

Sallust



*History
of Catiline's
Conspiracy*

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Men who would act up to the dignity of their nature ought not to pass their lives in obscurity, like the beasts of the field, formed with bodies prone to the earth, and under necessary subjection to their appetites.

Now, our faculties are twofold; those of the soul, and those of the body: the soul was designed for sovereign command, the body for subjection: the former we enjoy in common with the gods, the latter with the brute creation. So that to me it appears more agreeable to nature to pursue glory by the abilities of the mind than those of the body; and as our lives are but of short duration, it should be our study to render our memory immortal: for the splendour derived from riches and beauty is short-lived and frail, virtue^[1] alone confers immortality.

It has, however, been a great and long debate, whether success in war is most owing to bodily strength or mental abilities: for, as counsel is necessary before we enter on action, after measures are duly concerted, speedy execution is equally necessary; so that neither of these being sufficient singly, they prevail only by the assistance of each other.



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Accordingly, kings of old (for this was the first title of authority among men) applied themselves differently; some

to strengthen their bodies by exercise, others to improve their minds. Then, indeed, ambition had no share in influencing the conduct of men; every one was satisfied with his own. But after Cyrus began in Asia, and the Lacedæmonians and Athenians in Greece, to conquer cities and nations; when the lust of power was thought a sufficient reason for commencing a war, and glory was measured by the extent of dominions, then it was discovered by experience that genius conduces most to success. And if kings and rulers would exert their abilities in peace as they do in war, the condition of human affairs would be much more steady and uniform; nor should we see so frequent revolutions and convulsions in states, and such universal confusion: for the same arts by which dominion was at first acquired will serve to secure it. But when, instead of industry, moderation, and equity, sloth, licentiousness, and pride prevail, the fortune of a state changes with its manners: and thus power always passes from him who has least merit to him who has most.

It is to the powers of the mind we owe the invention and advantages of agriculture, navigation, and architecture, and indeed all the other arts of life. Yet many there are in the world who, abandoned to sloth and sensuality, without learning or politeness, pass their lives much like travellers; and who, in opposition to the design of nature, place their whole happiness in animal pleasure, looking on their minds as a heavy burden. The life and death of such as these are to me of equal value, since there is no notice taken of either. [2] He only seems to me to be truly alive, and to enjoy his rational nature, who, by engaging in an active course of life,

pursues the glory that is derived from noble actions, or the exercise of some honourable employment. Now, amid a great variety of occupations, nature has directed men to different pursuits.



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To act well for the state is glorious, and to write well for it is not without its merit. A man may become illustrious in peace or in war: many have been applauded for performing heroic actions, many for relating them. And though the character of the historian is not reckoned so glorious as that of the hero, yet to me it appears a very arduous task to write history well, since the style must be suited to the subject. Besides, many look on the censure of faults as the effect of malice and envy; and when the glorious achievements of brave and worthy men are related, every reader will be easily inclined to believe what he thinks he could have performed himself, but will treat what exceeds that measure as false and fabulous.

As for me, like most others, I had in my younger days a strong desire for a share in the administration; but found many obstructions in my way: for instead of modesty, justice, and virtue, licentiousness, corruption, and avarice flourished; which, though my soul, as yet untainted with evil habits, utterly abhorred, yet amid such general depravity my tender years were caught by ambition; and although I avoided, in the general tenor of my conduct, the corrupt practices of the age, yet being fired with the same ardour