

THE HORATII AND THE CURIATII

In the reign of King Tullus Hostilius there was a quarrel between the people of Rome and the people of Alba. The Romans and the Albans were generally very friendly to each other. They were of the same race; their way of living was the same, and they spoke the same language. Some of the Romans had married Alban women, and some of the Albans had married Roman women, so that each people had friends and relations in the other town.

But now there was a quarrel between them, and the Roman army with King Tullus at its head marched out to meet the Albans, who were commanded by their Dictator, Mettius Fufetius.

When the armies came near together, the Alban Dictator sent a messenger to King Tullus, The messenger came to the Roman army, and was led before the king, who was preparing himself for the battle.

Now, Tullus was a brave warrior; he was young and strong, and eager to win glory in war; but still he was wise, and he did not refuse to listen to the message of Mettius.

“O Tullus,” said the messenger, “I am sent to you by the Dictator of the Albans. He bid me tell you, that it will be much for the good of Rome as well as for the good of Alba if you will come out in front of your army, and speak with him before the fight begins.”

Tullus agreed to do as Mettius asked. The two armies took their places, and all was made ready for battle; and then Mettius and Tullus, followed by some of their nobles, advanced midway between the armies, and Mettius spoke these words:—

“Hear me, King Tullus, and you nobles of Rome. It seems to me that the only cause of our quarrel is that we know not whether Rome or Alba is the stronger, and which town shall be the master of the other. Can we not decide this in some other way than by the death of all the brave men who must be slain if we begin to fight?”

The thought pleased King Tullus, and after consulting together, they fixed upon a plan. It was agreed that three Romans should fight against three Albans, and that if the Romans conquered, Rome should govern Alba; but if the Albans were victorious, then Alba should govern Rome.

It happened that in the Roman army there were three brothers called Horatius, all strong men and brave soldiers. They were the sons of an old Roman named Publius Horatius, who had taught them, as Roman fathers in those days taught their sons, that they ought to be ready to die for the good of their people and their dear city of Rome. That was the first duty of every Roman, and you shall hear how the Horatii kept their father’s sayings.

The Roman army felt that they could choose no better champions than these three brothers. And the Horatii proudly and gladly agreed to fight, and each in his heart resolved to do his very best to save his country from being subject to Alba.

Now in the Alban army there were also three brothers, whose name was Curiatius. They too were good soldiers, and their country-men chose them to fight for Alba. These three brothers were friends of the Horatii, such dear friends that one of them had promised to marry the sister of Horatius. But they loved their town of Alba, and like the Romans they felt that they must lose their own lives, or take those of their friends, for the sake of their country.

When the Roman King and the Alban Dictator had promised solemnly that Rome and Alba