

## Numa Pompilius

By Plutarch

(legendary, died 7th century B.C.E.)

Translated by John Dryden

Though the pedigrees of noble families of Rome go back in exact form as far as Numa Pompilius, yet there is great diversity amongst historians concerning the time in which he reigned; a certain writer called Clodius, in a book of his entitled *Strictures on Chronology*, avers that the ancient registers of Rome were lost when the city was sacked by the Gauls, and that those which are now extant were counterfeited, to flatter and serve the humour of some men who wished to have themselves derived from some ancient and noble lineage, though in reality with no claim to it. And though it be commonly reported that Numa was a scholar and a familiar acquaintance of Pythagoras, yet it is again contradicted by others, who affirm that he was acquainted with neither

the Greek language nor learning, and that he was a person of that natural talent and ability as of himself to attain to virtue, or else that he found some barbarian instructor superior to Pythagoras. Some affirm, also, that Pythagoras was not contemporary with Numa, but lived at least five generations after him; and that some other Pythagoras, a native of Sparta, who, in the sixteenth Olympiad, in the third year of which Numa became king, won a prize at the Olympic race, might, in his travel through Italy, have gained acquaintance with Numa, and assisted him in the constitution of his kingdom; whence it comes that many Laconian laws and customs appear amongst the Roman institutions. Yet, in any case, Numa was descended of the Sabines, who declare themselves to be a colony of the Lacedaemonians. And chronology, in general, is uncertain; especially when fixed by the lists of victors in the Olympic games, which were published at a late period by Hippias the Elean, and rest on no positive authority. Commencing, however, at a convenient point, we will proceed to give the most noticeable events that are recorded of the life of Numa.

It was the thirty-seventh year, counted from the foundation of Rome, when Romulus, then reigning, did, on the fifth day of the month of July, called the Caprotine Nones, offer a public sacrifice at the

Goat's Marsh, in presence of the senate and people of Rome. Suddenly the sky was darkened, a thick cloud of storm and rain settled on the earth; the common people fled in affright, and were dispersed; and in this whirlwind Romulus disappeared, his body being never found either living or dead. A foul suspicion presently attached to the patricians, and rumours were current among the people as if that they, weary of kingly government, and exasperated of late by the imperious deportment of Romulus towards them, had plotted against his life and made him away, that so they might assume the authority and government into their own hands. This suspicion they sought to turn aside by decreeing divine honours to Romulus, as to one not dead but translated to a higher condition. And Proculus, a man of note, took oath that he saw Romulus caught up into heaven in his arms and vestments, and heard him, as he ascended, cry out that they should hereafter style him by the name of Quirinus.

This trouble, being appeased, was followed by another, about the election of a new king; for the minds of the original Romans and the new inhabitants were not as yet grown into that perfect unity of temper, but that there were diversities of factions amongst the commonalty and jealousies and emulations amongst the senators; for though all agreed that it

was necessary to have a king, yet what person or of which nation was matter of dispute. For those who had been builders of the city with Romulus, and had already yielded a share of their lands and dwellings to the Sabines, were indignant at any pretension on their part to rule over their benefactors. On the other side, the Sabines could plausibly allege, that, at their king Tatius's decease, they had peaceably submitted to the sole command of Romulus; so now their turn was come to have a king chosen out of their own nation; nor did they esteem themselves to have combined with the Romans as inferiors, nor to have contributed less than they to the increase of Rome, which, without their numbers and association, could scarcely have merited the name of a city.

Thus did both parties argue and dispute their cause; but lest meanwhile discord, in the absence of all command, should occasion general confusion, it was agreed that the hundred and fifty senators should interchangeably execute the office of supreme magistrate, and each in succession, with the ensigns of royalty, should offer the solemn sacrifices and despatch public business for the space of six hours by day and six by night; which vicissitude and equal distribution of power would preclude all rivalry amongst the senators and envy from the people,

when they should behold one, elevated to the degree of a king, levelled within the space of a day to the condition of a private citizen. This form of government is termed, by the Romans, interregnum. Nor yet could they, by this plausible and modest way of rule, escape suspicion and clamour of the vulgar, as though they were changing the form of government to an oligarchy, and designing to keep the supreme power in a sort of wardship under themselves, without ever proceeding to choose a king. Both parties came at length to the conclusion that the one should choose a king out of the body of the other; the Romans make a choice of a Sabine, or the Sabines name a Roman; this was esteemed the best expedient to put an end to all party spirit, and the prince who should be chosen would have an equal affection to the one party as his electors and to the other as his kinsmen. The Sabines remitted the choice to the original Romans, and they, too, on their part, were more inclinable to receive a Sabine king elected by themselves than to see a Roman exalted by the Sabines. Consultations being accordingly held, they named Numa Pompilius, of the Sabine race, a person of that high reputation for excellence, that, though he were not actually residing at Rome, yet he was no sooner nominated than accepted by the Sabines, with acclamation almost greater than that of the electors themselves.

The choice being declared and made known to the people, principal men of both parties were appointed to visit and entreat him, that he would accept the administration of the government. Numa resided at a famous city of the Sabines called Cures, whence the Romans and Sabines gave themselves the joint name of Quirites. Pomponius, an illustrious person, was his father, and he the youngest of his four sons, being (as it had been divinely ordered) born on the twenty-first day of April, the day of the foundation of Rome. He was endued with a soul rarely tempered by nature, and disposed to virtue, which he had yet more subdued by discipline, a severe life, and the study of philosophy; means which had not only succeeded in expelling the baser passions, but also the violent and rapacious temper which barbarians are apt to think highly of; true bravery, in his judgment, was regarded as consisting in the subjugation of our passions by reason.

He banished all luxury and softness from his own home, and while citizens alike and strangers found in him an incorruptible judge and counsellor, in private he devoted himself not to amusement or lucre, but to the worship of the immortal gods, and rational contemplation of their divine power and nature. So famous was he, that Tatius, the colleague

of Romulus, chose him for his son-in-law, and gave him his only daughter, which, however, did not stimulate his vanity to desire to dwell with his father-in-law at Rome; he rather chose to inhabit with his Sabines, and cherish his own father in his old age; and Tatia, also, preferred the private conditions of her husband before the honours and splendour she might have enjoyed with her father. She is said to have died after she had been married thirteen years, and then Numa, leaving the conversation of the town, betook himself to a country life, and in a solitary manner frequented the groves and fields consecrated to the gods, passing his life in desert places. And this in particular gave occasion to the story about the goddess, namely, that Numa did not retire from human society out of any melancholy or disorder of mind, but because he had tasted the joys of more elevated intercourse, and, admitted to celestial wedlock in the love and converse of the goddess Egeria, had attained to blessedness, and to a divine wisdom.

The story evidently resembles those very ancient fables which the Phrygians have received and still recount of Attis, the Bithynians of Herodotus, the Arcadians of Endymion, not to mention several others who were thought blessed and beloved of the gods; nor does it seem strange if God, a lover, not of horses or birds, but men, should not

disdain to dwell with the virtuous and converse with the wise and temperate soul, though it be altogether hard, indeed, to believe, that any god or daemon is capable of a sensual or bodily love and passion for any human form or beauty. Though, indeed, the wise Egyptians do not plausibly make the distinction, that it may be possible for a divine spirit so to apply itself to the nature of a woman, as to imbreed in her the first beginnings of generation, while on the other side they conclude it impossible for the male kind to have any intercourse or mixture by the body with any divinity, not considering, however, that what takes place on the one side must also take place on the other; intermixture, by force of terms, is reciprocal. Not that it is otherwise than befitting to suppose that the gods feel towards men affection, and love, in the sense of affection, and in the form of care and solicitude for their virtue and their good dispositions. And, therefore, it was no error of those who feigned, that Phorbas, Hyacinthus, and Admetus were beloved by Apollo; or that Hippolytus the Sicyonian was so much in his favour, that, as often as he sailed from Sicyon to Cirrha, the Pythian prophetess uttered this heroic verse expressive of the god's attention and joy:

"Now doth Hippolytus return again,



And venture his dear life upon the main."

It is reported, also, that Pan became enamoured of Pindar for his verses, and the divine power rendered honour to Hesiod and Archilochus after their death for the sake of the Muses; there is a statement, also, that Aesculapius sojourned with Sophocles in his lifetime, of which many proofs still exist, and that, when he was dead, another deity took care for his funeral rites. And so if any credit may be given to these instances, why should we judge it incongruous, that a like spirit of the gods should visit Zaleucus, Minos, Zoroaster, Lycurgus, and Numa, the controllers of kingdoms, and the legislators for commonwealths? Nay, it may be reasonable to believe, that the gods, with a serious purpose, assist at the councils and serious debates of such men, to inspire and direct them; and visit poets and musicians, if at all in their more sportive moods; but for difference of opinion here, as Bacchylides said, "the road is broad." For there is no absurdity in the account also given, that Lycurgus and Numa, and other famous lawgivers, having the task of subduing perverse and refractory multitudes, and of introducing great innovations, themselves made this pretension to divine authority, which, if not true, assuredly was expedient for the interests of those it imposed upon.

Numa was about forty years of age when the ambassadors came to make him offers of the kingdom; the speakers were Proculus and Velesus, one or other of whom it had been thought the people would elect as their new king; the original Romans being for Proculus, and the Sabines for Velesus. Their speech was very short, supposing that, when they came to tender a kingdom, there needed little to persuade to an acceptance; but, contrary to their expectations, they found that they had to use many reasons and entreaties to induce one, that lived in peace and quietness, to accept the government of a city whose foundation and increase had been made, in a manner, in war. In presence of his father and his kinsman Marcius he returned answer that "Every alteration of a man's life is dangerous to him; but madness only could induce one who needs nothing, and is satisfied with everything, to quit a life he is accustomed to; which, whatever else it is deficient in, at any rate has the advantage of certainty over one wholly doubtful and unknown. Though, indeed, the difficulties of this government cannot even be called unknown; Romulus, who first held it, did not escape the suspicion of having plotted against the life of his colleague Tatius; nor the senate the like accusation, of having treasonably murdered Romulus. Yet Romulus had the advantage to be thought divinely

born and miraculously preserved and nurtured. My birth was mortal; I was reared and instructed by men that are known to you. The very points of my character that are most commended mark me as unfit to reign, love of retirement and of studies inconsistent with business, a passion that has become inveterate in me for peace, for unwarlike occupations, and for the society of men whose meetings are but those of worship and of kindly intercourse, whose lives in general are spent upon their farms and their pastures. I should but be, methinks, a laughingstock, while I should go about to inculcate the worship of the gods and give lessons in the love of justice and the abhorrence of violence and war, to a city whose needs are rather for a captain than for a king."

The Romans, perceiving by these words that he was declining to accept the kingdom, were the more instant and urgent with him that he would not forsake and desert them in this condition, and suffer them to relapse, as they must, into their former sedition and civil discord, there being no person on whom both parties could accord but on himself. And, at length, his father and Marcius, taking him aside, persuaded him to accept a gift so noble in itself, and tendered to him rather from heaven than from men. "Though," said they, "you neither desire

riches, being content with what you have, nor court the fame of authority, as having already the more valuable fame of virtue, yet you will consider that government itself is a service of God, who now calls out into action your qualities of justice and wisdom, which were not meant to be left useless and unemployed. Cease, therefore, to avoid and turn your back upon an office which, to a wise man, is a field for great and honourable actions, for the magnificent worship of the gods, and for the introduction of habits of piety, which authority alone can effect amongst a people. Tatius, though a foreigner, was beloved, and the memory of Romulus has received divine honours; and who knows but that this people, being victorious, may be satiated with war, and, content with the trophies and spoils they have acquired, may be, above all things, desirous to have a pacific and justice-loving prince to lead them to good order and quiet? But if, indeed, their desires are uncontrollably and madly set on war, were it not better, then, to have the reins held by such a moderating hand as is able to divert the fury another way, and that your native city and the whole Sabine nation should possess in you a bond of goodwill and friendship with this young and growing power?"

With these reasons and persuasions several auspicious omens are said

to have concurred, and the zeal, also, of his fellow-citizens, who, on understanding what message the Roman ambassadors had brought him, entreated him to accompany them, and to accept the kingdom as a means to unanimity and concord between the nations.

Numa, yielding to these inducements, having first performed divine sacrifice, proceeded to Rome, being met in his way by the senate and people, who, with an impatient desire, came forth to receive him; the women, also, welcomed him with joyful acclamations, and sacrifices were offered for him in all the temples, and so universal was the joy, that they seemed to be receiving, not a new king, but a new kingdom. In this manner he descended into the forum, where Spurius Vettius, whose turn it was to be interrex at that hour, put it to the vote; and all declared him king. Then the regalities and robes of authority were brought to him; but he refused to be invested with them until he had first consulted and been confirmed by the gods; so being accompanied by the priests and augurs, he ascended the Capitol, which at that time the Romans called the Tarpeian Hill. Then the chief of the augurs covered Numa's head, and turned his face towards the south, and, standing behind him, laid his right hand on his head, and prayed, turning his eyes every way, in expectation of some auspicious signal from the

gods. It was wonderful, meantime, with what silence and devotion the multitude stood assembled in the forum, in similar expectation and suspense, till auspicious birds appeared and passed on the right. Then Numa, apparelling himself in his royal robes, descended from the hill to the people, by whom he was received and congratulated with shouts and acclamations of welcome, as a holy king, and beloved of all the gods.

The first thing he did at his entrance into government was to dismiss the band of three hundred men which had been Romulus's life-guard, called by him Celeres, saying that he would not distrust those who put confidence in him; nor rule over a people that distrusted him. The next thing he did was to add to the two priests of Jupiter and Mars a third, in honour of Romulus, whom he called the Flamen Quirinalis. The Romans anciently called their priests Flamines, by corruption of the word Pilamines, from a certain cap which they wore, called Pileus. In those times Greek words were more mixed with the Latin than at present; thus also the royal robe, which is called, Laena, Juba says, is the same as the Greek Chlaena; and that the name of Camillus, given to the boy with both his parents living, who serves in the temple of Jupiter, was taken from the name given by some Greeks

to Mercury, denoting his office of attendance on the gods.

When Numa had, by such measures, won the favour and affection of the people, he set himself without delay to the task of bringing the hard and iron Roman temper to somewhat more of gentleness and equity. Plato's expression of a city in high fever was never more applicable than to Rome at that time; in its origin formed by daring and warlike spirits, whom bold and desperate adventure brought thither from every quarter, it had found in perpetual wars and incursions on its neighbours its after sustenance and means of growth, and in conflict with danger the source of new strength; like piles, which the blows of the hammer serve to fix into the ground. Wherefore Numa, judging it no slight undertaking to mollify and bend to peace the presumptuous and stubborn spirits of this people, began to operate upon them with the sanctions of religion. He sacrificed often and used processions and religious dances, in which most commonly he officiated in person; by such combinations of solemnity with refined and humanizing pleasures, seeking to win over and mitigate their fiery and warlike tempers. At times, also, he filled their imaginations with religious terrors, professing that strange apparitions had been seen, and dreadful voices heard; thus subduing and humbling their minds by a sense of supernatural fears.

This method which Numa used made it believed that he had been much conversant with Pythagoras; for in the philosophy of the one, as in the policy of the other, man's relations to the deity occupy a great place. It is said, also, that the solemnity of his exterior garb and gestures was adopted by him from the same feeling with Pythagoras. For it is said of Pythagoras, that he had taught an eagle to come at his call, and stoop down to him in his flight; and that, as he passed among the people assembled at the Olympic games, he showed them his golden thigh; besides many other strange and miraculous seeming practices, on which Timon the Philasian wrote the distich-

"Who, of the glory of a juggler proud,  
With solemn talk imposed upon the crowd."

In like manner Numa spoke of a certain goddess or mountain nymph that was in love with him, and met him in secret, as before related; and professed that he entertained familiar conversation with the Muses, to whose teaching he ascribed the greatest part of his revelations; and amongst them, above all, he recommended to the veneration of the Romans one in particular, whom he named Tacita, the silent; which



he did perhaps in imitation and honour of the Pythagorean silence. His opinion, also, of images is very agreeable to the doctrine of Pythagoras; who conceived of the first principle of being as transcending sense and passion, invisible and incorrupt, and only to be apprehended by abstract intelligence. So Numa forbade the Romans to represent God in the form of man or beast, nor was there any painted or graven image of a deity admitted amongst them for the space of the first hundred and seventy years, all of which time their temples and chapels were kept free and pure from images; to such baser objects they deemed it impious to liken the highest, and all access to God impossible, except by the pure act of the intellect. His sacrifices, also, had great similitude to the ceremonial of Pythagoras, for they were not celebrated with effusion of blood, but consisted of flour, wine, and the least costly offerings. Other external proofs, too, are urged to show the connection Numa had with Pythagoras. The comic writer Epicharmus, an ancient author, and of the school of Pythagoras, in a book of his dedicated to Antenor, records that Pythagoras was made a freeman of Rome. Again, Numa gave to one of his four sons the name of Mamercus, which was the name of one of the sons of Pythagoras; from whence, as they say, sprang that ancient patrician family of the Aemilli, for that the king gave him in sport the surname of Aemilius,

for his engaging and graceful manner in speaking. I remember, too, that when I was at Rome, I heard many say, that, when the oracle directed two statues to be raised, one to the wisest and another to the most valiant man in Greece, they erected two of brass, one representing Alcibiades, and the other Pythagoras.

But to pass by these matters, which are full of uncertainty and not so important as to be worth our time to insist on them, the original constitution of the priests, called Pontifices, is ascribed unto Numa, and he himself was, it is said, the first of them; and that they have the name of Pontifices from potens, powerful, because they attend the service of the gods, who have power to command over all. Others make the word refer to exceptions of impossible cases; the priests were to perform all the duties possible to them; if anything lay beyond their power, the exception was not to be cavilled at. The most common opinion is the most absurd, which derives this word from pons, and assigns the priests the title of bridge-makers. The sacrifices performed on the bridge were amongst the most sacred and ancient, and the keeping and repairing of the bridge attached, like any other public sacred office, to the priesthood. It was accounted not simply unlawful, but a positive sacrilege, to pull down the wooden bridge; which moreover

is said, in obedience to an oracle, to have been built entirely of timber and fastened with wooden pins, without nails or cramps of iron. The stone bridge was built a very long time after when Aemilius was quaestor, and they do, indeed, say also that the wooden bridge was not so old as Numa's time, but was finished by Ancus Marcius, when he was king, who was the grandson of Numa by his daughter.

The office of Pontifex Maximus, or chief priest, was to declare and interpret the divine law, or, rather, to preside over sacred rites; he not only prescribed rules for public ceremony, but regulated the sacrifices of private persons, not suffering them to vary from established custom, and giving information to every one of what was requisite for purposes of worship or supplication. He was also guardian of the vestal virgins, the institution of whom, and of their perpetual fire, was attributed to Numa, who, perhaps, fancied the charge of pure and uncorrupted flames would be fitly intrusted to chaste and unpolluted persons, or that fire, which consumes, but produces nothing, bears an analogy to the virgin estate. In Greece, wherever a perpetual holy fire is kept, as at Delphi and Athens the charge of it is committed, not to virgins, but widows past the time of marriage. And in case by any accident it should happen that this fire became extinct, as

the holy lamp was at Athens under the tyranny of Aristion, and at Delphi, when that temple was burnt by the Medes, as also in the time of the Mithridatic and Roman civil war, when not only the fire was extinguished, but the altar demolished, then, afterwards, in kindling this fire again, it was esteemed an impiety to light it from common sparks or flame, or from anything but the pure and unpolluted rays of the sun, which they usually effect by concave mirrors, of a figure formed by the revolution of an isosceles rectangular triangle, all the lines from the circumference of which meeting in a centre, by holding it in the light of the sun they can collect and concentrate all its rays at this one point of convergence; where the air will now become rarefied, and any light, dry, combustible matter will kindle as soon as applied, under the effect of the rays, which here acquired the substance and active force of fire. Some are of opinion that these vestals had no other business than the preservation of this fire; but others conceive that they were keepers of other divine secrets concealed from all but themselves, of which we have told all that may lawfully be asked or told, in the life of Camillus. Gegania and Verenia, it is recorded, were the names of the first two virgins consecrated and ordained by Numa; Canuleia and Tarpeia succeeded: Servius afterwards added two, and the number of four has continued the present time.

The statutes prescribed by Numa for the vestals were these: that they should take a vow of virginity for the space of thirty years, the first ten of which they were to spend in learning their duties, the second ten in performing them, and the remaining ten in teaching and instructing others. Thus the whole term being completed, it was lawful for them to marry, and, leaving the sacred order, to choose any condition of life that pleased them; but this permission few, as they say, made use of; and in cases where they did so, it was observed that their change was not a happy one, but accompanied ever after with regret and melancholy; so that the greater number, from religious fears and scruples, forbore, and continued to old age and death in the strict observance of a single life.

For this condition he compensated by great privileges and prerogatives; as that they had power to make a will in the lifetime of their father; that they had a free administration of their own affairs without guardian or tutor, which was the privilege of women who were the mothers of three children; when they go abroad, they have the fasces carried before them; and if in their walks they chance to meet a criminal on his way to execution, it saves his life, upon oath made that the

meeting was an accidental one, and not concerted or of set purpose. Any one who presses upon the chair on which they are carried, is put to death. If these vestals commit any minor fault, they are punishable by the high priest only, who scourges the offender, sometimes with her clothes off, in a dark place, with a curtain drawn between; but she that has broken her vow is buried alive near the gate called Collina, where a little mound of earth stands inside the city, reaching some little distance, called in Latin agger; under it a narrow room is constructed, to which a descent is made by stairs; here they prepare a bed, and light a lamp, and leave a small quantity of victuals, such as bread, water, a pail of milk, and some oil; that so that body which had been consecrated and devoted to the most sacred service of religion might not be said to perish by such a death as famine. The culprit herself is put in a litter, which they cover over, and tie her down with cords on it, so that nothing she utters may be heard. They then take her to the forum; all people silently go out of the way as she passes, and such as follow accompany the bier with solemn and speechless sorrow; and indeed, there is not any spectacle more appalling, nor any day observed by the city with greater appearance of gloom and sadness. When they come to the place of execution, the officers loose the cords, and then the high priest, lifting his hands to heaven,

pronounces certain prayers to himself before the act; then he brings out the prisoner, being still covered, and placing her upon the steps that lead down to the cell, turns away his face with the rest of the priests; the stairs are drawn up after she has gone down, and a quantity of earth is heaped up over the entrance to the cell, so as to prevent it from being distinguished from the rest of the mound. This is the punishment of those who break their vow of virginity.

It is said, also, that Numa built the temple of Vesta, which was intended for a repository of the holy fire, of a circular form, not to represent the figure of the earth, as if that were the same as Vesta, but that of the general universe, in the centre of which the Pythagoreans place the element of fire, and give it the name of Vesta and the unit; and do not hold that the earth is immovable, or that it is situated in the centre of the globe, but that it keeps a circular motion about the seat of fire, and is not in the number of the primary elements; in this agreeing with the opinion of Plato, who, they say, in his later life, conceived that the earth held a lateral position, and that the central and sovereign space was reserved for some nobler body.

There was yet a farther use of the priests, and that was to give people directions in the national usages at funeral rites. Numa taught them to regard these offices, not as a pollution, but as a duty paid to the gods below, into whose hands the better part of us is transmitted; especially they were to worship the goddess Libitina, who presided over all the ceremonies performed at burials; whether they meant hereby Proserpina, or, as the most learned of the Romans conceive, Venus, not inaptly attributing the beginning and end of man's life to the agency of one and the same diety. Numa also prescribed rules for regulating the days of mourning, according to certain times and ages. As, for example, a child of three years was not to be mourned for at all; one older, up to ten years, for as many months as it was years old; and the longest time of mourning for any person whatsoever was not to exceed the term of ten months; which was the time appointed for women that lost their husbands to continue in widowhood. If any married again before that time, by the laws of Numa, she was to sacrifice a cow big with calf.

Numa, also, was founder of several other orders of priests, two of which I shall mention, the Salii and the Fecials, which are among the clearest proofs of the devoutness and sanctity of his character.



These Fecials, or guardians of peace, seem to have had their name from their office, which was to put a stop to disputes by conference and speech; for it was not allowable to take up arms until they had declared all hopes of accommodation to be at an end, for in Greek, too, we call it peace when disputes are settled by words, and not by force. The Romans commonly despatched the Fecials, or heralds, to those who had offered them injury, requesting satisfaction; and, in case they refused, they then called the gods to witness, and, with imprecations upon themselves and their country should they be acting unjustly, so declared war; against their will, or without their consent, it was lawful neither for soldier nor king to take up arms; the war was begun with them, and when they had first handed it over to the commander as a just quarrel, then his business was to deliberate of the manner and ways to carry it on. It is believed that the slaughter and destruction which the Gauls made of the Romans was a judgment on the city for neglect of this religious proceeding; for that when these barbarians besieged the Clusinians, Fabius Ambustus was despatched to their camp to negotiate peace for the besieged; and, on their returning a rude refusal, Fabius imagined that his office of ambassador was at an end, and, rashly engaging on the side of the Clusinians, challenged the bravest of the enemy to a single combat. It was the fortune of

Fabius to kill his adversary, and to take his spoils; but when the Gauls discovered it, they sent a herald to Rome to complain against him; since, before war was declared, he had, against the law of nations, made a breach of the peace. The matter being debated in the senate, the Fecials were of opinion that Fabius ought to be consigned into the hands of the Gauls; but he, being forewarned of their judgment, fled to the people, by whose protection and favour he escaped the sentence. On this, the Gauls marched with their army to Rome, where having taken the capitol, they sacked the city. The particulars of all which are fully given in the history of Camillus.

The origin of the Salii is this. In the eighth year of the reign of Numa, a terrible pestilence, which traversed all Italy, ravaged likewise the city of Rome; and the citizens being in distress and despondent, a brazen target, they say, fell from heaven into hands of Numa, who gave them this marvellous account of it: that Egeria and the Muses had assured him it was sent from heaven for the cure and safety of the city, and that, to keep it secure, he was ordered by them to make eleven others, so like in dimensions and form to the original that no thief should be able to distinguish the true from the counterfeit. He farther declared, that he was commanded to consecrate to the Muses

the place, and the fields about it, where they had been chiefly wont to meet with him, and that the spring which watered the fields should be hallowed for the use of the vestal virgins, who were to wash and cleanse the penetralia of their sanctuary with those holy waters.

The truth of all which was speedily verified by the cessation of the pestilence. Numa displayed the target to the artificers and bade them show their skill in making others like it; all despaired, until at length one Mamurius Veturius, an excellent workman, happily hit upon it, and made all so exactly the same that Numa himself was at a loss and could not distinguish. The keeping of these targets was committed to the charge of certain priests, called Salii, who did not receive their name, as some tell the story, from Salius, a dancing-master, born in Samothrace, or at Mantinea who taught the way of dancing in arms; but more truly from that jumping dance which the Salii themselves use, when in the month of March they carry the sacred targets through the city; at which procession they are habited in short frocks of purple, girt with a broad belt studded with brass; on their heads they wear a brass helmet and carry in their hands short daggers, which they clash every now and then against the targets. But the chief thing is the dance itself. They move with much grace, performing, in quick time and close order, various intricate figures, with a great display

of strength and agility. The targets were called Ancilia from their form; for they are not made round, nor like proper targets, of a complete circumference, but are cut out into a wavy line, the ends of which are rounded off and turned in at the thickest part towards each other; so that their shape is curvilinear, or, in Greek, ancylon; or the name may come from ancon, the elbow, on which they are carried. Thus Juba writes, who is eager to make it Greek. But it might be, for that matter, from its having come down anecathen, from above; or from its akesis, or cure of diseases; or auchmon lysis, because it put an end to a drought; or from its anaschesis, or relief from calamities, which is the origin of the Athenian name Anaces, given to Castor and Pollux; if we must, that is, reduce it to Greek. The reward which Mamurius received for his art was to be mentioned and commemorated in the verses which the Salii sang, as they danced in their arms through the city; though some will have it that they do not say Veturium Mamuium, but Veterem Memoriam, ancient remembrance.

After Numa had in this manner instituted these several orders of priests, he erected, near the temple of Vesta, what is called to this day Regia, or king's house, where he spent the most part of his time performing divine service, instructing the priests, or conversing with them on

sacred subjects. He had another house upon the Mount Quirinalis, the site of which they show to this day. In all public processions and solemn prayers, criers were sent before to give notice to the people that they should forbear their work, and rest. They say that the Pythagoreans did not allow people to worship and pray to their gods by the way, but would have them go out from their houses direct, with their minds set upon the duty, and Numa, in like manner, wished that his citizens should neither see nor hear any religious service in a perfunctory and inattentive manner, but, laying aside all other occupations, should apply their minds to religion as to a most serious business; and that the streets should be free from all noises and cries that accompany manual labour, and clear for the sacred solemnity. Some traces of this custom remain at Rome to this day, for, when the consul begins to take auspices or do sacrifice, they call out to the people, Hoc age, Attend to this, whereby the auditors then present are admonished to compose and recollect themselves. Many other of his precepts resemble those of the Pythagoreans. The Pythagoreans said, for example, "Thou shalt not make a peck-measure thy seat to sit on. Thou shalt not stir the fire with a sword. When thou goest out upon a journey, look not behind thee. When thou sacrificest to the celestial gods, let it be with an odd number, and when to the terrestrial, with even." The significance

of each of which precepts they would not commonly disclose. So some of Numa's traditions have no obvious meaning. "Thou shalt not make libation to the gods of wine from an unpruned vine. No sacrifices shall be performed without meal. Turn round to pay adoration to the gods; sit after you have worshipped." The first two directions seem to denote the cultivation and subduing of the earth as a part of religion; and as to the turning which the worshippers are to use in divine adoration, it is said to represent the rotatory motion of the world. But, in my opinion, the meaning rather is, that the worshipper, since the temples front the east, enters with his back to the rising sun; there, faces round to the east, and so turns back to the god of the temple, by this circular movement referring the fulfilment of his prayers to both divinities. Unless, indeed, this change of posture may have a mystical meaning, like the Egyptian wheels, and signify to us the instability of human fortune, and that, in whatever way God changes and turns our lot and condition, we should rest contented, and accept it as right and fitting. They say, also, that the sitting after worship was to be by way of omen of their petitions being granted, and the blessing they asked assured to them. Again, as different courses of actions are divided by intervals of rest, they might seat themselves after the completion of what they had done, to seek favour of the

gods for beginning something else. And this would very well suit with what we had before; the lawgiver wants to habituate us to make our petitions to the deity not by the way, and, as it were, in a hurry, when we have other things to do, but with time and leisure to attend to it. By such discipline and schooling in religion, the city passed insensibly into such a submissiveness of temper, and stood in such awe and reverence of the virtue of Numa, that they received, with an undoubted assurance, whatever he delivered though never so fabulous, and thought nothing incredible or impossible from him.

There goes a story that he once invited a great number of citizens to an entertainment, at which the dishes in which the meat was served were very homely and plain, and the repast itself poor and ordinary fare; the guests seated, he began to tell them that the goddess that consulted with him was then at that time come to him; when on a sudden the room was furnished with all sorts of costly drinking-vessels, and the tables loaded with rich meats, and a most sumptuous entertainment. But the dialogue which is reported to have passed between him and Jupiter surpasses all the fabulous legends that were ever invented. They say that before Mount Aventine was inhabited or enclosed within the walls of the city, two demigods, Picus and Faunus, frequented

the springs and thick shades of that place; which might be two satyrs, or Pans except that they went about Italy playing the same sorts of tricks, by skill in drugs and magic, as are ascribed by the Greeks to the Dactyli of Mount Ida. Numa contrived one day to surprise these demigods, by mixing wine and honey in the waters of the spring of which they usually drank. On finding themselves ensnared, they changed themselves into various shapes, dropping their own form and assuming every kind of unusual and hideous appearance; but when they saw they were safely entrapped, and in no possibility of getting free, they revealed to him many secrets and future events; and particularly a charm for thunder and lightning, still in use, performed with onions and hair and pilchards. Some say they did not tell him the charm, but by their magic brought down Jupiter out of heaven; and that he then, in an angry manner answering the inquiries, told Numa, that, if he would charm the thunder and lightning, he must do it with heads. "How," said Numa, "with the heads of onions?" "No," replied Jupiter, "of men." But Numa, willing to elude the cruelty of this receipt, turned it another way, saying, "Your meaning is, the hairs of men's heads." "No," replied Jupiter, "with living"- "pilchards," said Numa, interrupting him. These answers he had learnt from Egeria. Jupiter returned again to heaven, pacified and ileos, or propitious. The place



was, in remembrance of him, called Illicium, from this Greek word; and the spell in this manner effected.

These stories, laughable as they are, show us the feelings which people then, by force of habit, entertained towards the deity. And Numa's own thoughts are said to have been fixed to that degree on divine objects, that he once, when a message was brought to him that "Enemies are approaching," answered with a smile, "And I am sacrificing." It was he, also, that built the temples of Faith and Terminus, and taught the Romans that the name of Faith was the most solemn oath that they could swear. They still use it; and to the god Terminus, or Boundary, they offer to this day both public and private sacrifices, upon the borders and stone-marks of their land; living victims now, though anciently those sacrifices were solemnized without blood; for Numa reasoned that the god of boundaries, who watched over peace, and testified to fair dealing, should have no concern with blood. It is very clear that it was this king who first prescribed bounds to the territory of Rome; for Romulus would but have openly betrayed how much he had encroached on his neighbours' lands, had he ever set limits to his own; for boundaries are, indeed, a defence to those who choose to observe them, but are only a testimony against the dishonesty of those

who break through them. The truth is, the portion of lands which the Romans possessed at the beginning was very narrow, until Romulus enlarged them by war; all those acquisitions Numa now divided amongst the indigent commonalty, wishing to do away with that extreme want which is a compulsion to dishonesty, and, by turning the people to husbandry, to bring them, as well as their lands, into better order. For there is no employment that gives so keen and quick a relish for peace as husbandry and a country life, which leave in men all that kind of courage that makes them ready to fight in defence of their own, while it destroys the licence that breaks out into acts of injustice and rapacity. Numa, therefore, hoping agriculture would be a sort of charm to captivate the affections of his people to peace, and viewing it rather as a means to moral than to economical profit, divided all the lands into several parcels, to which he gave the name of pagus, or parish, and over every one of them he ordained chief overseers; and, taking a delight sometimes to inspect his colonies in person, he formed his judgment of every man's habits by the results; of which being witness himself, he preferred those to honours and employments who had done well, and by rebukes and reproaches incited the indolent and careless to improvement. But of all his measures the most commended was his distribution of the people by their trades into companies or guilds;

for as the city consisted, or rather did not consist of, but was divided into, two different tribes, the diversity between which could not be effaced and in the meantime prevented all unity and caused perpetual tumult and ill-blood, reflecting how hard substances that do not readily mix when in the lump may, by being beaten into powder, in that minute form he combined, he resolved to divide the whole population into a number of small divisions, and thus hoped, by introducing other distinctions, to obliterate the original and great distinction, which would be lost among the smaller. So, distinguishing the whole people by the several arts and trades, he formed the companies of musicians, goldsmiths, carpenters, dyers, shoemakers, skinners, braziers, and potters; and all other handicraftsmen he composed and reduced into a single company, appointing every one their proper courts, councils, and religious observances. In this manner all factious distinctions began, for the first time, to pass out of use, no person any longer being either thought of or spoken of under the notion of a Sabine or a Roman, a Romulian or a Tatian; and the new division became a source of general harmony and intermixture.

He is also much to be commended for the repeal, or rather amendment, of that law which gives power to fathers to sell their children; he

exempted such as were married, conditionally that it had been with the liking and consent of their parents; for it seemed a hard thing that a woman who had given herself in marriage to a man whom she judged free should afterwards find herself living with a slave.

He attempted, also, the formation of a calendar, not with absolute exactness, yet not without some scientific knowledge. During the reign of Romulus, they had let their months run on without any certain or equal term; some of them contained twenty days, others thirty-five, others more; they had no sort of knowledge of the inequality in the motions of the sun and moon; they only kept to the one rule that the whole course of the year contained three hundred and sixty days. Numa, calculating the difference between the lunar and the solar year at eleven days, for that the moon completed her anniversary course in three hundred and fifty-four days, and the sun in three hundred and sixty-five, to remedy this incongruity doubled the eleven days, and every other year added an intercalary month, to follow February, consisting of twenty-two days, and called by the Romans the month Mercedinus. This amendment, however, itself, in course of time, came to need other amendments. He also altered the order of the months; for March, which was reckoned the first he put into the third place; and January, which

was the eleventh, he made the first; and February, which was the twelfth and last, the second. Many will have it, that it was Numa, also, who added the two months of January and February; for in the beginning they had had a year of ten months; as there are barbarians who count only three; the Arcadians, in Greece, had but four; the Acarnanians, six. The Egyptian year at first, they say, was of one month; afterwards, of four; and so, though they live in the newest of all countries, they have the credit of being a more ancient nation than any, and reckon, in their genealogies, a prodigious number of years, counting months, that is, as years. That the Romans, at first, comprehended the whole year within ten, and not twelve months, plainly appears by the name of the last, December, meaning the tenth month; and that March was the first is likewise evident, for the fifth month after it was called Quintilis, and the sixth Sextilis, and so the rest; whereas, if January and February had, in this account, preceded March, Quintilis would have been fifth in name and seventh in reckoning. It was also natural that March, dedicated to Mars, should be Romulus's first and April, named from Venus, or Aphrodite, his second month; in it they sacrifice to Venus, and the women bathe on the calends, or first day of it, with myrtle garlands on their heads. But others, because of its being p and not ph, will not allow of the derivation

of this word from Aphrodite, but say it is called April from aperio, Latin for to open, because that this month is high spring, and opens and discloses the buds and flowers. The next is called May, from Maia, the mother of Mercury, to whom it is sacred; then June follows, so called from Juno; some, however, derive them from the two ages, old and young, majores, being their name for older, and juniores for younger men. To the other months they gave denominations according to their order; so the fifth was called Quintilis, Sextilis the sixth, and the rest, September, October, November, and December. Afterwards Quintilis received the name of Julius, from Caesar, who defeated Pompey; as also Sextilis that of Augustus, from the second Caesar, who had that title. Domitian, also, in imitation, gave the two other following months his own names, of Germanicus and Domitianus; but, on his being slain, they recovered their ancient denominations of September and October. The two last are the only ones that have kept their names throughout without any alteration. Of the months which were added or transposed in their order by Numa, February comes from februa; and is as much a Purification month; in it they make offerings to the dead, and celebrate the Lupercalia, which, in most points, resembles a purification. January was also called from janus, and precedence given to it by Numa before March, which was dedicated to the god Mars;

because, as I conceive, he wished to take every opportunity of intimating that the arts and studies of peace are to be preferred before those of war. For this Janus, whether in remote antiquity he were a demigod or a king, was certainly a great lover of civil and social unity, and one who reclaimed men from brutal and savage living; for which reason they figure him with two faces, to represent the two states and conditions out of the one of which he brought mankind, to lead them into the other. His temple at Rome has two gates, which they call the gates of war, because they stand open in the time of war, and shut in the times of peace; of which latter there was very seldom an example, for, as the Roman empire was enlarged and extended, it was so encompassed with barbarous nations and enemies to be resisted, that it was seldom or never at peace. Only in the time of Augustus Caesar, after he had overcome Antony, this temple was shut; as likewise once before, when Marcus Atilius and Titus Manlius were consuls; but then it was not long before, wars breaking out, the gates were again opened. But, during the reign of Numa, those gates were never seen open a single day, but continued constantly shut for a space of forty-three years together; such an entire and universal cessation of war existed. For not only had the people of Rome itself been softened and charmed into a peaceful temper by the just and mild rule of a pacific prince,

but even the neighbouring cities, as if some salubrious and gentle air had blown from Rome upon them, began to experience a change of feeling, and partook in the general longing for the sweets of peace and order, and for life employed in the quiet tillage of soil, bringing up of children, and worship of the gods. Festival days and sports, and the secure and peaceful interchange of friendly visits and hospitalities prevailed all through the whole of Italy. The love of virtue and justice flowed from Numa's wisdom as from a fountain, and the serenity of his spirit diffused itself, like a calm, on all sides; so that the hyperboles of poets were flat and tame to express what then existed; as that-

"Over the iron shield the spiders hang their threads," or that-

"Rust eats the pointed spear and double-edged sword.  
No more is heard the trumpet's brazen roar,  
Sweet sleep is banished from our eyes no more."

For during the whole reign of Numa, there was neither war, nor sedition, nor innovation in the state, nor any envy or ill-will to his person, nor plot or conspiracy from views of ambition. Either fear of the



gods that were thought to watch over him, or reverence for his virtue, or divine felicity of fortune that in his days preserved human innocence, made his reign, by whatever means, a living example and verification of that saying which Plato, long afterwards, ventured to pronounce, that the sole and only hope of respite or remedy for human evils was in some happy conjunction of events which should unite in a single person the power of a king and the wisdom of a philosopher, so as to elevate virtue to control and mastery over vice. The wise man is blessed in himself, and blessed also are the auditors who can bear and receive those words which flow from his mouth; and perhaps, too, there is no need of compulsion or menaces to affect the multitude, for the mere sight itself of a shining and conspicuous example of virtue in the life of their prince will bring them spontaneously to virtue, and to a conformity with that blameless and blessed life of good-will and mutual concord, supported by temperance and justice, which is the highest benefit that human means can confer; and he is the truest ruler who can best introduce it into the hearts and practice of his subjects. It is the praise of Numa that no one seems ever to have discerned this so clearly as he.

As to his children and wives, there is a diversity of reports by several

authors; some will have it that he never had any other wife than Tatia; nor more children than one daughter called Pompilia; others will have it that he left also four sons, namely, Pompo, Pinus, Calpus, and Mamercus, every one of whom had issue, and from them descended the noble and illustrious families of Pomponii, Pinarii, Calpurnii, and Mamerci, which for this reason took also the surname of Rex, or King. But there is a third set of writers who say that these pedigrees are but a piece of flattery used by writers who, to gain favour with these great families, made them fictitious genealogies from the lineage of Numa; and that Pompilia was not the daughter of Tatia, but Lucretia, another wife whom he married after he came to his kingdom; however, all of them agree in opinion that she was married to the son of that Marcius who persuaded him to accept the government, and accompanied him to Rome, where, as a mark of honour, he was chosen into the senate, and after the death of Numa, standing in competition with Tullus Hostilius for the kingdom, and being disappointed of the election, in discontent killed himself; his son Marcius, however, who had married Pompilia, continuing at Rome, was the father of Ancus Marcius, who succeeded Tullus Hostilius in the kingdom, and was but five years of age when Numa died.

Numa lived something above eighty years, and then, as Piso writes, was not taken out of the world by a sudden or acute disease, but died of old age and by a gradual and gentle decline. At his funeral all the glories of his life were consummated, when all the neighbouring states in alliance and amity with Rome met to honour and grace the rites of his interment with garlands and public presents; the senators carried the bier on which his corpse was laid, and the priests followed and accompanied the solemn procession; while a general crowd, in which women and children took part, followed with such cries and weeping as if they had bewailed the death and loss of some most dear relation taken away in the flower of age, and not an old and worn-out king. It is said that his body, by his particular command, was not burnt, but that they made, in conformity with his order, two stone coffins, and buried both under the hill Janiculum, in one of which his body was laid, and the other his sacred books, which, as the Greek legislators their tables, he had written out for himself, but had so long inculcated the contents of them, whilst he lived, into the minds and hearts of the priests, that their understandings became fully possessed with the whole spirit and purpose of them; and he therefore bade that they should be buried with his body, as though such holy precepts could not without irreverence be left to circulate in mere lifeless writings.

For this very reason, they say, the Pythagoreans bade that their precepts should not be committed to paper, but rather preserved in the living memories of those who were worthy to receive them; and when some of their out-of-the-way and abstruse geometrical processes had been divulged to an unworthy person, they said the gods threatened to punish this wickedness and profanity by a signal and wide-spreading calamity. With these several instances concurring to show a similarity in the lives of Numa and Pythagoras, we may easily pardon those who seek to establish the fact of a real acquaintance between them.

Valerius Antias writes that the books which were buried in the aforesaid chest or coffin of stone were twelve volumes of holy writ and twelve others of Greek philosophy, and that about four hundred years afterwards, when P. Cornelius and M. Baebius were consuls, in a time of heavy rains, a violent torrent washed away the earth, and dislodged the chests of stone; and, their covers falling off, one of them was found wholly empty, without the least relic of any human body; in the other were the books before mentioned, which the praetor Petilius having read and perused, made oath in the senate, that, in his opinion, it was not fit for their contents to be made public to the people; whereupon the volumes were all carried to the Comitium, and there burnt.

It is the fortune of all good men that their virtue rises in glory after their deaths, and that the envy which evil men conceive against them never outlives them long; some have the happiness even to see it die before them; but in Numa's case, also, the fortunes of the succeeding kings served as foils to set off the brightness of his reputation. For after him there were five kings, the last of whom ended his old age in banishment, being deposed from his crown; of the other four, three were assassinated and murdered by treason; the other, who was Tullus Hostilius, that immediately succeeded Numa, derided his virtues, and especially his devotion to religious worship, as a cowardly and mean-spirited occupation, and diverted the minds of the people to war; but was checked in these youthful insolences, and was himself driven by an acute and tormenting disease into superstitions wholly different from Numa's piety, and left others also to participate in these terrors when he died by the stroke of a thunderbolt.

THE END