

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

ARCHÆOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

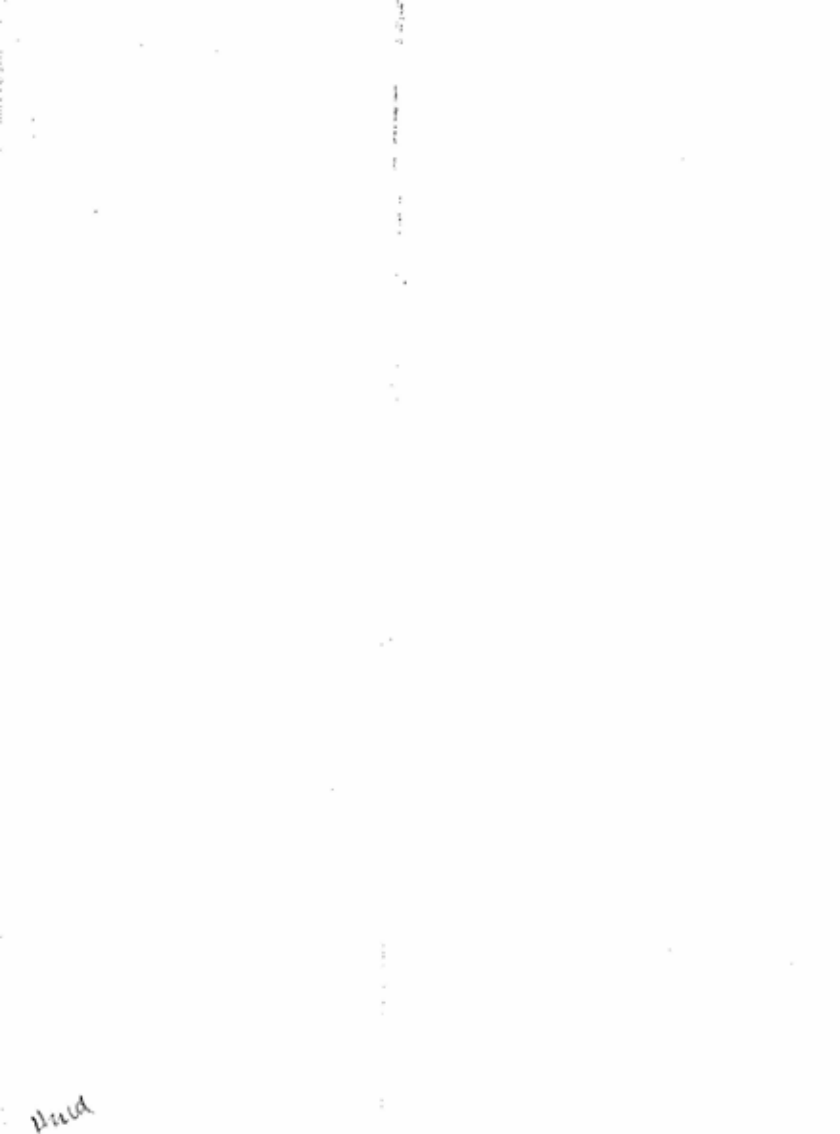
CENTRAL  
ARCHÆOLOGICAL  
LIBRARY

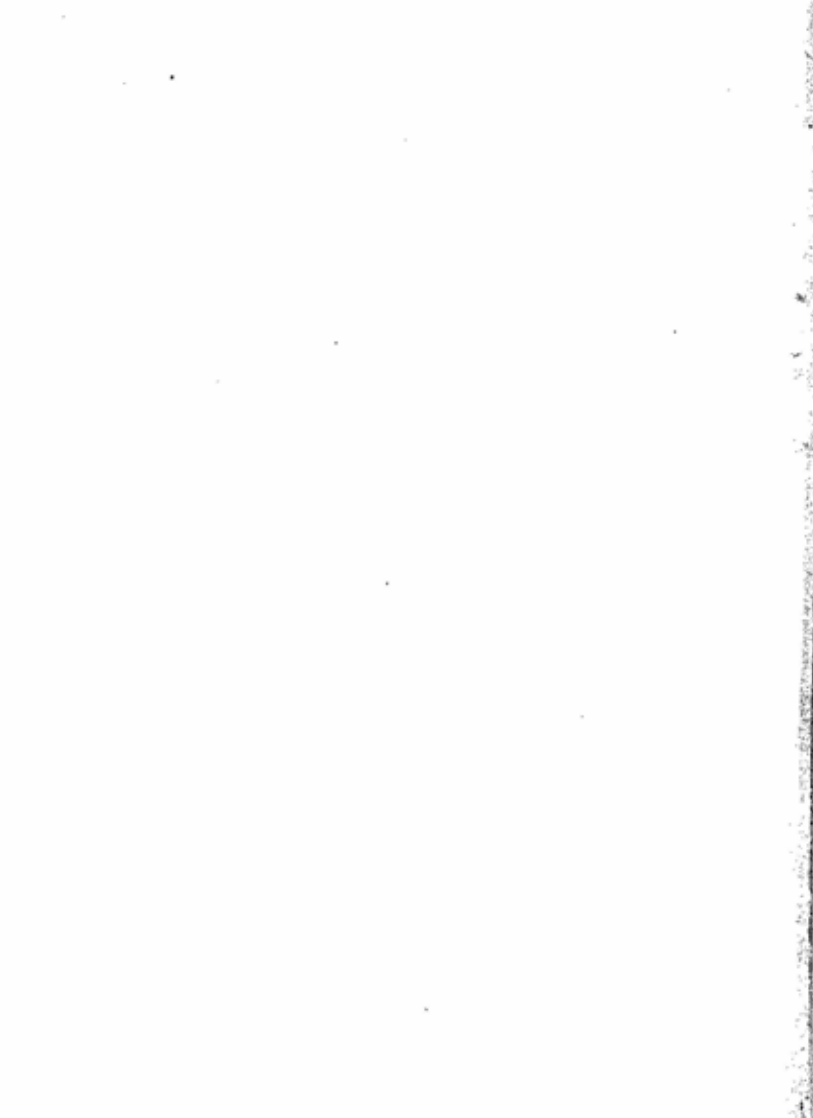
---

ACCESSION NO. 36235

CALL No. 937.01 *Cow*

D.G.A. 79,





**The Great Revolutions**

**THE REVOLUTIONS OF  
ANCIENT ROME**



## **The Great Revolutions**

F. R. Cowell

**THE REVOLUTIONS OF  
ANCIENT ROME**

36235



937.31  
2547



**Thames and Hudson**

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
LIBRARY, NEW DELHI.

Acc. No.....36235.....

Date .....14-10-62.....

Call No.....937.01/Cow.....

© THAMES AND HUDSON LONDON 1962  
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON LTD WORCESTER

## Contents

FOREWORD	<i>page</i> 7
FROM ROYALTY TO REPUBLICANISM	13
THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND	21
DISCONTENTS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.	30
EARLY REVOLUTIONARY ACTION	38
FORGING THE ROMAN CONSTITUTION	47
RISE TO WORLD POWER 290-167 B.C.	65
T. GRACCHUS AND HIS PREDECESSORS	77
G. GRACCHUS AND THE TURNING OF THE TIDE	95
DRIFT TO CATASTROPHE 121-91 B.C.	106
VIOLENT REVOLUTION 91-31 B.C.	116
THE RISE OF JULIUS CAESAR 66-50 B.C.	132
CIVIL WAR AND DICTATORSHIP 50-30 B.C.	152

THE SETTLEMENT OF AUGUSTUS	169
CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS OF THE EMPIRE	179
CONSOLIDATION AND COLLAPSE	188
THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME	203
EPILOGUE	213
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	218
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND BOOK LIST	224
INDEX	226

## Foreword

IF THE ROMANS cannot be said to have begun the tradition of political revolution, it is at least true for the western world that no revolutions have had a more enduring influence upon subsequent political thinking than theirs.

Their history, as distinct from their legendary story, is traditionally thought to have begun with a revolution. The Republic which they then established in 509 B.C. endured for nearly four hundred years, during which time they conquered their earlier masters, the Etruscans, succeeded in vanquishing their Italian neighbours and rivals as well as the flourishing Greek communities of southern Italy, and then in going on, after desperate warfare, to conquer most of the then known world.

No peoples who have risen to imperial power in the world had so long a record of free political development untrammelled by imperial, royal or court intrigues as the Romans. They long had an open, face-to-face contact between rulers and ruled, between rich and poor, high and low in a relatively small community sharing the same traditions, outlook, language and ways of life. Their situation therefore was one which optimistic democrats might consider to have been ideal, because it should have seen acute political and social problems melt away or at least become far more tractable, easier to understand and to resolve. In the course of this long partnership all parties to it saw their country attain unrivalled power, wealth and glory. For their first two centuries at least, they had been in constant peril from external foes. A common danger might have been expected to weld a common fellow-feeling and a true solidarity which would survive into the following age of security and prosperity to introduce a well-run, just, enjoyable and progressive social life for all. Yet despite their record of amazing success and notwithstanding the great ability and wisdom of the leaders of the Republic to which that record bears so

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

striking a witness, the Romans ultimately failed to realize the promise of their splendid opportunities. They did not succeed in creating a form of government adequate to sustain the burden and responsibility of world-rule.

Their failure still excites curiosity because in discovering the reasons for it—if we can—we may get clues to the causes of some of the great revolutions of other and later times.

The first crack in the Republic of free Roman citizens appeared very early. It had all the appearance of a class struggle between the large majority who became exceedingly discontented with the way that the small minority were managing their affairs. A bloodless revolution in 494 B.C. struck at the overwhelming power of the ruling class which it sought permanently to subject to some popular control by creating the novel office of Tribunes of the People, ten powerful protectors of the plebeian underdog.

This second revolution led within the brief space of less than fifty years to the third Roman revolution in 449 B.C., made necessary to maintain the power of the Tribunes and to enforce respect for the Rule of Law, that bulwark of such political and social equality as the early Republic was able to achieve.

Successful in providing some remedies against the grosser forms of political oppression, these revolutions had still not given the plebeians access to the levers of power in the State. They coveted the privilege of election to the highest offices or magistracies who wielded executive and judicial authority. To wrest this right from the stubborn aristocrats whose families had a virtual monopoly of political distinction and leadership, required a persistent and protracted struggle which, however, fell short of an open revolutionary outbreak. At last, in 367 B.C., the plebeians were not merely allowed but were legally entitled to provide from their ranks one of the two chief officers, the Consuls, of the Republic.

After a prolonged struggle lasting nearly a century and a half, the plebeian majority had succeeded in freeing the way for some of the more eminent and more energetic of their ranks to become eligible for positions of executive power in the State.

Their next task was to dominate the law-making or legislative power of the Roman Republic as well. Such was aristocratic opposition to this further and decisive encroachment by the plebeians upon their constitutional position that the fourth revolution of ancient Rome was required to break it. In 287 B.C. it was finally agreed that the wishes of the plebeians, expressed in their own public assembly under the leadership of their Tribunes, should be binding upon the community as a whole. It was the final Roman revolution carried through by the people as a whole with the aim of altering the distribution of political power in the Republic. Like all the three preceding revolutions, it had been finally won without bloodshed or lasting acrimony, however fiercely passions had been inflamed while the struggle was in progress. For nearly two centuries thereafter the political settlement which the three revolutions had secured, seems to have ensured a relatively peaceful, harmonious state of affairs at home, a boon that was all the more valuable because the Romans were continually at war.

When internal troubles again disturbed social life within the City of Rome, they came about not in the way the earlier revolutions had been caused, by struggles over constitutional inequalities and injustices, but by discontent over economic inequalities. This was something new in Roman life, for while material wants and shortages had always bred envy and covetousness, they had stopped short of inciting planned action by the State as the best means of ensuring satisfaction.

In 133 B.C., Tiberius Gracchus began what was in effect the first 'share the wealth' campaign, as distinct from one to share booty of war, which the Romans had seriously to consider, and he used the office of Tribune of the People to do so. For the first time in the history of the Republic there was a violent clash over economic affairs. Roman blood was shed by Romans who had hitherto always solved their difficulties by peaceful means and Tiberius Gracchus was the first eminent Roman so to perish. Nothing daunted, his younger brother Gaius Gracchus took up the cause again ten years later with more far-reaching aims, only to share his brother's fate in a yet more



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

horrible scene of violence along with 3,000 other Romans. The economic revolution which the Gracchi brothers had brought about at such heavy cost was not entirely fruitless but it lacked political guarantee and its lasting effect was small. It was a revolution that failed, although it left a lasting memory and a new and sinister precedent of violence in public life.

From 123 B.C. onwards Roman political life became steadily less settled and stable. Partly because the economic discontents which had so violently come to a head still remained, but still more because personal political ambitions seemed to become sharper, more compelling and more extravagant, a new era of violence began. It was not, as were the earlier revolutions, the outcome of any mass movement, neither did the protagonists present themselves as popular leaders. Unrest and strife were deliberately engineered by individuals who used the armies of the Republic rather than the votes of its citizens in order to gain their own ends. Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar and Augustus were all army commanders and they all fought for their own hand. Except for Sulla, the future shape and destiny of the Republic seems to have had a subordinate place in their thoughts. Yet in the outcome, Caesar and still more Augustus carried through the greatest Roman revolution of all, for between them they abolished the Republican constitution under which Romans had risen to world supremacy. They overthrew the Rule of Law and substituted for it that military tyranny by which, under various disguises, the Romans were to be ruled throughout the Roman Empire. Although they could not face it, the stark fact was that after nearly 400 years of relative political freedom, the Romans again became subject to arbitrary power just as they had been under their last king of hateful memory long before. The revolutionary change consolidated by Augustus after 31 B.C. is often referred to as *The Roman Revolution*. It was indeed the final and fatal revolution, for it took power out of the hands of the people and they never got it back again.

The story of the revolutions of ancient Rome which this book attempts to outline is, of course, only part of the grand

## Foreword

story of the rise and fall of the Roman Republic and Empire. It has often been told and retold, for it will engage human interest as long as men wrestle with questions of political stability, with the problem of the best form of government, with the art of devising constitutions and laws and with the political task of making the governmental machine work efficiently and well to provide a framework in which the good life may be lived in freedom from want, from violence and from fear.

For centuries men in search of the right way to go about such difficult, complex and still largely unsolved tasks have turned to the study of Roman precedents. Memories of Brutus have raised many a dagger against arbitrary and unjust despots. The eloquence of Cicero has been revived to make tyrants tremble. The peace of Augustus has been invoked by sham supermen to soothe opponents of totalitarian, fascist rule. Vivid Roman word-pictures of the misery of despotic power nerved many to withstand the horrors of Hitlerism. The Revolutions of Ancient Rome cannot therefore be dismissed as mere obscure events lost in the mists of Time. They remain a lasting memory with enduring effects upon the history of mankind.



Italy c. 290 B.C.

## From Royalty to Republicanism

REVOLUTIONARY ENTHUSIASMS are not easily stirred up among settled agricultural peoples. The Romans who began as a collection of small groups of farmers and herdsmen certainly seem to have shared that dislike of change, particularly of violent change, that characterizes most agricultural communities who venerate the old-established customs and traditions of their race. In their deep attachment to the ways of their ancestors, which they venerated as the *mos maiorum*, the custom of the great majority, that is of the dead of the previous generations, the Romans had a deep suspicion of anyone wanting to introduce changes. 'New things', *res novae*, was indeed their expression for 'revolution' in politics; the inference being clear that new things were bad and alarming. Yet their early history was far from an idyllic tale of bucolic and placid enjoyment of the kindly fruits of the earth, undisturbed by the vileness of mankind. On the contrary, the history of the Roman people was one of amazing growth and change accompanied as time went on by violence and bloodshed that burned into their consciences.

Roman  
aversion to  
change

From the very earliest times there had been tough domestic struggles and upheavals, the memory of which had long been kept alive in legend and story. Romans who took any interest in their country's past looked back to those stirring times in the dim and distant past when in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. their ancestors had been ruled by kings, the last of whom was driven out of Rome in 509 B.C. They recalled the long and stubborn fight which then went on to secure some measure of democratic political equality, some greater recognition of the common man's demand for elementary social justice and for a more sympathetic attitude and fellow-feeling between rich and poor. They remembered the great victories won in battles which had to be waged over the centuries before their ancestors obtained any satisfaction and they clung firmly to the

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

institutions by which they believed the path of political progress had been marked.

Such notably were their republican instead of royal rulers; their elective offices of Consul, Praetor and Quaestor; their Tribunes of the People; their right to be governed by a settled body of public and private law and the supreme right of any one of them to appeal to the people as a whole for ultimate justice against sentence of death.

Good old  
days

The very fact that the Romans were so uneasy about political and social change and deeply suspicious of all innovators, directs attention back to the nature of that settled way of life which in later times they longed in vain to recover. The story of Roman revolutions goes back therefore in history to very early times, so early in fact that it becomes impossible to disentangle history from legend and fact from fiction.

Yet the main outlines of the Roman story stand out clearly enough. Rome's humble beginnings; its domination by foreign Etruscan kings; its achievement of independence; its long and desperate struggle against the predatory enemies by which it was hemmed in; its incredible toughness and fighting spirit; its ultimate victory against all other Latins, Italians and foreign invaders—Celts or Gauls, Greeks and Carthaginians; its conquest, subjugation and permanent rule over Greece, the Balkans, North Africa, Spain, Western Europe, the Middle East and Egypt; all combine to give the record a stirring, epic quality.

Before the Romans themselves began to write history, an intelligent Greek taken as a captive in war was brought to live as an exile in Rome. With a literary skill that no Roman could then rival, he brought a trained mind and a scholar's instincts to bear upon the story of their past. What drove him to the task as long ago as 150 years before the birth of Christ, may still serve in the twentieth century to spur curiosity and to revivify an oft-told tale. 'Can anyone,' he asked, 'be so indifferent or idle as not to care to know by what means and under what kind of polity almost the whole inhabited world was conquered and brought under the dominion of the single city of Rome and

## From Royalty to Republicanism

that too within a period of not quite fifty-three years?'  
(219-167 B.C.)

Such evidence as we have about the quality of life of the Roman people at the dawn of their history indicates that from the earliest times right down to the beginning of their authenticated history in the days of Polybius, they were a race of stubborn, tough farmers and shepherds, their horizon bounded by their arable plots and the grazing lands of their sheep, goats and cattle. In very early times they were always forced to be keyed up to defend their homes, the small settlements above flood level on the hills above the River Tiber, some fifteen miles upstream before its silt- and sand-charged waters reached the sea. In their small round or square huts of wood, wattle or stone and thatch they lived in precarious security, surrounded by enemies and enjoying a standard of living little superior to that of the animals which they tended and which alone, with their land, they regarded as real wealth. Their womenfolk saw to the domestic manufacture of their simple one-piece items of clothing, hand spun and woven from the backs of their sheep and roughly sewn to make vests, tunics or the large plaid-like ceremonial toga.

Their simple rustic faith nourished a deep regard for the mysterious spirits by whom all the occurrences in their lives of any significance were deemed to be controlled. They venerated their ancestors and were wholly committed to maintain the standards and the way of life which they had learned from them. This traditional pattern, the *mos maiorum*, was more of a self-sufficient standard of conduct than a phrase such as 'the American way of life' probably conveys today.

There seems little doubt that when their story begins, the average Roman family had a hard struggle to win a bare subsistence. Traditionally it was thought that not more than about an acre and a quarter, or two *iugera* in the Roman measure of area, was sufficient to support an average family, along with certain grazing rights on public land. With no more than a garden plot of this size, the greatest industry and diligence were needed to husband the soil. Around Rome a losing battle was

Romans of the  
6th Century  
B.C.

Land Hunger

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

being fought in the effort to maintain fertility, so more land had to be found if the Romans were to be able to avoid starvation or to allow any increase in their numbers.

Rome's nearest neighbours, the Etruscans and the Latins, and their neighbours in turn, the Italians, were inevitably the victims of the Roman will to survive. They however were in much the same position themselves, with equally strong motives to wish to prosper at Rome's expense. In such a tough situation the internal pressure within the Roman community for roughly equal shares in available resources in land, flocks and herds was bound to be strong. For, while the majority existed upon a somewhat low and primitive level, it seems that there was already a marked class distinction in Rome where a small *élite* of more intelligent, enterprising and older families had, by inheritance, luck or greater skill, succeeded in acquiring much more land and livestock than the average family could ever hope to possess. Inevitably such richer folk carried great weight in the community. For they had most at stake and they were prepared to shoulder the responsibilities which their possessions and their position in society devolved upon them. Leadership there had to be if the Romans were to maintain their hold upon the riverside bunch of hills and adjacent plains.

Romans and  
Etruscans

The first Roman revolution could hardly have occurred without such leadership. About 650 B.C. Rome had been conquered by the Etruscans, a strange, non-Italian people who are thought to have come to Italy by sea from the East probably in the eighth century B.C. By conquering hill towns in strategic positions they came to dominate the land of Italy north of the Tiber and they intermarried with the natives to create the Etruscan race. Living as conquerors, they seem soon to have attained a relatively high pitch of luxury, refinement and sophistication. When their warlike qualities were still uppermost, they succeeded in overpowering the stubborn resistance of the Romans and in becoming lords both of Latium and the rich plain of Campania, south of Latium.

Etruscan kings and aristocrats then ruled over the Romans, who were rather violently introduced to a civilized and cultural

## From Royalty to Republicanism

life which seems to have been considerably more developed in its reliance upon and appreciation of the pleasures of the senses than their own had by then become. The Etruscans moreover opened doors on the Mediterranean world which was then in a constant ferment, so that throughout the sixth century B.C. the Romans were forced into some awareness of other people and other ways of life, including commercial and trading possibilities, they had not hitherto glimpsed. They were well placed to profit from such new opportunities, had they had a mind to do so, because of the strategic site of Rome with its bridge, for long the only bridge across the lower Tiber, connecting Latium and Campania with Etruria. Etruscan influence acted to force the Romans into a more tightly-knit community behind tough defensive walls. Etruscans organized Romans for their own purposes; the names of the three original 'tribes', 'clans' or 'ward-groups' of the Roman people which long survived as the titles of the cavalry units of the Roman army, *Ramnes*, *Tities* and *Luceres* were Etruscan. It has been suggested that the very name, Rome, was Etruscan, derived either from *rumon*, the Etruscan name for the Tiber, or from *Ruma*, the name of an Etruscan family.

The simple agricultural labourer who made up the mass of the Roman people may not have felt the same distaste for their Etruscan rulers as did the heads of the older, wealthier Roman families. It has indeed been conjectured that the Etruscan king tried to win them to his side so as to be able to play them off against the recalcitrant Roman nobles. Yet even if the poor did not share an aversion to the sophisticated Etruscans who were already somewhat 'decadent' in comparison with their own boorish rustic simplicity, they would not have relished being led into battle against their Latin neighbours by men who spoke a strange language and who practised weird religious rites. Roman noble families may have felt the contrast even more strongly, for the cultural life of the Etruscans, in so far as it is possible to judge from such of their sculpture, jewellery, painting and ceramics that still remain, must have been almost as remote from the very undeveloped culture of the Romans as

Clash of  
Cultures



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

that of London, Paris or New York is now from the culture of the wilds of the Congo.

The clash between Romans and Etruscans seems to have been fundamentally a clash of incompatible cultural values, than which no division goes deeper or is more irreconcilable. Antagonisms which are so often attributed in facile fashion to 'racial' and often also to 'economic' oppositions usually turn out to rest upon different ideas about all that which gives meaning and value to life. Such explanations are of course mere guesses, for there are no contemporary accounts either of the Roman attitude towards the Etruscans or of the Etruscan opinion of the Romans.

Romans and  
Greeks

While the Etruscans were conquering Central Italy, Greek civilization had attained its height. From the eighth century B.C. onwards boatloads of Greeks, seeking beyond the seas a fuller life than they could enjoy in their cramped unfertile peninsula, landed on the southern shores of Italy and occupied most of Sicily. The result was the establishment of a prosperous Greek civilization which, as that of the Etruscans, was far in advance of the cultural levels of any of the natives of Italy, including the Romans. Long before the Romans had created any literature of their own, or had learned to read that of any other peoples, the Greek writers had already achieved masterpieces, many of which survive to amaze, to humble and still to teach mankind. The Greeks, like the Etruscans, were well aware of Rome's existence, but in all the extant Greek literature of this period, and indeed for some hundred years thereafter, not one word is devoted to the Romans, their city or their way of life. Whatever the Etruscans may have had to say about them has disappeared or will remain locked in mystery until a clue is rediscovered to enable us to decipher their language.

Both Greeks and Etruscans had their troubles and the Romans were by no means the worst of them. Whatever the situation may have been when these sea-borne invaders made their first settlements, it seems clear that by the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Italy was already becoming uncomfortably overcrowded in relation to contemporary possibilities of finding

## From Royalty to Republicanism

adequate food and other basic necessities of life. The race for survival was on.

It was against such a background that the Romans, with a sudden revolution, began their history as an independent people.

An ancient tradition, which, like much of this early history of Rome belongs to the realm of poetry rather than to that of history, records how a noble Roman matron Lucretia, ravished and dishonoured by the son of the Etruscan King Tarquin, killed herself after first calling upon her husband and kinsmen to avenge her. They then turned in fury on the King, drove him into exile and so toppled the Etruscan throne. Whatever truth it may contain, such a legend points to patrician initiative against the alien monarchy. That it embodies some element of fact can be detected in the hatred which the Romans traditionally always felt for the very name of King, a tradition so strong that thereafter the blackest political crime of which any Roman could be accused was ambition to become a king. Over four hundred and fifty years later, it was impossible for Julius Caesar to assume the title, despite the fact that he had achieved all the power, and more, that any king could expect to exercise.

However great our scepticism may be about the Lucretia legend, the fact remains that millions of Romans and more recent peoples over the centuries accepted it as true, so that like the deeds of the heroes in other national legends such as those of King Arthur and King Alfred, of Charlemagne and St. Louis, it survived to stir the passions and to animate the will of later generations as though it had been an event of only yesterday. Since the eighteenth century a more critical scholarship has cast serious doubts upon much of the traditional record of events in early Rome. Nevertheless the undoubted fact that until that time they had been accepted without any doubts, endows them with a significance that it is impossible to minimize. The scepticism of Gibbon, of de Beaufort, of Niebuhr, Mommsen, Pais and other scholars has effectively withdrawn much of the confidence which the traditional record formerly inspired, but in more recent times there has been something of a reaction and

The First  
Roman  
Revolution  
509 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

a greater willingness to credit some part at least of the stories, hoary with antiquity, which purport to illustrate the history of the Roman people.

That the Romans achieved independence and that they would have been unable to do so without a struggle, whether it took place in 510-509 B.C. or considerably later as some scholars now maintain, is the main fact about which there can be little doubt. The precedent for achieving popular ambitions by resolute revolt thus became the first and foremost reality in the traditions by which Roman public life was henceforth guided. It set limits to what Romans would tolerate in the way of oppression from others, so that soon after the Etruscans had failed in their attempts to reconquer Rome in 508 and 496 B.C., and there was less fear of subjection to foreign rule, Romans began to be equally determined not to become the victims of domestic tyrants either.

## The Social and Political Background

THE WAY IN WHICH three primitive tribes in a small settlement beside a small river in Central Italy managed their affairs in the fifth century B.C. hardly seems a matter of deep concern to us today. Yet generations of scholars have devoted years of their lives to the problem, which has thereby become part of the heritage of western political thought. Romans themselves naturally looked back to the distant time when their institutions took shape, so it is unavoidable that some space should be devoted to the story of the origins of Roman political life, speculative although much of it must be.

The first Roman revolution was organized and carried through by some of the chief men among the small community of three clans or tribes who regarded themselves as the rightful occupiers of the seven hills of Rome. The revolutionary leaders were the chiefs, elders, or the fathers, *patres*, of the well-established families from whom the Etruscan kings selected their advisers. They and their families prided themselves upon their ancient origin all the more as time went on and as newcomers began to settle in the district. Perhaps unusual bravery in war, wisdom in counsel, strength of character or charm of manner, or combinations of these excellent qualities, had conferred a natural distinction upon some outstanding Romans, for this is the obvious way in which aristocracies arise. After the manner of aristocracies also, the Roman patricians at first won a willing deference, and it was not until later that their descendants, some of whom might have had no other mark of distinction than their family origin, sought to keep the newcomers and others without a long pedigree at a distance and in a position of permanent inferiority for which any obvious justification was singularly absent.

Leadership was not looked for solely from the patrician heads of the old-established families. From the very earliest times deference was paid to the few men who were regarded as

The  
Patricians

Priests,  
Augurs and  
Haruspices

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

specially skilled in interpreting the will of the gods and specially learned in the religious traditions of the Roman people. These were the pontiffs, the augurs and the *fetiales*.

During the Etruscan domination of their city the Romans took over some un-Italian religious observances from them, notably the art or so-called science of the *haruspices* which was based upon an examination of the vital organs of sacrificial animals, such as the livers and gall-bladders of sheep. The supposed significance of their form and position, together with the supposed significance of other natural phenomena such as the frequency and duration of lightning flashes, the flight of birds and the behaviour of certain sacred chickens, were among the chief signs, so it was thought, whereby the will of the gods was made known to mankind. How any rational ideas or any plausible theology could emerge from such a mish-mash of superstitious twaddle is one of the Roman mysteries that defy explanation. Yet it was the stock-in-trade of the Augurs, one of the most select and venerated body of men throughout Roman public life, who were held in high esteem as long as paganism endured. To become an Augur was an honour to which highly intelligent Romans continued to aspire even after they had climbed to the highest post on the ladder of political success and distinction.

There was of course more in Roman religion than augury, which is stressed here for its political importance. For to engage an army in battle, or to hold a political ceremony, such as the election of a senior public official or magistrate, without a favourable report from an Augur, was regarded as very risky, while to proceed against his advice was held to entail certain disaster. Powers so wide and so effective naturally had their political uses, and it is not surprising that the ruling classes of Rome found it convenient to have the Augurs on their side.

Having driven away their king and his immediate entourage, the Romans had to look for direction in their public activities to the *patres*, those heads of the leading families in the City who, as a council of elders or 'senate', had taken the initiative in expelling the King. Political authority, said Rome's great his-

## The Social and Political Background

torian Livy five hundred years later, then reverted to the elders: *res ad patres redit*. Almost equal in importance in the primitive superstitious Roman community were the communications which it was believed that the kings alone could hold with the gods by whom all mortal fate, including the fate of Rome, was determined. To interpret aright the signs and portents, the *auspicia* by which divine favour or disfavour was signified, was a matter of the greatest concern, and it also now became a sacred trust for the elders: *auspicia ad patres redire*, said Cicero, before Livy, in the first century B.C. Correct performance of religious rites was a matter of such vital concern that for it even the hated name of 'King' was perpetuated. A 'King' for sacrifices, *rex sacrorum*, was created but he was expressly debarred from holding any political office. The only other use of the word 'king' which the republican Romans conserved was the title they gave to a stop-gap chief official, if for any reason normal appointments could not be made. He was the *interrex*, provisional king.

The *patres* who together formed the council of elders or Senate in whom religious and civil authority was now vested, became the ultimate source of continuous authority in the Republic. Tradition told how they had, to the number of one hundred, been called together as an advisory council by Romulus the traditional founder of the City of Rome and how they had been maintained as such and increased in numbers by his Etruscan successors. Tradition also had it that the ranks of the Senators had been thinned by royal tyranny before the fall of the monarchy, so Lucretia had not been the only victim of arbitrary power. In order to fill the ranks and to make the numbers up to three hundred, men were chosen from new families. The original members of the Senate were still called *patres*, the new ones *conscripti*. Together, *patres (et) conscripti* or 'lords and associates', they formed a kind of House of Lords. The *patres* retained some exclusive authority. They alone and not the *conscripti* could set the final stamp of approval on decisions by the army assembly of the centuries and they alone could nominate an *interrex*. The Senators were not exclusively

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

an upper-class body, for men outside their ranks might be chosen to join them, but they tended more and more to behave as a superior exclusive body towards the far more numerous families not represented among them.

Consuls or  
Praetors

The day-to-day management of public business would not of course be undertaken by immobilizing three hundred of the busiest men in the Republic in continual sessions of the Senate. Executive authority was therefore conferred upon two or three men for a limited period of twelve months. These were at first called *praetors*, men who led, and there may have been three of them, one from each of the original tribes. Two at any rate were military commanders, later known as Consuls, while the third retained his title of *praetor* and dealt solely with civilian business and the growing Roman preoccupation with law.

The army assembly, the *comitia centuriata*, elected these chief magistrates, but the choice was limited to the men whose names were proposed as candidates for office by the Senate. Naturally the Senators selected men from their own patrician ranks, so the choice of rulers was practically made by the Senate.

The Roman  
People

Throughout the history of the Republic the Roman people, the partners in that renowned combination S.P.Q.R., *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, stood politically for Roman men of military age with a vote in the public assembly. Women never had votes. For the first centuries of the Republic the public assembly was the army and the only way for the ordinary man to participate in any political activity was by using his vote, if he were invited to give it while drawn up in army formation.

The voting arrangements were never such as to favour democratic equality. 'One man, one vote' was never a Roman principle as far as the public assembly of politically active citizens was concerned, although 'one senator, one vote', or one expression of opinion, was the practice in the Senate. In their public assemblies the voting was always by groups of men and the only votes that were counted were the votes of the groups. Within the groups each man's vote counted for one, and the way that the majority voted determined the way that group's single vote would be cast in the public assembly.

## The Social and Political Background

Citizenship  
through  
Property

The *comitia centuriata* was the name of the assembly of Roman voters after the Roman army had been reorganized in the sixth century B.C. Tradition credited the legendary King Servius Tullius with the initiative by which it was achieved, and the Roman form of government in the days of the last kings was called the Servian Constitution for this reason. He divided the Roman army into five or six groups according to their wealth measured in pounds of copper which served as a rough unit of accounts, so that the richer a Roman was, the bigger the share he had to take in equipping himself at his own expense to fight in Rome's wars. The richest class of all were the cavalry because they could afford a horse. Large numbers of Romans were very poor and if they were unable for this reason to provide themselves with any weapons they were excused army service. Roman men were therefore drawn up in military array under their officers in order to vote. By long established custom they were not allowed to meet inside the City so their votes on new laws and to elect their rulers were taken outside the walls on the parade ground, the 'field of Mars', *campus Martius*. The bulk of the men of military age were in the five or six classes of infantry. Livy includes the sixth class with the fifth for voting purposes. The following army organization resulted, each class being subdivided into 'centuries' or regiments nominally of one hundred men in each:

### COMITIA CENTURIATA

Class	Estimated wealth valued in Roman pounds of copper	Number of voting centuries in each class
Cavalry and Infantry I	—	18
II	100,000 or over	80 { 40 Senior 40 Junior
III	75,000 to 100,000	20
IV	50,000 to 75,000	20
V	25,000 to 50,000	20
VI	11,000 to 25,000	30
	11,000 or less	1



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

In so far as this account of the economic divisions of the Romans in the earliest days of the Republic can be trusted, it shows that there were men of property owning ten or a hundred times as much as the poorer rank and file. The wealthy were at first mostly patricians, while the poorer Romans were the 'plebs', from a Greek word signifying the majority. They were just as much Roman citizens as the patricians, and in time many plebeian families became wealthy and able as well to boast a distinguished family reputation. They therefore increasingly resented patrician pretensions to exclusive privileges and unassailable priority in the State, and from this division a bitter conflict, the 'struggle of the orders', was to develop. The patricians had a flying start.

Respon-  
sibilities of  
Wealth

Through this Servian reorganization the decision of the public assembly became the decision of the chief men of the State, although no one was ostensibly deprived of his vote, except, it would seem, the large class of poorer citizens who were not required to join the Roman army. What happened in practice was that the eighteen centuries of the cavalry were first summoned to vote, then the eighty centuries of the infantry of the first class. Together these two classes could record ninety-eight votes, because of the voting by centuries and not by individuals. It is highly unlikely in a poor agricultural community that there should have been such a preponderance of wealthy men as these numbers imply. Unless the votes of the two richest classes were divided, which seldom happened, they could always carry the day against the remaining ninety centuries of the other four classes. If a century really meant a hundred men, this would have constituted a valid majority of eight hundred men, assuming that there was a clear split of opinion between the four centuries and the cavalry and first century, something also unlikely to happen. The result was that the lowest centuries in which all the poorer men were grouped never got asked for their opinions at all.

The extent moreover to which any of them were really able to influence public policy was severely limited by the fact that neither the King nor, when he was expelled, the Consuls, were

## The Social and Political Background

compelled to consult them, and, if this was done, it was only to find out if they agreed or disagreed with the proposals. For voting was a kind of referendum which consisted in signifying either consent to a change or preference for things as they were. The King as military commander had no doubt needed to explain something of his plans to the assembled army if he was to get their enthusiastic support, and the soldiers would receive his message, as free men, either with shouts of approval and support or with silence, murmurs and misgiving. In order to gauge the real state of opinion in the army, it was natural to call for a show of hands, for or against the royal proposals, and in order to record the result accurately, the voting system described above was organized, by regiments or centuries, within each of which a majority vote would be taken. Continually throughout their long subsequent history the Romans never changed this system of voting in block units. It would therefore be wrong to speak of the Roman Republic as a democratic state in the sense in which we use the word democracy today.

In order to enrol men in the army in their correct class and in order to levy taxes or tribute, the King had to find out how much property was owned by every man in the City, and he was only able to do so by taking a census. For this purpose the City had to be surveyed, district by district. Four local City 'tribes' were accordingly created as the basis of classification. In this way a new territorial division of the citizens of Rome was established which replaced the earlier traditional three great clan tribes of Ramnes, Titenses and Luceres, whose origin as we have seen was Etruscan, although the Romans attributed it to the legendary King Romulus who was supposed to have founded Rome in 753 B.C.

At an early date during the monarchy Rome prospered and expanded sufficiently to attract newcomers so that three new tribes were created to bring the newcomers into military service and the payment of taxes. As Rome continued to grow, more 'tribes' had to be formed until there were thirty-five of them by 241 B.C., after which no more were created, despite an

Citizenship  
through  
Residence,  
the City  
Tribes

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

enormous expansion of the City and a huge increase in the number of Roman citizens. This new division by place of residence, by wards or tribes, cut across the army division by wealth and formed the basis for a new kind of public assembly, the *comitia tributa*, which at some unknown later date virtually superseded the army assembly by centuries. In so far as it remained legally necessary to hold the army assembly for elections, a way was found of combining it and the assembly by tribes for special votes. But this was a later development.

### Clients

Some free Roman citizens were by no means averse from accepting a position of subordination which obliged them to do deference to a distinguished or to a wealthy Roman. There seems in fact always to have been an intermediate grade or class of citizen, which gradually became larger, between the poor but free, independent City mob and the equally poor and free Roman who was dependent upon the great. Such were the *clientes*, the 'clients', a particularly Roman institution. How they originated, what precise form the client relationship took at different periods of Roman history, exactly what it involved and how it progressed, will probably never be known in any detail. Broadly speaking however clients were men and their families who depended upon a *patronus*, or patron, that is a Roman citizen who was more distinguished and influential, socially, politically and economically than they were themselves. At first none but patricians were *patroni* but later, as plebeians rose in the social scale, they too might become patrons. The ranks of the clients also were swollen by the increasing hordes of emancipated slaves or freedmen, all of whom became the clients of their former masters.

### Patrons

It was well worth a poor man's while to be a client. His patron was his adviser and benefactor. Just as before our age of the Common Man, illiterate or ill-educated village labourers in England occasionally needed someone 'to speak for them' and to advise them, so the Roman client relied upon his patron. It was a very real dependence, for the patron, trained as a public speaker in the Forum, was expected to act as his client's legal adviser and to act without charge. The client could be a con-

## The Social and Political Background

siderable drain upon his patron's wealth as well as upon his time, for he could expect scraps of food, clothing, or, in later times, a coin or two instead of or as well as charity in kind. This he received when each morning, clad in a toga, he went to pay his respects to his patron. In the days before organized State charity had been thought of, this was an invaluable form of first-aid against calamity or destitution. It must also have powerfully cemented fellow-feeling and social solidarity, an aspect of clientship that has not been accorded its due weight, for the patron was regarded almost as a father. The clients were therefore bound in almost filial dependence to their patron. When times of trouble occurred they might be a force to be reckoned with, because they were ready to escort their patron about the town and to protect him against violence. This was no mean advantage, for the Roman Republic never developed a police force. The sense of added security and support which a large body of clients would give a public man probably nerved him for efforts he might never have undertaken if alone. In revolutionary times, however, nobody could rely solely upon clients. There was moreover no way of compelling them to serve their patrons.

In normal times, however, serve him they did, with deference at his morning levee, with applause when he spoke in public, with their willing escort in his progress round the town and, most important of all, with their votes in the public assemblies. This was a more notable feature of Roman life later in the Republic.

## Discontents in the Fifth Century B.C.

TOUGHNESS WAS A VERY NECESSARY QUALITY if the Romans were to survive in their relatively crowded environment. The record of the first three hundred years of the Republic is of almost continual fighting with neighbouring peoples. In the Roman family the boys were valued as future soldiers and farmers and were brought under strict military discipline as soon as they were of age. Roman girls were much less regarded and their arrival in the world was often lamented as a disaster.

### Army Service

This is not the place to describe the equipment, organization, training and exploits of the Roman legions; it is sufficient to recall that Rome's fate hung upon their victory or defeat. Victory in battle and all that flowed from it in security and in booty, notably in land and slaves to work on the land, was the supreme objective. Often a high price had to be paid for these triumphs, and the men and their families who had made the greatest sacrifices to win them were the ones who often had the smallest share of the fruits of victory. Instead, they ran a considerable risk of losing everything that they possessed, including their own liberty. For military service was compulsory and it might be prolonged. There was a limit to what the boys, the greybeards, the women and the slaves left at home could do to maintain tillage, to care for the animals and to bring in the harvest. Not all families were able to rely upon such help. Neighbours might, and no doubt did, help the helpless, but there were inevitably hard cases. Warriors came home to face a hard task in restoring cultivation and in restocking their holdings; some returned maimed or wounded, many never returned.

### Roman Debtors

Merely to survive, a poor agricultural family reduced in this way by the absence of the breadwinner or by illness, bad harvests, the loss of animals, or by the hundred and one strokes of bad luck which could suddenly plunge them into dire dis-

## Discontents in the Fifth Century B.C.

tress, were forced to look for help. It does not seem that there was any permanent publicly organized source of relief for such misfortunes. When family and neighbourly generosity was exhausted and the limits of the help a client could expect from a patron had been reached, a loan of food, seed corn, a plough, perhaps a pair of oxen was the sole source of salvation.

Now the Romans clung tenaciously to an almost religious regard for private property and the bonds by which rights to it were secured. Nothing that we know about early Roman religion, social ways or traditions required them to be specially tender towards the suffering poor. There was at first no limit to the interest that might be demanded on loans, so those in desperate want were forced to accept any terms. Moneylenders in ancient times were notorious for their harsh, grasping greed and, left uncontrolled as they were, they demanded thirty, fifty, a hundred per cent interest and more. As it is clear that capital sunk in agriculture cannot normally earn a return anything like as high as this, insolvency and its dreadful consequences were the inevitable fate of most borrowers. Long before the development of the Roman system of law, the owner of any property required some tangible guarantee before he would lend it to anybody. The most obvious kind of pledge was some hostage. In primitive times, moreover, to wreak vengeance upon a wrongdoer was regarded as a form of justice. A defaulting debtor was eminently a wrongdoer, so it seemed elementary justice to the creditor that he should be made to suffer, as hostages had to suffer if a truce or a trust was broken. In this way a defaulting Roman debtor could be reduced to slavery and ill-treated as slaves were ill-treated, without hope of rescue.

Much of the ferment in early Roman social history seems to have been due to a decline in the fertility of the soil which had too long been pushed to the limit of productivity by the need to feed an ever-growing population. No question was more urgent therefore than the land question. It was the thorniest problem on the domestic scene almost throughout the history of the Republic. Acute hunger or starvation was averted whenever possible by stealing land from neighbouring tribes. 'As

Farm Lands

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

they went on gaining the mastery over the various peoples of Italy,' said the Greek historian Appian writing about A.D. 150, 'the Romans used to take possession of some of their land on which they established towns. Or else they used to send colonists to the towns already there. These colonies were their strongholds.'

Such relief was never more than temporary. Population increased and the old difficulties recurred. When there was little or no prospect of further gains by conquest and colonization, there was only one other way of helping poor farmers and landless men, and that was by stealing land belonging to richer Romans. When relief could not be had, and it was by no means always available, famine and death by starvation was the fate of many Romans.

Social and  
Political  
Distinctions

United under the threat of war and magnificently co-operative when their whole existence and way of life was threatened, the Romans were divided at home when living at peace; often very bitterly divided. Economic in essence, the differences between them bred other differences which were hard to bear. Such in particular were those distinctions in social and political life which the undistinguished felt all the more keenly in proportion to the extent that their belief in their own merits and abilities was scorned by the eminent and the powerful. To find themselves slighted; to realize that try how they might, there was no way to induce the ruling classes to see their point of view; to witness injustice, folly and stupidity prevail against reason and common sense, was the bitter experience of many of the abler plebeians. Their frustrations and vexations mounted, to become all the more maddening as they were denounced as wicked men whose demagogic passions would wreck the Republic.

Power in the  
Roman  
Republic

Revolutions aim at seizing and controlling the sources of power in a society. The power chiefly in question is that which can forcibly interfere in private life by depriving a citizen of his property, his expectations, his comfort and amenities; by curtailing his liberty to come and go as he pleases, to say what he thinks. Political power may compel him to undertake jobs he

may not like, such as army service or forced labour on roads or mines; it may compel him to migrate from his home lands; it may deprive him of all personal liberty through imprisonment or by exile; finally it may deprive him of life itself by the executioner.

Until such power is brought under control and life is made tolerably secure for average men, the danger of revolution is ever-present, unless the community, like the Russians, has become inured to a tradition of tyranny, or is so broken in spirit by long servitude, by the slaughter of its leaders, by the hopelessness of the struggle, that, like sheep, its members passively accept their fate. The ancient Romans had certainly not been reduced to that pathetic low level. On the contrary, their martial spirit, fortified by their numbers and continually sharpened by conflict with their aggressive neighbours, was keyed to a high pitch. They, like all virile peoples, were confronted with the age-old problem: how to entrust a few men to use their collective might wisely and well for their common good. History is a long record of human failure to solve this problem and reflection upon it has produced such judgments as 'power should always be distrusted, in whatever hands it is placed' and 'power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

Power in Rome was *imperium*, from the verb *impero*, 'I command', and it meant exactly that. When the Romans conferred *imperium* upon any of their fellow-citizens such as a Consul, they agreed that he should use the full power of the Republic wherever and whenever he thought fit and they pledged their obedience to his orders. The Consul was authorized to inquire into their property, to send them into one of the army-classes, to tax them, to select some men as Senators, and disappoint scores of others by not selecting them. In the field he commanded the Roman army. At home he was a judge in all disputes. Such were the main powers of the early Praetors or Consuls. There were, however, two of them, and one could be a check upon the other. In times of grave emergency, however, this safeguard had to be given up, for the Consuls had



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

then to appoint a Dictator as supreme autocratic ruler. 'When for the first time a Dictator was created in Rome a great fear fell on the people,' reported Livy of the events of 501 B.C. 'For there was not, as in the case of the Consuls, each of whom possessed the same authority, any chance of securing the aid of one against the other, nor was there any right of appeal, nor in short was there any safety anywhere except in punctilious obedience.' The practical-minded Romans put up with this dangerous dependence, however, because that was the way to get things done in a grave emergency.

Safeguards  
against  
Tyranny

How, in normal times, did the Romans protect themselves against victimization and ill-treatment at the hands of men armed with such overwhelming power? For their Consuls were kings in all but name.

In the first place *imperium* was never conferred upon any man for more than twelve months at a time. Every year the Senate had to propose new names for public election by the army centuries. A Dictator was rarely appointed for more than six months and if he succeeded in meeting the emergency within that period, he at once laid down his powers and the direction of affairs was resumed by the Consuls.

Secondly, apart from the extraordinary emergency office of Dictator, *imperium*, as Livy's comment shows, was never conferred upon one man alone. There were always two Consuls and each had equal power. Because it was equal, it was in a sense greater, as Cicero observed much later, since one Consul could undo or forbid what the other Consul commanded. Modern writers on political theory who repeat the views of Bodin and Hobbes to the effect that sovereignty is indivisible do not give sufficient attention to this striking aspect of Roman Republican rule.

Thirdly, the Consuls had to put to the public assembly of the centuries any new proposals they wished to introduce to modify time honoured ways and its agreement had to be given before they could become law.

Fourthly, an individual Roman citizen in Rome could always appeal to the same public assembly if he were sentenced to be

## Discontents in the Fifth Century B.C.

scourged or to be executed. An ancient tradition holds that this was the first law to be passed by the army assembly of the centuries under the new Republic. There can be little doubt that it was always regarded as a basic right of a Roman citizen. No such right protected him outside the City boundaries, however, and once in the field, a Consul, as supreme commander, could have anyone on active service executed by his sole command. The enmity of a Consul therefore was a very serious danger in the early days of the Republic when wars were frequent. Discipline was harsh. Livy records that the Consul Appius Claudius Crassus punished his army for an unnecessary defeat in 471 B.C. by scourging and beheading every tenth man, as well as all standard bearers who had lost their standards. So much for the four political safeguards. On the side of religion, which was almost equally important, a 'king for sacrifices' had to be appointed to carry on that part of the former royal duties. He was, however, made subordinate to the Pontifex Maximus, who was elected to his job for life. The influence of the Augurs has been mentioned (p. 22).

Writing about these things some five hundred years later when Republican freedom was extinguished, Livy, in one of his rare general judgments, said, 'I think they went to unreasonable lengths in devising safeguards for their liberty, in all, even the smallest points.' This view may have suited Augustus, the new ruler of Rome whom Livy served, but it would not have been shared by Cicero and others who lost their lives in the effort to preserve the Republic.

Romans had a base line from which to measure the true evil of political oppression and tyranny. Many of them even in the early days of the Republic owned slaves. Horror of slavery was one of the most powerful inducements to military heroism, for a defeated enemy in those primitive times, if he was not killed or executed, faced a life-time of degrading slavery not only for himself but for his wife and family. Man's inhumanity to man already had a long history before Romans fought Etruscans. Men who surrendered or were overpowered were often beheaded or crucified, their sons, daughters, wives and mothers

Horror of  
Slavery

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

were dishonoured and driven to menial tasks if they were allowed to survive.

Such was the fate of slaves, and it was a fate that no Roman was willing to contemplate for himself or for his family, whom he cherished with a religious piety fortified by daily ritual observances at the domestic shrine with its little cult images of the family *Lar*, at the family hearth, and at the daily meal in which all the household shared. Kindly, simple Romans no doubt treated their slaves well, even if in a somewhat rough and boorish fashion. The real horror of slavery was the slaves' lack of any rights or any redress against ill-treatment. In this respect there was little or nothing to choose between their lot and that of the domestic animals on a Roman farm. They were completely in the power of their master or their mistress and she sometimes was more devilish and cruel than he was.

Much speculation has been devoted to the question whether the Romans were on the whole harsh or kindly masters. It is as impossible to answer, as the question whether the British, French, Italians and other peoples today treat their domestic animals cruelly or humanely. As time went on, evidence accumulates to support both judgments.

Menace of  
Slavery

Already in the early days of the Republic slaves were a potential revolutionary danger. In 460 B.C. Livy records, 'political refugees and a number of slaves, some 2,500 in all under the leadership of Appius Herdonius, the Sabine, seized the Capitol and the Citadel by night'. A pitched battle, in which a Consul was killed, had to be fought to recover that stronghold and holy place. 'What the Romans most dreaded,' said Livy about this disaster, 'was a rising of the slaves when every man would have an enemy in his own house whom it would be as dangerous to trust as not to trust.'

It was a danger with which the Romans had to live throughout their history, and more than once in later years it erupted with shattering force. The slaves were always liable to revolt, and did revolt, but theirs was no political revolution in the sense in which the word is normally used and is understood in this book, meaning a forcible substitution of a ruler, a new

## Discontents in the Fifth Century B.C.

political system or a new way of life for the old ways which the Romans had inherited.

If this were a study of Roman social evolution as a whole, instead of a review of Roman revolutionary spirit, very much more would have to be said about slaves and particularly about emancipated slaves or the freedmen. They, as we have seen, became clients of their former masters and got votes in the public assemblies. Their whole background, way of life and attitude to life was different from that of the old Romans. Gradually the freedmen and their descendants grew in numbers to swamp the descendants of free Romans. Here was a silent revolution which probably did more to alter the whole tone and quality of Roman civilization than all the political revolutions put together.

## Early Revolutionary Action

HARMONY IN THE NEW STATE was essential if it was to survive Etruscan ambitions to recapture the City and the aggressive thrusts of warring neighbours. They were surrounded by tough hill men in need of winter grazing and hungry men of the plains and valleys of Central Italy, always eager like the Romans themselves to grab more land in order to meet the ever-pressing need for corn and cattle. Life was less easy after the Etruscans had been expelled. Industrial products of the skilled Etruscan craftsmen were no longer to be had and some trade routes which had been a source of profit and of goods were closed. The Roman standard of living probably declined. Common troubles, according to Livy's later account, at first inspired a spirit of mutual assistance.

Early Years  
of the  
Republic

Many concessions were made at that time to the plebs by the Senate. Their first care was to lay in a stock of corn. The sale of salt, hitherto in the hands of private individuals who had raised the price to a high figure, was now wholly transferred to the State. The plebs were exempted from the payment of harbour-dues and the war-tax, so that they might fall upon the rich who could bear the burden; the poor were held to pay sufficient to the State if they brought up their children. This generous action of the Senate maintained the harmony of the Commonwealth.

The harmony by all accounts did not last long. The death of the hated Tarquin who had taken refuge among the Greeks in the south was received with delight in Rome, 'but the elation of the patricians was carried to excess', says Livy, adding: 'Up to that time they had treated the commons with the utmost deference; now their leaders began to practise injustice upon them.' This was in the year 495 B.C. when for the first time the name of Appius Claudius Sabinus figures in the consular *fasti*, that list of the names of the two Consuls for each year by which

the Romans dated their history. No other single family had, for good and ill, a longer or more memorable association with the history of Rome.

In the very early years of the Republic, in 504 B.C. so the story goes, the head of a Sabine family Attus Clausus, unable to prevail against his fellow-countrymen bent on war against the Romans, fled with his whole family and their numerous dependents and sought refuge among the Romans, by whom, according to Livy, 'they were admitted to the citizenship and received a grant of land lying beyond the Anio'. Attus, now known as Appius Claudius, had shrewdly switched his allegiance and backed the winning side. Soon he was elected to the Senate where 'it was not long before he gained a prominent position in that body'. Election to the coveted position of Consul followed in 495 B.C., when the number of tribal districts of Rome was increased to twenty-one with the new Claudian family of dependents, clients and slaves forming one of them.

As Consul he soon had a tough incipient civil revolt on his hands. The struggle of the Orders, which was to fill the next two centuries of Roman history, had begun.

Two so-called 'orders' or classes of society were involved in the struggle of the Orders. The first were the patricians, defined, as we have seen, as the older wealthier Roman families, able, by their position of privilege in the Senate and the army assembly, their social standing, and their bands of faithful clients, to manage public affairs very largely in their own way. The second, the great majority, was the people, *populus Romanus*, or *quirites*, the plebeian majority. Both patricians and plebeians were Roman citizens. Their differences were traditionally represented as being very largely economic, arising from the land-hunger of the poor, and the selfishness and greed of the richer Romans.

Let Livy tell the story of the causes of the explosion of the year 495 B.C., with which Appius Claudius had to deal.

An old man, bearing visible proofs of all the evils he had suffered, suddenly appeared in the Forum. His clothing was covered with filth, his personal appearance was made still

The Struggle  
of the  
Orders

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Grinding the  
Poor

more loathsome by a corpse-like pallor and emaciation, his unkempt beard and hair made him look like a savage. In spite of this disfigurement he was recognized by the pitying bystanders; they said that he had been a centurion, and mentioned other military distinctions he possessed. He bared his breast and showed the scars which witnessed to many fights in which he had borne an honourable part. The crowd had now almost grown to the dimensions of an Assembly of the people. He was asked, 'Whence came that garb, whence that disfigurement?' He stated that whilst serving in the Sabine war he had not only lost the produce of his land through the depredations of the enemy, but his farm had been burnt, all his property plundered, his cattle driven away, the war-tax demanded when he was least able to pay it, and he had got into debt. This debt had been vastly increased through usury and had stripped him first of his father's and grandfather's farm, then of his other property, and at last like a pestilence had reached his person. He had been carried off by his creditor, not into slavery only, but into an underground workshop, a living death. Then he showed his back scored with recent marks of the lash.

On seeing and hearing all this a great outcry arose; the excitement was not confined to the Forum, it spread everywhere throughout the City . . . Those of the senators who happened to be in the Forum and fell in with the mob were in great danger of their lives. Open violence would have been resorted to, had not the consuls, P. Servilius and Ap. Claudius, promptly intervened to quell the outbreak. The crowd surged round them, showed their chains and other marks of degradation. These, they said, were their rewards for having served their country; they tauntingly reminded the consuls of the various campaigns in which they had fought, and peremptorily demanded rather than petitioned that the senate should be called together. Then they closed round the Senate-house, determined to be themselves the arbiters and directors of public policy.

The crisis was temporarily averted by news of an imminent attack of a Volscian army and the promise of P. Servilius Priscus the other Consul that 'none should keep a Roman

## Early Revolutionary Action

citizen in chains or duress whereby he would be prevented from enrolling for military service, none should distrain or sell the goods of a soldier as long as he was in camp, or detain his children or grandchildren'. The need for such a guarantee and its instant success when given in producing volunteers for a war in which the plebs had refused to fight, is the best measure of the evils to which Roman citizens were exposed by their harsh laws of debt. The war was won but as soon as it was over trouble broke out afresh. Once again Appius Claudius was cast for the role of villain and oppressor of the poor in the traditional, probably legendary story.

Returning victorious from their hard-won campaigns the Romans were disappointed in their confident expectation of a New Deal.

Appius, partly from his innate love of tyranny and partly to undermine the confidence felt in his colleague, gave the harshest sentences he could when debtors were brought before him. One after another those who had before pledged their persons as security were now handed over to their creditors, and others were compelled to give such security.

A soldier to whom this happened appealed to Servilius the colleague of Appius. A crowd gathered round Servilius, they reminded him of his promises, upbraided him with their services in war and the scars they had received, and demanded that he should either get an ordinance passed by the senate, or, as consul, protect his people; as commander, his soldiers. The consul sympathized with them, but under the circumstances he was compelled to temporize; the opposite policy was so recklessly insisted on not only by his colleague but by the entire party of the nobility. By taking a middle course he did not escape the odium of the plebs nor did he win the favour of the patricians. These regarded him as a weak popularity-hunting consul, the plebeians considered him false, and it soon became apparent that he was as much detested as Appius.

Tempers were inflamed. The plebs were now determined to get satisfaction.



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

'The Senate,' said Livy:

was excessively angry, but the courage of the plebs had risen, and they went to work in a very different method from that which they had adopted at first. For as any prospect of help from the consuls or the senate was hopeless, they took matters into their own hands, and whenever they saw a debtor brought before the court, they rushed there from all sides and by their shouts and uproar prevented the consul's sentence from being heard, and when it was pronounced no one obeyed it. They resorted to violence, and all the fear and danger to personal liberty was transferred from the debtors to the creditors, who were roughly handled before the eyes of the consul.

The consular year 495 B.C. ended 15 March 494 B.C. on an ominous note.

From that time the mischief became more serious every day, not only through open clamour but, what was far more dangerous, through secession and secret meetings.

At length the consuls, detested as they were by the plebs, went out of office—Servilius equally hated by both orders, Appius in wonderful favour with the patricians.

The situation was too much for the newly-elected Consuls who followed. They were reputed to have seen the danger of taking the tough line for which die-hard Senators led by Appius Claudius continued to clamour. Such was his energy and resolution that the Senate agreed to his demand that a Dictator should be appointed who should mobilize the insubordinate plebs. The men did not dare to refuse to obey the Dictator, M. Valerius Maximus, when he led them against some neighbouring peoples who had thought that it was a good time to strike at Rome while it was paralysed by internal dissension. When the war was won, Valerius, failing to persuade the Senate to take a moderate course with the debtors, refused to remain as Dictator, so the trouble broke out with renewed fury.

## Early Revolutionary Action

Then a characteristically Roman solution was found. Rejecting the sacrilegious suggestion that in an armed uprising they should murder the Consuls, which would have precipitated a violent civil war, in 494 B.C.

they decided, at the instigation of a certain Sicinius, to ignore the consuls and withdraw to the Sacred Mount, which lay on the other side of the Anio, three miles from the City . . . There, without any commander, in a regularly entrenched camp, taking nothing with them but the necessities of life, they quietly maintained themselves for some days, neither receiving nor giving any provocation.

There was nothing for it but to surrender to the plebeian demands. As Livy records:

An agreement was arrived at, the terms being that the plebs should have its own magistrates, whose persons were to be inviolable, and who should have the right of affording protection against the consuls. And further, no patrician should be allowed to hold that office. Two 'tribunes of the plebs' were elected, C. Licinius and L. Albinus. These chose three colleagues.

No other country has developed a political office quite like that of the Roman Tribunes. They constituted a fifth freedom from arbitrary ill-treatment by those in authority, the first four of which have been mentioned already in describing the safeguards against bad treatment and the misuse of political power in Rome. They were the most effective brakes upon the executive action of public officials that any political system has ever devised. 'Protection against the consuls' meant in effect that the Tribunes could, within the City boundaries, neutralize any action which the Consuls ordered and the Consuls were the supreme commanders of the Roman people. They could prevent the introduction of new laws. There was no appeal against their decisions save that one Tribune could neutralize the work of another by his veto. There was only one way of overcoming them and that was by the appointment of a Dictator.

The Second  
Roman  
Revolution  
of 494 B.C.

Tribunes of  
the People

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Early  
champions of  
the Poor

The full development of the powers of the Tribunes brought other consequences which could not be foreseen in 494 B.C. Some way had to be found of choosing Tribunes. At first they were elected in the army assembly of the centuries where naturally the patricians were able to choose Tribunes whom they could trust. By this means the plebeians were robbed of their victory and the struggle had to be renewed. It was not until 471 B.C. that the plebeians got their own way despite the fierce opposition of Appius Claudius Crassus, who protested that the Republic was being betrayed. A new assembly of none but plebeians was then allowed to meet in order to elect the plebeian Tribunes. It did something to redress the balance of authority in the State, but at the cost of creating what was almost a State within the State. For the plebeian Tribunes, usually by far the most politically active of the plebs, often tended to develop ambitions of their own for the improvement of the welfare of their own people whom it was their duty to protect. In the plebeian assembly, the *comitia plebis tributa* or *concilium plebis*, they would debate public issues and secure an expression of plebeian opinion in the form of resolutions *plebiscita*. At the same time the new tribunician office acted as a safety-valve or warning post so that on balance, powers of opposition and dissent which might, if disregarded, have produced violent explosions, were canalized and directed so as to avoid trouble and to produce harmony. As with all constitutional innovations, a considerable lapse of time was necessary in which to work out all the consequences of the great new innovation represented by the Tribunes and the way at first could not be described as easy.

The patricians were bad losers and the animosity aroused in this struggle died hard. The picturesque legend of Coriolanus dates from the time of the first Secession of the plebs. Failing to persuade his fellow-Senators to make use of famine conditions to force the plebs to give up their newly appointed Tribunes under threat of starvation, Gnaeus Marcius went into exile at Corioli, among the Volscians, whom he incited into warfare against Rome, conducting a successful campaign in

## Early Revolutionary Action

which ultimate victory failed him in 491 B.C. only because he yielded to the pleas of his wife and his mother to withdraw his victorious troops before a decisive battle. This incident was the only occasion in the early Republic in which a Roman citizen seemed willing to use force against his fellow-citizens.

Hardly was the threat from Coriolanus averted than a formidable new internal conflict was provoked. Roman success in war, as we have seen, brought spoils of the most valuable kind in the land of the conquered, who were usually either killed, left to starve on their reduced and inadequate territory, or brought to near starvation and slavery. Land seized as booty of war was the property of the Roman people who were deemed to act through their victorious commander in the field. Cultivated land could either be sold in plots of 50 *ingera* or 31 acres; or given as a reward to Roman citizens in plots varying in size from the modest 2 *ingera* or 1½ acres of the early days up to 7 or more or 4½ acres of later times; or it might be retained in public possession and let at an annual rent. The opportunities for rich men greatly to increase their estates were thus very many. Land at a distance from Rome, land requiring many slaves, land that had been neglected or devastated so that it needed a heavy capital outlay, held little interest for the urban poor at Rome. Inevitably it got into the occupation of the richer landowners even although their unrestricted legal ownership could not be established. After a family had cultivated and improved such land and had passed it on from father to son, inevitably their rights to it came to be regarded as very strong, so that to propose to abolish them would seem most unjust.

In 486 B.C. Spurius Cassius, who seven years earlier had concluded an equitable peace with the Latins, Rome's nearest neighbours, was elected Consul for the third time. A recent victory over the Hernici, neighbours in Rome's hinterland, provided more land which Cassius proposed to award in equal shares to the Roman plebs and the Latins. This was sufficient to alienate the patricians but he joined with this a new proposal 'adding a quantity of land' which, according to Livy, 'he alleged,

The Land  
question and  
Agrarian Laws

Greed and  
Jealousy

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

although State land, was occupied by private individuals'. These occupiers were patricians and they evidently did not relish a scrutiny of their title to it. They were seriously alarmed and they raised the cry that all property was in danger. On public grounds also they felt anxious because they considered that by means of this generous proposal to give away other people's property, 'the Consul was building up a power dangerous to liberty. Then for the first time an Agrarian Law was proposed, and never from that day to the times within our own memory, has one been mooted without the most tremendous commotions.'

Livy's words, written probably between 27 and 20 B.C., are ominous, for they sound a new note of conflict in Roman society, and conflict over a very material and critical question which was none other than the ownership of the main source of wealth in the State. Together with the problem of the treatment of debtors, we have the two main economic questions over which fierce political battles were to rage off and on for the next four hundred years and more. The fate of Spurius Cassius, legendary though it may be, serves as a prototype for much that was to follow. That he should arouse the hatred of the patricians whom he proposed to mulct of some of the public land they had acquired was natural enough. But his regard for the Latin allies of Rome damned him almost as much in the eyes of the plebs, who saw no reason for treating their former enemies with such generosity. When therefore the patricians raised the cry that Spurius Cassius was aiming at becoming a king by proposing to bribe the plebs with land, they found many of the plebs willing to listen. When Cassius laid down his Consulship after his year of office he was reputed to have been condemned and executed. Then the plebeians began to realize their mistake; the attractions of the proposed agrarian law dawned on them, but it was too late. Such, however, was the need, that the land question could never be long neglected.

## Forging the Roman Constitution

GREAT AS WAS THE FERMENT caused by the ambitions and the determination of the more resolute and energetic plebeians to win recognition of their political equality and economic independence, it seems never to have seriously disabled the Republic in its harsh conflict with other inhabitants of Italy.

The Roman State had to be held together by more than the danger of attacks by external enemies, just as it takes more than the iron hoops round a barrel to maintain it tight and waterproof. It is worth trying to discover how the Romans managed to make their Republic so successful a going-concern despite their deep divisions, their internal squabbles and the extraordinary division of authority represented by the power of the Tribunes of the People after 494 B.C. For, as we have seen, the public following they began to build up developed into a public assembly which was to rival and ultimately in 287 B.C. to surpass the army assembly of the centuries as a source of law-making within the State. Although that may be thought a natural development, just as in the Parliament in England the Commons gained ascendancy over the Lords, the independent authority of the Tribunes anticipated in Rome a development that in England was a slow process of evolution. For it immediately at one stroke gave the representatives of the common people of Rome the power to interfere in and ultimately to control much of the public activity of the Republic. So striking a political invention invites curiosity. How did it work out in practice?

What, indeed, would be the value of the study of the causes of revolution if it did not throw light on the forces inhibiting revolution and cementing social cohesion and social solidarity? In after years when the history of Rome began to be written, the positive aspect of life in the early Republic was written up, largely no doubt as a model of public spirit for the admiration and the edification of a degenerate posterity which seemed little

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

capable of rising to similar heights of moral integrity. Had there ever been such a wonderful early period of social harmony? Did the ballad which Macaulay imagined Romans may have sung before their written literature began, refer to a real state of affairs or was it as mythical as Aeneas and his voyage from Troy to found the Roman State?

The Heroic  
Age of Rome  
5th to 3rd  
Centuries B.C.

Then none was for a party;  
Then all were for the State;  
Then the great man helped the poor,  
And the poor man loved the great;  
Then lands were fairly portioned;  
Then spoils were fairly sold;  
The Romans were like brothers,  
In the brave days of old.

Difficult as it might be at any period if one could pierce the mists of time, to find any Romans who would accept such a glowing tribute as truly applicable to their own day and age, it would be very easy in the later days of the Republic and Empire to get emphatic agreement to the assertion that their own times certainly did not merit such praise and that they very much wished that it did. Cato, Cicero, Horace, Livy, Seneca and Tacitus, among many others, all gave nostalgic backward glances to that golden age when Roman men were steadfast in their loyalty to the Republic; when they regarded all posts as honourable in which they could defend the State; when they made light of wounds, danger and death and cheerfully sought a hero's end in the thick of the fight, content to perish under a mound of spears provided that the Republic might live.

Virgil pictured this tough simplicity of primitive times:

Antique  
Romans

'Willing to endure long toil and accustomed to making do on very little, our young men are either breaking the soil with hoes or shaking cities in war. All our years are worn out by war, we goad the flanks of our bullocks with spear reversed. Though age may slow us, we do not weaken nor

## Forging the Roman Constitution

lose our strength of purpose. We still burden our grey heads with heavy helmets and always delight in bringing in fresh plunder and living by prey.'

Their womenfolk also were renowned for their purity, steadfast fidelity, their obedience to their husbands; their unremitting care of the family and the household in their hard work at the loom and the hearth. On innumerable tombstones in later times these ancient feminine virtues were recorded.

*Quod modestia, probitate, pudicitia, opsequio, lanificio, diligentia, fide par similisque ceteris probeis feminis fuit. . .*

The general picture emerges of a grave, somewhat dour people with their feet very much on the ground, able to look after themselves and to provide for their own needs, little inclined to welcome novelty in their deep attachment to the ancient well-tried ways of the past, rating high the virtues of courage, self-control and obedience to the State.

The whole set and way of their mind and life may therefore be said to have been directed in part at least towards something beyond themselves and their narrow personal concerns, their individual pleasures of the senses, the enjoyment of the moment, the pursuit of novelty at all costs in the effort to be in the fashion or to wallow in some ephemeral titivation of the passing hour. To be sure they were not all like that. Many were, or would have been, as gross and carnal as the Etruscans they despised, but they were on the whole restrained, and they tried also to conform to the prevailing pattern which was not that of what, by contrast, may be described as the way of a 'sensate' society.

The sterling qualities of the Romans were constantly being put to the harshest tests in that continuing fierce struggle for survival in which we have seen the somewhat legendary fathers of the father of the Republic were constantly engaged. The Romans succeeded in maintaining their independence and, through the wise use they made of some of their victories, they won the allegiance and co-operation of some of their neighbours. When in 459 B.C. 'war on an immense scale was

Wars and  
Invasion



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

commenced by the Volscians and Aequi', those tough hillmen to the south and east, 'two-thirds of the army' sent against them, according to Livy, 'consisted of allies, the rest of Roman citizens'. Such an incident shows that the Romans were achieving through common devotion to common ends a social solidarity with their Latin neighbours at the same time as they were still painfully groping for it at home. It was not the only example.

The Struggle  
to establish  
the Rule of  
Law

Harsh experience had convinced the Romans that they would never be safe from the uncertainty and the cruelty of the arbitrary exercise of power by their rulers until they had a common standard set of principles to which they could appeal and by which all would be bound. It was all very well for Consuls and high priests to pretend that they were the custodians of the law, but until that law was made generally known and made public and permanent, a miserable state of uncertainty prevailed upon matters of deep concern to many Roman families. It was true that for half a century the plebeians, who were the principal victims of this state of affairs, had enjoyed the protection of their Tribunes who could intervene with their veto to stop action by a Consul or magistrate. The deadlock so produced was not merely galling to the patricians as the conventional accounts of Republican Rome are content to assert, but potentially so paralysing that it seems remarkable that the State was able to survive. Some extraordinarily powerful influences must have been at work to ensure that public affairs were carried on, despite the potentially disrupting force which the Tribunes represented.

Rome's great successes are the best evidence that the Republic was held together, for it was driven forward to ever greater heights of power and glory in a way that would have been impossible if it had really been torn in two by the Struggle of the Orders. The need to disarm, to conciliate, to circumvent or if the worst came to the worst to beat down, plebeian opposition might be thought sufficiently difficult, but the Roman leaders were usually able to do better by winning plebeian support for their policies. In the process there was

## Forging the Roman Constitution

necessarily some considerable give and take, with the balance of advantage usually being credited to the plebeians.

The ever-present threat of contingent anarchy seems to have stimulated a genuine search for solutions tolerable to both sides which, although far from being uniformly successful, nevertheless staved off disaster and sometimes was productive of a real advance. It seems plausible to believe that as a result of a persistent endeavour by the plebeians, the Senators and governing families were driven to see some merits in the plebeian demand for a statement of the law, much as they resented it. The story goes that the patricians tried delaying tactics. In 454 B.C. three men were sent to Greece to make a study of Greek laws. After their return the agitation was renewed and to meet it the consular office was abolished.

'The plebeians,' said Livy, 'had learned to detest the name of "consul" as much as that of "king".' All powers were transferred to a body of ten men (the 'Decemvirs') from whose decisions there should be no appeal. Their duties were to produce the code of law and to run the State at the same time, in both of which tasks they did well enough to appease the plebeians who had tried in vain to have some of their own class included among the Ten. At length, as Livy reports:

These eagerly looked-for laws were at length inscribed on ten tables which were exhibited in an Assembly specially convened for the purpose. After a prayer that their work might bring welfare and happiness to the State, to them and to their children, the decemvirs bade them go and read the laws which were exhibited. 'As far as the wisdom and foresight of ten men admitted, they had established equal laws for all, for highest and lowest alike; there was, however, more weight in the intelligence and advice of many men. They should turn over each separate item in their minds, discuss them in conversations with each other, and bring forward for public debate what appeared to them superfluous or defective in each enactment. The future laws for Rome should be such as would appear to have been no less unanimously proposed by the people themselves than ratified by them on the proposal of others.'

The Twelve  
Tables of  
c. 450 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

When it appeared that they had been sufficiently amended in accordance with the expression of public opinion on each head, the Laws of the Ten Tables were passed by the Assembly of Centuries. Even in the mass of legislation to-day, where laws are piled one upon another in a confused heap, they still form the source of all public and private jurisprudence.

There is a suspiciously 'modern' ring about this admirable statement which for all we know may have been invented by Livy, in the same way that he invented long speeches supposed to have been delivered by the heroes of old. Nevertheless his words may stand to indicate the great importance of the Twelve Tables in Roman history which were thought to stand for a genuine effort to make Republican Rome a just and worthy society.

It is, however, surprising that the harsh treatment of debtors which roused so much passion during the early Republic was not materially eased by the new laws. Table III lays down that thirty days shall be allowed for the payment of a debt either acknowledged or proven. After that the debtor is brought before a magistrate and unless payment or a surety is provided the creditor can take the debtor away in chains weighing up to fifteen pounds. During the next sixty days the fact and the amount of indebtedness shall be proclaimed publicly on three successive market days. Failing a settlement the debtor then became the creditor's property, to be sold across the Tiber as a slave or to be cut up into pieces.

There has been considerable doubt about the correct interpretation of this very extraordinary provision. Scholars have argued that it merely authorized the division of the debtor's property but others, like some ancient Roman commentators, believed that it was meant literally, and that Roman debtors might be treated as Shylock meant to deal with Antonio by slicing a pound of flesh off him. But nobody has given any evidence that a Roman debtor had ever been cut into small pieces and the inhumanity of such a proceeding even among the Romans, brutal as they could be, seems incredible.

## Forging the Roman Constitution

A noteworthy point which is usually missed in the argument about this exceedingly harsh enslavement of debtors is that it was a general law. It dealt with debtors, not 'plebeian' debtors. Of course the poor were mostly plebeian and a patrician in financial difficulties could no doubt count upon the aid of family or friends with greater assurance than could a plebeian.

But class distinction was not regarded as relevant, and this was a capital achievement in the progress towards the establishment of that Rule of Law which is Rome's greatest single contribution to the advancement of civilization.

The task of codifying the law had not been completed but what had been done gave general satisfaction, so that another ten men were elected in the following year to produce two additional tables of laws. They, according to the traditional account, seem to have been so seduced by the exercise of power that they began to behave like tyrants, lording it over Senate and people alike and refusing to lay down their office. Again an Appius Claudius figures in the villain's role, as Macaulay's stirring lines best record:

Of all the wicked Ten still the names are held accursed  
And of all the wicked Ten, Appius Claudius was the  
worst.

That brow of hate, that mouth of scorn marks all the  
kindred still;  
For never was there Claudius yet but wished the  
Commons ill.

How Appius Claudius cast his lustful eyes upon young Virginia and sought to seize her for his bed on the pretence that she had been born a slave to one of his fawning clients; how the girl's father was brought hot-foot from the camp and could find no way of saving her from misery and shame but by sacrificing her life, became one of the immortal stories whose recital armed the Romans with courage to resist tyrants.

True or false, the legend is always associated with the third revolution by which the form of government of the Republic

Rome's Third  
Revolution  
449 B.C.

Legend of  
Virginia

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

was changed. News of the violent riots provoked by the tragic death of Virginia reached the camps of two Roman armies who picked up their standards and marched back to Rome where they occupied the Aventine hill. To the efforts of the remaining Decemvirs who tried to calm the storm they replied that they too had daughters and sisters and wives, adding, 'we are men and we have arms'. Then they and the civilian plebeians marched in order out of the City in the second great Secession of the plebs and camped on the Sacred Hill.

Tribune's  
powers  
restored

The immediate demands of the plebeians were then met. The Decemvirs had to go. The two Consuls L. Valerius and M. Horatius by whom they were replaced had been spokesmen for the rebels but both were patricians. To them are always attributed the Valerian-Horatian laws of 449 B.C. conferring personal inviolability upon the Tribunes who were restored to the number of ten, with strengthened power and influence to their office which had been given up at the time of the election of the Decemvirs. In future anyone attacking a Tribune was to be *sacer* or accursed, and as such his life was to be sacrificed to the gods. Moreover anyone 'who should leave the plebeians without Tribunes, or who should create an office in the state from which there should be no appeal, should be scourged and beheaded'. But first of all, according to Livy, 'as it was a doubtful legal point whether the patricians were bound by ordinances of the plebs, the Consuls carried a law in the Assembly of Centuries that what the plebs had passed in their Tribes should be binding upon the whole people'. It is, however, by no means certain that the plebeians were able to strengthen their political position in the State in this decisive way as early as 449 B.C., for an almost identical plebeian victory is attributed to the years 339 B.C. and 287 B.C. While there is no doubt about the victory of 287 B.C. the other two may have been partial. It has been suggested for example that after 449 B.C., the *plebiscita* first had to have the authority of the Consul and Senate before they could become law, while after 287 B.C. no such approval was required.

Without being able to sort out fact from fable in this record

## Forging the Roman Constitution

of tragic and stirring deeds, and without having the unanimous agreement of scholars that the famous Twelve Tables of the laws of Rome can with certainty be attributed to so early a period in the history of the City, we may none the less regard the traditional story as sure enough evidence of the nature of public aims, of the persistent effort of the plebeians to achieve them, and of their ultimate success, whatever the date of their victory may have been.

Into all the history of this long and persistent struggle it is unnecessary to enter in more detail than to bring out its essentially revolutionary nature. The determination of the plebeians to change the form and character of the Roman State is the critical factor. That despite long frustration and failure, the ultimate revolution, when it came, was virtually bloodless, is the second outstanding characteristic of the revolutionary movements in the early Roman Republic.

No settled equilibrium of forces within the Republic had, however, been ensured by the plebeian victory of 449 B.C., for it had done no more than restore and reaffirm the power of the Tribunes of the People. Defence against oppression is one thing, and of course tremendously important. It is quite another thing to be able to promote positive action to achieve some step forward towards the attainment of some concrete benefits. As long as the plebeians were unable to shape executive and legislative action as they desired, the political situation in Rome remained unstable. 'The one order was always restless when the other showed moderation,' according to Livy, 'whilst the plebs was quiet, it began to be subjected to acts of violence from the younger patricians. . . . On the other hand, the older patricians realized that their younger members were too aggressive, but if there were to be excesses they preferred that their own side should commit them.'

Livy's comment on this situation must have been full of deep significance to those of his countrymen who with him had witnessed the Roman Civil War of the first century B.C.

'So difficult is it to observe moderation in the defence of

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

liberty, while each man under the pretence of equality raises himself only by keeping others down, and by their very precautions against fear men make themselves feared, and in repelling injury from ourselves we inflict it on others as though there were no alternative between doing wrong and suffering it.'

Ban on  
Mixed  
Marriage

Undoubtedly valuable safeguards having been won securing elementary human rights for plebeians, they became a basis for further claims. The plebeians began to pursue other ambitions. Socially, they wanted to remove the customary barrier to mixed marriages between patricians and plebeians to which the second lot of Decemvirs were said to have given legal force by writing into the first of their two additional Tables, No. XI, the provision 'Intermarriage shall not take place between plebeians and patricians'. This is the only piece of class discrimination to be found in what remains of the Twelve Tables.

The second source of grievance was political—the inability of the plebeians to secure election to the chief magistracies, the Consulship and the Praetorship. Both the limitation upon intermarriage and their exclusion from the chief offices in the Republic seemed to the plebeians to be due to pure snobbery on the part of the patricians. They, however, tried to make it a matter involving a very profound principle; none less than that of the continuing favour of the Gods of Rome, for, they said, none but patricians could interpret divine signs or mediate between the gods and the Romans. The presumption of inferiority which these two limitations fastened upon the plebeians was therefore a source of resentment of a social and religious, rather than of a political nature. Upon this theme Livy expends some of his most impressive language, inventing speeches for the orators on either side of the question in language that Cicero would not have disowned. They read rather as though, in British history, the exchanges between Wat Tyler and his opponents in the Middle Ages had been carried on with the vocabulary and the fluency of Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke or in American history by John C. Calhoun and Daniel Webster.

## Forging the Roman Constitution

The gist of the patrician case against intermarriage was that it would contaminate patrician blood and gravely prejudice the religious rites that had from time immemorial been celebrated in patrician homes. It was a weak argument, because intermarriage had not been formally prohibited until the second lot of Decemvirs had included it in their two additional tables of laws. The same argument was used against the plebeian claims upon the Consulship. 'No plebeian could have the auspices.' The two questions were intimately bound together because the son of a mixed marriage, not being wholly patrician, was necessarily unqualified to be a Consul, because Consuls had to take the auspices. Now no plebeian would ever agree to the doctrine that they were incompetent to take the auspices, for this would have meant that they were hateful to the immortal gods.

The patricians struggled hard to avoid defeat. They gave way in 445 B.C. and allowed mixed marriages hoping that the plebeians would be content with a partial victory. They do not seem to have realized that they had conceded a vital part of their case against plebeian Consuls for which the plebeians now clamoured with all the greater insistence. The Tribunes went to the length of stopping enlistment in the army as a means of bringing the patricians to reason. Faced with the alternative of defeat by the enemy or by their own countrymen, the patricians yielded to the extent of allowing the election of three Tribunes of the soldiers with consular powers to be substituted for the election of the two Consuls. Characteristically, having gained their point the people were said to have elected none but patricians, but this may be a touch of poetic licence, for the name of at least one of the first military consular Tribunes was plebeian. This, however, would not be the only story which seems to show that the Romans, like the British many centuries later, dearly loved a lord.

The patricians scored a success in the year 443 B.C. when the new office of Censor was created, for which patricians alone were eligible, to take over from the Consuls the duty of counting the citizens, assessing their property, allocating men to their right class in the army, levying taxation, administering

Plebeians  
demand  
Consulship

Censors



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

public property and contracts and, later, probably about 312 B.C., of removing unworthy members of the Senate. One more target for plebeian ambitions was thereby created.

The traditional account of Rome's development over the seventy years after 444 B.C. has much to say about the continuing struggle of the plebeians for political and social equality with the patricians, for a greater share in the booty won by successful wars, and for a limitation of the amount of land which any man might own. The Tribunes, as might be expected, took the lead in keeping these aims very much alive, not without a lively anticipation that the most distinguished office in the State would come within their grasp as soon as the patrician monopoly control of the power of the State could be broken.

### External Dangers

The Republic was as yet by no means free from external danger which was suddenly revealed from an unexpected quarter. More than a match now for single Etruscan towns such as the neighbouring wealthy strong point of Veii, which they took and sacked in 396 B.C. after a long tough struggle and fierce massacre, the Romans themselves were suddenly almost obliterated by a vast Celtic or Gallic horde sweeping down from the north. All the City except the Capitol was overrun by the Gauls in 390 B.C. and so great was the destruction that after the Gauls had been bought off with gold, the temptation to leave the ruins and to make Veii the capital was narrowly rejected. That recently captured town was more magnificent and the lands were both more fertile and more extensive than those of Rome. The strongly conservative character of the Roman patricians was manifest in the vehemence with which they successfully opposed the plan. Tradition records or invents how the Gauls, as they went northwards, were caught by a Roman army which signally avenged their first frightful defeat and recaptured the gold and other booty which the Gauls were taking home.

### Hatred within Rome

The heavy task of rebuilding the City did not for long damp down Roman revolutionary spirit. In 385 B.C. the very man who had led the defence of the beleaguered Capitol against the

## Forging the Roman Constitution

Gauls, the patrician Marcus Manlius, nicknamed Capitolinus in honour of his exploits was, said Livy, 'the first of the patricians to become a partisan of the people and to take sides with the plebeian tribunes'. How far the story is true and how far it was invented so as to serve as a precedent for events in the second half of the second century B.C. cannot be disentangled. The plebeian grievances which Manlius was said to have made his own, to the consternation and rage of the patricians, were to be heard more and more as time went on. 'Not content with agrarian laws which the tribunes regularly made use of in order to stir up sedition, he began to undermine credit, knowing that the debt question provoked more bitterness because it not only carried the threat of poverty and shame, but it terrified free men by the fear of prison and chains.'

It was no mere threat. One day, as a centurion with a splendid war record was being led away after having been condemned for debt, Manlius with an inflammatory speech paid his debt and restored him to freedom in full sight of the people. 'The wretched man said that he had paid in interest many times the amount of the capital he had borrowed to rebuild his ruined home yet, but for Manlius, he would have ended his days in a slave-prison. By such deeds and by selling some of his property to help debtors 'the actions of Manlius and not only his speeches,' said Livy, 'while ostensibly democratic, were really revolutionary'. So dangerous was the situation within and without that a Dictator had to be appointed to deal with the emergency. Manlius overreached himself with wild accusations that he could not substantiate to the effect that gold taken from the Gauls had been stolen by certain Senators. When the Dictator ordered his arrest for making false accusations he was confident that the plebs would rescue him but 'there were certain rules of conduct which the citizens, completely submissive to constituted authority, regarded as inviolable'. This remark by Livy points to the tremendously weighty ballast of traditional ways which always tended to keep the Roman ship of State on an even keel. Perhaps also it covers up the cowardice and lack of real vigour on the part of the plebeians.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Tempers were up, but the Senate released Manlius before the plebeians had decided to storm his prison. Far from being tamed, Manlius and the plebeian leaders busied themselves with revolutionary plans. When everything pointed to 'violence and bloodshed involving a tremendous struggle', two Tribunes of the people were said to have succeeded in bringing Manlius down by accusing him of aiming at making himself King. 'Nothing is less popular than kingly power' they are supposed to have said. This false accusation combined with the fear of civil war spelled the doom of Manlius. The defender of the Capitol against the Gauls was flung to his death in 384 B.C. by two Tribunes from that very Tarpeian Rock on which he had made his memorable stand. 'Such was the end of a man who, had he not been born in a free state, would have left a memorable name,' was Livy's comment. He added that, 'In a short time the people remembering only his good qualities regretted him now that he was no longer a source of danger.'

Well they might, for in the aftermath of the Gallic invasion, the load of debt and the misery of the defaulting debtors grew to become a public scandal. 'A city and a Forum rid of creditors and lands delivered from unlawful occupation' was the plebeian programme. The civil war that Manlius all-but provoked again became a lively fear. The wealthy plebeians C. Licinius Stolo and L. Sextius, elected as Tribunes in 378 B.C., led the popular cause with three major demands. Debt was to be reduced by the amount of interest already paid; nobody should own more than 500 *iugera* of land (312 acres) or graze more than a hundred head of cattle or five hundred sheep or goats on public land; and finally one Consul should henceforth always be plebeian.

From 377 B.C. until 367 B.C., the struggle raged. Licinius and Sextius were re-elected eight times yet still failed to carry their proposals. After they had refused all compromise and had for the tenth time been elected, the Senate gave way in 367 B.C. Debts were reduced and the land law was passed. It was moreover agreed that henceforth one of the two Consuls must be of plebeian origin. The patricians were given some

Laws of  
Licinius and  
Sextius 367 B.C.

## Forging the Roman Constitution

compensation by the creation of a Praetor to act as a judge in legal disputes who was to be a patrician, and two patricians or *curule aediles* as junior public officials. The military tribunes with consular powers were heard of no longer.

With this political victory of the plebeians, a victory won by persistent determined effort on constitutional lines, the hundred years embittered struggle of the Orders was regarded by Livy as having closed, *ita ab diutina ira tandem in concordia reductis ordinibus*. The Great Games, still largely a religious event, were held in celebration. Clearly a landmark in Roman history was thought to have been reached. It was the climax to a period of incipient revolution in which the Republic had twice all but been split in twain on a straight class-division of aristocrat versus populace. Both sides had their distinguished martyrs, yet neither resorted to violence on a grand scale. A revolution had indeed occurred. The form of Roman government had been reshaped to allow plebeians to share in elections to the highest executive position in the Republic and the task had been accomplished without a civil war.

Despite the cessation of acute internal conflict, this harmony of the Orders was still shaken by some very jarring notes. The plebeians had, it is true, won a political victory giving them a chance to share in the control of the top executive position in the government of the City. They had already achieved substantial equality before the law and had won a statement of what the law was supposed to be. But they did not have control over the legislative machinery of the Republic. Even their share of executive power was inadequate. The plebeians were not likely to rest content as long as they were excluded from other executive and priestly offices. One by one they gained them all. The principle of the thing seemed to matter most, for the plebeians again did not make that full use of their political victories that might have been anticipated.

During the first eleven years after 366 B.C. a plebeian Consul was regularly elected. Their candidates came, however, from a relatively small number of the more eminent plebeian families, no doubt those least obnoxious to the Senators. Despite the

Plebeian  
victory  
incomplete

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

new law, there were six or seven occasions between 355-343 B.C. in which the Roman people elected none but patricians as Consuls. The same men tended to be re-elected for second, third, fourth and even fifth terms. Murmurs were heard, which are said to have developed into a serious threat to peace, to the effect that there ought to be a ten-year interval before re-election was to be allowed. Then came the claim that plebeians should be eligible for both consular positions as well as for all other magistracies. Economic worries were again acute and there was a demand that all interest on loans should be prohibited.

Plebeians'  
further gains

In 339 B.C. plebeian democratic control advanced another step or two. The old demand that the resolutions *plebiscita* passed by the plebeians in their own assembly, the *concilium plebis*, should be the laws of Rome as a whole, granted already according to one account in 449 B.C., was said once more to have been confirmed. The remaining control over legislation still exercised by the patrician members of the Senate, the *patrum auctoritas*, was reduced to a mere formality. There is, however, some doubt whether all these changes occurred at this time. One Censorship was assigned to the plebeians at the same time. The plebeian Consul, Q. Publilius Philo, who was the main author of these changes, carried them as Dictator, the post to which he had been elevated by his patrician consular colleague. He added to this singular distinction by becoming the first plebeian Praetor in 337 B.C. and Censor in 332 B.C.

In 327 B.C. a significant new development and extension of Roman executive power occurred when Publilius Philo was nominated to act as a Consul, *ut pro consule rem geret*, in command of an army against the Greeks in Naples. Both a decree of the Senate and approval by a *plebiscitum* were said to have authorized this innovation. Later the Senate alone named pro-Consuls, so adding greatly to its power. As yet the dangers which such an appointment threatened to Republican liberties were unthinkable, for there was no instance of a magistrate in these early times trying to use the army under his command to advance his own interests at the expense of the Republic. That

## Forging the Roman Constitution

the day would dawn when the Roman army was no longer a national levy and when Roman army commanders were no longer so scrupulous in their duty, could not then have been foreseen.

The success of Philo made it easier for the plebeians to gain access to the sole remaining posts of distinction from which they had hitherto been zealously excluded. In 300 B.C. the number of Augurs and of the State-priests or *pontifices* was increased to nine and plebeians were declared eligible for all of them. By this advance the plebeians finally gained access for their more vigorous and energetic leaders to all posts carrying executive responsibility in the Roman Republic.

Meanwhile in 304 B.C. a clerk in government service managed to get hold of the zealously-guarded rules of Roman legal procedure, hitherto the monopoly of the priests and higher magistrates. He daringly made them public, with, it is believed, the connivance of another Appius Claudius, the renowned blind Consul who built the Appian Way. The fame of this action is the best evidence of the effort still made by those in authority to retain the keys of power in their own hands as long as they possibly could. However, the plebeians had succeeded in further strengthening the force of the Rule of Law in the Republic.

In 287 or 286 B.C., for the precise date is not known, the final step giving the bulk of the people much greater weight in determining the direction of public affairs by enforcing their control over the law-making process was taken under the plebeian Dictator Q. Hortensius. It is said that a third secession of the plebs across the Tiber to the Janiculum Hill south-east of the Capitol was necessary to secure it. It was the last such exodus or general strike, for thereafter whatever the plebs decided in their *concilium plebis* was accepted as the law of Rome. From this time onwards the significance of the Tribune, as the presiding officials of the popular assembly, was much enhanced.

In the two hundred years that had elapsed since the first murmurs of plebeian discontent with patrician political monopoly

Fourth Roman  
Revolution  
and final  
victory of  
Plebeians

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

had begun to be heard, the Roman people had come a very long way. From a position of almost total subjection to an aristocratic control over the executive, legal and law-making processes of the State, the plebeians had in fact successfully advanced their claims to share them, if indeed not to dominate them all. In all essentials the constitutional pattern of the Roman Republic had been finally shaped by 287 B.C. at the cost of four bloodless revolutions. The succeeding troubles within the Republic which were to culminate in the most bloodthirsty outbreaks of violence just over a century and a half later were different from these peaceful but far-reaching political changes, in that they were not the spontaneous expression of deep-seated discontent by the Roman masses. Already by 300 B.C., the distinction between patrician and plebeian, by no means forgotten despite its legal abolition, was of less consequence. A clever and enterprising plebeian in the third century B.C. probably stood in no greater awe of many of his patrician fellow-citizens than Edward Gibbon or Samuel Johnson felt for the descendants of the baronets created by James I.

## Rise to World Power 290-167 B.C.

WHILE THE ROMANS at home were divided by the political struggle of the Orders, they were united in the field by a fierce will to victory that sustained them through serious reverses to bring them finally to triumph. The disaster of the destruction of Rome by the barbarous Celtic nomads from Gaul in 390 or 384 B.C. was the first of several such invasions. Damaging as they were to Rome, they were not as fatal as they proved to be to the Etruscans. If Rome no longer had much to fear from the Etruscans, it was largely because they had borne the brunt of the battle in a century of warfare against the Celts who had succeeded in extending to the south of the River Po the boundaries of Gaul, their homeland. The Etruscans meanwhile, increasingly enamoured of their luxurious city civilization and culture, like the Greeks later and for much the same reason, were no longer formidable in the field. They would never have been the menace to the growing power of Rome that the Celts or Gauls proved to be. Yet, in so far as they were dangerous, they had tended to produce their own antidote by somewhat diminishing the reluctance of other neighbouring Italian peoples to make common cause with Rome.

The long, confused story of the military and political measures by which the Romans succeeded in conquering first the whole of Central Italy by 290 B.C., and thereafter the entire south by 266 B.C., need not be told here. But it is of tremendous significance because of its economic benefits. Less was heard of the debt question and the misery and want of poor Romans in the fourth century B.C., because new lands were being conquered and made available for Roman settlers. Between about 400 B.C. and 290 B.C., the territory of Italy under Roman rule was practically doubled. The pattern was set after the conquest of Veii in 393 B.C. The lands of the slaughtered or captive Etruscans were divided among Roman citizens so as to give

Supremacy  
in Italy



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

every man 7 *ingera*. Now a Roman *ingerum* was  $\frac{1}{8}$  acre and a plot of  $4\frac{3}{8}$  acres of good land was sufficient to nourish a Roman family. A race of peasant proprietors was thus created who were able by the proverbial magic ownership of property, to turn dust into gold

Then lands were fairly portioned  
In the brave days of old

Tremendous although it seemed, the capture of Veii was no more than a prelude to yet greater things. Having overcome the Greeks of Southern Italy, the formidable seafaring people who had long dominated the entire Eastern Mediterranean, the Romans were next locked in a life and death struggle with the other great Mediterranean sea power, that of the Phoenicians based on Carthage. How in the second Carthaginian or Punic War between 218 and 202 B.C., Rome at first suffered calamitous defeat and was all but overcome, is the epic story in which the staunch, indomitable Roman character still shines with undiminished lustre.

Hardly had the Romans begun to rebuild the shaken fabric of their dominion in Italy after their final defeat of the Carthaginian General, Hannibal, in Africa, by the young aristocratic commander of genius, P. Cornelius Scipio, in 202 B.C., than the Senate drove them into empire building. They had first to learn how to sail ships, a skill they had never acquired until the harsh necessity of the war with Carthage drove them into shipbuilding in the middle of the third century B.C. Then after successful campaigns in Macedonia, all fear of attack from the East was also neutralized. Rome was supreme in the Mediterranean from the Greek islands to the shores of Spain, for Spain had fallen to Rome after the defeat of the Carthaginians. By 167 B.C. Rome was the strongest power in the then known world.

Romans and  
Latins

Romans were merely one of a relatively numerous people on the plain of Latium of a common stock and sharing a common language—Latin. The distinction between Romans

and Latins arose fairly early. Whatever very early inter-tribal understanding there may have been among these Latin people of Central Italy had been upset by the Etruscans as they dominated strategic settlements there. When Rome threw off Etruscan rule it failed to re-create a sense of inter-tribal unity under Roman leadership. On the contrary, a Latin League, from which Rome was excluded, was formed over a territory somewhat larger than that of Rome.

From practical necessity an understanding was concluded between Romans and the League around 493 B.C., an agreement known as the *Foedus Cassianum*. By guaranteeing common commercial rights and recognizing intermarriage, this treaty laid the foundations of what should have been a prosperous and enduring partnership. That such early promise was not fully achieved was due to the greed and insolence of the Romans. By not allowing the Latins a fair share of war booty and occasionally by victimizing them by sending their men into the thick of the battle to fight Rome's wars, the Romans not only failed to win the unhesitating loyalty of the Latins but drove them to revolt instead. Discord flared into armed revolt in 343 B.C., and Romans had to fight hard in order to vindicate the superiority they eventually won in 338 B.C., when the Latin League was dissolved.

This victory marked a very decided advance, for until then Rome had been a small power with its future greatness very far from being evident. The use the Romans made of their victory to consolidate a home base for further expansion was of cardinal importance but they did not seem able either politically or economically to reap the full advantage it offered. There were as many Latins as Romans and they were by no means disposed to live in their native land as an inferior class of citizens. From early times they wanted equality with the Romans politically and economically. The Romans were wise enough to begin to satisfy such demands but too selfish to continue doing so fast enough to keep the Latins satisfied. Their partnership in war demanded a partnership in the spoils of war but in that they inevitably came off second best to the Romans. When new

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

lands were won and Roman colonies were planted on them, Latin allies were increasingly invited to take up their share. Military considerations rather than economic motives prompted such offers, for the colonies were all designed to strengthen Roman power on seaport towns, on strategic border lands and commanding mountain passes. By the third century B.C. already the Latins alone went as colonists; the Romans preferred to stay at home. No longer was there land-hunger, but rather the beginning of an ominous shortage of man-power.

To go as a colonist to lands far distant from Rome involved a surrender of political rights as a Roman citizen, for the Romans never invented any system of nation-wide voting which would allow provincials a say in the government of the country. To vote, it was necessary to be physically present in Rome and to be a member of a city ward or 'tribe' as it was called.

Beyond this small warring group of Latins lay the more numerous Italians who did not have either the same racial background or common language.

Romans and  
Italians

The hard struggle through the centuries in which Romans had fought their way to world supremacy had to be waged largely at the cost of these other Italian peoples as well as at the expense of the non-Italians, the Etruscans and the Greeks who at the outset controlled most of Italy between them.

Surprisingly little is known about the early Italians. Their language, religion and mode of life have all been virtually obliterated from human memory. The energy of archaeologists has been attracted more by the relics of Etruscans and Greeks than of the Aequi, Volsci, Sabini, Hernici, Samnites, Marsi and other neighbours of Rome. The one Italian dialect that might have rivalled Latin was Oscan, the language of the people of Campania to the south. It was also spoken in differing dialect form by Paeligni, Marrucini, and Vestini and probably by the Aequi, Marsi, Sabini, Samnites and others. Remote although it was from Latin it was both understood and spoken by many educated Romans of the Republic. Rather as the peoples and kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia, Kent and Wessex were fused in English history into the realm of Eng-

## Rise to World Power 290-167 B.C.

land, so the Italian peoples at length became Roman. The union of Italy was achieved piecemeal. A map or chart showing the distribution in Central Italy at the beginning of the third century B.C. of the various grades of Roman citizens, such as those with votes in the public assembly at Rome, the *cives Romani*, those with citizenship but no votes, the Latin allies, other allies, Roman colonies and Latin colonies is a complicated affair.

A certain amount of reliable information can be put together about them, but it is all rather sketchy. In relation to Roman politics and consequently to Roman revolutionary movements, the Italians can be relegated to a subordinate role, but they were certainly far from negligible. From an all-Italian point of view Roman political democracy therefore was very imperfectly organized. It was rather like an inverted pyramid which grew all the more unstable as the unrepresented majority became more numerous. If Roman citizens could be ground down to utter ruin and servitude by falling into debt with other Roman citizens, the fate of Latins and Italians in a similar predicament was unlikely to be more favourable. Economic hardship pressed all the more heavily upon them because they would always take second and third place after the Romans. And they had not the same protection that Roman law afforded Roman citizens. To be sure the more enlightened Romans were aware of all this and they did something to alleviate it. A special judge was appointed around the middle of the third century B.C. to ensure that justice was not denied to the stranger within the gate. But enlightened Romans were too few and the majority saw little reason to be tender towards people whose ancestors had been the traditional enemies of the Republic.

A century later we have the striking and invaluable testimony of the Greek historian Polybius, whose deep interest in Roman history has already been quoted. He began his history with an account of the first war between Rome and the Phoenicians of Carthage which had occurred about a century before he began to write. If the record was not all within the memory of living men much of it would have been, while some contemporary

The Secret of  
Roman Power  
around  
150 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

records and early chronicles enabled him to narrate the events of the two generations before him with considerably greater assurance than the historians who, a century after his death, again took up the story and sought to cast their gaze into far earlier times than those with which he had ventured to deal.

The testimony of Polybius to the state of Roman public life as he found it towards the middle of the second century B.C. has special value, because he had witnessed the ruin and collapse of his own country and the failure of his fellow-countrymen to make good that world-supremacy for which they seemed to have been so eminently fitted by reason of their extraordinary genius and energy. Polybius had every reason to think long and dispassionately upon that enormous tragedy. By contrast the Romans stood out as amazingly more successful. It was not because of their superior knowledge that they had succeeded, not 'by means of abstract reasoning, but through many struggles and difficulties, and by continually adopting reforms from knowledge gained in disaster'. It was in that way that the Romans had achieved a social organization and a form of government or constitution that Polybius regarded as 'the best of any existing in my time . . . than which it is impossible to find a better'. Its secret, he said, was not easy to unravel.

### A Balanced Constitution

The Roman constitution had three elements, each of them possessing sovereign powers: and their respective share of power in the whole state had been regulated with such a scrupulous regard to equality and equilibrium, that no one could say for certain, not even a native, whether the constitution as a whole were an aristocracy or democracy or despotism. And no wonder: for if we confine our observation to the power of the Consuls we should be inclined to regard it as despotic; if on that of the Senate, as aristocratic; and if finally one looks at the power possessed by the people it would seem a clear case of a democracy.

Here is the origin and first hint of that idea of a balanced constitution which was to exercise a profound influence upon

political speculation in later times. In A.D. 1743 an Englishman, Edward Spelman, translated that part of Polybius in which the praise of the Roman constitution is found as *A Fragment of the Sixth Book of Polybius . . . wherein the system of Polybius is applied to the Government of England*. He contended that 'the excellency of a government founded upon an equal mixture of Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy' discovered by Polybius, was 'a description of the advantages enjoyed under that of England'.

Locke, however, fifty years before Montesquieu, had developed the more fertile distinction between the functions rather than the form of government by separating the legislative, executive and what he called the federative powers of a state. Montesquieu, who did not mention the balance of power in his book on the Romans in 1734, distinguished between the legislative, executive and judicial power in his *L'Esprit des Lois* of 1748. He may have seen Spelman's book meanwhile.

Polybius proceeds to show how the two Consuls, to whom the supreme command of the Roman army was entrusted during their year of office, might be regarded as despots and 'a clear case of royal government'. For they were the head of what we would describe as the executive arm of the State. Yet the Senate, with its power of the purse and control of public expenditure, had so much authority that 'if one were staying at Rome when the Consuls were not in town, one would imagine the constitution to be a complete aristocracy'. The people of Rome were the third source of authority with a most important part of government in their hands. They elected the Consuls and other magistrates every year for their twelve months' terms of office and they were the only court to decide matters of life or death. The people were therefore 'the sole fountain of honour and of punishment . . . and it is by these two things and these alone that dynasties and constitutions and, in a word human society, are held together'. The people also legislated for they had 'the absolute power of passing or repealing laws; and, most important of all, they deliberated on the question of peace or war'. Looking at the power of the people in their public assembly alone, therefore, a visitor to

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Rome would say 'that the chief power in the State was the people's and that the constitution was a democracy'.

The situation at Rome was such that the harmonious co-operation of all these parts of the government was essential if anything at all was to be accomplished. And it was forthcoming:

for whenever any danger from without compels them to unite and work together, the strength which is developed by the State is so extraordinary that everything required is un-failingly carried out by the eager rivalry shown by all classes to devote their whole minds to the needs of the hour. . . . Accordingly the peculiar constitution of the State makes it irresistible and certain of obtaining whatever it determines to attempt.

Social  
cohesion  
through self-  
sacrifice

In the light of this testimony of Polybius, who described the Romans as he saw them when their Republic was still in full vigour, we are able to come a little nearer the answer to the question raised earlier about the ways in which social cohesion and social solidarity are cemented so that revolutions do not occur. Clearly mere constitutional arrangements in which the main sources of power within the country—the people, the rulers or magistrates and the Senate—balance each other, will not of themselves produce harmony. Polybius evidently did not believe that they would, for he put his finger on the vital point when he wrote about 'the eager rivalry shown by all classes to devote their whole minds to the needs of the hour'. That surely was the essence of the matter. Naturally an efficient system of government made it easier to organize and direct such forces, but without them mere organization would have done little.

Polybius earlier suggested that rewards and punishments bind human societies together, but history abundantly proves that they will never alone keep people in subjection. If the source of the rewards and punishments is not respected, they have little influence. When honours are for sale, honourable people do not want them. For they cannot create a community spirit, which indeed they presuppose. In Rome the only avenue

to honours was through political and military service, and it was the opportunity for achievement in the service of the Republic, rather than any reward that might come out of it, that was the true source of Roman community spirit. Crowns of laurel and of gold were the mere outward signs, mere objective aspects of social solidarity, like those of our day which the Romans did not possess: a national flag, a national anthem, medals, ribbons and titles. The first thing some newly created States have done is to invent such objective signs of social solidarity. Such things, however, which have been thrown up by societies that have achieved a reasonable measure of genuine social solidarity are but outward signs and symbols of a vital inner spirit. The Romans did not have most of them, neither were they able, as in a modern monarchy, to benefit from the general respect and devotion shown to a person as head of the State, because there was no single head of the Republic. There were two at least, and they changed every year. Most Romans, moreover, seem to have had little racial feeling apart from conviction about their own right to rule, and they do not seem to have tried deliberately to spread their own language at the expense of Greek in the way that some modern communities declare war upon words not of their own minting.

Many of the means whereby social solidarity is sought today do not therefore enter into the Roman scene. All those so far mentioned are, however, productive at best of what has been well described as objective solidarity. They are the emblems rather than the reality, which is subjective solidarity, that 'eager rivalry shown by all classes to devote their whole minds to the needs of the hour'. How that arises is probably still as much an unsolved mystery as it was to Polybius. He came nearer the answer when he said that scrupulous fear of the gods was the real binding force that kept the Commonwealth together, for he then touched upon a form of that human loyalty and reverence given to some value or ideal transcending narrow personal ambitions and desires for merely personal satisfactions.

It is devotion to some commonly shared objective value, to some force which everyone feels is making for righteousness,



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Secret of  
Roman  
Strength

for the discovery, safeguarding and propagation of truth, for the achievement and diffusion of a sense of beauty and real worth, that alone creates the subjective solidarity of a unified people; for it alone stirs myriad human hearts and arms myriad human wills to act for a common purpose. Like the poles of a magnet that can produce a pattern out of a random heap of iron filings, devotion to some objective value induces unity of purpose and a sense therefore of community among all those willing to dedicate themselves to its advancement. So far the history of the Republic gives many examples of just such self-sacrificing devotion. The revolutions by which it was marked were undertaken to vindicate the principle that the relations between Romans should be regulated by elementary justice so that all should share in the common life and in the growing fortunes of the community to which they belonged and which they defended. The quality and stamp of such a community may be said to be 'ideational' when it is animated mainly by a deep religious faith, or 'idealistic' when its mainspring is devotion to objective human values which can be discussed and defended upon a purely rational basis without invoking any supernatural, mystical or theological elements. Both stand in sharp contrast to what has been described as the sensuous or sensate society such as the Etruscan appears to have become.

Devotion to  
Principles

Polybius was using the wrong metaphor when he spoke of rewards and punishments 'holding' the Romans together. In stressing the common devotion of all Romans to what they considered their religious and moral obligations, Polybius does, however, illustrate the point made here about subjective solidarity in an 'ideational' or 'idealistic' society: 'To such an extraordinary height is this carried among them,' he said, 'both in private and public business, that nothing could exceed it.' Polybius realized that this was an extraordinary state of affairs by Greek or any other standards, and he thought that it was indeed a very wise and sensible way of maintaining public standards and that stern moral code which rewarded bribery with death and regarded 'nothing as more disgraceful than to receive bribes and to make profit by improper means'. He

contrasted the high regard of the Romans for moral principle of this sort with the failures of his own countrymen:

Greek statesmen, if entrusted with a single talent, though protected by ten checking-clerks, as many seals, and twice as many witnesses, yet cannot be induced to keep faith: whereas among the Romans, in their magistracies and embassies, men have the handling of a great amount of money, and yet from pure respect to their oath, keep their faith intact. And, again, in other nations it is a rare thing to find a man who keeps his hands out of the public purse, and is entirely pure in such matters: but among the Romans it is a rare thing to detect a man in the act of committing such a crime.

Such were some of the qualities making for greatness which Polybius detected in the Romans among whom he lived as an honoured member of Rome's leading aristocratic families around 150 B.C. Yet he was no naïve simpleton admiring everything he saw and writing comfortable words designed merely to ingratiate himself with his captors. On the contrary, with remarkable prescience, he declared from the experience of his own country that there would be bad, dangerous times ahead. 'The future of Roman polity,' he said, 'is quite clear in my opinion.'

When a commonwealth, after warding off many great dangers, has arrived at a high pitch of prosperity and undisputed power, it is evident that, by the lengthened continuance of great wealth within it, the manner of life of its citizens will become more extravagant; and that the rivalry for office, and in other spheres of activity, will become fiercer than it ought to be. And as this state of things goes on more and more, the desire of office and the shame of losing reputation, as well as the ostentation and extravagance of living, will prove the beginning of a deterioration. And of this change the people will be credited with being the authors, when they become convinced that they are being cheated by some from avarice, and are puffed up with

A pessimistic  
prophecy

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

flattery by others from love of office. For when that comes about, in their passionate resentment and acting under the dictates of anger, they will refuse to obey any longer, or to be content with having equal powers with their leaders, but will demand to have all or far the greatest themselves. And when that comes to pass the constitution will receive a new name, which sounds better than any other in the world, liberty or democracy; but, in fact, it will become that worst of all governments, mob-rule.

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

SOUND AND SATISFACTORY as was the state of affairs in Rome around 150 B.C., it was already threatened by ominous clouds on the horizon. What were these oncoming troubles and how can they be explained?

A century elapsed before we get another connected history of Rome after that written by Polybius. When Livy, who has already been quoted, took up the story, a vast change had occurred which inevitably coloured his views, so that we must seek to allow as far as possible for the fact that the Rome he knew was not that of Polybius. He and those who followed him regarded the economic discontents which so powerfully stirred up the poor Roman citizens to revolt as being just as acute as their political discontents which had provoked that 'Struggle of the Orders' by which the first two centuries of the early Republic had been bedevilled. So much so that we might get the impression that the main cause of the plebeian agitation for greater political influence was due to the belief that it would be through such increased political power that remedies for economic distress could be found. When the political battle was said to have been won, however, there is no evidence of wide-sweeping economic legislation; no vigorous schemes for land-settlement or for the regulation of the rate of interest to help the plebeian debtors. So it can hardly be said that the early agitation in Rome for political control derived its force solely from the desire for economic reforms.

To suppose that there was such a direct connection would be to project back into history a link between economics and politics that hardly became a reality in Europe much before the nineteenth century. The force of traditional attitudes to property and to private rights was so strong that it would hardly have occurred to the statesmen of the early Roman Republic to suppose that magistrates and public officials, who were chosen for no more than a twelve-months spell of duty, had

New problems  
of a later age

No economic  
planning

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

any call to interfere with property rights, still less to propose any fundamental change in Rome's well-established ways of life. Many Romans wanted more land, fewer taxes and less onerous burdens of war service; none relished death by starvation; but it would be unhistorical to suppose for example that there could have been in those early times anything like a demand for the public regulation, still less 'the public ownership of the means of production'. Such a phrase would hardly have been intelligible in the Roman Republic. Misery and want had been all too familiar aspects of the human heritage and were ultimately accepted, as animals accept disease and death, mutely, as part of the natural order of things. Poverty was the normal lot of the great majority.

As time went on, human initiative began to make some effort to relieve acute misery. The Senate in the early years of the Republic was, as we have seen (p. 38), ready to try to prevent acute hunger. The precedent was never forgotten and public oversight of the corn-market was the duty of a special official, a Prefect. By going back a little in Roman history it is possible to illustrate the traditional Roman attitude towards this major problem of national economy, the food supply. An incident recorded of the years 440 and 439 B.C. throws light upon the impact of economic need on the political machine. It was a time of troubles. Livy describes it thus:

The misfortunes began with a famine, owing either to the year being unfavourable to the crops, or to the cultivation of the land being abandoned for the attractions of political meetings and city life; both causes are assigned. The senate blamed the idleness of the plebeians, the tribunes charged the consuls at one time with dishonesty, at another with negligence. At last they induced the plebs, with the acquiescence of the senate, to appoint as Prefect of the Corn-market L. Minucius. . . . By cutting down the daily rations of the slaves to one half, by holding up the corn-merchants to public execration, by rigorous and inquisitorial methods, he revealed the prevailing distress more than he relieved it. Many of the plebs lost all hope, and rather than drag on a

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

life of misery muffled their heads and threw themselves into the Tiber.

The story did not end there. A man, Spurius Maelius, said to have been 'very wealthy for those days', bought corn in competition with the State and gave it away to the poor and needy instead of putting it on the market as the Senate was doing. The patricians put the story around that he had done so in order to curry favour with the poor in the hope of becoming sufficiently popular to be made King of Rome. Improbable as such an ambition may sound, the sequel is only too plausible, for the patricians in their alarm nominated a Dictator who summoned Maelius to stand trial for sedition. Fearing the worst, he called upon the plebeians to save him, which some seemed ready to do, but he was cut down by the Dictator's emissary 'because he had refused to come to the Dictator when summoned by the Master of the Horse'.

This grim story, like the later story of Manlius Capitolinus, gave as plain a warning as any social reformer ought to have needed of the frightful risks of trying to intervene on behalf of the poor in Roman economic affairs. Yet the rumblings of a growling discontent can still be detected in the scraps of evidence we have about the economic and social history of the Republic. C. Flaminius, one of the Tribunes in 232 B.C., took up the people's cause by passing a law dividing up land taken from the Gauls who had settled in the north of Italy, and thereby earned the passionate hatred of the patricians. Yet he survived to become Praetor, and it was as Consul in 217 B.C. that he perished in the fatal battle of Lake Trasimene when Hannibal obliterated the Roman army under his command in the second Punic War. The Tribunes of the people inevitably occupy a prominent place in the history of Roman revolutions both because of their origin and the kind of work they were supposed to do on behalf of the otherwise unrepresented or exceedingly inadequately represented small man, the man in the Roman street. For if revolutionary ambitions were to get an outlet or any expression in Rome, the Tribunes were likely

Reforming  
Tribunes

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

to be their channel. Any revolution in ancient Rome was likely to be a movement from the mass of the people rather than from the ruling senatorial class whose interests all lay in preserving the privileged, exclusive position in the Republic which had been theirs for so long. This mere fact that everyone was accustomed to the marked class division was itself its strongest point, because the Romans were very loth to depart from their established ways.

Popular grievances, however, were very real. They arose especially over army service because apart from the hardship, danger and possible death of the soldier, his long absences could lead to the economic destitution of his family, even if he returned uninjured. When national existence was at stake because of the aggression of neighbouring peoples or invaders from Gaul, there was no question of refusing to defend hearth and home, whatever the sacrifice. But when Rome itself was to all appearances fully secure in the second century B.C., the men who had to fight began to have strong opinions of their own about the necessity of going to war. The prospect of an easy war in Greece or the East found willing volunteers, because it seemed to promise easy loot. Service against the tough tribes of the Spanish peninsula on the contrary was by no means relished. Spain was a far distant land. Campaigns there were long and bitter. The inhabitants offered fierce resistance and the bones of many a Roman legionary lay bleaching in the mountain passes and valleys of that inhospitable peninsula. The booty to be won was such that the Republic alone could exploit, for it was very largely in the form of mineral wealth, which first had to be mined and then refined for export. The common soldiers did not get much out of it. They would therefore bring strong pressure to bear on the Tribunes to resist the military levy if armies were being recruited for Spain.

By the second century B.C., however, the Tribunes were no longer so attuned to the aspirations of the people they were supposed to serve. After their great political victory of 287 B.C. sealed by the adoption of the *lex Hortensia*, their social status in the Republic improved. Even before that time, Livy could

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

describe them as early as 294 B.C., as mere tools of the nobles. They still presided over the chief law-making assembly of the people, the *comitia tributa*, but they had also gained entry into the Senate, subject to the scrutiny of the Censors. It was easier to get into the Senate as one of the ten Tribunes than as one of eight Quaestors, so ambitious men who had no deep concern for the wrongs of the people, got themselves elected as Tribunes as a stepping-stone in their personal advancement. Since 367 B.C. plebeians had been eligible for the Consulship, so naturally the Tribunes, who were the most politically active of the plebeians, were likely to get elected. The terrifying times of the Punic Wars between 264 and 202 B.C. reformed political unity in Rome, but as soon as the danger was lifted private political ambitions began to come more into the open and to operate with less restraint. From then onwards Roman life began to change. Slowly the old settled ways of full faith and confidence in established custom, in the *mos maiorum*, began to break up and dissolve. Before the second century B.C. closed, a critical turning point in the affairs of the Republic had been reached.

Already after 200 B.C. the political alignment had changed. Because the Tribunes were Senators with hopes of becoming Consuls, their interests and outlook veered round in the direction of the Senate, in which they were still a very small minority. They took on a more aristocratic complexion and began themselves to aspire to enter the new class of office-holding nobility. For some years the Senate and the Tribunes achieved an effective working partnership, reasonably satisfactory to the Senators, whatever the people thought about it. It was shortly before the middle of the second century B.C. that two laws were passed, the *leges Aelia et Fufia*, giving the Senate powers to call off meetings of the public assemblies of the people on religious grounds by alleging that the omens were unfavourable. This simple dodge of pretending that the gods were always on the side of the Senators could be evoked to hamper the effectiveness of the Tribunes. Later, and for this reason, it was regarded by Cicero as providing one of the great bulwarks



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Economic  
and Social  
Developments  
of the 2nd  
century B.C.

of the Roman Republic. Anyone therefore who wanted to take a line in opposition to the Senators, faced tremendous odds.

By the year 150 B.C., the Romans could look back on their past history with undisguised satisfaction. The story was indeed amazing. Their ancestors, from trivial, insignificant beginnings three hundred years previously, had mastered their former rulers, had become supreme in Italy, had defeated the only foreign powers able seriously to threaten them, and had acquired large dependencies overseas in Sicily, Sardinia and Spain. Men whose grandfathers had no other ambition than to work on their own ten or a dozen acres with a couple of oxen, and who rarely handled a coin, were now deeply immersed in speculative commerce, in public contracts or in high politics upon which the fate of distant peoples depended.

The best families, it is true, could not engage in trade or commerce without losing face and much else besides. In 218 B.C. the Senators agreed to a law that forbade them or their sons to make money by foreign trade. The traditional high regard for an agricultural life continued to equate social prestige with the ownership of broad acres. No position of dignity could, however, be sustained upon the small plots which had sufficed for the founding fathers of the Republic. Not merely had the quality of the soil around Rome deteriorated badly, but new crops, far more remunerative than the corn and cattle of early Rome, were being developed. Where arable land had become exhausted or had been washed away after reckless deforestation and overcropping, the canny grasping Roman of the more enterprising type was creating large grassland tracts on which a few herdsmen, mostly slaves, tended large flocks of sheep, goats and cattle. Or skilled slaves brought from Greece or Africa were managing groves of olives or vineyards, for both were able to survive on the scanty soil around Rome where wheat would not. All these new crops were for progressive rich farmers alone. Poor men had neither the necessary knowledge, skill nor slave-resources to grow them, but even if they had the skill they could never have acquired the necessary capital to wait, without return to their investment, for the five

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

years which it takes to establish remunerative vines, or for the fifteen years that are needed to bring an olive tree to the stage of yielding a saleable crop.

Despite the Licinian-Sextian laws of 367 B.C., the rich became richer and extended their possessions. The limitation of their estates to 500 *iugera* was disregarded and evaded in the same way that sumptuary laws trying to limit personal luxury in clothes, food, carriages and jewellery were always disregarded. Licinius himself was one of the first victims of his own law. As the penalty was no more than a modest fine, it was cheaper to pay the fine than to give up the land. The Greek writer Plutarch described what happened when he was writing his lives of eminent Greek and Roman soldiers and statesmen at the beginning of the second century A.D.

Wealth  
accumulates

Of the land which the Romans gained by conquest from their neighbours, part they sold publicly, and turned the remainder into common; this common land they assigned to such of the citizens as were poor and indigent, for which they were to pay only a small acknowledgment into the public treasury. But when the wealthy men began to offer larger rents, and drive the poor people out, it was enacted by law, that no person whatever should enjoy more than five hundred acres of ground. This act for some time checked the avarice of the richer, and was of great assistance to the poorer people, who retained under it their respective proportions of ground, as they had been formerly rented by them. Afterwards the rich men of the neighbourhood contrived to get these lands again into their possession, under other people's names, and at last would not stick to claim most of them publicly in their own. The poor, who were thus deprived of their farms, were no longer either ready, as they had formerly been, to serve in war or careful in the education of their children; insomuch that in a short time there were comparatively few freemen remaining in all Italy, which swarmed with workhouses full of foreign-born slaves. These the rich men employed in cultivating their ground, of which they dispossessed the citizens.

and  
men decay

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Tiberius  
Gracchus and  
the Land  
question

The story has often been told how as a young man of twenty-six, Tiberius Gracchus, grandson of the renowned Scipio Africanus who had freed Rome from the Carthaginian menace, was appalled by the emptiness of once rich Etruria as he went on a journey from Rome to Numantia in the year 137 B.C. Roman farmers had been displaced and the few human beings he encountered were slaves from barbarian countries. He left a city already on the way to forgetting the agricultural foundation of its strength. A new economy based upon money, foreign booty, cheap imports and skilful slaves were all signs that the Romans were embarking upon a new and feverish pursuit of wealth and luxury. To produce at the cheapest rate and to sell at the dearest was an age-old human motive that was now capable of more precise realization because increasingly the habit of rational calculation in terms of money was replacing the customary regulation of life on traditional lines.

Economic  
Priorities

It was then found that the greatest return to capital invested in the land was not to be had from the plough. Old Cato the Censor (234-149 B.C.) used to recommend cattle-raising as the best way to make money on the land. Vines, olives, market-garden crops and willow trees he also put higher in his priority list, in that order, than the grain-growing which had, next to war, been the major industry of the Roman people until the second century B.C. The great City itself was beginning to be surrounded by splendid villas with their fishpools, aviaries and flower gardens. Vegetables, flowers and fruits for the City markets claimed more and more land. At the same time the loss of fertility through overcropping, overploughing, and under-manuring had rendered parts of the flat plains of Latium fit for nothing but pasture. The destruction of mountain forests in the hinterland left the scanty topsoil there unprotected, with the result that it was eroded by the heavy rains to silt up the lowlands which became marshy and malarious. Economically, cattle ranching seems undoubtedly to have been the right answer, but it needed a large capital investment in cattle and in land; land moreover at different levels so that the animals could be moved up the hills as the summer sun burned up the

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

grass on the plains. The cheaper the labour, the greater the return on the investment, so slaves were employed. Politically, therefore, ranching seemed disastrous, for it banished the Roman farmer and his family from the original Roman homeland. If Plutarch is to be believed, and he lived near enough to the time to know, the trouble was by no means confined to Rome, for he expressly says that it affected 'all Italy'.

Thoughtful Romans could not but view such a result with apprehension. Slaves from foreign lands were being shipped in growing numbers from Rome's foreign battlefields and the dependencies won by Roman armies. How unreliable they could be was proved by two fierce slave revolts in Sicily, the first between 135 and 131 B.C. and the second between 103 and 99 B.C. when thousands of slaves on the great estates there broke loose, tortured and murdered their masters with their families and repeatedly defeated the Roman armies sent against them. What way was there of keeping a supremacy for Romans except through prosperous citizen families of small farmers? But if they could no longer cultivate the land, where would they find a livelihood?

The Greek answer, to emigrate as pioneers to distant lands, to the Po valley for example, does not seem to have appealed to the stay-at-home Romans who were becoming more and more attached to the amenities of city life. Neither did the development of industry, which is often our answer to the problem today. Sincere and well-meaning Romans saw the problem clearly enough. At this time in the mid-second century B.C., the responsibilities of empire and the new opportunities to learn from the wisdom of the Greeks were producing a few reflective, statesmen-like characters typified by the members of what Mommsen first called the 'Scipionic circle'.

It is a convenient name to use for the more reflective, 'modern', responsible Romans of whom the great Scipio Africanus may be regarded as the first ideal type. Later this so-called Scipionic Circle got a powerful support from the friends of Scipio Aemilianus (185-129 B.C.), adopted son of the heir of Scipio Africanus. He was married to Sempronia, sister

Dawn of  
Rome's  
'Modern' Age

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

of the Gracchi, and it is clear from the enthusiastic picture of him which Polybius records that he stood resolutely for the maintenance of the old Roman standards of scrupulous honesty and high character. In his lifetime they were already being undermined for, despite his earlier praise for the Romans, Polybius refers in his account of Scipio Aemilianus to 'the general deterioration of morals' and to the fact that among the young men 'dissoluteness had burst into flame at this period . . . Some had wasted their energies on favourite youths; others on mistresses, and a great many on banquets enlivened with poetry and wine.' They had, said Polybius, 'caught the dissoluteness of Greek manners'. He put the trouble down first to the fact that having defeated the Macedonians 'universal dominion was now secured to them beyond dispute' and secondly, to the immense increase in public and private wealth and splendour made possible by the loot they brought back from Macedonia. The Scipionic Circle resisted the changes in the old Roman ways that this development threatened to bring.

One of Scipio's friends, Caius Laelius, nicknamed the Wise for the moderation of his ways, was as concerned as Tiberius Gracchus about the decline in Roman farming, and he set about looking for a remedy. But, said Plutarch, 'meeting with opposition from men in authority, and fearing a disturbance, he gave it up'. Tiberius Gracchus could therefore have been under no illusion about the tremendous difficulty of getting anything done, and he was powerfully discouraged by his brother-in-law and his friends from attempting any change. Even-tempered, reasonable and of a kindly nature himself, he seems to have counted upon his ability to evoke similar attitudes in others, and he decided to follow what seemed to him to be the irresistible call of duty.

In order to propose his carefully planned remedy he sought office as a Tribune of the people for the year 133 B.C., an office for which he was eligible, despite the fact that his mother was from a very distinguished patrician family. His father had come from one of the more eminent plebeian families.

Rome's first  
economic  
planner

As he was portrayed by the Greek author Plutarch, writing nearly two hundred and fifty years later and at a considerable distance from Rome, Tiberius Gracchus was by no means the stock figure of the political demagogue, whose inevitable entry upon the Roman political scene had been forecast by Polybius. On the contrary, 'in the form and expression of his countenance and in his gesture and motion he was gentle and composed . . . and persuasive, awakening emotions of pity'. He had gained a good reputation in the army. He made a brilliant marriage, for the head of the socially distinguished house of Claudius, Appius Claudius, eleventh of his line, selected him as the husband of his younger daughter. The elder had become a Vestal Virgin.

Naturally he did not embark upon the scene as an economic reformer without strong backing and support. His deep conviction that the problem was terribly grave and that a solution had to be found was said to have been reinforced by public clamour.

Though it is also most certain that the people themselves chiefly excited his zeal and determination in the prosecution of it, by setting up writings upon the porches, walls and monuments, calling upon him to reinstate the poor citizens in their former possessions.

'The people' in this context are not defined. They were not organized as a political 'party', although there were family groups and cliques who made common cause politically rather as the Whig families did in English society during the eighteenth century. Nothing in the nature of a 'party' in its modern democratic sense can be discerned in Rome. In any case, Plutarch makes it clear that Tiberius was not alone among Rome's governing classes to feel the call for action, saying that

he did not draw up his law without the advice and assistance of those citizens that were then most eminent for their virtue and authority; amongst whom were Crassus, the high-priest, Mucius Scaevola, the lawyer, who at that time was consul, and Claudius Appius, his father-in-law. Never did any law

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

appear more moderate and gentle, especially being enacted against such great oppression and avarice.

Encouraging  
small-holders

The cause was just, the remedy proposed was well-considered. According to Appian writing in the second century A.D. in the generation after Plutarch, all Tiberius Gracchus tried to do was to reassert the Licinian-Sextian laws that limited the amount of public domain that should be in private occupation to five hundred acres, except that the sons of actual occupiers should be allowed up to half that amount. Over and above that, all land should revert to the Roman people, its lawful owners, and be divided up among the poor by a commission of three men, *Triumvirs*, who were to be changed annually. Plutarch says that occupants of the land were to be compensated for any they had to surrender and 'to receive a price for quitting their unlawful claims' upon it. He added that the proposed reform was to be managed with great tenderness for the monied men with great estates. Nevertheless the whole plan, said Appian, caused a tremendous commotion:

On the other side were heard the lamentations of the poor—that they had been reduced from competence to extreme penury, and from that to childlessness, because they were unable to rear their offspring. They recounted the military services they had rendered, by which this very land had been acquired, and were angry that they should be robbed of their share of the common property. They reproached the rich for employing slaves, who were always faithless and ill-tempered and for that reason unserviceable in war, instead of freemen, citizens, and soldiers. While these classes were lamenting and indulging in mutual accusations, a great number of others, composed of colonists, or inhabitants of the free towns, or persons otherwise interested in the lands and who were under like apprehensions, flocked in and took sides with their respective factions.

Rome was thoroughly shaken up by this clash of interests. Yet Appian tries to make it clear that Tiberius was not actuated

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

by mere economic motives. His was no 'Share the wealth' campaign resting upon the implicit assumption that property is a good thing in itself and should therefore be widely and evenly shared. To quote Appian again:

What Gracchus had in his mind in proposing the measure was not wealth, but an increase of efficient population. Inspired greatly by the usefulness of the work, and believing that nothing more advantageous or admirable could ever happen to Italy, he took no account of the difficulties surrounding it. When the time for voting came he advanced many other arguments at considerable length and also asked them whether it was not just to divide among the common people what belonged to them in common; whether a citizen was not worthy of more consideration at all times than a slave; whether a man who served in the army was not more useful than one who did not; and whether one who had a share in the country was not more likely to be devoted to the public interests.

There was clearly no hope of reconciling the bitter and determined opposition stirred up by the land law of Tiberius. The landowners first managed to persuade Marcus Octavius, one of the fellow-Tribunes of Tiberius, to block all proceedings by interposing his veto, a perfectly legal and permissible act. When after repeated entreaties Tiberius failed to induce him to give way, he made an issue of the continuance in office of that opposing Tribune. He did so with the greatest reluctance. He tried in vain to persuade the Senate to support him. From the Senate, where

A Tribune  
removes a  
Tribune

as he had only a few followers and was upbraided by the rich, he ran back to the Forum and said that he would take the vote at the comitia of the following day, both on the law and on the magistracy of Octavius, to determine whether a tribune who was acting contrary to the people's interest could continue to hold his office. And so he did, for when Octavius, nothing daunted, again interposed, Gracchus distributed the pebbles to take a vote on him first. When the



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

first tribe voted to abrogate the magistracy of Octavius, Gracchus turned to him and begged him to desist from this veto. As he would not yield, the votes of the other tribes were taken. There were thirty-five tribes at that time. The seventeen that voted first angrily sustained this motion. If the eighteenth should do the same it would make a majority. Again did Gracchus, in the sight of the people, urgently importune Octavius in his present extreme danger not to prevent this most pious work, so useful to all Italy, and not to frustrate the wishes so earnestly entertained by the people, whose desires he ought rather to share in his character of Tribune, and not to risk the loss of his office by public condemnation. After speaking thus he called the gods to witness that he did not willingly do any despite to his colleague. As Octavius was still unyielding he went on taking the vote. Octavius was forthwith reduced to the rank of a private citizen and slunk away unobserved.

A Tribune had never before been removed from office by popular vote or recall in this way. Tiberius then gained the day, as Appian reports:

Quintus Mummius was chosen Tribune in his place, and the agrarian law was enacted. The first triumvirs appointed to divide the land were Gracchus himself, the proposer of the law, his brother of the same name, and his father-in-law, Appius Claudius, since the people still feared that the law might fail of execution unless Gracchus should be put in the lead with his whole family. Gracchus became immensely popular by reason of the law and was escorted home by the multitude as though he were the founder, not of a single city or race, but of all the nations of Italy. After this the victorious party returned to the fields from which they had come to attend to this business. The defeated ones remained in the city and talked the matter over, feeling bitterly, and saying that as soon as Gracchus should become a private citizen he would be sorry that he had done despite to the sacred and inviolable office of Tribune, and had opened such a fountain of discord in Italy.

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

The Senate tried to make difficulties about financing the new measure but chance gave Tiberius a sudden unexpected opportunity to circumvent them. Plutarch records that

About this time, king Attalus died, and Eudemus, a Pergamenian, brought his last will to Rome, by which he had made the Roman people his heirs. Tiberius, to please the people, immediately proposed making a law, that all the money which Attalus left should be distributed amongst such poor citizens as were to be sharers of the public lands, for the better enabling them to proceed in stocking and cultivating their ground; and as for the cities that were in the territories of Attalus, he declared that the disposal of them did not at all belong to the Senate, but to the people, and that he himself would ask their pleasure herein. By this he offended the Senate more than ever he had done before.

Foreign gold  
finances  
reform

The first act was over. The climax came at the end of 133 B.C. when new Tribunes were to be elected for the following year. The Senators had reason for alarm. Although Tiberius Gracchus seemed perfectly within his rights by asking the people to decide between him and his opposing colleague, the Tribune Octavius, the outcome of his act was to weaken the whole system of checks and balances in the Roman State. A rampant demagogue, if he was a Tribune, would now have a precedent for overcoming the opposition of any of his colleagues. An essential principle of the whole tribunician system had been destroyed. The Tribune's power of veto was the key to his position in the Roman constitution and Tiberius had shown how to nullify it. The Senators were thereby in danger of losing their possibility of holding up a demagogue, as they had tried to hold up Tiberius, by prevailing upon another Tribune to oppose him with his veto. We may think that Tiberius was not a dangerous demagogue, but the fact remains that the precedent he created would be available to future demagogues who were dangerous.

It was a natural reaction for Tiberius, when the Senators refused to finance his Land Commission, to seek the people's

Tiberius  
Gracchus  
flouts Rome's  
Constitution

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

authority to use revenues from the new province of Pergamum instead. But to create such a precedent for the control of distant lands by the assembly of the people of Rome was fraught with unforeseeable consequences. To relegate imperial responsibilities to such an ignorant chance assembly in this way seems to have been asking for trouble. The rich, therefore, made every effort to oppose the re-election of Tiberius. He, feeling in mortal danger unless he could be protected by his supposedly inviolable office, strove desperately for re-election. Tempers on both sides ran high and the traditional account given by Plutarch and Appian puts the blame for the tragic conclusion upon the Senators. Appian reports:

Reactionaries  
win the day

Under these circumstances the Senate assembled at the temple of Fides. It is astonishing to me that they never thought of appointing a Dictator in this emergency, although they had often been protected by the government of a single ruler in such times of peril. Although this resource had been found most useful in former times, few people remembered it, either then or later. After reaching the decision that they did reach, they marched up to the Capitol, Cornelius Scipio Nasica, the pontifex maximus, leading the way and calling out with a loud voice, 'Let those who would save the country follow me.' He wound the border of his toga about his head either to induce a greater number to go with him by the singularity of his appearance, or to make for himself, as it were, a helmet as a sign of battle for those who looked on, or in order to conceal from the gods what he was about to do. When he arrived at the temple and advanced against the partisans of Gracchus they yielded to the reputation of a foremost citizen, for they saw the Senate following him. The latter wrested clubs out of the hands of the Gracchans themselves, or with fragments of broken benches or other apparatus that had been brought for the use of the assembly, began beating them, and pursued them, and drove them over the precipice. In the tumult many of the Gracchans perished, and Gracchus himself was caught near the temple, and was slain at the door close by the statues of the kings. All the bodies were thrown by night into the Tiber.

## T. Gracchus and his Predecessors

The gravity of the incident marked a turning point in Roman history. A revolution had occurred in Roman political life. This, said Plutarch,

we are told, was the first sedition amongst Romans, since the abrogation of kingly government, that ended in the effusion of blood. All former quarrels which were neither small nor about trivial matters, were always amicably composed, by mutual concessions on either side, the senate yielding for fear of the commons and the commons out of respect to the senate.

A new Roman  
Revolution

The comment by Appian is even more significant:

So perished on the Capitol, and while still Tribune, Gracchus, the son of the Gracchus who was twice consul, and of Cornelia, daughter of that Scipio who subjugated Carthage. He lost his life in consequence of a most excellent design, which, however, he pursued in too violent a manner. This shocking affair, the first that was perpetrated in the public assembly, was seldom without parallels thereafter from time to time. On the subject of the murder of Gracchus the city was divided between sorrow and joy. Some mourned for themselves and for him, and deplored the present condition of things, believing that the commonwealth no longer existed, but had been supplanted by force and violence. Others considered that everything had turned out for them exactly as they wished.

Had Tiberius Gracchus died in vain? The Senate seemed cautious about using its victory. They did not dare to abolish the three-man Land Commission. Its work was made very difficult by the lack of adequate records of land-ownership. 'Immediately a great number of embarrassing lawsuits sprang up' said Appian so that 'there was nothing but a general turn-about, all parties being moved out of their own places and settled down in other people's'.

In the general confusion, the landowners tried delaying tactics. The Italians were especially vulnerable and if victimized,

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

they probably had less chances of getting redress than the Romans. Appian gave the following account of the situation:

Those who were in possession of the lands even after these events postponed the division on various pretexts for a very long time. Some thought that the Italian allies, who made the greatest resistance to it, ought to be admitted to Roman citizenship so that, out of gratitude for the greater favour, they should no longer quarrel about the land. The Italians were glad to accept this, because they preferred Roman citizenship to possession of the fields. Fulvius Flaccus, who was then both consul and triumvir, exerted himself to the utmost to bring it about, but the Senate was angry at the proposal to make their subjects equal citizens with themselves. For this reason the attempt was abandoned, and the people, who had been so long in the hope of acquiring land, became disheartened.

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

New-style  
Politics

TO SAVE FROM TOTAL RUIN the achievement for which his brother had sacrificed his life, was the pious duty as well as the ambition of Gaius Gracchus. Nine years younger than Tiberius, he had been nominated by his brother as a member of his Land Commission. After his brother had been murdered in 133 B.C. he withdrew into private life, although it was soon apparent, according to Plutarch, that his disposition 'was one of an utter antipathy to a lazy retirement and effeminacy, and not the least likely to be contented with a life of eating, drinking, and money getting'. He had, moreover, an eloquence, an energy and a scheming practical intelligence which made him stand out head and shoulders above his contemporaries. His also was a new style of oratory. Impetuous and passionate, he would, said Plutarch, 'walk about on the hustings and in the heat of his orations, would pull his toga off his shoulders, he was the first of all the Romans that used such gestures'.

Such was his fame already, after his twelve years' service with the army, that when in 124 B.C. he eventually stood for election as Tribune 'such infinite numbers of people came from all parts of Italy to vote for him that they could not find anywhere to lodge in the City'. The Senators were well aware of his qualities and they would not have wanted him in public affairs even if his name had not been Gracchus. Their opposition was powerless to prevent his election but although they succeeded in preventing him heading the poll, he came fourth among the ten Tribunes then elected.

The years 123 and 122 B.C. were memorable for the first attempt by Gaius Gracchus to bring about a New Deal. Not content as was his brother with an attempt to reverse the trend on the land by trying to break up large estates, he sought to plan the economic life of the City on more rational economic lines, and to deal with his political opponents by playing one lot off against another.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

The Business  
Class or  
*Equites*

At this point in Roman history a new class of Roman citizen first began to count for something on the political front. They were business men who had been gaining wealth and the influence that wealth brings, with the rise of Imperial Rome after the defeat of Carthage and the increase in number of the overseas possessions of the Republic. Growing rich from business and commercial operations from which Senators were barred, they came to occupy the second place in the State after that of the Senators, a rank which in the early days of Rome had always traditionally entailed war service as cavalry. It was a liability to which they were still exposed so they were still called *equites*. Their rank may be translated as *knights* rather than as 'the equestrian' order or 'men of cavalry rank', for the word 'knight' in English has since the Middle Ages had much the same change of meaning as *equites* had in Latin although probably more *equites* rode a horse than most British knights do today.

The Gracchan  
New Deal

What we know about all the various projects Gaius Gracchus fought to realize is unfortunately neither very detailed nor very precise, but their main trend is fairly evident. Gaius seems to have been concerned above all to improve the welfare of the mass of Roman and Italian citizens and to make the government of the Republic more efficient and more honest. The changes he introduced into the administration of the Republic seem to have been tactical moves by which he tried to play off the main power blocs against each other and to make it easier to get his principal schemes through the very complicated and difficult traditional political machinery of the Roman Republic.

—land  
resettlement

On the economic side of Roman life Gaius Gracchus naturally continued the land-limitation and land-allotment laws of his brother which had already had some success. By 125 B.C. Rome's census list of property owners registered some 73,000 more names than there had been before the agrarian laws of Tiberius Gracchus had been passed. It is generally supposed that the Land Commission had been fairly effective and that in its ten years' work it had reduced many large estates. The new smallholders were presumably struggling to make a success of the land redistribution scheme. The problem of

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

urban poverty was by no means solved, however, and new measures were needed. To encourage emigration from the increasingly crowded city of Rome, Gaius devised a new sort of colony, not primarily military and not predominantly agricultural, but at seaports in Southern Italy, with the aim, it would seem, of developing commerce. His very much more controversial novelty was an attempt to reduce the cost of living in Rome. He drove the Republic into State-trading by allowing all Roman citizens to buy corn from public granaries below the prevalent market price. They still had to pay for it, but the price was now stable and it was low. The British, who have lived for a generation or more with a public wheat subsidy scheme, are less likely to be astonished now at such a development than their ancestors used to be, for they had almost a sacred veneration for the virtues of a free-market price. To old-fashioned Romans also it appeared as a shocking innovation. Gracchus seems to have been one of the few statesmen of the ancient world who believed that economic efficiency is aided by good roads for he launched a State-road-building scheme. He also relieved poorer citizens of the necessity to buy their own clothing and equipment when summoned to army service.

—colonies  
and commerce

—state-  
trading in  
wheat

—road-  
making

Much as the Senators disliked such innovations they were unable to stop them. Gaius was under no illusions about their desire to do so, which no doubt explains why he brought business men into public affairs at the expense of the privileged Senators.

Gaius Gracchus did more than any man to make a class and a party or an 'order' out of the knights. At first his chief aim seems to have been to prevent bribery in the courts and to ensure fair trials. The outcome of his actions, after senatorial opposition to him had become very bitter, was the abolition of the ancient practice whereby a Senator might serve as a *iudex*. He reserved for the order of knights the honourable and influential task of acting as *iudices* on the standing tribunal for criminal cases, including the court of claims *judicia repetundarum* which became busier as Rome's empire expanded and as

Tax-collectors  
as judges in  
their own  
cause



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

aggrieved provincials sought redress from brutal exploitation by Roman governors.

Roman courts consisted of a president, usually a Praetor, and a panel of *iudices* who were more than jurymen because they decided the case by secret ballot. It seems probable that Gracchus had not at first intended to strike such a powerful blow against the Senators but was driven to it by their hatred of his plans to help the poorer classes. It was a disastrous move. Montesquieu in eighteenth-century France, who knew tax-farmers at first hand, praised the old laws of France that regulated such men as though they were public enemies, for the simple reason that they had only one aim in life—their own profit which they sought tirelessly and without remorse, from rich and poor alike. They were the last people who should have been made judges.

Gaius did more than improve the political position of the knights at the expense of the Senators. He reorganized the tax collection in Rome's new Asian provinces by entrusting the work to those who offered the Republic the most favourable terms for the exclusive right of raising the revenue. The Republic had no civil service, and the army was a citizen levy, to be used only in war. Unless the taxes were 'farmed out' in this way the provincials themselves would have had to collect them. To let Roman business men organize the work through their own employees at their own expense therefore seemed an easy way out. The unfortunate provincials were thus handed over to the tender mercies of tax collectors, whose own income was the surplus they succeeded in screwing out of their victims over and above the amounts they had contracted to pay to the Roman Treasury. The tax-collectors had a simple and single ambition: it was to make that surplus as large as possible. However vigorously the provincials might complain, they could not start a prosecution in Rome, because the Court of Claims dealt merely with accusations against Roman provincial governors who were Senators. As Senators they could not be business men. Gaius Gracchus seems to have expected all Romans in authority to behave according to his own ideas

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

of honesty. When Fabius, as the Governor in Spain, sent a lot of corn to Rome as a gift Gracchus persuaded the Senate to

sell the corn, and return the money to the same provinces which had furnished them with it; and also that Fabius should be censured for rendering the Roman government odious and insupportable. This got him extraordinary respect and favour among the provinces.

Plutarch characterizes this action as 'very just and honourable'.

Gracchus may have thought it was a smart move to set the business men against the Senators, but it fatally poisoned Roman public life. The Senators were too much for Gracchus. They undermined his own following among the people. They persuaded another Tribune, Livius Drusus, to overbid Gaius 'by playing the demagogue in opposition to him and offering favours contrary to all good policy', said Plutarch. When Gaius required those getting land allotments to pay the State a rent, Drusus proposed that there should be no rent. When Gaius proposed two colonies Drusus suggested twelve. It was when Gaius sought to make Roman rule more tolerable to the Italians that Drusus had his best chance. Gaius was in favour of granting full Roman citizenship to Rome's allies and nearest neighbours, the Latins, and of improving the status of the Italians also. The jealous Roman mobs had no wish to see Latins made their equals, so when Drusus said that it would be sufficient to forbid Roman commanders to flog Latins, he found more favour, and Gracchus lost support. Gracchus had deserved to win, for the Latins and Italians were getting very restive about their inferior position.

Keen to make a success of his colonizing schemes, Gaius was away for seventy days in 122 B.C. helping to found a new Roman colony near the desolate site of Carthage, which had been vindictively destroyed by Roman spite and fury in 146 B.C.: one of the blackest outrages in Rome's long list of crimes. Gaius, like other reformers, suffered also from the less

Scheme to  
undermine  
G. Gracchus

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

scrupulous men who supported him, particularly one of his co-Land Commissioners, Fulvius, a man, said Plutarch, 'of a turbulent spirit . . . an unsettled character and of a well-known seditious temper'. He was widely supposed to have been stirring up the Italians to rebel and of having earlier been involved in the murder of Scipio Aemilianus, leader of the Scipionic Circle, who had been found dead in his bed in 129 B.C. There was no evidence to support either charge, but in the inflamed state of politics, anything was apt to be believed. 'This was one principal cause of the ruin of Gaius, according to Plutarch, 'for part of the feeling against Fulvius extended to him also.' He returned from Carthage to find that his stock was falling just when he needed public support if he were to become Tribune for the third time in the following year. His championship of the Latins was his undoing. 'What room will be left for you at the games and festivals when Gracchus has given citizenship to the Latins?' the Consul was said to have asked the Roman mobs in 122 B.C. Gracchus was not re-elected.

Mass murder  
of the  
Gracchans

As soon as he reverted to private life without the protection of his inviolable office, he was exposed to the hatred of his enemies. He seems to have gone about with a bodyguard. Before long there was the inevitable clash from which the Senators at once profited. Then it was that they first instructed the Consuls with a form of words which was to become memorable, then used for the first time, 'to take all necessary measures for the safety of the State'. One of the Consuls, Opimius, a brutal blackguard, was only too pleased to interpret his authority in the way many of the Senators wished. A violent conflict resulted in which many of the supporters of Gaius Gracchus were slaughtered. Gracchus himself got as far as a sacred grove where he either took his own life or commanded a faithful slave to kill him. Their bodies were found together. Three thousand Roman citizens were said to have been slaughtered by the Consul's orders, many of them in cold blood, for no other crime than having supported Gracchus.

The story of the Gracchi has often been told and it has frequently been described as a turning-point or a revolution in

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

Roman political life, particularly from the point of view of the irruption of rioting, violence and political murder, all of which had never occurred before on such a spectacular scale. Coming within the short space of one generation after Polybius had drawn his flattering picture of the stability, harmony and excellence of Roman political life, it is indeed a sign of startling changes within the Republic. It is not surprising therefore that it should be regarded as indeed a revolution or that the moral of the story should have been variously drawn from ancient to modern times.

Certain aspects of the tragic attempt of the Gracchi to remould the Roman way of life seem to have been overlooked or insufficiently brought out in the conventional commentaries. The first is their idealism. They did not try to do what they attempted from mere personal ambition or out of a desire for distinction, still less out of a developed instinct of self-preservation, all of which motives were to become increasingly significant as the story of Rome advances. It is true that some efforts were made, possibly with a little success here and there, to smear Tiberius Gracchus with the stock accusation that he had the criminal ambition to become a king, but it was patently ridiculous and carried no weight. Neither he nor Gaius Gracchus tried to use their popularity to advance their careers by aiming at the Consulate.

Despite Plutarch's positive statement that Tiberius was incited by 'the people themselves' it seems doubtful whether the Gracchi could really be said to have been impelled to do what they did in response to a widespread clamour of public opinion. Tiberius had, it seems, already sought and achieved election as Tribune before any such appeals had been made to him. Perhaps his motives became known to some extent and thereby stimulated popular demands for which he was the chosen target, but every year for several hundred years before him Tribunes had been elected as protectors of the people. Men like Flaminius (p. 79) can be numbered among the precursors of the Gracchi, but they were few and far between. Tiberius himself had nine other Tribunes as colleagues. If popular agitation was the sole

Idealism  
in Roman  
Politics

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

or main explanation of his actions, it is difficult to understand why in 133 B.C., he should have been the sole public figure in the democratic free-for-all, rough-and-tumble of Roman politics to be willing to become its champion and martyr.

Fickle and faint-hearted as the City mobs may have become later in the days when Plutarch wrote, they still retained many of their old Roman qualities in the second century B.C., so that had they really been the instigators of the Gracchan reforms, it is difficult to believe that the opposition to them would have been so easily victorious. Three hundred people were said by Plutarch to have perished with Tiberius, three thousand with Gaius. Many became thoroughly committed to the cause of reform as time went on and the movement grew. They venerated the memory of the slaughtered brothers. 'The people,' said Plutarch,

though humbled, and affrighted at the time, did not fail before long to let everybody see what respect and veneration they had for the memory of the Gracchi. They ordered their statues to be made and set up in public view; they consecrated the places where they were slain, and thither brought the first-fruits of every thing, according to the season of the year, to make their offerings. Many came likewise thither to their devotions, and daily worshipped there, as at the temples of the gods.

The blood of the martyrs can be the seed of great movements in politics as in religion.

The Gracchi were in fact the martyrs of an ideal, one which by their time no longer moved the minds of men as it might have done in the past. Tiberius, said Appian, 'lost his life in consequence of a most excellent design which, however, he pursued in too violent a manner'. The plan of Gaius also, Appian described as 'most excellent and useful, if it could have been carried out'. Cicero in his candid moments said the same and there can be little doubt that they were right.

It seems extraordinary that the ruling classes were so blind to the probable result of their acquiescence in the great increase

Revolu-  
tionaries or  
Reformers?

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

in the slave population and in the growing number of freed slaves and their progeny who replaced Roman citizens, and that they preferred to let them increase than to welcome Latins and Italians as fellow-citizens. The vast influx was serious enough, but more ominous was the fact that once in Italy they naturally married and began to raise families. There was no public educational system to give the children of slaves or freedmen a schooling in Roman ideals and values and in the Roman way of life. As time went on the word 'Roman' ceased to mean what it once had meant.

The more far-sighted leaders were well enough aware of what was happening. Scipio Aemilianus, surrounded by a shouting, yelling mob in the Forum who hated him for approving the murder of Tiberius Gracchus, his brother-in-law, cut them short by saying 'Silence, you stepchildren of Italy' and by telling them that having brought them to Rome in chains he did not fear them because they had lost their bonds. But he would not do anything to help Tiberius. Yet Scipio was upright, honest, exceptionally intelligent, courageous and a proud aristocrat. Where Scipio saw no need for action it is highly unlikely that the rest of the Senators would be wiser.

Both the Gracchi were reformers but can they be described as revolutionaries as well? There seems little doubt that they were indeed the instigators, unwilling and unpremeditated no doubt, of nothing short of a revolution in Rome. They broke with the past by changing constitutional practice and they provoked a violent upheaval. They flouted the authority of the Senate and they sought to override the Senators by getting the public assembly to vote in favour of schemes which they knew the Senate would not approve. Plutarch pointed to the real revolutionary significance of Gaius Gracchus.

Essence of  
the Gracchan  
Revolution

While he was arguing for the ratification of this law, his behaviour was observed to show in many respects unusual earnestness, and whereas other popular leaders had always hitherto, when speaking, turned their faces towards the senate house, and the place called the comitium, he, on the contrary, was the first man that in his harangue to the people

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

turned himself the other way, towards them, and continued after that time to do so. An insignificant movement and change of posture, yet it marked no small revolution in state affairs, the conversion, in a manner, of the whole government from an aristocracy to a democracy, his action intimating that public speakers should address themselves to the people, not the senate.

Appeals to  
the people no  
substitute for  
Government

True democratic government, a more efficient new form of government, cannot be organized overnight as the Gracchi tried to do. They were both young men in a hurry and they did not stop to realize that the government of a country and of an empire cannot be carried on by a series of appeals to the people or plebiscites. It is true that a plebiscite is a way of discerning what the people think about any particular proposal, so that it may seem the essence of democracy to rely upon it, but this is to forget that the real power is then in the hands of the people who arrange the plebiscite. We see this clearly enough today in the prison-States of the Soviet Union and its satellites. There, the prearranged response of a dragooned people to prearranged questions is presented to the world as 'democracy'. The party-boss of the moment and his yes-men frame the questions; the people cannot do so.

Now he who has the right or the power to ask questions in this way necessarily becomes the real ruler, because the power of the State must be carried on and the people cannot undertake it. There are vastly too many questions, too many decisions to take, for it to be possible to have a plebiscite about each of them. Many of the questions require special knowledge which the general run of voters do not possess. A plebiscite with its 'yes' or 'no' is too crude a device by which to handle problems needing much study and involving long and complicated negotiation. In Rome the Senators could provide such political and administrative ability. Annually elected Tribunes with no administrative authority or duly constituted staff of officials and subordinates could not.

The tragedy of the Gracchi lay in the fact that the Senators no longer measured up to their responsibilities and to the

## G. Gracchus and the Turning of the Tide

demands of the hour. Failing to convince the Senators that they must rise to the occasion, the Gracchi sought to by-pass them, to overrule them by getting the people to approve what the Senators and therefore the magistrates, the executive, did not approve. There could be no future for government on these lines. An upheaval was inevitable. The Senators failed in their duty, but they still had a duty, and nobody else could undertake it without changing the system of government in Rome.



## Drift to Catastrophe 121-91 B.C.

THE AGE OF THE GRACCHI saw so marked a change in the affairs of the Roman people that it is inevitable that we should ask why it came about when it did, particularly with a swiftness that the testimony of Polybius already cited at the end of the previous chapter makes so amazing. Why was it suddenly so dangerous for a Roman to try to persuade his fellow-citizens to put the welfare of the Republic before their personal enrichment and interests?

The strength of the Roman Senate had traditionally rested upon its ability to put general welfare first despite errors, shortcomings and personal failures. In that spirit it had, reluctantly it is true, conceded legitimate popular demands in the past. In that spirit it had risen to the greatest heights in times of terrible danger. The Senate never despaired of the Republic when Hannibal was at the gates and while Italy lay at his mercy. What, in one or two short generations, had turned the Fathers into enraged opponents of 'excellent designs', that had no other motive than public welfare? For when the Senators opposed the Gracchi they had no plans of their own to deal with the evils and the dangerous threat to Rome so vigorously brought to their attention. They seemed blind to the dangers which roused Tiberius to martyrdom. They had but one answer to his calm study of the problem, to his efforts to interest them in it, to his appeal for advice and help to improve his own plans. They had him clubbed to death. What had gone wrong in Roman public life?

The old  
order changes

When H. G. Wells faced this question in his stimulating but rather cocksure *Outline of History*, he commented:

various answers are made—a decline in religion, a decline from the virtues of the Roman forefathers, Greek 'intellectual poison' and the like. We who can look at the problem with a large perspective, can see that what happened to Rome was 'money'—the new freedoms and chances and

## Drift to Catastrophe 121-91 B.C.

opportunities that money opened out. Money floated the Romans off firm ground. . . . Money was young in human experience and wild, nobody had it under control.

While such an idea seems more ingenious than the stock remarks that usually do duty as pretended explanations of the decline such as the growing greed of the Romans, it really does not carry the matter much further. 'Money' is a passive thing and to personify it in this way substitutes one mystery for another. Why should 'money' suddenly be able to assume such power? Is there any evidence that whenever people begin to use money their morals inevitably decay?

A real explanation must account for the changed Roman attitude to property in general, money included. Why did 'money' suddenly appear on the scene and become endowed with such mystic properties? The answer can only be found in a new spirit, a new way of looking at the world, which has occurred in the history of many peoples whether they made great use of money or not. The Greeks experienced such a change and so, it may be guessed, did the Etruscans.

The great German sociologist Max Weber has pointed out how in the history of Europe since the Renaissance, a greater reliance upon the powers of human reason has tended to replace age-old reliance upon traditional ways. It is not true that in primitive times the economic impulse was absent, but it was kept under control by traditional ways and usually had fewer outlets. The change that the Romans introduced was typified by the formal juristic thinking seen in their system of law. For the first time an ordered body of calculable procedure was available to foster the growth of rationally directed economic, utilitarian interests. Before commercial life was rationalized and brought under review and control by a system of accountancy, quantitative thinking, according to Max Weber, was of relatively small influence and was far from dominating economic life in the way that it does today.

Broadly speaking this was probably true of Rome also except that the need to measure and assign land had the effect

New Roman  
outlook

Economists  
and  
Calculators

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

in Rome, as in ancient Egypt where the Nile floods obliterated landmarks, of developing a scientific, measuring, quantitative spirit, at least in its rudiments. In the light of such a view, Gaius Gracchus may be seen as the planner, the economist and calculator trying to direct public life by rational intelligence.

In complete contrast to this view Dr. Arnold Toynbee in his massive work, *A Study of History*, describes Tiberius Gracchus as an 'archaist'. If the Gracchi were archaists, it is not easy to find a label for their opponents whose stubborn, fierce resistance to the changes which the Gracchi proposed, and to some extent succeeded in bringing about, was hardly an example of devotion to progress, unless it was 'progressive' for those to whom the destinies of a great people were committed to make no effort to guide or rescue them from the disastrous consequences of economic change for which they were not responsible and with which they, unaided, did not know how to cope. The Gracchi were conscious innovators, the Senators dumb swimmers with the economic tide of the times.

The Senators and the wealthy landowners made what use they could of their victory. No attempt seems to have been made to restore the Senators to the jury lists. The rule preventing the resale of land granted by the Land Commissioners was the first to go, so the rich again began to get back what they had lost. Then the Land Commission was abolished and rent was no longer demanded from the occupiers of public lands who were in effect told that they could keep what they held as their own property.

Appian summed it up generally, if not accurately in all detail, by saying:

So the plebeians lost everything. What resulted was a still further decline in the numbers of both citizens and soldiers, and in the revenue from the land and the distribution thereof; and about fifteen years after the enactment of the law of Gracchus, the laws themselves fell into abeyance.

Not only were little or no durable economic benefits gained at the cost of such great effort and sacrifice but the whole tone

and atmosphere of political life in Rome was poisoned. During the next fifty years civil strife and discord were to claim more and more victims. The slaughter of the Gracchi and their supporters let loose an era of violence.

Sedition did not end with this abominable deed. Repeatedly the parties came into open conflict, often carrying daggers; and occasionally in the temples, or the assemblies, or the forum, some one serving as Tribune, or Praetor, or Consul, or a candidate for those offices, or some person otherwise distinguished, would be slain. Unseemly violence prevailed almost constantly, together with shameful contempt for law and justice. As the evil gained in magnitude, open insurrections against the government and large warlike expeditions against the country were undertaken by exiles, or criminals, or persons contending against each other for some office or military command. There were chiefs of factions in different places aspiring to supreme power, some of them refusing to disband the troops entrusted to them by the people, others levying forces against each other on their own account, without public authority. Whichever of them first got possession of the city, the others made war nominally against their adversaries, but actually against their country. They assailed it like a foreign enemy. Ruthless and indiscriminate massacres of citizens were perpetrated. Men were proscribed, others banished, property was confiscated, and some were even subjected to excruciating tortures.

Rome had domesticated the revolutionary spirit with a vengeance. To fill in all the details of Appian's dismal tale of disasters would involve more than the story of Roman revolutions, so attention may be concentrated upon the more significant developments before that mighty explosion occurred soon after the beginning of the first century B.C., which began the final ruin of the Republican constitution.

While civic discord was occupying all men's minds in Rome, it was by no means safe to conclude that all danger from foreign attacks was a thing of the past. Romans were pushing out into the Mediterranean, occupying the Balearic Islands (122 B.C.),

The new  
model  
Roman army  
after 103 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

establishing new provinces and colonies in Southern Gaul (Narbo Martius, 118 B.C., now Narbonne). After 116 B.C. new energies began to be developed against Rome by an unscrupulous semi-savage African ruler, Jugurtha.

In 115 B.C. a new and vigorous ruler, Mithridates VI, seized the kingdom of Pontus in Asia Minor and began to conquer his neighbours. What was much nearer home and potentially vastly more dangerous were the defeats from 114 B.C. onwards of one Roman army after another by hordes of Germanic tribes, Cimbri, Tigurini and another whom the Romans called Teutoni. The command against these northern barbarians was entrusted to an Italian, Gaius Marius from Arpinum. When he was born there in 157 B.C. only one generation of his fellow-countrymen had enjoyed Roman citizenship. He had risen to fame by getting appointed directly by the vote of the people to command in the war in North Africa against Jugurtha in 107 B.C., ousting his chief, the Consul Metellus. Hitherto the Senate alone had nominated army commanders, so by the demagogic election of Marius another successful blow had been delivered against senatorial supremacy.

Marius was an efficient ruthless commander. He 'modernized' and 'streamlined' the Roman army; he changed the whole order of battle, abolished the traditional organization in three grades differently armed at the troops' own cost, gave each soldier the same arms and equipment at State expense and threw open recruitment to all classes of society. The poorest classes, hitherto excluded, were now accepted. They were also well trained, fed and paid. Their loyalty was to their commander who kept them mobilized and active and thereby gave them the chance to collect a lot of booty on their campaigns and a good reward when the wars were over.

During the year 103 B.C. Marius drilled and hardened his new model army in Transalpine Gaul which was not then Roman soil. Re-elected for the fourth time as Consul in 102 B.C. and for the fifth time in 101 B.C., he successively smashed the Teutoni and the Cimbri. The northern frontier was secure—for the time being. Rome had improved its fighting power, but at

the cost of creating an army of professionals who steadily replaced the citizen-soldiers who seem to have been very willing to look after their own private affairs and to leave the responsibilities of their own defence to others.

Soldiers returning from the wars, perhaps unfit for further fighting because of advancing years or other disabilities, looked for a reward for their services, and the personal popularity of an army commander rose in proportion to his success in finding them cash or land or both. A new incentive arose to embark on foreign conquests which provided booty and territory to be divided. A new loyalty began to be developed towards the commander whose success in the field had won such prizes.

Marius, who had done as much as any Roman to create these new conditions, was the first to benefit from them. Others sought to profit from them also, among whom was Lucius Appuleius Saturninus. Elected Tribune in 103 B.C. and again in 100 B.C., he seems to have revived the plans of Gaius Gracchus by proposing to sell corn at a nominal price and to have sought to found colonies in Sicily, Greece and Macedonia on behalf of Italians as much as of Romans. The veterans of the wars under Marius were promised lands in Gaul on the Po. He had an ally in a man of the people like Marius, Gaius Servilius Glaucia, who was Praetor in 100 B.C. Marius was again Consul in the same year, and for the sixth time. There seemed a good chance that the three together would be able to carry the people with them on any plans they might devise.

Exactly what the full play of forces was at the time we shall probably never know. Such accounts as remain depict both Saturninus and Glaucia as demagogues of reckless irresponsibility, but they were written by their enemies. Metellus on the other hand, the former Consul whom Marius had ousted and had again defeated in the consular elections of 101 B.C., and who resolutely opposed their plans, was written up as the one honest man in among a bunch of thieves. He was driven into exile because he would not swear to respect the agrarian law giving away land to veterans and Italians. In spite of all this and an apparently cast-iron mobilization of political forces with

Renewed civil  
disorders.  
Saturninus  
and Glaucia,  
100 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

whose brute strength they murdered Memmius in cold blood as he was about to be elected Consul, Saturninus and Glaucia went down to defeat.

The Roman mob would not accept a measure benefiting Italians on equal terms with themselves. Whether Marius saw this and thought it best to desert the Italians, or whether on the contrary, he thought Saturninus was likely to supplant him in popular favour as it has been improbably suggested, we do not know. What is certain is that at the end of 100 B.C. Marius turned upon Saturninus and Glaucia, who were butchered, not as the Gracchi had been by senatorial hirelings, but by the Roman mob. Metellus returned in triumph in 99 B.C. and so fickle was the mob that Marius, mistrusted by both sides, left Rome to travel in the East. Roman political life sank to a lower point, until as Appian records:

Freedom, democracy, laws, reputation, official position, were no longer of any use to anybody, since even the tribunician office, which had been devised for the restraint of wrong-doers and the protection of the plebeians, and was sacred and inviolable, now committed such outrages and suffered such indignities.

After the massacres of 100 B.C. the cause of reform may well have seemed desperate, but men were forthcoming whose confidence in their own abilities, ambition, or plain sense of public duty drove them forward in an attempt to reconcile what already seems to have become the irreconcilable clash of interests. On one side were the rich landowners, the Senators who used their traditional position of eminence to support the landowners, together with the financially successful but socially and politically ambitious knights. The other side was made up of the poverty-stricken City mobs of Roman citizens and the underprivileged, slighted, and victimized Italians whose only hope and aim was political equality with the citizens of Rome as a preliminary to acquiring some greater personal security of life and limb, some improved economic resources and finally some greater social consideration; all of which boons were

Roman  
Politics  
reach an  
Impasse.

resolutely opposed by the Roman voters. The Romans in turn were not completely united, except in opposition to Italians, while the vast City mobs had only four votes against the thirty-one votes of country residents in the public assembly.

Politics had become a maelstrom that had engulfed everyone who sought to navigate upon it. High-minded martyrs to duty, cunning politicians and 'fixers', and many innocent, naïve spectators had perished. They had all come from the so-called 'popular' ranks in opposition to the men entrenched in all their panoply of ancestral eminence in the Senate.

In the year 92 B.C. a well-connected, able and eloquent young Roman, Marcus Livius Drusus, whose father and grandfather had been Consuls, who was rich and well-connected, flung himself into the fray on behalf of the Senators, but not at their instigation. The situation was now much worse than it had been in the previous generation. Political morality had further declined. The knights had shamefully abused the powers that Gaius Gracchus first conferred upon them. Their extortion in the provinces was scandalous. The Court of Claims in Rome could not touch them. On the contrary it was used to secure verdicts on trumped-up charges against honest Roman commanders who had thwarted the tax-gatherers and traders in their foul work of extortion in their provinces.

In 92 B.C., P. Rutilius Rufus, Consul of 105 B.C., a man of high character who was corruptly condemned in this way, went to live in exile in Smyrna as the honoured guest of the very people he had been falsely accused of oppressing. While the subject races in the new-won Empire were being bled by the money-grabbers, Latins and Italians resident in Rome, some of whom were passing themselves off as Roman citizens, were suddenly expelled from the City in 95 B.C. When, therefore, Drusus got himself elected as Tribune for the year 91 B.C. to put into operation his plan to get the plebs, the Latins and Italians on the side of the Senators, the political temperature was near boiling point.

The fate of Drusus makes it difficult to believe that any man could have mastered such a grim state of affairs. As soon as he

M. Livius  
Drusus and  
his bid to  
save the  
State 91 B.C.



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

was suspected of wanting to favour the Italians his fate was sealed as far as the mob was concerned. His lavish bribery, his efforts to court and cajole the City masses, went for nothing. His proposals included cheaper corn from the public granaries, grants of land and fresh colonies. So lavish were his schemes that it was said that the currency was debased in the effort to pay for them. The knights were implacably opposed to him from the start and if this story is true, Drusus must have aroused their most venomous opposition. His proposal to double the size of the Senate by admitting three hundred knights lost him the support of the Senators but it did not mollify the knights or assuage their wrath at his proposal to reform the Court of Claims and to diminish their power as the judges—*iudices*—in it. The Senators wrote Drusus off before long as an unwelcome liability and declared that none of his acts was valid because of some technical fault and the alleged observance of signs portending unfavourable omens and threat of the displeasure of the gods. In rejecting Drusus they still had no policy of their own, except to sit tight and trust to force.

Reaction  
wins again

Drusus had failed and he knew it. There was a story to the effect that, realizing that he had gone too far and could not withdraw to enjoy the quiet life he began to regret, he turned to the very necessary task of ensuring his own safety and to this end he set about building up a 'Drusus party' among the Italians whose members were bound by a solemn oath that pledged them to 'spare neither substance nor parent nor child nor life of any, so it be not for the good of Drusus and of those who have taken this oath; and that if I become a citizen by the law of Drusus I will hold Rome my country and Drusus my greatest benefactor'.

Whether such an oath had ever been thought of by Drusus seems doubtful and it may have been a later malicious invention of his enemies. Evidence of the possibility of any such personal cult, a very early forecast of the methods of Russian and Central American dictators of later times, was, however, something new and strange in Roman public life, and the story is worth recording as an indication of the way Roman political

## Drift to Catastrophe 121-91 B.C.

life was changing. It is also recorded that there was much coming and going by Italians to consult with Drusus who would have had the support of all Italy had he begun to stir up riots and civic strife. Before anything of the sort could happen he, an inviolable Tribune, met a violent end at the hand of an unknown assassin who killed him in his home (91 B.C.).

## Violent Revolution 91-31 B.C.

The Italian  
Revolt or the  
Social War  
91-89 B.C.

THE TORCHES THAT KINDLED the funeral pyre of Livius Drusus in 91 B.C. touched off a conflagration that not even the blood of 300,000 Italians could fully quench. He had been the one man who was prepared at great personal risk to champion the claims of the thwarted Italians to political and social equality with the Romans, so that when he vanished, all hopes of the Italians for honourable treatment vanished with him.

The clansmen of the glens and the mountains of Southern and Central Italy who had in the past fought Rome's battles under Roman generals, forthwith took up arms against Rome. Refused citizenship in the Roman Republic, they resolved to create a republic of their own. Its capital, Corfinum, almost in the centre of Italy, was renamed Italia. What form their union took is not known but its spirit was typified on their coins which showed a Roman lion being gored by an Italian bull. It was no idle boast.

The Romans sustained one severe defeat after another in the fierce social war that at once broke out in 91 B.C.; two Consuls were killed in battle and thousands were slain with them. The short-sighted selfishness of the Roman electors, the refusal of their leaders to face the realities of political life and their lack of statesmanlike vision, met with fearful retribution. The Romans fought on with the dogged persistence they had always developed in adversity, but their difficulties mounted. There was a real fear that the Etruscans and Umbrians who had held aloof might join the rebels and on top of this came a declaration of war against Rome by King Mithridates of Pontus who after having built up his strength over the years thought that the time had come to profit by Rome's internal weakness.

All these factors induced the Romans to try to shorten the conflict by offering citizenship to all the allied peoples who had not revolted, an offer later extended to all who would lay down their arms. Many continued to fight, but as Rome had virtually

conceded the objective for which they strove, the ultimate issue was hardly in doubt. Peace was not, however, to be achieved without further frightful slaughter, and when peace came the victorious Romans dishonoured their bond by defrauding the Italians of the full rights to which citizenship entitled them.

As we have seen, democratic control through voting rights, such as it was in the public assembly at Rome, was exercised by the votes of thirty-five wards or 'tribes'. All the new Italian citizen voters were assigned to eight of the 'tribes', which meant that they could always be outvoted by the Romans in the twenty-seven other 'tribes'. To his eternal credit P. Sulpicius Rufus, one of the two outstanding orators of his age and one of the few progressive members of noble families, got a law passed when he was Tribune in 88 B.C. to distribute the Italians evenly among the thirty-five tribes. It was of short duration.

*Sulla versus  
Marius 88 B.C.*

Sulpicius had other aims. One was to come to the rescue of debtors who were still being bled white by the moneylenders. Another was to buy the support of the popular old General Marius, then aged 69, by giving him command of the war in the East instead of accepting Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Consul in 88 B.C., who had already been appointed by the Senate. Sulla, who was forty-nine years old, and of patrician descent, had won distinction in the social war against the Italians, and he was not in the least inclined to favour the mob. Sulpicius broke with tradition by putting the transfer of command to Marius to popular vote or plebiscite. He succeeded, but at the cost of riot and bloodshed. It was an evil precedent and it brought swift retribution. Sulla resisted and, what is most significant, his troops supported him. At their head he marched to Rome and occupied it, the first time that Rome had fallen to armed men since the sack of the City by the Gauls three hundred years earlier. Sulpicius was driven out, caught and murdered. His head was nailed to the rostra in the Forum. Marius, after an epic adventure, in which he also was caught, was saved from death by the timidity he inspired in his executioner by his glaring eyes and by shouting at him with all the force of his

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

parade-ground authority, 'Man, dost thou dare murder Gaius Marius?' He succeeded in escaping to Africa.

Why did a Roman army agree to make war on Rome and to defy the decision of the popular assembly led by a Tribune of the people? Appian gives the answer:

They were eager for the war against Mithridates because it promised much plunder, and they feared that Marius would enlist other soldiers instead of themselves. Sulla spoke of the indignity put upon him by Sulpicius and Marius, and while he did not openly allude to anything else (for he did not dare as yet to mention this kind of a war), he urged them to be ready to obey his orders. They understood what he meant, and as they feared lest they should miss the campaign they spoke boldly what Sulla had in his mind, and told him to be of good courage, and to lead them to Rome.

Even so it was not a unanimous decision for Appian reports:

All of his superior officers, except one quaestor, left him and hastened to the city, because they would not submit to the idea of leading an army against their country.

It was therefore less an army than a loot-hungry mob.

The revolutionary nature of Sulla's proceedings stands out clearly in Appian's narrative:

Marius and Sulpicius went, with some forces they had hastily armed, to meet the invaders near the Aesquiline forum, and here a battle took place between the contending parties, the first that was regularly fought in Rome with trumpet and signal under the rules of war, and not at all in the similitude of a faction fight. To such extremity of evil had the recklessness of party strife progressed among them.

It was, he says, a process whereby:

The seditions proceeded from strife and contention to murder, and from murder to open war, and now the first

## Violent Revolution 91-31 B.C.

army of her own citizens had invaded Rome as a hostile country. From this time the civil dissensions were decided only by the arbitrament of arms.

The Army  
becomes a  
force in politics

Seditions and civic strife had, however, so poisoned Roman life already that except for the spectacular scale of the conflict and the fact that a Roman army was involved, it was not more, as Mommsen pointed out, than 'the interference of the sabre with the constitutional rule of the bludgeon'. Not that bludgeons were now laid aside.

The revolutionary significance of the story lies in the fact that the 'new model' troops created by Marius from the dregs of the population were willing to follow any commander who would make them rich. Sulla's men wanted to loot Asia; they were not going to risk being ousted by another army recruited by Marius. It was no doubt for this reason that Sulla could not remain long in Rome to consolidate his victory. He hastily passed laws to re-establish the Senate's control of Roman public life. The popular assembly in future was not to vote upon any proposal that was not put to it by the Senate, and that popular assembly was no longer to be the ward group meeting of the thirty-five tribes but the old army assembly of the centuries. Tribunes of the people therefore were no longer able to propose new laws. This accomplished, Sulla left for the East.

'New model'  
troops

After the gory scenes which Romans had witnessed more and more frequently in the generation following upon the slaughter of Gaius Gracchus and his followers, it might be thought that a reaction would have set in. On the contrary, as Appian said, violence increased on a horrible scale. Animosities aroused in the social war died hard and the legal equality which the Italians had won did not confer social equality upon them if they came to rub shoulders with their fellow-citizens in Rome. Their presence stirred hatred and added new fuel to the smouldering embers. Before Sulla had left the City to rejoin his troops ready to embark, his fellow-Consul Quintus Pompeius was foully murdered in 88 B.C. at

Marius and  
Cinna  
87-84 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

the instigation of Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo, father of Pompey 'the Great', when he went to supersede Quintus in command of the army.

Massacre in  
Rome 87 B.C.

The Consuls for the year 87 B.C. were two patricians, Lucius Cornelius Cinna and Gnaeus Octavius. Sulla evidently mistrusted Cinna for he made him swear a tremendous oath to respect and preserve the constitution of the Republic as it had been amended. No sooner had Sulla left than Cinna began to prove how worthless the solemn oath of a Roman Consul could be in the first century B.C. He at once proposed to give the new citizens from Italy equal voting rights with the Romans. The Senate and Octavius said 'No' and Cinna tried to raise a riot but was forced to flee. He was then deprived of his Consulship and citizenship and proclaimed an enemy of his country. Determined to resist he, together with Sertorius and some other tried commanders, won over the large army in Campania, marched on Rome and summoned Marius back from exile. The Senate and Octavius were hopelessly outnumbered and after a short siege Rome fell to an invading Roman army for the second time. Scenes of horror then ensued that seem to prove that Roman political morality had vanished and that the Republican constitution which Polybius had found so admirable was already wrecked beyond repair.

Cinna and Marius assumed the title of Consuls but were in fact military dictators, and dictators of a new kind, who took a fiendish delight in exterminating their enemies. Octavius was murdered and his head adorned the Forum in front of the rostra. It was, said Appian,

the first head of a consul that was so exposed. After him the heads of others who were slain were suspended there. This shocking custom, which began with Octavius, was not discontinued, but was handed down to subsequent intestine massacres. Now the victors sent out spies to search for their enemies of the senatorial and equestrian orders. After the knights were killed no further attention was paid to them, but all the heads of senators were exposed in front of the rostra. Neither reverence for the gods, nor the indignation of

men, nor the fear of odium for their acts existed any longer among them. After committing savage deeds they turned to hideous sights. They killed remorselessly and severed the necks of men already dead, and they paraded these horrors before the public eye, either to inspire fear and terror, or for a monstrous spectacle.

So the grisly tale went on:

Burial was not permitted to any of the slain. The bodies of such men as these were torn in pieces by birds and dogs. There was also much private and irresponsible murder committed by the factions upon each other. There were banishments, and confiscations of property, and depositions from office, and a repeal of the laws enacted during Sulla's consulship. All of Sulla's friends were put to death, his house was razed to the ground, his property confiscated, and himself voted a public enemy. Search was made for his wife and children, but they escaped. Altogether no sort of calamity was wanting, either general or particular.

The bestiality was the responsibility of Marius, whose coarse foul nature came out in his dotage. It was too much for Cinna who stopped the slaughter after five days and nights of horror by ordering his troops to massacre the slaves who were acting as butchers at the orders of Marius. Fortunately Marius died on 13 January 86 B.C. Thereafter matters settled down somewhat, despite the economic chaos resulting from the social and civil wars and the loss of the Asian revenues. Cinna remained Consul for the four years 87-84 B.C.

Meanwhile in the East, Sulla fulfilled the hopes of his troops; in Appian's words:

Sulla  
Victorious  
83-78 B.C.

Within less than three years he had killed 160,000 men, recovered Greece, Macedonia, Ionia, Asia, and many other countries that Mithridates had previously occupied, taken the king's fleet away from him, and from such vast possessions restricted him to his paternal kingdom alone. He returned with a large and well-disciplined army, devoted to



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

him and elated by its exploits. He had abundance of ships, money, and apparatus suitable for all emergencies, and was an object of terror to his enemies.

He made no secret of his intentions, which were to retain his army, to take vengeance upon his enemies and thereafter to run the Republic as he chose. Cinna and Carbo, the two Consuls for 85 and 84 B.C., were very frightened. They made all preparations to resist and to fight Sulla in Greece to prevent him landing in Italy. They had reckoned without their army, many of whom had no stomach for the voyage or for the war into which they were to be launched. Cinna, four times a Consul, was killed in a mutiny and Sulla arrived in Italy unhindered. A horrible conflict was inevitable and impending disasters, said Appian, seemed to have been foretold by divine Providence:

Sights terrible and unexpected were observed by many, both in public and in private, throughout all Italy. Ancient, awe-inspiring oracles were remembered. Many monstrous things happened . . . There was a severe earthquake divinely sent and some of the temples in Rome were thrown down (the Romans gave altogether too much attention to such things). The Capitol, that had been built by the kings 400 years before, burned down, and nobody could discover the cause of the fire. All things seemed to point to a succession of slaughters, to the conquest of Italy and of the Romans themselves, to the capture of the city, and a change in the form of government.

Sulla's  
Civil War  
83-81 B.C.

The war which began after Sulla had landed in Brundisium in 83 B.C., said Appian:

lasted three years in Italy alone, until Sulla had secured the supreme power, but in Spain it continued even after Sulla's death. Battles, skirmishes, sieges, and fighting of all kinds were numerous throughout Italy, both regular engagements under the generals and by detachments, and all were noteworthy.

## Violent Revolution 91-31 B.C.

The struggle went on with brutal ferocity to reach a climax in a fierce battle outside the Colline Gate of Rome in 82 B.C. Sulla nearly lost his life and was forced to retreat within the City walls, so valiantly had his opponents assailed him. The backbone of their resistance was the Samnite army, tough highlanders who had never been afraid of Rome. They were, however, forced to withdraw and were subsequently defeated. With cold-blooded deliberation Sulla seems to have decided upon nothing less than the elimination of the Samnites as a force in Italy; an early form of that genocide which rulers of the prison-states of Russia and of Germany have practised in the twentieth century. From Sulla's time onwards the Samnites disappear from history.

Sulla's victory was as horrible as the war. 'He moved against his enemies,' said Appian, 'with a most intense yet concealed hatred.' That was true before his victory. Once supreme, he exacted his diabolical vengeance:

Sulla himself called the Roman people together in an assembly and made them a speech vaunting his own exploits and making other menacing statements in order to inspire terror. He finished by saying that he would bring about a change which would be beneficial to the public if they would obey him. He would not spare one of his enemies, but would visit them with the utmost severity. He would take vengeance by every means in his power on all praetors, quaestors, military tribunes, and everybody else who had committed any hostile act after the day when the consul Scipio violated the agreement made with him. After saying this he forthwith proscribed about forty senators and 1,600 knights. He seems to have been the first one to punish by proscription, to offer prizes to assassins and rewards to informers, and to threaten with punishment those who should conceal the proscribed. Shortly afterward he added the names of other senators to the proscription. Some of these, taken unawares, were killed where they were caught, in their houses, in the streets, or in the temples. Others were picked up, carried to Sulla, and thrown down at his feet. Others were dragged through the city and trampled on, none of the spectators daring to utter

Proscriptions  
begin in  
Rome 82 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Through  
slaughter to  
a throne

a word of remonstrance against these horrors. Banishment was inflicted upon some and confiscation upon others. Spies were searching everywhere for those who had fled from the city, and those whom they caught they killed.

There was much killing, banishment, and confiscation also among those Italians who had obeyed Carbo, or Marius or Norbanus, or their lieutenants. Severe judgments of the courts were rendered against them throughout all Italy on various charges—for exercising military command, for serving in the army, for contributing money, for rendering other service, or even giving counsel against Sulla. Hospitality, private friendship, the borrowing or lending of money, were alike accounted crimes. Now and then one would be arrested for doing a kindness to a suspect, or merely for being his companion on a journey. These accusations abounded mostly against the rich. When charges against individuals failed Sulla took vengeance on whole communities. He punished some of them by demolishing their citadels, by destroying their walls, or by imposing heavy fines and contributions on them. Among most of them he placed colonies of his troops in order to hold Italy under garrisons, sequestering their lands and houses and dividing them among his soldiers, whom he thus made true to him during his life and even after his death. As they could not be secure in their own holdings unless all of Sulla's affairs were on a firm foundation, they were his stoutest champions even after he was deceased.

Carbo had escaped to Sicily where he was pursued by young Gnaeus Pompeius, son of Pompeius Strabo, who had thrown in his lot with Sulla. He was then only 24. Carbo was captured in 82 B.C. with many persons of distinction who had fled with him. Pompey, according to Appian

ordered his officers to kill all of the others without bringing them into his presence; but Carbo, who had been thrice consul, he caused to be brought before his feet in chains, and after making a public harangue at him, killed him and sent his head to Sulla.

## Violent Revolution 91-31 B.C.

Sulla was supreme. In the year 81 B.C. he had himself voted Dictator with vast powers. He was then fifty-seven years old.

While the human butchers were still at work upon the helpless victims of his revengeful cruelty and covetousness, Sulla showed that he was no mere Marius with murder and destruction as his only aim. Neither was he aiming at perpetual personal rule. Through the foulest tyranny he sought to restore liberty. He knew enough about Rome's recent past and he was sufficiently candid to realize that the Republic needed safeguards against others who might be just as ambitious to wield supreme authority as he was himself. If he were king in all but name, he had nobody to whom he wished to hand on the crown. To make the Senate supreme; to subordinate the public assemblies and the executive officials, particularly the army commanders, to it; to prevent demagogues rising in the State by becoming Tribunes, and to prevent any magistrate being often re-elected to high office: such were the main steps he considered necessary in order to restore the Republic.

In 81 B.C. he chose three hundred men from his own supporters, a motley crew, to become Senators. To fill future vacancies, he enlarged the number of junior magistrates or *quaestors* to twenty and made them Senators after their year of office. As *Quaestors* were elected by public vote, the Senate was recruited as time went on from men whom the Roman people could be said to have chosen. In this way, therefore, the Senate began to gain a somewhat greater representative quality, although indirectly, without however, being subject, as British Members of Parliament are subject, to periodical re-election. New Senators, thanks to this new rule, would have had some practical experience of public administration and some awareness of the responsibilities accompanying the exercise of political power. Cicero was among the unknown young men then alive who were to become Senators by virtue of Sulla's reforms. One of the main tasks of the Censors having thus been provided for, they were no longer appointed.

The Senate was also to be a school for the education of magistrates and commanders, none of whom henceforward

Sulla restores  
and reforms  
the Republic  
81-80 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Sulla enforces  
order and  
discipline

could expect office until they were well into the years of discretion. By fixing an age limit of thirty for election to the first magistracy or Quaestorship; thirty-nine for Praetor and forty-two for Consul, Sulla ensured that no man should exert considerable authority in the State until almost his fortieth birthday and until he had served the Republic for eight years as a Senator. Sulla again made the Senators the source from which judges were selected to serve on the panels in the Court of Claims where dishonest Roman governors were arraigned.

Next, in order to prevent another Marius being seven times elected as Consul, he enforced a ten-year interval between a man's first election as Consul and his second. He deflated the popular office of Tribune of the people by the simple device of making it impossible for a man once elected as Tribune to hold any other office in the Republic. No man with political ambitions therefore would want to become Tribune. He reduced the scope of permissible interference by the Tribunes in public affairs and he seems to have curtailed or ended their right to propose new laws. But he did not try to abolish the Tribunes.

Army commanders were increasingly selected from the ranks of ex-Consuls and ex-Praetors and rules were made in the hope of maintaining them in dependence upon the authority of the Senate.

The popular assembly of the tribes was henceforward to be of much less account than the older army assembly of the centuries and the people lost their privilege of buying State corn at a cheap rate. Those of the people whose menfolk had served in the wars under Sulla's command benefited when his veterans, to the number of over one hundred thousand men, were planted out all over Central Italy on lands stolen from the estates of his victims, the majority of whom had been Italians. Never before had so huge a number of free land-grants been made. Never before, therefore, had so vast a number of Italians been slain, displaced or reduced to destitution and servitude in order that Romans might steal their inheritances. The Italians had fought against Rome and Sulla and they were

treated in the same brutal way as he treated all his enemies. Ill-gotten gains, the new allotments did not greatly prosper those who acquired them. The life of violence and plunder led by the Roman legionaries did not fit them to maintain the intricate system of terrace-farming and irrigation by which Italian hill-dwellers had wrested a precarious living from difficult territory. Many soon got into difficulties, not only with their neighbours by whom they were not unnaturally hated, but with Roman moneylenders as well. They were a smouldering source of discontent with a tradition of violence which later revolutionaries could fan into flames. The enormity of the injustices the Italians were forced to suffer, aroused hatred so bitter that, crushed as they had been, they broke out here and there into renewed uprisings against their oppressors.

Not for nothing did succeeding generations of Romans shudder at the mention of the reign of Sulla. Italy in general and Rome in particular had endured a blood-bath of new and unprecedented horror. The slaughter had been tremendous. The uncertain fate of the struggle had made both sides desperate and in their desperation they had but one thought and one ambition, which was to slaughter as many as they might of their leading opponents. By a horrible fatality each side had temporarily been victorious. Many of the eminent and the wealthy on both sides had therefore been slain. The full catalogue of the slaughter has never been listed. One estimate puts the more eminent of the victims of Marius at fifty Senators and one thousand knights; those of Sulla at forty Senators and one thousand six hundred knights. No city state can survive such a loss of ability and experience without being gravely weakened.

Sulla probably liquidated very many more and for no reason but for revenge as blind and savage as that of Marius. Indeed, he was worse. His dread proscription lists were said to have sealed the fate of four thousand seven hundred of his enemies. That word now took on a far wider meaning. To be rich when the Dictator or his minions coveted your property, was often enough to produce your death warrant. One day an innocent

The toll of  
Revolution  
and Civil War

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

citizen, gazing in curiosity at the proscription lists posted in the Forum, turned pale at seeing his own name among the doomed. It was his Alban villa that they wanted, and he was soon cut down. Others perished because of their gardens, their hot bath installation or their household of slaves. Merely by picking out the youngest and strongest of the slaves confiscated from the estates of the slaughtered Romans Sulla recruited ten thousand able-bodied young men whom he freed to carry his family name as *Cornelii* and to become his clients. In that capacity they, together with his loot-laden veterans, were as good as a standing army ready to act on his behalf. With them at his beck and call he had less need to fear his enemies, supposing that any had survived, in the retirement to which he departed in 79 B.C. to lead the life of a private citizen.

The Dictator  
resigns

Indelibly stained by the most horrible cruelties, Sulla was one of the few Dictators who was able to give up his supreme position for a life of ease, to die in his bed in 78 B.C. at the age of 60, instead of by a revengeful dagger which might have been his fate. 'Sulla the Fortunate': he had earned the description at the expense of hundreds of thousands of his fellow-human beings whose hopes, happiness and whose lives he had extinguished with a ruthless severity that went far beyond the limits of any such horrors that Romans had as yet witnessed. Authority and discipline were his aims, both characteristic of the old Roman way of life. Neither was popular any more. All classes, even those who would have benefited from them, resented restraints.

In retrospect, it seems clear that beginning with the death of the innocent, well-intentioned and peace-loving Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C., a series of disturbances of revolutionary force had continually mounted in strength and violence to produce the tremendous eruption of the social and civil wars. Under the impact of such manifest and terrible upheavals, the old ordered way of life of the freedom-loving Romans was completely shattered.

When Sulla restored order, an uneasy peace brooded over

the ashes of victims so numerous that it must have seemed impossible that the fiercely rent fabric of society could ever be repaired. Sulla was, however, no mere destroyer. Ready to build on the ruin he created, he completed the counter-revolution and he did so thoroughly, intelligently and competently. The praise that he and his fellow-aristocrats would have most relished might well have been to say that had the Sullan constitution been effectively in force in 133 B.C., the Gracchan revolution could not have occurred. That Sulla was convinced that he had found a real cure of the ills of Republican government, and that he had no personal ambition to become a king, seems to have been proved by his decision to retire into private life. If liberal institutions can by force be successfully imposed upon a people unfit for them, Sulla should have been able to restore liberty to Rome. Yet within ten years of his death the situation had again deteriorated to such an extent that the Sullan State was undermined.

The first attack upon Sulla's new way of running the Republic was made in the name of the Tribunes. To curry favour with the mob against the Senators, nothing was more successful than to promise to restore the Tribunes and to reopen State granaries to supply cheap wheat. In 75 B.C. a law was passed making it possible once more for Tribunes to stand for any other office in the Republic. In 73 B.C. the wheat subsidy was restored; so soon was the Sullan constitution being undermined.

How little the rest of it amounted to was soon to become apparent. The extortion courts, for example, clearly ceased to have any terrors, for in the three years 73, 72 and 71 B.C., the scoundrel Verres was holding the whole of Sicily to ransom in a most outrageous and publicly notorious way. But for the courage of one young man then with his feet on the first rung of the ladder of political fame in Rome, Verres would undoubtedly have got off scot free after a reign of terror and rapine that made even Romans gasp. His young and successful prosecutor who eventually laid him low in 70 B.C. was Marcus Tullius Cicero, a countryman from Arpinum, the home of

The Sullan  
Constitution  
undermined  
78-67 B.C.



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Marius. Verres was but one example showing how Sulla's system had failed. Too many of the Romans who had survived war and proscription were nonentities or worse.

Menace of  
the Army

What was to bring down the Sullan constitution and with it the Roman Republic, was the natural tendency of successful army commanders to follow Sulla's example of transferring the soldiers' loyalty from the Republic to themselves and using their support to secure paramount powers. The new model army forged by Marius became in this way fatal to Roman liberties. Pompey and Crassus soon showed it by refusing to give up their commands after successful campaigns. Pompey had defeated Sertorius who was carrying on the war against Sulla in Spain which he controlled from 80-72 B.C., and Crassus had crushed the revolt of Spartacus and his band of gladiators and slaves who very nearly rivalled Hannibal in the ruin and havoc they caused up and down Italy between 73 and 71 B.C.

Spartacus  
wages war  
on Rome

Like the slave insurrections, the revolt of Spartacus was not a political revolution although it rivalled the worst in horror and brutality. From a small band of about seventy desperadoes from the school for gladiators in Capua, his forces grew to an army of one hundred and twenty thousand before whom one Roman army after another went down to defeat. Cornered at last by Crassus, Spartacus and his men fought with desperate ferocity. They continued to fight, said Appian, 'until they all perished except six thousand who were captured and crucified along the whole road from Capua to Rome'. Once again the old saying 'woe to the vanquished' was translated, as Romans knew how to translate it, into fiendish form.

Back in Rome in 71 B.C., Pompey and Crassus resolved not to be pushed around by the Senators. They insisted on being chosen as Consuls for the year 70 B.C. Pompey was not strictly qualified, for he was six years below the minimum age prescribed by Sulla's constitution. Together they overthrew the main pillars of Sulla's reforms by restoring the powers of the Tribunes of the people and also the Censors. The extortion court was again revised to let knights into it, ostensibly in partnership with the Senators, but actually in the majority.

## Violent Revolution 91-31 B.C.

While all this was going on in the west, Lucius Licinius Lucullus, who had been Consul in 74 B.C., was conducting brilliant campaigns with a small Roman army against Mithridates, who in alliance with Sertorius, was again seeking to rid Asia of the Romans, whose very name had been rendered hateful by the greed of the tax-farmers and business men.

A commander of the old school, Lucullus maintained strict discipline, did not give his troops great opportunity to loot and sternly reduced the outrageous demands of Roman business men and moneylenders. Despite his outstanding military capacity, he was deprived of his command in 66 B.C. He had broken the power of Mithridates, but Pompey was to reap the rewards of his victories. During 67 B.C. Pompey was engaged with immense forces in sweeping the Mediterranean clear of the pirates who had practically paralysed Roman seaborne traffic. He had been appointed not by the Senate according to the rules of Sulla but by the direct vote of the corrupt popular assembly and on the proposal not of a Consul or senior executive magistrate, but of a Tribune of the people. In 66 B.C. another Tribune carried by popular acclamation a law giving Pompey command of the army in the East against Mithridates. It was not solely with the stubborn King of Pontus that Pompey was to deal but with the Near East as a whole. Civil war had broken out among the Jews in 67 B.C. so in addition to settling accounts with Mithridates he decided to clean up and restore order in Syria and Palestine. He captured Jerusalem. After Mithridates had chosen death on failing to persuade his forces to follow him up the Danube and over the Alps into Italy in 63 B.C., the Eastern campaign was over. No Roman armies had ever collected so much loot.

Pompey  
another  
Sulla?

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

THAT IMMENSE PRIZES were still within the reach of greedy and ambitious men who were prepared to play for high stakes in the political arena was again made clear. Sulla's effort to draw up rules to circumscribe private initiative and to subordinate personal ambitions to the good of the Republic had failed. It was all very well for him, sated with wealth, power and glory, to draw up plans to make it illegal for anybody ever to follow his example. 'If Sulla could do it, why should not I do it?' was the question which Pompey continually asked himself. It was all very well for Sulla to suppress by force any influences that might upset his well-laid scheme and to decree strict limits to restrain those who would voice popular discontents and seek to ride upon them to achieve positions of great power in the State.

Sulla's  
example  
persists

If Pompey was not content to be the humble servant of the new Senate packed with Sulla's creatures and their cronies, there were others also who did not see why they should not exploit popular grievances against those same Senators and all they represented in narrow self-interest, sloth and cupidity.

Were there no genuine patriots as honest and well-meaning as the Gracchi, Scipio Aemilianus and the statesmen of the second century and earlier? It is clear that there were a few, and prominent among them was now Marcus Tullius Cicero, the prosecutor of Verres and candidate in 64 B.C., at the age of 43, for the Consulship. He was, of course, a careerist also to the extent that the first essential for a man wishing to influence the public life of his time is to get himself known and approved by the people who elect their governors. That there were many others moved by personal ambition for purely selfish ends and that their numbers increased as standards of political and public morality sank, is not only plausible but confirmed by the record. No very great argument is needed to establish the reality of the decline in public spirit. The fearful downward plunge which

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

Roman political morality took after the slaughter of the Gracchans has already been sufficiently indicated. The dreadful blood-letting of the social and civil wars; the Sullan terror; careers such as those of Verres; the terrors of the revolt of Spartacus; the seething unrest of the Italians were no mere incidents or casual phenomena. All pointed to deep underlying dissatisfactions justifying the belief that the Roman State was indeed sick. That much used metaphor seems strictly applicable to a situation going from bad to worse.

Catiline's first  
Conspiracy  
66 B.C.

When political wisdom is deficient, quacks abound, and so it was among the Romans. Among the opponents of Cicero in his candidature for the Consulship was Lucius Sergius Catilina. A tool of Sulla, he was generally regarded as having been deeply implicated in the proscriptions, but if he had been, his reckless spendthrift habits had quickly exhausted whatever gains he had thereby made. He had also run through the loot he had accumulated in 67-66 B.C. as pro-Praetor in Africa, where his brutality and extortions were such that he was immediately put on trial when he returned to Rome in 66 B.C. With his trial pending, his candidature for the Consulship in 65 B.C. was not allowed, a frustration which spurred him to ally with two other men both deprived of their Consulships for bribery and ejected from the Senate. They devised a plan to restore their lost honours by the simple expedient of murdering the two newly elected Consuls for 65 B.C. and seizing power by force.

It is difficult to believe that so crazy a conspiracy could have been contemplated, particularly when neither of the three conspirators had any public following or any plans for making use of the headship of the State apart from their own personal aggrandizement. They were so indiscreet that rumours of their intentions got to the Senate, so the Consuls were adequately protected and the conspiracy failed. It was necessary in those days for conspirators to use daggers on their victims. Had fire-arms existed, the Republic would have lain in ruins much earlier. Notorious as the scandal was, neither Catiline nor his accomplices were prosecuted, despite a senatorial inquiry which left the question of their guilt in little doubt.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Crassus and  
Pompey

Catiline's back-street intrigues were indeed derisory in relation to the major force in Roman public life, which was the overwhelming power in the hands of Pompey in the East. Would he return, another Sulla, to govern as Dictator and if he did would his former opponents and rivals be allowed to sleep safely in their beds? No Roman in public life was more worried by this question than Marcus Licinius Crassus.

More shrewd and businesslike than Catiline or indeed any other Roman of the time, he had steadily improved the fortune he had quickly got together as one of the abler of Sulla's commanders. Although he had patched up an alliance with Pompey in order to become Consul with him in 70 B.C., there was no love lost between them and Crassus remained profoundly jealous of Pompey who was six years his junior, discontented by his great and successful commands, and deeply suspicious of his motives. Crassus, because of his vast wealth and the venality of many Roman public men, became a force in politics far more influential than his rather narrow outlook and limited abilities really warranted. His hidden hand was at work and as Pompey's return steadily became more likely, his activity increased. He hushed up the Catilinarian affair and hoped to control Spain through one of Catiline's associates. When that scheme fell through because the man, Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, was murdered by the Spaniards whom he outraged, Crassus tried in 65 B.C. to get the Senate to annex Egypt, a country they had always left alone, and to give him command there. When the Senators, powerfully persuaded by Cicero, refused, he switched his attention to the Gauls beyond the River Po, courted their support and hoped to use their gratitude by enrolling them, if need be, as an army to counter Pompey's force.

Of all the allies Crassus bought at that time with his gold, none was more able than Gaius Julius Caesar. He was then 35 years old. Crassus was 48. Unlike Catiline he was an opponent of Sulla's from whose clutches he had been very lucky to escape alive, for he was audacious and reckless beyond the normal degree of a headstrong young aristocrat. He was more-over connected with Marius, whose wife was his aunt. Like

Catiline, he was hopelessly in debt, and there were dark suspicions that he knew more than he should about the first Catilinarian conspiracy. He was, however, too sagacious to join so criminal an enterprise, so he survived to continue his political career, although he seems to have been implicated in the plot to annex Egypt.

Matters continued in this uneasy state throughout 64 B.C., and when the campaign opened for the election of the two Consuls for the following year, Catiline was again a candidate. He began bribing electors upon such a scale that it seems probable that Crassus met the bill, because he was still casting around for the means to resist Pompey. Crassus and his business friends were therefore not in the least likely to favour the election of Cicero, who was also among the half-dozen candidates. The prospects of a man such as Cicero, who did not come from the snobbish ranks of the aristocracy, of winning access to the highest position in the State in any case were not bright, for no 'new man' outside the charmed circle had won election for thirty years. Less from any special regard for him than dislike of his opponents, however, the senatorial class supported him, so that he beat all his opponents. Almost until the last moment Catiline seemed likely to win but his reckless behaviour aroused alarm and he just failed of election.

Far from ending, Cicero's troubles now grew greater. Caesar with all his resource and daring, backed by the gold of Crassus, continued to try to find some way of building up both himself and his patron so that they might have less fear of Pompey. A comprehensive measure for the wholesale purchase and redistribution of land on Gracchan lines was immediately proposed by an obscure Tribune, P. Servilius Rullus. Its object seems to have been to forestall Pompey's likely need for land as a reward to his veteran soldiers whose return was merely a matter of months away. Caesar was supposed to have been the real author of the scheme, but when it failed owing to the strenuous opposition of Cicero, Caesar had further poisoned political animosities by making his aristocratic senatorial opponents more odious to the City mobs.

Cicero's  
Consulship  
and Catiline's  
second  
conspiracy  
63 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Julius Caesar  
as Pontifex  
Maximus  
63 B.C.

Julius Caesar was meanwhile establishing his personal position by more direct means. To help him face his creditors, he stood for election as Pontifex Maximus, the sacrosanct head of Roman religious offices, and, surprisingly, he won. He was also successful as candidate for the Praetorship for 62 B.C. Now well set-up in a position of great dignity, he had less need of Catiline who, however, was more than ever embarrassed by debts against which, unlike Caesar, he had no offsetting hopes of relief. How he schemed to extricate himself by creating a revolutionary disturbance which, if successful, would enable him and all others like him to cancel their debts, presumably by murdering their creditors, has remained one of the best-known incidents in the later history of the Republic before Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon. Fortunately for himself and his fellow-Romans, Cicero was alert to the danger and very much more intelligent than Catiline. With the resources of the consular office at his disposal, he was able to detect the conspiracy and to identify the main conspirators. Catiline, meeting the fierce hostility of his fellow-Senators, and finding his consular candidature to be hopeless, slipped out of Rome to raise a rebellion by recruiting twenty thousand of Sulla's discontented veterans in Etruria. In November 63 B.C. the whole story broke. Cicero and his consular colleague were given full powers to meet the danger, whereupon he promptly arrested five of Catiline's prominent conspirators who remained in Rome and sent his colleague at the head of an army to defend the City against Catiline.

Cicero's  
Victory

It was nothing less than civil war, but civil war fought for no great political principle, no great human cause. Its object was to rescue some seedy aristocrats in Rome from the consequences of their disordered finances and to gratify a greater number of disgruntled unsuccessful smallholders by offering them the prospect of loot and plunder on Sullan lines and an escape from the difficulties into which many had plunged by failing as farmers and exhausting their capital. In the general alarm the Senate recommended the execution of the five prisoners, although Caesar was for exiling them. Cicero had the

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

death penalty carried out, although the men were Roman citizens and had never been brought to trial before the people. He and his friends regarded him as the saviour of the Republic and he quitted office with the title Father of his country. The praise was not unanimous for shortly after Catiline had been wiped out with most of his army in January 62 B.C. a Tribune, a stooge of Pompey's, was put up to accuse Cicero of illegal tyranny. Pompey's supporters were not at all pleased to find that his services were not needed to save Rome from Catiline.

Attempting some twenty-five years later to arrive at an impartial judgment upon the stirring events of these troubled times in which he had lived and played a part, the Roman historian Sallust (86-34 B.C.) wrote that 'it was at this crisis that the Empire of the Roman people, in my opinion, reached its most pitiable condition'. And this too, he said, at a time when 'every land between the rising and the setting sun had been brought by arms into Roman obedience and when in Rome itself, wealth and ease, the two things that all men put first, were to be had in abundance'. Sallust blamed all parties equally and summed it up by saying:

To tell the truth in a few words, from Sulla's time onwards, while all those active in public life may have professed honourable motives such as the defence of the rights of the people or the enlargement of the authority of the Senate, what they were really out for was their own ends which they disguised as measures for the good of the state.

In other words, demagogues had replaced statesmen, just as Polybius prophesied that they would.

Were Pompey and Caesar any exception? Pompey was no demagogue although he owed his pre-eminent position in the Republic to demagogic infringements of the constitution. He was no ruthless autocrat either, despite a strong temptation to be. 'Sulla could do it, why should I not be able to do it?' The short answer was that he fell short of Sulla in ability and in mental and moral energy. He shared too much of the flabby

Political  
adventurers  
oust  
Statesmen



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

irresolution of his aristocratic supporters. They seem on the whole to have been poor stuff compared with the men of the previous century. There was Cicero, but no equivalent in Pompey's day to the Scipionic Circle. There were no statesmen with plans like those of the Gracchi. It was as though Marius, Cinna and Sulla had laid low the giants of the forest leaving none but a few straggling survivors. The abundance of wealth and ease which should, as Sallust seems to have thought, have ensured a peaceful and happy state of affairs, merely bred lethargy and political irresolution, making it easier for any truly dynamic and purposeful figure to get his own way.

Pompey lets  
slip the reins  
of power

Everybody's nerves in Rome had been thoroughly shaken by Catiline's attempt to overthrow the Republic by force. An army of twenty thousand veterans led by reckless desperadoes within a few days march of the capital must have seemed a worse threat than that of Spartacus had been. The nightmare of the Sullan dictatorship was revived. Hardly had it been removed when, in a still electric atmosphere, Pompey, unquestionably all-powerful, returned to Rome in December 62 B.C. with an army of 35,000-40,000 seasoned troops, loaded down with new wealth and loot beyond the dreams of avarice. Unlike Sulla he had no need to fight his way through the gates of Rome. The City, the Republic, the world, lay at his mercy. His past career, depending as it had done upon demagogic support giving him huge military commands by unconstitutional methods, could not have made any Senator sanguine about his likely behaviour in Rome. Yet to everybody's astonishment, as though he were a loyal commander of the old school, he laid aside his power and returned as a private citizen. The loot he brought back, when turned into Roman money, provided his troops with 384 million sesterces. He and his staff officers were able to live in very good style merely on the interest which their shares of it could earn. The rank and file, if they had used their gratuity wisely, would also have been set up for life. The Roman treasury received yet more, 480 million sesterces. New annual revenue from the new Eastern provinces which he organized, raised Rome's

profits of Empire from 200 million to 340 million sesterces a year. This enormous booty of war flooded Rome with a second wave of rich loot from the East to add to the first wave which had come in Sulla's wake. Oriental gold, gems, and treasure of all kinds and new hordes of slaves arrived further to adulterate Roman traditions of sparse living and further to weaken the rigour of its ancient ways.

Beyond the enjoyment of a gorgeously spectacular triumph and this tremendous share-out, Pompey made no demands beyond two eminently reasonable requests. The first was that the Senate should officially confirm the detailed measures he had taken to control the new provinces, alliances and political arrangements he had made in the East. The second was that in accordance with custom, his veteran troops should be given their reward by being set up as smallholders on Italian soil.

Events, it would seem, had taken an unexpected, almost miraculous turn for the better. Free from the fear of Catiline and of Pompey, yet benefiting enormously from Pompey's undoubtedly great achievements against the pirates and in the East, the Senate and the Republic had been given a new lease of life. Cicero, still bemused and boastful after his consular fame, saw a heaven-sent opportunity to consolidate the power of the Republic in a general co-operative partnership between the Senate and the business men or knights. His slogan was *concordia ordinum*, a compact between all good men.

The prospects of achieving such harmony when there was obviously a crying need for it, filled him with an optimism with which it is easy to sympathize. Yet the cause of peace and orderly progress he went on advocating so tirelessly does not seem to have had a chance. The Senators, far from showing Pompey any gratitude, made every kind of difficulty about the ratification of his settlement of the East, and they also failed to allot land to his veterans.

Not content with rebuffing Pompey, the Senators also refused any aid or comfort to the business men, many of whom had recently run into grave difficulties by overbidding for tax-gathering contracts in the East. Crassus led their appeal but the

Senators let  
slip their  
opportunity

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Senate followed the path of the very strictest financial rectitude set out for their benefit by the high-minded Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 B.C.) grandson of the stern old Censor of the previous century and so much more the antique Roman than anyone could believe to be possible. Crassus, like Pompey, was left sourly resenting a severe frustration. The Senators had behaved as though they were still paramount, serenely enjoying the prestige won by the fathers of the Republic in the third century B.C. Cicero's hopes and his eager striving for harmony were doomed, the Senators harped on only one string and saw no need for any accompaniment.

Something  
rotten in the  
State

In the meantime, a City scandal cast a lurid light upon morality in high society and corruption in Roman courts. Publius Clodius, whom fourteen generations in direct descent separated from the founder of his house, a great-grandson of the Appius Claudius who had aided Tiberius Gracchus (p. 87), was a wild libertine, one of whose mad escapades had led him, in December 62 B.C., in woman's dress, to profane a solemn religious rite as it was being celebrated by women alone led by Pompeia the wife of the Pontifex Maximus in his official residence. The Pontifex Maximus was Julius Caesar, so people suspected an affair between Clodius and Pompeia. The sacrilege was grave and Clodius was brought to trial, only to be acquitted because Crassus, who found Clodius a useful tool, bribed the judges. Cicero was brought in as a witness, when he soon demolished a flimsy alibi Clodius had put up to perjure himself out of the charge. This clash rankled and both aggravated it.

Cicero was more than a match for Clodius in the Senate where he routed him, later on, after a lively exchange, by retorting, when he taunted Cicero by saying that the court had not trusted him although on his oath, 'Yes, twenty-five jurors did trust me, thirty-one didn't trust you, for they took care to get their money beforehand.' Caesar, a notorious adulterer, divorced his wife Pompeia on the ground that 'Caesar's wife must be above suspicion'. Pompeia, niece of Sulla, was the granddaughter of Quintus Pompeius the Consul whom Pompey's father had done to death in 88 B.C. (p. 120).

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

The significance of this event lay not so much in the irresponsibility of Clodius, or of Caesar to whom one wife more or less was of small concern, but, as Cicero said in the following year, in 'the insecurity and rotten state of the law-courts'. It was a startling revelation of a fearful evil and as part of the venality of Cicero's Age, it contrasts with the incorruptibility of the days of Polybius a century before (p. 75).

Having to all appearances checkmated Pompey and flouted Crassus, the Senate seem to have expected to make short work of Julius Caesar. As pro-Praetor he had spent the year 61-60 B.C. in Further Spain from which he returned, his coffers overflowing with loot, to appease his creditors and to claim a commander's triumph, the Consulship for 59 B.C., and another province to command as pro-Consul thereafter. He could not be denied, but the Senate tried to humble him by refusing him a province and by appointing him instead to a mere civilian job of overseer of forests and mountain passes. They did not know their man.

Caesar was not ready tamely to suffer frustration. He quickly saw his line. By offering, as soon as he became Consul, to satisfy Pompey's claims and to compensate Crassus and the tax-gatherers, he got them both on his side. This was in the year 60 B.C., in the Consulship of Caecilius Metellus, a year which in later days the Romans were to regard as the beginning of that fatal course of action in which the Republic was to be destroyed and the whole temper and complexion of Roman politics and with it much of the traditional Roman way of life was to undergo a drastic change. *Motum ex Metello consule civium* as Horace later recalled.

Not until Caesar was in office as Consul did the plot between the three men become apparent, but Caesar was as good as his word. A comprehensive Land Bill to relieve the crowded City and to provide for Pompey's veterans was quickly introduced. It was well-designed, but the Senators, led by Cato, objected to it on principle. Caesar thereupon resorted to a new way of passing laws. He hustled Cato off as he was speaking and took the bill from the Senate to the public assembly with the addition

Caesar,  
Pompey  
Crassus and  
the First  
Triumvirate  
60-50 B.C.

Caesar Consul  
59 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Rule by  
Violence

of a clause requiring all Senators to swear their consent to it on pain of exile. The Senate retorted with the veto of three Tribunes and religious objections by Caesar's consular colleague, a Senator called Bibulus whom senatorial bribery had made into a Consul. Further procedure by Caesar was therefore illegal. He thereupon easily collected a mob of Pompey's land-hungry veterans who had flocked to Rome and let them loose upon his opponents who were forcibly driven out of the Forum. In vain the other Consul summoned the Senate to his house, tried to stop the public assembly transacting any business and proclaimed Caesar's acts illegal.

Caesar's bill was passed and his next move was to rescind his appointment as overseer of woods and forests and to have himself voted commander in Gaul south of the Alps for five years from 58-54 B.C. with ample forces. To this he soon managed to add that part of Southern Gaul in Roman possession beyond the Alps. Caesar, it was plain, was determined to stop at nothing in order to get his own way. He was able to do so only by the strong-arm methods of the political gangster. The Senators had no defence and only one Senator went into exile sooner than swallow Caesar's law.

When the truth dawned upon everybody, for at first no such combination was suspected, Caesar, Pompey and Crassus became very unpopular and not only among the Senators. Caesar did not much care, but Pompey, never very resolute, was much depressed. Cicero, still an influential political figure, was heartbroken. He refused several approaches by Caesar. In July he reported that 'Caesar wishes me to accept a legateship under him', but attractive as it would have been to save himself, he refused. He clung to his illusion that Pompey had not his heart in the business and might yet save the Republic and himself, for already Clodius was sharpening his weapons against him. But he realized that a disaster had overtaken the Republic.

Public  
Opinion in  
Rome

About a score of his letters written during 59 B.C. in the Consulship of Caesar have survived. They were mostly to his shrewd but cautious and commercial friend Atticus, to whom he was ready to pour out his inmost feelings at any time. Some

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

were written from the country where he had gone to escape from the depressing atmosphere of Rome. 'I have determined not to think about politics,' he wrote, 'in these bad times when the life of all the best men hangs on a thread.' Sulla's example and that of Marius were not forgotten. One stout old Senator explained a thin attendance at a session of the Senate by saying that they all feared a massacre and when Caesar asked him, 'What made you come then?' replied, 'My age. I have little left to lose.'

As the implications of Caesar's one-man rule became clear, resentment mounted. 'Young Curio has been to call on me,' Cicero reported from his seaside villa at Antium in April. 'He told me that the young men were very angry and could not put up with the present state of things.' That was what Cicero wanted to hear and Curio was unreliable, but there was more objective evidence. At first the mob had been ready to welcome the change. 'The despotism was popular with the multitude though offensive to the loyalists,' but by July opinion had hardened against the Triumvirs, 'now all of a sudden they have become so universally hated,' wrote Cicero, 'that I tremble to think what will be the end of it'.

Cicero feared that Caesar, Pompey and Crassus would be provoked to harsher measures. 'I fear they may have been exasperated by the hisses of the crowd, the talk of the respectable classes and the murmurs of Italy.' Cicero had heard these himself in April in the country.

What loud murmurs! What angry souls! What unpopularity for our friend Pompey! . . . I have met no one here to take the present state of things as quietly as I do.

Back in Rome Cicero found

the feeling of the people was shewn as clearly as possible in the theatre and at the shows. For at the gladiator fights both master and supporters were overwhelmed with hisses. At the games of Apollo the actor Diphilus made a pert allusion to Pompey (nicknamed the Great).

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

'By our misfortunes thou art—Great'

He was encored countless times. When he delivered the line

'The time will come when thou wilt deeply mourn  
That self-same valour'

the whole theatre broke into applause. For the verses do seem exactly as though they were written by some enemy of Pompey's to hit the time.

Romans still  
hated despots

'If neither laws nor customs can control,' etc., caused a great sensation and loud shouts. Caesar having entered as the applause died away, he was followed by the younger Curio who received an ovation such as used to be given to Pompey when the constitution was still intact. Caesar was much annoyed. . . . There has been a great hubbub altogether. I should have preferred their doings being silently ignored, but I fear that won't be allowed. Men are indignant at what nevertheless must, it seems, be put up with. The whole people have indeed now one voice, but their strength depends rather on exasperation than anything to back it up.

It is impossible in the light of this testimony to pretend, as Caesar's apologists pretend, that he was the clear-sighted champion of the people against a despised and hated lot of Senators and business men. Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, as Cicero reported, 'are at war with everybody' and it was, as Sallust correctly said, 'for no other motive than their own security and power'. For that very reason it was naïve to suppose that the storm and the danger would subside as soon as Caesar's year as Consul was over. Cicero did not make the mistake. 'There is now no hope, I don't say of private persons, but even of the magistrates being ever free again' and 'I am certain that all is lost'. He repeats the truth in another letter, 'The Republic is utterly ruined.'

The unenviable position of a man like Cicero, by his own confession inclined to be timid and irresolute, comes out in his letters. In April he owned to Atticus, 'I have so completely lost all nerve that I prefer a despotism, with the existing peace, to a state of war with the best hopes in the world.' Back in

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

Rome three months later when he reported his refusal of Caesar's offer of a job which he realized was 'a more honourable method of avoiding the danger', he said, 'but I don't wish to avoid it. What do I want then? Why, I prefer fighting. However, I have not made up my mind.' It would be wrong to base a final judgment of Cicero on such words, since he adds, 'But I write in haste, and by Hercules, in rather a nervous state.' His letter shows the agonizing uncertainty of the times and the tremendous difficulty of improvising a counterblow to resolute illegality backed by the whole weight of the official machine which Caesar was ready to throw into action against any opponent.

For the next ten years Cicero and his fellow-Senators had no respite from this perpetual uneasiness and uncertainty. A gnawing anxiety about the outcome of the strange conditions in which they were forced to live, poisoned their whole outlook on life. They were conditions which included open partisan gang warfare in the streets and public places of Rome. Cicero's enemy Clodius, the protégé and the tool of Julius Caesar, recruited a gang made up of gladiators who would otherwise have been killing each other to amuse the Romans. The worst of the rabble seem to have relished the excitement they provided. Elected as Tribune, having first shed his patrician status by getting himself adopted as the son of a plebeian boy much younger than himself, he carried several new measures among which was one aimed directly at Cicero. This was a retrospective law outlawing anyone who had condemned a Roman citizen without trial. Cicero was driven into exile despite earlier frequently renewed solemn promises by Pompey that no harm would befall him. Again and again Pompey was to prove himself weak and unreliable. He would not stand up to Caesar, who seems to have decided that Cicero, the foremost advocate of free Republican institutions, must be humbled and shown who was master.

From March 58 B.C. until the late summer of 57 B.C., Cicero, whose proud spirit was temporarily quite shattered, had to endure the miseries of exile. Recalled at last, he returned to

Clodius and  
Mob Violence  
in Rome  
58-57 B.C.

A Demagogue  
has his day



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

### Gang-war in Rome

find Clodius, who by rioting had postponed his recall by six or seven months, as active and more violent than ever. He was also a popular hero, for as Tribune in 58 B.C., he had also abolished the ban on clubs and associations. They quickly grew to provide him with a huge following which he had further bound to him by passing another law to give corn away to the 320,000 Romans who used to buy it at about cost price under the subsidized wheat supply scheme begun by Gaius Gracchus. The cost was enormous, probably rather more than one-third of the revenues of the Republic. The fact that a noisy, dangerous demagogue was able to buy himself mass support by such a colossal bribe at public expense is an indication of the extent to which the political life of Rome began to degenerate under dictatorial control. No wonder Clodius ran wild. Pompey himself had been intimidated by him and his gangsters. For five years his street warfare went on despite the most violent protests. Nobody without a strong bodyguard was safe from a beating. Clodius and his thugs brazened it out at meetings of the Senate where they did not stop at spitting at their critics. At length in 52 B.C. a young Senator took up the task that the Republic shirked, hired his own police force and catching Clodius off his guard, murdered him on the spot.

During this period Cicero's letters from 56 to 53 B.C. give a picture of life in Rome under arbitrary rule, so vivid that we can almost participate ourselves in the stress of that melancholy time. It was, he wrote, 'an age of perfidy and unfair dealing'. There were no principles by which to steer. 'Good-bye to straightforward honest and high-minded policy! One can scarcely believe the amount of treachery there is in these leaders of the State.' The life of a leading politician such as Cicero was now exposed to new dangers. 'I know that all events small or great are reported to Caesar,' he said, so it is not surprising to find him uttering the caution, now routine in all the police or prison-States that cover so much of the earth, 'I give you this hint—don't commit anything at all to writing, the publication of which would be embarrassing. There are many things that

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

I would rather not know than learn at some risk.' This was in 54 B.C. two years after he had been reduced to obedience to the Triumvirate (56 B.C.). He had no alternative, for as he said (55 B.C.)

public affairs are all in the hands of our friends to such an extent that it does not seem that the present generation will witness a change . . . the most we can hope for is tranquillity . . . the old consular prestige, indeed that of a courageous and consistent senator, we must no longer think of.

Eclipse of  
Republican  
freedom

It must not be supposed that Cicero and his friends were easily reconciled to the revolutionary denial of principle which such a state of affairs represented. On the contrary his lamentations were loud and frequent.

What could be more humiliating than the life we are living, especially mine? . . . if I say what I ought about the Republic, I am looked upon as mad, if what expediency dictates, as a slave, and if I say nothing, as utterly crushed and helpless—what must I be suffering.

He was not alone but resistance was in vain. 'No one takes the lead: money reduces all to the same level.' To his brother, then on Caesar's staff in Gaul, in 54 B.C., he wrote, 'you must see that the Republic, the Senate, the law courts are mere cyphers and that not one of us has any constitutional position at all'. What he and his fellow-Romans were witnessing, as he said in the following year, was 'the decline and virtual extinction of all our institutions'. In such a situation, force alone was the arbiter and all the force, represented by the new professional Roman armies, was controlled by Caesar, Pompey and Crassus.

The final show-down was delayed by Caesar's five-year command in Gaul, a delay prolonged by his reappointment for a second term. Rome was left to Pompey, so social life went on much as before. Pompey's irresolution and faint-heartedness at the enormity of the damage that the Triumvirate was causing must have been all the greater because he had to live among its

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome.

chief victims. Until 54 B.C., his link with Caesar was sustained by Julia, the beautiful and attractive only child of Caesar's whom Pompey had married in 59 B.C., as the sign and seal of their union. She died as a result of a shock at seeing a slave bring back Pompey's blood-stained toga after he had been involved in a street riot. They had been a devoted couple and her premature death was a great blow to Pompey, to Caesar then in Britain, and to the understanding between them.

'What millions died that Caesar might be great.'

Politics in Rome were dead, for all important decisions were subject to the wishes of the Big Three. In 53 B.C. they became the Big Two, because Crassus, the third member of the Triumvirate, having achieved his ambition of a big military command, lost his life in a totally unnecessary war on which he wantonly embarked against the Persians. He seems to have hoped to follow Caesar's example in Gaul by hacking the Persians to bits, so as to be able to return as Caesar later did, laden with captives, loot and a powerful army so that he should no longer fear Pompey or Caesar. Persia, like Gaul, would then have been a blood-stained ruined country, another province for Romans to exploit.

The Final  
Crisis of the  
Republic  
52-49 B.C.

From then onwards events moved to a climax that later seemed inevitable. After the murder of Clodius in 52 B.C., when his frustrated followers burned down the Senate House as his funeral pyre, the exasperated Senators turned to Pompey to restore order and some security to life in Rome. Appointed sole Consul for the purpose, his old energy returned and he rapidly mastered the situation. He sought by trying to repress bribery and corruption, to restore some respect for public life when some Senators began to gain new courage. So much so that the idea of terminating Caesar's command in Gaul was mooted as a way of forcing him to return to private life.

Caesar was not such a fool as to place himself unarmed at the mercy of his enemies and he wanted guarantees, as all parties to disarmament conferences, that Pompey would do the same. Whether either would actually have honoured such a bargain is difficult to say. Mutual distrust prevented it ever being likely to be realized. On 1 December 50 B.C. it was put to the

Senate by a Tribune, M. Scribonius Curio, who was secretly in Caesar's pay, and passed by 370 votes to 22. It was vetoed by Caesar's opponents who regarded it as a surrender to Caesar. The Senate thereupon called upon Pompey to assume command of the forces of the Republic in Italy.

Cicero, who had been absent as pro-consular governor of Cilicia from May 51 B.C. until late November 50 B.C., sensed 'the most imminent danger' as soon as he got back from his province of Cilicia. On 10 December he spent two hours with Pompey, who already 'assumed the existence of downright war. He held out no hope of maintaining peace.' Cicero saw clearly that a war would be a disaster. 'The political situation,' he wrote, 'gives me greater terror every day . . . what we want is peace. From a victory, among many evil results, one at any rate will be the rise of a tyrant.' He was for a deal with Caesar. 'It is more expedient to yield to his demands than to fight.' There was not time to organize resistance.

Civil War  
inevitable

Pompey gravely misjudged the situation. On 25 December Cicero saw him again and found that he 'had not even a wish to make peace . . . he entertained a low opinion of Caesar's power, and felt confident of his own and the State's resources'.

On 1 January 49 B.C. Curio brought back from Caesar, then in Ravenna, a renewed appeal for the plan of mutual disarmament, already rejected by the Senate, backed this time by a declaration which was tantamount to an ultimatum. The Senate, after receiving it, passed a resolution requiring Caesar to lay down his command or else to be regarded as a public enemy. Two of the Tribunes in Caesar's pay, newly elected for 49 B.C. to replace Curio and others, promptly vetoed the motion. They were given a plain hint to get out if they valued their skin so they fled to tell Caesar what had happened and to provide him with a propaganda line that the Senators were attacking Tribunes of the people.

On 7 January 49 B.C., in this dangerous atmosphere, the Senate passed the supreme decree that the Consuls and magistrates should see that the Republic came to no harm. When he heard the news, Caesar, firm and resolute, was ready for

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

immediate action. With only one legion, he defied the law confining him to his province, and crossed the small river Rubicon, its border, on the night of 10 January 49 B.C., a few hours after the Tribunes had arrived at his camp. Another civil war was on.

Politics and  
opinion in  
Rome's days  
of crisis

In the modern age when throughout the world millions of human beings have recently been, and many still remain, subject to the arbitrary will of one man and his clique, we are better able to appreciate the miserable condition of the leading Romans when old political understandings and the old competitive striving for positions of distinction in the State no longer gave zest to their lives. Under Sulla from 81-78 B.C., and under Julius Caesar and the Triumvirate after 59 B.C., positions of dignity and power were no longer to be had as the rewards of public service. All were handed out and withdrawn at the whim of one man. Cicero's letters give eloquent and convincing testimony to the depression and sense of degradation all true Romans must have felt at the overthrow of their constitution and the breakdown of the political fabric of their lives.

It was not that Caesar and Pompey, like dictators of our recent memory, were mentally diseased, personally contemptible, beastly or ruthless; quite the reverse is true. Cicero counted them both as old friends and close friends, as statesmen can, despite their public quarrels. But he expected them to honour, as he was ready to honour, the maxim he quoted from, 'that god of our idolatry . . . that same great Plato whom I emphatically regard as my master: "maintain a political controversy only so far as you can convince your fellow citizens of its justice; never offer violence to parent or fatherland".' He freely acknowledged 'Caesar's memorable and almost super-human kindness to myself and my brother'. Of Pompey he often wrote in terms of deference and admiration which seem far beyond Pompey's deserts.

Might  
overcomes  
Right

Was Cicero a hypocrite or inhuman in being unable in his heart, whatever he had to say or to write, to forgive them for what they had done to Rome by destroying the Republican machinery of government? For destroy it they did, with all its

## The Rise of Julius Caesar 66-50 B.C.

imperfections and inefficiency. They had no far-reaching plan for its reformation or reinvigoration, or if they had, they kept it to themselves.

The conflict which broke out in 49 B.C. was not fought in order to bring about any great reform planned and matured by a political party in the belief that it would contribute to the welfare of mankind. There was no great body of public opinion insistently demanding revolutionary changes as there had been almost continuously until the fourth Roman revolution in 287 B.C. had at last succeeded in satisfying public claims. Opinions and passions were certainly aroused by Caesar and Pompey but they were generated out of individual, headstrong, limitless ambition, not out of national needs and public desires. In so far as great points of principle arose, they were stated by men like Cicero and Cato, the opponents and the victims of the revolutionaries, rather than by those who provoked the upheaval.

## Civil War and Dictatorship 50-30 B.C.

POMPEY'S POSITION IN THE REPUBLIC in 50 B.C. to all appearances was very strong. He had become reconciled to the Senators; he had always seemed to be the chief partner in the Triumvirate; he was believed to have the loyalty of thousands of his veterans: he had ruled in Rome for nine years during the whole of which time Caesar had never been nearer than Luca, a frontier town of his province nearly 170 miles away.

The Balance  
of Forces  
50-47 B.C.

Cicero, however, was under no illusions. Before his return to Rome in December 50 B.C., he wrote to Atticus, 'The political situation gives me more terror every day. For the loyalists are not all of the same mind, as people think.' Summing up the situation at that time, he reported, 'I have found hardly anyone not convinced that it would be better to yield to Caesar's demand than to fight,' a view which Cicero himself shared. The constitutionalists had sold the pass ten years previously. 'We should have resisted him when he was weak and it would have been easy. Now, a leader of tremendous influence and audacity, he has eleven legions, all the cavalry he wants, the tribes across the northern frontier, the city mob and the corrupt younger generation.' Such was Cicero's summary of Caesar's strength.

Caesar's  
strength and  
guile

Suetonius a century later described the way Caesar had won a following very much as Cicero had done in 44 B.C.:

After putting all Pompey's friends as well as a large number of Senators in his debt through loans at low rates of interest, or without interest, he lavished gifts upon men of all other classes . . . including even freedmen and slaves . . . he was the one man ready to rescue all in legal difficulties or debt.

He drew the line only at those so loaded with debt, poverty or extravagant tastes that not even he could save them. 'These he

told quite openly that their only hope lay in a civil war.' That is what Catiline had realized in 63 B.C.

On the other side were 'the right people', the *boni*, the constitutionalists, the loyalists, but they were an unreliable lot. 'When there is a political clash, you must look for classes and groups of loyalists,' Cicero wrote to Atticus. 'Do you regard the Senate as loyalist when it has sent no commanders to the provinces? Or the tax-gatherers who have never been loyal and are now enamoured with Caesar, or the financiers or farmers with their overwhelming desire for peace?' This assessment of forces made before the clash was only too accurate.

Cicero described the Senate's decision to fight Caesar as 'an insane decision' and Pompey as 'fatuous and rash', but it did not make him waver in his fierce opposition to Caesar. 'What an unprincipled bandit,' he described him, 'What a disgrace to the Republic.' His worst fears about Pompey were quickly confirmed. Already on the 8 February 50 B.C. he described him as 'an inconceivably miserable spectacle. He has utterly broken down! No courage, no plan, no forces, no energy.' Ten days later he said the same thing, 'nothing more discreditable was ever done in any country by any statesman or leader', and 'there isn't an atom of wisdom or courage in anything he has done: I may add nothing that is not against my counsel and advice'. Yet Cicero clung to him, refused all Caesar's friendly advances, persuaded his brother, Caesar's comrade in arms, much against his will to desert him. Realizing too late that he was no match for Caesar in Italy, Pompey marched south with such forces he could collect at the last minute, and sailed to Macedonia. Caesar dashed after him, just failing to prevent his departure.

Quotations could be multiplied to indicate the cruel, searing uncertainty into which responsible well-intentioned Romans such as Cicero were plunged as a new revolution of appalling magnitude and unforeseeable consequences burst upon them. Cicero was indeed correct, 'nothing can exceed the misery, ruin and disgrace'. And it was all so unnecessary. Cicero was convinced that it should have been possible to preserve peace.

Pompey's  
fecklessness

Caesar's gang



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

He corresponded with Caesar, met him, received the most friendly treatment from him culminating, however, in a plain warning that he did not expect Cicero to strain their friendship by acting against him. But Cicero like many other leading Senators could not condone Caesar's high-handed defiance of constituted authority. He could not bring himself to join Caesar's supporters, 'ye gods, what a gang, what an inferno . . . don't imagine that there is a single scoundrel in Italy who wasn't among them. I saw the whole lot at Formiae. I could not, by Hercules, believe them to be human beings and I knew them all. But I had never seen them all in one place.' He mistrusted all of them and their leaders. 'If Caesar conquers,' he wrote to Atticus on 2 May 49 B.C., 'I foresee massacre, confiscation of private wealth, a recall of exiles, repudiation of debts, promotion to high office of the lowest dregs and a despotism not only hateful to a Roman but one not even a Persian would tolerate.'

Cicero was exaggerating. Not all the best families rallied to Pompey's side although the more distinguished joined him. A recent estimate shows that out of 139 of the leading men of Rome who are all who can be identified by name from the remaining record, 40 joined Pompey against 55 who joined Caesar. There were 11 neutrals and 33 about whose choice we are ignorant. By the time Pompey fled from Italy to try to build up an army in Greece, many waverers no doubt thought Caesar most likely to win and they gave him their support.

Actually there was little to choose between either side, as Cicero found, when, against the advice of his friends and Caesar's plain warnings, he left Italy to join Pompey on 7 June 49 B.C. 'They were such a bloodthirsty lot, so akin to barbarous tribes, that they had drawn up proscription lists not of individuals but of whole classes.' The very leaders, the men of rank, apart from Pompey had enormous debts and were driven by a lust for plunder such that Cicero 'shuddered at the idea of victory itself'. There was 'nothing good except the cause'.

Victory went to the greatly superior energy, dash and resource of Caesar aided by his seasoned and devoted troops.

Caesar's  
Victory  
and its  
aftermath

After securing Rome and helping himself to the gold and silver which Pompey had stupidly left behind, he made himself master of Spain and the West. He sent Curio to Africa and sailed to attack Pompey in Dyrrhachium. At the battle of Pharsalus on 6 June 48 B.C., Caesar's forces overthrew those of the Republic. Looking over the blood-stained field on which fifteen thousand of Pompey's army lay dead: 'They would have it so,' Caesar remarked to his staff. 'After all my achievements, I should have been found guilty had I not appealed to my army.' Pompey fled to Egypt where he was murdered.

The final act of the great drama was fittingly the suicide of Cato in Africa after the final defeat of the opponents of Caesar at Thapsus in April 46 B.C. Cato's life, devoted to the practical exemplification of what he regarded as the sterling virtues of the great days of the Republic, had always been something of an anachronism, but it had been all of one piece, and his memory haunted the consciences of many a Roman who survived him. It was destined to inspire not a few of their descendants. Caesar recognized his quality when he paid him the compliment of attacking him in a pamphlet, *Anti-Cato*. Its loss deprives the world of what could not fail to be a fascinating dialectic between the Old Rome and the New.

Mopping-up operations did not alone keep Caesar away from Rome. In 47 B.C., when he had been in grave danger from an Egyptian army ready to attack Cleopatra the seventh Egyptian queen of that name, he became involved on her side. Greek by descent, but Egyptian by culture, she was then a girl of 19 and fascinatingly attractive. Caesar was then 53. Their union, which was bigamous by Roman standards, was to be no temporary affair, for Cleopatra was to follow Caesar, with their son, to live in Rome. He got back there in June 46 B.C. In November he was off again to Spain, but in the meantime he had begun to give some indication of the way in which he thought the Republic should be run. Nobody else brought forth any great new ideas to revitalize Roman public life, but even if they had done they would not have had attention. In Caesar's absence the machinery of State was virtually paralysed

Cleopatra's  
début

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

### Caesar's one-man rule

as far as the possibility of any innovation was concerned. When he was in Rome, and he was never there for more than a month or two at a stretch, he had vastly too much to arrange on his own account than to have time to study other people's notions.

Merely to try to put an end to some of the evils of the times was in itself a programme. His most enduring reform curiously had nothing to do with public discontents. It was a recalculation of the Roman calendar which had got out of relation to the sun. Caesar added sixty-seven days to the year 46 B.C., so beginning the Julian calendar which has been observed in Europe ever since, with a minor adjustment by his successor and a greater correction which in England occurred in A.D. 1752 when eleven days had to be lopped off the month of September.

Sharing the views of the moralists that wealth was corrupting Rome, Caesar made rules forbidding pearls, purple dye, litters and various expensive foods. 'Sometimes,' said Suetonius, 'he sent his lictors and soldiers to take from a dining-room anything that the market overseers had failed to detect, even after they had been served.' So much for the Liberty of the Subject under Caesar's rule. Public order was taken more firmly in hand and soldiers were provided to enforce it. There was no call for and no need for another Clodius so, in addition to restoring order, two more evils fostered by that irresponsible creature of Caesar's a mere eight years previously were tackled by the abolition of all popular clubs and associations that had any political leanings and by the drastic scaling down of the list for the free corn dole from 320,000 to 150,000 names. It can only be guessed whether Caesar's men were likely to leave on the free list the names of many citizens known to be regretting the vanished Republic.

Constructive measures were few and none was directed at the main crying evil of the time—the inadequacy, inefficiency and inability of the traditional Republican form of government to measure up to the needs and the responsibilities of ensuring the progressive welfare not of Rome merely, or of Italy but of the vast world beyond as well that was now dependent on Rome. Caesar probably thought that he knew it better than any

Senator, including those who had gone, as he himself had first gone to Spain, for little more than to gain riches to enjoy in Rome. That he was not without plans is evident from his attempt to stiffen the law against extortion and by the limit of two years which he set upon pro-consular governorships and one year on Praetorian commands in the provinces. He had plans which he did not live to complete for the organization of local government in Roman citizen colonies. A fortnight after he crossed the Rubicon in 49 B.C. full Roman citizenship had been given to the population of Gaul south of the Alps, but Caesar made no move to extend it later.

Apart from his measures to provide rewards in cash and land for his veterans in Italy and beyond, which he undertook partly by confiscating the possessions of his defeated enemies, he did little or nothing to redeem the mass-poverty of Rome. Accepting the large ranches that so horrified Tiberius Gracchus as inevitable, he decreed that one-third at least of the herdsmen they employed should be free men. Such a rule was probably very much more difficult to enforce than were his sumptuary laws in Rome and there is no evidence that it was any more successful than they were.

There was nothing revolutionary in all this, and there is nothing to show that Caesar had anything fundamentally new to propose. He has been credited with being 'whole heartedly bent on reform as he understood it' which may be conceded, although it could simply mean no more than that he was determined to get his own way. Among the 'ifs' of history is the fascinating possibility of imagining the plan of reform for the government of Rome and of the Empire which Caesar might have devised had he been able to spend years instead of merely months in supreme command.

Nevertheless, although he did not lead a revolutionary party, Julius Caesar was the greatest revolutionary in Roman history. There is no evidence that any of the men who followed him so loyally were conscious supporters of a revolutionary programme to bring new ideas and a new life to Rome. He did not start out on the adventure that was to put Rome at his feet

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Caesar on  
'why I did it'

with any other compelling motive than that of preventing his enemies from encompassing his ruin.

In his own report of the harangue he delivered to his troops before leading them against Rome, his main appeal was that they should 'defend the reputation and the honour of their commander against the attacks of his enemies'. He referred in passing to the way the Tribunes had been overruled by Pompey and he worked in a reference to the fate of Saturninus and the Gracchi, but he made no promises of a political kind and he offered no rewards. Their applause he said proved that 'they were ready to avenge the harm done to their general and to the Tribunes'. The Tribunes in question had been his own agents to provoke sedition. His account of his speech to the Senate when he arrived in Rome on his way to settle accounts with Pompey, beyond his justification for taking arms to defend himself, records no constitutional or political complaint or demand except that after denouncing the brutal and unheard of limitation of the powers of the Tribunes, 'he urged and insisted that the Senators should take the Republic in hand and administer it with him; if their courage failed them, he would not shirk the responsibility but would govern the Republic himself'.

The Senators led by Pompey were the men he intended to disarm. He did not attack the Republic although he was later credited with the remark that it was a sham. Many Romans by that time would have agreed with such a verdict, for after the Social War, law had been increasingly replaced by brute force. This was plain to Caesar who now had no retreat. He had to wade through a sea of blood and to incur great popular dislike in order to come out on top. After he seemed to have laid the ghost of the Republic it rose again and slew him on the Ides of March 44 B.C.

The revolution by which Caesar ruined the Republic was a personal revolution but not for that reason ineffective. Rome had known dictators, for there had been eighty-three of them before Julius Caesar, but it had never known a dictator for life, which was what he became early in 44 B.C.

## Civil War and Dictatorship 50-30 B.C.

An obsequious Senate, deserted by Republicans such as Cicero and packed with many of Caesar's creatures, now heaped additional honours upon him in fulsome adulation after having surrendered all public control over his acts. Not that those additional honours were by any means negligible. Cumulatively they also testified to his supreme power. He already named the men to be elected as Consuls, chief magistrates and governors of provinces. His head adorned coins from the official mint which had never before shown a living man. Statues were said to have been set up to him in all cities and all temples of the capital, although not one has survived. One inscribed to the Unconquerable God was set up in the temple of Quirinus, the deified Romulus. Another statue of him in ivory was carried with those of the gods of Rome customarily borne in state to inaugurate the chariot races and games at public festivals. It did not get a good reception. 'The people were splendid not even to clap Victory because of her bad neighbour,' wrote Cicero. The fifth month was renamed Julius. He had a gilt chair in the Senate and a robe like that of the kings. Any son yet to be born to him or adopted by him was to inherit the office of Pontifex Maximus, itself an appointment for life. The Senators took a solemn oath to protect him from harm, whereupon he dismissed his bodyguard and went unarmed through the City.

Grim and harrowing although the years had been since Caesar first made war on the Republic, his conquest of supreme power had not been the signal for the massacres and the confiscations that Cicero thought inevitable. Caesar, who could be as ruthless as any Roman in order to get his own way, prided himself, when he had got it, on his clemency. And well he might. Cicero confessed that he was amazed at his sobriety, fairness, wisdom, clemency and liberality. But the civil war had been a tremendous disaster. The best families of Rome, already thinned by the earlier civil war between Cinna and Sulla, suffered new losses. Defeated, it was not merely blood and treasure that they lost; their whole way of life was no more.

They had run the Republic: indeed, in so far as that word stood for an active, working organization, they *were* the

Romans  
accept an  
autocrat

The Republic  
becomes a  
vacuum

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Republic, for it was from their ranks that the men came to command Rome's armies and to direct affairs of state. None of them was ever again to achieve positions of dignity, honour, and creative activity in public life comparable with those filled by their fathers and their ancestors. For now one man had more power than the Republic; a state of affairs that no true Roman could easily endure, even for a limited period during a grave emergency.

The essence of  
Caesar's  
revolution

Caesar's revolution had been too complete and too sudden to be tolerable by such of the proud aristocrats of Rome who had survived the civil wars, all of whom considered themselves fit to run the Republic. Henceforth none was to be allowed any part in it unless they were willing to wait for their appointment by Caesar's grace and favour and to use it as he wished and directed them to do. His victory over the traditional machinery of government, lamed and inadequate as it had become, had created a vacuum which none but he could fill. Never again were free institutions to flourish in Rome. This is the best measure of Caesar's revolution, for it was a true revolution that took power away from one class and gave it to one man and thereby radically changed the spirit and the system of government. The institutions, the titles of office, the forms of election all remained. Now Caesar alone made them work. Nobody else had any serious scope for personal achievement. Crazy creaking structure though the Republican system may have been, at least it worked after a fashion. Through it or in spite of it, Romans had achieved world-supremacy, which is no trivial consideration upon any theory of politics. The most doctrinaire devotee of theories for the better direction of his fellow-human beings may be expected somewhat to temper his purely personal critiques and Utopian constructions by the contemplation of that record.

Strength of  
republican  
traditions

It is true that the Roman Republic fell far short of ensuring a good life for everybody. Because the Romans had supreme power, they probably increased the sum of human misery in the world on a scale that recalls the earlier Assyrians and the later Mongols. Yet, in spite of the wreckage and the ruin,

the poverty and the suffering, some seeds of civilization and culture took root to create a grandeur that the world had not previously witnessed. Was it all henceforth to be at the absolute discretion and disposal of one man? Over three hundred and fifty years of devotion to the Republic and as long a detestation of the very name of King, said 'No'. It is true that Caesar, willingly or advisedly, refused the royal title. But it had been offered to him and leading Romans privately called him King, as Cicero did in his letters.

In such an atmosphere, at least sixty Roman aristocrats began in deadly secrecy to plot his death. Cicero, the only living Roman besides Caesar to bear the proud title 'Father of the Country', was not in the secret, despite his known devotion to Republican ways. On 15 March 44 B.C. Caesar was lured unarmed into the Senate and struck down by twenty-three dagger wounds. He fell dead at the foot of Pompey's statue.

If the whole history of the previous fifteen years from the formation of the first Triumvirate to Caesar's dictatorship had not revealed the bankruptcy and ineffectiveness of the leaders of the Republic, their assassination of Caesar surely did. Quite quickly their irresponsible folly became clear. They had made no plans to restore constitutional government, yet they knew that Caesar's right-hand man, Marcus Antonius, was Consul along with P. Cornelius Dolabella, another of Caesar's nominees. All the levers of power therefore remained with the Caesarians, who were immediately alerted to make sure that they did not suffer their master's fate. Succeeding, possibly to their surprise, they were able to turn their thought to maintaining the upper hand and thereafter to revenge their fallen master.

The immediate reaction of a convinced Republican such as Cicero to the dastardly assassination of his friend Caesar was one of almost delirious enthusiasm at what he regarded as 'a most magnificent and noble deed'. While he said then that he would never regret it, he soon began to see the folly of the conspirators. He seemed at first surprised that 'the constitution has not been recovered along with liberty' and

The Senators  
revolt  
15 March  
44 B.C.



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

that 'though the tyrant is slain, we are not free'. Less than two months after that fatal deed he realized that it had been 'done with the courage of men but with the imprudence of a child'. Three weeks after the assassination, however, he had heard the voice of common sense from his friend Gaius Matrius who thought that 'the situation could not be more desperate: there is no way out of the mess; for if a genius like Caesar had failed, who now can hope to succeed? In short, this is the end.' Cicero confessed that the man might be right. Seven weeks later he even began to regret the murder, 'I can take no pleasure in the Ides of March,' he wrote as he saw how things were going. It seems amazing that politically mature Romans who were accustomed to commanding armies and to planning military campaigns could scheme only to strike down their commander-in-chief without having given any thought to the strategical follow-through and sequel of their desperate deed.

What followed was not a revolution but a confused, desperate and unsuccessful struggle to stand up against the men that Caesar's revolution had left in power.

After a few months of deepening uncertainty during which time Antony claimed Caesar's authority for all kinds of projects which he had himself invented, the alignment of forces began to take shape. Antony began to recruit a bodyguard of Caesar's veterans and tried hard but unsuccessfully to prevent Brutus and Cassius, the two ringleaders of the assassination, from reaching the provinces of Macedonia, and Syria respectively, to which they had been nominated by Caesar.

Caesar's heir

The sudden appearance of young Octavian, then only 19 years old, Caesar's great-nephew and adopted son, to claim his vast inheritance, greatly complicated the situation, for Antony was using Caesar's vast reserves as though it had been his own property. Snubbed and rebuffed by Antony, Octavian by no means lacked influence, and it was growing all the time. Cicero and others hoped that Octavian might help to save the threatened Republicans. Little did they realize his implacable hatred of the assassins.

Considering that the conspirators had more or less to improve their forces, they did well, but not well enough.

Cicero had finally burned his boats and committed himself with unflagging energy to the restoration of the Republic. He had tried at the beginning of September 44 B.C., in a speech in Rome, to appeal to Antony for restraint and for loyalty to the constitution. It drew a reply full of abuse of Cicero who then delivered a series of further speeches and addresses on public affairs which together constitute a terrible indictment of Antony as a coarse and brutal scoundrel. Eagerly listened to, often by crowded audiences and later handed around and preserved for posterity, these Philippic Orations, as they were called, effectively blasted the reputation of Antony for all time.

The appeal to arms did not come until early in 43 B.C. when after a clash at Mutina in the north in which Antony was worsted, the Senate was induced to declare him a public enemy. The die was cast. The hopes of the Republicans revived, particularly as Octavian had done well against Antony, but the Senators showed no enthusiasm for him. Meanwhile a Republican army under Lepidus refused to fight Antony's troops, whereupon Lepidus joined forces with Antony. Two other Republican commanders also joined him. Octavian, already attempting a reconciliation with him, marched with eight legions on Rome, demanding election as Consul, although he was only 20 years old. There was no way of resisting him so he was duly elected under the magic name of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (19 August 43 B.C.). A law sentencing all assassins to outlawry next revealed his determination to avenge his great-uncle. He then set off north with eleven legions to try to come to terms with Antony.

In November 43 B.C. Antony, Lepidus and Octavian concluded the foul alliance known as the Second Triumvirate. It was a thieves' and murderers' bargain with but two objectives, murder and loot, but it was disguised as a move 'to reconstitute the Republic'. All that Cicero mistakenly feared from Caesar now came to pass at the hands of his adopted son. Proscription lists which had not been seen in Rome since the

Second civil  
war 43 B.C.

The Second  
Triumvirate  
43-31 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Sullan terror forty years previously were now the order of the day. Three men drew them up instead of one and, as Appian recorded, they were all the more savage.

They put on the list those whom they suspected because of their power, and also their personal enemies, and they swapped their own relatives and friends with each other for death, both then and later. For they made additions to the catalogue from time to time, some on the ground of enmity, others for a grudge merely, or because the victims were friends of their enemies or enemies of their friends. Some were proscribed on account of their wealth, for the triumvirs needed a great deal of money to carry on the war.

Their proclamation also showed their method.

In God's name then, let no one harbour any one of those whose names are hereto appended, or conceal them, or send them away, or be corrupted by their money. Whoever shall be detected in saving, or aiding, or conniving with them we will put on the list of the proscribed without allowing any excuse or pardon. Those who kill the proscribed and bring us their heads shall receive the following rewards: to a free man 25,000 Attic drachmas per head; to a slave his freedom and 10,000 Attic drachmas and his master's right of citizenship. Informers shall receive the same rewards. In order that they may remain unknown the names of those who receive the rewards shall not be inscribed in our registers.

Foremost on the lists were all the aristocratic supporters of the Republican constitution, including, of course, Cicero, his brother and their sons. All were quickly butchered except Cicero's own son, who survived because he was in Athens. Cicero was within a few days of his sixty-fifth year, an old man by Roman standards.

The gangsters  
triumph

Some managed to escape, thanks to the heroism of their wives and families, their friends and their slaves. We have seen in our own day how brutal tyrants never lack human butchers willing to murder for them and so it was in Rome. Panic

reigned as the slaughter began. Appian, who gives a circumstantial account of much of what happened, which may not be accurate in all its details, sufficiently conveys something of the horror of those ghastly days.

Straightway, throughout city and country, wherever each one happened to be found, there were sudden arrests and murder in various forms, and decapitations for the sake of the rewards when the head should be shown; also undignified flights in strange costumes, of persons hitherto well dressed. Some descended into wells, others into filthy sewers. Some took refuge in chimneys. Others crouched in the deepest silence under the thick-set tiles of their roofs. Some were not less fearful of their wives and ill-disposed children than of the murderers. Others feared their freedmen and their slaves; creditors feared their debtors and neighbours feared neighbours who coveted their lands. There was a sudden outburst of previously smouldering hates and a shocking change in the condition of senators, consulars, praetors, tribunes who threw themselves with lamentations at the feet of their own slaves, giving to the servant the character of saviour and master. It was most lamentable that even after submitting to this humiliation they did not obtain pity.

Those who were faithful and well-disposed feared to aid, or conceal, or connive at the escape of the victims because such acts made them liable to the very same punishments.

Some died defending themselves against their slayers. Others made no resistance, considering the assailants not to blame. Some starved, or hanged, or drowned themselves, or flung themselves from their roofs or into the fire. Some offered themselves to the murderers or sent for them when they delayed. Others concealed themselves and made abject entreaties, or dodged, or tried to buy themselves off. Some were killed by mistake, or by private malice, contrary to the intention of the triumvirs.

Three hundred Senators and two thousand knights of all those marked down for destruction were butchered and their possessions seized. Then began the harsh work of driving

Republican  
opposition  
liquidated

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

others from their lands and homes to provide rewards for the veterans who were not needed to pursue Brutus and Cassius in the East where they had succeeded in organizing a respectable force. In two hotly contested battles at Philippi in Macedonia, Antony and Octavian finally defeated them both. (September–October 42 B.C.) The Republican cause was then hopeless, although Sextus Pompeius kept up a flicker of defiance in Spain and Sicily.

After Philippi, Octavian returned to Italy while Antony remained in the East. It was a fateful division, almost bound to improve Octavian's chances in the clash between them that could hardly be avoided provided that both survived.

Octavian was a young man with his career before him and he lost no time in giving it shape. Halley's comet, which appeared in the sky at the end of 43 B.C., was widely regarded as a sign that Julius Caesar had become a god so he was forthwith revered as the Divine Julius. Octavian became 'son of the God Julius'. Sextus Pompeius, the last of the Republicans, was still a potential danger in Sicily, but after a temporary understanding, Octavian attacked him, was nearly defeated but his lieutenants saved the day. At the same time (36 B.C.) Lepidus, the third member of the Triumvirate, was driven into private life and consoled with the office of Pontifex Maximus.

Octavian then undertook (35–33 B.C.) a military expedition in Dalmatia to strengthen Rome's eastern frontier which kept his troops in trim, even if it had no very positive result. He then turned to consolidating his position in Italy by seeking the personal loyalty of all Italians all of whom he declared to be his personal clients; a status, as we have seen (p. 28), with a very special meaning in Rome. He spent lavishly on the adornment of Rome in which he was aided by his able lieutenants M. Vipsanius Agrippa (c. 63 B.C.–12 B.C.) and a rich Etruscan, Maecenas, later renowned for his patronage of Virgil and Horace. He had ten years in which to exploit his heritage and he used them carefully and skilfully to build himself up in a way that anticipated something of his later success. Antony gave him great annoyance but little real trouble for he returned

Octavian  
*versus*  
Antony

## Civil War and Dictatorship 50-30 B.C.

twice only to Italy, the second time in 37 B.C. to renew the Triumvirate when its first five-year term expired. He had married Octavian's sister Octavia in 40 B.C. but when he returned to the East in 37 B.C. it was to Cleopatra who had already captivated Julius Caesar ten years previously. A Macedonian princess of extraordinary charm and great ambition, she was then only 29. Antony was then about 45.

In the following year he sought to fulfil Caesar's plan to avenge Rome on the Persians but they were too much for him also. He narrowly avoided the fate of Crassus and struggled back over the mountains into Syria having lost nearly half his forces. He appealed for help to Cleopatra and to Octavian, despite the fact that he had dismissed Octavia who had preserved the peace between her husband and her brother. When she also went with reinforcements and supplies after his disaster in Persia, he accepted the supplies but would not see her. He preferred to live like an oriental despot with Cleopatra. Their three children were cared for by the angelic Octavia in Rome. His conduct outraged the Romans and gave Octavian the pretext he needed.

In 32 B.C. war was declared against Cleopatra who had never been popular in Rome. In a propaganda campaign of extraordinary virulence, her character and alleged ambitions were assailed with ferocious and slanderous attacks.

In this fierce slanging match which preceded the final showdown, Antony made some telling rejoinders. Among them curiously was a statement that Octavian alone prevented the restoration of the Republic. The foul abuse and filthy accusations which the lackeys of Octavian poured out against Cleopatra and Antony anticipated something of the style of communist polemics of today and are a measure of the degradation of the Roman spirit. They probably magnified fears of Antony and Cleopatra by which they must have been largely inspired and discouraged many who might have fought for Antony.

At the naval engagement of Actium in September 32 B.C. where Antony and Cleopatra finally faced Agrippa and Octavian, the day was lost by the surrender of most of Antony's

Antony and  
Cleopatra

Civil war  
renewed  
32-31 B.C.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Octavian  
cleans up

forces. With Cleopatra he fled to Egypt where further resistance was useless. Antony committed suicide before Octavian arrived in Alexandria, Cleopatra soon afterwards. Octavian then got what he had mainly come for and badly needed: the fabulous treasure of the Ptolemies in gold, jewels and ivory. When it reached Rome the rate of interest fell from 12 to 4 per cent and the price of property rose with the inflation of money values which resulted. Octavian was able to hand out further lavish bribes to his troops and to the inhabitants of Rome. He was now undisputed master of Rome and the Roman world which he now further enriched by the never-failing granary of the new province-to-be in Egypt.

No independent force existed in the Roman world that could challenge Octavian, who now had to decide whether to resign his power to the Senate as Pompey had done in 62 B.C. or to retain and augment it as his great-uncle Caesar had done in 46 B.C. If Pompey's solution hardly occurred to him at all, he is scarcely to be blamed, for the Senators who might have been worthy to receive such a huge responsibility and so vast an authority had nearly all perished in the wars or by the proscription lists for which Octavian himself was largely responsible. A new plan was clearly necessary.

## The Settlement of Augustus

AFTER THE DEFEAT AND DEATH OF ANTONY in 31 B.C. Octavianus remained in the East. When he returned to Rome on 13 August 29 B.C. he commanded personally the loyalty of some 400,000 tough disciplined soldiers in seventy legions as well as the allegiance of the whole population of Italy which had been sworn to him, Octavianus in person, by solemn oath and not to the Senate and the people or the Republic of Rome. With such resources he was all-powerful, the mightiest general, monarch or tyrant then known to the western world. Legally his position was very doubtful; it is true that in 31 and 30 B.C. he was Consul for the third and fourth times, but we have already seen how he got himself accepted for that high office. Small wonder that Mommsen, a prince among the students of the ancient world, said that there never was a system of government which had lost so completely the idea of legitimacy as had that which Octavianus established. He wrote, of course, in the nineteenth century, and he never saw the dictators of the twentieth century.

The year 28 B.C. passed with Octavianus as Consul for the sixth time and his right-hand man Agrippa as his colleague. They overhauled the membership of the Senate and reduced it by two hundred. Beyond assuming the time-honoured title of *Princeps*, *princeps senatus*, signifying that he had the right to speak first, there was no further definition of the position Octavianus held in the Republic.

In January 27 B.C. in the purged and packed Senate he made a show of transferring his own power, his army command and his rule over the provinces, without saying how he had got it, to the Senate and the people of Rome. All the mighty changes since Pompey, Crassus and Caesar had made their fell compact in 60 B.C., were presumably to be annulled. The scene seems to have been elaborately stage-managed, for amid the tumultuous applause there were no doubt prearranged cries of No! No!

Political  
window-  
dressing  
29-27 B.C.



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Of the great military power so handed over, the three major groups of Roman provinces—Spain, Gaul and the East on which the main force of the Roman army was concentrated, were forthwith handed back to Octavianus, and for ten years. Those at peace and with no armies of any consequence were left to the Senate to manage. In return for his palpably sham self-denying ordinance, the Senate three days later rewarded him with yet more fulsome praise and new honour. A golden shield in the Senate recorded his 'valour, clemency, justice and piety'; the civic crown of oak leaves conferred upon a soldier who has saved a comrade's life was placed permanently over his door and he was dignified with a new title and one by which he is henceforth known—Augustus.

The steel  
fist of  
Augustus

As a propaganda exercise these arrangements had a great success right up to our own days, for misled, it would seem, by titles, forms and show, many have believed that a genuine partnership in power was then achieved between Augustus and the Senate which has been described by a scholar as great as Mommsen as a joint rule or a dyarchy. Augustus was a Consul invested also with wide pro-consular powers for a term of ten years, a man therefore subject, according to legal constitutional practice, to re-election at the people's will and ultimately to reappointment or dismissal by the Senate. The reality was very different, and in 23 B.C., when he made another show of resigning power to the Republic by refusing renomination as Consul, Augustus was compensated by being confirmed in yet fuller powers than he had so far exercised. His army command or *imperium* of the three great groups of provinces was extended over the whole Empire. Traditionally no commander could enter the City during his command but an exception was made in favour of Augustus. He could have as many troops with him in Rome as he wished. Most of the 400,000 troops under his command after the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. were paid off and provided with a lump sum or a grant of land by way of pension. He maintained, however, some twenty-five legions of about 140,000 men as a standing army under his personal command. Next, although a patrician

## The Settlement of Augustus

and constitutionally unable therefore to become a Tribune, he was invested with the power of all the Tribunes by being awarded a new dignity of undisclosed scope and power, the *tribunicia potestas*.

Endowed therefore with full command of all the armed forces of the Republic as commander-in-chief, he personified the army; endowed with the power of all the Tribunes, he personified the people. Such was the source of his undisputed one-man rule and such was the secret of the revolution of Augustus. The Roman Empire had begun and although Augustus was never spoken of as King, for the rest of his life he reigned over Rome and its Empire as a powerful monarch, disguised though his power was by the use of old titles. He had completely and finally abolished the Republican Constitution.

In practice, what was essentially a military tyranny was veiled by the use of old Republican forms and labels. Just as today political realities in Eastern Europe are obscured and disguised by what is well described as 'double-talk', so was the principate or the empire of Augustus. In Rome then, as in the countries behind the Iron Curtain today, the real ruler was the man able to give orders to the troops, including any secret police, and have them obeyed. Such realities were masked in ancient Rome, as they are in communist countries today, by the evident fact that the vast majority of the people had no contact with the real ruler. The men they had to obey were the men they used to elect but who were now nominated for election by Augustus. They still bore the old titles of Consul, Praetor, Quaestor, Aedile, and it was not apparent to the men in the street that, for all the traditional dignity and seeming might of such officials, the orders they gave were all subject to the slightest word or nod of one man, Augustus. Such was the 'Republic' of ancient Rome under Augustus, anticipating the so-called 'Peoples Republics' of our own time.

Unlike the story of Caesar's revolution which can be followed in startling contemporaneous detail sometimes almost from day to day, thanks to the letters of Cicero, the record of

Double-Talk  
in Roman  
political life

Opposition  
liquidated

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

events conferring supreme power upon Augustus are sadly deficient. So also is our knowledge of the inner history of Rome during most of his rule. Occasional glimpses show the way things were going. One such event was an alleged indiscretion of Varro Murena, Consul for 23 B.C. He was said to have been involved with some others in a conspiracy. What it may have been has never been disclosed or discovered, but he and his associates were hunted down, captured and slain, without proper trial or defence, as Hitler disposed of Nazis under suspicion or as rival gangs are eliminated in the underworld of Chicago or New York. So much for golden shields vaunting 'clemency, justice and piety'.

Comparisons of the kind hinted at here between events in the ancient world and those of modern times usually and rightly arouse mistrust, for even if we knew more than we do about those ancient times, we run into serious danger in thinking about them as we do about the contemporary world, which in so many ways is so utterly different. Yet in its essential elements, the political process whereby the affairs of men and societies are regulated must still be seen to consist of some few fundamental kinds of activities, whether they are exercised among men who owned slaves and fought with swords, spears and shields or in our modern age of high explosives, electricity, space travel and atomic weapons.

Physical force still constrains human behaviour through police and armies. The kind of behaviour which that force is designed to secure or to prevent must still be decided upon by someone or some body of men. There must be some method of regulating disputes between men and of deciding whether a man's behaviour does or does not conform to the pattern or standard desired by those who say what that behaviour must be. These various aspects of political life must be detected, if we are to understand human history in the Roman Republic as Polybius knew it, as Cicero dreamed of it and as Augustus reshaped it, just as we discern them in the very different world of England of Edward III, of Charles I and Cromwell, of Sir Robert Walpole and of Sir Winston Churchill. They were

Essence of  
politics of  
yesterday  
and today

## The Settlement of Augustus

present in the Germany of Bismarck, of the Weimar Republic and of Hitler. Disguised and relabelled, they are no less the realities lurking beneath the façade of those communist régimes which have been clamped down so firmly upon the decimated population of the once free countries of Eastern Europe.

In none of these widely separated periods of time, or among peoples so diverse, are we likely to find an Augustus, a Senate and a popular assembly exactly like that of the end of the first century B.C. Yet in all we may see who commands the army and the police and controls the executive arm of government; who gets into Parliament, representative assembly, Senate, Congress, Diet or Praesidium; how he or she gets there; what independence of mind and action they can show there, what influence they can exert on policy and how far they must take their orders from the executive. Beyond executive and legislature, stand the courts and judges. We need to know, in order to understand the quality of life in any State, who appoints the judges, whether they can be influenced by threats, by fear of dismissal or by bribes in the shape of money and hopes of promotion, we need to know who makes the laws they interpret and what power if any they have to interpret or to suggest changing them.

After establishing the true nature of all these parts and aspects of government, it remains to discover the great purpose they all serve. It may be detected by using the distinction, which was a commonplace in the days of Aristotle, whether they were designed to promote the interests of the people who were governed by them or merely the security and supreme position of the governing power itself.

Such being the essence of any political community, an understanding of past political systems can be sought by reference to the manner in which their executive, legislative and judicial activities were conducted and by comparing them with the systems with which we are familiar today. It is therefore with no intention of drawing up exact equivalents or of making facile comparisons, but with the aim solely of aiding

—executive

—legislative

—judicial

—the ends of  
government

Caesar and  
Augustus as  
'Fascists'

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

the understanding of the past that the Imperial control devised by Augustus in Rome is compared with the absolutism of Mussolini's Italy, of Hitler's Germany, of Stalin's Russia and of many governmental devices similar in essence that are today to be found not in Eastern Europe alone but in almost every one of the other four continents of the world. For they all proceed, however good the intention of their founders may have been, to disable the State in which they arise and to carry the germs of the most frightful anarchy and oppression such as we ourselves have witnessed today and can read about once more in the record of ancient Rome.

Profiting by the deeper and more general understanding of the nature of the political process that has been forced upon us by a cruel and tragic experience, we may use it in trying to understand the political experience of the ancient Romans. In doing so we shall inevitably have to discard interpretations suggested by some of those who, in previous generations, have written about the history of Rome. In the eighteenth century, when men knew what absolute government was like, there were fewer illusions about the real nature of the revolution of Augustus than have since gained currency. It is difficult to read what was said before A.D. 1933 by some eminent scholars about early Roman Imperial Government without something approaching revulsion.

A realization of the true nature of the early Empire can extend to influence the appreciation of Roman art, for knowing the shams by which Augustus imposed himself upon the Romans, it is difficult to generate much enthusiasm for the idealized sculptured portraits of him that abound in the world or for the remains of that Altar of Peace dedicated to his glory in Rome during the latter years of his reign. For all its sculptured skill and great elegance there seems to be an element of ostentatious theatrical illusionism, a sugary artificiality about it, recalling the commercial sculpture adorning late nineteenth-century luxury hotels and expensive monumental masonry. Not in itself displeasing, it yet imparts a feeling of insincerity and unreality, as having been 'made to order' like the régime

## The Settlement of Augustus

of Augustus itself and not being the product of a spontaneous upsurge of genuine emotions, as for example the sculptures of the Parthenon in Athens seem to be.

The lack of detailed contemporary records of affairs in Rome under Augustus bothered ancient historians who were very much closer to the period than we are. Tacitus, who wrote a century after the death of Augustus, complains both in his *Histories* and *Annals* that

Our lack  
of facts

many writers have dealt with the eight hundred and twenty years since the founding of the City with equal frankness and eloquence as long as the story of the Roman Republic was their theme, yet, after the battle of Actium, when all power had to be concentrated in the hands of one man for the sake of peace, those great geniuses, the historians, wrote no more. The truth was then falsified in more ways than one; firstly through an ignorance of public affairs as though they were outside the writers' competence, and before long through adulation or hatred of the rulers, so what with the sycophants and the hostile, posterity has been ill-served.

The Greek historian, Dio Cassius, another hundred years later, added the very material point that whereas under the Republic all public business was conducted openly and was discussed and recorded, so that it was possible to get out the truth, events during the usurpation of Augustus, on the other hand, could not be followed in the same way because

most things were done in secrecy and were concealed. If now and again some were made public, yet because there is no means of verifying them, such publication inspires little confidence as long as there is reason to believe that everything was said or done according to the wishes of the Emperor and those in power around him.

Nothing succeeds like success, and few reputations in the ancient world glow brighter than that of Augustus. He is praised as one who in times of the greatest danger and difficulty managed to strike anew a spark of ordered government

The idealized  
character of  
Augustus

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

out of the most shocking anarchy, nursed it into a flame, tended it with care, trimmed and augmented it with skill and devotion, until its benign rays shed sweetness and light over all the dark places of the Republic and Empire. Having tamed and soothed the disordered spirits of his fellow-countrymen, beautified their City and made them prosperous once more, he expired in an effulgence of genius and grace, to be venerated for ever after as the Father of his Country and the Architect of the Roman Empire.

The other  
side of the  
medal

A close examination of the reality behind this stock recital of his virtues, soon reveals elements of exaggeration and falsity in so synthetic a beatitude, for it is not difficult to paint another picture compounded out of the man's cruelty, vindictiveness and hollowness, his hypocritical attempts to enforce high standards of conduct, in sexual relations for example, to which he was not himself willing to conform and finally, and worst of all, of having set the Romans on the fatal path of no return that was to lead them through military dictatorship into the foulest form of arbitrary monarchical absolutism.

The truth has to be sought amid a great deal of artificial light and not a little real shade. The seamy side of the character and conduct of Augustus was revealed most clearly in his early days, when in conditions of great danger and uncertainty he had to struggle hard for survival. Dominion eluded him for many years during which he was exposed to many risks and prolonged uncertainty and anxiety. As one of the Triumvirate he could have spared the life of Cicero with whom he had been on the friendliest terms, and many others as well, but when he and his two partners in crime decided upon the proscription of their opponents, 'he carried it through with a greater severity than either of them. For while they were often willing to be moved by personal influence and entreaty, he stood out most insistently against sparing anyone, even putting his own guardian, his father's colleague, on the list. When a halt in the slaughter was called at last, he made it clear that he agreed "only on condition that he was allowed a free hand for the future". He showed the same cold vindictiveness after the

## The Settlement of Augustus

final defeat of the Republicans at Philippi, when "he did not use his victory with moderation, but after sending the head of Brutus to be thrown down before Caesar's statue in Rome, he foully abused even his most distinguished captives before having them slaughtered". It would not be surprising that he "incurred general detestation by many of his acts".

Suetonius, who reports all this, wrote, it is true, a century after the death of Augustus, but he diligently collected facts and records even if he did not narrate them in a very well-ordered form, or always beyond fear of contradiction. Appian, who tried to put Antony in a good light, said that it was he who found the body of Brutus and burned it, sending his ashes to his mother.

The sharp contrasts between evil and good in the character of Augustus can be reconciled to some extent by the possibility that in later life he grew somewhat more mellow, tolerant and occasionally benign, as he could afford to be, for he had rescued and consolidated his inheritance. He was, however, careful to retain all power completely within his own absolute and final authority. It was no longer very difficult, although he was willing to allow a good deal more latitude at times to other leading citizens than were some of his more ruthless successors. Here and there the old Roman spirit still broke through in occasional flashes as when some Senators shouted at him as he left the Senate House one day in a huff, that 'senators ought to be free to talk about the Republic'.

It is really rather surprising that the fire of Roman liberty retained any vital spark, so violently had it been assailed. If in the United Kingdom half the Members of Parliament and a larger proportion of the wealthiest and more eminent chairmen and directors of the great business concerns of the City of London were rounded up and shot out of hand in the way the Nazis in Hitler's Germany or the Communists in Eastern Europe dealt with their opponents, we might form some idea of the manner in which Augustus smoothed his path to imperial glory. That blood-bath moreover was but the beginning. It does not include that large number of high-spirited Romans

A summing-  
up of  
Augustus



## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

who, like Cato and Brutus, preferred to put an end to their lives rather than to survive to witness in the first place the ruin of everything for which they had fought and then to perish at the command and for the pleasure of the tyrants they detested.

Most of the stories that remain about Augustus depict him as a reasonably well-natured Roman, solicitous of public welfare and mindful of his friends and associates. He had a considerable interest in literature, as his friendship with Horace and Virgil proves. In later life he seems to have become more urbane, mild and sociable, an improvement for which his wife Livia has often been given the credit. Yet the autocrat remained. The eighteenth-century translator of Montesquieu's book on *Les causes de la Grandeur des Romains et leur décadence* calls him 'a smooth and subtile tyrant', a brief characterization which yet stands to sum up the essence of the man. With this summary judgment we may contrast the glowing tribute paid to him on the occasion of a great exhibition organized in honour of his memory under Mussolini in Rome when he was credited with the possession of all the best political talents of Caesar, Cicero and Pompey. It would be nearer the truth to say that he combined their worst qualities. He had neither the military genius, the clemency nor the generosity of Caesar, nor the devotion to principle and the good humour of Cicero, nor the integrity of Pompey. Yet it would be going a good deal too far to speak of him in the same breath as of that shabby Italian adventurer who, between A.D. 1922 and 1944, sought to establish another Roman Empire and to borrow some of the glory of which two thousand years of history have not deprived, and are never likely completely to deprive Augustus.

## Constitutional Basis of the Empire

THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OF AUGUSTUS was not diminished because he necessarily had to employ hundreds of agents in the great task of running the Republic, any more than the ruler for the time being in the Kremlin is less of an autocrat because of the vast apparatus of the national and local communist party organizations that he controls. On the contrary the power of a determined ruthless autocrat is often vastly increased by such a huge machinery, for his smallest command or direction is apt to be magnified and executed with immense zeal and energy by countless small-minded officials whose sole ambition is to serve him without question so as to stand well in his sight.

Augustus began to build up such a corps. One or two converted elderly Republicans who had escaped proscription and had survived in battle might be found among them as examples of Augustan 'clemency' but he knew very well that they were no longer dangerous. They were in any case swamped by the hordes of younger men who had no memory of Republican liberty although they may have had tragic experience of the effects of warring would-be despots in the anarchy after 60 B.C. In any case they could not look back in loyalty to murdered men: they had their future to consider and they could see but one path to their advancement which was the same public service enjoined of old upon all good Romans.

The first step of an ambitious young man had to be through army service as an officer with the legions where he would at once encounter a stiff discipline enforced by men whose loyalty to Augustus had put him in supreme command. Before such service could begin, the young man had to be approved as suitable by Augustus or one of his trusted councillors. Few men of poor families were likely to be eligible. Those who did sufficiently well in the army might aspire to a minor post in the administrative service that Augustus necessarily had to organize to manage the increasingly complicated affairs of state.

Executive  
power in  
Augustan  
Rome

—the army

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

—the civil  
services

Very little is known about administrative history at any time in the remote past and we are signally short of facts about the civil service of Rome. It is obvious that there must have been some clerical assistants to the annually elected magistrates of Republican times, many of whom came new to their jobs and were hardly in them long enough to learn all that it was necessary to know. We have in fact a few references to administrative officers (*scribae*) and to more or less routine clerks (*librarii*). From the very nature of the public activities of a State, it is clear that some clerks *scribae* would have to be employed. The care, custody and accounting for the expenditure of public money kept several *scribae* active. The poet Horace was said by Suetonius to have become a Quaestor's clerk, *scriptum quaestorium comparavit*, which has been translated to signify that he bought the office which, however, the words do not necessarily imply. The plebeian Tribunes and Aediles also had their staff of clerks to manage the multiple business of the City, its streets, sewers, markets, the mint and later the aqueducts and water supply. There were more such jobs under Augustus than there had been in Republican days.

Even in Republican times, clerks must have been employed by the Censors to assess and collect internal taxes (until 167 B.C.) and to maintain the roll of citizens liable to army service (until about 102 B.C.). The management of the purchase and distribution of subsidized corn since the days of Gaius Gracchus must have required a good deal of clerical labour. By the days of Julius Caesar and Augustus over 120,000 tons of wheat had to be bought, consigned, shipped, warehoused and distributed every year, a task that inevitably needed control and management by civilian officials. Many of the men employed as clerks in these various jobs would have been slaves. To refer to their work as Roman Public Administration or to them as the Imperial Civil Service is apt to give a very distorted picture because of the vastly greater numbers so employed today. Early eighteenth-century England offers a more plausible parallel, for then the numbers employed by the State were very small and, as in Rome, most big jobs were let out on contract to the

## Constitutional Basis of the Empire

most advantageous bid. Most of these posts were humble, little liable to be much affected by political squabbles.

More vulnerable were the more prominent citizens who took jobs under Augustus. As energetic, able young men who had proved their worth, they aspired to get elected to a Quaestorship, to enter the Senate and to climb upwards as Aedile and Praetor to the supreme distinction of the Consulship. All these old titles were maintained and they were still conferred ostensibly by the people at elections in the public assembly, the *comitia*. Needless to say the candidates were confined to those nominated by Augustus who, to keep up appearances, used to canvass the electors to persuade them to elect his candidates. After A.D. 8, when he was already 70 years old, he gave up canvassing and reverted to the practice of Julius Caesar who merely sent lists of the men for whom the people had to vote in just the same way as communist so-called 'elections' are managed today.

—fictitious  
elections

Of much more practical consequence than these executive posts in the civil service were the army commands. The *legatus legionis*, of whom there were normally twenty-five, each had some six thousand men under his command. The 'divisional commander', the *legatus Augusti*, might have three legions together with allied troops under him—some twenty to thirty thousand men.

—the  
lieutenants  
of Augustus

These were the pillars upon which the Empire was long to rest. They governed the dangerous frontier provinces. They owed their appointment not to popular election or to the successful intrigues of a few leading families but to distinguished army service marking them out as men of ability whom the Emperor could trust. They served, not as under the Republic, for a year, but for as long as the Emperor chose. Tacitus has left a sympathetic and convincing account of one of them, his father-in-law, Agricola. Others such as Plautius, Vespasian and Trajan all added lustre to the annals of the Empire.

One all-important branch of executive government, the raising and expenditure of public money and the custody of public funds, formerly a matter for the Senate, was now very

The Power  
of the Purse

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

much at the disposal of Augustus who also created a private imperial treasury of his own, his *fiscus* administered through his personal slaves and freedmen. The routine management of the public treasury (*aerarium*) was left largely to the Senate but the money paid into it seems first to have passed through the offices of Augustus. Towards the end of his reign he selected three Senators by lot for an economy campaign to cut public expenditure. His own funds were vast as a result of the huge booty he collected in Egypt, Spain, Gaul and the Balkans. They were annually supplemented by huge sums left to him as legacies by those he had promoted and enriched. He does not seem to have stolen land or property from private people in Italy as his successors began to do, neither did he own estates in Egypt which was, however, very much under his control. The annual tribute which it yielded was as great as that from Gaul and it was paid into the public treasury and not into his private *fiscus*.

Undoubtedly by far the richest man in the then known world, Augustus gave away large sums during his lifetime as money gifts and free corn to the impoverished plebs; land and money to soldiers; for the celebration of public games and for the adornment of the City of Rome, particularly by the repair of old temples and the construction of others. He did not keep the rich booty he had won but threw it on the market and converted much of it into money, producing a very considerable inflationary addition to the currency.

Approved administrative service of the sort just described was a necessary preliminary to membership of the Senate save perhaps for some special favourites who were given easy entry. For the Senate, mere stage property although it had become, still had a part to play and Augustus took some pains to keep it going. Among his first acts in 28 B.C. as we have seen, was to rearrange its membership and to discard 'unsuitable' men. It was a task he repeated at least twice. Senators were forbidden to leave Italy and were fined for non-attendance. They were thus kept in Rome, under the Emperor's eye. The Senate had its uses, principally as a dignified body, traditionally

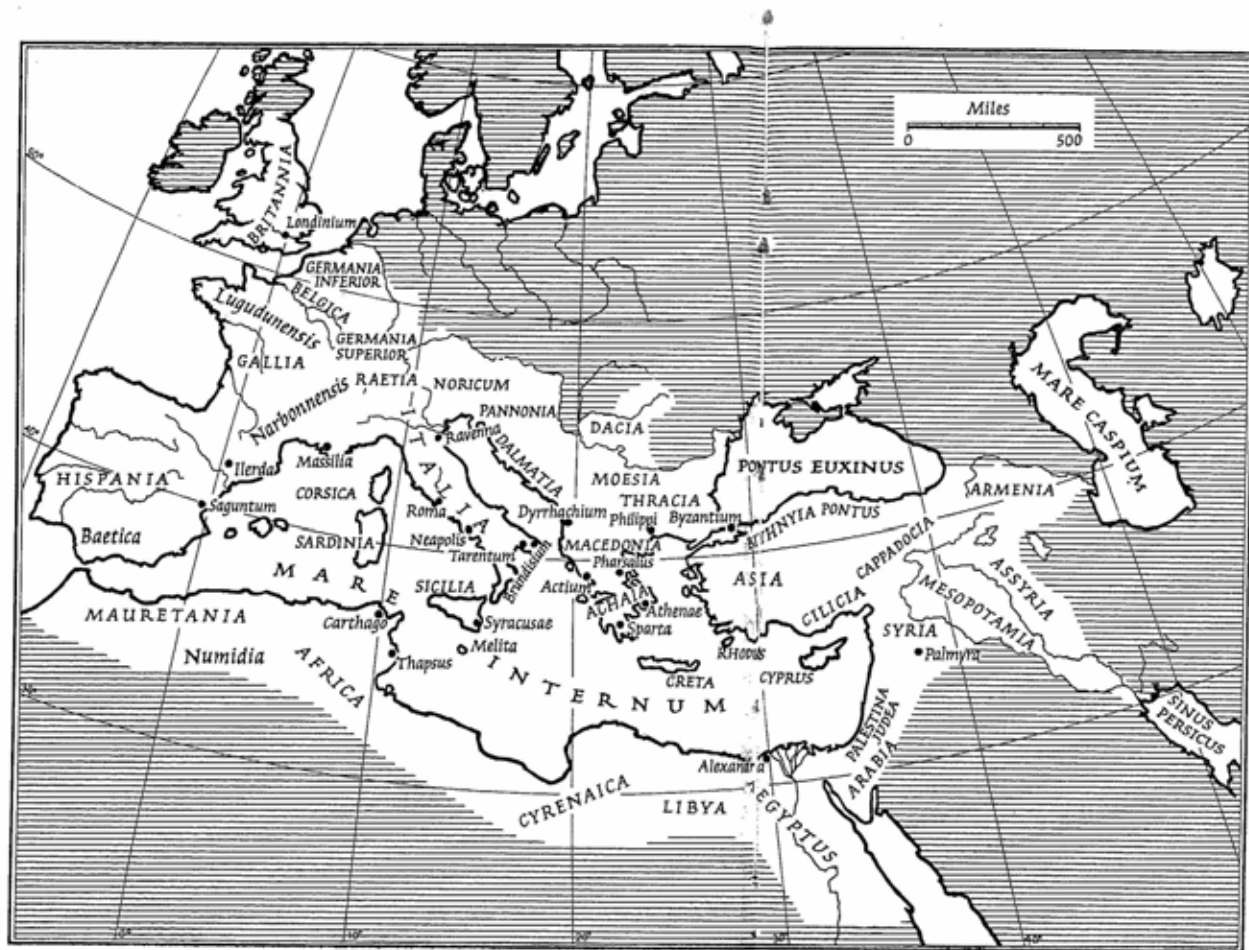
The Senate  
under  
Augustus

## Constitutional Basis of the Empire

honoured, whose name still lent weight to imperial decisions and decrees.

The real ruler, beginning with Julius Caesar and continuing down to the very end of the Roman Empire, continued to speak and act in its name and in that of the people *Senatus populusque Romanus*. From its ranks Augustus drew a small advisory council or privy council upon which he relied for much of the not very controversial routine administrative direction and discretion that were inevitably required in order to run the vast Empire. A sample of the formula used in the Senate was a document 'concerning the matters which Emperor Caesar Augustus, our *princeps* in accordance with a resolution of the Advisory Board selected by lot from the Senate, desired to be brought before the Senate'. This advisory board or privy council included fifteen Senators chosen by lot who served for six months at a time together with the Consuls and one each of the holders of other magistracies. Service on such a committee brought a random sample of Senators into close contact with Augustus for six months at a time and gave him therefore a very good opportunity to get to know more Senators and to test their quality.

Senators with Republican leanings, Senators secretly critical of the new Augustan constitution were therefore under constant scrutiny by Augustus and they cannot have relished being forced to attend. New men raised by Augustus to what in Roman society was still an impressive position as Senators on the other hand, and those who from constitutional timidity or respect had a genuine or feigned loyalty to the Emperor would have no such reserves. The lustre conferred by personal association with the Emperor would have been one that many Senators coveted and about which they were able to boast in their family circle and among their friends to the end of their days. It carried some responsibility and risk also of course, but this burden was nothing like that borne by the Fathers of the Republic, for the ultimate decisions in every case were the responsibility of the Emperor, or in his absence of the presiding member from his immediate inner circle.



The Roman Empire  
at its greatest extent  
under Trajan A.D. 117

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Vacuum in  
public life

It seems inevitable that a realization of the futility of their position must have given the abler and more energetic Romans such a distaste for public affairs that their interest waned and they preferred retirement, idleness, or amusement to the artificiality and dangers of politics. A potential source of strength to the State thereby ran to waste.

Such men did not turn to scientific inquiry, politically neutral although it is; history, except for the rare lucid intervals of renewed intellectual freedom, was much too dangerous; art was not an activity for gentlemen for it, like all occupations for the hand, eye and muscles, was undertaken by slaves or by freedmen. There remained religion. The old Roman beliefs and practices were of less and less account in the lives of the leading men and women of the great capital City, despite the strenuous efforts of Augustus to revive them.

The population of the City was at the same time becoming less and less Roman. Augustus alone seems to have been aroused by the tremendous change in the quality of Roman life brought about by the ever-mounting torrent of slave-births, slave imports and slave emancipations. He was no more successful in arresting it than he was in making Romans revere the gods and goddesses of their forefathers.

Augustus worked hard himself. Suetonius records how he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the poet Horace to become his secretary in a letter to Maecenas in which he said, 'Hitherto I always used to write letters to my friends myself but now, in poor health and overwhelmed with work, I want to steal Horace from you.'

Augustus and  
Roman Law

Such was the machinery which replaced Republican methods of framing and passing laws and maintaining the machinery of government. What of the law courts and of judgments in criminal and civil cases? As Emperor, Augustus was of course the final arbiter in all lawsuits in the provinces he commanded, so when that command was extended to the whole Empire, his duties as Supreme Judge of appeal expanded also. It seems that he took his duties seriously, but they were so numerous that he was forced to delegate some of his authority. Over a



## Constitutional Basis of the Empire

wide field of petty offences and of civil cases raising no points of political interest, he was able to delegate all judicial work to the *praetor urbanus*, as was the custom under the Republic. Graver charges, particularly those involving serious crimes or treason and appeal cases, came before Augustus.

The old slowly evolving praetorian case law now came under a new influence in the supreme power of Augustus and a new source of law arose whose development, as it was summed up in an authoritative maxim by a great Roman jurist two centuries later, would have horrified Cicero: 'The wish of the emperor has the force of law.' Matters had not of course overtly got to that length in the days of Augustus, but such was the reality even then, had Augustus chosen to demonstrate it. With the realization of this fatal outcome which was to spell death to that rule of law perceived first by the Greeks and magnified by Cicero as the mainstay of a free society, we are better able to understand the true nature of the achievement of Augustus.

Reviewed in the light of basic political principles we can appreciate the full import of the words by which Tacitus a century later summed up the achievement of Augustus:

A Roman  
verdict on the  
Revolution  
of Augustus

He first won over the army by bounties, the populace with cheap corn and all men with the delights of peace. Then he grew in power step by step, concentrating in himself the functions of the Senate, the magistrates and the laws. He met no opposition, the boldest spirits had fallen in battle or by proscription. The remaining nobility gained wealth and fame the more quickly in proportion to their acceptance of slavery, so that having prospered through revolution, they preferred the new order and safety to the old order and its dangers. Nor was the new state of affairs unpopular in the provinces where the rule of the Senate and People had become odious because of the feuds between the great and the greed of the Roman governors and where laws gave no protection because they were overturned by violence, intrigue and finally by corruption.

## Consolidation and Collapse

HOWEVER MUCH the discontented members of the Roman nobility might grumble about their subservience and slavery, there can be little doubt but that as a first-aid measure, the Augustan revolution worked well enough from the standpoint of the everyday considerations that made life tolerable for the average man. Therein lay its insidious power, as the sequel was to reveal.

The interests  
of Peace

At first, however, peace and security were enjoyed on a scale new in the experience of every Roman then alive. Many of those who had escaped personal disaster in the desperate days of civil war, anarchy and proscription, had witnessed slaughter, misery and suffering on a scale to make them profoundly uneasy if indeed they did not live in a state of almost constant anxiety. Amidst so much human wretchedness, the wreck and ruin of private fortunes and of the currency system of the Republic were relatively minor matters. Both sides in the war had confiscated property, tried to raise funds by selling it at any price and had moreover destroyed the value of money by turning out quantities of debased coins so as to be able to pay their troops and to buy supplies. Enterprise, and the hopes by which it is nourished, languished and sickened.

The best measure of the impoverishment of Roman life resulting from the chronic uncertainties of the grim period of civil war was the sudden bound forward which occurred after Augustus had brought that troubled time to an end by imposing order and peace throughout the Roman world.

Economic  
recovery

During the principate of Augustus the population increased by nearly one million, or about twenty-five per cent (from 4,063,000 to 4,937,000) although some scholars regard this figure as merely the number of male citizens of seventeen years and over. A large number of new colonies were formed by the purchase of land for many of the 300,000 troops whose term of service had expired. A great new building and rebuilding

## Consolidation and Collapse

programme, including repairs to temples, roads and bridges and the reshaping and adornment of the City of Rome, created a demand for materials and labour even if much of it was done by slaves. Sound money was circulating vigorously and its velocity was aided by the huge treasure from Egypt. Many debts could be settled and mortgages paid off, so creating an atmosphere of confidence and expectation, bringing greater ease and prosperity to many. The result was seen in a burst of land speculation and building, especially around Rome. So spectacular was it that Augustus boasted that he had turned a city of brick or mud huts into one of marble.

—rapid  
prosperity

The convergence of the profits of empire upon Rome was of course nothing new, for it had begun under the Republic nearly two centuries previously. Now, however, the flow was regular, sustained and capable of increase as a more tolerable life began to be possible in provinces freed from blood-sucking Roman pro-consuls, grafters and tax-collectors. As servants of Augustus, the emissaries he sent to govern the provinces and to collect their revenues had to behave themselves. This was a pure gain to the provincials and of course to Rome also which was to draw new strength and ultimately new rulers and new supporters for Roman cultural life from what were to become the loyal and, on the whole, tolerably well-managed imperial domains. The wealth of the western world became concentrated in Rome which rapidly attained a magnificence that has hardly yet been surpassed anywhere.

—the Empire  
benefits

Among the chief beneficiaries of all this expansion among the upper classes were the lucky ones who made profitable investments in land and real estate when the market for it had been almost non-existent. Many new fortunes were probably made by small men who were in business as slave owners and slave traders, building contractors, shippers, importers and bankers. They did not count socially, for they were still looked down upon by the better families and the many new families aspiring to social distinction.

—growing  
grandeur of  
Rome

The common people, the *plebs* or populace, although still on a miserably low level of existence, were nevertheless better

—the  
common  
people

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

off than they had been. The more vigorous had enlisted in the army and those who did well and survived were able to establish themselves as smallholders on a colony or in Italy, or to set up as petty traders in the City, thanks to the generous gratuities paid out by Augustus. The large residue of lazy, good-for-nothing slackers and parasites now had an assured free corn supply. Augustus saw the folly of it, but is said to have continued it because he knew that if he did not, someone else would propose it as a political weapon against public order. Clodius evidently was not forgotten. The free water supply was improved by Agrippa who managed it all by employing two hundred and forty of his slaves on doing nothing else but repair the aqueducts. On his death the slaves and the work were taken over as an imperial responsibility by Augustus. Circus races and some mammoth 'Games' or wild beast and gladiator shows were organized to keep the public entertained and a beginning was made in the erection of those great public baths and playgrounds which together with bread, water and circuses were to fill the days of the idle City mobs of Rome for the next three hundred years and more.

All these innovations and achievements were pure gain for the average Roman. The Italians and the provincials also began to revive in the glow of prosperity and progress radiating from Rome. This sense of well-being and security naturally engendered feelings of the warmest gratitude to the man to whom it all seemed to be owing. An aged and experienced Roman of A.D. 1 had already had several possible worlds to contemplate, such as the one-man rule of Pompey; the ideal Republic of Cicero; life under Caesar had he survived, or under Cato had he defeated Caesar; the rule of Antony and his Egyptian queen, or the perpetuation of the rule of the Senators selfishly seeking to monopolize the profits of Empire, fighting each other for the largest share and resolutely excluding all outsiders. Looking back upon all this, he may well have felt that of all those possible worlds, that of Augustus was the best. Whether he would have judged rightly or wrongly is as impossible to determine as it would be to say whether the English would have

—bread and  
circus-shows

—the best  
possible  
world?

done better if William the Conqueror had been defeated at the Battle of Hastings; if the Cavaliers had routed the Roundheads and preserved the throne for Charles I; or if the Americans had lost their War of Independence and had remained, with Canada, within the British Commonwealth.

If he were a reflective, ambitious Roman of the upper class, he would have regretted that the free political activity in which his forebears had indulged was no longer open to him. They however were chiefly to blame for his plight. They had been warned that all was far from well. The Gracchi had given their lives to make that warning clear and the Gracchi were no mob-frenzied demagogues. Others repeated the warning, but in vain. The Senators who had approved the streamlined army formation perfected by Marius should have realized the danger it held for the Republic. If they had failed to do so at the time, Sulla both made it clear beyond any room for doubt and also showed them how to restrain others from using the army against the Republic as he had done so easily and so successfully himself. Having ignored Sulla's lesson they were sharply re-taught it by Pompey and Crassus in 70 B.C. and again given another chance. Pompey gave a new alarm in 61 B.C. when he returned all-powerful from the East, although he left the Senators undisturbed. Again they took no heed. It was their last chance. Julius Caesar, more able, more energetic, more clear-sighted than any of his contemporaries or predecessors, wrenched the power of the Republic from their feeble hands and his successor determined that they should never win it back.

This great revolution in Roman political life had been completed in a hundred years from the death of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C. to the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Thereafter there were no real Roman revolutions and no possibility of them. The political framework of Roman life so patiently, cunningly and persistently devised, shaped and controlled by Augustus, who remained for over forty-four years in complete command of the destinies of the Roman people, proved sufficiently workable and tough to inhibit any serious attempts to overturn it.

Sporadic  
unrest  
during the  
Empire

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

There were, it is true, a long catalogue of civil wars and rebellions during the Empire which he had established. There were palace intrigues and assassinations, there were revolts goaded by the foulest despotism, cruelty and corruption of evil men who were totally unfit to manage the inheritance of Augustus, but there were no political revolutions to change the Empire back into a republic or to take power out of the Emperor's hands. The very idea of a constitutional monarchy did not exist: indeed, it was hardly possible to invent it in the absence of those representative institutions which the ancient world signally failed to develop on any nation-wide scale. Not that in after years there were no nostalgic thoughts about the vanished Republic, but they must have had an antiquarian, theatrical quality, never to be seriously entertained by more than a few men whose practical political judgment does not seem to have been of a very high order.

The Empire  
as a military  
tyranny

Contrary to some recent presentations of the Augustan revolution, it must be regarded in essence as a military tyranny, even if it appears to have been comparatively mild, with its essentially military character well-concealed. *Princeps*, Augustus may have been called, a good senatorial title, but for forty-four years he was sole commander, *Imperator*, of some twenty-five legions. There was moreover never any civil power independent of his personal control, did he choose to exercise it. By nothing is the reality of the military dictatorship of Augustus better confirmed than by the subsequent history of the Roman State. The Emperors who came and went after the final extinction of the Augustan family connection when Nero perished in A.D. 68, all won or held their position thanks to the loyalty of their troops.

Political revolutions, according to Marxist theory, involve the transfer, usually the violent transfer, of political power from one class in society to another class. If that were the only definition of a revolution, it might be said that the change in Roman politics between 133 B.C. and A.D. 14, when Augustus died, was no true revolution because it did not transfer power to a class but to a single person, unless of course the army is

to be regarded as a class. Clearly it should not be, as long as the army obeyed one man. As long as they did so the Emperor was secure but when their loyalty waned or was transferred, the Emperor fell. The underlying military basis of the principate of Augustus may have been cunningly concealed but it was none the less real and fundamental.

Any lingering doubts about the essentially military basis of the imperial system established by Augustus disappear as the history of Rome develops in the later Empire. Before long the army became conscious of its power. In the first century A.D. when the memory of Augustus was yet strong, Tacitus records a conspiracy which, put in the modern idiom, would tell how a couple of corporals plotted to switch the power of the State from one Emperor to another and got away with it. After the precedent set by Augustus in fact, as Mommsen pointed out, any armed man had the right to make himself, or anyone else Emperor, if he could.

Emperors sought to buy the favour of the troops by lavish bribes which ruined the treasury and doomed their successors who might be murdered if they lacked the means of over-bidding the men they succeeded. Attempts to restore discipline and to reduce armies to obedience were usually fatal. If the army had been the old citizen army of the early Republic, its supreme power might have been regarded as a return to something approaching democratic control, crudely established no doubt, and lacking any political organs or machinery of political direction. As it was, Roman armies were largely comprised of the dregs of the people and of barbarians whose periodic butcheries and looting were nothing if not a negative contribution to any process of government. For armies in different parts of the Empire began trying to set up their commander as Emperor so as to profit if he won.

At length after a miserable century of military anarchy, Diocletian, after having divided the Empire in two in A.D. 285, appointed in 293 two Caesars, one to rule under him in the Eastern half of the Empire, the other under his co-Emperor Maximian in the West. In this way sovereignty in the Roman

The Army  
realizes its  
power

The Empire  
divided  
A.D. 285

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

State was again divided as it had been of old under two Consuls, and the army of one Emperor might in theory neutralize that of another, but the change did not long survive. The capital city of the Empire, which had been reunited under Constantine who was supreme by A.D. 325, was transferred to Constantinople in A.D. 330.

The decline of  
Rome begins  
A.D. 330

In outward show, Rome was then at the height of its magnificence, as far as public buildings and impressive monuments, the testimony to its thousand years of history, could give it renown. In essence it was little more than the empty shell of an organism that had once been great. The City endured unspoiled until A.D. 410 when it was captured by Alaric, leader of the Visigoths, and looted for six days, an unbelievable, breathtaking event which shook public opinion throughout the known world. In 455 and 472 it was again sacked but by then the centre of political gravity had moved East. The decline of Rome which thereafter set in was less of a revolution than a slow decay, a change no less revolutionary because it was so unbelievable to those who recalled the City's long history of glory and of grandeur.

To say that a political system is a military despotism or even subject to the influence and control of the army would, according to good liberal tradition, be tantamount to writing it off as a miserable and hopeless tyranny. Such a dismal verdict is, however, not inevitable. After all, the Roman Republic in its finest hours was a civil administration run by soldiers. All important political decisions down to 287 B.C., as we have seen, were made after consulting the army, although it is true that the army spoke only with the voice of its wealthiest and senior members. The two Consuls were generals in full command of Roman armies. Most if not all the Senators and magistrates had seen army service and many had exercised army commands.

Under the Empire the situation was radically different. The army was no longer a citizen army but a standing army recruited from the lowest classes and increasingly manned in later years by men from the provinces and even by barbarians from beyond. From the days of Julius Caesar onwards it no longer



elected its own commanders afresh every year. It was under the permanent command of one man—the Emperor—and he appointed his own staff officers. The public assemblies no longer met to transact business. The Senate continued to do so but it was largely a sham. Before long even a simulation of independent activity by the Senate, even shadow-boxing with vital public issues, became too dangerous. Bad as the situation of the politically active classes had become, they were involved in the general evils of the times in which all Romans lacked fundamental guarantees. They could no longer rely upon due process of law or count upon the enjoyment of those basic human rights which over two thousand years of political experience have taught us to respect as the very bulwarks of civic liberty and of a worthy social existence.

The Roman people's lack of any alternative form of government after the principate of Augustus can be taken as a tribute to his skill and as a testimony to his long reign and his unremitting hard work, but other considerations also arise. Before its final plunge into ruin, it is true that the imperial system had survived shocking troubles in which the Romans were soon involved at the hands of the incompetent successors of Augustus, from which they were temporarily redeemed by a lucky succession of good Emperors from A.D. 69 to A.D. 180. Thereafter, however, there had been a renewed decline into new depths of untold horror and chaos for another century until the final collapse and the barbarian invasions beginning in A.D. 410.

Yet throughout this long and varied period there was always an Emperor of some sort somewhere with an army behind him. There was no thought of anything but the Imperial system of government backed by the army. The reason is not hard to find. There was virtually no political thought at all, no free speculation about public affairs, no play of mind, no competition for public favour, no eager initiative busy about plans for any policy of reform. 'Why not?' is a question loaded with immense significance. For it was not political thought alone that disappeared. Great creative literature also waned and died

Hushed  
voices in  
Imperial  
Rome

Cultural  
decline

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

—literature  
decays

with the extinction of the Republic. It is true that the Augustan Age boasts the imperishable glory of Virgil, Livy, Horace and adornments such as Ovid, Tibullus and Propertius. But Virgil and Horace were middle-aged at the Battle of Actium and Livy was then already 28 years old. They, like all the greatest figures in Roman literature, were Italians not Romans, and they were products of the dying Republic rather than of the rising Empire. Whatever the virtues of the imperial peace, it did not foster literary excellence. *Magna illa ingenia cessere*, said Tacitus, already quoted above, and historians were not the only great geniuses heard no more after the Battle of Actium. 'By the operations of the great Imperial system a hush has come upon eloquence as indeed it has on the world at large.' These words again are those of Tacitus.

No doubt the average Roman was not going to grieve over-much if the virtual death of literature was part of the price he had to pay for peace and prosperity. He had taken scant interest in it, if indeed he was aware of its existence. The real trouble, however, went much deeper. Literature is a symptom of intellectual vitality and cultural creativity. When it fails to appear or what is worse, when it suddenly dries up and disappears among a people by whom it was being nourished and sustained, grave doubts inevitably arise about the true quality and worth of their way of life. They are doubts that find ample confirmation from the record of social manners and from the standards of thought, conduct and behaviour of many of the leading people in imperial Rome from the Emperor downwards. Not without good grounds, the marble city of Rome constructed by Augustus has been shrewdly described as the mausoleum of the Roman Spirit.

During the reign of Augustus the sinister effects of discouraging free thought and discussion had not come to the surface, just as the deposition of a Tribune by Tiberius Gracchus could not be seen in 133 B.C. to presage the violent revolutionary consequences it was to entail. Under the successors of Augustus the crime of injuring or attempting to injure the sovereign power of the Roman people, the *crimen majestatis*,

was extended to cover any treason directed against the Emperor and later, under evil Emperors, to any real or assumed slight that any ill-minded persons might consider to have been levelled against him.

As a result of thus magnifying the *crimen majestatis* a foul breed of informers began to curry favour and to make their fortunes by finding victims to accuse. It became too dangerous to whisper words about politics, let alone to write controversially on the subject. This was a great disaster, for a vital political system depends essentially upon the free exercise of a lively dialectic, otherwise opportunities of adapting institutions and practices to the needs of the moment, which is of the essence of the political process, cannot occur. If men cannot follow where the argument should lead, inevitable decisions have to be taken on the basis of hastily improvised judgments rather than upon a system of matured precepts and living thought, and naturally some of them will be wrong: wrong and irremediable.

It may be objected that political thought and discussion were free enough under the Republic, that there were no informers then, and yet Republican liberties were lost. It is of course true that freedom of thought and speech cannot be counted upon everywhere and at all times to produce great geniuses or even to advance political understanding. But one certain way of failing to advance is to make all political discussion highly dangerous to those who engage in it. Moreover it must be remembered that the Romans had hardly begun to indulge in reasoned philosophical thought upon the principles of politics before the Republic was at an end.

Romans who read Greek were of course able to profit from Plato's *Statesman*, *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics* and his comparative study of political constitutions, all of which were renowned and had been in circulation in the Hellenic world for three hundred years before the fall of the Roman Republic. The generation of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus might read Polybius. But few Romans read Greek and even in Cicero's day, apart from him, few thought that they had much to learn from the Greeks. His ambition to try to transmute the

The Imperial  
terror

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

thought of Plato into Latin was in itself a great pioneer effort and it did not come until Caesar was already supreme. So even if Cicero had not become discredited as a failure and as a victim of political proscription, his literary efforts came much too late. In any case they would have had too small an audience to have been able to deflect the course of events. Where his tremendous oratorical powers failed to sway the course of history, despite his great force and the susceptibility of his audience, it is unlikely that a few rolls of parchment hidden in a few wooden boxes among the homes of one or two studious men would have stopped either Julius Caesar or Augustus from climbing to supreme power.

Yet an audience and a following that Cicero failed to find in his lifetime began many hundred years later to honour him with their attention. Then hundreds and soon thousands, and hundreds of thousands, not in Rome alone nor in Italy, but wherever men honour learning and literary skill, turned to his speeches and his writings, to be stirred and thrilled by his impassioned stand for humanity, for decency, for fair dealing and above all for justice between man and man derived from that rule of law:

—Rule of Law  
forgotten

Not one law for Rome and another for Athens, one thing today and another tomorrow, but a law eternal and unchangeable, for all people and in every age, the general master and governor, the one God of all, itself its own author, promulgator and enforcer.

Hopefully rather than realistically, Cicero rounded off this impassioned, inspired utterance by declaring, 'He who does not share this sentiment flies from himself and from nature as a man despised.'

That was what was at stake in the Roman revolution. By sacrificing it to one man backed by all the legions of Rome, the Romans signed away their birthright. 'That which the Emperor desires shall have the force of law' was the doctrine which replaced the Republican rule of law and with it went

the basis of all security and all fundamental guarantee of justice. Over the free development of human thought and expression hung the thought which might become a terrible paralysing fear, 'shall I offend the Emperor or one of his powerful toadies?' The few interludes under high-minded Emperors when such fears were in abeyance were too brief and uncertain to repair the damage done to Roman cultural life by their base and often villainous successors. 'Such blessed periods,' as Tacitus said of his life under Nerva and Trajan between A.D. 96-117, 'when a man might think what he liked and say what he thought, were all too rare'.

Yet by that time the cause of human freedom had fallen too low to be revived. Tacitus seems to have been the only writer of great eminence to seek to profit by the new indulgence and he had no successors.

Some men realized well enough what had happened. The unknown writer in the days of Tacitus of the celebrated treatise on the Sublime, attributed of old to Longinus, makes one of the characters in his dialogue refer to what he called

—minds in  
blinkers

the trite explanation that democracy is the kind nursing-mother of genius and that literary power may be said to share its rise and fall with democracy. . . . For freedom . . . has power to feed the imagination of the lofty-minded and to inspire hope. . . . Today we seem in our boyhood to learn the lessons of a righteous servitude, being all-but completely swathed in its customs and observances when our thoughts are young and tender, so that we emerge in no other guise than that of sublime flatterers.

He put the point more shortly by saying, 'no slave ever becomes an orator.'

The lumbering machinery of State which, as we have seen, Augustus began to organize and set in motion, went stolidly forward. Emperors might come and go, but the routine of administration went on in his name whoever was in effective control of the army for the time being. The character of the Emperor began in time to be of lesser account in day-to-day

Problems of  
Totalitarian-  
ism

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

administrative affairs, although he was naturally always a force to be reckoned with and often to be greatly feared, particularly by those in the limelight around the imperial palace.

—bureaucratic  
controls

Judged by present-day standards, bureaucracy had already got to pretty serious lengths by the second century A.D., in so far as Pliny's letters to the Emperor Trajan afford a reasonable sample of the kind of problems which a timid senior public servant referred for the personal decision of the Emperor. He was then governor of the province of Bithynia, probably in A.D. 112, and he sent a stream of letters back to his friend Trajan the Emperor. They included applications for the grant of Roman citizenship to aliens and freedwomen, for permission to move some statues of previous Emperors, for jobs and honours for himself and his friends. He reported the route and manner of conveyance that were to take him to his province, asked for a surveyor to measure public buildings, inquired whether soldiers or public slaves should guard prisoners, whether a local prefect on the Black Sea coast could have one or two more soldiers, whether the inhabitants of a small town might repair a public bath at their own expense, whether after a fire, the town of Nicomedia might recruit a fire brigade and so forth. Trajan replied patiently and apparently personally; he refused permission for the fire brigade because 'whatever title we give them and whatever the purpose may be, men who meet together for a common purpose turn into a political association before long'. When fires were of much less concern to Emperors than sedition, it is not surprising that local initiative was stifled.

—denial of  
self-govern-  
ment

It is difficult to believe that Trajan wrote or dictated all these replies himself. Some are the kind of letter that an efficient secretary would produce from his knowledge of precedents and the likely reply he would guess that the Emperor would send. The tremendous task of controlling some thirty provinces as well as maintaining the Roman army and supervising affairs in Rome and Italy was such that it is impossible to believe that one man, however gifted, could undertake it all personally. Emperors, moreover, were often away. Trajan remained on the

## Consolidation and Collapse

Rhine and did not visit Rome until two years had passed after his accession. Meanwhile the affairs of state had to go on without him to a very considerable extent in so far as minor matters were concerned. Some urgent decisions might also have to be taken because they could not wait for a messenger galloping on horseback over the Alps and up the Rhine and back to Rome. A core of administrative competence must therefore have existed in Rome, subject to the Emperor's direction and control but nevertheless capable to some extent of carrying on public business on his behalf and in his name although without his personal intervention.

Imperial control of the courts also could not always have been a matter of direct intervention. As remarked already above, it is not true that judgments in all cases were delivered personally by the Emperor, although since he was a patron whose personal clients were the whole population of Italy, it would not have been foreign to Roman practice for him to have intervened in their disputes and troubles. Augustus and the early Emperors did indeed spend far too much time in listening to trivial, petty cases which today would be summarily disposed of by a police court magistrate. Yet the Praetors' courts went on building up slowly but surely that vast body of Roman Law which has been one of the most enduring legacies bequeathed by the Romans as a practical guide to many who have had to devise and apply legal principles in creating the communities and states of the modern world.

Yet over all Roman legal practice hung the formidable menace of that pernicious doctrine *quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem*. No single phrase comes nearer to distilling the very essence of the revolution of Caesar and of Augustus than this. The fear of iniquitous judgments and the denial of justice was merely part of the evil. Far worse was the fear of attempting to get justice if one of the Emperor's favourites or protégés was likely to be the defendant. Imperial agents, therefore, enjoyed a degree of immunity from due process of law that could make the idea of justice a bad joke whenever the Emperor was himself corrupt and depraved. Unfortunately for humanity,

—application  
of Roman law

—Emperor  
always has  
the last word

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

this lesson of the last Roman revolution has never been properly or generally assimilated. The English are not the only people of modern times who have waded through bloodshed and civil war in order to relearn it. Who after 1933 dared to drag Goebbels or Goering before a German judge and what would it have availed him had he done so? How vigorous dared the defence be in trying to save men accused by a prominent Nazi or by Stalin, if indeed there was any defence? Who would dare to prosecute the secretary or any of the leading members of the Communist Party in Moscow with any hope of success, however just his cause?



## The Perspective of Time

WE NOW HAVE a ready standard by which to estimate the extent to which elementary human rights and fundamental freedoms are available in any given society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations at the end of 1948 sets forth their scope and nature in a document devised after long and careful study by specialists from many parts of the world.

It is doubtful whether the Romans in the most flourishing days of their Empire could have had any confidence in the enjoyment of any of them. It is true that they would not have believed it possible that anyone ever should be able to live with such protection as we now unquestionably assume should exist in every free country. In so far as they thought about such problems, they put the emphasis upon the duties of individuals rather than upon their rights.

No Roman considered that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, although some under the influence of Stoic philosophy were beginning to see that everyone should act towards others as they would wish themselves to be treated, in a spirit of brotherhood. Despite Cicero's eloquent defence of the idea, they did not consider that rights and freedoms could exist independently of national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, nor were they likely to consider other nations and peoples entitled to the same rights as they were. Tolerant of most religions, they persecuted Christians. Slavery, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment were all part of everyday life, and they did not allow that everyone had the right to life, liberty and security of person. That right was indeed more secure for full Roman citizens during the Republic than it was during most of the Empire, for then there was no equality before the law, far less possibility of winning an effective remedy in independent and impartial tribunals against acts violating fundamental rights

Human  
Rights in  
the Roman  
Empire

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

and freedoms, including arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and exile. Romans were better placed during the Republic in these respects. They were protected by their Tribunes in the Republic but the Emperor, as a perpetual Dictator, left no real responsibilities to Tribunes who soon disappeared from the political scene.

Such is the essence of the first ten articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The others equally could not be assumed in Rome. A Roman might have his property confiscated, he dared not freely express his opinions, he was forbidden freedom to assemble and associate in peace, for during the Empire he was no longer able to take part in the government of his country directly or through chosen representatives.

During the Republic the will of the people had been regarded as the basis of the authority of government, and it was expressed in periodic and genuine elections, even although in earlier times it was neither by universal and equal suffrage nor by secret vote. During the Empire the fiction of such elections was so transparent that they were soon given up altogether. As for rights to work, to form trade unions, to be guaranteed social services, including education and the free participation in the cultural life of the community, it can only be said that neither the Republican nor the imperial government possessed or tried to create the means by which they could be assured. The very ideas behind them are products of our own times.

Roman  
Private Law

The preservation of human rights in the sense described briefly above is not of course the whole of law. Generations of lawyers and judges were active under the Empire, further refining and carrying forward the formulation of the laws of property, of inheritance, of marriage and family status, of contracts, and the criminal law in non-political cases. For the most part all this legal activity went on under the rule of law because it did not invite interference from authority. On the other hand, questions of personal freedom of speech and writing and of political assembly and political action soon came under suspicion and were therefore vulnerable to political interference.

The rule of law, however, is an idea that extends beyond providing standards for the law of contract, of damages, of property and so forth. After the experience of the twentieth century the question of the guarantee of individual freedom and liberty is the acid test of any legal system. In so far as a short and summary judgment is possible it must be said that human rights were not legally recognized and were much less secure under the Roman Empire than during the Republic.

An effort is sometimes made to palliate this damaging indictment after conceding its substantial truth, by holding that the insecurity, uncertainty and desperate risks to which Romans were exposed did not seriously affect more than the most prominent and wealthy citizens of Rome. The average man, it is said, did not have to worry; he could go about his affairs with a sense of peace and security greater than he had ever known; protected against external enemies by armies in which he did not have to fight; protected against common fraud, wrongs and crimes by the imperial police and the law courts and against disasters such as fire by the imperial fire brigade. Imperial bounty, the changed political and social atmosphere, made it less necessary for him to have to make a daily and degrading pilgrimage to the house of some great man there to fawn on his patron for a crust and a penny and to endure the scorn and insolence of his servants and flunkies, although the minions of the Emperor continued to have a crowded levee. But to regard such improvements as adequate and satisfactory is surely to acquiesce in a universal servitude from which there was no hope of escape by rising in the social scale? Under the Republic there had been opportunities for small men to use their abilities with good effect. Under the Empire all such energies, as soon as they began to emerge in any significant way, had to be controlled and directed with an eye upon the likely reaction of the Emperor's agents and favourites.

When the Emperor was strong, resolute and just, as Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius tried to be, life could expand and blossom. But Marcus Aurelius was succeeded by Commodus, his eldest son, whose horrible excesses can only be explained by the

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

assumption that he went mad. The imperial system created with such painstaking care by Augustus and managed by the Flavian, Spanish and Antonine Emperors with energy and considerable devotion to duty and to public welfare, might therefore, and did suddenly, fall into the hands of a madman. The range of action of the most desperate tyrant is no doubt limited by his vision and what he could find time to do during each twenty-four hours, but the havoc he was able to wreak before outraged humanity brought him down, vastly and wantonly added to the sum of human misery.

Well does the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights hold up for detestation the disregard and contempt for human rights that have in the past resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind and well does it declare that such rights must have the protection of the rule of law if men are not to be forced as a last resort into open rebellion against tyranny and oppression.

When Augustus subtly undermined that rule of law and thereafter his less scrupulous and less timid successors found that they could flout it with impunity, there was but one remedy and that was to assassinate them. Such is the situation in most police states where one man can tyrannize over others. Even when the tyrant was said to have died a natural death as Tiberius and Claudius may have done, it was commonly believed that their end had been hastened, like that of Stalin in recent times. The more notorious criminals such as Gaius (Caligula), Nero, Domitian Commodus, Antonius Aurelius (Caracalla), Elagabalus and many of their successors all met the violent end their crimes had so richly merited.

The degeneration and decay of civic enterprise had reached such a pitch when Diocletian tried to pull the Roman Empire together at the end of the third century A.D. that he seems to have felt compelled to try to organize everything down to the last detail. Prices were minutely regulated and part of his official tariff of prices has survived. It is the only tolerably comprehensive price list we have over the whole thousand years of Roman history.

Nemesis and  
Imperial  
Totalitarian-  
ism

## The Perspective of Time

From then onwards, ranks, titles, precedences, were minutely graded and were adorned with florid oriental-sounding names. Emperors began to refer to themselves as 'Our Clemency', 'Our Omniscience', 'Our Serenity' and 'Our Divinity'. Their predecessors became 'Our Sainted Father'.

The subservient populace had to do what they were told and no more. Sons were bound to their father's calling and were sternly forbidden to aspire to rise above their humble social station. To enforce the imperial decrees and to maintain the vast creaking machinery of State, secret police were employed in great numbers. They, in turn, were spied upon by police more secret still. Yet in spite of it all, or because of it, the population became listless and their numbers declined. Large, very sparsely inhabited tracts were an open invitation to the barbarians, who were able to migrate rather than to conquer, often living among the few remaining Romanized inhabitants they found there.

There were other causes for the loss of numbers, for the second century A.D. had witnessed some devastating outbreaks of plague. In 166 to 180 and again from 250 to 270 it raged with a virulence and created a havoc that was probably not again seen in Europe until the catastrophic Black Death of A.D. 1348. Europe recovered from that deadly visitation but Rome seems to have lacked the vigour and the resilience to revive.

It has not been difficult to see why the men who should have been the leaders of Roman society suffered most as victims of imperial absolutism. A strange chance has preserved for us a document dated 25 December A.D. 438 to light up, in one brief flash, the pathetic fate of that Roman Senate which Cicero, five hundred years earlier, had proudly described as 'the chief men of the most honourable council on the whole face of the earth'. We have the minutes of a meeting held in that year to receive the code of laws compiled by the Emperor Theodosius II, then ruling the Empire from Constantinople. His son-in-law, Valentinian III, established in Ravenna, was Emperor of the West but subordinate to him. The duty of laying the code before the Senate was undertaken by 'The Most Noble and

Serious  
decline in  
manpower

Roman  
'yes-men' in  
the fifth  
century A.D.

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Illustrious Praetorian Prefect and Consul Ordinary' whose first few sentences of fulsome stuff about 'Our immortal Emperors and the Most Sacred Emperor, Our Lord Theodosius' were greeted by the whole assembly shouting, 'Thou art newly eloquent, truly eloquent.' The gist of his message was the Emperor's remark that his laws 'must undoubtedly be valid and the power to emend and to revoke shall be reserved to Our Clemency'. The Senate's blind and unanimous consent must have been as carefully rehearsed as the proceedings at a communist party assembly, for they all had to shout what seems to have been a lengthy sort of political litany. It is so long and so nauseating that merely a few of its forty-three chants will be quoted here.

The assembly shouted.

Augustuses of Augustuses, the greatest of Augustuses  
*repeated eight times*

God gave you to us! God save you for us!  
*repeated twenty-seven times*

As Roman Emperors, pious and felicitous, may You rule  
for many years!  
*repeated twenty-two times*

For the good of the human race, for the good of the  
Senate, for the good of the State, for the good of all!  
*repeated twenty-four times*

Our hope is in You, You are our salvation!  
*repeated twenty-six times*

May it please our Augustuses to live for ever!  
*repeated twenty-two times*

Dearer than our children, dearer than our parents!  
*repeated sixteen times*

We give thanks for this regulation of Yours!  
*repeated twenty-three times.*

When, after this dreary and humiliating performance, the Senators at length got back to the luxurious homes that they retained at the price of such servitude, they might have turned, had they dared, to the works of Cicero, '... a despotism not

## The Perspective of Time

only hateful to a Roman but one not even a Persian would tolerate . . .'; his ringing phrases would have shown up the lie in the souls of the degenerate men who sat in the seats of Cato, of Brutus and of Cicero himself; men no longer worthy of the name of Romans. When public life had reached so low a degree of degradation, the Goths and Vandals bringing fire and the sword to sweep it away seem almost necessary as Nature's scavengers to compel men to make a fresh start in the management of their affairs.

No two revolutions are exactly alike, but it may help to sharpen up our ideas upon the nature of the revolutions of Rome, particularly that of Caesar and Augustus, to inquire what features, if any, they have in common with the great revolutions of modern times, such as those of France and of Russia.

As in those revolutions, so in Rome in the first century B.C., the men who should have defended the established form of government seemed to have lacked sufficient energy and determination to maintain the very way of life on which they themselves depended for their own careers, their own security and well-being. Already at the end of the second century B.C. they had shown unmistakable signs of their loss of grip. There were the shocking scandals of the war against Jugurtha and of his success in bribing senatorial commanders. At the same time, the men the Senate sent against the Cimbri and the Teutones were failures, as the shattering defeat of the Romans at Arausio in 105 B.C. alarmingly demonstrated. It was a 'new man', Marius, who had to create a new military machine out of the forces of the Republic. With it he saved the Republic and wiped out the shame of senatorial failure. Instead of taking this new weapon he had forged firmly into their own control, the Senators left it lying about, as it were, so that a Sulla or a Caesar could pick it up and use it for their own private ambitions. Clearly senatorial wisdom and resolution left a lot to be desired.

It is true that soon after these events political murders wiped out some of the best stock and that the subsequent uneasy

Modern  
Revolutions  
and the  
Revolutions  
of Ancient  
Rome

—demoraliza-  
tion of ruling  
classes

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

—liquidation  
of the few  
who resist

atmosphere and political disturbances culminating in the horrors of the civil war and the proscriptions of the Triumvirate had terribly reduced the ranks of those who had stood resolutely for Republican freedom. It is also true that there had been firm opponents of the forces of revolution who were prepared, like Cicero, to die for the cause, but they were too few and had been overborne by the ruthlessness of the revolutionaries. Apart from such really resolute men, too many of the old senatorial ruling class, just like the French and Russian aristocrats, were neither vigorous nor united in their self-defence; so they may be said to have lost the old faith of their forefathers in the virtues of their Republican system and to have been half-hearted in its defence. Cicero's scorn of 'the fish-breeders' and his many disillusioned remarks about the so-called 'loyalists', some of which have been quoted already, make it clear that like other defenders of established authority against revolutionary usurpers, they failed to mobilize their own forces as they might have done. As we have also seen, they had had ample warnings of the way things were going ever since the days of Tiberius Gracchus.

—ruthless  
violence  
triumphs

The Roman revolution of Augustus also had characteristics of other and later great revolutions. It was ushered in by a reign of terror. It centralized power in the hands of one ruthless man. It replaced or diluted one ruling class by another made up of new men. It improved the efficacy of the administrative machinery of government. It transferred an enormous amount of property from one set of people to others; in a spectacular fashion to some of the chief beneficiaries, but a great deal was thrown on the market. In all these respects the Gracchan revolution fell far short, but that, of course, was a revolution that failed.

Contrasts in  
the Roman,  
French and  
Russian  
revolutions

Unlike the French and Russian revolutions, the Roman revolution was not a movement that can be described in modern terms as a movement from the Right to the Left in politics, for such words have no real relevance to Roman conditions. There was, moreover, no pretence of ending the tyranny of a ruling clique in order to restore freedom. Peace



and security were its aims, not freedom. It was not Caesar, but his enemies who put the cap of liberty on their coins.

The Roman revolution was not the result of fierce class hatreds, nor could it pretend, as the beneficiaries of the French and Russian revolutions have pretended, to have been supported by great masses of the people. Votes or plebiscites are rarely, if ever, taken to decide whether a people want a revolution. Such indications as Cicero reported in his letters, and he is our sole contemporary 'mass-observer' of the state of public opinion, show that Caesar who began the final Roman revolution had public opinion against him. Unlike the situation in France or Russia, revolutionary enthusiasm in Rome had not been stirred up by the ardour of a few irresponsible intellectuals inflated by a fine conceit in the infallibility of their own particular political nostrums. The lack of such theorists comes out in the fact that, unlike the French revolution, the Roman revolution ended, instead of began, a philosophy and a tradition of revolt against established authority.

Far from advancing the cause of democracy and popular government, breaking down class barriers, removing exclusive rights and privileges as the modern revolutions have, often fallaciously, pretended to do, the whole effort of Augustus was in the other direction. He strove to restore patrician pride and to revive decayed rites and customs.

No Roman writer, as far as we know, attempted in the manner of the lackeys of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin, to furbish up a respectable political theory to justify absolutism. The need for it was indeed at first played down. For many years the harsh reality of one-man rule was hypocritically, cunningly and successfully concealed under a sham façade of pretended republicanism. The civil government of Rome was carried on under the old formulas, and none but those who might have been the governing classes and other well-informed people could immediately realize how bogus the whole façade really was. They perforce had to put up with it for the sake of a quiet life. Later, when realization of the hopelessness of the cause of individual liberty and private political aspirations stimulated sensations of

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

acute frustration, they had to be stifled by pious phrases barely concealing the bitter irony in which they had been framed. Tacitus, writing probably between A.D. 102 and 107 under the humane, enlightened, but none the less firm Emperor Trajan, had to say that political oratory characterized periods of freedom and turbulence. There was no need for it in a well-run state in which all the power was held by one man and he was the wisest. Sensible men soon arrived at the right decisions, so there was no need for lengthy debates in the Senate.

A later commentator summed up the development by saying that 'not in institutions only, but in the hearts of men, liberty withered away and its place was taken by servility, and stoicism, and Byzantine Christianity'. So far is it from being true that cultural life can be independent of its political setting, that, as the Roman experience proves, both are but aspects of men's fundamental attitude to life. It is to this fact that the study of revolution, whether Roman or any other, owes its commanding interest and attraction.

## Epilogue

IN RETROSPECT, Roman revolutions may seem to have been inevitable because of the stubborn, mulish incapacity of the ruling class to read the signs of the times and to accept their responsibility for adapting the social, economic and political policy of the Republic to the changing needs of an expanding and developing Empire. But it would be naïve to look for one single explanation, such as the failure of nerve of the governing class, for the explosion that resulted. Too much is involved in the many-sided life of a great people for such single, simple aspects of it to explain their fate. Not merely their physical health and strength, their education or their lack of it, their means of livelihood, their numbers training and skills, their industry and co-operative spirit, their form of government, their political awareness, their fortunes in war and their ability to defend themselves, their relations with other peoples, but their religious outlook and their whole scheme of values, their cultural life, have all to be taken into account.

There is in fact more to the problem than the sum of all these aspects and factors in social life. In the last analysis the matter seems to rest upon what may be called the general 'set' and direction of mind, upon the spontaneity and energy of the great mass of the individuals in any given society and, above all, upon the strength of determination of every member of it to uphold common ideas about all that which gives meaning and value to life. The Romans of early Republican days, despite their often acute differences, were able to agree upon what they regarded as fundamentals—upon their attitudes to the gods, to their solemn oaths and binding pledges, to the security of their City with its hearths and homes. They, that is most of them, were idealists in that they put their duty towards these matters first, before any consideration of personal ease and comforts.

It was only when this stern attitude was given up, when the

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

Romans began to go to the other extreme and to put the enjoyment of tangible sensate satisfactions first, that troubles began. In the days of Augustus the rot had gone far. Horace put the real trouble into four words when he asked, 'What's the use of laws if we lack moral fibre?'—*quid leges sine moribus?* From then onwards the standard became simply the fullest possible indulgence in selfish personal pleasures and the excitement of the senses at the circus or the arena; at the tavern and the table; at the baths and the theatre. The Romans, who had by then become mainly a race of Romans by adoption rather than by birth or descent, ceased to be the well-knit co-operative community of the early Republic. They were not spontaneously animated by public spirit, devotion to the Republic, and by loyalty to the rule of law. That great principle, like the spirit of the constitution which it sustained and fortified, was neither sufficiently understood nor recognized to be able to generate a will and a determination which might have united to save the State.

How tenaciously the great majority of Romans clung to their routine of City life comes out in a moving poem written early in the fifth century A.D. by a romanized Gaul on his way back to his native land to try to save his patrimony in Toulouse from the Visigoths who were swarming southwards. His name was Rutilius Claudius Namatianus. Like so many other provincials, he had fallen under the sway of the imperial City where he had risen like his father before him to high honours in the service of Rome and its Emperors. Both had become Prefect, or civil and military governor of Rome.

On that October day in the year A.D. 417 as he journeyed sadly to Ostia to take a ship, because the usual overland route through Northern Italy was no longer safe, he kept casting sad glances back to the distant horizon where rose the smoke haze of the great city, the capital of the universe. He seemed still to hear the frenzied shouts of the spectators still thronging the amphitheatres and the circuses. In spite of the incredible disaster only seven years previously when the Goths led by Alaric had burst through the weakened defences and looted the City,

Rutilius could not imagine that it might utterly perish. 'As long as the earth endures and heaven upholds the stars, there shall be no limit to the centuries before you,' was his farewell message to Rome, 'Queen of the World, bright star of the firmament, mother of men and of gods in whose temples we come nearer to heaven. Never shall I cease to sing your praises . . . your glories, like the sun's rays, reach to the uttermost ends of the earth.' Here was no incipient revolutionary, hoping for a new form of government, no rat deserting a sinking ship.

Yet for a long while a vast and silent revolution had been going on all around him. On his way he encountered a once gay, rich young man who, converted to the still rather new Christian faith, had become a recluse. Rutilius, a good pagan, recoiled in horror at the sight of him, saying that 'he had been driven by the Furies to leave the world of men for a disgusting retreat, where, poor deluded wretch, he supposes that the divine spark will sustain him, provided that he lives in squalor'. To Rutilius, Christianity was 'worse than the fabled poisons of Circe, for while she changed the bodies of men into animals, it transformed their very souls'. It was Rome's misfortune that this transformation was occurring at the very moment when barbarians from northern and eastern wastes were massing to crash through the defences of the Empire, of Italy and of the eternal City itself.

Divided within and seriously reduced in manpower, Rome was in no condition to organize resistance on an adequate scale. The more reflective, spiritually minded dwellers in the City who had turned to Christianity hardly had an overpowering urge to die in the defence of pagan sensualists. Alaric was a Christian too. Increasingly, Roman loyalties were given to a kingdom that was not of this world. Herein was the final revolution in which Romans rebelled, not against constituted political authority after the manner of the revolutionaries so far described in this book, but against the very way of life which that authority sustained.

Because revolutions, like wars, begin in the minds of men,

## The Revolutions of Ancient Rome

a change of heart and mind can alone cause or cure them. The final Roman political revolution, engineered, perfected and transmitted by Augustus, ultimately failed because the system it established could not elicit deep enough loyalties in the minds of men. The appeal it sought to make was in fact less to their minds and hearts than to their worldly interests—to their stomachs. Remarkably successful with the masses, no doubt for this reason, it had no enduring claims upon all those with thoughts beyond their sensate satisfactions, who in all ages are alone the true leaders of men. For them, Roman life had become less a world than a chaos, despite its seemingly so well-established material form and its set routine, hardened into a pattern over the centuries. Those with a mind of their own and with other interests than the daily round of eating, drinking, sex, baths and circuses no longer looked to City life for joy. Despising alike its excitements, pomp and glory, they sought elsewhere a peace which the world could not give.

The prophecy that when Rome falls, the world shall fall, then came true. For, after all, what does 'the world' really mean for anybody apart from all those things that they prize and value? A Christian in Rome could not venerate the temples of the heathen gods. The statues and monuments glorifying the deified Julius, the deified Augustus and later Emperors who on their death were proclaimed also to be gods, whatever their crimes and enormities, were all odious in the sight of a true believer in the Christian gospel. Odious also were the lascivious haunts of the baths. Even more odious were the amphitheatres which had witnessed so many Christian martyrdoms. Would it be remarkable if Christians cared for none of these things? Would it be surprising if large numbers of Romans therefore almost longed for the day when the wind of destruction should blast it all so 'that the place thereof should know it no more'?

The wheels on Time's chariot had indeed gone full circle since the first Roman revolution nearly a thousand years back had precariously set up the tiny Republic. They had been years filled with epic stories which the memory of man will not

willingly let go. The Romans, like Julius Caesar, had lived long enough for glory. A mighty change came over them at last which was more than a revolution because it did more than transfer political power from one class to another, for when it was finally accomplished all the old classes had disappeared and new men had come to take over their heritage.

# Chronological Table

## *Beginnings of Rome*

- B.C.  
700-600 Etruscans dominate Central Italy  
Greeks colonize Southern Italy  
753 Traditional date of Foundation of Rome by Romulus  
640 Rome becomes an Etruscan city  
578-535 Reign of Servius Tullius, Etruscan King of Rome  
535-509 Reign of Tarquin the last King (Etruscan) of Rome

## *Establishment of the Republic. Struggle for Constitutional Reform*

- 509 FIRST ROMAN REVOLUTION  
494 SECOND ROMAN REVOLUTION. Secession of the Plebeians  
Appointment of Tribunes of the People  
471 Plebeian public assembly elects Tribunes annually  
451 Committee of Ten (*Decemviri*) appointed to replace all magistrates  
450 Law of Twelve Tables. Beginning of the Rule of Law in Rome  
Second Committee of Ten (*Decemviri*) replace first, refuse to lay down their office and provoke the  
449 THIRD ROMAN REVOLUTION. Revolt of Army after death of Virginia. Powers of Tribunes confirmed. *Decemviri* replaced by Consuls. The 'Struggle of the Orders' for political and social equality continues until 287 B.C.

B.C.

- 445 Military Tribunes with consular powers replace Consuls to allow plebeians to become eligible. Inter-marriage of plebeians and patricians allowed  
443 Office of Censor created for patricians only  
421 Plebeians eligible for election as Quaestors  
409 First plebeian Quaestor  
400 Plebeians first elected as Military Tribunes with consular powers  
396 Romans capture Etruscan Veii besieged since 406  
390 Gauls sack Rome  
384 Execution of M. Manlius  
367 Laws of two Tribunes C. Licinius Stolo and L. Sextius passed after ten years' agitation. Plebeians eligible as Consuls  
L. Sextius becomes first plebeian Consul  
New office of Praetor, limited to patricians, established and of Curule Aediles in which patricians and plebeians alternate  
356 First plebeian Dictator (C. Marcius Rutilus)  
343-41 First Samnite War  
339 Authority of Plebeian Assembly further strengthened. One Censor to be plebeian  
340-338 War with Latins  
337 First plebeian Praetor (Publilius Philo)



## Chronological Table

B.C.

- 332 First plebeian Censor (Publius Philo)
- 327-304 Second Samnite War
- 326 One of the consuls for 327 (Publius Philo) prolonged as proconsul for first time
- 304 A freedman clerk publishes the pontiff's hitherto secret code of legal procedure
- 300 Plebeians eligible for the nine elections as Augurs and eight as Pontiffs
- 298-291 THIRD SAMNITE WAR
- 287 Secession of Plebeians and FOURTH ROMAN REVOLUTION  
Resolutions of Plebeian Assembly recognized henceforth as valid laws of Rome  
Conclusion of popular struggle to reshape the Constitution of the Republic

### *Roman Supremacy in Italy and Mediterranean*

- 266 Rome wins supremacy in Italy south of Cisalpine Gaul (River Po)
- 264 First exhibition of Gladiators killing each other for show
- 264-241 First Punic War
- 241 Reform of Army Public Assembly
- 232 Agrarian Law of C. Flaminius Tribune, sharing land taken from Gauls among the plebeians
- 218-201 Second Punic War
- 217 Hannibal defeats Romans at Lake Trasimene
- 216 Hannibal defeats Romans at Cannae
- 212 Comedies of Plautus first performed in Rome

B.C.

- 207 Romans defeat Hasdrubal at the Metaurus
- 202 Scipio defeats Hannibal at Zama in N. Africa  
Dictator appointed in Rome for last time until Sulla in 82 B.C.
- 200-196 Second Macedonian War
- 197 Roman victory at Cynoscephalae
- 196 T. Quinctius Flaminius, proconsul, proclaims independence of the Greeks
- 195 M. P. Cato Consul
- 192-188 War against King Antiochus of Syria
- 189 Roman victory at Magnesia
- 184-182 Cato, Censor
- 172 Two plebeian Consuls elected for first time
- 171-167 The Macedonian War
- 168 Roman victory at Pydna
- 167 Romans cease to pay taxes. Public expenditure covered by foreign tribute. Polybius brought as one of 1,000 Greek prisoners to Rome, writes his History of Rome down to 145-44 B.C.
- 161 Greek philosophers and teachers of oratory expelled from Rome
- 163-160 Plays by Terence performed in Rome
- 156 Lex Aelia and Lex Fufia modifying powers of Tribunes
- 155 A permanent theatre in Rome, demolished by Consul when nearly finished
- 150-146 Third Punic War and obliteration of Carthage

## Chronological Table

### *Revolutionary Economic Policies*

- B.C.
- 145 Laelius abandons plans for Agrarian reforms
- 139 Slave revolt in Sicily. Vote by ballot instead of orally introduced for elections of magistrates
- 135-131 Great slave revolt in Sicily under Eunus
- 133 Tiberius Gracchus, Tribune, secures Agrarian law enforcing legal limits on private possession of land, but deposes another Tribune who vetoed the measure  
TIBERIUS KILLED while a candidate for re-election
- 132 Gracchan Land Commission of three men begins reallocation of public land under the Law of Tiberius Gracchus
- 131 Voting by ballot introduced in passing and repealing laws
- 123 Gaius Gracchus, Tribune, renews his brother's agrarian law; subsidizes citizens' wheat supply
- 122 Gracchus re-elected, transfers judicial duties in Court of Claims from Senators to Equites. Is outbid for public favour by M. Livius Drusus
- 121 MURDER OF G. GRACCHUS and 3,000 of his followers

### *Beginnings of Struggles for Personal Political Supremacy*

- 116-112 Jugurtha disturbs the peace in Africa
- 112-106 War against Jugurtha who bribed Roman commanders
- 113 108 105 Romans defeated by Cimbri

B.C.

- 107 Marius Consul
- 106 Cicero and Pompey born
- 106 105 Marius Proconsul
- 104-100 Marius, Consul, reforms Roman army
- 103-99 Slave revolt in Sicily
- 102 Victory of Marius over Teutoni at Aquae Sextiae
- 101 Victory of Marius over Cimbri
- 100 Saturninus, Tribune, and Glaucia, Praetor, propose new land laws and corn laws, but are murdered
- 95 Law expelling Italians from Rome
- 91 Failure and sudden death of Senatorial reformer M. Livius Drusus.  
OUTBREAK OF SOCIAL WAR
- 89 Rome extends citizenship to many Italians. End of Social War
- 88 Sulla retains his command against Mithridates which had been voted to Marius who is driven from Rome. Mithridates murders Italian and Roman businessmen
- 87 Marius and Cinna murder prominent Romans
- 86 Death of Marius
- 85-83 The Marians Cinna and Carbo prepare to resist Sulla
- 84 Sulla concludes peace with Mithridates
- 82 Sulla defeats the Marians (November) who were being helped by Samnites  
Sulla becomes Dictator and proscribes his enemies
- 81 Sulla restates and reforms the Republican Constitution

## Chronological Table

B.C.

- 79 Sulla retires to private life
- 73 Slave revolt under Spartacus
- 71 Spartacus and his followers are destroyed
- 70 Pompey (36) and Crassus (c. 43) impose themselves as Consuls.  
Birth of Virgil
- 67 Pompey liquidates piracy in the Mediterranean
- 66 Pompey given vast extraordinary powers in the war against Mithridates
- 65 Birth of Horace
- 63 Cicero Consul (44). Demagogic agrarian bill of Rullus  
Conspiracy of Catiline. Execution of five conspirators (Dec.)  
Caesar (37) elected Pontifex Maximus
- 62 Defeat and death of Catiline
- 61 Pompey returns from the East. Clodius acquitted by bribery
- 60 The First Triumvirate. Caesar, Pompey, Crassus.
- 59 Julius Caesar (41) Consul. Campanian land divided among 20,000 citizens by lot. Debts of *publicani* reduced. Caesar given five years proconsular command in Gaul.  
Birth of Livy
- 58 Clodius, Tribune, exiles Cicero (March), gives free corn. Caesar's campaigns in Gaul
- 57 Cicero returns from exile (Sept.)
- 56 Triumvirate renewed at Luca
- 55 Caesar's command extended by five years. Death of Lucretius

B.C.

- 54 Pompey remains in Rome. Crassus in Syria. Death of Julia, Pompey's wife, Caesar's daughter. Death of Catullus
- 53 Defeat and death of Crassus
- 52 Clodius murdered by Milo. Pompey sole consul
- 51 Cicero governor of Cilicia. Caesar completes conquest of Gaul
- 50 Curio, Tribune, bribed by Caesar, undermines Pompey's power

### *Civil War and Rise of Military Despotism*

- 49 CAESAR INVADERS ITALY (Jan.). Pompey sails to Greece (March)
- 48 Defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus; is murdered in Egypt
- 47 Caesar in Alexandria with Cleopatra; returns to Rome (Sept.)
- 46 Caesar's victory at Thapsus in Africa, suicide of Cato (50)  
Caesar (54) Dictator for 10 years

### *Caesarism*

- 45 CAESAR'S FINAL VICTORY at Munda, BECOMES DICTATOR FOR LIFE and sacrosanct
- 44 Caesar (56) assassinated.  
CIVIL WAR begins. Lepidus becomes Pontifex Maximus
- 43 Second Triumvirate of C. Octavius (20), M. Antonius (c. 40) and Lepidus. Proscriptions and murder of Cicero (64).  
Birth of Ovid
- 42 Octavian triumphs at Philippi. Antony goes East, meets Cleopatra

## Chronological Table

B.C.

- 40 Roman World divided between Octavian in West and Antony in East who marries Octavia
- 41-35 Sextus Pompeius attacks Triumvirs
- 32 Antony divorces Octavia. Octavian declares war on Cleopatra
- 31 Defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, their suicide
- 30 OCTAVIAN annexes Egypt and BEGINS as Consul (31-24). ONE-MAN RULE OF ROMAN EMPIRE
- 29 Triumph of Octavian

### *The Roman Empire*

THE PRINCIPATE. JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPERORS, 27 B.C.-A.D. 69

- 27 Octavian becomes Augustus, is awarded many honours and imperial authority for 10 years in control of all provinces needing large armies
- 18 Imperial authority of Augustus renewed for 5 years
- 12 Augustus becomes Pontifex Maximus on death of Lepidus and the office henceforth held by Emperors alone

A.D.

- 3 Imperial authority of Augustus renewed for 10 years
- 9 Roman Army under Varus annihilated by Arminius in Germany
- 10 Defence of Rhine organized
- 13 Imperial authority of Augustus renewed for 10 years
- 14 Death and deification of Augustus
- 14-37 Tiberius Emperor

A.D.

- 37-41 Gaius Emperor
- 41-54 Claudius
- 54-68 Nero
- 69 Struggle for Imperial succession by Vitellius, Galba, Otho, Vespasian

FLAVIAN EMPERORS, A.D. 69-98

- 69-79 Vespasian Emperor (Dec. 69)
- 79-81 Titus
- 81-96 Domitian
- 96-98 Nerva

SPANISH EMPERORS, A.D. 98-138

- 98-117 Trajan. Roman Empire at its greatest height
- 117-138 Hadrian

ANTONINE EMPERORS, 138-193

- 138-161 Antoninus Pius
- 161-180 Marcus Aurelius
- 165-180 Great plague
- 180-193 Commodus

NORTH AFRICAN AND SYRIAN EMPERORS

- 193-211 Septimius Severus
- 198 Caracalla proclaimed Augustus and his brother Geta, Caesar
- 211-217 Caracalla
- 218 Elagabalus, after disputed succession
- 222-235 Severus Alexander

ANARCHY, 235-284

Period of rebellion, civil war, barbarian invasions, renewed plague, with a succession of over 50 rival claimants and short-lived Emperors

## Chronological Table

A.D.

of whom 27 were recognized in Rome

### *The Roman Empire*

#### AUTOCRACY

284 Diocletian

285 Maximian becomes Caesar  
Diocletian and Maximian become Augustuses

293 Two additional Caesars appointed

305 Diocletian and Maximian abdicate

#### DYNASTY OF CONSTANTINE (305-363)

305-325 Constantine gradually consolidates his supremacy

312 Constantine converted to Christianity. Battle of Mulvian Bridge. Praetorian Guard at Rome disbanded

325 Council of Nicaea. First Ecumenical Church Council

330 Byzantium becomes the new capital as Constantinopolis

337 Constantine's three sons succeed on his death

340-360 Imperial rivalries

360-363 Julian renounces Christianity and re-establishes pagan cults

#### DYNASTY OF VALENTINIAN AND THEODOSIUS (364-394)

364 Jovian restores Christian worship

379-395 Theodosius I

391 Theodosius I in Milan orders the

A.D.

closing of Pagan temples and forbids the worship of ancient gods

394 Theodosius I in Rome officially abolishes paganism there

395 Honorius

396-408 Stilicho defeats Goths under Alaric

408-450 Theodosius II. Goths, Vandals, Visigoths and Franks overrun the Roman Empire

410 Alaric captures and sacks Rome

### *The End of the Roman Empire in the West*

438 Theodosian Code

441-452 Huns under Attila devastate Eastern Empire and Italy

455 Vandals under Geiseric. Sack of Rome

456 Ricimer controls Italy. Plunders Rome, 472

476 Last Roman Emperor deposed by Odacer who becomes first barbarian King of Italy, 476-493

### *Reconquest of Italy from Byzantium*

527-565 Justinian Emperor of the East

539-542 Belisarius retakes Africa, Sicily and Italy for Justinian

542 Goths under Totila counter-attack

552 Narses reconquers Italy for Justinian

565 Death of Justinian

568 Lombards begin their conquest of Northern Italy

## Acknowledgments and Book List

THERE ARE VARIOUS translations of the ancient historians and writers whose works provide the facts on which any account of the Revolutions of Ancient Rome must be based. For convenience of reference, the extracts in the preceding pages have, in the main, been taken from the generally available versions of: *The Histories of Polybius* translated by E. S. Shuckburgh (Macmillan 1889) and the same translator's *Letters of Cicero* (Bell 1904); *The Roman History of Appian* by H. White (Bell 1899); *Plutarch's Lives* by A. H. Clough (1876 and later). I am indebted to Messrs. J. M. Dent and Sons for permission to quote from *Liwy's History of Rome* translated by Canon W. M. Roberts and published in their Everyman's Library (1912). I am also grateful to Mr. Clyde Pharr and the Princeton University Press for permission to quote from his great edition of *The Theodosian Code* (1952). A. W. Pollard's *The Catiline of Sallust* (Macmillan 1891) has a useful short introduction refuting Beesley's attempt to whitewash Catiline and Clodius. The Loeb Library (Heinemann) provides translations with the original texts of these authors as well as of others such as *Dio Cassius* and *Suetonius*.

Studies of the Roman Revolutions form a part of all general histories of the Republic and Empire. The most detailed is *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vols. 7-12 (1928-1939), which also contain exhaustive bibliographies. It did not everywhere deal adequately with the political problem of totalitarian autocratic rule. Noteworthy among more recent works are:

Adcock, F. E., *Roman Political Ideas and Practice*, 1959.

Boak, A. E. R., *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West*, 1955.

Frisch, H., *Cicero's Fight for the Republic*, 1946.

## Acknowledgments and Book List

- Grant, M., *From Imperium to Auctoritas. A study of the aes coinage 49 B.C.-A.D. 14*, 1946.
- Marsh, F. B., *A History of the Roman World from 146-30 B.C.*, 1935.
- Scullard, H. H., *A History of the Roman World from 753 B.C. to 146 B.C.*, 1951.
- Scullard, H. H., *Roman Politics 220-150 B.C.*, 1951.
- Scullard, H. H., *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 1959.
- Syme, Sir Ronald, *The Roman Revolution*, 1939.
- Syme, Sir Ronald, *Tacitus*, 1958.
- Taylor, Lily Ross, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, 1949.
- Walbank, F. W., *Decline of the Roman Empire in the West*, 1946.
- Wirzsubski, C. L., *Libertas as a Political Idea in Rome*, 1950.

# Index

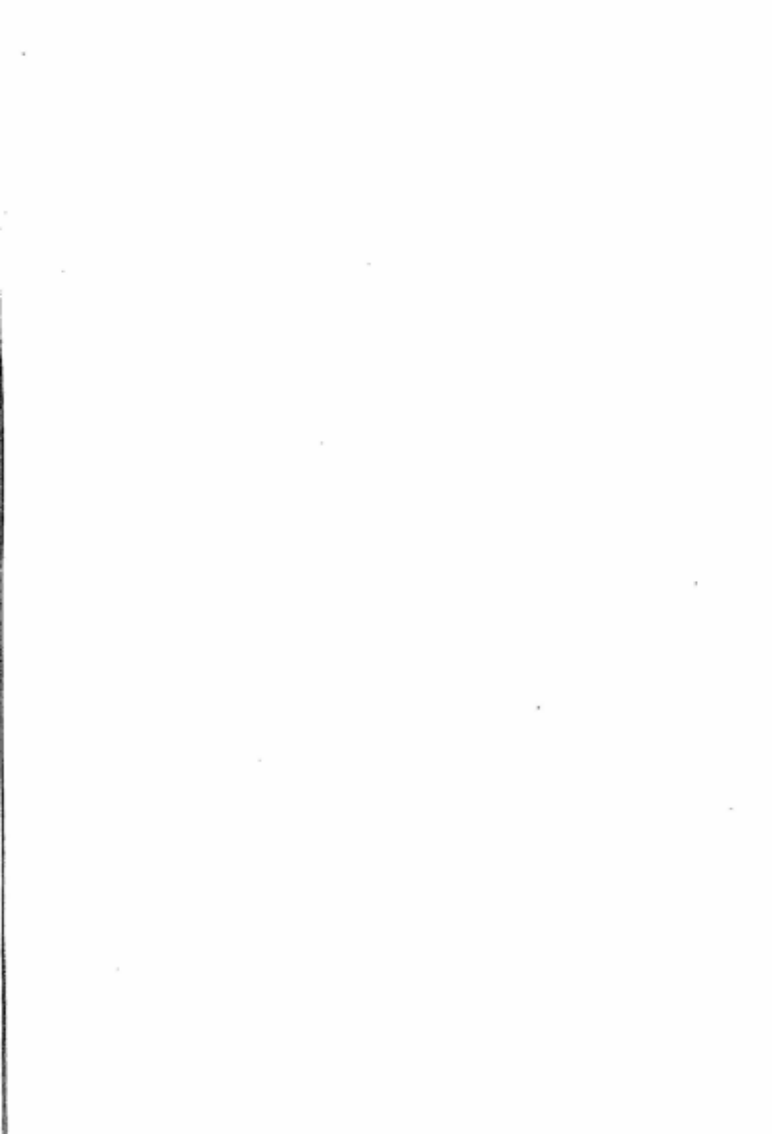
- Agrarian Laws, *see* Land Ownership
- Agriculture: 31, 60, 82-4; eclipse of small-scale cultivators, 84-5
- Agrippa, M. Vipsanius: 166, 167; consul, 169; water-supply, 190
- Antonius, Marcus: consul at Caesar's death, 161; declared public enemy, 163; joined second triumvirate, 163; and Cleopatra, 167; failure in Syria, 167; defeat by Augustus and death, 167-8
- Appian, 88-90, 94, 108, 118-19, 120-4, 164-5
- Army and Politics, 24, 110, 117-19, 125, 130, 150, 155, 158, 171, 181, 193-4
- August, 22
- Augustus, *see* Caesar
- Battles: Actium, 167; Pharsalus, 155; Philippi, 166; Thapsus, 155; Trasi-mene, 79
- Bribery, 74-5, 134-5, 140, 142
- Brutus, M., 162, 166
- Bureaucracy, 200, 206
- Caesar, Augustus (Octavian): 10, 35; claims inheritance of Julius, 162; elected consul, 163; triumvirate with Antony and Lepidus, 163-7; defeat of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, 166; return to Italy, 166; defeat of Antony, 167; re-shapes Senate, 169; granted full powers, 170-1; comparison with modern dictators, 173-4; summary of character, 177-8; political system of, 179-86; Tacitus on, 187
- Caesar, C. Julius: 10; joins Crassus, 134; proposes land redistribution, 135; divorces Pompeia, 140; first triumvirate, 141; land reform, 141-142; command in Gaul, 142; quarrel with Pompey, 149; ordered to lay down command, 149; crosses Rubicon, 150; Civil War, 150-4; victory at Pharsalus, 155; dictatorship, 156-61; assassination, 161
- Carthage, 66, 99
- Cassius, C., 162, 166
- Cassius, Dio, 175
- Cassius, S., 45-6
- Catiline, L. S., 133-6
- Cato, M. P. (the Censor), 84, (the younger), 140, 141, 155
- Censors, 57-8
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius: 23, 34, 48, 81, 125; prosecution of Verres, 129; consul, 135; has Catiline's conspirators executed, 137; defence of the Republic, 139-47, 149, 150, 152-4, 161-4; murder, 164; on rule of law, 198
- Cinna, L. C., 120-2
- Civil War, 122-3, 152-5, 163, 167-8
- Claudius, Appius I, 39, 41, 44; III, Decemvir, 53; IV, Caecus, 63; XI, 87
- Cleopatra, 155, 167-8
- Client and patron, 28-9
- Clodius, P., 140-1, 145-6
- Comitia centuriata*, 24-5
- Comitia tributa*, 28-81
- Concilium plebis*, 44, 62-3
- Conquests: Veii, 58; South Italy, 65; Macedonia, 86; Pontus, 131, 138



- Constantinople, 194  
 Consuls: 8; institution, 24; powers and limitations, 33-5; demand for plebeian eligibility, 56-7; enacted that one *must* be plebeian, 60, 61-2, 71; Sulla enforces interval between consulates, 126  
 Coriolanus, Gnaeus Marcius, 44-5  
 Crassus, A. C., 35, 44  
 Crassus, M. L., 10, 130, 134-5, 139-40, 142-4, 147-8  
 Debtors, 30-1, 39-41, 52-3, 60  
 Democracy, 70-6, 104, 112, 125, 151, 199  
 Dictators, 34, 123-8  
 Diocletian, 193, 206  
 Drusus, L., 99  
 Drusus, M. L., 113-15  
 Economics and politics, 78-95, 188-9, 206  
 Electoral system, 24-7  
*Equites*, 96-7, 113  
 Etruscans, 16-18  
 Flaminius, C., 79, 101  
 Food supplies, 78, 97, 190  
 Freedmen, 37  
 Gauls, 58, 134  
 Gracchus, Gaius: 9, 10; elected tribune, 95; administrative reforms, 96; economic development, 97; help to *equites*, 98; attacks on, 100; massacre of Gracchans and G.'s death, 100; 101-3, 119  
 Gracchus, Tiberius: 9, 10, 84, 86-93; attempts at land-reform, 88-9; has Octavius removed from tribunate, 89-90; murdered, 92  
 Greeks, 7, 18, 66, 75, 86, 197  
 Hadrian, 205  
 Hannibal, 66, 79  
*Harpagites*, 22  
 Horace, 48, 186, 196  
 Hortensius, Q., 63  
 Human Rights, 203-6  
 Idealism, Roman, 72-5, 85, 99, 101, 132, 138, 213-14  
 Informers, 197  
 Italians, 68, 99, 112-13  
*Indices*, 98  
 Kings, 13, 19, 27  
 Laelius, C., 86  
 Land ownership, 46, 60, 83, 88, 96-7, 108, 135  
 Latins, 66-8  
 Laws: Aelian Fufian, 81; Hortensian, 63, 80; Licinian-Sextian, 60, 83; Valerian-Horatian, 54  
 Lepidus, M., 163, 166  
 Livy, 23, 35, 36, 38, 39-43, 45, 46, 48, 54, 55-6, 60, 196  
 Lucullus, L. L., 131  
 Macaulay, Lord, 48, 53  
 Maelius, Spurius, 79  
 Manlius, M., 59-60  
 Marcus Aurelius, 205  
 Marius, Gaius: 10, 110, 111; has opponents murdered, 112; nearly executed, 117-118; with Cinna captures Rome, 120; massacres, 120-1; death, 121  
 Marriage law, 56  
 Military service, 30  
 Mithridates, 116, 121, 131  
 Mob violence, 120-1, 146, 156  
 Mommsen, T., 119, 169, 193

# Index

- Montesquieu, 71
- Octavia, 167
- Octavian, *see* Caesar, Augustus
- Octavius, Marcus, 89
- Patricians, 21, 39-46
- Plague, 207
- Plebeians, 21, 39-46, 56-7, 60-4
- Plebiscites, 104
- Plutarch, 86, 91, 93, 102
- Polybius, 14-15, 69-72, 74-6, 86
- Pompeius, Gnaeus: 10, 124, 130, 131, 134, 138; rebuffed by Senate, 139; support for Caesar, 141; consul, 148; lack of leadership in Civil War, 153; defeat and death, 155
- Population, 31, 68, 84, 89, 188, 207
- Prætors, 24
- Pro-consuls, 62
- Property, 31, 60, 83
- Proscription, 123, 127-8, 163-5, 176
- Religion, 22, 186, 211, 215
- Revolutions: first, 19-20; second, 43; third, 53-5; fourth, 63; of Julius Caesar, 157-61; of Augustus, 169-95
- Rule of law, 50-2, 198, 201-6
- Sabinus, A. C., 38-41
- Sallust, 137
- Samnites, 123
- Scaevola, Mucius, 87
- Scipio Aemilianus, 85-6, 103
- Scipio, P. C., 66
- Scipionic Circle, 85
- Secession of the Plebs: first, 43; second, 54; third, 63
- Secret Police, 207
- Senate, 22-4, 125-6, 182-3, 191, 195, 208
- 'Sensate' society, 86, 137, 144
- Servian constitution, 25
- Slavery, 35-7, 85, 186
- Social cohesion, 29, 72-3, 139
- Spain, 66
- Spartacus, 130
- Suetonius, 152, 177, 186
- Sulla, L. C., 10, 117-19, 121-9
- Tacitus, 48, 175, 187, 199
- Tarquinius Superbus, 19
- Tax-farming, 98
- Trajan, 200
- Treason, 196-7
- Tribes, 27
- Tribunes: 8, 9; protection against consuls, 43; and public assembly, 47; inviolability, 54; become less radical, 80-1; reduced by Sulla, 126; reinstated in 75 B.C., 129
- Triumvirates: first, 141; second, 163-7
- Tullius, Servius, 25
- Twelve Tables', the, 51-3
- Valerian-Horatian laws, 54
- Verres, 129
- Virgil, 48, 178, 196
- Visigoths, 194
- Volscians, 40, 50
- Voting system, 24-7
- Wars: Punic, 66, 79; Volscian, 41, 49-50
- Weber, Max, 107
- Wells, H. G., 106



Cal-  
12/12/75

*"A book that is shut is but a block"*

**CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIBRARY**

GOVT. OF INDIA  
Department of Archaeology  
NEW DELHI.

Please help us to keep the book  
clean and moving.

---

S. B. 142, N. DELHI.