

CHAPTER XII

THE CHARACTER OF THE WATER COMMISSIONER, SEXTUS JULIUS FRONTINUS

His ego rebus pascor, his delector, his perfruor.
CICERO (106-43 B. C.), *In Pison.*, 20.
With those things am I feasted, these I delight
in, these I thoroughly enjoy.

WE have thus reached the end of our consideration of life in ancient Rome from the point of view of a waterworks superintendent of the time, and as commented on by a hydraulic engineer and superintendent of water-properties of the present day. It must have afforded but another illustration that life in ancient Rome is a very different thing according to the point of view and according to him who describes it. If any one, for instance, will take Gaston Boissier by the hand and will allow oneself to be led by him on one of that author's charming "Proménades" through Rome or its environs, or through some of its other towns or colonies; or will allow Mrs. Frances Elliott to pass before his eyes as he reclines in his easy-chair some of her delightful word-pictures of life in Rome, he will get a very different notion of what ancient Rome really was from what he must if he only stood up to be drilled in Roman History, so-called, or to be shouted and scolded at by some other writers I might name about the sins and shortcomings, and nothing else, of almost every man, woman, and child who figures in that "frightful machine," — as Montaigne calls "The History of Rome."

In Frontinus we have had a guide whose distinguishing characteristics, as revealed in his treatise "De aquis urbis Romae," have had their effect in the picture he has presented to us. It may be proper now to review them and thus still better learn to know the water commissioner of A. D. 97 from these "II. Books" he has left us.

Nothing could exceed the zeal, the love, he shows for this his work, undertaken at the age of about sixty-two. And a selection of his own words is the best proof of this.

1. "Inasmuch as every office conferred by the emperor demands especial attention; and inasmuch as I am moved not only to devote diligence, but even love to any matter confided to my care, be it on account of inborn zeal, or by reason of faithfulness in office; and inasmuch as Nerva Augustus, an emperor of whom it is difficult to say whether he devotes more love or more diligence to the common weal, has now imposed upon me the duties of water commissioner [*curator aquarum*], duties contributing partly to the uses, partly to the health, even to the safety of the city, and from olden time exercised by the most distinguished citizens; I therefore consider it to be the first and most important thing to be done, as has always been one of my fundamental principles in other affairs, to learn thoroughly what it is that I have undertaken.

2. "There is, indeed, no better foundation for any business; nor can it in any other way be determined what is to be done, and what omitted; nor is there for a fair-minded man so debasing a course as to fulfil the duties of an office entrusted to him according to the directions of assistants: a course, however, which must be followed, whenever an inexperienced official takes refuge in the practical knowledge of his assistants; whose services, although necessary for rendering help should nevertheless be only a sort of hand and tool of the principal in charge. It is for this reason that I have set down in this commentary all that I could gather as bearing on the subject matter, after having arranged and codified it in accordance with my habit as already exemplified in other offices, so that I might consult it as a guide in the duties of this. But my other commentaries were inspired by my own hard-earned practice and experience, and were intended for the benefit of my successors, and this commentary may also be of use to a successor; but as it has been written at the beginning of my administration, it will serve more especially for my own instruction, and as a guide."

17. "It has seemed to me not superfluous to examine consecutively the lengths of channel of each aqueduct in its several parts, and in detail;—this because the maintenance of the works is the most important part of the duties of this office, wherefore it is necessary that whoever is placed in charge of them should know which of them

are in need of having money spent upon them. But my zeal was not satisfied by a mere personal examination in detail; I also had plans made of the aqueducts, from which it may be seen where there are valleys, and how wide they are, and where rivers have been crossed; also where the conduits laid on the hillsides need an extended and continued care for their protection and maintenance. In this way we reap the advantage of having, as it were, the works referred to directly before us, and of being able to study them as though we stood by their side."

23. "Having now given the builders and age of each aqueduct, also their sources, lengths of channel, and order of heights, it seems to me not out of keeping to go more into detail, and to demonstrate how large is the quantity of water which is allotted to public and to private uses, as well as for luxury; and through how many tanks it is conveyed, and in what wards these are located; how much water is distributed within the city walls, how much without, how much is used for water-basins, how much for fountains, how much for public structures, how much on account of the State, how much by private consumers."

As we have seen, he goes on fighting waste, fraud, and unlawful taking of water, in every form, from this point on.

64. "There were, be it noted, in the aggregate, 12,755 *quinariae* recorded, 14,018 discharging water; that is, 1,263 more were reported as delivering water than had been received. Astonished at this, I felt it to be no small part of my duty to investigate, so as to arrive at reliable data concerning the aqueducts and their discharge, and to see how it could come about that more was being delivered than belonged, so to speak, to the estate. So before doing anything else, I set about to measure the intake of the conduits, etc."

A law having been passed, requiring lictors to accompany the water commissioner on his journeys outside the city walls, says Frontinus: 101. "In my examination of the aqueducts, my self-reliance and the authority given me by the sovereign will stand in place of the lictors."

103. "I will now set down what the water commissioner must observe, being the laws and Senate enactments which serve for his

guidance. As concerns the draft of water by private consumers, there is to be noted: 'That no one shall draw water without a writing from Caesar; that is, that no one shall draw water from the public supply without a license, and no one shall draw more than has been granted. By this means we propose to make it possible, that the quantity of water concerning whose recovery we have spoken, may be distributed to new fountains and may be used for new grants from the sovereign. But in both cases must a great zeal in the service be opposed to manifold forms of fraud. The channels of the aqueducts, without the city, must be frequently examined, one after the other, to review the granted quantities; the same must be done in case of the delivery tanks and fountains, that the water may flow without interruption, day and night, which the commissioner has been directed to see to, by vote of the Senate, etc.

119. "These numerous and extensive works have a natural tendency to fall into decay, and they must be attended to, before they call for large appropriations. As a rule, however, they are only to be taken hold of after due consideration; because, those who urge the construction or extension of works cannot always be trusted. The water commissioner, therefore, ought not only to be provided with advisers, but ought also to be armed with self-acquired practical experience of his own. He must consult, not only the builders in the employ of the office, but must seek aid from the trustworthy and thorough knowledge of outsiders, in order to judge what must be taken in hand forthwith, and what postponed; again, what is to be carried on by public contractors, and what done by his own regular workmen."

Referring to a law passed 39 B. C. (the *Lex Quinctia*), which made the damaging of aqueducts a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of 100,000 *sestertii*, say \$4,000 or \$14,000 according as the intrinsic or purchasing value of money be considered. Frontinus, 130, says: "I should call the transgressor of so beneficent a law not unworthy of the threatened punishment. But those who have lived in an atmosphere of delusion, and to whom a violation of the law had become second nature in the course of time, had to be brought back to the right way of thinking by gentle means. I therefore endeavored with

diligence that as far as possible the erring ones should remain unknown. Those who sought the emperor's pardon, after due warning received, may thank me for the pardon granted. But for the future, I would wish that it might not be necessary to invoke the law, for it will be necessary to maintain the honor of my office, even at the risk of giving offence."

With this sterling resolution to do his duty should the necessity arise, we can leave our consideration of this honest old Roman water commissioner, — of the man and of his work; only adding his remark to Pliny,¹ which in his case has been realized in the fullest sense of the words uttered, and with all the import that attaches to them: —

Memoria nostra durabit, si vita meruimus.

Remembrance will endure, if the life shall have merited it.

¹ PLINY, *Epist.*, ix. 19.

Valeas, viator, lector mei carminis.

C. I. L., viii. 5370.

Fare you well, traveller, reader of my roundelay.

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