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CATVLLVS AND HORACE ON SVFFENVS AND ALFENVS.

ALFENVS VARVS of Cremona, a quondam friend of Catullus, studied law with the great Seruius Sulpicius—some of whose lectures he published—served to the advantage of Vergil as land commissioner in Cisalpine Gaul,¹ became *consul suffectus* in 39 B.C., and provided Horace with the point of a joke. He seems also—hence this note—to have been the versifier whom Catullus calls Suffenus in c. 14 and 22. If he is, we have here a somewhat rare instance of Horace's adapting to his own use a suggestion from Catullus.

In *Sermo* I. 3, 130, Horace cites the example of Alfenus, once cobbler, recently consul, in pretended support of the Stoic paradox that the wise man alone is the universal expert. Though Alfenus, the pettifogger, long ago closed his shop, he has never outgrown being a cobbler.

Vt Alfenus uaffer omni
abiecto instrumento artis clausaque taberna
sutor erat.

Porphyrio explains the reference: 'Vrbane autem Alfenum Varum Cremonensem deridet, qui, abiecta sutrina quam in municipio suo exercuerat, Romam petit, magistroque usus Sulpicio iuris consulto ad tantam scientiam peruenit ut et consulatum gereret et publico funere efferretur.'

Of course we need not interpret *sutor* too literally. It is not likely that Octavian would have raised an actual cobbler to the consulship. If the father of Alfenus was a colonial of the usual type found in the Po Valley, he doubtless invested the surplus earnings of his farm in urban shops and factories. At Cremona, this would hardly cause any social embarrassment, provided the shops brought good returns. At Rome, however, where the boy was sent to study law, a young man aspiring to position needed to have a generation or two between himself and a trade. Alfenus, apparently of Catullus' age (Cat. 30), associated with the young men about town in his early youth, which would seem to prove that he had never sat at the cobbler's bench. But the source of his ready money became the talk of the city. He was a *terrae filius* in the eyes of Roman nobles, and became, like Ventidius, a standing example of a class, very rare at Rome, that succeeded in breaking from the industrial

¹ Servius Dan. *ad Ecl.* IX. 27: 'blanditur Alfeno Varo, qui, Pollione fugato, legatus Transpadanis praepositus ab Augusto'; Probi *Vita Verg.*: 'postea restitutus beneficio Alpheni

Vari, Asinii Pollionis et Cornelii Galli.' The accuracy of these statements has been questioned repeatedly in recent essays.

group into the political nobility. It may even be that 'cobbler' is here but a loose generalization, common from Socrates' day, to designate a man of humble station, and that Porphyrio, with his usual literal-mindedness, fastened upon *sutrina* with no better evidence than that of this text.

The scribbler Suffenus of Catullus 14 and 22 seems to be this very Alfenus. The twenty-second poem reads in part :

Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti,
homo est uenustus et dicax et urbanus,
idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.
puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura
perscripta, nec sic, ut fit, in palimpsesto
relata : chartae regiae, noui libri,
noui umbilici, lora, rubra membrana,
derecta plumbo et pumice omnia aequata.
haec cum legas tu, bellus ille et urbanus
Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor
rursus uidetur : tantum abhorret ac mutat.
hoc quid putemus esse ? qui modo scurra
aut si quid hac re tritius uidebatur,
idem infaceto est infacetior rure
simul poemata attigit.

The point of this passage is much the same as in Horace's taunt : 'Your Suffenus is, to be sure, a man of wit and polite manners, but when he tries to write poetry he becomes what he was before, a country bumpkin.' The sting in the epigram lies in *rursus*. Suffenus reverts to type when he writes : he betrays his provenance.

Have not the two poets chosen the very same man ? The points of similarity are at least numerous. Suffenus and Alfenus were of about the same age. Both were poets of a kind, Suffenus according to Catullus 14 and 22, Alfenus¹ according to Servius Dan. on Vergil, *Ecl.* IX. 35. The cognomen of both seems to be Varus, for *Suffenus iste, Vare* (Cat. 22, 1) is most readily interpreted : 'Suffenus, who bears your name, *Varus*.' If, however, it means 'That fellow-townsmen of yours,' it comes to the same thing, for Quintilius Varus was also from Cremona ; and Catullus adds : 'quem probe nosti.' Furthermore, Suffenus is, as we have said, twitted for unintentionally betraying his low birth, as was Alfenus in Horace. Finally, the name Suffenus, which seems not to be found except in Catullus, is apparently a slight perversion of Alfenus, as Horace's 'Alfenus uaser' is but a slight alteration of Alfenus Varus. The clue lies in the suggestion of ἀλφύ= 'profit.' The Romans, bilingual as they were, readily found Greek wordplays in names (see Friedrich's commentary on Cat. 95, 5). I do not know whether it has been noticed that

¹ licet iuris consultus et successor Serui Sulpicii esset, etiam carmina aliqua composuisse dicitur.

Horace's *fenerator Alfius* (*Epode* II.) grew out of the word-play ἀλφή = 'fenus,' but I have long felt that the position of the words betrayed the poet's intention. *Suffenus* then seems to be adopted as the opposite of *Alfenus*, in memory of expressions like *fenore obrutus*, *oppressus*, etc. There is then a very strong case in favour of identifying the two men.

This identification may help in solving some other standing puzzles in Catullus. If *Suffenus* of 22 is *Alfenus*, then the person addressed as *Vare* is definitely not *Alfenus*. The likelihood that he is *Quintilius Varus* of Cremona grows when we give heed to *iste*. Furthermore, if this *Suffenus* is *Alfenus Varus*, the probability is very strong that the *Alfenus* of *Carmen* 30 is also. Finally, if the man addressed as *Vare* in 22 is *Quintilius Varus* and not *Alfenus*, the *Varus* of *Carmen* 10, also a jovial friend, is all the more likely to be *Quintilius*. When we remember the position that *Quintilius* held with Vergil and Horace it is of some interest to find on what footing he stood with Catullus. If no one else attracted Horace's attention to Catullus' joke on *Alfenus*, we trust that *Quintilius*, the recipient of the poem, would have referred to it.

Finally, I would suggest that *Alfenus Varus* now stands out as a man who was deeply interested in poetry in his youth, even though he failed to satisfy the fastidious taste of Catullus. This fact makes it all the more likely that he took an interest in the youthful Vergil and that the scholium which credits him with aiding Vergil is not as improbable as it has seemed to some critics. There is little reason to doubt that he is the *Varus* of the ninth *Eclogue*.¹

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¹ The *Varus* of the sixth *Eclogue* seems to be *Quintilius*, see *Class. Phil.*, 1920, pp. 114, 115.