

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst on the manners of the Roman aristocracy

July 30, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

A worthy reminder that stern ethic is more valuable than great amounts of schooling, and that enforced custom can mitigate a lacking in virtue. Rusticism-versus-pomp is less pertinent.

“In speaking of Roman society, one has to divide it into three distinct groups: Roman society proper i.e., the Roman aristocracy, the Diplomatic Corps, and the foreigners. Roman aristocratic society is one of the best in the world. The good breeding which is a peculiar and inborn characteristic of the Roman people, this fine feeling for good form natural to all the higher classes, is specially developed in the aristocracy and gives to society a polish of manners and behaviour which makes a most agreeable impression on all persons of taste. There is a certain stiffness which strikes one at first, but disappears on further acquaintance, and there remains in intimate relations an impression of exquisite reserve and courtesy. There is not much education among the higher classes. The men, with few exceptions, are very ignorant. The women are more cultivated though their education is very imperfect. The men do not go to public schools, or try in any way to acquire knowledge. When a young man has got beyond the elementary stages and knows a little French his education is at an end, and he is turned out into the world very carefully dressed. A few go on to study at the Universities. They have no prospect of making a career for themselves, so they have no incentive to complete their education. They drive about the streets and the Pincio, and flutter from one party to another; they serve their time in the Guardia nobile if their rank entitles them; they marry as early as possible if they have any prospect of an independent position, and enjoy life. For the most part they are harmless creatures, the more accomplished in all the ways of their world as that world is the end and aim of their existence, careful as all Romans are to avoid the difficulties and dangers of life, and much astonished if they hear that there are people who have ample means and yet give themselves up ‘to drudge and slave and die in their travail.’”

“The women have mostly a French education, but a few of the younger ones an original Italian cultivation, with some acquaintance with their own authors, and an interest in their own country and its history. Their knowledge comes little to the surface, however, as they fear above all things to be called Blue-stockings.”

“Their morals are, on the whole, good. At least one doesn’t see much wrong in society. Flirtation, so called, is tabooed. One may guess that certain relations exist between men and women one meets in society, but there is very little to be seen. I am only speaking now of the highest classes, i.e., the Roman princes; of what goes on in the mezzo ceto (middle-class society) I cannot say. The nobles of the second rank, who are admitted into this patrician society and are on sufferance there are not of much account, and all kinds of scandalous gossip is current about them.”

“Family life amongst the Roman aristocracy is still quite patriarchal. They all meet together for prayers, morning and evening, in the best families. Marriages are not made from inclination, but are arranged by agreement between the heads of the two families, *et les jeunes gens ne s’en trouvent pas plus mal*. Extravagance in a young girl in the best families is impossible. When a marriage is arranged all the details of daily life are set down in the contract, so that the young couple have their existence mapped out for them, and not only the amount of the dowry is known, but also the amount of their expenditure, how often they may go to the theatre, how much travelling they can afford, how many servants, horses, and carriages they can keep, &c. &c. This is necessary as marriages are contracted very early, and husbands and wives are mostly of the same age, and equally inexperienced.”

“Nor are these peculiarities confined to the aristocracy. With some modifications the same customs are found among the lower classes also, and these last think it perfectly correct that the same habits should prevail amongst the aristocracy, only on a different scale. The Roman aristocracy, with all their faults, have a greater regard and respect for the lower classes than we have in Germany, and are

more in touch with them. The envy of the higher classes and the democratic revolutionary spirit which with us extends through all society exists here only amongst the heads of the revolutionary societies, and not in the hearts of the people.”

— *Memoirs of Prince Chlodwig of Hohenlohe-Schillingsfuerst* (1906), taking place c.1857, ([source \(https://archive.org/stream/memoirsauthorise01hoheuoft#page/80\)](https://archive.org/stream/memoirsauthorise01hoheuoft#page/80))

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