CHAPTER XL

THE FIVE GOOD EMPERORS

THE LIMITED MONARCHY

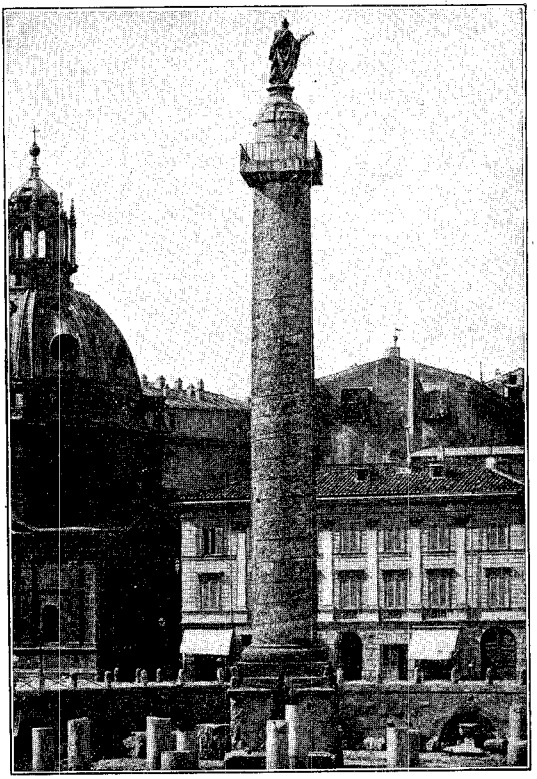
96–180 A.D.

521. Nerva Emperor (96–98 A.D.). — As soon as the senate heard of the death of Domitian, it appointed as prince one of its members named Ner'va, who was about sixty-five years old, and whose life had been blameless. He was the first of a succession of rulers known as the Good Emperors. Domitian had made himself a monarch. Had his successors resembled him, we should now have had to speak of an absolute monarchy. But his example was not followed. The Good Emperors guaranteed the senate freedom and a share in the government, which therefore became a limited monarchy. The title prince was still used; but as the word imperator now began to signify "emperor" as well as "general," [1] we may henceforth speak of the princes as emperors. The senate became reconciled to the new form of government. This concord resulted in an era of good feeling which lasted through five successive reigns. Nerva put an end to the law of treason, which Domitian had revived. He then advised his subjects to forget past wrongs in the happy present. But, like Titus, he was too amiable to be a just and vigorous ruler. When he found himself unable to control the pretorians, he adopted as his son and successor the able general Tra'jan, then commander in Upper Germany.[2]

522. Trajan Emperor (98–117 A.D.); **his Wars.** — Nerva was followed by Trajan. He was born in Spain, and was therefore the first provincial emperor. In contrast, too, with the earlier princes, who were uniformly peaceful, Trajan was ambitious for conquest. In two wars he subdued Dacia, a great country north of the Danube,

[1] §§ 486, 496. [2] § 501.

and converted it into a Roman province a thousand miles in circuit. The work of settlement followed rapidly upon the conquest. While the emperor found land here for his veterans, other colonists poured into the province from various parts of the empire. Engineers,



THE COLUMN OF TRAJAN
(From a photograph)

architects, and workmen built roads and fortresses. Miners found iron and gold in the mountains. The province soon became thoroughly Roman in character. Trajan's column still stands in Rome as a memorial of this conquest.

A few years afterward the emperor attempted the conquest of the East. One of his generals had already made a province of northwestern Arabia. Trajan himself took the field against the Parthians. He drove them from Armenia, where they were trying to set up a vassal king. After converting the country into a Roman province, he marched through the Parthian empire as far as the Tigris River. Then he followed the river to the Persian Gulf. Meantime the provinces he had hastily established about the Tigris and Euphrates fell to pieces, and their population rose against him. His return march, in which he pretended to suppress the revolt, was in fact a disastrous retreat. He died in Cilicia on his way to Rome.

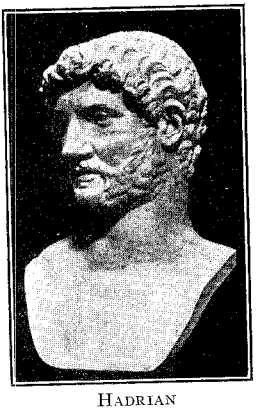
PLOTINA, WIFE OF TRAJAN
(Vatican Museum, Rome)

523. His Administration. — We shall now turn to his administration. Following Nerva's policy, he treated the senators as his equals. But though they talked much, the emperor granted them less actual power than they had enjoyed under Augustus. The consuls, too, had lost much of their importance, as their term had been gradually reduced to two months. The monarchy was still growing at the expense of the republican institutions.

This increasing power of the emperor appeared in Italy and in the provinces, as well as in Rome. When the finances of a town fell into disorder, Trajan sent it an agent to control its accounts. Such an imperial officer gradually usurped authority, until, after a century or two, he deprived the town of self-government. In Trajan's

time, however, the institution was only helpful. To recruit the wasting population of Italy, Trajan lent the towns considerable money, which they were to invest on the security of land, that they might have the interest to use for the support and education of poor children. Though the avowed object was to rear soldiers for the armies, the institution was humane; we see in it a sign of the moral improvement of mankind.

His administration was energetic and just. He had the strength to punish evil-doers; he repealed oppressive taxes; and, costly as were his wars and his public buildings, he laid no new burdens on his people. His wife Plo-ti'na was as frugal and as thrifty as he. Like Livia, she was the emperor's able helper, and when he died, her tact brought to the throne the man who had stood highest in her husband's favor.

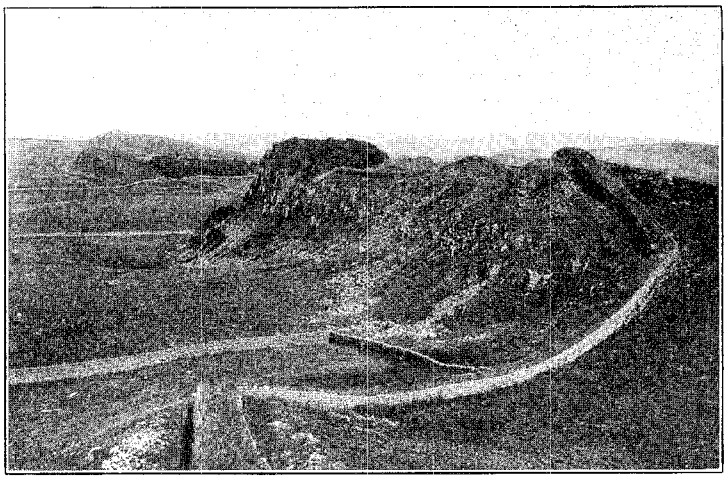


HADRIAN
(Vatican Museum, Rome)

524. Hadrian Emperor (117–138 A.D.). — The heir was Ha'dri-an, a general and provincial governor of great ability, and a scholar. Two-thirds of his reign he spent in travelling through the provinces. His first object was to cultivate friendship with the border nations. To maintain peace without increasing the army, he found it necessary to abandon all his predecessor's conquests, excepting Dacia and Arabia.

Another object was to improve the armies and the frontier defences. He banished harmful pleasures from the camps; he dismissed boy officers, who had received appointments through favoritism; and, in his own words, he restored "the discipline of Augustus." Under him the armies were so well exercised and trained that they could perform wonderful labors in marching and in building. Among his frontier defences the best known is the so-called Wall of Hadrian, which extends across northern Britain from near the mouth of the Tyne to Solway Firth. In the following century it was rebuilt on a grander scale. After this enlargement the line of defence consisted of two parallel moats and walls, strength-

ened by a series of turrets, castles, and camps. Ruins of these works still exist. Equally important was his completion of the defences between the Rhine and the Danube. By such fortifica-



HADRIAN'S WALL
(From a photograph)

tions, as well as by his military reforms, he gave the empire new strength for resisting the assaults of the barbarians.

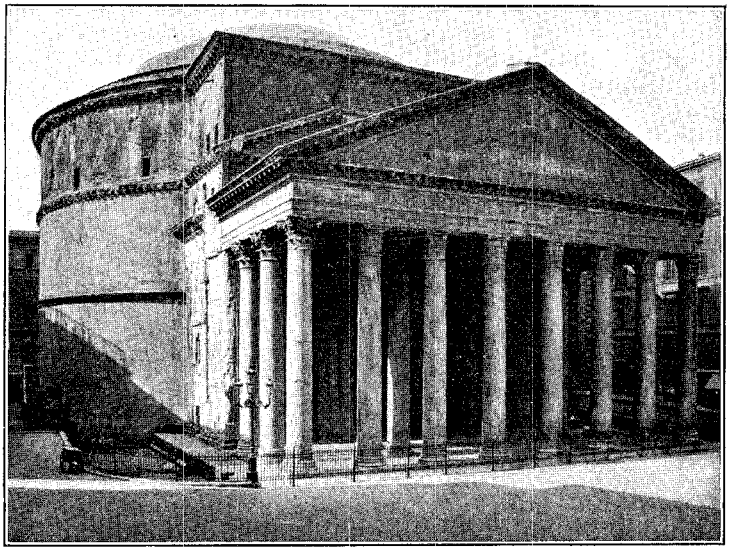
Throughout the empire he built temples, theatres, and aqueducts. Finally, by devoting so much of his time to the provinces, he showed clearly that he considered them more important even than Rome and Italy.

525. **Hadrian's Buildings at Rome; the Civil Service.** — Among his buildings at Rome was the Pantheon, originally the work of Agrippa,[1] but reconstructed by Hadrian. It is circular, a hundred and forty-two feet in diameter and the same in height, and is covered by a magnificent dome. In front is a great portico. The building is still well preserved, and is used as a Christian church. The visitor who stands within this rotunda cannot fail to see in it an emblem of the vast and durable power of Rome. The tomb Ha-

[1] § 503.

drian built for himself, across the Tiber from the city, was on as magnificent a scale, but far inferior to the Pantheon in artistic merit.[1]

The amount of public business in the hands of the prince had greatly increased since the time of Augustus. Claudius had under-



PANTHEON

(Exterior, present appearance; from a photograph)

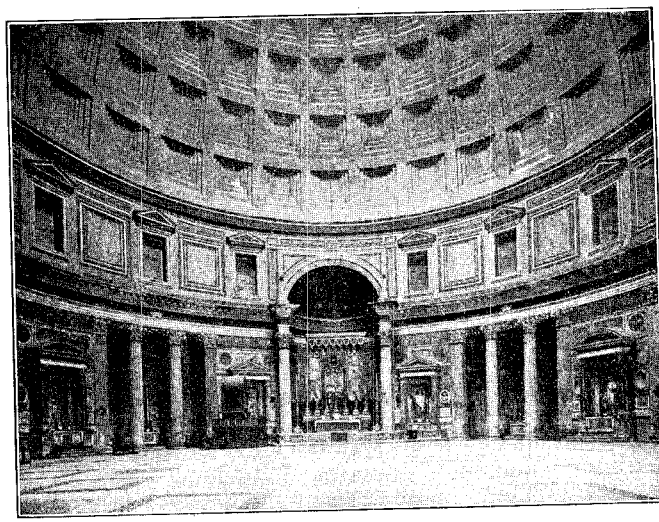
taken to create a civil service for doing this work, and had assigned his own freedmen to the most important parts in it.[2] Men of this class, however, were distasteful to the nobles, and on the other hand many knights were now acquainted with administrative duties. Hadrian accordingly reformed the civil service, and employed none but knights in all the higher offices. The official system was made more extensive and more efficient than it had been.

526. Antoninus Pius Emperor (138–161 A.D.). — An-to-ni'nus, surnamed Pius, the heir of Hadrian, was a man of estimable charac-

[1] During the Middle Ages it was converted into a fortress — the Castle of Sant' Angelo — and is now a military museum.

[2] § 507.

ter, who loved justice and peace. His reign is noted for humane legislation. Especially he limited the right of the master to torture



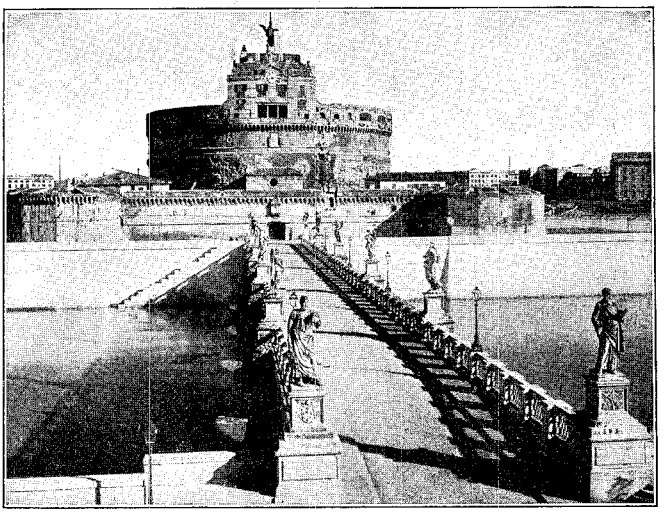
PANTHEON

(Interior, present appearance; from a photograph)

his slaves for the purpose of extorting evidence; and he originated the legal principle on which all trials are now conducted throughout the civilized world, that an accused person should be considered innocent till proved guilty. Enlarging on the charitable policy of Trajan, he set aside an endowment for orphan girls, whom he called Faus-tin-i-a'nae, after his wife Faus-ti'na. His long reign, unmarked by events, was prosperous and happy.

527. **Marcus Aurelius Emperor** (161–180 A.D.). — When he died the imperial powers passed to Marcus Au-re'li-us, his adopted son. This emperor associated with himself as colleague Lucius Ve'rus, his brother by adoption; so that Rome was ruled for a time by two Augusti. Verus sought only pleasure; Aurelius was a Stoic philosopher, whose chief aim was to do his duty toward his fellowmen. But he had little time to give to books and meditation; for the easy disposition of his predecessor had left him a great legacy

of troubles. On his accession, he found war brewing along the northern and eastern frontiers. The troops of Syria had grown too effeminate to resist the invading Parthians; but fortunately there



THE TOMB OF HADRIAN
(The Tiber in the foreground. Present appearance; from a photograph)

were good generals in the East, the ablest of whom was A-vid'i-us Cassius. A Syrian by birth, but of the old Roman type of severity, he put the licentious troops on coarse rations, burned the disobedient, and restored discipline. He defeated the Parthians, overran their country, and compelled them to sue for peace. Rome retained a part of Mes-o-po-ta'mi-a.

Meantime a fearful pestilence was raging in the East; and as the troops returned from the war, they spread the disease over the eastern half of the empire and over Italy itself. It weakened the army; in some places, as in Italy, it carried off perhaps half the population; and the efforts to relieve it so drained the treasury that the prince lacked funds for the defence of the empire. The enemies of Rome were growing formidable. All Europe be-

yond the frontier was full of restless tribes, which threatened the civilized countries of the Mediterranean. The Parthian war was scarcely over when they broke into the empire in a continuous line from northern Italy to the farthest limits of Dacia. The leaders were the Mar-co-man'ni, a powerful German nation, who lived in southern Germany, and who gave their name to the war.

CINERARY URN
(Vatican Museum, Rome)

Both emperors took the field, and when Verus died in the following year, Aurelius continued the war alone. After seven years of hard fighting, he won an honorable peace, which, however, was broken while he was engaged in putting down a revolt of Avidius Cassius in the East. As soon as he had finished this war, he returned to the Danube, and reconquered the Marcomanni. He was about to make their country into a province when death cut short his work.

528. The Silver Age of Literature. — As the Augustan period of literature has been called "golden," the age which followed is commonly described as "silver." After the principate of Augustus a decline set in. Most writers, considering a simple style insipid, sought to attract attention by rhetorical bombast, far-fetched metaphors, and other unnatural devices.

Seneca, the philosopher, shared with his age the striving after brilliancy in language. Nevertheless he gives evidence of the broader, deeper thought which the provinces were bringing Rome. A great improvement in this direction came with the Flavian princes, who patronized literature and introduced fresh life from

the provinces. In this age Plin'y the Elder wrote a *Natural History* in thirty-seven books. In addition to the natural sciences, it includes geography, medicine, and art. What Pliny did for science Quin-til'i-an, a native of Spain, achieved for rhetoric. His *Training of the Orator*, in twelve books, gives a complete course in rhetoric, beginning with the boy and ending with the well-equipped public speaker. The work is valuable, not only for the famous author's principles of rhetoric, but also for his opinions of the leading Greek and Latin writers.

The age of the good emperors produced the last great writers of classic Latin, Tac'i-tus and Ju've-nal. The *Annals* and the *Histories*[1] of Tacitus covered the period from the death of Augustus to the death of Domitian. Besides these larger works, he wrote a brief treatise on the *Life and Character of Agricola*, the conqueror of Britain, and another, the *Ger-ma'ni-a*, on the character and institutions of the Germans of his time. His experience as an army officer and a statesman gave him a clear understanding of military and political events. He was conscientious, too, and we may trust his statement of all facts which were known to the public at the time of their happening. His style is exceedingly rapid, vivid, and energetic. His excellences as a historian, however, are balanced by serious defects. He belonged to the strictest circle of aristocrats, who looked upon all the princes from Tiberius to Domitian as usurpers and tyrants. Hence he was unfair in judging the motives of these rulers. Like the historian, Juvenal, author of *Satires*, was powerful and dramatic. In the spirit of Tacitus he looked back to the society of Rome under Nero and Domitian, to discover in it nothing but hideous vice. But if we allow for his gross exaggeration, we shall find his writings a storehouse of information about the manners, customs, and morals of the age.

The *Letters* of Pliny the Younger, a nephew of the elder Pliny, are valuable for the study of the times, but show a decline in style. The *Lives of the Caesars* from Julius to Domitian, by Sue-to'ni-us,

[1] Of the *Annals* we have Bks. i–iv, parts of v and vi, and xi–xvi, with gaps at the beginning and end of this last group of books; of the *Histories* there remain Bks. i–iv and the first half of v.

Hadrian's secretary, is a chaotic mixture of useful facts and foolish gossip. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius is one of the best and noblest of books. It contains the ripest fruit of Greco-Roman philosophy.

A revival of Hellenic literature in this age produced some authors of unusual merit. Ap'pi-an of Alexandria wrote a narrative *History of Rome*, which we find very useful. In this age, too, Pausanias compiled his *Tour of Greece*, which describes the classic monuments of that country. "Above all Plutarch wrote his immortal *Lives*, perhaps the most widely and permanently attractive book by one author known to the world." [1] While the Greeks were producing literature, they did not neglect science. Ga'len, a physician of Marcus Aurelius, wrote many works on anatomy and medicine. Ptol'e-my published a system of astronomy, in which he represented the earth as the centre of the universe. His views were accepted for more than a thousand years, till they were superseded by those of Co-per'ni-cus (1473–1543 A.D.).

529. Art. — From the time of Augustus Rome was the artistic centre of the world. The greatest architects, sculptors, and painters of Greece gathered there, to find employment in the service of the prince or of wealthy citizens. With the increase in wealth and power of the princes it was natural that their palaces, temples, aqueducts, baths, and other public works should be planned on a grander scale. Examples are the Claudian aqueduct and the Pantheon, already mentioned.[2] Such works required a thorough acquaintance with practical science for their planning, and great care and skill in their execution. From the time of Hadrian the artistic value of buildings rapidly declined.

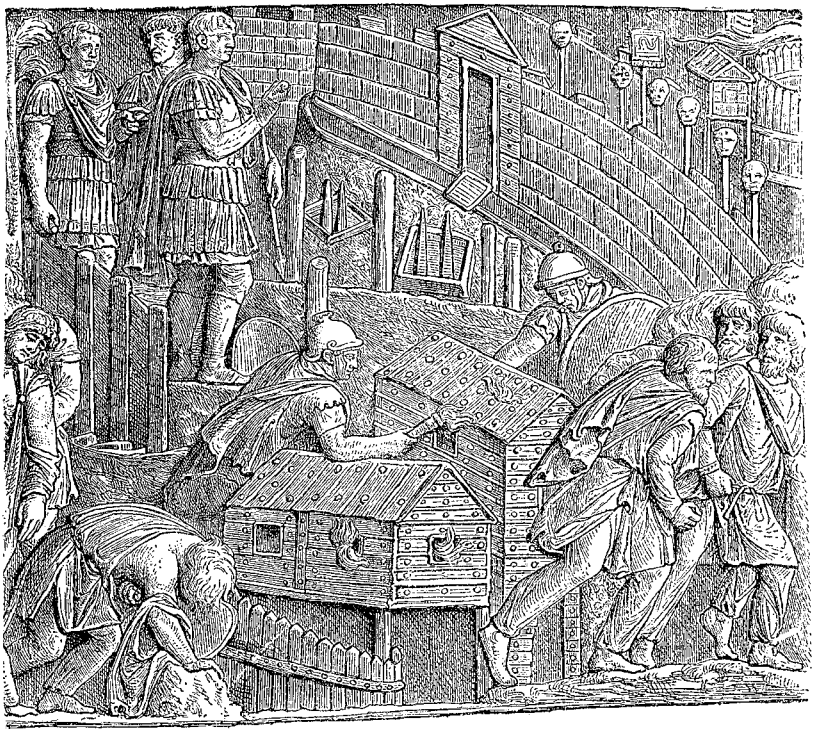
In the column of Trajan we find a new idea in sculpture. Around it from base to summit winds a spiral band of reliefs,[3] representing the successive events in his Dacian campaigns — his marches, battles, sieges, the building of camps, the burning of towns, and the care of the wounded. Though Trajan's own account of these wars has been lost, this "chiselled picture-book" gives us valuable knowledge, not only of the campaigns, but of the military habits of

[1] Murray, *Ancient Greek Literature*, 395 f.

[2] § 507, 525.

[3] On the meaning of the word see § 175.

the Romans and of their northern neighbors. The figures in these reliefs are cut with remarkable accuracy and taste. The column of Marcus Aurelius, in commemoration of his German campaigns, is similar to that of Trajan, though inferior in artistic merit.



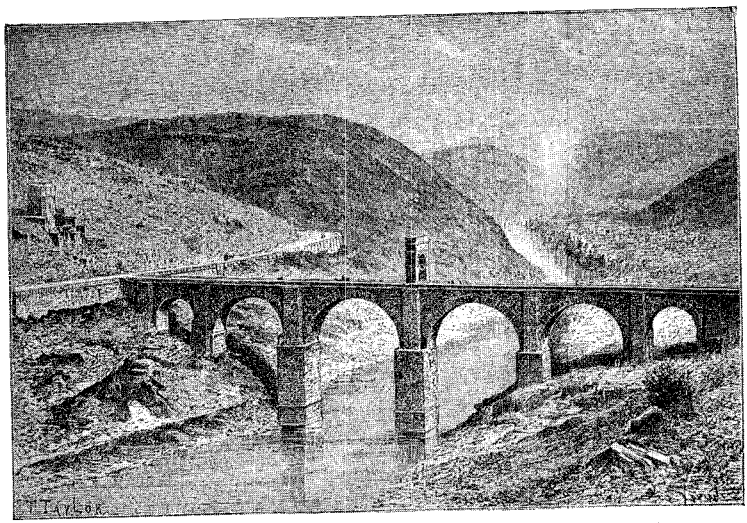
BURNING A DACIAN TOWN

(Relief on Trajan's Column; from Schreiber, *Atlas of Classical Antiquities*)

The sculptors of the period were active, too, in making statues. The forms of deities and other ideal persons were copies of the great Greek masters. Nearly all ideal statues still in existence are such "Roman copies." The period showed originality, however, in its portrait busts and statues of the princes and their kinsfolk

and of private persons. This form of sculpture reached the height of its perfection in the Flavian age; for the marble portraits of that time are most natural and living. That of Vespasian[1] is a good example. In the time of Hadrian Greek idealism gained momentarily the upper hand, as is seen in his portrait.[2] Thereafter we discover a marked decline in this form of art as well as in all others.

530. **Condition of the Empire in the Second Century, A.D.** — In this period the empire reached its greatest extent. East of the Euphrates the Romans continued for a time to hold Mesopotamia, and north of the Danube they retained Dacia. The profound

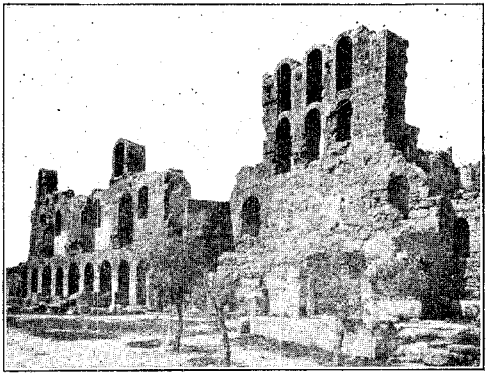


BRIDGE AT ALCANTARA, SPAIN
(Built by Trajan; from Duruy, *History of Rome*)

peace was scarcely disturbed by wars on the distant frontiers or by occasional tumults in the capital. The emperor, looking upon himself as the father of the provincials, made their welfare his chief object. As many had received the Latin rights[3] or the full Roman citizenship, the political distinction between Italy and the provinces nearly disappeared.

[1] P. 468. [2] P. 487. [3] § 406.

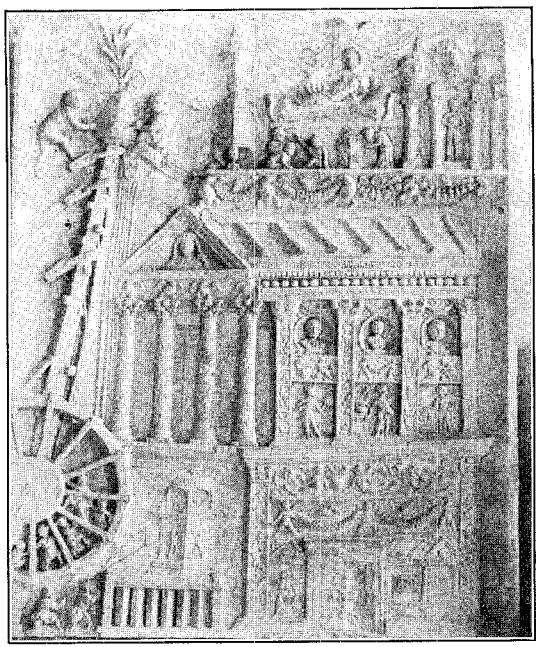
Throughout this age we find an intense activity in building. Considerable money for the purpose came from the emperors, but much more from the liberality of wealthy private persons. Pliny the Younger gave his town — modern Como in northern Italy — a library, an endowment for a school, another endowment for poor children, and a temple to Ceres. Provided with spacious colonnades, this temple was especially for the use of traders while attending the great fair held in his town. The most magnificent giver of the age was He-ro'des At'ti-cus, a Greek. He built public works in many towns in Italy, and in most of those of Greece. In Athens, his birthplace, he revelled in entertaining the citizens and in building. There are still standing the ruins of his Odeum, a music hall which seated six thousand persons. These men are cited merely as examples of liberality. Every city and town had its generous patrons, who spent their fortunes on their communities. In giving and in building the age is unparalleled in history.



ODEUM OF HERODES ATTICUS
(Athens; from a photograph)

But these wonderful activities are not a sign of unusual wealth or prosperity. It was simply that the spirit of giving and building had seized the civilized world, just as, for instance, at a certain epoch of the Middle Ages the crusading spirit seized all western Europe. The empire under Hadrian and the Antonines was prosperous in appearance only. Inwardly the whole civilized world was falling to decay. The mind had nearly lost its power of invention; the body fell an easy prey to pestilence. The number of inhabitants was rapidly decreasing. The military spirit had

so declined that Marcus Aurelius had been compelled to enlist slaves and gladiators for the defence of the frontier. He introduced, too, the policy of employing Germans on a large scale in



PROCESS OF BUILDING
(Relief from the Tomb of the Haterii; Lateran Museum, Rome)

military service.[1] As the precious metals were disappearing, he had to debase the silver coinage with thirty per cent of copper. But these symptoms of decay passed unnoticed at the time.

Suggestive Questions

1. Write a summary of this chapter like that on p. 444. 2. Make a list of all the important acquisitions of Rome between 241 B.C. and 117 A.D., giving date and location of each (cf. the maps). 3. What countries were

[1] § 556.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT

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