INTRODUCTION


Professor Hirschfeld has pointed out that there is a general misconception as to the true meaning of later Roman history and that the time of the Roman Empire is, in reality, by no means exclusively a period of decline. In point of fact, there were long periods of imperial history when the glory of Rome, as measured by its seeming material prosperity, by the splendour of its conquests, and the wide range of its dominion, was at its height. But two prominent factors, among others, have served to befog the view in considering this period. In the first place, the fact that the form of government is held to have changed from the republican to the monarchial system with the accession of Augustus, has led to a prejudice for or against the age on the part of a good share of writers who have considered the subject. In the second place the invasion of Christianity during the decline of the empire has introduced a feature even more prejudicial to candid discussion.

Yet, broadly considered, neither of these elements should have had much weight for the historian. In the modern sense of the word the Roman commonwealth was never a democracy. From first to last, a chief share of its population consisted of slaves and of the residents of subject states. There was, indeed, a semblance of representative government; but this, it must be remembered, was continued under the empire. Indeed, it cannot be too often pointed out that the accession to power of Augustus and his immediate successors did not nominally imply a marked change of government. We shall have occasion to point out again and again that the "emperor" was not a royal ruler in the modern sense of the word. The very fact that the right of hereditary succession was never recognised—such succession being accomplished rather by subterfuge than as a legal usage,—in itself shows a sharp line of demarcation between the alleged royal houses of the Roman Empire and the rulers of actual monarchies. In a word, the Roman Empire occupied an altogether anomalous position, and the power which the imperator gradually usurped, through which he came finally to have all the influence of a royal despot, was attained through such gradual and subtle advances that contemporary observers scarcely realised the transition through which they
were passing. We shall see that the senate still holds its nominal power, and that year by year for centuries to come, consuls are elected as the nominal government leaders.

Nevertheless, it is commonly held that posterity has made no mistake in fixing upon the date of the accession of Augustus as a turning-point in the history of the Roman Commonwealth. However fully the old forms may have been held to, it is only now that the people in effect submit to a permanent dictator. The office of dictator, as such, had indeed been abolished on the motion of Mark Antony; but the caesars managed, under cover of old names and with the ostensible observance of old laws, to usurp dictatorial power. There was an actual, even if not a nominal, change of government. This change of government, however, did not coincide with any sudden decline in Roman power. On the contrary, as just intimated, the Roman influence under the early caesars reached out to its widest influence and attained its maximum importance. Certainly, the epochs which by common consent are known as the golden and the silver ages of Roman literature—the time, that is to say, of Augustus and his immediate successors—cannot well be thought of as periods of great national degeneration. And again the time of the five good emperors has by common consent of the historians been looked on as among the happiest periods of Roman history. In a word the first two centuries of Roman imperial history are by no means to be considered as constituting an epoch of steady decline. That a decline set in after the death of Marcus Aurelius, some causes of which were operative much earlier, is, however, equally little in question. Looking over the whole sweep of later Roman history it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the empire was doomed almost from the day of its inception, notwithstanding its early period of power. But when one attempts to point out the elements that were operative as causes of this seemingly predestined overthrow, one enters at once upon dangerous and debatable ground. At the very outset, as already intimated, the prejudices of the historian are enlisted pro or con by the question of the influence of Christianity as a factor in accelerating or retarding the decay of Rome’s greatness.

Critics have never tired of hurling diatribes at Gibbon, because his studies led him to the conclusion that Christianity was a detrimental force in its bearing on the Roman Empire. Yet many more recent authorities have been led to the same conclusion, and it is difficult to say why this estimate need cause umbrage to anyone, whatever his religious prejudices. The Roman commonwealth was a body politic which, following the course of all human institutions, must sooner or later have been overthrown. In the broader view it does not seem greatly to matter whether or not Christianity contributed to this result. That the Christians were an inharmonious element in the state can hardly be in question. As such, they cannot well be supposed to have contributed to communal progress. But there were obvious sources of disruption which seem so much more important that one may well be excused for doubting whether the influence of the early Christians in this connection was more than infinitesimal for good or evil. Without attempting a comprehensive view of the subject—which, indeed, would be quite impossible within present spatial limits—it is sufficient to point out such prevailing influences as the prevalence of slavery, the growing wealth of the few and the almost universal pauperism of the many fostered by the paternal government, and the decrease of population, particularly among the best classes, as abnormal elements in a body politic, the influence of which sooner or later must make themselves felt disastrously.
Perhaps as important as any of these internal elements of dissolution was that ever-present and ever-developing external menace, the growing power of the barbarian nations. The position of any nation in the historical scale always depends largely upon the relative positions of its neighbour states. Rome early subjugated the other Italian states and then in turn, Sicily, Carthage, and Greece. She held a dominating influence over the nations of the Orient; or, at least, if they held their ground on their own territory, she made it impossible for them to think of invading Europe. Meantime, at the north and west there were no civilised nations to enter into competition with her, much less to dispute her supremacy. For some centuries the peoples of northern Europe could be regarded by Rome only as more or less productive barbarians, interesting solely in proportion as they were sufficiently productive to be worth robbing. But as time went on these northern peoples learned rapidly through contact with the civilisation of Rome. They were, in fact, people who were far removed from barbarism in the modern acceptance of the term. It is possible (the question is still in doubt) that they were of common stock with the Romans; and if their residence in a relatively inhospitable clime had retarded their progress towards advanced civilisation, it had not taken from them the racial potentialities of rapid development under more favourable influences; while, at the same time, the very harshness of their environment had developed in them a vigorous constitution, a tenacity of purpose, and a fearless audacity of mind that were to make them presently most dangerous rivals. It was during the later days of the commonwealth and the earlier days of the empire that these rugged northern peoples were receiving their lessons in Roman civilisation—that is to say, in the art of war, with its attendant sequels of pillage and plundering. Those were hard lessons which the legions of the Caesars gave to the peoples of the north, but their recipients proved apt pupils. Even in the time of Augustus a German host in the Teutoburg Forest retaliated upon the hosts of Varus in a manner that must have brought Rome to a startled realisation of hitherto unsuspected possibilities of disaster.

It has been pointed out that the one hope for the regeneration of Rome under these conditions lay in the possibility of incorporating the various ethnic elements of its wide territories into one harmonious whole. In other words, could Rome in the early day have seen the desirability—as here and there a far-sighted statesman did perhaps see—of granting Roman citizenship to the large-bodied and fertile-minded races of the north, removing thus a prominent barrier to racial intermingling, the result might have been something quite different. We have noted again and again that it is the mixed races that build the great civilisations and crowd forward on the road of human progress. The Roman of the early day had the blood of many races in his veins, but twenty-five or thirty generations of rather close inbreeding had produced a race which eminently needed new blood from without. Yet the whole theory of Roman citizenship set its face against the introduction of this revivifying element. The new blood made itself felt presently, to be sure, and the armies came to be recruited from the provinces. After a time it came to pass that the leaders—the emperors even—were no longer Romans in the old sense of the word. They came from Spain, from Illyricum, and from Asia Minor. Finally the tide of influence swept so strongly in the direction of Illyricum that the seat of Roman influence was transferred to the East, and the Roman Empire entered a new phase of existence. The

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1 This must not be construed as implying that such were the only lessons of Roman civilisation: See p. 4 et seq.
regeneration was effected, in a measure, by the civilisation of the new Rome in the East; but this was the development of an offspring state rather than the regeneration of the old commonwealth itself. Then in the West the northern barbarians, grown stronger and stronger, came down at last in successive hordes and made themselves masters of Italy, including Rome itself. With their coming and their final conquests the history of old Rome as a world empire terminates.

It is the sweep of events of the five hundred years from the accession of Augustus the first emperor to the overthrow of Romulus Augustulus the last emperor that we have to follow in the present volume. Let us consider in a few words the sources that have preserved the record of this most interesting sequence of events.

THE SOURCES OF IMPERIAL HISTORY

Reference has already been made to the importance of the monumental inscriptions. For the imperial history these assumed proportions not at all matched by the earlier periods. It was customary for the emperors to issue edicts that were widely copied throughout the provinces, and, owing to the relative recency of these inscriptions a great number of them have been preserved.

As a rule, these inscriptions have only incidental importance in the way of fixing dates or establishing details as to the economic history. On the other hand, such a tablet as the Monumentum Ancyranum gives important information as to the life of Augustus, and such pictorial presentations as occur on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius are of the utmost importance in reproducing the life-history of the period. For mere matters of chronology — having also wider implications on occasion — the large series of coins and medals is of inestimable importance. Without these various inscriptions, as has been said, many details of imperial history now perfectly established must have remained insoluble.

Nevertheless, after giving full credit to the inscriptions as sources of history, the fact remains that for most of the important incidents that go to make up the story, and for practically all the picturesque details of political history, the manuscripts are still our chief sources. The authors whose works have come down to us are relatively few in number, and may be briefly listed here in a few words. For the earliest imperial period we have the master historian Tacitus, the biographer Suetonius, the courtier Velleius Paterculus, and the statesman Dion Cassius. As auxiliary sources the writings of Martial, Valerius Maximus, Pliny, and the Jewish Wars of Josephus are to be mentioned. For the middle period of imperial history Dion Cassius and Herodian, supplemented by Aurelius Victor and the other epitomators, and by the so-called Augustan histories or biographies, are our chief sources. After they fail us, Zosimus and Ammianus Marcellinus have the field practically
to themselves, gaps in their work being supplied, as before, by the outline histories. Details as to these writers will be furnished, as usual, in our general bibliography.

THE FIRST CENTURY OF EMPIRE: AUGUSTUS TO NERO
(30 B.C.—68 A.D.)

29. Temple of Janus closed for the third time. 28. Senate reduced in numbers. 27. Octavian lays down his powers; is given the proconsular imperium for ten years, and made commander-in-chief of all the forces with the right of levying troops, and making war and peace. He receives the title of Augustus. Provinces divided into senatorial (where no army was required) and imperial where troops were maintained. 23. Proconsular imperium conferred on Augustus with possession of the tribunicia potestas. 20. War against the Parthian king, Phraates. Tigranes reinstated in his kingdom of Armenia. 19. Cantabri and Astures (in Spain) subdued. 15. Rætia and Noricum subjugated by Drusus and Tiberius and included among the Roman provinces. 12–9. Campaigns of Drusus in Germany and subjugation of Pannonia by Tiberius. 4 B.C. Birth of Jesus. 4 A.D. Augustus adopts his step-son Tiberius. 9. Illyricum, having rebelled, is reduced by Tiberius. Arminius, the chief of the Cheruscii, a German tribe, annihilates a Roman army under Quintilius Varus. 14. Tiberius, emperor. Germanicus, nephew of Tiberius, quells the revolted legions on the Rhine and makes war on the German tribe of the Marsi. 15. Germanicus invades Germany a second time and captures the wife of Arminius (Hermann). 16. Battle of the Campus Ildistavisus. Arminius defeated by Germanicus. 17. Recall and death of Germanicus. 23. Praetorian cohorts collected into one camp outside Rome on the suggestion of Sejanus, who now exercises great influence over Tiberius. 31. Sejanus put to death with many of his friends. 37. Caligula succeeds Tiberius. 41. Murder of Caligula. Claudius succeeds. 42. Mauretania becomes a Roman province. 43–47. Britain subdued by Plautius and Vespasian. 43. Lycia becomes a province. 44. Judea becomes a province. 54. Claudius poisoned by his wife Agrippina and succeeded by her son Nero. 55. Nero poisons his step-brother Britannicus. 58. Domitius Corbulo sent against the Parthians and Armenians. 59. Agrippina murdered by Nero's orders. 61. Suetonius Paulinus suppresses the revolt of Boadicea in Britain. 62. Nero murders his wife Octavia. 63. Parthians and Armenians renew the war. The Parthians finally sue for peace. The king of Armenia acknowledges his vassalage to Rome. 64. Destruction of great part of Rome by fire, said to have been started by Nero's command but attributed by him to the Jews and Christians. First persecution of the Christians. 65. Piso conspires against Nero. The plot is discovered. 66. First Jewish War. Vespasian sent to conduct it. 68. Gaul and Spain revolt against Nero, who commits suicide.
THE SECOND CENTURY OF EMPIRE: GALBA TO MARCUS AURELIUS
(68–180 A.D.)

68. **Galba, Otho, and Vitellius** succeed each other as emperors. 69. **Vespasian**, the first Flavian emperor, proclaimed by the soldiers. Vitellius put to death. The aristocratic body purified and replenished. Official worship restored. Public works executed. Reforms in the army and the finances, and the administration generally. **Batavian revolt** under Claudius Civilis. 70. Fall of Jerusalem. Batavian revolt quelled by Cerealis. 71. Cerealis becomes governor of Britain. 78. **Agricola** begins his campaigns in Britain. 79. **Titus**, the second Flavian emperor. Pompeii and Herculanenum destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius. 80. Agricola reaches the Solway Firth. 81. **Domitian**, the third Flavian emperor. 83. War with the Chatti. 84. **Caledonians** under **Galgaenus** defeated by Agricola, who completes the conquest of Britain. 86. **Dacian invasion** of Moesia. 87. **Dacians** defeat a Roman army. 89. Peace with the Dacians. 93. **Antonius Saturninus**, governor of upper Germany, revolts. The rebellion is put down and his papers are destroyed. Domitian executes the supposed accomplices of Saturninus and begins a series of cruelties. Philosophers expelled from Rome. Persecutions of Jews and Christians. 96. **Nerva** succeeds on the murder of Domitian, and introduces a policy of mildness. 98. **Trajan**, emperor. 101–102. Dacians attacked and overthrown by Trajan. 106. Dacians finally subdued by Trajan. Their country becomes a Roman province. 114. Parthian War undertaken to prevent the Parthian king from securing the Armenian crown to his family. 116. Parthian War ends with the incorporation of Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria amongst the Roman provinces. Trajan dies on his return. Many public works were executed in this reign. 117. **Hadrian**, emperor. He abandons Trajan’s recent conquests. 118. Mesia invaded by the Sarmatians and Roxolani. Hadrian concludes peace with the Roxolani. The Sarmatian War continues for a long time. 120–127. Hadrian makes a tour through the provinces. 121. Hadrian’s wall built in Britain. 132. **Edictum perpetuum**, or compilation of the edictal laws of the praetors. 132–135. Second Jewish War, beginning with the revolt of Simon Bar Kosiba. Many buildings were erected in Hadrian’s reign. 138. ** Antoninus Pius, emperor.** He promotes the internal prosperity of the empire, and protects it against foreign attacks. 139. British revolt suppressed by Lollius Urbicus. Wall of **Antoninus** (Graham’s Dyke) built. 161. Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, joint emperors. 162–166. Parthian War. It terminates in the restoration of Armenia to its lawful sovereign and the cession of Mesopotamia to Rome. 163. Christian persecution. 166. A barbarian coalition of the Marcomanni and other tribes threatens the empire. Both emperors take the field against them. 169. Lucius Verus dies. 174. Victory over the Quadi. Miracle of the Thundering Legion. 175. Avidius Cassius proclaims himself emperor, and makes himself master of all Asia within Mount Taurus. He is assassinated. 578. Peace with the Marcomanni renewed.
THE FOURTH CENTURY OF EMPIRE: AURELIAN TO THEodosius

(270–395 A.D.)

them which is followed by their establishment in Thrace, Phrygia, and Lydia, and the enrollment of large numbers in the army of the Eastern Empire. 383. Clemens Maximus revolts against Gratian, who is captured and put to death. 387. Maximus makes himself master of Italy. Theodosius restores Valentinian II, and puts Maximus to death. 390. Massacre of the inhabitants of Thessalonica by order of Theodosius in revenge for the murder of officials. 392. Valentinian II murdered. Eugenius emperor of the West. 394. Theodosius defeats Eugenius and becomes the last emperor of the whole Roman world. 395. Death of Theodosius. Arcadius becomes emperor of the East and Honorius of the West.

THE WESTERN DOMINIONS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY OF EMPIRE

(395-476 A.D.)

Africa, on invitation of Boniface, who has been several years in revolt. 431. War of Boniface with Vandals ended with capture of Hippo. The Vandals are masters of a large part of Africa. 432. War between Boniface and Attila. Death of Boniface. 434. Attila becomes king of the Huns. It is said that Honoria, sister of Valentinian, in disgrace at court, invites him to attack Italy. 435. Peace with Generic. War with the Burgundians and Goths in Gaul. 436. Theodoric besieges Narbo. 437. The war in Gaul continues. Valentinian marries daughter of Theodosius II. 439. Theodoric defeats Litorius at Tolosa. Peace with the Goths. 440. Generic invades Sicily. 444. Attila murders his brother, Bleda, and succeeds to the full authority. 446. The Vandals devastate Roman dominions in Spain. The Britons ask aid against the Saxons. 448. The Suevi ravage Roman dominions in Spain. 451. Attila invades Gaul. He is defeated at Châlons by Attilius and Theodoric. Death of Theodoric, who is succeeded by his son, Torismond. 452. Attila invades Italy. Siege and capture of Aquileia. Attila retires to Gaul. Death of Torismond, succeeded by Theodoric II. Leo, bishop of Rome, goes as ambassador to Attila. 453. Death of Attila. His army is scattered. 455. Murder of Valentinian by Petronius Maximus. Maximus declared emperor. He marries the widow of Valentinian, who calls Generic to her aid. 456. Murder of Maximus as he is preparing to fly from the Vandal. Avitus proclaimed emperor in Gaul by Theodoric II. He is recognised by Marcian at Constantinople. 457. Majorian made emperor by Ricimer, who the previous year, has deposed Avitus. 458. Majorian proceeds against the Vandals and Gauls. 459. Peace between Majorian and Theodoric II, who has been defeated. 460. Roman fleet destroyed by Generic at Carthage. Peace between Majorian and Generic. 461. Deposition and murder of Majorian by Ricimer. Elevation of Severus. 462. Vandals ravage Italy. 463. Theodoric II attempts to gain possession of Gaul. Is defeated, but rules over a large portion of Spain. 465. Death of Severus. No emperor is appointed, Ricimer keeping power in his own hands. 466. Murder of Theodoric II by his brother, Euric, who succeeds him. 467. Anthemius appointed emperor by Leo of Constantinople, at Ricimer's request. 470. Euric takes Arelate and Massilia, and defeats the Britons. Execution of the patrician Romanus, who aspires to the empire. 472. War between Ricimer and Anthemius. Ricimer declares Olybius emperor, and puts Anthemius to death. 473. Death of Ricimer. Death of Olybius. 473. Glycerius proclaimed emperor. The Ostrogoths prepare to invade the empire. 474. Leo sends Julius Nepos to reign in the West. Glycerius deposed. Euric occupies Arverna. Peace between Euric and Nepos. 475. Orestes drives out Nepos and proclaims his own son, Romulus Augustulus, emperor. 476. Odoacer invades Italy. Romules Augustulus deposed, and Odoacer acknowledged king of Italy. The Byzantine Emperor Zeno confirms the title of patrician upon Odoacer, who rules a nominal vicar. "There was thus," says Bryce, "legally no extinction of the Western Empire at all, but only a reunion of East and West."