

# NATURAL HISTORY OF PLINY

## BOOK I.<sup>34</sup>

### DEDICATION.

#### C. PLINIUS SECUNDUS TO HIS FRIEND TITUS VESPASIAN.

THIS treatise on Natural History, a novel work in Roman literature, which I have just completed, I have taken the liberty to dedicate to you, most gracious<sup>35</sup> Emperor, an appellation peculiarly suitable to you, while, on account of his age, that of *great* is more appropriate to your Father;—

“For still thou ne’er wouldst quite despise  
The trifles that I write<sup>36</sup>,”

if I may be allowed to shelter myself under the example of Catullus, my fellow-countryman<sup>37</sup>, a military term, which you well understand. For he, as you know, when his napkins had been changed<sup>38</sup>, expressed himself a little harshly, from his anxiety to show his friendship for his dear little *Veranius* and *Fabius*<sup>39</sup>. At the same time this my importunity may effect, what you complained of my not having done in another too forward epistle of mine; it will put upon record, and let all the world know, with what kindness you exercise the imperial dignity. You, who have had the honour of a triumph, and of the censorship, have been six times consul, and have shared in the tribunate; and, what is still more honourable, whilst you held them in conjunction with your Father, you have presided over the Equestrian order, and been the Prefect of the Prætorians<sup>40</sup>: all this you have done for the service of the Republic, and, at the same time, have regarded me as a fellow-soldier and a messmate. Nor has the extent of your prosperity produced any change in you, except that it has given you the power of doing good to the utmost of your wishes. And whilst all these circumstances increase the veneration which other persons feel for you, with respect to myself, they have made me so bold, as to wish to become more familiar. You must, therefore, place this to your own account, and blame yourself for any fault of this kind that I may commit.

But, although I have laid aside my blushes<sup>41</sup>, I have not gained my object; for you still awe me, and keep me at a distance, by the majesty of your understanding. In no one does the force of eloquence and of tribunitian oratory blaze out more powerfully! With what glowing language do you thunder forth the praises of your Father! How dearly do you love your Brother! How admirable is your talent for poetry! What a fertility of genius do you possess, so as to<sup>3</sup> enable you to imitate your Brother<sup>42</sup>! But who is there that is bold enough to form an estimate on these points, if he is to be judged by you,

and, more especially, if you are challenged to do so? For the case of those who merely publish their works is very different from that of those who expressly dedicate them to you. In the former case I might say, Emperor! why do you read these things? They are written only for the common people, for farmers or mechanics, or for those who have nothing else to do; why do you trouble yourself with them? Indeed, when I undertook this work, I did not expect that you would sit in judgement upon me<sup>43</sup>; I considered your situation much too elevated for you to descend to such an office. Besides, we possess the right of openly rejecting the opinion of men of learning. M. Tullius himself, whose genius is beyond all competition, uses this privilege; and, remarkable as it may appear, employs an advocate in his own defence:—"I do not write for very learned people; I do not wish my works to be read by Manius Persius, but by Junius Congus<sup>44</sup>." And if Lucilius, who first introduced the satirical style<sup>45</sup>, applied such a remark to himself, and if Cicero thought proper to borrow it, and that more especially in his treatise "De Republica," how much reason have I to do so, who have such a judge to defend myself against! And by this dedication I have deprived myself of the benefit of challenge<sup>46</sup>; for it is a very different thing whether a person has a judge given him by lot, or whether he voluntarily selects one; and we always make more preparation for an invited guest, than for one that comes in unexpectedly.

4

When the candidates for office, during the heat of the canvass, deposited the fine<sup>47</sup> in the hands of Cato, that determined opposer of bribery, rejoicing as he did in his being rejected from what he considered to be foolish honours, they professed to do this out of respect to his integrity; the greatest glory which a man could attain. It was on this occasion that Cicero uttered the noble ejaculation, "How happy are you, Marcus Porcius, of whom no one dares to ask what is dishonourable<sup>48</sup>!" When L. Scipio Asiaticus appealed to the tribunes, among whom was Gracchus, he expressed full confidence that he should obtain an acquittal, even from a judge who was his enemy. Hence it follows, that he who appoints his own judge must absolutely submit to the decision; this choice is therefore termed an appeal<sup>49</sup>.

I am well aware, that, placed as you are in the highest station, and gifted with the most splendid eloquence and the most accomplished mind, even those who come to pay their respects to you, do it with a kind of veneration: on this account I ought to be careful that what is dedicated to you should be worthy of you. But the country people, and, indeed, some whole nations offer milk to the Gods<sup>50</sup>, and those who cannot procure frankincense substitute in its place salted cakes; for the Gods are not dissatisfied when they are worshiped by every one to the best of his ability. But my temerity will appear the greater by the consideration, that these volumes, which I dedicate to you, are of such inferior importance. For they do not admit of the display of genius, nor, indeed, is mine one of the highest order; they admit of no excursions, nor orations, nor discussions, nor of any wonderful adventures, nor any variety of transactions, nor, from the barrenness

of the matter, of anything particularly pleasant in the narration, or agreeable to the reader. The nature<sup>5</sup> of things, and life as it actually exists, are described in them; and often the lowest department of it; so that, in very many cases, I am obliged to use rude and foreign, or even barbarous terms, and these often require to be introduced by a kind of preface. And, besides this, my road is not a beaten track, nor one which the mind is much disposed to travel over. There is no one among us who has ever attempted it, nor is there any one individual among the Greeks who has treated of all the topics. Most of us seek for nothing but amusement in our studies, while others are fond of subjects that are of excessive subtilty, and completely involved in obscurity. My object is to treat of all those things which the Greeks include in the Encyclopædia<sup>51</sup>, which, however, are either not generally known or are rendered dubious from our ingenious conceits. And there are other matters which many writers have given so much in detail that we quite loathe them. It is, indeed, no easy task to give novelty to what is old, and authority to what is new; brightness to what is become tarnished, and light to what is obscure; to render what is slighted acceptable, and what is doubtful worthy of our confidence; to give to all a natural manner, and to each its peculiar nature. It is sufficiently honourable and glorious to have been willing even to make the attempt, although it should prove unsuccessful. And, indeed, I am of opinion, that the studies of those are more especially worthy of our regard, who, after having overcome all difficulties, prefer the useful office of assisting others to the mere gratification of giving pleasure; and this is what I have already done in some of my former works. I confess it surprises me, that T. Livius, so celebrated an author as he is, in one of the books of his history of the city from its origin, should begin with this remark, “I have now obtained a sufficient reputation, so that I might put an end to my work, did not my restless mind require to be supported by employment<sup>52</sup>.” Certainly he ought to have composed this work, not for his own glory, but for that of the Roman name, and<sup>6</sup> of the people who were the conquerors of all other nations. It would have been more meritorious to have persevered in his labours from his love of the work, than from the gratification which it afforded himself, and to have accomplished it, not for his own sake, but for that of the Roman people.

I have included in thirty-six<sup>53</sup> books 20,000 topics, all worthy of attention, (for, as Domitius Piso<sup>54</sup> says, we ought to make not merely books, but valuable collections,) gained by the perusal of about 2000 volumes, of which a few only are in the hands of the studious, on account of the obscurity of the subjects, procured by the careful perusal of 100 select authors<sup>55</sup>; and to these I have made considerable additions of things, which were either not known to my predecessors, or which have been lately discovered. Nor can I doubt but that there still remain many things which I have omitted; for I am a mere mortal, and one that has many occupations. I have, therefore, been obliged to compose this work at interrupted intervals, indeed during the night, so that you will find that I have not been idle even during this period. The day I devote to you, exactly portioning out my sleep to the necessity of my health, and contenting myself with this reward, that

while we are musing<sup>56</sup> on these subjects (according to the remark of Varro), we are adding to the length of our lives; for life properly consists in being awake.

In consideration of these circumstances and these difficulties, I dare promise nothing; but you have done me the most essential service in permitting me to dedicate my work to you. Nor does this merely give a sanction to it, but it determines its value; for things are often conceived to be of great value, solely because they are consecrated in temples.

I have given a full account of all your family—your<sup>7</sup> Father, yourself, and your Brother, in a history of our own times, beginning where Aufidius Bassus concludes<sup>57</sup>. You will ask, Where is it? It has been long completed and its accuracy confirmed<sup>58</sup>; but I have determined to commit the charge of it to my heirs, lest I should have been suspected, during my lifetime, of having been unduly influenced by ambition. By this means I confer an obligation on those who occupy the same ground with myself; and also on posterity, who, I am aware, will contend with me, as I have done with my predecessors.

You may judge of my taste from my having inserted, in the beginning of my book, the names of the authors that I have consulted. For I consider it to be courteous and to indicate an ingenuous modesty, to acknowledge the sources whence we have derived assistance, and not to act as most of those have done whom I have examined. For I must inform you, that in comparing various authors with each other, I have discovered, that some of the most grave and of the latest writers have transcribed, word for word, from former works, without making any acknowledgement; not avowedly rivalling them, in the manner of Virgil, or with the candour of Cicero, who, in his treatise “De Republica<sup>59</sup>,” professes to coincide in opinion with Plato, and in his Essay on Consolation for his Daughter, says that he follows Crantor, and, in his Offices<sup>60</sup>, Panæcius; volumes, which, as you well know, ought not merely to be always in our hands, but to be learned by heart. For it is indeed the mark of a perverted mind and a bad disposition, to prefer being caught in<sup>8</sup> a theft to returning what we have borrowed, especially when we have acquired capital, by usurious interest<sup>61</sup>.

The Greeks were wonderfully happy in their titles. One work they called Κηρίον, which means that it was as sweet as a honeycomb; another Κέρας Ἀμαλθείας, or Cornu copiae, so that you might expect to get even a draught of pigeon’s milk from it<sup>62</sup>. Then they have their Flowers, their Muses, Magazines, Manuals, Gardens, Pictures, and Sketches<sup>63</sup>, all of them titles for which a man might be tempted even to forfeit his bail. But when you enter upon the works, O ye Gods and Goddesses! how full of emptiness! Our duller countrymen have merely their Antiquities, or their Examples, or their Arts. I think one of the most humorous of them has his Nocturnal Studies<sup>64</sup>, a term employed by Bibaculus; a name which he richly deserved<sup>65</sup>. Varro, indeed, is not much behind him, when he calls one of his satires A Trick and a Half, and another Turning the Tables<sup>66</sup>. Diodorus was the first among the Greeks who laid aside this trifling manner and named his history The Library<sup>67</sup>. Apion, the grammarian, indeed—he whom

Tiberius Cæsar called the Trumpeter of the World, but would rather seem to be the Bell of the Town-crier<sup>68</sup>,—supposed that every one to whom he inscribed any work would thence acquire immortality. I do not regret not having given my work a more fanciful title.

That I may not, however, appear to inveigh so completely against the Greeks, I should wish to be considered under the same point of view with those inventors of the arts of<sup>9</sup> painting and sculpture, of whom you will find an account in these volumes, whose works, although they are so perfect that we are never satisfied with admiring them, are inscribed with a temporary title<sup>69</sup>, such as “Apelles, or Polycletus, was doing this;” implying that the work was only commenced and still imperfect, and that the artist might benefit by the criticisms that were made on it and alter any part that required it, if he had not been prevented by death. It is also a great mark of their modesty, that they inscribed their works as if they were the last which they had executed, and as still in hand at the time of their death. I think there are but three works of art which are inscribed positively with the words “such a one executed this;” of these I shall give an account in the proper place. In these cases it appears, that the artist felt the most perfect satisfaction with his work, and hence these pieces have excited the envy of every one.

I, indeed, freely admit, that much may be added to my works; not only to this, but to all which I have published. By this admission I hope to escape from the carping critics<sup>70</sup>, and I have the more reason to say this, because I hear that there are certain Stoics and Logicians<sup>71</sup>, and also Epicureans (from the Grammarians<sup>72</sup> I expected as much), who are big with something against the little work I published on Grammar<sup>73</sup>; and that they have been carrying these abortions for ten years together—a longer pregnancy this than the elephant’s<sup>74</sup>. But I well know, that even a woman once wrote against Theophrastus, a man so eminent for his eloquence that he obtained his name, which signifies the<sup>10</sup> Divine speaker<sup>75</sup>, and that from this circumstance originated the proverb of choosing a tree to hang oneself<sup>76</sup>.

I cannot refrain from quoting the words of Cato the censor, which are so pertinent to this point. It appears from them, that even Cato, who wrote commentaries on military discipline<sup>77</sup>, and who had learned the military art under Africanus, or rather under Hannibal (for he could not endure Africanus<sup>78</sup>, who, when he was his general, had borne away the triumph from him), that Cato, I say, was open to the attacks of such as caught at reputation for themselves by detracting from the merits of others. And what does he say in his book? “I know, that when I shall publish what I have written, there will be many who will do all they can to depreciate it, and, especially, such as are themselves void of all merit; but I let their harangues glide by me.” Nor was the remark of Plancus<sup>79</sup> a bad one, when Asinius Pollio<sup>80</sup> was said to be preparing an oration against him, which was to be published either by himself or his children, after the death of Plancus, in order that he might not be able to answer it: “It is only ghosts that fight with the dead.” This gave such a blow to the oration, that in the opinion of<sup>11</sup> the learned

generally, nothing was ever thought more scandalous. Feeling myself, therefore, secure against these vile slanderers<sup>81</sup>, a name elegantly composed by Cato, to express their slanderous and vile disposition (for what other object have they, but to wrangle and breed quarrels?), I will proceed with my projected work.

And because the public good requires that you should be spared as much as possible from all trouble, I have subjoined to this epistle the contents of each of the following books<sup>82</sup>, and have used my best endeavours to prevent your being obliged to read them all through. And this, which was done for your benefit, will also serve the same purpose for others, so that any one may search for what he wishes, and may know where to find it. This has been already done among us by Valerius Soranus, in his work which he entitled “On Mysteries<sup>83</sup>.”

The 1st book is the Preface of the Work, dedicated to Titus Vespasian Cæsar.

The 2nd is on the World, the Elements, and the Heavenly Bodies<sup>84</sup>.

The 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th books are on Geography, in which is contained an account of the situation of the different countries, the inhabitants, the seas, towns, harbours, mountains, rivers, and dimensions, and the various tribes, some of which still exist and others have disappeared.

The 7th is on Man, and the Inventions of Man.

The 8th on the various kinds of Land Animals.

The 9th on Aquatic Animals.

The 10th on the various kinds of Birds.

12

The 11th on Insects.

The 12th on Odoriferous Plants.

The 13th on Exotic Trees.

The 14th on Vines.

The 15th on Fruit Trees.

The 16th on Forest Trees.

The 17th on Plants raised in nurseries or gardens.

The 18th on the nature of Fruits and the Cerealia, and the pursuits of the Husbandman.

The 19th on Flax, Broom<sup>85</sup>, and Gardening.

The 20th on the Cultivated Plants that are proper for food and for medicine.

The 21st on Flowers and Plants that are used for making Garlands.

The 22nd on Garlands, and Medicines made from Plants.  
The 23rd on Medicines made from Wine and from cultivated Trees.  
The 24th on Medicines made from Forest Trees.  
The 25th on Medicines made from Wild Plants.  
The 26th on New Diseases, and Medicines made, for certain Diseases, from Plants.  
The 27th on some other Plants and Medicines.  
The 28th on Medicines procured from Man and from large Animals.  
The 29th on Medical Authors, and on Medicines from other Animals.  
The 30th on Magic, and Medicines for certain parts of the Body.  
The 31st on Medicines from Aquatic Animals.  
The 32nd on the other properties of Aquatic Animals.  
The 33rd on Gold and Silver.  
The 34th on Copper and Lead, and the workers of Copper.  
The 35th on Painting, Colours, and Painters.  
The 36th on Marbles and Stones.  
The 37th on Gems.