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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, PRAETOR?S LUNCH ***

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PRAETOR'S LUNCH

By DOM

The ancient magistrate is having lunch at noon and these are our attempts at capturing his thoughts in the midst of dining. Thoughts are expressed in both verse and prose form. Take this morsel by morsel.

FIRST MORSEL

We wish an end to war with promises and hopes of peace. We wish for peace, we prepare for war. We threaten peace of others with war. We rouse ourselves with the cry to arms. In peace or war we are restless. In peace we amuse ourselves by sparring and wargames. In war we sing our lamentations of peace.

What are we? A warlike race intent on keeping an empire with abundance. At the same time advance in all directions with our might.

The horns of bulls are never far from another warring bull's tips. When reins are loosened, gates thrown wide, beasts lunge forth and lock horns again.

Mars. Venus. Ares. Aphrodite. Their temples are extremes. We invoke their benison at various stages of life.

Nature. Choice. Reason. They hatch outcome. We're capable of breathing life force and personify the two exorbitant passions. There is another passion but its sedateness hardly qualifies it for that intense term. It is more an affliction. We are within range

of it too. This frigid indifference.

SECOND MORSEL

All will have their day. The thwarted, triumphant. The Gods ,their final say. All will be, whatever they may be. What soothsayers are privy to ,what the oracle withholds. The gods intervene, they alter destinies. It all rests on the will of the Being who wields the armoury of Nature and reins of the universe.

Miltiades and Alexander crushed the might of armed Persian pride. Marathon and Salamis undid Darius and Xerxes.

Patroclus wasn't meant to sack Troy. Struck by Apollo, slain by Hector.

Menelaus could have slain Paris but his sword broke. Paris though defeated was spared by Aphrodite who returned him to Trojan lines.

Pandarus' arrow injured Agamemnon . That one arrow aggravated the wounds of Greeks. Troy was meant to fall .

Poseidon shielded Aeneas from the furious sword of Achilles. Rome was meant to be.

THIRD MORSEL

View of evening and morning are crowning achievements of nature's light and shadow play. The rest of the day is a hiatus between splendour. We need to live through and endure the rest of it like life. Between glory and triumph, there are those simple times which we seldom note or cherish. Times of neither sadness or gladness. Existential. Not piquant vividness of acute alertness.

FOURTH MORSEL

To bear the fruits of victory and to have the muscle of vanquished people, the state has to continually nurture a nation of courageous loyal citizens. Conquest has to be maintained, watched by ever vigilant sentries and keepers. The state neither needs nor reveres idlers whose business is to indulge themselves in Bacchanalian excesses on account of their ancestry to heroes of preceding generations.

Lawmakers duel with wit, logic and words while the war machine duels with tools of the army .Laws made or repealed as fearless scions fight for aspirations of a greater state.

To safeguard the abundance of far flung regions brought for the enjoyment of the homeland. Have the names of conquerors venerated by the conquered people.

Have kings, queens and chieftains of unknown lands pay tribute to the imperial standard.

FIFTH MORSEL

Two friends. They talk of things past, of bets against each other. They laud things,

condemn a few and lampoon absurdities.

They try things out , chalk up mutual experiences .Argue in good humour.

They are both the core of their world. All else backdrops. There are friendships which rival or surpass the closeness of blood relations.

Other lives about them are ambience to their drama of life. All that the world holds enrich their learning. They have their own company to increase their happiness.

They help themselves and with relish exhaust the time granted.

SIXTH MORSEL

Morning recedes.

Noon emerges.

Up on the bridge ,the cobbled passage below, the sun nigh. Breeze blows mildly.

Dries noon swelter dry. A column on the march .At the outskirts of the garrison town, clatter of horses, armed men of war and metal are accustomed sounds , familiar sights.

Javelins high , tips glinting. Clear without scarlet stains of battle or rust of war.

Chins up. Feet in perfect stride. Sturdy steps in unison.

Bouncing blades , sheathed in their scabbards. Jangling armour as leather soles stamp the stone tiled road.

Neighing mounts , tasselled reins, governed by their masters, they gallop obediently.

Shields glint. Their helmets of war inject ferocity to their visages.

Meridian peaks.

Morn recedes.

The proud standard borne by its bearer. Beast's paws knotted at his chest.
Beast's maw agape from the top of his helmet till rear curvature of his neck.
Fangs in line with temples. His cohorts, the horn blowers ride nearby.
The visibility and density of dyed tufts discern common soldier from centurion,
centurion from officer.
Red cloaks clasped and drape imperiously over backs of the empire's officials.
Saddled snugly atop their mounts, towards destination, advance.
To the horizon, another outpost awaits them. Keeping their presence seen and
felt. Mere manoeuvres. Necessary routine.
Town square forums and resthouses. Aqueducts and baths of villas. They must forego
these comforts. They are duty bound for now.

Daylight recedes.
Evening emerges.

SEVENTH MORSEL

Prosperity has many friends and many envious schemers who duck at blind corners.
Comrades and kin trumpet deeds. Generosity towards common masses too gains
favour. We'll know it when the market place speak of none but the doer.
To detractors, motives are questioned unflaggingly.
Any hint of misdemeanour or misstep, the forum echoes with it with the zeal equalled
only by the homecoming of a victor crowned with honours except it's ill distinction
and not exalted honour.
Whisperings at public baths, hastened steps towards or away from the object of their
speculation.
Some will speak well of them. Some will be too distant to know them well enough to
dislike or to be fond of with conviction sprung from familiarity. Prosperity puts a
person on different plain yet this dagger is just as sharp on both sides for the one is
also vulnerable to the critical eye of scrutiny.
Doubts, beliefs, suspicions and truths addled with syllables which make a name.
Common populace, will they choose to know the truth and live with the measure of
a human being or swallow myth and live with the flight of legend?
That shall be determined by conduct, attainments, favourable circumstances and an
orator's persuasive logic.

EIGHTH MORSEL

Fear their leaders more than their faceless enemies . Guard the standard as if it were one's life .A source of pride to be defended. In all manner of weather or even in peace the play of battle fills the gap of idleness. Hardened muscles are not to grow soft and feeble.

Barbaric tribes of east and west. Threats to outer reaches of reign. There our garrisons cannot rest their tools . Craggy mountains and treacherous forests are home to nomadic tribes which live to hunt and plunder , wild like their wilderness dwellings.

They have neither patience nor skill to cultivate the land. They are not of that ilk.

Cities and orderliness are strange to them. They are curiosities amongst us .We are game in their company.

They see our numbers and strength .They do not venture forth . An uneasy peace simply broken by the party which is the first to charge , cry out and first to snatch their arms out of their housing .

NINTH MORSEL

?Quot homines tot sententiae.?

So many people so many opinions. The voice of the leader slices across the indiscernible chatter. All persuading , nobly commanding . A clear voice brings with it a defined course. The rest obey , they lack the chief's possessions.

?Qualis Rex talis grex?. Such is the leader , such is the people.

One's virtues are taken note of .The most ardent admirers mold themselves to that manner. What their leaders do and do not. Whatever those venerated say or withhold. There are imitators , emulators , travesty smiths.

Once in a while , one or a small band of them rise to remold status quo. A wave is hatched and unleashed .It becomes an acceptable convention.
It is the manner of people that which is proven will be used till the spring is parched or when something superior is offered and that offering tickles their longing.
Far easier to remain constant than alter a course. Given the disposition toward ease , the well trodden tempts .Yet heed well that it is the passage of tribulation where the coronet of glory and honour rests on the head of those who are uncowed .They shall find that fame latches like their own skin to their name .

TENTH MORSEL

We who hold the torch
We must be patient
Decorum requires it
The pride of a legion
lives within its standard
one standard bearer bears
sacrament of cohorts

We who hold the torch
We must be patient
Decorum requires it
One official?s carriage
personifies the rest
one written inscription
ultimate seal of fate

We who hold the torch
We must be patient
Decorum requires it
Make way for those better
while we wait with patience
allow them the better seats
their merit exceed ours

ELEVENTH MORSEL

I am not one to dispute the will of God ,
divine will becomes our lot ,
but I question the logic of some .
Foolish is the soul who enters the place ,
who announces his innermost desires ,
swears a gift in return ,
should they be fulfilled ,
by divine consent ,
upon his earthly cares ,
mortal souls have none to offer better ,
than the rewards of paradise ,
what are our trappings to heaven ,
when it is God who grants ?
It is not worship or invocation ,
it is a wager posed by hubris ,
displace pomposity and affectation ,
come in a penitent pose ,
humility warrants attention ,
or else snuff the lamp ,
take the oil elsewhere .

I am not one to dispute the will of God ,
divine will becomes our lot ,
but I question the right of tyrants .
Charred cities after their sacking ,
the cries of dependent humanity ,
sent to feed searing flames ,
the weak , meek and lame ,
no daylight dawns again ,
a winding trail of chains and clubs ,
the gathered wounded ; conquered ,

these tyrants do not govern ,
they seize and consume their fill ,
then hunger rumbles again ,
they repeat their atrocities ,
till the Fates pluck them .
For each tyrant reaped ,
by droves victims precede them ,
their number exceed sacrificial offerings ,
made to appease wrathful spirits ,
or custom of ceremony ,
of a deity worshipped .

TWELFTH MORSEL

Our moments of glory
a lifetime to remember
fair token of youth's vigour

Carve now before the die sets
while still new and pliable
when it dries your mark stays
hardened and nobly set
surpassing life of wilted crowns
a monument in your honour

Our moments of glory
a lifetime to remember
come pay heed to youth's prayer

We won't be here to bother
having surpassed such worries
earthborn to earth it goes
like Assyrian ruins
to those with merits deserving
God and kind Fortune preserve them

Our moments of glory
a lifetime to remember
mementos of youth's flower

THIRTEENTH MORSEL

A peasant who wishes for more
changes his plough for arms
The army has loyal farmers
with absent fathers away far

Children of empire's troops
though honoured their father's name
they hardly know the man well
though his name they proudly bear

Years abroad have rendered fathers
estranged from families and friends
yet love and regard still remain
after gaps of years and distance

A peasant who wishes for more
changes his plough for arms
fertile fields left idle
while we take grain from conquered lands

For children whom fathers left
when they were too young to recall
esteem comes to their hearts prior
before the warmth of filial love

At long last parted faces meet again
strange and familiar strange yet familiar
they rekindle ties and retell tidings
memories and previous habits return

Fertile fields left idle
while we take grain from conquered lands
the army has its own farmers
with absent fathers battling far

Families once again reunited
when warriors in togas turn civilians
their children venture and nestle gladly

FOURTEENTH MORSEL

?De mortuis nil nisi bonum?
speak well of the departed
or else do not speak at all .
The now sacred departed
immune to our rebuke
rejoice with their memory.

?De mortuis nil nisi bonum?
speak well of the departed
or else do not speak at all .
Allow their good part live on
they have gone beyond the gates
those whom we regard dearly.

FIFTEENTH MORSEL

What draws us to oracles ?
Those structures where we worship ,
The place where future unfolds ,
For those who are uncertain ,
Gripped by Trouble?s tentacles .

What draws us to oracles ?
Priests and priestesses reveal ,
With omniscience in their being ,
With eyes of the temple gods ,
Free from earthly manacles .

SIXTEENTH MORSEL

There is nothing loathsome ,
in learning from others ,
with elders and with peers ,
we shared experiences ,
treasures of our youth ,
amusing in retrospect .

It is the matter's worth
the source dictates not choice
progress comes not from disdain
to live we nourish the form
to advance we emulate
the source dictates not choice
It is the matter's worth

If they should enrich us ,
ennoble the manner ,
magnify happiness ,
increase our contentment ,
in learning from others ,
there is nothing loathsome .

SEVENTEENTH MORSEL

For common good and for own glory
a seat in the senate
For common cause and own aspirations
a seat in the senate
For power over destinies for by themselves they'll drown
a seat in the senate
For a hand in fate and privilege to avert a few unpleasantries
a seat in the senate
For the pristine tunic and the challenge to keep it unsoiled
a seat in the senate
For rhetoric comes with quandaries of office
a seat in the senate
The toga is equal in prestige with the weight of armour
a seat in the senate

EIGHTEENTH MORSEL

Arena gladiators
with their lives amuse us
liberty bought with blood
the last one is set free.

Slaves of silver mines
they crawl in tunnels dark
they live with the terror
of cave-ins and landslides .

Privilege of victory
marked by thriving slavery
of people subjugated.

The nameless galley slaves
unpaid naval oarsmen
chained to oars in battle
live or drown with the ship.

Slaves who serve the household
by bonded servitude
are bound to their masters
for their food and lodging.

Our state's territory
with empire's history
adorned with places conquered.

NINETEENTH MORSEL

PORTION I

callow upstarts
those who dare advise
hindrances to them

callow upstarts
heedless of counsel
unfelled by the mace
uncut by the blade
young and rash

callow upstarts
they shall not avert

except the obvious

PORTION II

To the philosopher
thoughts and writings
are his close friends
he sees to needs
he then dotes on
work and study

To the philosopher
thoughts and writings
are his dear friends
exile's release
from sycophants
wary of him

TWENTIETH MORSEL

Emotion in the thick of bandying
Eloquence is reduced to instinct
The will to survive repeats in mind
Asserts itself amidst the bedlam
Barbaric ululations and cries
Enemy's breath and blows on the flesh
Attack..defend..retaliate..avenge
Advance..retreat..encircle..scatter
There is no room to mourn the fallen
While in the midst of war's grim reaping
Those destined to live long and see much
Shall live and thrive long after youth's bloom .

TWENTY FIRST MORSEL

One class wash clothing
inside common pools
with scent and reek of others' washing
One class have clothing
cleaned inside clear pools
water stored in lavish amphoraes
Disparity exists
even in the city of the world

A part of the city
is alive when the sun is out
A part of the city
languishes in darkness at dusk
The beast of disparity
also dwells and lurks in Rome

Garrisons guard borders ever vigilantly
behind stone slabs of sturdy fortress walls
But it is too risky to take a walk at night
in the city without armed entourage
One quarter boasts stone and marble
One quarter built from brick and wood
Disparity exists
even in the city of the world

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