



Titus Livius (Livy), *The History of Rome, Book 2* Benjamin Oliver Foster, Ph.D., Ed.

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("Agamemnon", "Hom. Od. 9.1", "denarius")

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12. The blockade went on notwithstanding. The corn was giving out, and what there was cost a very high price, and Porsinna was beginning [2] to have hopes that he would take the City by sitting still, when Gaius Mucius, a young Roman noble, thinking it a shame that although the Roman People had not, in [p. 257]the days of their servitude when they lived under¹ kings, been blockaded in a war by any enemies, they should now, [3] when free, be besieged by those same Etruscans whose armies they had so often routed, made up his mind that this indignity must be avenged by some great and daring deed. [4] At first he intended to make his way to the enemy's camp on his own account. Afterwards, fearing that if he should go unbidden by the consuls and without anyone's knowing it, he might chance to be arrested by the Roman sentries and brought back as a deserter—a charge which the state of the City would confirm—he went before the senate. [5] “I wish,” said he, “to cross the river, senators, and enter, if I can, the enemy's camp—not to plunder or exact reprisals for their devastations: I have in mind to do a greater deed, if the gods grant me their help.” [6] The Fathers approved. Hiding a sword under his dress, he set out. [7] Arrived at the camp, he took up his stand in the thick of the crowd near the royal tribunal. It happened that at that moment the soldiers were being paid; a secretary who sat beside the king, and wore nearly the same costume, was very busy, and to him the soldiers for the most part addressed themselves. Mucius was afraid to ask which was Porsinna, lest his ignorance of the king's identity should betray his own, and following the blind guidance of Fortune, slew the secretary instead of the king. [8] As he strode off through the frightened crowd, making a way for himself with his bloody blade, there was an outcry, and thereat the royal guards came running in from every side, seized him and dragged him back before the tribunal of the king. [9] But friendless as he was, even then, when [p. 259]Fortune wore so menacing an aspect, yet as one² more to be feared than fearing, “I am a Roman citizen,” he cried; “men call me Gaius Mucius. [10] I am your enemy, and as an enemy I would have slain you; I can die as resolutely as I could kill: both to do and to endure valiantly is the Roman way. Nor am I the only one to carry this resolution against you: behind me is a long line of men who are seeking the same honour. Gird yourself therefore, if you think it worth your while, for a struggle in which you must fight for your life from hour to hour with an armed foe always at your door. [11] Such is the war we, the Roman youths, declare on you. [12] Fear no serried ranks, no battle; it will be between yourself alone and a single enemy at a time.” [13] The king, at once hot with resentment and aghast at his danger, angrily ordered the prisoner to be flung into the flames unless he should at once divulge the plot with which he so obscurely threatened him. Whereupon Mucius, exclaiming, “Look, that you may see how cheap they hold their bodies whose eyes are fixed upon renown!” thrust his hand into the fire that was kindled for the sacrifice. When he allowed his hand to burn as if his spirit were unconscious of sensation, the king was almost beside himself with wonder. [14] He bounded from his seat and bade them remove the young man from the altar. “Do you go free,” he said, “who have dared to harm yourself more than me. I would invoke success upon your valour, were that valour exerted for my country; since that may not be, I release you from the penalties of war and dismiss you scathless and uninjured.” [15] Then Mucius, as if to requite his generosity, answered, “Since you hold bravely [p. 261]in honour, my gratitude shall afford you the³ information your threats could not extort: we are three hundred, the foremost youths of Rome, who have conspired to assail you in this fashion. [16] I drew the first lot; the others, in whatever order it falls to them, will attack you, each at his own time, until Fortune shall have delivered you into our hands.”

1 B.C. 508

2 B.C. 508

3 B.C. 508

Livy. Books I and II With An English Translation. Cambridge. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1919.

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