

CHAPTER XXXIX

FROM PRINCIPATE TO MONARCHY: THE CLAUDIAN AND THE FLAVIAN PRINCES

41-96 A.D.

507. The Principate of Claudius (41-54 A.D.). — The senate would have had the principate end with the Julian line; but while it was discussing the situation the pretorians made a new prince. Their nominee was Claudius,¹ uncle of Caligula. From early youth he had applied himself with great zeal to the study of history and science, and had published a number of works in these fields. Grotesque in manners and lacking in mental balance, he was generally considered a learned fool. We are surprised, therefore, to find him making his principate the beginning of a new era.

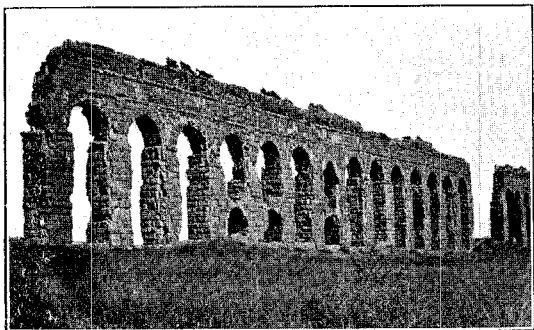
Breaking with the policy of Augustus, he bestowed the Roman citizenship freely upon provincials. Thus he began the process of making the provinces equal with Italy and Rome. And, in appointing governors of provinces, he used to say, "Do not thank me, for I do you no favor, but call you to share with me the burdens of government; and I shall thank you if you fulfil your duty well." Mingled with this generosity and wisdom, was firmness in punishing offenders and in protecting the frontiers. One of his generals conquered southern Britain and made of it a Roman province. For nearly four hundred years Britain remained a part of the empire.

His kindly temper shows itself in a law for the protection of sick and aged slaves from cruel treatment, and in his efforts to prevent famine in Rome. To supply the city with pure water, he built

¹ Thus began the rule of the Claudian princes. There were but two, Claudius and a stepson adopted into the Claudian gens. The father, as well as the son, was a Claudius Nero, Nero being the name of the family. For convenience we call the father Claudius and the adopted son Nero.

two magnificent aqueducts, one of which was the famous Claudia. Later princes continued to build aqueducts, till all of them together poured into Rome more fresh water each day than the Tiber now empties into the sea.

Notwithstanding many plots against his life, he would have no informers or law of treason, but preferred to surround himself with



REMNANT OF THE CLAUDIAN AQUEDUCT

(From a photograph)

soldiers, who even waited on his table, and accompanied him into the senate-house. Distrusting the nobles and the knights, he employed his own freedmen¹ as helpers. His principal secretaries, taken from this class, became the chief ministers of the empire. In this way and in others he attempted to make himself independent of the senate. Thus the balance of power between the senate and the prince was turning decidedly in favor of the latter. In other words, the principate was developing into a monarchy.

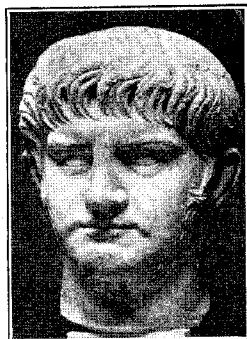
508. The Principate of Nero (54-68 A.D.). — His successor was Nero, the son of his wife A-grip-pi'na by a former marriage. As the new prince was only seventeen years of age, and showed more taste for dancing and music than for official work, the government for the first ten years of his administration was in the hands of Sen'e-ca, his tutor, and Bur'rus, pretorian prefect. Both were able men.

¹ § 519.

A Spaniard by birth, Seneca was a philosopher of the Stoic school, which taught that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness, and that a man should rise above all passions and follow his reason. Man, it asserted, is lord of his own life, and may end it when he thinks fit. This severe, practical philosophy suited well the character of the Romans. From the later republic to the adoption of Christianity, many found in it a guide to self-discipline. Although Seneca lacked moral firmness, his intentions were good. Under him and Burrus the provinces were well governed; and a law of theirs permitted ill-treated slaves throughout the empire to bring their complaints before the magistrates. This provision marks a great advance in the improvement of mankind.

Burrus died in 62 A.D., and as Nero began to take the government into his own hands, Seneca retired to private life. Accused of sharing in a conspiracy, he killed himself by order of the prince. The men of this age did not hesitate to die, but they knew not how to live and fight for freedom and principle. By recommending suicide, Stoicism aided tyranny.

The personal rule of Nero was a capricious despotism. But though he was vain and extravagant, his acts of cruelty were few. When a great fire destroyed the larger part of Rome, he sheltered and fed the sufferers, and helped rebuild their houses. The worst blot on his principate was the persecution of the Christians on the groundless suspicion that they had caused the mischief. Many were condemned. "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to flames and burned to serve as a nightly illumination"¹ of the prince's gardens. The Romans, who as yet knew little of the Christians,



NERO

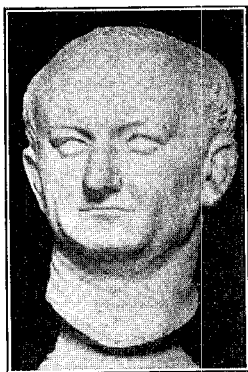
(The most authentic portrait;
Museum of the Terme, Rome)

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44. Nero was himself suspected of having set fire to the city but with little reason.

considered them a sect of Jews, and despised them because they then belonged to the lowest class of society. Nero's persecution, however, was only a sudden outburst of ferocity which did not extend beyond the city.

But at last his tyranny stirred up revolt. Gal'ba, a governor of Hither Spain, was proclaimed emperor. Nero fled from the city, and took refuge in a dingy cell provided by a freedman. A few attendants stood about him. "Some one show me how to die," he begged, but no one obeyed. The end was drawing near. The senate had declared him a public enemy, and he heard the tramp of approaching horses. "Pity that such an artist should die!" he said, as he stabbed himself.

509. The Principate of Vespasian (69-79 A.D.). — Galba was followed by O'tho, and Otho by Vi-tel'li-us. These three princes together ruled about a year. All perished by violence in a civil war concerning the succession. Then Ves-pa'si-an became prince. He and his sons are called, after their gens, Flavian princes. Though a plebeian by birth, he was broad-minded, able, and experienced in public affairs.



VESPASIAN

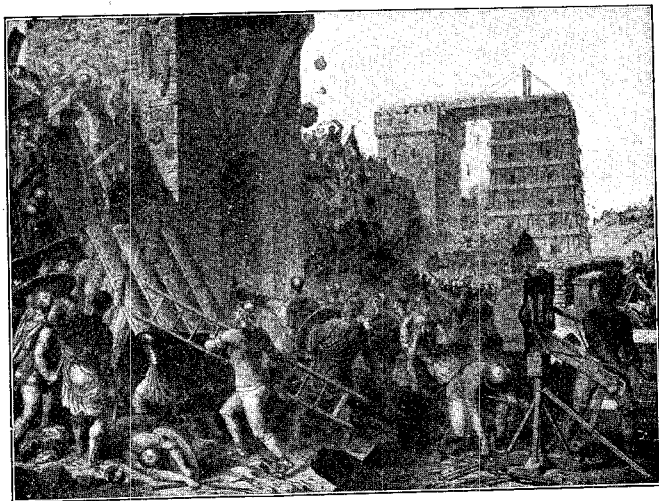
(An excellent example of Roman realism; Museum of the Terme, Rome)

Among the many difficulties he had to meet on his accession, the most serious was a revolt of the Jews. His son Titus besieged Jerusalem, their strongly fortified capital. As they refused to accept any terms offered them, no quarter was thereafter given. It was a war to death. The Jews believed that God would protect His holy temple, and that at the critical moment the Mes-si'ah would come to

save His people from the oppressor and to make them rulers of the world. They fought therefore with fanatic zeal, and as famine threatened they even ate human flesh. When after a five months' siege, the Romans stormed the city and the temple, the Jews killed their wives, their children, and then one another, as the lot determined, so that the victors found nothing but flames and

death. More than a million Jews were destroyed during the siege; not a hundred thousand were taken captive (70 A.D.). The triumphal arch of Titus, finished by Domitian, still stands as a monument of this victory.

As the nobles and knights were dying out, Vespasian recruited their ranks with new families from Italy and the provinces, — the

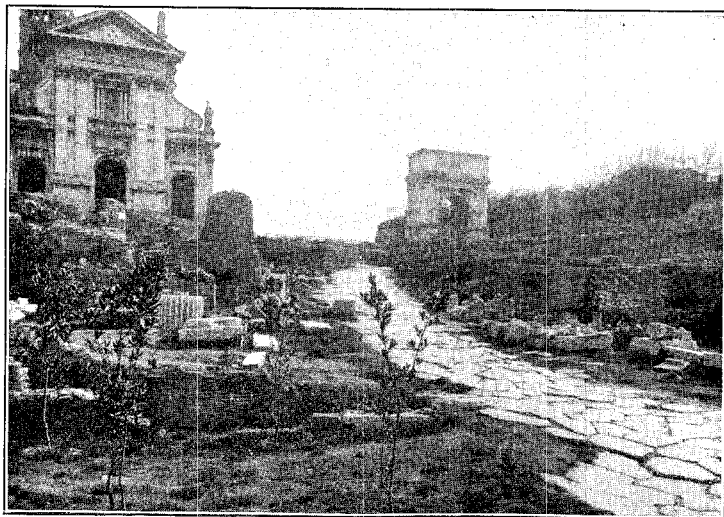


STORMING A CITY

(From Schreiber, *Atlas of Classical Antiquities*)

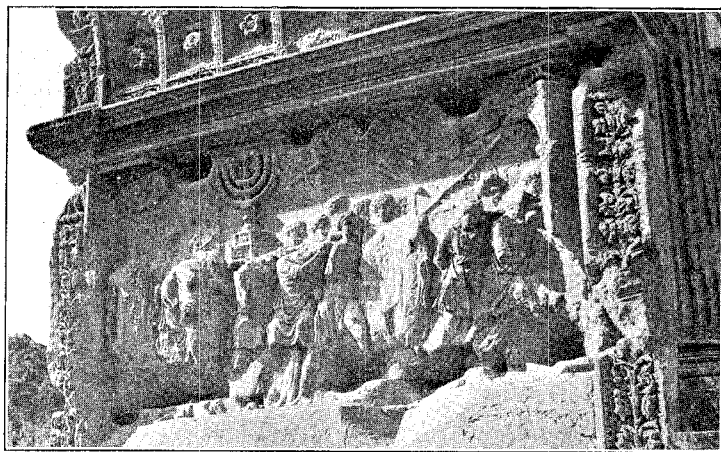
best and the most loyal he could find. Looking upon the prince as their patron, these provincials generally supported him. Hence the principate became more solidly established, and fewer conspiracies threatened it. During the late republic and early principate the society of Rome had been vicious and depraved; but the new families brought to the capital wholesome ideas and better morals.

To repair the fortifications and other public works, which had long been neglected, Vespasian found it necessary to increase the taxes. But with careful management he had money left for education, for the help of unfortunate cities in the provinces, and for new buildings. The most famous of his works is an immense



THE SACRED WAY

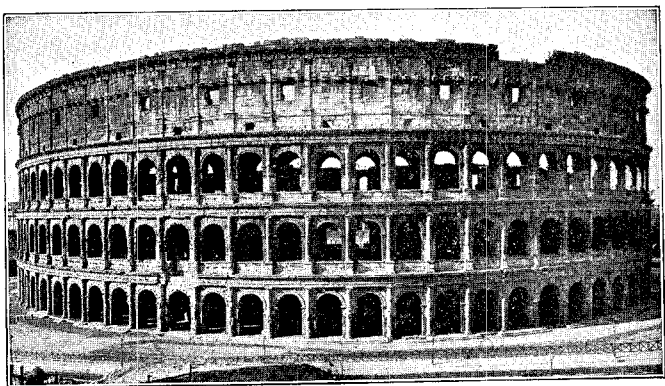
(Ascending the Velia east of the Forum. Notice the ancient pavement. At the highest point of the road, to the right, is the Arch of Titus. To the right of the arch rises the Palatine Hill.)



ROMAN SOLDIERS IN TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION

(Carrying the "Seven Golden Candlesticks" and other spoils from Jerusalem ; Arch of Titus)

amphitheatre, usually known as the Col-os-se'um. It could seat about forty-five thousand spectators.¹ Its oval form and enormous size may be seen in the illustration. Though in ruins, it remains to-day one of the most impressive buildings in the world. In it the Romans gathered to see the combats of gladiators and of men



THE COLOSSEUM OR FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATRE
(Present appearance; from a photograph)

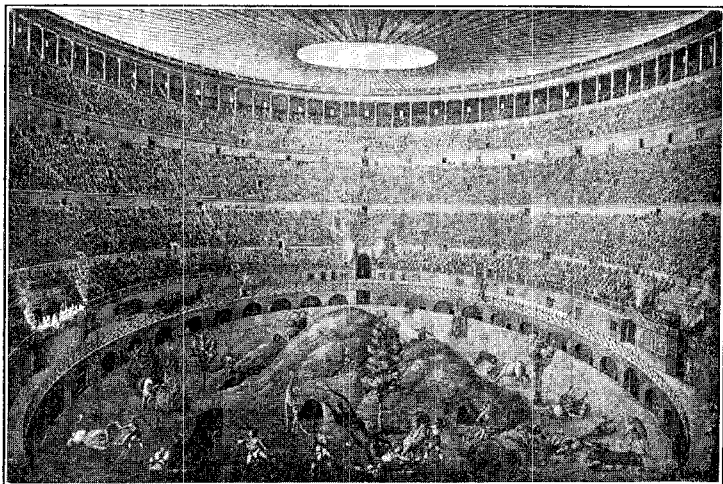
and savage beasts. As Vespasian died before completing the work, it was finished by Titus.

510. The Principate of Titus (79-81 A.D.). — Titus succeeded his father. His kindness toward citizens and subjects alike made him the most popular of the emperors, "the delight and the darling of mankind." Once at supper, remembering that he had favored no one during the day, he exclaimed, "My friends, I have lost a day!" As chief pontiff he thought it his duty to keep his hands pure; and accordingly after accepting that office he would condemn no man to death, however great might be the offence. In fact he was too indulgent to be just; this easy temper made his successor's task more difficult.

The chief event in his administration was an eruption of Vesu'vi-us. For ages this volcano had been inactive, so that the Cam-

¹ The statement of the ancients that it could seat eighty-seven thousand people is found on careful measurement to be a great exaggeration.

panians had fearlessly covered its sides with vineyards. But in 79 A.D. a fearful eruption buried Pom-pe'ii, a city of twenty thousand inhabitants, Her-cu-la'ne-um, and some smaller places. After eighteen centuries Pompeii has been unearthed. Its temples, shops, and dwellings, with their statues, wall paintings, furni-



INTERIOR OF THE COLOSSEUM

(Showing combats with wild beasts; restoration by C. Nispi-Landi)

ture, and tools, make real to us the life and civilization of the ancients.

511. Principate of Domitian (81-96 A.D.). — After ruling but two years, Titus died, and was succeeded by Do-mi'ti-an, his younger brother. Though the empire was rarely at peace, the principate of Domitian is especially noted for wars along the northern frontier. A-gric'o-la, an able general, extended the boundary of the province of Britain to Cal-e-do'ni-a, the modern Scotland. The prince himself took the field against the Germans. Still later the Da'ci-ans, who lived north of the Danube and who were fast adopting Roman civilization, invaded the empire. In his war with them Domitian met with so little success that he granted

them favorable terms of peace, and gave their chief valuable presents, which the enemies of the prince maliciously termed tribute.

Domitian was a firm ruler. Able men commanded on the frontier, and the provinces were probably never better ruled than under him. An autocrat by nature, he tried to gain entire control of the government and to put the senate beneath him. The discovery of a conspiracy, in which many senators shared, inflamed him against them. From that time to his death he was a terror to the nobility. But at last a plot developed in his own household. His wife Domitia, fearing for her own safety, induced some servants and pretorians to murder him.

"Like their god Janus, the Roman emperors have a double face." In estimating their character we must bear in mind that the one most hateful to the nobility was often the most just and merciful protector of the provinces. So it was with Domitian. The aristocratic historian¹ has branded him a tyrant; if the subject nations could speak, they would bless his memory.

512. The Growth of Monarchy from Augustus to Domitian.—The Augustan government was a republic under the patronage of a man of overwhelming personal and family influence. This man, the prince, held a combination of military, civil, and religious powers. The government was still spoken of as a republic; the senate had still an important part in the administration, and far more independence than it wished to maintain. Although it was in a position to check the prince and to reduce his influence, the members strove among themselves for precedence in flattering him and in voting him more authority. Under these circumstances the prince gradually gained power at the expense of the senate till, in the second century A.D., he came to be a real monarch, still somewhat limited by the senate. The word *imperator*, originally meaning commander in war, then came to be used in the sense of emperor. The growth of his power was aided by religion. The worship of the prince exalted him above the senate and the ordinary magistrates.

Another reason for the increase of the prince's authority was the disposition of the people to call upon him to right all their wrongs and to make every needed improvement, in some such way as the

¹ On Tacitus, the historian here referred to, see § 528.

people of the United States are more and more inclined to depend upon the President. Readily accepting such invitations, either through interest in the public welfare or from love of popularity, the prince generally accomplished the desired improvement to the satisfaction of all. In this way he continually acquired new duties and new power.

No magistrate, however able, can rule as a monarch without a large number of trained, loyal helpers. Augustus found no one acquainted with the duties of administration outside the senate. The knights collected the tribute throughout the empire, and sat in the juries at Rome, but had no other part in the administration. All the higher civil and military offices in Italy and the provinces for a long time had to be filled as before by senators, who remained on the whole loyal to the republic. Some less important duties connected with the prince's share in the government Augustus intrusted to his more intelligent slaves, his freedmen, and his personal friends among the knights. In the course of a few generations there grew up a class of knights well trained in administration and devoted to the prince, as they depended on him alone for political advancement. Meantime beginning under Claudius, the various public duties above mentioned were developing into offices, and new duties were constantly undertaken. The growth of this system of officials helped change the government from principate to monarchy.

513. The Frontier and the Provinces. — From Augustus to Domitian the frontier policy had been one of peace. Generally wars were waged merely for defence. Judea and Mauretania became provinces, but no important change of boundary took place either on the east or on the south. Along the Danube the Romans with difficulty held their own. On the upper Rhine they drove the Germans back from the right bank and began to settle the district thus made vacant. It was not organized as a province, but became tributary under the name "Tithe Lands." Along its eastern border the prince's began to build a line of strong fortifications, which when finished extended from the Rhine to the Danube. The conquest of Britain has been mentioned. In the south of that province Roman civilization began to take root, but it never became so thoroughly Romanized as Spain or southern Gaul.

During this period life and property in the provinces were more secure than ever before. The result was general happiness, prosperity, and doubtless an increase in wealth. But the growing expenses of the government and the increasing taxation were a beginning of the oppression which in time was to become unendurable.

514. Commerce and Travel. — Domestic security promoted commerce. A great network of roads, centring in Rome, extended over the entire empire. Along all these ways, as well as over the seas and on the rivers, merchandise of all kinds circulated. No heavy duties restricted trade. Commerce was not confined within the empire, but reached out to India, central Asia, and northern Europe. Thousands of Italian traders swarmed over the provinces and the border countries. Tribute from the provinces flowed in to Rome, then back to the provinces in exchange for the necessities and the luxuries of life. Much gold and silver went thus to India and never returned. At the end of the period the precious metals were becoming insufficient for the needs of business and government.

The most important result of this great commercial activity was the blending of all the peoples of the empire in one race and one culture. The same Greco-Roman religion, the same education and culture, based on the Latin and Greek authors, the same social and political system, prevailed over the empire. Latin was the language of the West, and Greek of the East.

Good roads and security promoted travelling. "It was a time when all the world was in motion, — the trader hastening to his market, the centurion to his cohort, the administrator to his duties, the invalid to the healing waters and the altars of the helpful divinities, the superstitious to the renowned shrines and famous oracles, the idler to festivities and solemnities, and the man of taste to places consecrated to history and art, to the architectural splendors of Rome, Greece, and Egypt."¹ Students travelled to their schools; professors often went on distant journeys in quest of pupils; rhetoricians and sophists visited city after city, to display their eloquence or wisdom before crowds of generous listeners.

515. Cities and Towns. — In the countries which Rome found

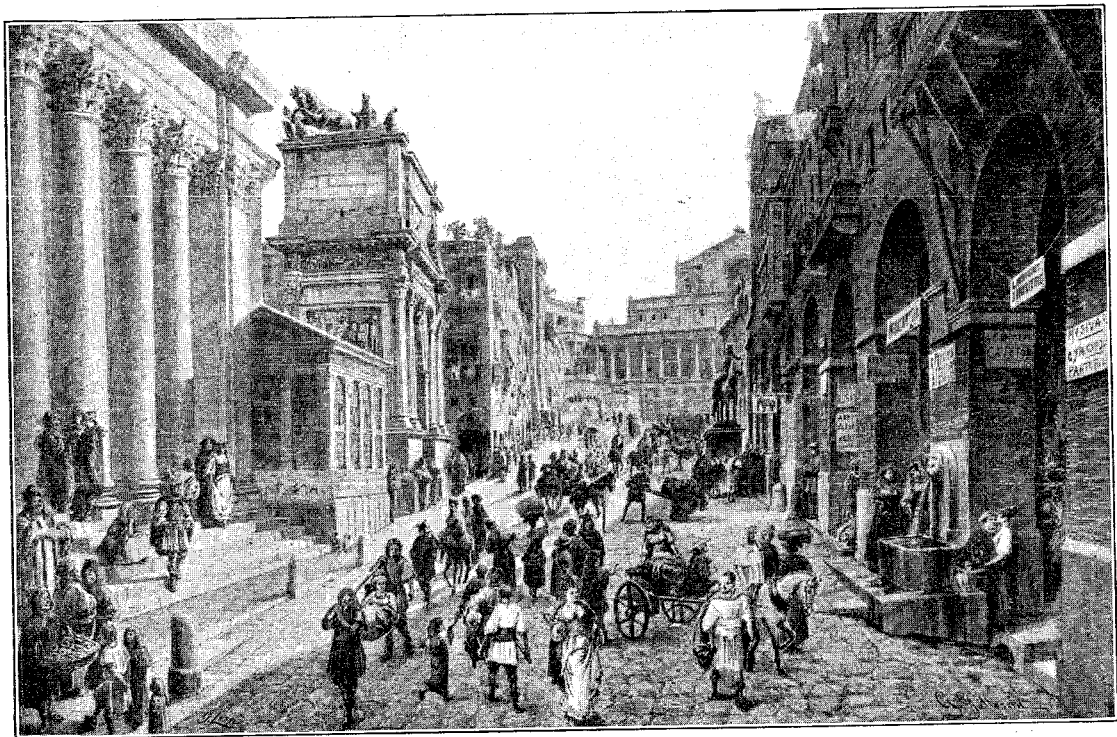
¹ Duruy, *History of Rome*, vi. 177 f.

already highly civilized were many large cities. In other parts, as in western Europe and along the Danube, people usually lived in the country. In all these places Rome encouraged the growth of cities. As a result of this policy most of the states of the empire in the West came to be city-states, just as they already were in the East. These city-states were like those of Greece, or like Rome before she began to extend her power.

The population of a city consisted of slaves and freemen. The latter were either citizens or non-citizens. Citizenship could not be acquired by residence, but was occasionally bestowed as a gift. All the citizens had the right to attend the assembly and vote in the election of magistrates and in the making of laws. Those only who possessed a certain amount of property fixed by law, and who had an honorable character and occupation, were eligible to offices. The chief magistrates were the *du-o'vi-ri* ("board of two"), patterned after the Roman consuls. At the expiration of their year of office all the important magistrates, including the duoviri, became life members of the *cu'ri-a*—city council—if they did not already belong to it. Every fifth year the duoviri took a census and made an assessment of their community. As there were not enough retired magistrates to fill the curia to its normal number, usually a hundred, the duoviri supplied the deficiency by enrolling among the members — *cu-ri-a'les* — the more wealthy and distinguished private citizens of the community, and sometimes even rich or celebrated strangers. In the period we are now studying there was spirited rivalry for office. On the walls of Pompeii may be found written in large letters¹ such expressions as, "The barbers wish to have Tre'bi-us as aedile"; and "The fruit-sellers unanimously support Hol-co'ni-us Pris'cus for duovir." To ridicule a candidate some one wrote, "All the sleepy men nominate Vatia as aedile."

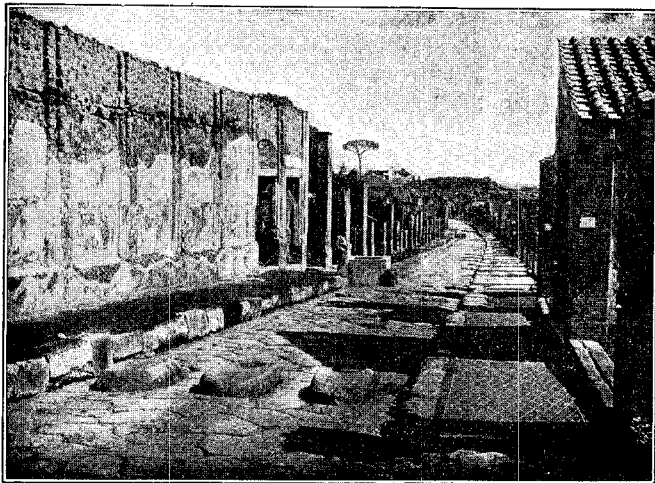
516. Public Spirit in the Cities. — The magistrate received no salary; in fact on entering office or on becoming a curialis he had to pay a fee fixed by law. Public life gave him little opportunity for illegal gains. On the contrary, the people expected him, in addition to the required payment, to expend his own money in entertaining them with feasts and shows and in building or repairing public

¹ These writings are called by the Italian term *Graffiti*.



SUMMIT OF THE SACRED WAY
(Restored by Gatteschi)

works. It was partly by gifts from wealthy citizens that most cities acquired enough property to pay from the revenue all their necessary expenses, without resort to taxation. Many a city received from the same source an endowment for producing the annual tribute due to Rome. Such communities levied no taxes whatever. In general the ancient state possessed a large capital either in money or in rentable property, the income from which



A STREET IN POMPEII

(From a photograph)

went far toward defraying expenses, whereas a modern state or municipality as a rule has no productive wealth, but is burdened with heavy debts, the interest on which, in addition to other enormous expenses, must be paid by taxes on the citizens. Only by taking account of this great contrast can we appreciate the prosperity of the cities of the empire and the generous patriotism of the wealthy people. The motive was often unselfish; but sometimes it was the mere desire of popularity. In any case the city received the benefit; and the result was a prosperity throughout the empire such as the world had not seen before. We read of it in the books written at

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