CHAPTER 27

THE CÆSARS BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE GREAT PLAINS

§ 1

WESTERN writers are apt, through their patriotic predispositions, to overestimate the organization, civilizing work, and security of the absolute monarchy that established itself in Rome after the accession of Augustus Cæsar. From it we derive the political traditions of Britain, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy, and these countries loom big in the perspectives of European writers. They ignore what Rome destroyed in the East.

By the scale of a world history the Roman Empire ceases to seem so overwhelmingly important. It lasted about four centuries in all before it was completely shattered. The Byzantine Empire was no genuine continuation of it; it was a damaged resumption of the Hellenic Empire of Alexander; it spoke Greek; its monarch had a Roman title, no doubt, but so, for that matter, had the late Tsar of Bulgaria. Mesopotamia developed for the most part upon lines of its own during the Roman period; its recent Hellenic acquisitions were extensively modified by the genius of the Persian and Parthian peoples, and in India and China the influence of Rome was infinitesimal.

During its four centuries of life the empire of Rome had phases of division and complete chaos. Its prosperous years, if they are gathered together and added up, do not amount in all to a couple of centuries. Compared with the quiet steady expansion, the security, and the civilizing task of the contemporary Chinese Empire, or with Egypt between 4,000 and 1,000 B.C., or with

Sumer before the Semitic conquest, this amounts to a mere incident in history. The Persian Empire of Cyrus again, which reached from the Hellespont to the Indus, had as high a standard of civilization; and its homelands remained unconquered and fairly prosperous for over two hundred years. Its predecessor, the Median Empire, had endured for half a century. After a brief submergence by Alexander the Great, it rose again as the Seleucid Empire, which endured for some centuries. The Seleucid dominion shrank at last to the west of the Euphrates, and became a part of the Roman Empire; but Persia, revived by the Parthians as a new Persian Empire, first under the Arsacids and then under the Sassanids, outlived the empire of Rome. It became a refuge for Greek learning from Western suppression, and a hotbed of religious ideas.

The Sassanids repeatedly carried war into the Byzantine Empire, and held the line of the Euphrates steadfastly. In A.D. 616 under Chosroes II they were holding Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt, and threatening the Hellespont. But there has been no tradition to keep alive the glories of the Sassanids. The reputation of Rome has flourished through the prosperity of her heirs. The tradition of Rome looms far greater than the reality. A coalescence of the earlier civilizations had occurred, and civilization had spread westward. Semite and Aryan mingled, without combining, in a seething development round the basin of the Mediterranean, and the Roman administration was flung like a net, that broke and was mended again and at last broke altogether, over the whole interplay.

History distinguishes several groups of Roman emperors who were great administrators. The first of these groups began with:—

Augustus Cæsar (27 B.C. to A.D. 14), the Octavian of the previous section, who worked hard at the reorganization of the provincial governments and at financial reform. He established a certain tradition of lawfulness and honesty in the bureaucracy, and he restrained the more monstrous corruptions and tyrannies by giving the provincial citizen the right to appeal to Cæsar. But he fixed the European boundaries of the empire along the Rhine and Danube, so leaving Germany, which is the necessary backbone of a safe and prosperous Europe, to barbarism; and he made a similar limitation in the east at the Euphrates, leaving Armenia independent, to be a constant bone of contention with the Arsacids and Sassanids. It is doubtful whether he considered that he was fixing the final

boundaries of the empire along these lines, or whether he thought it desirable to consolidate for some years before any further attempts at expansion.

Tiberius (A.D. 14 to 37) is also described as a capable ruler, but he became intensely unpopular in Rome, and it was alleged that he was addicted to gross and abominable vices. But his indulgence in these and his personal tyrannies and cruelties did not interfere with the general prosperity of the empire. It is difficult to judge him; nearly all our sources of information are manifestly hostile to him.

Caligula (A.D. 37 to 41) was insane, but the empire carried on during four years of his eccentricity at its head. Finally he was murdered in his palace by his servants, and there seems to have been an attempt to restore the senatorial government, an attempt which was promptly suppressed by the household legions.

Claudius (A.D. 41 to 54), the uncle of Caligula, upon whom the choice of the soldiers fell, was personally uncouth, but he seems to have been a hardworking and fairly capable administrator. He advanced the westward boundary of the empire by annexing the southern half of Britain. He was poisoned by Agrippina, the mother of his adopted son Nero, and a woman of great charm and force of character.

Nero (A.D. 54 to 68), like Tiberius, is credited with monstrous vices and cruelties, but the empire had acquired sufficient momentum to carry on through his fourteen years of power. He certainly murdered his devoted but troublesome mother, and his wife—the latter as a mark of devotion to a lady, Poppæa, who then married him. But the domestic infelicities of the Cæsars are no part of our present story. The reader greedy for criminal particulars must go to the classical source, Suetonius. These various Cæsars and their successors and their womenkind were probably no worse essentially than most weak and passionate human beings, but they had no real religion, being themselves gods; they had no wide knowledge on which to build high ambitions, their women were fierce and often illiterate, and they were under no restraints of law or custom. They were surrounded by creatures ready to stimulate their slightest wishes and to translate their vaguest impulses into action. What are mere passing black thoughts and angry impulses with most of us became, therefore, deeds with them. Before a man condemns Nero as a different species of being from himself, he should examine his own secret thoughts very carefully. Nero became intensely unpopular in Rome, and it is interesting to note that

he became unpopular not because he murdered and poisoned his intimate relations, but because there was an insurrection in Britain under a certain Queen Boadicea, and the Roman forces suffered a great disaster (A.D. 61), and because there was a destructive earthquake in Southern Italy. The Roman population, true to its Etruscan streak, never religious and always superstitious, did not mind a wicked Cæsar, but it did object strongly to an unpropitious one. The Spanish legions rose in insurrection under an elderly general of seventy-three, Galba, whom they acclaimed emperor. He advanced upon Rome, carried in a litter. Nero, hopeless of support, committed suicide (A.D. 68).

Galba, however, was only one of a group of would-be emperors. The generals in command of the Rhine legions, the Palatine troops, and the eastern armies, each attempted to seize power. Rome saw four emperors in a year, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian; the fourth, Vespasian (A.D. 69–79), from the eastern command, had the firmest grip, and held and kept the prize. But with Nero the line of Cæsars born or adopted ended. Cæsar ceased to be the family name of the Roman emperors, and became a title, Divus Cæsar, the Cæsar god. The monarchy took a step forward towards Orientalism by an increased insistance upon the worship of the ruler. So ended the first group of Cæsars, just ninety-five years of them.

Vespasian (A.D. 69 to 79) and his sons Titus (A.D. 79) and Domitian (A.D. 81) constitute, as it were, a second dynasty, the Flavian; then, after the assassination of Domitian, came a group of emperors related to one another not by blood, but by adoption, the adoptive emperors. Nerva (A.D. 96) was the first of this group, and Trajan (A.D. 98) the second. They were followed by the indefatigable Hadrian (A.D. 117), Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138), and Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161 to 180). Under both the Flavians and the Antonines the boundaries of the empire crept forward again. North Britain was annexed in A.D. 84, the angle of the Rhine and Danube was filled in, and what is now Transylvania was made into a new province, Dacia. Trajan also invaded Parthia and annexed Armenia, Assyria, and Mesopotamia. Under his rule the empire reached its maximum extent.

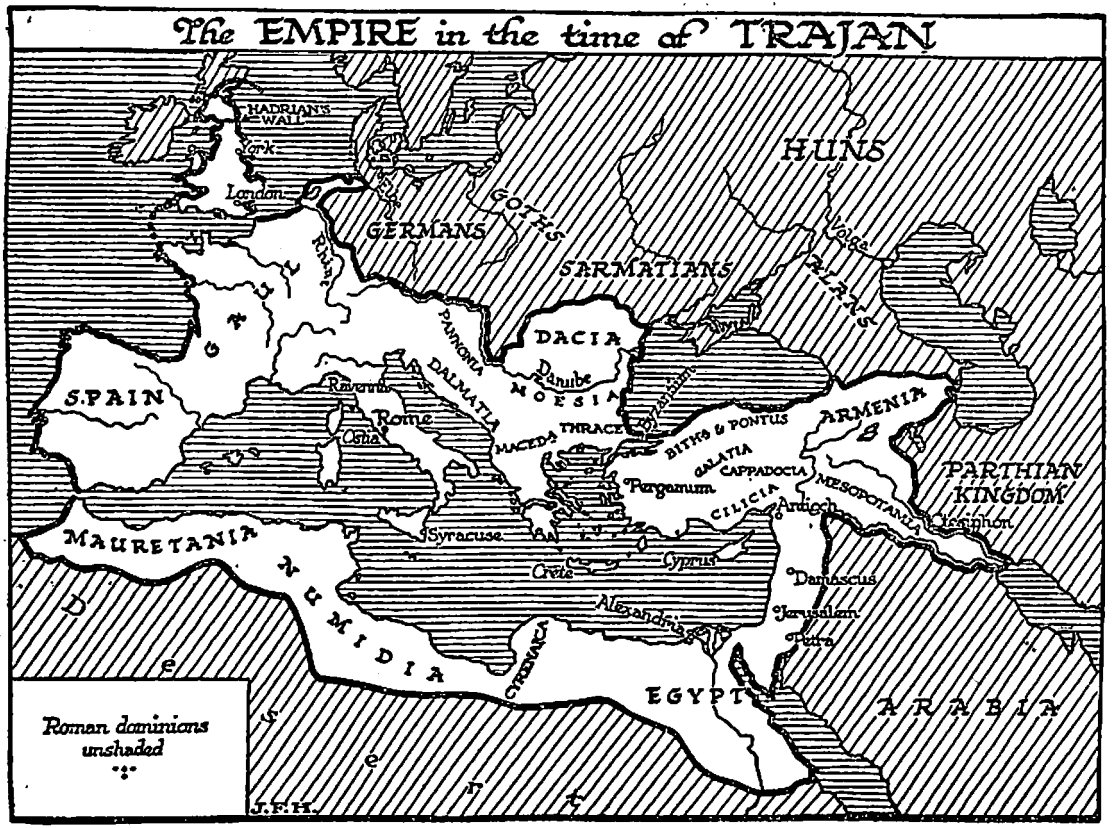
Hadrian, his successor, was of a cautious and retractile disposition. He abandoned these new eastern conquests of Trajan's, and he also abandoned North Britain. He adopted the Chinese idea of the limiting wall against barbarism—an excellent idea so long as the pressure of population on the

imperial side of the wall is greater than the pressure from without, but worthless otherwise. He built Hadrian's Wall across Britain, and a palisade between the Rhine and the Danube. The full tide of Roman expansion was past, and in the reign of his successor the North European frontier was already actively on the defensive against the aggression of Teutonic and Slavic tribes.

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus is one of those figures in history about which men differ widely and intensely. To some critics he seems to have been a priggish person; he dabbled in religions, and took a pleasure in conducting priestly ceremonies in priestly garments—a disposition offensive to common men—and they resent his alleged failure to restrain the wickedness of his wife Faustina. The stories of his domestic infelicity, however, rest on no very good foundations, though certainly his son Commodus was a startling person for a good home to produce. On the other hand, he was unquestionably a devoted and industrious emperor, holding social order together through a series of disastrous years of vile weather, great floods, failing harvests and famine, barbaric raids and revolts and at last a terrible universal pestilence. Says F. W. Farrar, quoted in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "He regarded himself as being, in fact, the servant of all. The registry of the citizens, the suppression of litigation, the elevation of public morals, the care of minors, the retrenchment of public expenses, the limitation of gladiatorial games and shows, the care of roads, the restoration of senatorial privileges, the appointment of none but worthy magistrates, even the regulation of street traffic, these and numberless other duties so completely absorbed his attention that, in spite of indifferent health, they often kept him at severe labour from early morning till long after midnight. His position, indeed, often necessitated his presence at games and shows; but on these occasions he occupied himself either in reading, or being read to, or in writing notes. He was one of those who held that nothing should be done hastily, and that few crimes were worse than waste of time."

But it is not by these industries that he is now remembered. He was one of the greatest exponents of the Stoical philosophy, and in his *Meditations*, jotted down in camp and court, he has put so much of a human soul on record as to raise up for himself in each generation a fresh series of friends and admirers.

With the death of Marcus Aurelius this phase of unity and comparatively good government came to an end, and his son Commodus inaugurated an age of disorder. Practically, the


The EMPIRE in the time of TRAJAN
HADRIAN'S WALL
York
London
GERMANS
GOTHS
SARMATIANS
HUNS
Volga
ALANS
Rhine
Danube
DACIA
PANNONIA
DALMATIA
MOESIA
Ravenna
Rome
Ostia
S.PAIN
MACEDON
THRACE
Tyras
BITHYN & PONTUS
ARMENIA
GALATIA
CAPPADOCIA
Pergamum
CILICIA
Antioch
MESOPOTAMIA
PARTHIAN KINGDOM
Ctesiphon
Syracuse
MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
Crete
Cyprus
Damascus
Jerusalem
Petra
Alexandria
CYRENAICA
EGYPT
ARABIA
Roman dominions unshaded
J.F.H.

empire had been at peace within itself for two hundred years. Now for a hundred years the student of Roman history must master the various criminology of a number of inadequate emperors, while the frontier crumbled and receded under barbarian pressure. One or two only seem to have been able men; such were Septimius Severus, Aurelian, and Probus. Septimius Severus was a Carthaginian, and his sister was never able to master Latin. She conducted her Roman household in the Punic language, which must have made Cato the elder turn in his grave. The rest of the emperors of this period were chiefly adventurers too unimportant to the general scheme of things for us to note. At times there were separate emperors ruling in different parts of the distracted empire. From our present point of view the Emperor Decius, who was defeated and killed during a great raid of the Goths into Thrace in A.D. 251, and the Emperor Valerian, who, together with the great city of Antioch, was captured by the Sassanid Shah of Persia in A.D. 260, are worthy of notice because they mark the insecurity of the whole Roman system, and the character of the outer pressure upon it. So, too, is Claudius, "the Conqueror of the Goths," because he gained a great victory over these people at Nish in Serbia (A.D. 269), and because he died, like Pericles, of the plague.

Through all these centuries intermittent pestilences were playing a part in weakening races and altering social conditions, a part that has still to be properly worked out by historians. There was, for instance, a great plague throughout the empire between the years A.D. 164 and 180 in the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. It probably did much to disorganize social life and prepare the way for the troubles that followed the accession of Commodus. This same pestilence devastated China, as we shall note in § 5 of this chapter. Considerable fluctuations of climate had also been going on in the first and second centuries, producing stresses and shiftings of population, whose force historians have still to appraise.

But before we go on to tell of the irruptions of the barbarians and the attempts of such later emperors as Diocletian (A.D. 284) and Constantine the Great (A.D. 306) to hold together the heaving and splitting vessel of the state, we must describe something of the conditions of human life in the Roman Empire during its two centuries of prosperity.

§ 2

Roman Civilization at its Zenith.

The impatient reader of history may be disposed to count the two centuries of order between 27 B.C. and A.D. 180 as among the wasted opportunities of mankind. It was an age of spending rather than of creation, an age of architecture and trade in which the rich grew richer and the poor poorer and the soul and spirit of man decayed. Looked at superficially, as a man might have looked at it from an aeroplane a couple of thousand feet in the air, there was a considerable flourish of prosperity. Everywhere, from York to Cyrene and from Lisbon to Antioch, he would have noted large and well-built cities, with temples, theatres, amphitheatres, markets, and the like; thousands of such cities, supplied by great aqueducts and served by splendid high-roads, whose stately remains astonish us to this day. He would have noted an abundant cultivation, and have soared too high to discover that this cultivation was the grudging work of slaves. Upon the Mediterranean and the Red Sea a considerable traffic would be visible; and the sight of two ships alongside each other would not at that altitude reveal the fact that one was a pirate and plundering the other.

And even if the observer came down to a closer scrutiny, there would still be much accumulated improvement to note. There had been a softening of manners and a general refinement since the days of Julius Cæsar. With this there had been a real increase of humane feeling. Rome was, in fact, climbing to the level of civilization attained long before by Greece and Babylon and Egypt.

During the period of the Antonines, laws for the protection of slaves from extreme cruelty came into existence, and it was no longer permissible to sell them to the gladiatorial schools. Not only were the cities outwardly more splendidly built, but within the homes of the wealthy there had been great advances in the art of decoration. The gross feasting, animal indulgence, and vulgar display of the earlier days of Roman prosperity were now tempered by a certain refinement. Dress had become richer, finer, and more beautiful. There was a great trade in silk with remote China, for the mulberry tree and the silkworm had not yet begun to move west. By the time silk had ended its long and varied journey to Rome it was worth its weight in gold. Yet it was used abundantly, and there was a steady flow of the precious metals eastward in exchange.

There had been very considerable advances in gastronomy

and the arts of entertainment. Petronius describes a feast given by a wealthy man under the early Cæsars, a remarkable succession of courses, some delicious, some amazing, exceeding anything that even the splendours and the imagination of modern New York could produce; and the festival was varied by music and by displays of tight-rope dancing, juggling, Homeric recitations, and the like.

There was a considerable amount of what we may describe as "rich men's culture" throughout the empire. Books were far more plentiful than they had been before the time of the Cæsars. Men prided themselves upon their libraries, even when the cares and responsibilities of property made them too busy to give their literary treasures much more than a passing examination. The knowledge of Greek spread eastward and of Latin westward, and if the prominent men of this or that British or Gallic city lacked any profound Greek culture themselves, they could always turn to some slave or other, whose learning had been guaranteed of the highest quality by the slave-dealer, to supply the deficiency.

It is quite impossible to deal with either the literature or art of Rome as a thing in itself; both are a continuation and a part of the much greater and more enduring Hellenic culture. Hellenic art and writing threw out a Latin branch. The mother stem existed before the branch grew out, and went on growing after the branch was withered. The native impulse of the Latin mind in literary expression before it was deflected by Greek models was towards a form, if one can call it a form, the *satura*, a form like the modern revue in spirit, a medley of invective, imitation and music. A sort of bard, the *vates*, also sang sarcastic verse, Fescennine verses, to the peasants, and there were orations, dirges, religious litanies. The *satura* developed with writing into a form of prose and verse miscellany, and this again into a more continuous prose narrative. Much of the Latin literature is lost; most of it did not appeal, for some reason or other, to the Christian monks as worthy of preservation, but as reading and book reproduction spread there was probably a very considerable diffusion indeed of prose fiction, of which only a few fragments now remain.

The Roman people of the later Republic and early Empire was certainly a fiction-reading public. The *Satyricon* of Petronius, dating from the time of Nero, is a most illuminating vestige. No one who has ever written fiction can read that brilliant piece of writing and not recognize its high technical quality. Hundreds of such books must have existed and scores of men

must have worked at the art before the *Satyricon* became possible. Along another line the poetic satire of Horace and Juvenal owes much to the spirit of the *satura*, and was also a widely diffused type of reading matter. But from the third century B.C. onward the Greek influence imposed the already established forms of the Greek comedy upon the Latin mind, and the Latin comedy is rather a Latinization of that than an indigenous development. Plays by Plautus and Terence are available for the student who wishes to sample their quality.

There was also a distinctive Latin tradition of plain clear prose which Cato the Censor did much to sustain. It is interesting to compare Cæsar's *De Bello Gallico* with Thucydides. In its compact accessibility, if one may shock the earnest scholar by a novel but appropriate image, it is like a fitted dressing-bag beside a toilet-table.

The prestige of Greek learning of an approved and settled type was as high in the Rome of Antoninus Pius as it was in the Oxford and Cambridge of Victorian England. The Greek scholar received the same mixture of unintelligent deference and practical contempt. There was a very considerable amount of Greek scholarship, and of written criticism and commentary. Indeed, there was so great an admiration for Greek letters as almost completely to destroy the Greek spirit; and the recorded observations of Aristotle were valued so highly as to preclude any attempt to imitate his organization of further inquiry. Cicero rivalled Demosthenes and Sallust, the Greek historians. Catullus learnt to reveal his heart from the best Greek models. As Greece had her epics and so forth, the Romans felt they too must have their epics. The age of Augustus was an age of splendid insincerities. Virgil in the *Æneid* set himself modestly but resolutely, and with an elegant successfulness, to parallel the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Ovid and Horace challenge comparison with the best elegiac and lyric poets of Greece.

Concurrently with this "Golden Age" of Latin literature the stream of Greek literature continued to flow wide and abundant. Long after the Latin impetus was over, the Hellenic world was still richly productive. It passed without a break into early Christian literature. We have told already of the brilliant intellectual beginnings of Alexandria and of the comparative decline of Athens. If the science of Alexandria presently died away the literary flow continued in fair rivalry with Rome. There was an immense copying of books, without which no rich man's home was complete. History and biography continued. Polybius (*circa* 204–122 B.C.) told of the conquest

of Greece by Rome. Plutarch (*circa* A.D. 50–100) made his incomparable studies of great men. A vast variety of dialogues and novels appeared and have now, for the most part, disappeared again. A great and original imaginative writer was Lucian (A.D. ? 120–200), who still commands our interest and admiration. There was a considerable amount of translation between Greek and Latin. The two literatures were almost as close, and as much in the same world of thought, as the American and English to-day.

All this widespread culture of the wealthy householder is to the credit of the early Roman Empire, and Gibbon makes the most of it in the sunny review of the age of the Antonines with which he opens his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. His design for that great work demanded a prelude of splendour and tranquillity. But he was far too shrewd and subtle not to qualify his apparent approval of the conditions he describes. "Under the Roman Empire," he writes, "the labour of an industrious and ingenious people was variously but incessantly employed in the service of the rich. In their dress, their table, their houses, and their furniture, the favourites of fortune united every refinement of convenience, of elegance and of splendour, whatever could soothe their pride, or gratify their sensuality. Such refinements—under the odious name of luxury, have been severely arraigned by the moralists of every age; and it might perhaps be more conducive to the virtue, as well as happiness, of mankind, if all possessed the necessaries, and none the superfluities of life. But in the present imperfect condition of society, luxury, though it may proceed from vice or folly, seems to be the only means that can correct the unequal distribution of property. The diligent mechanic and the skilful artist, who have obtained no share in the division of the earth, receive a voluntary tax from the possessors of land; and the latter are prompted, by a sense of interest, to improve those estates, with whose produce they may purchase additional pleasure. This operation, the particular effects of which are felt in every society, acted with much more diffuse energy in the Roman world. The provinces would soon have been exhausted of their wealth if the manufacturers and commerce of luxury had not insensibly restored to the industrious subjects the sums which were exacted from them by the arms and authority of Rome." And so on, with a sting of satire in every fold of the florid description.

If we look a little more widely than a hovering aeroplane can do at the movement of races upon the earth, or a little more closely than an inspection of streets, amphitheatres, and banquets

goes, into the souls and thoughts of men, we shall find that this impressive display of material prosperity is merely the shining garment of a polity blind to things without and things within, and blind to the future. If, for instance, we compare the two centuries of Roman ascendancy and opportunity, the first and second centuries A.D., with the two centuries of Greek and Hellenic life beginning about 466 B.C. with the supremacy of Pericles in Athens, we are amazed by—we cannot call it an inferiority, it is a complete absence of science. The incuriousness of the Roman rich and the Roman rulers was more massive and monumental even than their architecture.

In one field of knowledge particularly we might have expected the Romans to have been alert and enterprising, and that was geography. Their political interests demanded a steadfast inquiry into the state of affairs beyond their frontiers, and yet that inquiry was never made. There is practically no literature of Roman travel beyond the imperial limits, no such keen and curious accounts as Herodotus gives of the Scythians, the Africans, and the like. There is nothing in Latin to compare with the early descriptions of India and Siberia that are to be found in Chinese. The Roman legions went at one time into Scotland, yet there remains no really intelligent account of Picts or Scots, much less any glance at the seas beyond. Such explorations as those of Hanno or Pharaoh Necho seem to have been altogether beyond the scope of the Roman imagination.

It is probable that after the destruction of Carthage the amount of shipping that went out into the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar fell to inconsiderable proportions. Still more impossible in this world of vulgar wealth, enslaved intelligence, and bureaucratic rule was any further development of the astronomy and physiography of Alexandria. The Romans do not seem even to have inquired what manner of men wove the silk and prepared the spices or collected the amber and the pearls that came into their markets. Yet the channels of inquiry were open and easy; pathways led in every direction to the most convenient "jumping-off places" for explorers it is possible to imagine.

"The most remote countries of the ancient world were ransacked to supply the pomp and delicacy of Rome. The forests of Scythia afforded some valuable furs. Amber was brought overland from the shores of the Baltic to the Danube, and the barbarians were astonished at the price which they received in exchange for so useless a commodity. There was a considerable demand for Babylonian carpets and other manu-

factures of the East; but the most important branch of foreign trade was carried on with Arabia and India. Every year, about the time of the summer solstice, a fleet of a hundred and twenty vessels sailed from Myos-hormos, a port of Egypt on the Red Sea. By the periodical assistance of the monsoons they traversed the ocean in about forty days. The coast of Malabar, or the island of Ceylon, was the usual term of their navigation, and it was in those markets that the merchants from the more remote countries of Asia expected their arrival. The return of the fleet to Egypt was fixed for the months of December or January, and as soon as their rich cargo had been transported, on the backs of camels, from the Red Sea to the Nile, and had descended that river as far as Alexandria, it was poured, without delay, into the capital of the empire." [1]

There were Roman warehouses in South India, and two cohorts were stationed at Cranganore on the Malabar coast, where there was also a temple to Augustus.

Yet Rome was content to feast, exact, grow rich, and watch its gladiatorial shows without the slightest attempt to learn anything of India, China, Persia or Scythia, Buddha or Zoroaster, or about the Huns, the Negroes, the people of Scandinavia, or the secrets of the western sea.

When we realize the uninspiring quality of the social atmosphere which made this indifference possible, we are able to account for the failure of Rome, during its age of opportunity to develop any physical or chemical science, and as a consequence to gain any increased control over matter. Most of the physicians in Rome were Greeks and many of them slaves—for the Roman wealthy did not even understand that a bought mind is a spoilt mind. Yet this was not due to any want of natural genius among the Roman people; it was due entirely to their social and economic conditions.

From the Middle Ages to the present day Italy has produced a great number of brilliant scientific men. And one of the most shrewd and inspired of scientific writers was an Italian, Lucretius, who lived between the time of Marius and Julius Cæsar (about 100 B.C. to about 55 B.C.). This amazing man was of the quality of Leonardo da Vinci (also an Italian) or Newton. He wrote a long Latin poem about the processes of Nature, *De Rerum Natura*, in which he guessed with astonishing insight about the constitution of matter and about the early history of mankind. Osborn in his *Old Stone Age* quotes with admiration long passages from Lucretius about primitive man, so good

[1] Gibbon.

and true are they to-day. But this was an individual display, a seed that bore no fruit. Roman science was still-born into a suffocating atmosphere of wealth and military oppression. The true figure to represent the classical Roman attitude to science is not Lucretius, but that Roman soldier who hacked Archimedes to death at the storming of Syracuse.

And if physical and biological science wilted and died on the stony soil of Roman prosperity political and social science never had a chance to germinate. Political discussion would have been treason to the emperor, social or economic inquiry would have threatened the rich. So Rome, until disaster fell upon her, never examined into her own social health, never questioned the ultimate value of her hard officialism. Consequently, there was no one who realized the gravity of her failure to develop any intellectual imagination to hold her empire together, any general education in common ideas that would make men fight and work for the empire as men will fight and work for a dear possession. But the rulers of the Roman Empire did not want their citizens to fight for anything in any spirit at all. The rich had eaten the heart out of their general population, and they were content with the meal they had made. The legions were filled with Germans, Britons, Numidians, and the like; and until the very end the wealthy Romans thought they could go on buying barbarians to defend them against the enemy without and the rebel poor within.

How little was done in education by the Romans is shown by an account of what was done. Says Mr. H. Stuart Jones, "Julius Cæsar bestowed Roman citizenship on 'teachers of the liberal arts'; Vespasian endowed professorships of Greek and Latin oratory at Rome; and later emperors, especially Antoninus Pius, extended the same benefits to the provinces. Local enterprise and munificence were also devoted to the cause of education; we learn from the correspondence of the younger Pliny that public schools were founded in the towns of Northern Italy. But though there was a wide diffusion of knowledge under the empire, there was no true intellectual progress. Augustus, it is true, gathered about him the most brilliant writers of his time, and the debut of the new monarchy coincided with the Golden Age of Roman literature; but this was of brief duration, and the beginnings of the Christian era saw the triumph of classicism and the first steps in the decline that awaits all literary movements which look to the past rather than the future."

There is a diagnosis of the intellectual decadence of the age in a treatise upon the sublime by a Greek writer who wrote

somewhere in the second, third, or fourth century A.D., and who may possibly have been Longinus Philologus, which states very distinctly one manifest factor in the mental sickness of the Roman world. He is cited by Gibbon: "The sublime Longinus, who, in somewhat a later period and in the court of a Syrian queen (Zenobia), preserved the spirit of ancient Athens, observes and laments the degeneracy of his contemporaries, which debased their sentiments, enervated their courage, and depressed their talents. 'In the same manner,' says he, 'as some children always remain pygmies, whose infant limbs have been too closely confined, thus our tender minds, fettered by the prejudices and habits of a just servitude, are unable to expand themselves or to attain that well-proportioned greatness which we admire in the ancients; who, living under a popular government, wrote with all the same freedom as they acted.'"

But this critic grasped only one aspect of the restraints upon mental activity. The leading-strings that kept the Roman mind in a permanent state of infantilism constituted a double servitude; they were economic as well as political. The account Gibbon gives of the life and activities of a certain Herodes Atticus, who lived in the time of Hadrian, shows just how little was the share of the ordinary citizen in the outward magnificence of the time. This Atticus had an immense fortune, and he amused himself by huge architectural benefactions to various cities. Athens was given a racecourse, and a theatre of cedar, curiously carved, was set up there to the memory of his wife; a theatre was built at Corinth, a racecourse was given to Delphi, baths to Thermopylæ, an aqueduct to Canusium, and so on and so on. One is struck by the spectacle of a world of slaves and common people who were not consulted, and over whose heads, without any participation on their part, this rich man indulged in his displays of "taste." Numerous inscriptions in Greece and Asia still preserve the name of Herodes Atticus, "patron and benefactor," who ranged about the empire as though it was his private garden, commemorating himself by these embellishments. He did not confine himself to splendid buildings. He was also a philosopher, though none of his wisdom has survived. He had a large villa near Athens, and there philosophers were welcome guests so long as they convinced their patron of the soundness of their pretensions, received his discourses with respect, and did not offend him by insolent controversy.

The world, it is evident, was not progressing during these two centuries of Roman prosperity. But was it happy in its stagnation? There are signs of a very unmistakable sort that

the great mass of human beings in the empire, a mass numbering something between a hundred and a hundred and fifty millions, was not happy, was probably very acutely miserable, beneath its outward magnificence. True, there were no great wars and conquests within the empire, little of famine or fire or sword to afflict mankind; but, on the other hand, there was a terrible restraint by government, and still more by the property of the rich, upon the free activities of nearly everyone. Life for the great majority who were neither rich nor official, nor the womankind and the parasites of the rich and official, must have been laborious, tedious, and lacking in interest and freedom to a degree that a modern mind can scarcely imagine.

Three things in particular may be cited to sustain the opinion that this period was a period of widespread unhappiness. The first of these is the extraordinary apathy of the population to political events. They saw one upstart pretender to empire succeed another with complete indifference. Such things did not seem to matter to them; hope had gone. When presently the barbarians poured into the empire, there was nothing but the legions to face them. There was no popular uprising against them at all. Everywhere the barbarians must have been outnumbered if only the people had resisted. But the people did not resist. It is manifest that to the bulk of its inhabitants the Roman Empire did not seem to be a thing worth fighting for. To the slaves and common people the barbarian probably seemed to promise more freedom and less indignity than the pompous rule of the imperial official and grinding employment by the rich. The looting and burning of palaces and an occasional massacre did not shock the folk of the Roman underworld as it shocked the wealthy and cultured people to whom we owe such accounts as we have of the breaking down of the imperial system. Great numbers of slaves and common people probably joined the barbarians, who knew little of racial or patriotic prejudices, and were open-handed to any promising recruit. No doubt in many cases the population found that the barbarian was a worse infliction even than the tax-gatherer and the slave-driver. But that discovery came too late for resistance or the restoration of the old order.

And as a second symptom that points to the same conclusion that life was hardly worth living for the poor and the slaves and the majority of people during the age of the Antonines, we must reckon the steady depopulation of the empire. People refused to have children. They did so, we suggest, because their homes were not safe from oppression, because in the case of

slaves there was no security that the husband and wife would not be separated, because there was no pride nor reasonable hope in children any more. In modern states the great breeding-ground has always been the agricultural countryside where there is a more or less secure peasantry; but under the Roman Empire the peasant and the small cultivator was either a worried debtor, or he was held in a network of restraints that made him a spiritless serf, or he had been ousted altogether by the gang production of slaves.

A third indication that this outwardly flourishing period was one of deep unhappiness and mental distress for vast multitudes, is to be found in the spread of new religious movements throughout the population. We have seen how in the case of the little country of Judea a whole nation may be infected by the persuasion that life is unsatisfactory and *wrong*, and that something is needed to set it right. The mind of the Jews, as we know, had crystallized about the idea of the Promise of the One True God and the coming of a Saviour or Messiah. Rather different ideas from this were spreading through the Roman Empire. They were but varying answers to one universal question: "What must we do for salvation?" A frequent and natural consequence of disgust with life as it is, is to throw the imagination forward to an afterlife which is to redeem all the miseries and injustices of this one. The belief in such compensation is a great opiate for present miseries. Egyptian religion had long been saturated with anticipations of immortality, and we have seen how central was that idea to the cult of Serapis and Isis at Alexandria. The ancient mysteries of Demeter and Orpheus, the mysteries of the Mediterranean race, revived and made a sort of *theocrasia* with these new cults.

A second great religious movement was Mithraism, a development of Zoroastrianism, a religion of very ancient Aryan origin, traceable back to the Indo-Iranian people before they split into Persians and Hindus. We cannot here examine its mysteries in any detail.[1] Mithras was a god of light, a Sun of Righteousness, and in the shrines of the cult he was always represented as slaying a sacred bull whose blood was the seed of life. Suffice it that, complicated with many added ingredients, this worship of Mithras came into the Roman Empire about the time of Pompey the Great, and began to spread very widely under the Cæsars and Antonines. Like the Isis religion, it promised immortality. Its followers were mainly slaves, soldiers, and distressed people. In its methods of worship, in the burning

[1] See Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*.

of candles before the altar and so forth, it has a certain superficial resemblance to the later developments of the ritual of the third great religious movement in the Roman world, Christianity.

Christianity also was a doctrine of immortality and salvation, and it too spread at first chiefly among the lowly and unhappy. Christianity has been denounced by modern writers as a "slave religion." It was. It took the slaves and the downtrodden, and it gave them hope and restored their self-respect so that they stood up for righteousness like men and faced persecution and torment. But of the origins and quality of Christianity we will tell more fully in a later chapter.

§ 3

Characteristics of Art under the Roman Empire.

We have said already that the artistic and literary culture of Rome was merely a branch of the great Hellenic culture which had inherited all that Greece and nearer Asia, Babylon and Egypt, had to bestow. But in certain directions the Roman system gave very definite thrusts of its own, and in none more than in architecture. The Roman Empire marks a new phase of history, a change in scale, which was reflected in the greater boldness and larger size of its buildings. The chief gifts of Rome to architecture were cement and the free use of the arch. Wherever the Roman legions went, went the arch and cement. Cement rendered possible vast domes and vaults, which could be faced with marble. The rich Corinthian column was taken and varied and elaborated and used in conjunction with arches. The arcade is typically Roman. So, too, is the disposition towards rounded buildings and the superposition of arcades in stories. Wherever the Romans went they left amphitheatres, triumphal arches, colonnaded streets, aqueducts and palatial buildings. Also they made roads with reasonable grades and fine bridges and aqueducts. To this day the Italian is the finest road-maker in the world.

The architecture of Rome had no such orderly development as the Egyptian and Greek. Its earliest efforts followed upon Etruscan lines and were in timber faced with terra-cotta. Gradually stone replaced the timber. But with the coming of the Empire, the Greek architect came to Rome and seized upon the new opportunities and materials that offered themselves to him. Roman architecture did not so much develop as break out. But having broken out it prevailed mightily.

A vigorous sculpture, also Greek in its essentials, went with