Trojans. The men strove with one another in a boat race, a foot race, in boxing and archery matches; and the boys took part in a drill and sham battle on horseback.

After the games were over, the Trojans coasted along the shore of Italy for some time, and finally came to the mouth of the Tiber River. When Æneas saw the fair country that stretched out before him, he bade his men sail up the stream, and towards evening they all went ashore to cook their food. Some flat cakes were baked, and as they had no dishes with them, Iulus proposed that these should serve as plates.

The men all sat down around the fire; and Iulus, who was very hungry indeed, quickly ate his share of meat, and then devoured the cake on which it had been placed. As he swallowed the last mouthful he cried: "Just see how hungry I was! I have eaten even the board on which my meal was served!"

At these words Æneas sprang to his feet, and cried that the prophecy was fulfilled at last, and that now they could settle in the beautiful country they had reached. The next day they were welcomed by Latinus, King of Latium, who, after hearing their story, remembered his dream, and promised that Æneas should have his daughter Lavinia in marriage.