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Tacitus the Liar *Le Génie de Tacite: la Création des Annales*. Par Eugène Bacha. Bruxelles: H. Lamertin; Paris: F. Alcan, 1906. Pp. 324. 8vo. Fr. 4.

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TACITUS THE LIAR.

Le Génie de Tacite : la Création des Annales.

Par EUGÈNE BACHA. Bruxelles : H. Lamertin ; Paris : F. Alcan, 1906. Pp. 324. 8vo. Fr. 4.

THE *Annals* are an extravagant romance, gravely facetious and maliciously false. Tacitus is a liar and a poet, infected with 'l'hystérie du mensonge'; driven by the law of his genius to invent absurdities in pairs, and to impose them on a gullible age. When he refers to the *commentarii senatus*, to the memoirs of Agrippina and Corbulo, or to the histories of Pliny, Cluvius, and Fabius Rusticus, he lies.

Such is M. Bacha's theme, set forth in his first two chapters. There follows a detailed examination of the element of invention in the *Annals*, under the four heads of the debates of the senate, the provinces and the frontiers, the charges of high treason under Tiberius, and the dramas of the palace. After a short epilogue comes a long appendix, containing, with much else, a review of the evidence afforded by writers older than Tacitus for the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero—the most valuable part of the book.

But Suetonius? Dio? Nay, they are slavish copyists. After Suetonius had sketched his lives of the emperors, he fell in with his contemporary's work, and borrowed all that was new; generalising from this lie, paraphrasing that, developing here and abridging there, and adding on occasion quotations from the poets or doggerel of his own.¹ Subsequent historians are all under Tacitus' spell.

But Suetonius is not the only contemporary of Tacitus whose works survive. I do not know if M. Bacha is acquainted with the letters of the younger Pliny, but he will find some interesting reading in vii. 29 and viii. 6. Among the inventions of Tacitus M. Bacha includes the proposal to give

fifteen million sesterces and the praetorian ornaments to Pallas.² Now Pliny had the curiosity to inspect this decree of the senate and the mention of it on the freedman's tomb, and his report from both quarters is in close agreement with Tacitus' account. What is the inference? Clearly that Pliny was in the plot: that he lied to cover the lie of his friend. I tremble for the eruption of Vesuvius in 79.³

The reader may have guessed that I do not think well of this book. It is unscholarly, reckless in accusation, unscrupulous in insinuation, ill written (for French), and ill arranged. It is not worthy of elaborate disproof. The effect of it, to my mind, is to leave Tacitus' reputation just as good, or just as bad, as it was. Yet it will not have been written in vain if it gives new life to the Tacitean question. Criticism has done little as yet to justify, and at the same time to limit, the mistrust which Tacitus awakes at every turn. Surely no historian was ever less competent 'zu sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.' His thought seems to move in the twilight between true and false. We mistrust in particular his speeches, his imputation of motives, and the details of his frontier wars; and, above all, his reports of gossip, whether he accepts or rejects it, or rejects and then accepts. Where his materials were inadequate, he breathed on the dry bones, as historians will and must; but we feel that his was a poisonous breath. When he speaks of early times, or of countries beyond his ken, his mistakes are easy to see, if not to correct; but the central events of his own period are harder to test. A first requisite is the reconstruction of the history of the first century from such sources as are innocent of Tacitus, and from such sources alone; and in this M. Bacha's appendix may be of assistance. That is the best that I can say for him.

E. HARRISON.

² P. 57 n.; xii. 53.

³ The elder Pliny too bears witness to the senate's adulation of freedmen under Claudius. M. Bacha's appendix refers to this evidence (p. 242), but here as elsewhere his text knoweth not what his appendix doeth.

¹ M. Bacha suggests that texts of Suetonius might distinguish his loans from Tacitus by a difference of type (p. 34); and he gives a specimen, which may serve as a warning, if not as an example, to anyone who undertakes this task.