

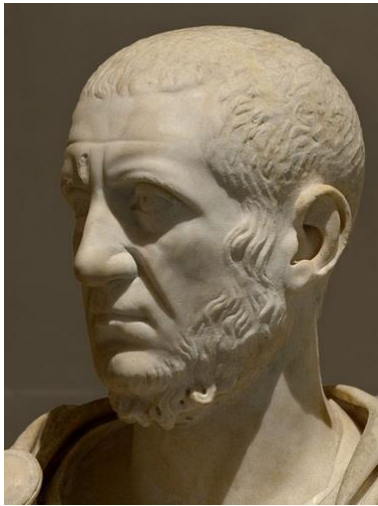
**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
PUBLIUS CORNELIUS TACITUS
THE LIFE OF AGRICOLA,
GERMANIA, DIALOGUE ON
ORATORY, THE HISTORIES, THE
ANNALS
Illustrated**

THE TRANSLATIONS

THE LIFE OF AGRICOLA

*Translated by John
Aikin*

Written circa AD 98, this biography recounts the life of Tacitus' father-in-law Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the eminent Roman general, and also briefly spans the geography and ethnography of ancient Britain. The *Agricola* was published following the assassination of Domitian in AD 96, at a time when the turmoil of the regime change allowed a new-found freedom to publish such works.



During the reign of Domitian, Agricola, a faithful imperial general, had been the most important general involved in the conquest of a large part of Britain. The proud tone of the biography recalls the style of the *laudationes funebres* (funeral speeches). A quick résumé of the career of Agricola prior to his mission in Britain is followed by a narration of the conquest of the island. There is a geographical and ethnological digression, taken not only from notes and memories of Agricola, but also from Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*. Tacitus exalts the character of his father-in-law, by demonstrating how, as governor of Roman Britain and commander of the army, he attended to matters of state

with fidelity, honesty and competence, even under the government of Domitian. Critiques of this unpopular Emperor and his regime of spying and repression come to the fore at the work's conclusion. Agricola remained uncorrupted; in disgrace under Domitian, dying without seeking the glory of an ostentatious martyrdom. Tacitus condemns the suicide of the Stoics as of no benefit to the state. Although Tacitus makes no clear statement as to whether the death of Agricola was from natural causes or ordered by Domitian, he does state that rumours were voiced in Rome that Agricola was poisoned on the Emperor's orders.

[This work is supposed by the commentators to have been written before the treatise on the manners of the Germans, in the third consulship of the emperor Nerva, and the second of Verginius Rufus, in the year of Rome 850, and of the Christian era 97. Brotier accedes to this opinion; but the reason which he assigns does not seem to be satisfactory. He observes that Tacitus, in the third section, mentions the emperor Nerva; but as he does not call him Divus Nerva, the deified Nerva, the learned commentator infers that Nerva was still living. This reasoning might have some weight, if we did not read, in section 44,

that it was the ardent wish of Agricola that he might live to behold Trajan in the imperial seat. If Nerva was then alive, the wish to see another in his room would have been an awkward compliment to the reigning prince. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Lipsius thinks this very elegant tract was written at the same time with the Manners of the Germans, in the beginning of the emperor Trajan. The question is not very material, since conjecture alone must decide it. The piece itself is admitted to be a masterpiece in the kind. Tacitus was son-in-law to Agricola; and while filial piety breathes through his work, he never departs from the integrity of his own character. He has left an historical monument highly interesting to every Briton, who wishes to know the manners of his ancestors, and the spirit of liberty that from the earliest time distinguished the natives of Britain. "Agricola," as Hume observes, "was the general who finally established the dominion of the Romans in this island. He governed, it in the reigns of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. He carried his victorious arms northward: defeated the Britons in every encounter, pierced into the forests and

the mountains of Caledonia, reduced every state to subjection in the southern parts of the island, and chased before him all the men of fiercer and more intractable spirits, who deemed war and death itself less intolerable than servitude under the victors. He defeated them in a decisive action, which they fought under Galgacus; and having fixed a chain of garrisons between the friths of Clyde and Forth, he cut off the ruder and more barren parts of the island, and secured the Roman province from the incursions of the barbarous inhabitants. During these military enterprises he neglected not the arts of peace. He introduced laws and civility among the Britons; taught them to desire and raise all the conveniences of life; reconciled them to the Roman language and manners; instructed them in letters and science; and employed every expedient to render those chains, which he had forged, both easy and agreeable to them.” (Hume’s Hist. vol. i. .) In this passage Mr. Hume has given a summary of the Life of Agricola. It is extended by Tacitus in a style more open than the didactic form of the essay on the German Manners required, but still with the

precision, both in sentiment and diction, peculiar to the author. In rich but subdued colors he gives a striking picture of Agricola, leaving to posterity a portion of history which it would be in vain to seek in the dry gazette style of Suetonius, or in the page of any writer of that period.]

1. The ancient custom of transmitting to posterity the actions and manners of famous men, has not been neglected even by the present age, incurious though it be about those belonging to it, whenever any exalted and noble degree of virtue has triumphed over that false estimation of merit, and that ill-will to it, by which small and great states are equally infested. In former times, however, as there was a greater propensity and freer scope for the performance of actions worthy of remembrance, so every person of distinguished abilities was induced through conscious satisfaction in the task alone, without regard to private favor or interest, to record examples of virtue. And many considered it rather as the honest confidence of integrity, than a culpable arrogance, to become their own biographers. Of this, Rutilius and Scaurus were instances; who were never yet censured on this account, nor was the fidelity of their narrative called in question; so much more candidly are virtues always estimated; in those periods which are the most favorable to their production. For

myself, however, who have undertaken to be the historian of a person deceased, an apology seemed necessary; which I should not have made, had my course lain through times less cruel and hostile to virtue.

2. We read that when Arulenus Rusticus published the praises of Paetus Thrasea, and Herennius Senecio those of Priscus Helvidius, it was construed into a capital crime; and the rage of tyranny was let loose not only against the authors, but against their writings; so that those monuments of exalted genius were burnt at the place of election in the forum by triumvirs appointed for the purpose. In that fire they thought to consume the voice of the Roman people, the freedom of the senate, and the conscious emotions of all mankind; crowning the deed by the expulsion of the professors of wisdom, and the banishment of every liberal art, that nothing generous or honorable might remain. We gave, indeed, a consummate proof of our patience; and as remote ages saw the very utmost degree of liberty, so we, deprived by inquisitions of all the intercourse of conversation, experienced the utmost of slavery. With language we should have lost memory itself, had it been as much in our power to forget, as to be silent.

3. Now our spirits begin to revive. But although at the first dawning of this happy period, the emperor Nerva united two things before incompatible, monarchy

and liberty; and Trajan is now daily augmenting the felicity of the empire; and the public security has not only assumed hopes and wishes, but has seen those wishes arise to confidence and stability; yet, from the nature of human infirmity, remedies are more tardy in their operation than diseases; and, as bodies slowly increase, but quickly perish, so it is more easy to suppress industry and genius, than to recall them. For indolence itself acquires a charm; and sloth, however odious at first, becomes at length engaging. During the space of fifteen years, a large portion of human life, how great a number have fallen by casual events, and, as was the fate of all the most distinguished, by the cruelty of the prince; whilst we, the few survivors, not of others alone, but, if I may be allowed the expression, of ourselves, find a void of so many years in our lives, which has silently brought us from youth to maturity, from mature age to the very verge of life! Still, however, I shall not regret having composed, though in rude and artless language, a memorial of past servitude, and a testimony of present blessings.

The present work, in the meantime, which is dedicated to the honor of my father-in-law, may be thought to merit approbation, or at least excuse, from the piety of the intention.

4. CNAEUS JULIUS AGRICOLA was born at the ancient and illustrious colony of Forumjulii. Both his grandfathers were imperial procurators, an office

which confers the rank of equestrian nobility. His father, Julius Graecinus, of the senatorian order, was famous for the study of eloquence and philosophy; and by these accomplishments he drew on himself the displeasure of Caius Caesar; for, being commanded to undertake the accusation of Marcus Silanus, — on his refusal, he was put to death. His mother was Julia Procilla, a lady of exemplary chastity. Educated with tenderness in her bosom, he passed his childhood and youth in the attainment of every liberal art. He was preserved from the allurements of vice, not only by a naturally good disposition, but by being sent very early to pursue his studies at Massilia; a place where Grecian politeness and provincial frugality are happily united. I remember he was used to relate, that in his early youth he should have engaged with more ardor in philosophical speculation than was suitable to a Roman and a senator, had not the prudence of his mother restrained the warmth and vehemence of his disposition: for his lofty and upright spirit, inflamed by the charms of glory and exalted reputation, led him to the pursuit with more eagerness than discretion. Reason and riper years tempered his warmth; and from the study of wisdom, he retained what is most difficult to compass, — moderation.

5. He learned the rudiments of war in Britain, under Suetonius Paullinus, an active and prudent commander, who chose him for his tent companion, in

order to form an estimate of his merit. Nor did Agricola, like many young men, who convert military service into wanton pastime, avail himself licentiously or slothfully of his tribunitial title, or his inexperience, to spend his time in pleasures and absences from duty; but he employed himself in gaining a knowledge of the country, making himself known to the army, learning from the experienced, and imitating the best; neither pressing to be employed through vainglory, nor declining it through timidity; and performing his duty with equal solicitude and spirit. At no other time in truth was Britain more agitated or in a state of greater uncertainty. Our veterans slaughtered, our colonies burnt, our armies cut off, — we were then contending for safety, afterwards for victory. During this period, although all things were transacted under the conduct and direction of another, and the stress of the whole, as well as the glory of recovering the province, fell to the general's share, yet they imparted to the young Agricola skill, experience, and incentives; and the passion for military glory entered his soul; a passion ungrateful to the times, in which eminence was unfavorably construed, and a great reputation was no less dangerous than a bad one.

6. Departing thence to undertake the offices of magistracy in Rome, he married Domitia Decidiana, a lady of illustrious descent, from which connection he derived credit and support in his pursuit of greater